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Speech at the opening of GERD ROTHMANN's Retrospective Exhibition in the DEUTSCHES GOLDSCHMIEDEHAUS (the House of German Goldsmiths) HANAU, Sunday, 18th September .2011, 11.30

Ladies and Gentlemen

It's not easy to speak about Gerd Rothmann. Not because there isn't a great deal to say about him – on the contrary. But so much has already been said and written about him, much of it excellent, as I was able to confirm as I went through the two publications about him in preparation for this exhibition.

That much has been said about Gerd Rothmann is not surprising. For Gerd is, and had been for some considerable time, at the zenith of his creative powers. And here is the really astonishing thing; the themes he deals with, as an artist working in jewellery, have been the same for a long time. His artistic approach is very simple and at the same time touched with genius.

His contribution has been no more or less than to introduce the body print into the art of jewellery, as Dorothea Baumer established so clearly in her preface to the monograph about Gerd Rothmann.

The fascinating thing is how many different variations he manages to wrest from this simple approach. Because he's not primarily concerned with technique or skill, his work has (as always when dealing with true art) far more to do with a second or a third level, in short the numinous, the spiritual. Kandinsky showed this a century ago, just before he went on to paint the first abstract picture.

But Gerd Rothmann turns things on their head. It's not abstraction which is the subject of his work - but its exact opposite, the concrete, the precise, the specific, the individual.

Historically jewellery, even if its only purpose was to decorate, was always something abstract, something added to its wearer, which had little to do with him or her as an individual. Even if the jewellery was

making a statement, as an indicator of value or power, those symbols could be transferred arbitrarily to the wearer. Indeed they could often only be used in that way because symbolically they stood for something beyond the individual. Even if a piece of jewellery was clearly made for one particular person, even represented that person in some way, (like for example a signet ring), this sign (because it was always chosen by them) was a mental and not a physical representation.

Thus jewellery and the body come together to form one identity. It was left to Gerd Rothmann to achieve this physically through the simple act of duplication- the wearing of an impression of a part of the body. There cannot be a stronger definition of an individual than the cast taken from that individual, - given that we consider the physical as expressive of the person; those cultures who define individuals purely through the spiritual wouldn't consider this relevant.

This is significant because the materials that Gerd Rothmann now uses as an artist - gold and silver- have always been seen as having an abstract quality "pure gold" and "pure silver" something valuable in and of itself. Traditionally the representation of a person on gold or silver was an additional guarantee that the material was indeed what it appeared to be, because of the value, function or office of the person represented; it was more than a portrait- it was another abstract statement, a certification like those which have been seen on sovereign coins for thousands of years. When there was a life size depiction, like the masks of the Pharaohs or the mask of Agamemnon, when precious materials were used what was represented was always an idealised image and not the individual.

Gerd Rothmann undertakes this individualization both in his jewellery and his objects. He is, then, a classical gold- and silversmith one of very few working today. Perhaps his secret lies in the fact- as we can see right from the earliest plastic works- that he has almost never been dealing with purely formal concerns. There is no prototype or maquette in the classical sense. His rings, necklaces, bracelets, bowls and cups are archetypes, rather than newly discovered forms. His interest is on another level. The bowl in its sheerest form was for centuries a symbol of clarity and purity. Whether made of silver, or even gold, it was at the same time both immaterial and purifying, one reason that such forms were reserved for the elect, and the initiated.

Gerd Rothmann's bowls involve the individual, they are touched in the most literal sense, the fingerprint, handprint, yes, even the footprint of the christened child can be found on the bowl, connecting object and person in authentic witness to the event. But, and this is what makes it so thrilling, even though it exists as something concrete, that event, unlike a drawing, a painting or even a photo or a film has an abstract quality to it through the mere fact that it exists on a piece of jewelry or some gold-or silver-ware.

A christening bowl with the impression of the christened child conveys a process to us, without being purely descriptive. The imprint of a part of the body on a piece of jewellery stands authentically for the person, even though there is no picture. Abstraction is achieved through the concrete, and nonetheless something spiritual is expressed.

This is the remarkable art of a Gerd Rothmann, who since the mid-70s, though always fresh, always different, and always completely individual, has been making the same work over and over again , and yet has always continued to surprise us. It seems so simple- but how hard it is to be so simple.