

Episode 4: Decoration and Jewelry

Transcript of the fourth episode of the podcast The Gianfranco Ferré Lesson titled “Decoration and Jewelry”. MOOC “Unfolding Gianfranco Ferré”, Polimi Open Knowledge, Politecnico di Milano.

This is “The Gianfranco Ferré Lesson”, a podcast curated by the Gianfranco Ferré Research Center, dedicated to revisiting notes, lectures, and conference texts delivered by the designer throughout his career. Each episode explores a different theme through the words of Gianfranco Ferré himself, enriched by references to books and writings that expand on his vision, along with a rich visual archive that transforms words into images and visual concepts.

In the fourth episode, “Decoration and Jewelry”, Gianfranco Ferré introduces the theme of jewelry not only as an integral part of a look, capable of enhancing and personalizing it, but also as a field of creativity and experimentation. He particularly focuses on the exploration of unconventional materials and techniques in a dialogue between innovation and tradition.

Composing with an eye toward simplification, essentiality, and clarity means leaving the pleasure of ornament to individual taste. Decoration carries the fundamental value of an eccentric choice, a true affirmation of self through dressing, one that cannot be passively standardized by “pre-packaged” canons and models. A bold piece of jewelry, a belt, an accessory: these are expressions of sensitivity and intelligence, and the designer’s duty towards them is to suggest compelling stimuli for everyone to interpret and make their own.

Today, Ferré’s jewelry is part of a constellation of elements orbiting around the garment, enriching and completing it: bags, belts, shoes, scarves. Expressions of a comprehensive style project that evolves season after season, linking each of these “complementary” elements closely and coherently to the garment itself. I believe jewelry is the most immediate way to express a timeless, innate desire for beauty, as ancient as humanity itself, deeply rooted in our sensibility, because it can give form to emotions and sensations. In the past, jewelry held extraordinary symbolic value, signifying wealth, power, prestige, and authority. Today, it is mostly an expression of personality. It is a means of self-representation, like clothing, and perhaps even more so.

For me, the relationship between clothing and accessories is essential and inseparable. They are born of the same inspiration, and they live in sync from the very first moment a collection takes shape in my mind, as they refer to the same impressions, even if developed through different forms and materials. And most importantly, they embody the same idea of quality and uniqueness. Of beauty and elegance. Garment and jewelry: each mirrors the other, each helps to explain and enhance the other.

Understood as a decorative element, jewelry becomes a tool for interpreting the garment, offering a subjective, individual reading of the piece. If the garment is the object – “what is worn” – jewelry

expresses the manner, thus “how it is worn”. And I firmly believe that in today’s world, the “how” must be determined autonomously. Now, as at the beginning, the creative process behind my jewelry is driven by a passion for research. A passion for continuous experimentation is dominant, expressed season after season through the use and reinterpretation of “poor” materials – those offered by nature and not inherently considered precious – as well as those that are defined “technological” – materials born of industrial culture, usually valued only for their functionality. Materials that, for one reason or another, fall outside traditional bijoux-making, and thus outside the realm of luxury and its production. Like a bracelet made from straw and raffia with small wooden elements or a sailing rope, braided with trim and combined with metal to create a new kind of opulence. Ebony and wengé wood, with veining and grooves that recall tree bark. Fiberglass coated in gilded leather to create sculptural jewelry, bodices, chokers, and cuff bracelets.

Another important aspect of my alchemical passion is capturing light and its reflections by playing with matter, creating effects reminiscent of the brilliance of metals – gold above all – and precious stones. This is a true leitmotif, unfolding year after year, collection after collection, in a dimension that reconciles technology with dreams. Yet, even as a firm believer in experimentation, I equally love to express through my jewelry all my devotion to the forms of traditional luxury. New interpretations take shape from timeless inspirations: refined yet opulent jewelry, the gleam of gold, silver, and metal, the sparkle of gemstones, rhinestones, jet embroidery, coral. Chinese echoes in bracelets and gold-toned metal earrings; a golden leather belt; nickel-based metal evoking antique silver in necklaces and pendants with Indian inspiration; rich Indian-style bracelets in gold-tone metal, stones, rhinestones, and pearls; absolute brilliance in necklaces and cufflinks with rhinestones and crystals. But also, the buttons – especially in womenswear – have gained a fundamental role as a key complementary element of the outfit, almost as focal points on jackets, shirts, and coats, uniting functionality with decorative flair, even rising to the level of true jewelry in the most elegant pieces. In Ferré’s style, the jewel-button becomes an authentic decorative pattern, inseparable from the spirit of the collection, echoing and emphasizing its most significant themes and elements. Crafted each time from different materials, gleaming metal, mother-of-pearl, hard stones, rhinestones, in a variety of shapes and sizes, the Ferré jewel-button highlights and illuminates the silhouette’s precision, completes its harmony, and gives space to dreams, fantasy, and the desire for beauty.

Sources

Transcription of the lecture “Composition and fashion”. Milan, 14th March 1997, Politecnico di Milano. Seminar of the course in Theories and Techniques of Architecture titled “Composition in the Practice of Art”.

Transcription of the lecture “Jewelry between East and West, a Balancing of Design and Fantasy”. Milan, July 14, 1997. Domus Academy. Fashion Design Summer Session: Fashion and Jewelry.

Gianfranco Ferré, notes. Gianfranco Ferré Research Centre Archive.