

hardened tears
amber jewellery exhibition





MUSEUM VILLA DE BONDT

Krijgslaan 124, B-9000 Gent / Belgium, www.villadebondt.be

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AMBER MUSEUM

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hardened tears

amber jewellery exhibition

Slawomir Fijałkowski □ Christiane Förster □ Karl Fritsch □ Sophie Hanagarth
Herman Hermsen □ Daniel Kruger □ Stefano Marchetti □ Wilhelm Tasso Mattar
Pavel Opočenský □ Annelies Planteijdt □ Ramon Puig Cuyàs □ Wolfgang Rahs
Ulrich Reithofer □ Philip Sajet □ Adolfas Šaulys □ Gisbert Stach
Manuel Vilhena □ Arek Wolski □ Petra Zimmermann

Artists "uncontaminated" with amber – an interview with Wim Vandekerckhove

Wim Vandekerckhove - the owner of the Villa de Bondt Gallery in Ghent / Belgium - has made his dream from 30 years ago come true by organising an amber art exhibition. This will be quite a peculiar exhibition because he has invited artists who in most cases have never worked with amber before. What was the idea behind this "experiment" and what is its result?

You are a co-organiser of the Hardened Tears exhibition where jewellery artists will showcase their amber art pieces. This is a rather uncommon project from the Western European point of view.

I'm very fond of both Poland and amber. In 1981-87, I was a member of the still-famous Henryk Tomaszewski Wrocław Mime Theatre – I was so enthralled with a production of theirs I saw in Belgium that, in spite of the obvious political and economic difficulties of the time, I decided to come to Poland. I met many artists here, including jewellery artists. It was in Poland that my fascination with this topic began – I felt that it would become my future. I remember that I even vowed to myself that I would never do anything else in my entire life. And so it has remained (laughs). Why amber? The first person to amaze me with her approach to this fossil resin was Maryna Lewicka-Wala, who emphasised the beauty of natural nuggets. Those were times when good amber jewellery, which would be intriguing from the point of view of both art and design, was practically non-existent. I really liked the amber in her work and I thought that if I got the chance, I would really want to organise an exhibition of amber works.

You've just got that chance and the pieces presented at the exhibition will come from the leading European designers.

The idea emerged in May 2012 in Gdańsk during my conversation with Stawek Fijałkowski, professor at the Gdańsk Academy of Fine Arts and well-known Polish jewellery designer. We have invited well-known European artists, of whom the substantial majority have never worked with amber before. All told 20 persons, whose task was to look at the gemstone with as much of an "uncontaminated eye" as possible and be inspired by it. It was, of course, a very risky move from our point of view because we did not know what the end result would be. But, at the same time, that was what made it incredibly fascinating: this uncertainty and anticipation how the artists would rise up to the challenge. I admit that I breathed a sigh of relief only when I saw the pieces. I think that the lion's share of them is really good. Our objective has been met: new creations and ideas have been developed, but also a new artistic sensitivity has been expressed.

And what was the artists' feedback on their participation in this "experiment?"

Generally speaking, they were very curious about this material, as it was new to them, and I think that was the reason why they agreed to take part in the project. Later on, they emphasised amber's artistic qualities and the ease with which it can be worked. Some of them were sorry to discover amber so late, which makes me think it may not be their last word on the subject. I am happy about such positive reactions, especially because I'm dreaming of further editions of the project, of course each time with different artists. I hope that the first exhibition will open up collaboration with artists who have a completely new outlook on amber and that my gallery will play an important role in this. I trust that even this amber dream of mine will come true.

The exhibition is called Hardened Tears. Is this a reference to the local amber legends?

Not only that. Of course this does include a reference to the myth of Jurata crying over the death of her beloved and the myth of the Heliades turned into poplars and weeping amber tears over their dead brother Phaeton. To me personally, however, these "hardened tears" are linked, first and foremost, to Gdańsk and, more broadly speaking, to Poland: although they used to be a symbol of the tragic events of history which took place in this country, today they are tears of joy encapsulated in a typically Polish material that amber is. The works by the artists invited to take part in the project give us many fascinating interpretations of the subject in both dimensions: the mythological and the historical. This makes it all the more interesting.

*Interview by Anna Sado
www.amber.com.pl*



A Fossilised Smile

A lot has been written about amber lately, perhaps even too much. At least it seems that way in Gdańsk, a place which is clearly associated world-wide with the fossilised resin of coniferous trees from 40 million years ago. What is self-evident to us, Gdańskers, may not be everyone's common knowledge. That is why it is always worthwhile to promote this extraordinary material – not only among users, but also among the makers of designer jewellery. This was one of the primary objectives of the Hardened Tears exhibition, which this catalogue documents. I hope that none of the artists who accepted the invitation to take part in the project ever felt to be an object of marketing manipulation, as the "image" aspect we had assumed was never commercial in nature. From the very beginning, the idea behind the exhibition was about the need to artistically interpret the natural properties of Baltic amber, but also about its deep, historical symbolism, expressed in the exhibition's very title which was borrowed from the ancient myth of Phaeton. We hoped that no one would be able better than artists to uncover what was not always a conscious point of reference for the answers to the most simple and yet the most difficult questions about the nature of the concept of value (by no means in the economic sense of the word). They have succeeded brilliantly and as a co-ordinator of the project it gives me personal satisfaction that the exhibition has become a reason to discover the avant-garde quality of The Gold of the North and has helped to create a unique collection of contemporary amber art pieces. The entire project was a success thanks to many persons involved in the International Amber Association, whose aim is to promote scientific and artistic activities which deepen the understanding of amber. Apart from its premiere at the Villa de Bondt Museum in Ghent, Belgium and the Amber Museum in Gdańsk, Poland, the exhibition which consists of original jewellery by nineteen contemporary artists will be shown in a number of places along the Baltic Sea coast: in Germany, Denmark, Lithuania and also along the ancient Amber Route in Austria and Italy. The history of Europe's material culture was determined by many manufacturing traditions and stylistic canons, but also by the signifiers of place – the materials which are region specific and substances which are rare in other parts of the world. Baltic amber was such a material once and is becoming so again. We hope that this discreet educational subtext will meet with the friendly understanding of the contemporary public and become a source of new inspiration to discover the elements of the European identity which date back to ancient myths and decidedly non-mythological discoveries in archaeology, palaeontology and art as well.

Prof. Stawomir Fijałkowski

Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Design
Gdańsk Academy of Fine Arts

hardened tears amber jewellery exhibition



Sławomir Fijałkowski



bloody Cherry. pendant, baltic amber, stainless steel

Rectangular amber? (minimally framed). Function as inclusion. Colour as title.
Object > Product > Context. Yes. I'm a designer. But I always look for exceptions to the rule.



Christiane Förster



no title. brooch, baltic amber, mother of pearl, copper, plastic

I loved the smell of amber.



Karl Fritsch



no title. pendant, baltic amber, oxidized silver

the amber was quite happy to talk about its past when holding it in my hand
but was a bit scared of getting shaped by other tools than nature
touch me but leave me alone

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Sophie Hanagarth



Neptun eyes in Goldwasser, necklace, baltic amber, iron

The piece of amber that was given to me looked like a cut of dried meat or bacon. Its surface gave the impression of wrinkled skin and under this crust there were thin sheets of different colours: creamy opaque and transparent honey. I tried to preserve the skin which covered this torn flesh and I was also interested to discover the depth of this piece of amber. So I created an oculus to look through this material. The idea was to create a polished window in the shape of an eye. At the same time, I went looking on the internet for some wrought iron (which happens to be a great interest of mine at the moment) in Gdansk and I found an image of the beautiful gate which protects the Fountain of Neptune. Neptune, usually represented as an old man, inspired the eyes and, at the same time, a Gdansk legend : the origin of the famous Goldwasser liqueur that reminded me of another form of Baltic gold: amber. The amber was sliced length-wise, so I had two identical drop-shaped parts. I engraved one eye on each part, one was creamy and the other golden. They are bound by hook-shaped chain links, an echo of the heavy chains lying in a harbour. Every iron hook was forged to form a worm for this sea god, originally a Chthonian god connected to the underground world..



Herman Hermsen



A mysterious character, necklace, baltic amber, gold

While working with the piece of raw material I discovered that this pre-historic treasure extorts respect by discovering its beauty.



Daniel Kruger



no title, brooch, baltic amber, gold

p.16



Stefano Marchetti

”

no title. brooch, baltic amber, gold, silver, glass

The piece was made in "electron (amber)" and "Electrum-gold (Lydian formula)."
The tear-shaped-glass functions as a reaction chamber, to make it a (potentially) working Philosopher's Stone. The piece was made with the latest theories of nuclear physics in mind.



Wilhelm Tasso Mattar



Hardened Tears of Vincent van Gogh . objects, baltic amber, painted

ear and vomit, after absinth

p.20



Pavel Opočenský

”

no title, pendant, baltic amber, silver

One of them, frozen in time. You can see inside by cutting and travel back in 50 000 000 years distance. Surface is contrasting with the inside, showing how time passed.

Karel Volipka (cooperated with the piece), Hugo Vítámvás (photographer)

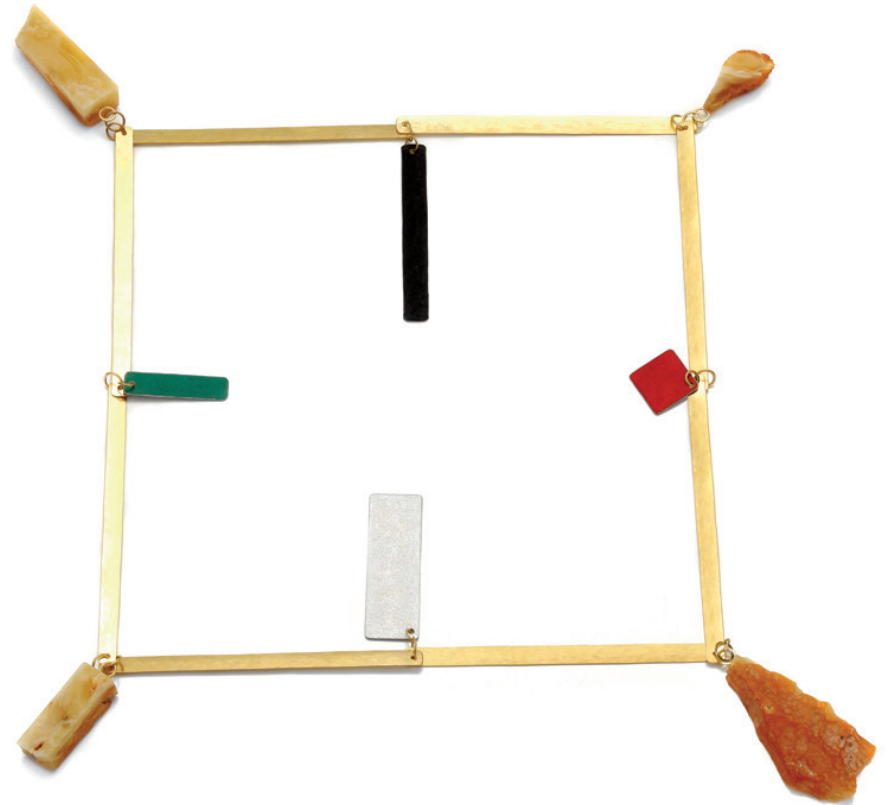


Annelies Planteijdt

”

„Beautiful city in the middle of the stonewood”
necklace, baltic amber, gold, pigments

In the middle of the stonewood everything takes place in another time and on another scale. Here you can see the smallest particles and the structure of thinking. Outside the wood you see everything on the human scale. You look back in time. You see resin turned to stone with prints of trees and rocks that were ever there. When wearing the piece everything comes together.



Ramon Puig Cuyàs



N°1462 subtle architectures

brooch, baltic amber, oxidized nickel silver

The thinking arrives almost always with action, arrive with dialogue, with materials and shapes. Making becomes for me a way of thinking. What drives my work is pre-feeling, that is to say, the search for a feeling that I look forward to finding out and which is trapped inside the object I have just made, but which is already in me. At the same time, the making becomes a dialogue, a vain struggle against time and oblivion; it becomes a desire of capturing some instant of life, of present, inside the object that I make as if it were the place where one keeps relics to project it towards the future.



Wolfgang Rahs



Hardened tears - not in vain . necklace, baltic amber, brass, tin

I am just a wounded man. I hope my piece of work suits a woman,
so that both of them get me into the flow again.



Ulrich Reithofer



no title . ring, baltic amber, wood, gold, silver, diamond

p.30



Philip Sajet



Une Larme Petrifiée . object, baltic amber

Sadness turned to stone

p.32



Adolfas Šaulys



identification with a hero

objects, baltic amber, gold, silver, wood, glass, rubber

The culmination of my hero's emotional state is tears. Any attempt to identify with our heroes always fails because we are separated by physical distance.



Gisbert Stach



Fritz's Snacks, brooch, baltic amber, silicone, stainless steel

Ironically, "Fritz's Snacks" – an imitation of Toast Hawaii made of Baltic amber and crushed amber mixed with silicone – is a reference to today's fast food culture. The brooch is reminiscent of a dried-up menu sample covered in dust from the window display of a fast food restaurant. At the same time, one could conceivably associate this artwork with a revolutionary discovery from the lost Amber Room of "Der Alte Fritz."*

(This was the nickname of Frederick II / Frederick the Great.



Manuel Vilhena



no title . brooch, baltic amber, gold, wood, string

I cut some tear-shaped forms from a raw piece of amber. The frozen moments of the past, captured in the amber are now placed in a dynamic and moving setting. The gold ring stands for the completeness of a cycle. The colourful string for the movement of modern life. Sadness into happiness. Despair into completeness. And it stops there. For, I hope, a very, very long time.



Arek Wolski

”

no title . object / pendant, amber, silver

I want to take over a place by marking it out; by "peeing" on it. It is not a random place, but a chosen one; the most "prestigious" one; on that gives significance to its new "owner."

p.40



Petra Zimmermann



no title . rings, baltic amber, polymethyl methacrylate, gold

The natural fossilised tree resin is combined with a material of our times, polymethyl methacrylate, a synthetic polymer. I was surprised how many material properties they have in common.





object.product.context

Jewellery Design Studio

Academy of Fine Arts - Gdańsk / PL

www.infraviolet.pl



amber.com.pl

bursztynowy portal / portal on amber



animal inclusion in baltic amber, feather
collection of the Amber Museum in Gdańsk

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