



'Dialogue Series', 2007, pendants (from left), actinolite quartz, 27 x 14 x 10 cm; prehnite, 15 x 12 x 10 cm; prehnite, 19 x 14 x 11 cm; chrysoprase, 27 x 18 x 11 cm; prehnite, 21 x 21 x 11 mm



'Making Manifest', 2008, brooches in stg silver and 24 ct gold (from left), fossilised coral and aventurine; quartz and rubelite; chabazite in basalt and chrysoprase, largest 41 x 50 x 8 mm

FACETS OF DELINEATION

Regine Schwarzer's signature style uses minerals and rocks from Australia and many other countries for their unique internal features, which she cuts to form the nucleus of each new design.

Text by Margot Osborne. Photography by Grant Hancock.

PINK tourmaline, amethyst, aquamarine, rutiled quartz, aventurine, chrysoprase, Mexican fire opal, prehnite and fossilised coral ... the very names of these precious and semi-precious stones are imbued with a poetic resonance that evokes their translucent natural beauty. Jeweller Regine Schwarzer obtains such stones when they are still raw, their luminous colours concealed within geological layers deposited over millions, sometimes billions of years. Painstakingly she carves into the layers to reveal the inherent structure of the stones and expose the glowing colours of nature's geological palette. Traditionally when carving translucent, semi-precious stones the facets are cut at angles to enhance reflectivity and colour flashes. Schwarzer, however, works against

this scintillating effect, faceting the stones in such a way that 'their inner life, trapped within the form, is made visible'. She seeks those gemstones that are regarded as of lesser value due to inclusions or natural impurities, and incorporates these imperfections into her design to accentuate their unique qualities of texture and pattern. Part of the allure for Schwarzer is to uncover patterns that are a record or residue of ancient geological events, encapsulated within the microcosm of each stone. Sometimes these patterns resemble miniature landscapes that echo or allude to patterns in the larger macrocosm of the natural environment.

While cutting a stone Schwarzer likes to work from the outside in, taking off layer by layer to discover an internal



'Dialogue' (detail), 2007, pendant, actinolite quartz, stg silver and 22 ct gold, 27 x 14 x 10 mm

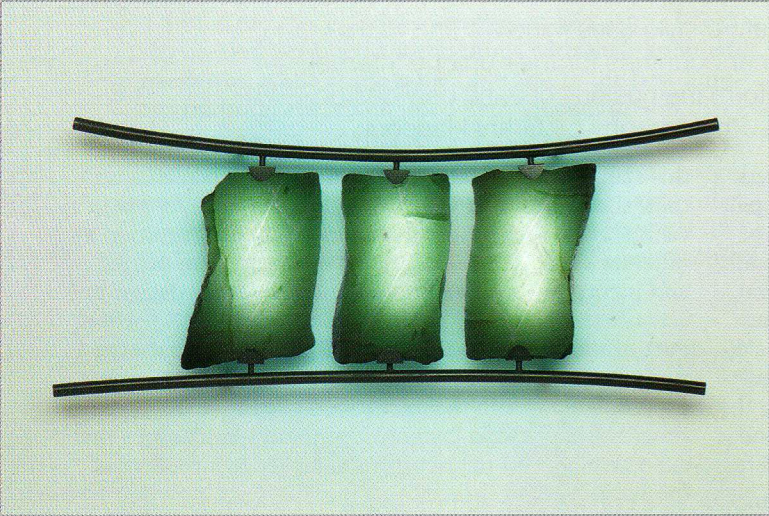


'Making Manifest', 2007, boulder opal, sterling silver, gold leaf, 39 x 30 x 4 mm

PHOTO: STEVE WILSON



'Reflections', 2006, ring, 18 ct gold, rubellite, 32 x 24 x 16 mm



'Wall Light', 2007, aventurine, brass, acrylic, LEDs, 28.5 x 54 x 4 cm



'Reflections', 2006, rings, stg silver, aquamarine and prehnite

secret life, often suggestive of landscapes. These hidden treasures are brought to the surface, carefully considering the shape, to enhance the stone's unique qualities.

This fascination can be traced back to the artist's childhood in Germany, when she used to accompany her father on fossicking expeditions in the Franken Jura to collect rocks and minerals. After migrating to Australia in 1993 to establish a studio in the Adelaide Hills, she travelled in the outback and started fossicking at Coober Pedy in SA and then in Queensland. This continent's abundant resources of gemstones were a revelation and became a strong influence on her work. She remains perplexed that Australia's gemstones and rocks, with their vast spectrum of rich hues and their ancient geological history, are so undervalued and rarely used by contemporary jewellers.

The jasperoid used in the brooches was mined in the Pilbara, Parapadoo, an area in WA owned by Rio Tinto. It was deposited in an ocean sediment during the Late Achaean-Paleoproterozoic, around 2.5 billion years ago.

Schwarzer was already a qualified professional jeweller when she migrated to Australia. She had worked as a studio jeweller in her native Germany for several years after receiving a rigorous training in metalsmithing – four years apprenticed as a goldsmith at the Staatlich Zeichenakademie, Hanau, followed by contemporary design studies with Gunther Lorenzen and guest studies in silversmithing at the Fachhochschule Hildesheim.

It seems particularly appropriate that she now works from a studio in Hahndorf with its rich German heritage. The influence of German-trained jewellers and goldsmiths in South Australia stretches back to the mid-1800s, with the Art Gallery of South Australia collection including works by Henry Steiner, Julius Schomburgk and the Wendt family of jewellers. More recently the German-trained master metalsmith Frank Bauer arrived in Adelaide in the 1970s to establish a jewellery studio at the JamFactory. He continues to work from his Adelaide studio and to share his skills with South Australian jewellers. Bauer was a mentor to Schwarzer during her research for a MA in Visual Arts and Applied Design at the University of South Australia.

During her time in Australia she has established a reputation for jewellery that is beautiful, superbly crafted and highly wearable. In her initial body of Australian work she set smoothly rounded gemstones in silver and gold rings and neckpieces. This became a successful signature style that she pursued for several years. In this work she acknowledges inspiration from the eminent British jeweller, Wendy Ramshaw, who is known for her contemporary sculptural jewellery inlaid with precious and semi-precious stones.

It is rare for jewellers to process and cut their own stones, with almost all outsourcing to gem-cutters. At first Schwarzer also sent out her stones to a professional cutter. However, her dissatisfaction with the results of



PHOTO: STEVE WILSON



PHOTO: STEVE WILSON

'Making Manifest', 2007, aquamarine, opal, stg silver, 24 ct gold

'Making Manifest', 2007, pendant, boulder opal, stg silver, gold leaf, 39 x 30 x 4 mm



'Dialogue Series', 2007, various stones, stg silver, 22 ct gold

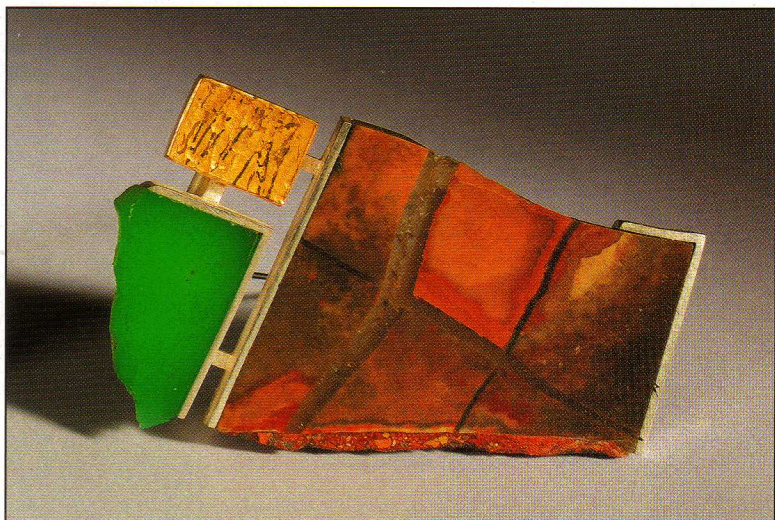


PHOTO: STEVE WILSON

'Making Manifest', 2007, brooch, jasperoid, chrysoprase, stg silver, 24 ct gold

outsourcing, particularly her lack of control over the process, inspired her to undertake training in opal-cutting and gem faceting. She sources her raw stones by collecting them in the outback and through suppliers, including some from overseas. Her progressive acquisition of expertise in this painstaking and highly skilled process is at the heart of the creative evolution in her most recent work.

The collection of neckpieces, pendants, brooches and rings in her recent exhibition called "Informing Facets" features superbly cut stones in settings designed to highlight the distinctive qualities of each gem. Large gemstones in glowing hues, each faceted at differing angles to reveal their limpid depths, take centre stage in pendants and rings. Black spikes shimmer in the pellucid clarity of actinolite quartz, held by sleek gold prongs. A rubellite (pink tourmaline) ring has been carved with irregular facets angled to capture the light within so that it seems to exude an amber glow, in harmony with the ring's thick band of gold.

In several pieces Schwarzer creates complex structures of multiple elements where two or three different stones are juxtaposed. Here one of her primary influences is prominent German jeweller Hermann Junger, who in his jewellery set up correspondences and connections through compositions mixing precious and non-precious media. In one piece she pairs the delicate patterns of fossilised coral with the muted green of chrysoprase. In

another, the coral pattern forms a subtle counterpoint to the soft lustre of pure gold and the subdued greyish-green tones of aventurine.

'The successful composition of different materials is achieved by observing fundamental design principles and colour combinations which create tension between geometrical constraint and fractured exposed edges; setting contrast through opacity; strong colours next to lines which are the result of contraction and expansion in the formation process.'

Schwarzer uses high carat gold and silver in all of her exquisitely detailed settings, which are not mere foils for the stones; they have a strong, aesthetically resolved presence in their own right, neither dominating the gems nor assuming a subservient, functional role. Getting the balance right is essential. This relies on the integration of her skills as both metalsmith and a stonecutter. It is the distinctive mark of Regine Schwarzer's latest body of work, and is the culmination of a prolonged process of creative development both as a jeweller and stonecutter over more than 25 years. Crucial, however, to the success of her work is her fundamental interest in the wearer as well as in the making.

'My aim for each piece I make is for it to be beautiful, wearable and to leave room for interpretation by the wearer. The appropriate site for jewellery is the human body, not the gallery showcase.'

Margot Osborne