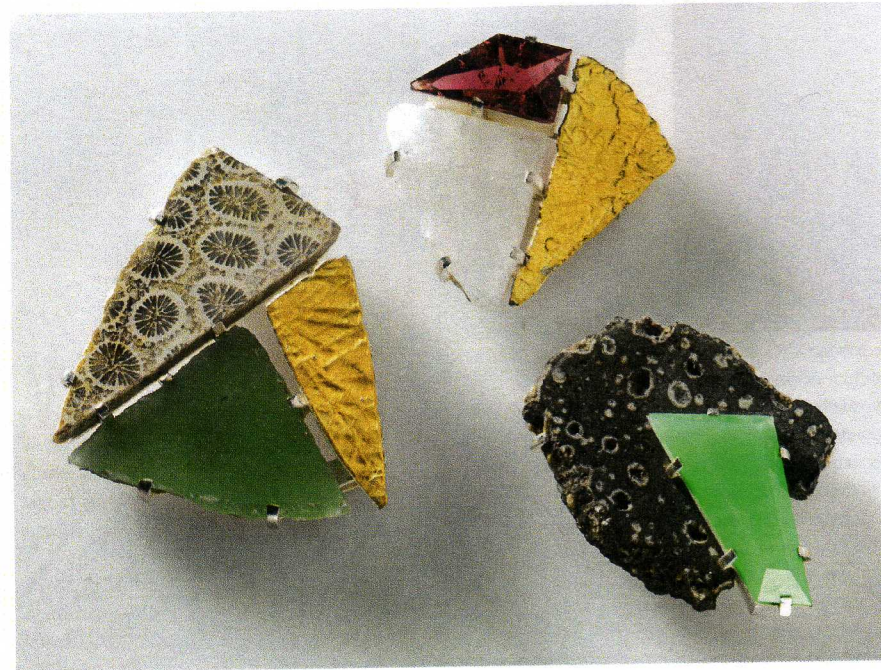


# REGINE SCHWARZER



Collecting stones and minerals can run in families. My mother collected semiprecious stones from fairs and shops, great hunks of amethyst and quartz crystals, slabs of agate and blocks of amber and pyrites. I collect stones as well, but specialise in small finds from the bush, near mines, on the beach or indeed in the city. The fact that stones do not need to be rare or cost a lot to be precious or to tell a story is a foundation for the jewellery practice of Regine Schwarzer.

Adelaide-based Schwarzer first collected rocks and minerals with her father in Germany as a child. Later with her husband in Australia, she noodled (noodling means fossicking for opals) in Coober Pedy and fossicked in the outback generally. Already a trained jeweller when she came to Australia, Schwarzer, over ten years, learnt how to cut and polish stones (a rare skill for a jeweller to acquire) in order to be able to find in raw minerals the exact shapes and features she wants to use. Schwarzer often likes to use flawed rather than perfect stones as she sees the history of the earth in tiny landscapes inside the stones and in the great forces that shaped them.

Klaus Bürgel, one of the jewellers that Schwarzer most admires, has said: "A successful piece to me has to incorporate the surprise of discovery, a secret and a mistake." This approach

will come as a surprise to people who see jewellers and metalworkers as perfectionists, but anything that is handmade has these elements to some degree and that is, of course, part of what makes handmade work feel alive.

A recent exhibition at Prospect Gallery called *Rhapos* brought together the work of Schwarzer and photographer/printmaker Catherine Hewitt. A little-known term, 'rhapos' is a Greek word meaning trivial or unimportant thing while rhopography is the depiction of such things, a term used by art historian Norman Bryson in his book *Looking at the overlooked: four essays on still life painting*.

*Rhapos* juxtaposed works on paper that Hewitt made from her beachcombing finds with Schwarzer's investigations of fossilised coral, fractals and crystalline formations. When I saw the exhibition I was struck by how humble it felt even though I didn't read about rhopography until later. The most memorable and striking element in the exhibition was definitely the fossilised coral used by Schwarzer. It is uncannily like the decorative glass technique known as millefiori but softly earth-coloured.

Previous work by Schwarzer in *Informing Facets*, her 2008 solo exhibition, contained strong gelati-coloured stones like chrysoprase and

prehnite, again emphasising a subtle earth-born beauty and oblique thoughtful arrangements. Schwarzer is not staying still with her practice. She has recently received a New Work grant from the Australia Council to develop ways of colouring her work, inspired by a workshop with enamelling expert Elizabeth Turrell. As well as exhibition and production work, Schwarzer does commissions. It is very tempting to get her to take one of the stones lying around my house and make it wearable.

Schwarzer has a studio at the JamFactory and sells her work at the JamFactory, Zudesign and the Hahndorf Academy in South Australia, Beaver Galleries in Canberra, Artisan in Brisbane, Studio 20/17 in Sydney, Gunyulgup in Western Australia and Studio Ingot in Melbourne.

Stephanie Radok

Left: Regine Schwarzer, *Making Manifest* series, 3 brooches, 2008, fossilised coral, aventurine, rubellite, quartz, chabazite in basalt, chrysoprase, sterling silver, 24ct gold, largest 4.1 x 5cm. Photograph Grant Hancock.

Right: Regine Schwarzer, *Facet Forms*, 3 vessels, 2009, patinated brass, nickel silver, largest 16 x 9 x 4cm. Photograph Grant Hancock.