

NARRATIVES IN PRECIOUS METAL AND STONES

Regine Schwarzer's creations are clear and balanced in form. Her designs are almost sparse but show a great depth and her stories suggest a tale while letting us fabricate our own. Text by Nicola Mill. Photographs by Michael Haines.

*Necklace, stg silver,
24 ct gold, with black
tourmaline and opal*

*Rings, stg silver,
24 ct gold engravings,
with aquamarine,
emeralds, sapphire,
rubies and diamonds*

NESTLED in the Adelaide foothills, Regine Schwarzer's workshop gives her a breathtaking view of the city of Adelaide, framed by the gums of the Belair National Park. Schwarzer draws great inspiration from the Australian bush and in this idyllic setting she produces work that is refreshingly simple, innovative and easy to wear. Born in 1961 in Hanau, near Frankfurt, Germany, Regine Schwarzer originally wanted to be a potter. As one who has always worked with her hands, she found great pleasure shaping the metals she explored during her goldsmith apprenticeship at the prestigious Staatliche Zeichenakademie, Hanau. Since her apprenticeship Schwarzer has studied silversmithing at the Fachhochschule Fuer Design, Hildesheim; completed a course in gem setting; designing and diamond practice; worked as a goldsmith; a jewellery designer and displayed in numerous galleries around Germany and Australia. In 1993 she moved to Adelaide where she established her workshop.

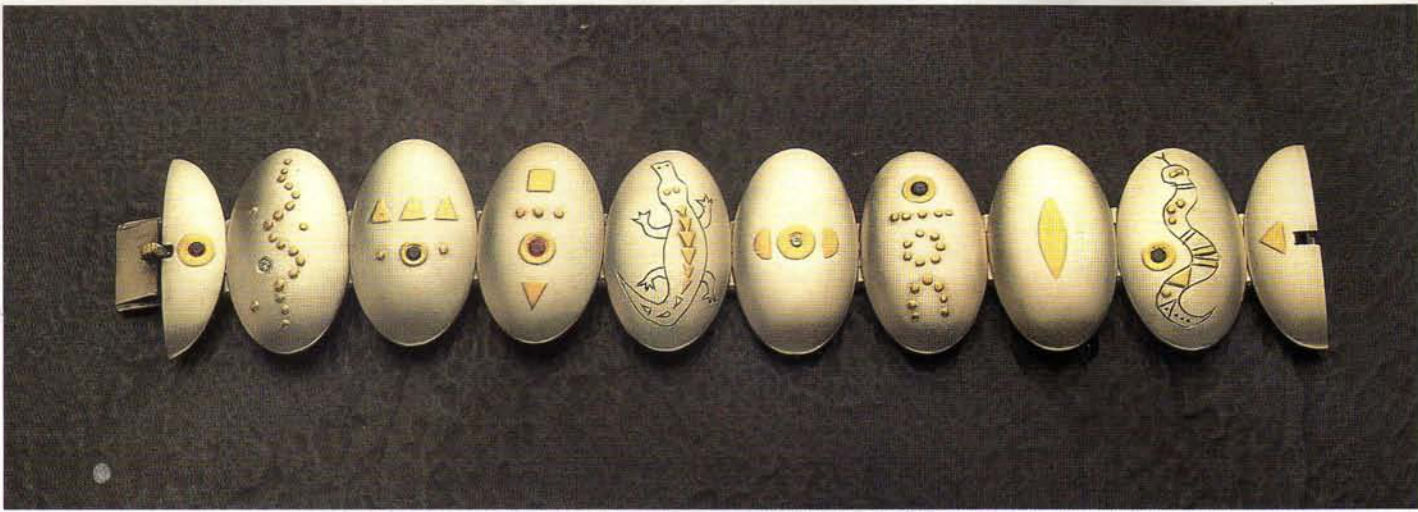
Since moving to Australia, Schwarzer has continued to explore her interest in the simplicity of images, from older cultures such as Aboriginal Australian, African and South American. Inspired by the inherent stories and strong meanings within these images Schwarzer also incorporates stories in her designs. The intrinsic meanings within her stories are left



Bracelets, stg silver, 24 ct gold, with engravings and sapphire



Rings, 18 ct gold, opal, diamonds, green tourmaline sapphire, ruby, yellow sapphire and emeralds



Bracelet, stg silver, 24 ct gold, engravings, sapphires, rubies, emerald, diamond



Ring, palladium aquamarine

Left: Necklaces, stg silver, 24 ct gold, engravings, ruby, diamond, emerald and sapphire

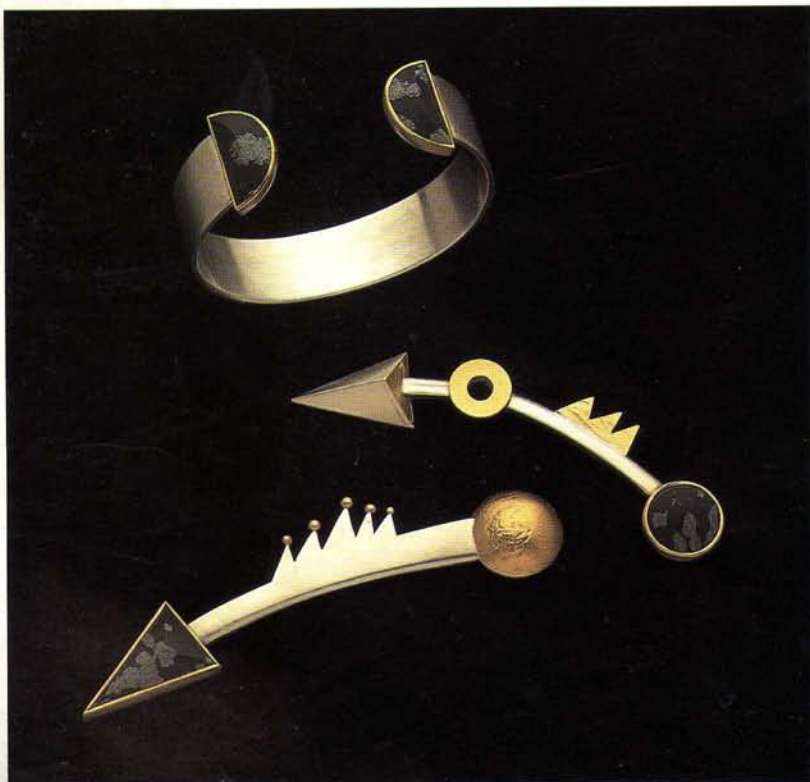
Right: Reversible brooch, stg silver, 24 ct gold, with engravings, rubies

Below: Bracelet and two brooches, stg silver, 24 ct and 22 ct gold, with snowflake obsidians

open to individual interpretation. 'They usually have a really strong meaning in them but they either mean something to you or they don't, I like it when something in the design of a piece attracts someone, it holds a special meaning for them' she says.

It is evident that she draws extensively from her travels through the Australian outback where she was inspired by images in cave paintings and the variety of animals she saw. She reflects her travels in Asia through carvings of aquatic creatures.

To tell a story about the main object in one of her



designs Schwarzer uses scratchings and markings. These extraneous markings around the main carving of an animal, particular shape or stone, are skillfully positioned in a manner which suggests a story without dictating what it is. 'My work has become more personal. The longer you do something the better you get in terms of technique. Like with the stories. The first ones were simpler, more condensed. My recent ones are clearer and more expressive. The longer I do them the more that comes into them.' Schwarzer often employs the basic forms of circles, squares and triangles in her work. She complements these clear shapes with different materials, other carvings or precious gems. Incorporated within her designs we will see a carving of an animal, such as a snake or turtle, which may or may not be the focal point of the piece. Other times her clean shapes stand alone within the design, highlighting a precious stone or the little King and Queen - icons that are frequently found in her work.

Her recent carvings lean more toward a sculptured look which suggests a further development in her style. Yet, she retains her characteristic simplicity. Schwarzer's strong background in the traditional techniques of jewellery-making, where detail is important, is obvious in her work. Each piece is strong and durable yet soft, gentle and pleasant to touch.

It is also comfortable and easy to wear. As she says, 'I take great care with each piece to ensure the wearer can't catch it on clothes. Most pieces can be taken off and played with, as my reversible rings.'

Most of her work is for everyday wear so one does not have to take it off. It is not theatrical. Schwarzer believes it is important for the person wearing her jewellery to feel comfortable with it; so comfortable that they would feel naked without it because it has become a part of themselves.

Schwarzer's concept of reversible jewellery has almost become her trademark. Nearly every piece is reversible, finished with her meticulous eye for detail and desire for simplicity. Fascinated by the notion of multiple use, she designs double-sided pieces with a different story on each side so they can be worn in alternative ways to suit an outfit.

As a designer, Schwarzer does not make things because she thinks they would suit other people's taste – it's what she would like to wear and what she feels comfortable with. In Europe people seem comfortable mixing gold and silver jewellery, whereas in Australia, they are hesitant. Schwarzer loves gold, silver and precious gems. She skilfully combines them with a confidence indicative of one who feels comfortable setting them against each other.

Schwarzer further manipulates colours by blackening engravings, polishing some part of a design, or leaving a section matt, which creates an interesting three-dimensional effect. Her delicate blend of gold and silver is often highlighted by the setting of a small precious stone. Colour is a key element in her designs and she often combines the bright colours of high-quality precious stones, offset against a background of pure gold or matt silver. The stones are always the focal point of a piece. Everything around the stone is there to bring it out more.

A recent introduction to Schwarzer's work is the opal, a stone automatically associated with Australia. An opal-cutting course in Adelaide gave her the opportunity to learn more about getting the most out of a good stone. As she says: 'With opals you can be really creative. You can look at it and see that the stone offers a particular form. I regard each stone as having its own life, and as I work with the material I get many ideas. Whenever the stones are cut by someone else, I feel as though I have missed out on that part which is important to me.'

Other variations to Schwarzer's work which still reflect her strong sense of style can be seen in her treatment of unusually shaped and cut stones. She tends to set these stones amongst very clean, simple designs, giving the piece an almost sculptured look that highlights the detail in the stone. For Schwarzer it is important that people receive something personal and she is always happy to work with clients' specifications and create a piece for them featuring their personal shape or symbol.

Schwarzer's designs continue to reflect her love of colours and desire for simple, condensed images. Where her jewellery is becoming more detailed she still manages to present clean, balanced and uncluttered lines. It is interesting to consider how her designs will progress further and what tales she will tell in the future.

Nicola Mill

Nicola Mill is an Adelaide-based freelance writer and film-maker. Regine Schwarzer's work can be found at Makers Mark Gallery in Melbourne and Sydney, Beavers Galleries in Canberra and the Jam Factory Craft and Design Centre in Adelaide. She can be contacted on (08) 339 4229 or 018 800 730.



Reversible brooches, stg silver, 24 ct gold, stainless steel, sapphire



Necklace, stg silver, 24 ct gold, engravings, diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds



Reversible rings, stg silver, 24 ct gold, emerald, diamond