

The Skinny, June 4, 2013

THE SKINNY

INDEPENDENT CULTURAL JOURNALISM

Karl Fritsch: Put a Ring on It by Amie Gee



Ring (of Silver, Lapis Lazuli, Crystal, Onyx, Amethyst, Chalcedon, Carnelian, Amethyst, Turquoise, Smoky Quartz), 2009 by Karl Fritsch

Manchester Art Gallery is currently home to a collection of jewelry designer Karl Fritsch's weird and wonderful creations. We take a look at the techniques and approaches used by the celebrated craftsman

Nestled in between Manchester Art Gallery's world renowned art collections, stretching from the historic to the contemporary and everything in between, is a jewelry exhibition like no other. Until 23 June, the gallery is playing host to the first UK solo exhibition from internationally acclaimed jewelry designer Karl Fritsch, whose unique and boundary pushing pieces of work are sought for exhibitions and by collectors across the world.

The unusual (and sometimes quite bizarre) collection features handcrafted pieces of jewelry where every process, from the soldering to the setting, has been completed by Fritsch himself – making each individual piece truly unique, right down to his fingerprints leaving their mark within the metals as a design feature. His work doesn't place importance on perfection, but rather on each piece having a different story to tell.

Fritsch utilizes traditional precious materials that you would expect to find in fine jewelry, such as gold and gemstones, and uses processes such as oxidization, where he purposefully tarnishes and distresses these materials and combines them with non-precious objects. Even rusty screws are used to create pieces that are both ornate and 'decayed', or 'neglected', at the same time. The once bright and polished gold and silver materials are unrecognizable, reduced from their former glistening glory to their dull and dark oxidized form. These oxidized bands, often intricate and delicate, are juxtaposed with beautifully cut glass and gemstones, often piled high on top of each other and within the designs of the manipulated metal.

Some pieces feature nails piercing through gemstones and holding them in place, cut cylinders of gemstones interlocking and protruding through mounds of black metal, and show-stopping miniature sculptures, including – in one case – a jewel-encrusted bronze cow sitting proudly on top of a ring, which itself would be considered unwearable by most due to the sculpture's actual size and weight.

Fritsch's pieces completely break the boundaries of jewelry design and show that it is possible to work even



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non-precious materials into something exquisite. His designs are praised as wearable pieces of avant-garde art, with each piece exciting and intriguing. Over his career, he has never failed to surprise with his lavish, ornamental and often outrageous collections. A jewelry show of this caliber and exclusivity is rarely seen in the UK, and is a must-attend event for anyone interested in design – and many of Fritsch's pieces are also available to purchase, with prices starting from (a pretty reasonable) £100.

Manchester Art Gallery, until 23 Jun, Mon-Sun 10am-5pm, Thu until 9pm, free <http://www.manchestergalleries.org>