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Students of the Three Schools Project and of Hiko Mizuno College of Jewelry, Re-places/Key-places: Synchronize, 2014, Omotesando Street, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo, photo courtesy of Hiko Mizuno College of Jewelry

Parades—Jewelry Takes to the Streets

Lizzie Atkins

On the morning of Saturday, November 20, 2004, a living, breathing, walking, talking jewelry exhibition erupted onto the streets of Tokyo. Approximately 175 students assembled at Hiko Mizuno College, ready to parade the city streets dressed in plain T-shirts printed with a baroque gilt picture frame and each wearing a piece of self-made jewelry. They made their way through the heart of the fashion district, pausing for 30 minutes to create, temporarily, the “longest jewelry gallery in the world,”¹ before finally coming to rest in a moment of perfect synchronicity at exactly 3 p.m. on the Shibuya crossing, the busiest intersection in Tokyo, where they released hundreds of balloons, each one carrying an image of a piece of jewelry.

This extraordinary spectacle was the final event staged as part of the

third iteration of the Three Schools Project, a collaborative exchange initiated in 1993 between three design schools—the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam and Hiko Mizuno College in Tokyo—and which involved three students from each institution. It was also perhaps the first incarnation of the phenomenon of jewelry “parades”—an unorthodox form of display that takes contemporary jewelry to the streets in an effort to seek social engagement and disseminate it differently to new and diverse audiences.

Though these parades are multifarious, essentially ephemeral and evanescent and increasingly widespread, they are all driven by a number of shared determinants. Born out of a desire to reach a varied public, a public who may not otherwise find its way into the hallowed halls of a contemporary

jewelry gallery, they are indicative of the participating jewelers' eagerness to engage, to interact, to increase awareness and provoke conversation with the public at large. Promoting contact between artist, wearer, viewer and the artwork and creating an open and informal space for sensory experience are the impulses that impel these artists' interventions. The role of the audience is no longer that of the purely passive onlooker, it now also demands a degree of participation through both direct interaction with the parading jewelers and also through actions that duplicate, albeit in a different context, those gestures familiar to the shopper who wants to try things on. These parades are "jewelry out of the box and ... in action." ² They seek to set it free from the confines of the gallery, from the precious isolation of the display case, and situate it back on the body, in public, in what they see as its natural habitat.

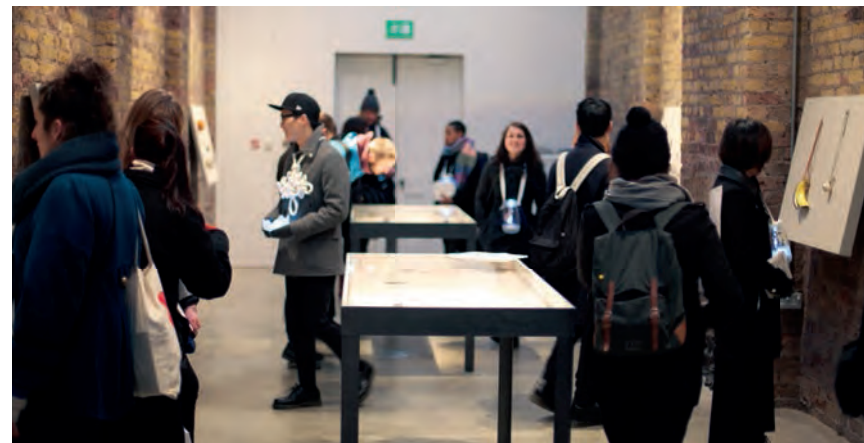
Since that pivotal event in Tokyo in 2004, both collectives as well as individual artists have taken their work to the streets. Some perform, others merely walk. Sometimes they insinuate themselves into other exhibitions, taking advantage of the ready-made audience. Whatever their modus operandi, these parades are a spectacle, a hook with which to reel in the curious or puzzled passers-by. Dressed in white coveralls and wearing a piece of their own jewelry, the ten members of Bórax08001 (a culturally diverse collective founded by a group of former students of the Escola Massana in Barcelona) were often mistaken for protestors as they showed their work in their first street

intervention, Jewellery Displaced, over a three-day period during the B-side Festival in Amsterdam in 2011. Jewelry is small, relatively speaking, created with the proportions of the human body in mind, so initially the group used photographs of their work, enlarged to a scale more aligned to the surrounding cityscape, as a device with which to initiate a dialogue with onlookers, and then later performed a series of silent, slow and precise movements outside the Central Station, in direct contrast to the frenzied rush and noise of the urban landscape.

Spectacle is essential to the success of New Zealand-based jeweler Vivien Atkinson's mobile gallery space, Salon Rouge, which is housed inside a voluminous old, red coat. With jewelry by Atkinson or other invited artists stitched and pinned to the interior "walls" of the coat, there is an unexpected theatricality to her actions as she walks around the city of Wellington, New Zealand, and invites people to view her gallery. Suspicion and hesitation turn to surprise and humor as Atkinson opens the coat to reveal the works, a gesture reminiscent of the shifty-looking and mildly criminal opportunist with his coat full of contraband and that plays on and subverts the comedic connotations of saucy seaside postcards as she "flashes" her jewels. ³

Some parades take a more prosaic approach, employing both strategic and guerrilla tactics to draw in an audience. In January 2013 the Moving On collective of former students from the Royal College of Art (RCA) in London, "on a mission to open up the debate around the accessibility and

Exhibition in progress, Moving On: 8.207,654mm, 2013, infiltrating S O Gallery, London, photo: Antoine Foulot



Exhibition view, Jewellery Displaced, Bórax08001, 2011, B-side Festival, Amsterdam, photo: Manu Ocaña



Exhibition view, MAD about SCHMUCK, the Object & Jewellery master students of the MAD-Faculty, Hasselt, 2014, Munich, photo: Gésine Hackenberg



knowledge of contemporary jewelry and objects,”⁴ travelled 8,207,654 mm across London with their exhibition⁵ of jewelry suspended around their necks in accessible, lit glass jars. They took their exhibition on foot, bus and tube from the RCA to the Design Museum at Shad Thames, stopping en route at significant cultural landmarks (museums and galleries) where they felt they might encounter a demographic that would be open to engaging with their work—through conversation, observation and touching and trying on. During these chance interactions the public was invited to visit and participate in jewelry “handling” events at two concurrent contemporary jewelry exhibitions—Design Overtime, part of Unexpected Pleasures (curated by Susan Cohn) at the Design Museum, and Chamber of Wonder at Gallery S O on Brick Lane.

Using infiltration as their means of mass exposure, the Object & Jewellery MA students from the MAD-faculty in Hasselt (Belgium) employed a less confrontational method of display. Strapping their jewelry to their backs in Perspex display cases where it could be viewed anonymously, without necessitating engagement with the artist, the students set about taking their mobile exhibition, MAD About Schmuck, to every static show, and all streets in between, during the 2014 Munich jewelry week.

And, between 2010 and 2012, the guerrilla tactics of Subliminal Infiltrations—a group of Auckland, New Zealand, jewelers—saw them infiltrate over 40 jewelry exhibition openings across the city and further afield, all wearing a piece by the member

selected for presentation. There is, perhaps, something impudent about infiltrating other people’s exhibitions, but this approach is pragmatic and the rewards are various—for up-and-coming artists it is an opportunity to see shows and also to be seen, to garner attention both from the public at large and from gallerists and collectors who might not otherwise be aware of your work. MAD About Schmuck became such a ubiquitous feature during the fair that the group was actively encouraged to attend openings by artists and gallery owners alike.

However these parades and interventions might challenge the insularity of contemporary art jewelry and overcome many of the issues of display perceived as inherent in the static gallery model, they are not without challenges. On a practical level, the unique portability of jewelry makes these events possible but exiting the gallery replaces one set of constraints (walls, furniture, security) with another (light, weather, permits). From a curatorial point of view, if you take jewelry off the plinth, out of the showcase or from the drawer, how then do you present it in a way that is innovative, relevant, cohesive and yet still focuses the attention and encourages connection and exchange? The white suits of Bórax08001 in some way extend the “white cube” of the gallery to the body, creating a neutral space where the spotlight falls on the jewelry without the confusion and noise of the body to complicate perception. These suits may seek to create an impartial place of reflection and focus but they cannot diminish the frenetic sensory chaos of the city.

The glass jars or display cases used by Moving On and MAD might be worn but they still keep the jewelry at one remove, distanced and isolated from the body itself. There is also the risk that, to the eyes of the viewing public, the spectacle of these parades might overshadow the jewelry itself, forgoing the notion of “display” in favor of “performance” and as such reduce the jewelry to an accessory to the event.

Although there have been some interventions by individual jewelry artists, many of these actions are marshalled by collectives, harnessing the power of a shared vision as well as the diversity and impact intrinsic to a group action. Their approach to exhibition and production is democratic—the parades are curated by the group, by mutual agreement, and each member is responsible for selecting their work for display. Many rely heavily on social media for the promotion, transmission and archiving of the parades through Facebook, blogs and websites, and also to raise money through crowdfunding campaigns. Despite professing a preference for the street and an ambition to build bridges between the unknowing public and the terra incognita that is contemporary jewelry,⁶ these parades are often played out during established jewelry-related events and accompanied by a traditional exhibition, documenting both the jewelry and the parade itself.

The two models are not mutually exclusive, it seems. Rather, these parades function not as an alternative but as complement to the traditional gallery or museum model. Both mechanisms of display can be

successful, depending on the kind of work on show, the curatorial intention behind the exhibition and the prospective audience. Fundamentally, parades are conceived out of a need to connect directly with people, to encourage tactile and emotional exchanges and to challenge the insularity of contemporary jewelry. The immediacy of the street as the site of performance enables the participating artists to make jewelry familiar, alive and accessible in ways that are not possible when framed within the reverential space of the gallery.

1 Marjan Unger, Unlimited: Presenting Jewelry Out of the Box. Amsterdam, Munich, Tokyo, (Amsterdam: Sandberg Institute, 2006), 65.

2 Sharon Fitness (of Subliminal Infiltrations), in response to an emailed questionnaire, received on December 4, 2014.

3 Vivien Atkinson (Salon Rouge), in response to an emailed questionnaire, received on December 7, 2014. Part of the Kete and Wunderruma exhibitions in Wellington, Salon Rouge “rested” between Atkinson’s parades: It was presented as a gallery within a gallery in different hosting venues in that city—the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts and Avid Gallery.

4 Moving On website, <http://movingoncollective.com/about.html>.

5 Moving Exhibition: 8,207,654mm. London, January 25, 2013.

6 Bórax08001, in response to an emailed questionnaire, received on December 7, 2014.