

REPORT ON A VISIT BY OTTO KÜNZLI

Andrea Daly

Otto Künzli is a Swiss-born contemporary jeweller residing in Germany. He held the chair of goldsmithing and taught the class for jewellery at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich from 1991 until 2014. From 2008 to 2012 he was a visiting professor at the Royal College of Art in London. He has an internationally acclaimed and widely respected contemporary jewellery practice. He has made a significant global contribution to contemporary jewellery and has an impressive international exhibition record.

During his presentation at the Dowse Art Museum, Otto Künzli described himself first and foremost as a goldsmith. However, in stark contrast to the world of fine jewellery, he has been a pioneer of contemporary jewellery. For his exhibition at the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, he was described as someone who "has revolutionized modern jewelry art. In the 45-odd years in which he has been addressing the topic of jewelry, Otto Künzli has carved out for himself a quite unique position of far-reaching international influence not only as an artist and a pioneer, but also as an author and mentor."¹

In New Zealand, his influence as educator has inspired the practices of renowned contemporary jewellers Lisa Walker and Karl Fritsch, both of whom studied under his tutelage in Munich. Other prominent international contemporary jewellers who studied under Otto Künzli include David Bielander, Yutaka Minegishi and Hellen Britton.

Otto Künzli came to New Zealand as a guest of the Dowse, and was keynote speaker at "Unpacking the Language of Things," a conference that was linked to the corresponding exhibition "The Language of Things: Meaning and Value in Contemporary Jewellery."

During his time in New Zealand, he also held workshops at Hungry Creek Art & Craft School in Auckland and the Dunedin School of Art at Otago Polytechnic.

At Hungry Creek, the workshop consisted of one-on-one critiques by Prof Künzli of individual jewellers' work. It began with silence and a few minutes contemplation by Künzli, who then spoke to the maker about the work. At this point the maker could respond, explaining or adding context to the work. Through this critique, each of our students and guest jewellers experienced a personalised, focussed interaction with a practitioner who has a vast depth of knowledge and experience and was able to offer a fresh response to their work and ask new questions of them. In addition, just as much learning was done by listening to critiques of others' work.

These critiques were often more rigorous when Prof. Künzli was looking at practicing jewellers' work, and lively debates ensued around a number of interesting questions such as when is a work jewellery and when has it become something else? This prompted a recognition that one's making practice can be larger than jewellery per se, and the various ways in which jewellery talks to its audience.

The respect that Prof. Künzli gave to each person's work was a corollary of the respect with which he engages this area of practice – a recognition of the role of culture in human development and the role of jewellery as an ancient tradition of crafting objects that mediate between our internal and external worlds. The rigour and intensity of the workshop made visible and real to the students the potential richness of the cultural landscape they could choose

to engage with. It also introduced them to the level of expertise and rigour they would need to develop in their own practices.

From day one, the students and makers quickly realised the truth of the following assessment: "Otto Künzli is one of the greats in contemporary art jewellery today. His remarkable career has spanned 5 decades wherein he has created iconic and signature works that define and shape the art jewellery field. Otto's work is hard hitting social and political commentary, emboldened with humour; wit and sophistication."² This was true of his teaching and of every interaction at the workshop: inspiring, thought-provoking and memorable.

Andrea Daly is a practicing jeweller and tutor who works from her own studio and has been involved in teaching at various institutions since 1990. She is HOD Jewellery at Hungry Creek and was a partner in Fingers Jewellery Gallery from 1991 to 2017.



Figure 1 and 2. A captive audience - Otto Künzli, makers and students at Hungry Creek Art & Craft School, Auckland



- 1 "Otto Künzli. The Exhibition, 09 Mar – 07 Apr 2013;" *Pinakothek der Moderne*, <https://artmap.com/pinakothek/exhibition/otto-kuenzli-the-exhibition-2013>.
- 2 "Lecture: Otto Künzli;" *Craft & Design*, 5 February 2017, <http://www.harbourfrontcentre.com/craft/lecture-otto-kunzli>.