

CARRY THE CAN

ACJ Conference, 5-8 July 2006

By Shelby Fitzpatrick

THE CONFERENCE The time is perfect for the ACJ to present a conference which addresses ethical issues of values and responsibility. The stage has already been set in a global context from organizations such as Fair Trade (produce supplied from small-scale growers who get fair returns for their goods) to opportunities for ethical investment (which have had a dramatic effect on stock markets). This adds up to the fact that we can and should be aware of the sourcing of our materials, and understand that we have the power to influence the market at all levels.

CARRY THE CAN was conceived and developed by Helen Carnac and Heidi Yeo, from a presentation at London Metropolitan University in 2003 on Honour, Ethics, Integrity and Morality. Libby Callinicos joined the team to help plan and create the conference. The expertise and experience of Rachael Carnac and Jill Fitzgibbon from Metal Events Ltd. were vital to the continuity of the event, and underlined the practicality of engaging professional organizers who could chair sessions as well as make important contributions to the discussions.

Christina Miller and Susan Kingsley of ETHICAL METALSMITHS gave a powerful and succinct account of the social, ethical and environmental devastation caused by mining companies around the world.

We were shown images of open pit mining with the mountains of mine waste required to extract a small amount of gold. They explained the process involved in this production which has led to acid and toxic metals such as arsenic, cadmium, mercury and lead leaking from the rock and polluting water systems. The inappropriate use of cyanide, used to leach metal from crushed rock in 85% of gold production, has killed fish and poisoned drinking water for large populations. Tailings from mines have contaminated environments and reeked havoc on wildlife and humans.

The positive message is that the magical gold which so many of us use in making our jewellery can and must be mined in a responsible way. The means are there if the mining companies choose to use them. When mining reforms are demanded by Jewelers of America as well as Tiffany's, it is clear that these moves are market-driven and necessary for consumer confidence. Ethical consumers are playing a vital role in policy decisions and issues of value and responsibility. The No Dirty Gold has over 50,000 signatures to its pledge. Its Golden rules for responsible gold production have set a standard for addressing social, environmental and ethical issues relating to the industry, emphasising the need for accountability and transparency.

Susan and Christina ended their talk with these suggestions for us individually and as a group:

- “We must recognize that gold tarnished by human rights abuses and environmental destruction presents an ethical dilemma.
- We can demand, and help create the demand for gold that has been certified as responsibly mined or recycled.
- We can become advocates for responsible mining by educating our students, customers and colleagues about the issues.
- We can stay informed about mining issues and what is being accomplished in other sectors. Our website, www.EthicalMetalsmiths.org, was created, in part, to be a clearinghouse of information for metalsmiths.
- As individuals, we can join and support the efforts of the environmental and human rights organizations that are already working, very effectively, on mining reform.
- We can question the origins of our materials. We can demand a choice.
- We can seek ways to change our mode of being in the world to promote, in everything we do, values of conservation and respect for the rights of indigenous peoples and communities.
- Consider adopting a resolution in support of responsible mining as our organization did. You have a voice. A resolution is a way for you to be heard.

The future of gold is not solely in the hands of mining corporations, or by initiatives drafted by the jewellery manufacturing industry, or through the efforts of NGOs or in the hands of fate. We live in a time of vast change. And often change happens as much by inspiration as by imposition. Another world is not only possible, it is inevitable, and we live in the time of its creation. Designer jewellers can be catalysts for change.”

ACJ members wishing to support the No Dirty Gold Campaign may consider signing the No Dirty Gold pledge which reads as follows: “I support the No Dirty Gold campaign to end destructive gold mining practices. I call on retailers and manufacturers of gold jewellery, electronics, and other goods to work to ensure that the gold in their products was not produced at the expense of local communities, workers and the environment. I demand that the global mining industry provide retailers and consumers with an alternative to dirty gold.”

BREAKAWAY SESSIONS The extra element of a large number (over 40) of academic delegates from home and abroad (Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, USA) meant that the topics of the conference could be explored in an even more exciting and informative way during the Saturday Break-out sessions. Three groups met at different locations, to discuss *Reflection, Experience, Knowledge* with Heidi at LMU’s Liebskind Building on Holloway Road, *Heirlooms & Legacies* with Libby in the Furniture Works on Commercial Road, and *Value & Material* with Helen at The Women’s Library near Aldgate East station. Speakers from the conference attended the sessions and made valuable contributions. Having these sessions on the final day meant that delegates had been able to give time to reflect on the many ideas presented in the previous days’ talks.

I attended Helen's session *Value & Material*, at The Women's Library. After some short presentations the discussions began in earnest. Christina Miller, Susan Kingsley and Robert Ebendorf gave invaluable comments and suggestions and it soon became clear that those attending were interested in taking action, not just in exchanging ideas. A mark from the Assay Office for work made from recycled gold was to be explored. A possible exhibition on the conference themes was proposed. Issues of the conference would be incorporated into curriculum for courses (Ethical Metalsmiths have already begun working on this for the USA). The ACJ website could feature information on conference issues. An ACJ resolution would be proposed to express our solidarity in supporting responsible mining practices, and in using gold that is independently certified to be responsibly sourced according to broadly accepted environmental, social and human rights standards.

Reflection, Experience, Knowledge: Mark Lewis opened the session with a thoughtful paper on the place of spirituality in art, and more specifically in jewellery, developing his theme as an inquiry and using the process of transformation of raw or pre-existing materials as a journey towards understanding and enlightenment. Mark's deeply felt exploration gave his talk a resonance that challenged the concept of jewellery as shallow frivolity. Next, we heard from Laura Cave, with a totally contrasting account of her visits to rural Peru, where over some years she has worked in a lively community development project. Laura related movingly how the experience of the response of women in an impoverished community to the stimulus of creativity had enriched her own life. Finally, we listened to Lynne Glazzard, whose chosen lifestyle in the North Yorkshire countryside follows her passionate commitment to environmental responsibility. Her title, 'Precious Life', reflected a deep response to her surroundings, and her involvement with the Ecological Design Association reinforces this concern. The morning presentation, convened by Heidi Yeo and ably chaired by Ray Bachelor, concluded with a thoughtful discussion between audience and speakers.
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THE FUTURE Now that the ACJ has hosted an event focusing on these issues and given us the opportunity to become aware of the ethical dimensions to our work, it is up to our members to promote this awareness. Public knowledge of the origins of gold and methods used for its extraction will demand accountability. With these issues now exposed, we have important decisions to make to assure the public of the ethical standards of our trade.

A resolution was proposed for the ACJ, based on one adopted at the S.N.A.G. conference in May. It was not possible to vote on this at the AGM but an Ethics Committee has been set up to develop a strategy for our group and, ultimately, to lead to a resolution.

The ideas of CARRY THE CAN - Honour, Ethics, Integrity and Morality - interlaced throughout the conference and provided the delegates with much to remember, to digest, and to disperse. It truly was a seminal event which will impact on our position in the metalwork field. Hopefully, those who were unable to attend the conference will visit the websites mentioned where there is a wealth of information, and enter the dialogue so that we can all "carry the can".

At the end of the conference on the final evening Central St Martin's Lethaby Gallery hosted a spectacular catwalk show of jewellery and body adornment by graduates of CSM, Middlesex, LMU, Bucks Chilterns and UCE (Birmingham), along with a selection of invited designers. **Arabel Lebrusan**, an artist/designer and amateur dancer, sent us her comments on the event:

Why choreography matters in jewellery One wonders every time when seeing a jewellery catwalk if it is the best way to show jewellery. Well, after watching the show at the ACJ Gala Finale at CSM one can only say 'definitely Yes', and it is the only way really to appreciate a certain kind of jewellery. That evening we all enjoyed some very inspiring choreographies that reminded us that a catwalk can also stand between an experimental theatre stage and an observe-me-yes-touch-me-not space. In this new era of contemporary jewellery the meaning and intention of the jewels need to be shown by means other than simply observation. In this case, performance and movement come into place fully to release the content of the work. All senses need to be alert to receive input and understand what we have in front of us. The models that night were not professional but they did carry that intense energy needed on the stage to perform and to attract our attention. The time of jewellery without the body, without reality is almost gone and choreography is becoming an important tool to use in jewellery design.

Conclusion Altogether an enormous amount of sheer hard work was put in by the principal organisers, Heidi Yeo, Helen Carnac and Elizabeth Callinicos, with the dedicated support of innumerable others all of whom earned our gratitude for their commitment and energy. Metal Events Ltd, run by Helen's sister Rachael, delivered an effective service at the brewery Conference Centre in Chiswell Street, and handled the vital administrative responsibility throughout. Sponsorship from Arts Council England, LMU, Bucks Chilterns and ACJ was crucial in providing financial viability, and the conference was prefaced by a reception on the Wednesday evening in the sumptuous surroundings of Goldsmiths' Hall, which ACJ's Patron, Lady Marie Alexander, was able to attend.

A 'legacy document' is planned, recording the papers and discussions of the conference, and in due course we shall be giving news of its progress and publication date.