

Where Moth and Rust Decay

Interview: Katheryn Leopoldseder



Contemporary jewellery artist Katheryn Leopoldseder uses precious baubles as a medium of expression and explores how consumerism creates a perpetual state of desire. In an email interview with *Time Out*, she spoke about her exhibition that will be held at 1, Shanthi Road this fortnight.

Tell us about your work.

I am an artist who uses jewellery to talk about the human condition. My artworks are quite sculptural and I use a mixture of gold, silver and non-precious materials to tell a story. I come from Melbourne, Australia, where the contemporary jewellery movement is part of the heartbeat of the artistic city.

Tell us about *Where Moth and Rust Decay*, your exhibition. The title comes from a scripture in the Bible: “Do not store up for yourselves wealth here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and burglars break in and steal. Instead store up for yourselves wealth in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and burglars do not break in. For where your wealth is, there your heart will be also.” (Mathew 6:19-21)

I found this scripture challenging in the context of being an Australian travelling through India. I have observed here a strong desire to embrace the consumer culture that characterises the West. Ironically, back home many of us want to escape this endless cycle of purchasing and waste and the necessary disconnection from one another and the environment that comes from pursuing this lifestyle. That’s why we travel to India often!

Where Moth & Rust Decay examines the limitations of material wealth and the intangible desires that drive us to pursue symbols of status and security. The jewellery reflects on the mythological nature of consumerism, which always keeps us in a state of desire and perceived lack.

How do you distill thoughts about values and culture in jewellery?

I’m not completely sure how it happens! I work in the symbolic and I’m very interested in what makes us human. Jewellery worn on the body as a form of self-expression seems the perfect medium for this conversation. Jewellery has such a rich history of preciousness attached to it, especially in India. This lends itself to telling a story about what we value as human beings.

I choose materials for their symbolic associations, often using gold and pearls to convey preciousness. I choose the object’s location on the body, whether it is a necklace worn around the neck, or a brooch worn on the heart, to add to its meaning.

There is a large ring in my exhibition called “Suburban Dream” – a silver representation of the classic three-bedroom brick veneer house that you find throughout the suburbs of Australia. Australians are very driven by property ownership. This style of home has come to symbolise the domestic ideal. It is intimately tied to the idea of getting married to the perfect partner, buying a home, having kids and a stable job. We exchange rings to symbolise marriage. So putting this house on a ring seemed right.

How does jewellery lend itself to the expression of ideas and emotions?

Jewellery is intimate in scale. It seems distinctly human. It engages the body. It is personal, yet a powerful form of outward expression. It is also more portable than many art forms, so it often travels with you on your life’s journey. There is another piece in my exhibition called “Tata Nano Traffic Jam Car Choker”. It includes tiny carved porcelain Tata Nanos circling the neck. From a distance they could be precious beads. There are three “lanes” of identical Nanos that go around and around the neck and they’re not getting anywhere. It’s like an endless congested roundabout. To me this talks about the individual and society.

Tell us about travelling across India and your insights about culture in the West and India.

If you are taken out of your own culture for a little while, somehow you can see where you have come from more clearly. I think there is a unique dynamic between India and the West, a mutual mythologising of each other’s lifestyle. My exhibition is really a conversation about this shared vulnerability. As societies we both have a tendency to believe that who we are is defined by what we own. That the things we invest our vision, our time and our money in will somehow save us.

Where Moth and Rust Decay shows at 1, Shanthi Road this fortnight.