



## **INDOSSARE LA BELLEZZA La grande bigiotteria italiana Velika italijanska bižuterija LEPOTA KOJA SE NOSI**

Belgrado, Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Belgrado / Beograd, Italijanski institut za kulturu u Beogradu  
10 dicembre / decembar 2015 – 2 febbraio / februar 2016

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Si ringraziano / Zahvaljujemo se  
Biblioteca della Moda di Milano, Ljiljana Bogojevic, Tamara Boskovic, Andrea Dardi, Aleksandar Rudolf, Tihana Trkulja, Spomenka Zojic Majdevac



# Great Italian Costume Jewellery – Beauty to Wear

## Bianca Cappello

To talk about Italian Costume Jewellery means to tell the story of habits and customs of a people that has changed the cultural characteristics of its local traditions so as to create a mutual identity code under the aegis of *Beauty*. With the unification of Italy in 1861, the country faced a number of economic investments aimed at creating and developing the manufacturing sector. In the wake of these events, owing to the invention of gold-plating by Giulio Galluzzi, the first Italian industrial jewellery district was born in Casalmaggiore in 1882. From the first decades of the twentieth century until the sixties this center remained among the leading production centers in the world. Since the early years of the Unification of Italy, the nobility promoted unique national taste, finding its inspiration in the Renaissance Tuscan and Lombard art, as well as in the revival of the regional folk costumes.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was very fashionable to wear brooches whose cameo could be made in micro mosaic, glass, coral or hard stone.

In addition to cameos, it was à la mode to wear *sautoirs*, long necklaces often made with lampwork glass beads, decorated with flowers in relief or made in murrine technique. *Sautoirs* could be also made of seed beads, tiny glass beads in size of sand grains.

Until the end of the twenties, bracelets in murrine glass were also produced in Venice but, because of their fragility, they had fallen into disuse.

The early twentieth century saw the birth of the Italian artistic and cultural movement of *Futurism* with its philosophy of breaking up with the tradition. Echoes of this innovation were visible in the Deco style and in experimenting with forms and materials. Return to Futurists principles was present among French progressive and cultural elite, as clearly witnessed in the fashion creations of Elsa Schiaparelli and Coco Chanel.

In 1922 Mussolini's Fascist party took the power, leading Italy to become a colonial empire. From 1935 and the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, till 1945 when the fascist regime falls, the jewellery production developed a series of models influenced by recent military achievements.

The occupation of Ethiopia resulted in sanctions brought up on Italy by the League of Nations. In response to this incident, Mussolini in 1936 decided to take the road of autarchy. Thus began a period of hardship that had forced the country to seek new materials, either by inventing them, like in the case of plastic or metal alloys, or by recovering the traditional ones, such as cork from Sardinia, the coral from Campania and Sicily, glass from Venice, the straw from Florence, cloth from Turin and so on.

Isolation contributed in a way to formation of an autonomous national style where imagination was nourished by a wide range of things, from everyday life to the ancient local myths.

In 1940 Italy entered the World War II, which forced many goldsmiths to convert their production to bijoux jewellery, inventing new metal alloys but processing them with the same quality process. During this period, necklaces were often with motifs of flowers and fruit made in colored glass, echoing thus a distant dream.

In the 50s the new plastic materials stood as an important part in the production of bijoux jewellery, together with wood, shells and ceramics.

The end of the War left Italy in ruins. However, the country was full of energy and enthusiasm. In the 50s, the most prominent female type was the one with the busty figure, such as Anna Magnani, Sophia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida who embodied the emerging myth of the Italian diva. Cinecittà was at its prime and Italy became the meeting point for the international jet set.

Dresses were designed in the shape of hour glass, with a scoop neck, narrow waist and wide, flared skirt, while the arms were left uncovered... all perfect spots on which to put bright bijoux! Rhinestones and crystals competed with glass beads to enrich the jewellery and to add up to the elegance of the outfits worn at the theatrical premiers and other social events, like cocktail parties – elegant daytime appointments for which good taste imposed an important and colorful dress combined with colorful fashion multi-wire necklaces of glass beads and crystals, collars in silk and beads, as well as with necklaces of embroidered crystals.

Fashion shows organized by the nobleman Giovan Battista Giorgini in 1951 in *Sala Bianca* of the Pitti Palace in Florence, launched the Italian fashion in the world. Big fashion houses walked side by side on the catwalk with the largest producers of jewellery. In the same year, at the 9<sup>th</sup> Triennial of Milan fine jewellery was exhibited together with costume jewellery one commenting that it had more attractive aesthetic proposals for that year.

Italian fashion and Costume Jewellery were a true revelation and already in the 60s the punch line *Made in*

*Italy* was forged to mark the Italian products exported abroad.

The years of national wellbeing initiated the process of democratization of goods and the fashion followed this lead by creating prêt-à-porter even for the fashion jewellery.

The excitement that rose in the 60s around scientific research and experiments in the open space, along with artistic experimentation of the Optical Art, influenced fashion and accessories that started to show geometric shapes, metallic foils and chromatic solutions of two strong tones juxtaposed one against another.

The decade ended with the protests praising the world peace and equality among peoples, largely organized by youth who had certain predilection for poor but colorful jewellery made of glass beads with strong ethnic flavor, a perfect match for jeans and parka jackets.

During the same period, photo sessions for the fashion magazines finally came out of the studios and moved outdoors in a more dynamic context, thus imposing the bigger dimensions and brighter colors to fashion jewellery making.

In the late 60s and early 70s, Valentino invented the *total look* concept contributing thus to a closer and more personal dialogue between the fashion houses and accessories and jewellery designers.

Shortly after, Walter Albini and Giorgio Armani gave birth to the figure of designer, a designer who no longer designed clothes for one fashion house, but for one or more fashion industries that produced ready-to-wear fashion.

Italian Fashion was consecrated in the world. Experiments with forms and irony, in line with Pop Art of the 80s, entered the fashion jewellery making and transformed every element of contemporary life into decoration, following a playful and hyperbolic code.

The lavishness of the 80s and the world economic crisis of the 90s determined the emergence of various trends such as minimalism and grunge. These elements, along with "hit and run" fashion and transformation of the fashion industry into multinational companies, had inflicted a heavy blow to the production of Italian quality costume jewellery, decimating its producers.

Between the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium, different creative realities got shaped and, although developing within the frame of business management, they didn't lessen their quality and technical design. These productions were able to resume the traditional materials and redesign them to answer the modern needs with entirely Italian know-how: the one that knows how to make things be luxurious and casual, decorative and colorful, clean and balanced at the same time.

After more than 150 years of evolution and ingenious aesthetic, formal and material achievements, we are witnesses that Italian costume jewellery is not just a body decoration or apparel, but a story told in pictures of history of a people for whom the Beauty is an innate strength.



Collana, *bouille* di vetro soffiato trasparente, 2002, Sorelle Sent, Archivio Sorelle Sent  
Ogrlica, loptice od providnog duvanog stakla, 2002. godina, Sestre Sent, iz Arhiva Sestara Sent



Catalogo  
Katalog





Collana, semicristalli, anni Cinquanta-Sessanta del Novecento, Lo.Sa, Collezione Luisa Anselmi

Ogrlica, poludragi kamen, između pedesetih i šezdesetih godina XX veka, Lo.Sa, Zbirka Luize Anselmi

Orecchini a clip, conterie, semicristalli e Swarovski *marguerite*, 1965 circa, Collezione Privata

Minduše na klip, perlice tipa *konterija* i poludragi kamen, Swarovski margarite, oko 1965. godine, Privatna zbirka



Bracciale, perle di vetro, 2011, Clotilde Silva, Archivio Unger  
Narukvica, staklene perle, 2011. godina, Kotilda Silva, iz Arhiva kuće Unger



