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FROM RECYCLED PAPER TO JEWELLERY

WHEN people try on the jewellery of Claudia Diehl they are surprised how light it feels. Their amazement continues when they discover that all her work is made from hand-made and recycled paper.

Claudia Diehl is an accomplished designer and paper artist based in Michelstadt, Germany, where she also has her own gallery. She says, 'Paper has the properties that no other material can give me, as it is light and easy to process. And the fact that I can create it myself in varying weights, textures and colours makes it the ideal source material for my work.'

She uses the same papermaking process that has changed very little over time. It starts by shredding old newspapers or magazines and soaking them overnight in water. The soaked paper is ground to a pulp and poured into a large tub. A frame is then dipped into the tub and lifted to catch the fibres. The screen is then moved onto a board, where the new paper is pressed, smoothed and dried.

With her new hand-made product, Diehl began exploring different processes and techniques. It was by experimenting with new ways of using the material that she discovered an unexpected property



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of paper. 'Once the making process is complete it can be treated like wood – so I can drill, sand and saw it.'

Diehl's fascination with paper began when she was a young girl travelling through Europe during school holidays with her father, who was an engineer responsible for setting up printing machines. Given off-cuts to play with, she recalls cutting out pictures and shapes and pasting them together. It was during these episodes that

her creative enthusiasm was born. She grew up in the small town of Otzberg in Germany and after finishing high school she became an interior decorator apprentice from 1981 to 1984. 'It was clear to me that I wanted to do something where I could apply my creativity, so I decided to learn a trade.'

After serving her apprenticeship she studied design at a technical college, where she met her future husband, whom she married in 1985. While dedicated to raising

their three children, her desire to do something creative prompted her to join a drawing class in her free time. With this group she took part in local art exhibitions and showed her drawings to the public. In 1995, she began exhibiting her first paper-arts, which included bowls, books and invitation cards.

The next step in her design career was a direct result of these shows, as her husband who had a friendly relationship with Stephan Koziol, visited an exhibition and was so impressed that he invited Diehl to join his design team at Koziol, an environment-friendly company producing accessories using 100% recyclable thermoplastics.

As creative design was always her dream, Diehl didn't hesitate and began working for Koziol in 1995. 'At first I only worked part-time as my children were still very young. However, after organising shows in Frankfurt my workload quickly increased and I started to work full-time organising exhibitions all around Europe.'

Diehl also began designing innovative products for the company, but in 2005 she succumbed to the extreme exhaustion of combining her full-time professional career with motherhood and decided to leave the company. This became a fundamental turning point in her life as she realised that she really

wanted to work with paper again. In 2006, a friend introduced her to IAPMA (the International Association of Hand Papermakers and Paper Artists) that organised an exhibition in Vienna with the topic "paper-jewellery". This exhibition inspired Diehl to begin creating her own jewellery from the paper she'd loved so much as a child and young adult. She created her first 10 big pieces for the exhibition and has never looked back.

However, the success came slowly. In the beginning paper jewellery was not really accepted, but since then the situation has changed and its acceptance is now gaining an increasing receptive audience.

Today Diehl designs and makes a wide range of jewellery that incorporates precious metals and pearls into her paper creations. Some necklaces combine pearls with the paper and are strung on leather bands or steel which can also be silver or gold plated.

The artist says that her favourite piece in her collection is a necklace that has a soft and graceful look about it created in multi-coloured paper. 'It was one of the first wearable pieces I made.'

She also makes yarn out of paper, which she knits into jewellery and accessories and even clothing. 'It



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was quite a challenge to produce these pieces as I had to make the paper string myself, which could take hours and sometimes I ended up with a tennis elbow,' she says.

The knitted necklaces and large hair decorations are the most expensive pieces, owing to the time involved to making the coloured strings.

Diehl is currently working on new ideas for necklaces created out of newspapers, which she knits and sews. She also has many more ideas for creating wearable paper art and is looking forward to the creating traditional dresses such as *Dirndl*, which is a traditional dress for the Oktoberfest. 'I want to concentrate more on the knitting pieces and experiment more in ways to refine the technique.'

Paper was invented more than 2000 years ago in China. Its versatility lends itself to making books, newspapers and cards, but to fashion durable ultra-light jewellery out of it is an invention itself.

The response to Claudia Diehl's innovative paper jewellery has been positive with a growing number of customers choosing to wear them to previews and exhibitions.

Sonja Ciberlin

For more information visit the artist's website: www.claudia-diehl.de



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