

Dana Bronfman offering sustainable jewellery at Gallery Gemma

By Constance Scrafield

When sourcing materials, it's very important to take a closer look and do the best you can and inform people about the process. This is the philosophy of jeweller Dana Bronfman, whose 'Oculus' designs are currently featured at Gallery Gemma in the Alton Mill Arts Centre.

During a telephone interview with Ms. Bronfman calling from her home in New York, she told the Citizen, 'I have achieved this, mostly the way I use gold and gems through my signature collection by using recycled materials.'

'Recycled' is relatively a misnomer, as she pointed out, 'nobody throws gold and diamonds away. I make mostly things to order; nothing is wasted.'

Yet mining is changing and around the world there are growing trends toward sustainable mining. In Peru and Columbia under the banner of Fairmined, Alliance Sustainable Mining is making headway in many regions globally. This is artisanal mining that works with miners to achieve the Fairmined standard.

As a young person, Dana Bronfman did not like fine jewellery and she did not know anyone in the business. Her grandmother loved native jewellery and that was her own first liking for jewellery. In college she studied Spanish and when she travelled, she liked looking the jewellery on little stands, purchasing small items as mementos of where she had been and the stories.

'I loved that connection to the place, to my loved ones too, that age old connection,' she said. 'The things that I loved were the things that belonged to [my grandmother]. Jewellery is the one material object that lasts and is beyond the money value and it became the way I started being interested in making it.'

She wanted to do something that made a difference, held some 'meaningfulness to it.' After a few years she went back to school to see how jewellery was made.

She was engaged in apprenticeship to see how designers worked and eventually started her own line while she was still working for other jewellers.

Describing her work, she said, 'So, it's all 18k gold and sterling silver and oxidized sterling silver with a lot of diamond accents. I like open space better than negative space. The pattern of the circular space 'oculus' is the term for open space in architecture. I do take energetic inspiration from my surroundings rather than literal, like the industrial quality to New York. I always love the contrast between light and shadow and sometimes I even create blackened detail to contrast with the diamonds.'

'I've always been attracted to the beauty of something that makes you take another look. My pieces might look minimal,' she continued, 'they're actually more complex. I want pieces that you can wear every day, that you can live with by being casual or dressed up.'

Ms. Bronfman called her pieces quietly bold; not ostentatious and not huge; a little bit bold, outside the box. It is a matter of a real confidence in the person that wears her pieces, saying, 'I don't need to be the biggest person. I have value. This is something I wear because I want to, not because I'm looking for a reaction to it.'

Eighteen karat gold and precious stones for long lasting and to give pieces structural integrity, 'This is what my intention is maybe emotionally and artistically.'

Starting in 2014, she was not working full time but she is now and considers herself 'very lucky.'

Lucky to be working with a jeweller for his level of technical expertise and his length of experience in the industry; lucky to have attended the Revere Academy of Jewellery Arts which closed a couple of years ago.

Reflectively, she mentioned, "Sometimes things come from the randomness places. I had a great assistant Daniella. She felt very differently than I did and that was very helpful. You can get in your own way."

Founder and owner of Gallery Gemma, Anne-Marie Warburton spoke to artisanal diamond mining, "Small mom and pop miners who go daily panning and mining and bring the gems out in the rough. One person will represent the gem stones but you're supporting a whole family."

In addition to selling fabulous jewellery for a wide range of prices, Ms. Warburton refurbishes old jewellery and makes new pieces from old, perhaps outdated items.

"I take people's family jewellery and reuse them and polishing them to make them look fantastic," she told us.

Her history with Ms. Bronfman began with an agent representing her pieces. Said Ms. Warburton, "The first jewellery designer we represented here in 2008, to represent people who were starting out, with a few new young artists and you could see the potential of the five, Dana's work sold the best."

The two ladies met this year at the jewellery show in Tucson, Arizona where "I asked if we could have her work back again," said Ms. Warburton, adding, "Dana has a lovely unique style. We have the Oculus collection. It has a lot of appeal, plus her consciousness around her sourcing. Gallery Gemma has always been about bringing things that are unique and that you just can't find anywhere else.

"And we have to be grateful to the community who had really understood the importance of shopping locally. If they didn't before, they watched stores closing down and realized why shopping locally matters."

As ambition Dana Bronfman reckons she is less ambitious now and more interested in strengthening relationships, interested to improve in all the different areas of what she is doing. At the end of the day, I want to have a successful business and be doing something that I feel positive about and doing something to improve the industry's transparency and continuing to improve the industry itself."

For more information and to see examples of Dana Bronfman's jewellery, Oculus go to www.gallerygemma.com There is much more to see that is wonderful there too.