

12.12 – 1.2.2026

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Bernhard Schobinger.

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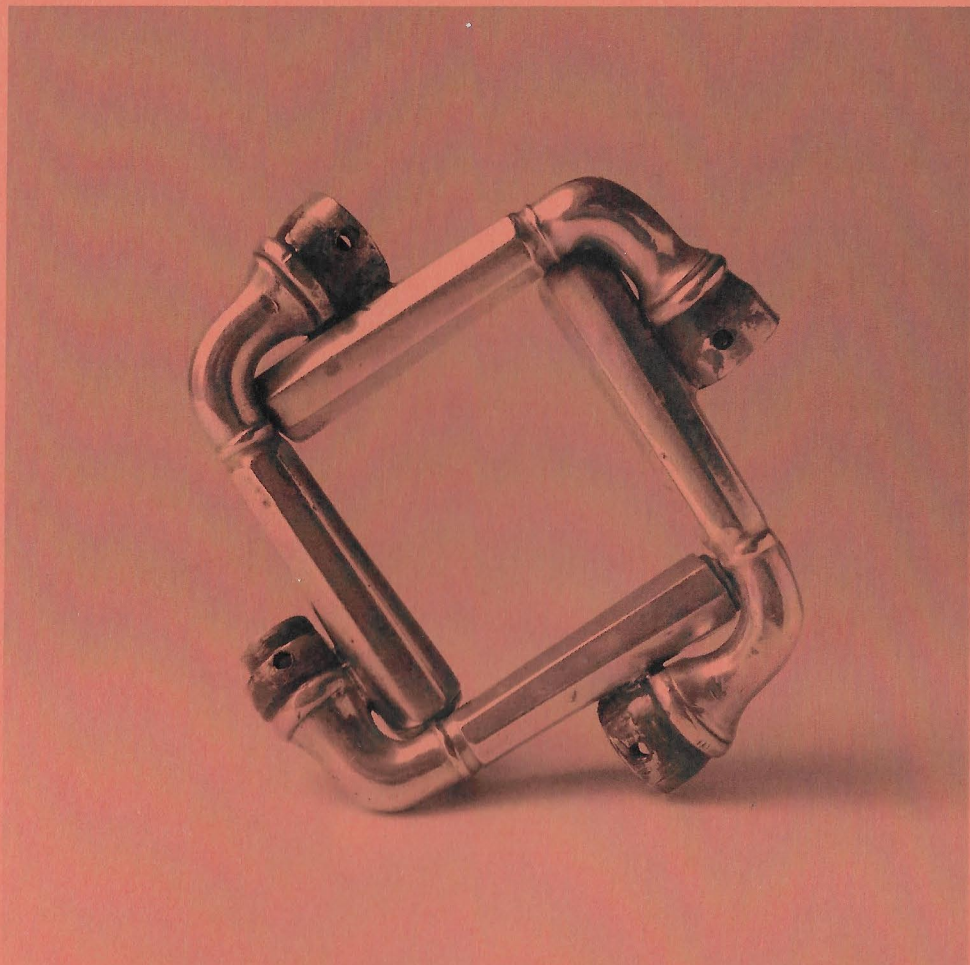
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Democracy of materials

Curated by Alessio de' Navasques

10·corso·como
Gallery



Bernhard Schobinger, *Rotating Square*, 2020
arm cuff made of antique brass door handles, lapis lazuli pigment
11 x 12 x 2 cm, Ø 0.7 cm
Courtesy of the Artist and Martina Simeti, Milano

Bernhard Schobinger: the cult of the unrepeatable

by Mariuccia Casadio

The unique charm of a basement studio that ascends to a monastic dwelling. Traces of a Zen philosophy cultivated in Japan, where he has taught since the 1990s, embellished by a small library of fundamental texts, artefacts and cult icons. A knowledge that pervades the interior spaces, but also the small garden: complete with a carp pond, a small *chashitsu* for tea ceremonies and huge ancient Japanese granite containers that collect rainwater here and there amid the trees and plants. Here, only a few kilometres from Zurich, in a small town overlooking the lake, Bernhard Schobinger has been working for over five decades.

His career began in the second half of the 1960s, after studying applied arts and completing a four-year apprenticeship as a goldsmith. His training was undoubtedly influenced by avant-garde movements such as Concrete Art and Arte Povera, as well as the anarchic and subversive punk movement, which Schobinger embraced while travelling between London and Berlin. However, as he himself likes to point out: *«It was not the artists who took shape from the rebellion, but the rebellion that took shape from the artists. And the assumption that my work is “shaped” by certain events is incorrect, just as it is when talking about Fischli-Weiss, Pippilotti Rist, Martin Disler and other Zurich artists of my generation.»*

The harmonious encounter between East and West ultimately crowned an approach to ornamentation that he, without a second thought, relieved of all obvious glitz and consecrated forever to art and rebellion. And without ever losing an ounce of his highly personal vocation.

It is the uniqueness of found materials, scattered fragments of real life – having been fished out with the aid of a metal detector from the bed of a lake, picked up along the pavement or from some abandoned building site, accumulated on travels and long exploratory walks – which retain their evocative power, as well as inspiring Schobinger's work with their destabilising irregularities and roughness. Pocked and mottled like stones or meteorites, but also sharp like scissor blades or glass shards, metallic and pointed like beer caps, drawing pins, fishing hooks, nails or scraps of iron, disturbing like razor blades or vials of poison, they interact with the precious lightness of Japanese pearls, ancient and disfigured by him during their removal, giving rise to unexpected couplings of gold and precious or semi-precious stones.

To all intents and purposes, it is a singular and determined approach, one deeply researched and a statement, a variation on jewellery that unshakably overturns priorities and value judgments. And again, to all intents and purposes, it is an artistic activity that

aspires to make the work a unique and unrepeatable object to be carried with you and worn. It is not what shines that determines the value of things but their intrinsic power, their autonomous and inexhaustible ability to conjure up and narrate, their magical transformation into expressions of the self.

Like microhistories, Bernhard Schobinger's ornaments transform the interaction of materials into a latent tension that becomes sensual and pervasive when they come into contact with fingers, wrists or a décolleté.

These are the compositions of a highly particular artist now approaching his eighties, who remains a diehard rebel and certainly continues to fascinate and captivate us with his ingenuity and creative challenges. *«I think in five hundred or a thousand years, when they see them behind glass in some museum, my works will be perceived as works of art»* he told me, adding an uncompromising *«but I see them as works of art even now.»*

All lovingly stowed away in recycled boxes. Old rectangular containers for Ilford photographic paper, perhaps lined with hair, or circular metal containers for 8 or 16 mm films. And then there are the packages once used for cosmetics or cutlery sets, perhaps lined with satin, providing the perfect shells and frames for treasures that aspire to feed our vanity at least as much as our spirit, inexhaustibly attractive

and provocative. Things that change us, which Schobinger keeps neatly stored in found boxes, ones that appear to be an indissoluble part of the work, labelled with inscriptions in cursive marker. They are stacked, gathered up in rusty metal cabinets in the frame of a studio which, while intimate in scale, does not fail to let your thoughts fly high among assemblages composed on the walls or hanging in free fall, with finds from the distant and recent past, finished works arranged on long platforms fashioned out of reclaimed wood.

If the avant-garde still exists, it is made of such exceptional experiences. Extraordinary and stubborn works that, like his, allow you to breathe in the major choices of the twentieth century, the genius of innovators and provocateurs such as Duchamp, whom Glenn Adamson quotes in his essay on Schobinger, *Lord of Misrule*, in the book *The Rings of Saturn*, published in 2014 on the occasion of an exhibition of the same name.

«What Duchamp called “assisted readymades”, in which a found object is extended or contextualised without mitigating its autonomous status, is among Schobinger's most common methods of operation. The handmade and the ready-made always keep close company in his work.»

Their interpretation then remains forever open, always entrusted to our gaze and our feeling.



Portrait of Bernhard Schobinger in summer 1980
after his return from NYC, with collected junk from West Broadway
© Annelies Štrba

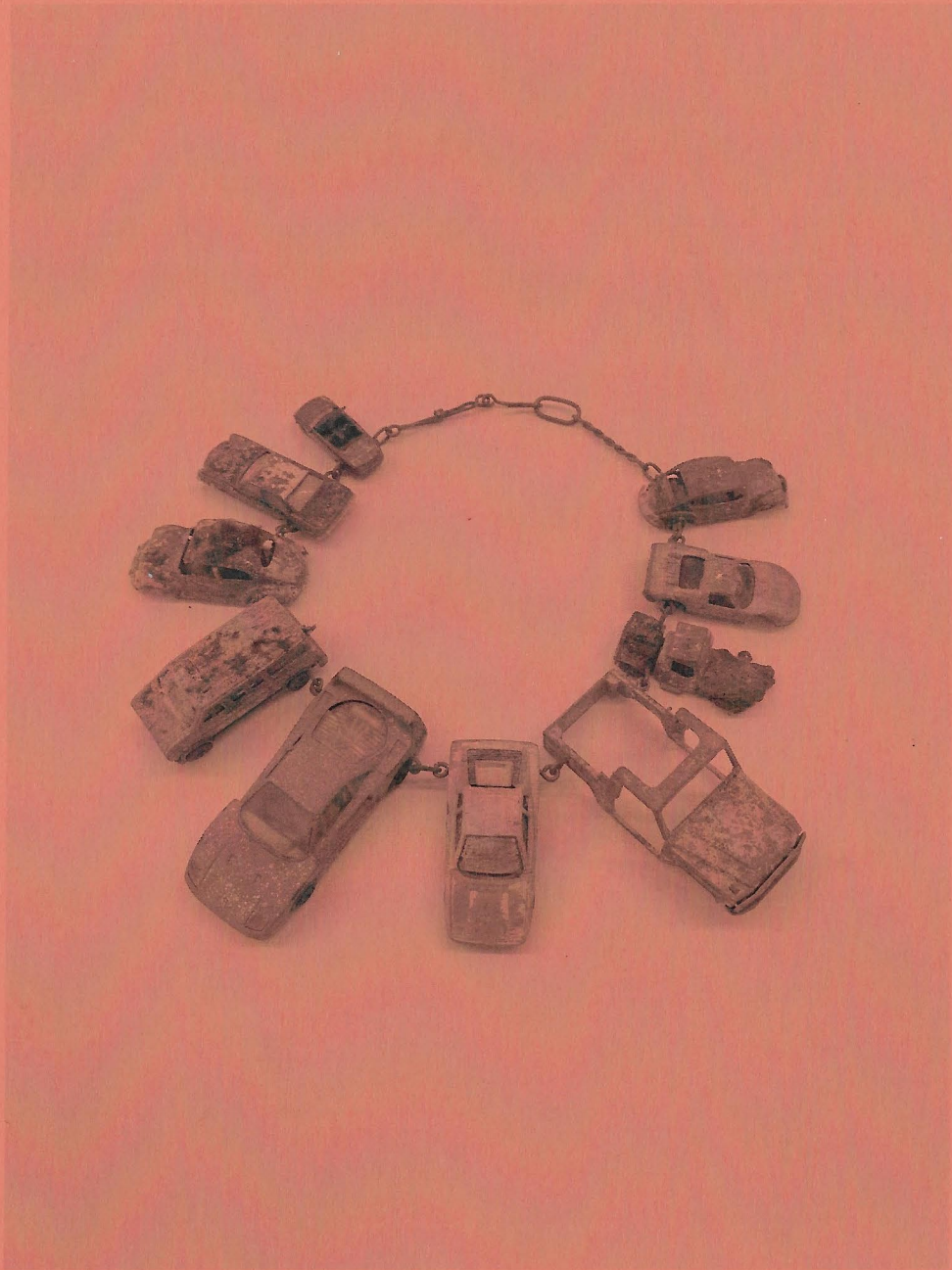
Exploring the meaning of ornaments through various practices and perspectives, from architecture to the visual arts, after *Pietro Consagra. Ornamenti* (February–March 2024) and *Andrea Branzi. Civilisations without jewels have never existed* (December 2024–January 2025), 10-Corso-Como Gallery completes its trilogy of exhibitions dedicated to jewellery as a contemporary medium with a retrospective of the work of Swiss artist Bernhard Schobinger. The exhibition *Bernhard Schobinger. Democracy of materials*, staged in collaboration with galleria Martina Simeti, brings together sculptures and jewellery works from the second half of the 1970s up to the present day. The exhibition is split into thematic islands, associations and contrasts of curved and broken lines, following an idea of dynamic “psychogeography” that evokes the travels of writer W. G. Sebald in his book *The Rings of Saturn*, which had a profound influence on the artist’s poetics.

The transformation of material – in its intrinsic power as raw material – from waste and remnants found as relics of a past era to crystals and precious

stones, becomes the subject of meditation and manual concentration. The result is works that go beyond conventional exhibition means and become wearable. Schobinger’s production challenges our perspective, like a paradox or an enigma of koans, the phrases or stories that Zen Buddhist masters impart to their disciples. The exhibition recounts a search for absolute freedom both in terms of classic goldsmithing materials and the idea of formal coherence between construction and function: principles inherited from Swiss Concrete Art design and graphics, with its roots in modernism, which Schobinger transcends thanks to the punk influences of the second half of the 1970s.

The result is a process of democratisation of material that turns jewellery into the expression of a political idea and blurs the boundary with works of art. His is a poetics of deconstruction in which the tension that animates material is manifested through the use of fragments, twists and cuts: precious and radical works, fuelled by the intensity of a process that goes “against the grain”.

Bernhard Schobinger (born 1946, Zurich) studied at the School of Applied Arts and opened his studio-gallery in Richterswil in 1968, where he has worked ever since. From an early constructivist phase, he shifted in the 1980s toward a radical rethinking of preciousness, combining industrial waste, found objects and noble materials. Guided by rigorous formal study and a subversive, punk-driven impulse, his practice destabilises conventions of art and material value. At the intersection of art, craft and critique, his provocative voice remains singular. His works are held in major museums including the V&A, London; MAD, Paris; LACMA, Los Angeles, among others. In 2024, Kunsthalle Friart presented a major retrospective spanning fifty years of his work. He is represented by gallery Martina Simeti.



Bernhard Schobinger, *Under Water Car Collection*, 2023

necklace in metal, plastic, copper, silver, algae

28 x 26 x 3.3 cm, neckline 56 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Martina Simeti, Milano

Exploring the meaning of ornaments through various practices and perspectives, 10-Corso-Como Gallery dedicates a retrospective to the Swiss artist Bernhard Schobinger. Sculptures and jewellery works from the second half of the 1970s up to the present day, explain about a process of democratisation of material that turns jewellery into a poetry of subversion.



Free entrance
Everyday
10:30 am – 7:30 pm

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