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JCK 2012 review

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# Québecois creativity

The Jewellery Artists of Québec Exhibition in New York City showcased 14 unique talents

BY LILIAN M. RAJI

hile colourless diamonds, pearls and traditional metals make up most of Québec's commercial jewellery industry, there's a growing commune of jewellery designers who like to experiment with the uncommon.

Embedded within the cultural identity of Québec is a profound love of the arts, of the creative and the unusual. So when the Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles (SODEC), the Québec government agency charged with promoting Québec culture to international markets, decided jewellery would be its next focus, it did so by digging deep into Québec's heritage to identify 14 of the most creative and distinct talents in jewellery artistry. These artists were then presented this past May at New York City's Aaron Faber Gallery.

# VISIONARY WORKS

Jewellery Artists of Québec: Innovation and Craftsmanship in Metal was the first of its kind exhibition featuring the visionary works of Barbara Stutman, Christine Larochelle, Elise Bergeron, Gustavo Estrada, Janis Kerman, Jean-Pierre Gauvreau, Laurie Dansereau, Lynn Légaré, Matthieu Cheminée, Pierre-Yves Paquette, Roland Dubuc, and Annegret Morf and Antonio Serafino, the husband and wife team of SERAFINO. These 14 artists delivered to a New York City audience an exhibition that celebrated Québec's cultural heritage.



# quebecjewellery



The U.S. jewellery industry isn't a stranger to the exotic artistry shared by these Quebecois artists. Todd Reed, Wilfredo Rosado and Gurhan have long found captivated benefactors for their unconventional designs. Claudio Pino, best described as a jewellery sculpturist, found enthusiastic acceptance for his audaciously redefined concepts on traditional ring design. Unifying kinetic movement with colours, metals and stones, Pino delivered a collection of rings far ahead of their time, yet perfectly embraced by those who prefer the avant-garde.

Matthieu Cheminée's poignant artistry was revealed in his complex, multilayered buckles, bracelets and rings constructed from recycled jewellery. His work is a reflection of a dynamic cultural heritage, balancing instruction in silversmith from the Navajo, Hopi and Zuni of Taos, New Mexico; a threeyear sabbatical in Mali, West Africa studying jewellery making with the Touareg and Bambara tribes; and current residence in Montreal learning classical design techniques.

#### **EYE-CATCHING SILVER**

Gustavo Estrada is an artist whose fundamental principal themes in design-form, volume and texture-were reflected in his rich treatment of eye-catching sterling silver bracelets, necklaces and rings in techniques of patina, copper on silver and repoussé. His work was so well received that a bracelet sold before the exhibition opened. Nine more pieces from other artists sold on opening night.

Lynn Légaré, a designer with a forceful mélange of elaborate, one-of-a-kind earrings and necklaces, hand-fabricated in complexly meandered sterling silver and 18k gold accented with semi-precious stones, elaborates on the influences to Québec's artists: "Québec has a very strong cultural identity in several artistic domains. Jewellery isn't any different than other art forms in that respect. The training quality in our schools and studios play an important role in the excellence we create.

"Worth mentioning is that several European jewellers settled in Montréal in the '60s and brought a savoir faire we didn't have before. The transfer of knowledge from them to our society has been successful."

#### DYNAMIC WORK

U.S. jewellery industry expert Meeling Wong was among the many saluting the dynamic work of Québec's jewellery artists. "These collections have an individualistic and artisan appeal," she says. "The workmanship, craft and creative use of materials is very impressive, and aligned with the collective of American jewellers who shy away from mainstream looks."



# quebecjewellery

While the artists found applauding patrons in New York City's insatiable thirst for the different, Légaré reveals that such a reception was uncommon at home: "I believe jewellery in Québec is doing well but jewellers are not. While we're quite a few designers in a fairly small market, there are only a few places we can exhibit. It's important our institutions support exhibitions such as this, which allow for promotion of our art to American and European markets."

## CONVENTION VERSUS INNOVATION

Annegret Morf, partner at SERAFINO, a collection of abstractly cut gemstones and whimsically sculpted pieces, continues, "The Québec jewellery industry represents the complete opposite of what was shown at Aaron Faber. Québec industry caters to a very conventional crowd, using classical designs, pearls, diamonds or other colourless stones and only occasionally rubies, emeralds or sapphires."

"Contemporary jewellery designers all have memories of entering contests in Québec where they were told their work is nice but has no profitable future by industry standard," adds Jean-Pierre Gauvreau, an artist whose rings are constructed in a multi-dimensional geometric vocabulary of combined alloyed 18k gold, sterling silver, white and coloured diamonds in platform tiers, juxtaposed with petals, squares and trapezoids.

Roland Dubuc is a master manipulator of metal sheets, who, absent of heat or solder and using a technique similar to origami, repeatedly cuts and folds gold and silver sheets upon themselves until extraordinary pendants and brooches are revealed.

"The Québec industry is split into two main markets: jewellery retailers who cater to more classic jewellery, where doors aren't open for contemporary jewellers; and jewellery artists who sell their work in shows, from their studio or in a craft stores. It's very difficult for those artists to expand their distribution," he says.

As a result, artists now look to the U.S. as a platform to gain more recognition.

### **FUTURE PLANS**

Légaré will continue her annual participation at the International Expositions of Sculpture Objects and Functional Art in Chicago, while targetting more U.S. galleries. Dubuc, after keeping his permanent collection in his Montréal studio-shop for many years, is now ready to show in U.S. and Canadian galleries and boutiques. Morf is focusing on the U.S. and other parts of Canada to continue SERAFINO's forward push. And Élise Bergeron participated for the first time at JCK Las Vegas. Bergeron is an enthusiast in the underused art of hand manipulation, offering designs birthed from hours of intense finessing of thin metal ribbons to create unrefined pieces with ornate textures and ethnic allusions.



For Janis Kerman, a celebrated instructor with an extensive resume of accolades by the who's who of private collectors, awards and prestigious exhibitions, looking to the U.S. is a good strategy. "For close to 25 years, I've focused on this career path to show my work in the U.S. and was initially very fortunate to benefit from more profitable and open economic times," she says. "In order to compete, I created and continue to develop pieces, both one-of-a-kind and limited series that stand out amongst the mass of existing American talent."

#### **NEXT GENERATION**

Kerman now prepares the next generation of Quebecois jewellery artists, collaborating with her daughter, Erin Wahed, who recently launched Bande des Quatres, a collection that takes inspiration from Kerman's own love of an asymmetrical view of balance, and meshes it with a voice distinctly Wahed's own. Her rings find the beauty in opposites, of what one side has that the other lacks, and how such differences account for a stunning, unified perspective.

As SODEC continues to push forward its mission to introduce foreign markets to the best of their jewellery artistry, the unconventional jewellery Artists of Québec find both a benefactor and a supportive podium to achieve international acclaim.

And to Meeling Wong, such acclaim is certainly well deserved. "I can't wait to see what else is coming from Québec!" she says. [CJ]