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METEORITES AND JEWELS

Spectacular London Show by Swiss Artist

In 1954, a young Swiss of a mere 24 years became designer and chief jeweller at Patek Philippe, the famous watch manufacturers in Geneva. He began to win prizes and awards in the most difficult competitions and to take part in international exhibitions. In 1962, he opened his own workshop in Geneva as designer of jewellery. He had been born, bred and trained there, at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and various watchmaking firms in the time-honoured tradition.

Today, at 35, he owns eight *Oscars* and his firm has been awarded three. According to the rules of the Diamonds-International Awards this makes him *hors concours* and automatically a member of the Diamonds-International Academy. In his workshop in Geneva he employs eleven craftsmen, three Spanish, one Italian, one French and six Swiss. He is under exclusive contract to the world-renowned watch firm OMEGA for items containing watch or clock movements.

To describe his work as unusual, would be an understatement. He uses superbly conceived ideas, mainly inspired by nature, and brings them to life with "love, rarity and poetic inventiveness" as Jean Anouilh expressed it. Gilbert Albert uses priceless gems and precious metals with the same unerring touch of genius as a lesser jewel, steel or a piece of coral. His new invention is the use of meteorites in the composition of his jewellery. The strange and sombre beauty of these stones, their value as unassessable as their age, combined with familiar stones and metals appeals not only to our sense of beauty, but touches the mystic which is hidden in everyone of us.

When Gilbert Albert first held a meteorite in his hands, he was moved to such an extent that he resolved that these mysterious fragments from cosmos would hold the place of honour among the jewels he would prepare for his own first big exhibition.

And that exhibition has just been held in London at the venerable Goldsmiths' Hall, Foster Lane. The exhibition represented the first one-man show ever staged in the 600 years' history of the illustrious Goldsmiths' Company, a great tribute to this remarkable Swiss craftsman and artist and his unique jewellery.

The exhibition (open from 10th to 26th November) has been a great success. The seventy-five pieces of jewellery were superbly displayed in small intimate show cases spread out in one of the spacious rooms of Goldsmiths' Hall.

My first impression was one of amazement at the daring of this artist. Whilst appreciating the craftsmanship and the beauty of the gems, my reaction was one of restlessness, and it was only during a second visit that I began to grasp the supreme artistry and understand the meaning of the message.

The exhibits on show consisted of seventy-five pieces, mainly necklaces, brooches and bracelets, and OMEGA watches concealed under stones and metalwork. Surprisingly, there was only a single ring. A clock and a cigarette box, a distinguished visitors' book, a dagger and a cross completed the collection. But what at first sight seemed elaborate pieces of ornate jewellery became invested with a meaning which had at first escaped me in spite of the picturesque language of the catalogue. Now I began to feel and not only to see. I began to be fascinated by the messengers from outer space with their enigmatic scars and opaqueness. Familiar precious stones took on a different face and became both less and more valuable.

I cannot do better than describe my favourite brooch — the first time I dismissed it uncomprehendingly. An almost unscathed meteorite discovered in Indo-China forms the central feature. A whirl of platinum and pure gold embraces it, studded with a bevy of brilliant pearl and diamond satellites. A shooting star, a solid fragment penetrating the earth's atmosphere after a journey of millions of years "hurtling through measureless distances, pursuing its unknown destiny". The piece of jewellery is (quoting the catalogue) "evocative of some dizzying spiral nebula — in the Great Bear, perhaps — as enigmatic as the heavens themselves".

The Cross fashioned from four meteorites discovered in Asia I positively resented at first. Now its meaning has struck me forcibly: the meteorites tortured in their shape and volume, symbolize suffering. On all sides they are "spitefully assailed by the gold and platinum claws of the Prince of Darkness". Set in the centre of the Cross is a ruby, an island of peace, symbolising hope and the certainty of redemption. Gradually, my resentment gave way to acceptance and admiration.

Jean Anouilh, in the preface to the catalogue, said that the few women who will be given a piece of meteorite jewellery will feel themselves marked with some indefinable secret sign. After the pearls from the oceans and the gems from the bowels of the earth, fragments of stars from the universe: the very gems of man's God.

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