



Art & Lifestyle

# Insights from our Experts





# Foreword



It gives me enormous pleasure to bring you the second annual edition of our Insights from our Experts brochure. This latest selection of articles from our international specialists explores some of the more unusual areas in which we look after the needs of high-net-worth customers. From elegant interior design, exquisite jewelry to classic car investments and an in-depth analysis of contemporary preservation, the range of subjects vividly illustrates the full diversity of our offer.

Of course, art is still the backbone of our business. Our belief in forming close relationships based on trust and understanding comes from many years of building successful partnerships across the art world. The expertise gained here now sets us apart in the wider arena of lifestyle insurance.

Today, AXA XL Art & Lifestyle\* protection combines global reach with an established specialist network, providing clients with individual advice on all aspects of asset protection. This brochure represents just a fraction of the circumstances in which we can add value through knowledgeable guidance and support. If you believe your own prized assets deserve the best protection, we would be delighted to share our insights with you.

Yours sincerely  
Sylvie Gleises  
**CEO Continental Europe & Global Head of Distribution,  
Marketing and Communications  
AXA Art\***

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\*AXA XL is a division of AXA Group providing products and services through four business groups: AXA XL Insurance, AXA XL Reinsurance, AXA XL Art & Lifestyle and AXA XL Risk Consulting. AXA Art Versicherung AG is part of the business group AXA XL Art & Lifestyle.



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The “Anita Banquette”  
Francis Sultana's best-selling  
piece of furniture,  
as referenced in the article  
“A World of interiors”

# On a matter of trust



## Philippe Bouchet examines the shared passions that unite Art Expert and Art Dealer in a revealing video.

In the art world in general, I'd say trust is the cornerstone of every good relationship. It makes all the difference to policy-holders that they can rely on us to support them in their daily lives and explore with them solutions that best meet their multiple and growing needs.

Not long ago, I set out to explore the dynamics of a healthy, trust-based professional partnership, in a conversation with my long-time friend and client, Anthony JP Meyer. The result was one in a series of short illustrative videos, "Matter of Trust #2: The Art Dealer", that we shot last July in his natural stamping-ground, the Parisian district of Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

Anthony's art gallery, Galerie Meyer, specializes in Oceanic art and Eskimo art, and celebrates its 38th anniversary this year. It's located in the heart of the city on the Left Bank — at Rue des Beaux-Arts, No. 17, just across from the prestigious "École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts". It's an area thronged with cafés, brasseries and cabarets, and historically renowned as the center point for the capital's intelligentsia. Today, the neighborhood is famed equally for its contribution to Parisian cultural life, with major publishing houses and numerous art galleries populating a maze of old streets dedicated to art, books, fashion and more broadly, to the French lifestyle itself.

A born collector, Anthony inherited his passion from antiquarian parents: his father Oscar opened a gallery in Paris in 1946 and then in Los Angeles a few years later, and his mother Rita founded the present gallery in 1980. Galerie Meyer was initially located in the "Louvre des Antiquaires", where Anthony joined her in 1981 as a partner, and relocated to Saint-Germain-des-Prés in 1986.

From its inception, Galerie Meyer has been dedicated to the ancient arts of the traditional cultures of the South Pacific Islands, with Anthony

### **Name:**

Philippe Bouchet

### **Role:**

Senior Underwriter & Art Expert

A former art gallery curator,

Philippe visits clients and provides guidance on all issues pertaining to the protection and conservation of works of art and tailor-made insurance solutions

Joined AXA Art (see \* page 1) in 1995

### **Qualifications:**

PhD in History of Art, Bachelor in Law

Member of the International Council of Museums (ICOM)

Member of the Chambre Nationale des Experts Spécialisés en Objets d'art et de collection (CNES)

Curatorial work and art criticism

### **Interests:**

Modern and contemporary art, architecture, design



**Figure ULI**

New Ireland,  
Melanesia, Oceania  
Wood, pigments, shells  
136 x 24 x 22 cm  
19th-20th century  
Ex coll.: German Museum  
before 1905 (unidentified);  
Marie-Ange Ciolskowska, Paris;  
Henri & Hélène Kamer  
(Galerie Kamer, Paris)  
circa 1955-56, exhibition  
& catalog ARTS d'Océanie,  
Galerie Kamer, 1966, inv. N° C450  
Photo: Mr. Gurfinkel, Paris. © Galerie  
Meyer - Oceanic & Eskimo Art, Paris

gaining widespread recognition as an exhibitor at major international art fairs (“La Biennale”- Paris, TEFAF Maastricht and New York, Frieze Masters in London, “Parcours des Mondes” in Paris), as an advisor to public institutions and private collectors, and also as the author of numerous exhibition catalogs and a reference work on Oceanic art. In 2010, Anthony expanded his interests and focused his expertise on another specialty; the artistic forms of the archaic Eskimo cultures. He has also created a scholarship for the study of Oceanic collections at the Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Museum, and at French museums in general.

Anthony has been insured by AXA Art almost from the beginning of his commercial activity. And for many years now, it's been my privilege to be his contact. It is my role to adapt his policy to meet his constantly evolving needs within a changing market. As he says in the video: “What I expect from Philippe is that he takes care of my insurance as I take care of my children, and that's what he does — he looks after things. We discuss, we fine-tune and perfect, he understands what I need and I understand what I must provide to him”.



#### Two-headed container

Eskimo, Thule Period,  
Point Hope Area, North Alaska  
Walrus tusk  
(*Odobenus rosmarus divergens*)  
11 x 5.5 x 3.7 cm  
18th-19th century  
Collected by whaler David McFall,  
on the "Bark Java" between 1857 and 1868

In the light of their individual needs, gallery owners, antique dealers and restorers all require finely tuned policies, depending on the exact nature of their inventories. Insuring some collectibles requires completely different criteria from those commonly applied to works of art. Likewise, works owned directly require a different approach from those entrusted by third parties for sale, exhibition or other professional purposes. The same is true for the transport guarantee, which sometimes has to be adjusted and temporarily extended for delivery to, or participation in, a trade show. Taking full care of all the details (and all of the potential headaches) falls within the realm of a close and healthy client relationship; a commitment which can also extend to dealing with storage questions, and even to making recommendations when setting up new gallery premises.

“In the art world in general, I’d say trust is the cornerstone of every good relationship.”

Mutual trust between insurer and dealer grows out of understanding. For our part, it’s a question of understanding intimately how a gallery works (maybe even from experience), being alive to the issues that concern the art business and being able to discuss a dealer’s needs and expectations, while also having the knowledge and experience to provide individual advice and support to them in their decision-making. The strength that exists within this level of relationship is at the heart of this video. And while, in the making of it, we both had a lot of fun on a sunny summer afternoon, the camera captures an inescapable sense of two professions united through a shared passion.



# So, is a classic car a work of art?



**Name:**

Benedetta Brandi

**Role:**

DMC - Responsible Marketing & Communications  
Joined AXA Art (see \* page 1) in 2008

**Qualifications:**

Degree in Classic Literature  
and Archeological Heritage  
Participating at several archeological  
campaigns with “Università degli Studi di Milano”  
Specialized in Communication and Management  
of Cultural Projects at “Il Sole 24 Ore”  
Business School and Marketing Management BtoB  
at Bocconi University School of Management

**Interests:**

Archeology , ethnic art and contemporary art

## Benedetta Brandi discusses the automobile as art-form with ADEMY CEO Gianluigi Vignola.

According to Gianluigi Vignola, the answer is an emphatic “Yes!”. A passionate collector and driver of classic cars himself, Gianluigi is also a founder of ADEMY (Automotive Data Evaluation Market Yield), a member of FIVA-ASI board and a senior contributor to several classic car magazines, such as “Ruoteclassiche” and “Classic and Sports Cars”.

In the aftermath of Michael Schumacher’s 2001 Ferrari F1 fetching €7.5M at the 2017 Sotheby’s Contemporary Art Evening Auction in New York (completely blowing away an optimistic initial evaluation of \$4 -5M), Gianluigi’s take on the state of the classic car market, informed as it is by 20 years’ research into market trends, is food for thought. We put a number of questions to him recently, and his observations make interesting reading.

### Firstly, can we now consider a classic car to be on the same level as, say, an Andy Warhol artwork?

“Definitely! Classic cars as passion assets are finally being considered as works of art in their own right, and as desirable additions to any collection. In many ways it’s an easy transition for the buyer, because the passion for cars is so deeply rooted within our collective imagination. A collector new to the market doesn’t necessarily have to negotiate the pitfalls of a specific art culture.”

### What is the ADEMY Classic Car Index?

“Drawing on a database of over 150,000 auction transaction records worldwide, the ADEMY index analyses 20 years of trends, issuing overall market reports and studies that detail results by make, model and country, right down to individual



MGJ2 (detail)  
Courtesy of Gianluigi Vignola.

chassis numbers. It's a strong awareness aid to anyone involved or even interested in buying or selling, one which also offers access to a worldwide network of make and model experts. Just like the art world, specialization in the classic car market is a key factor."

#### **What are the trends registered by the index in 2018?**

"The Pebble Beach Concourse is always the most eagerly awaited US classic car event. It's where the top worldwide collectors meet and where all the main auction houses — RM Sotheby, Bonham's, Mecum, Russo & Steele — present some of their most desirable models. What happens at Pebble Beach can be extremely meaningful. This year's turnover of \$368M — countering a small drop in the market to register a 12% increase over 2017 — may have flattered to deceive, and in any event lags far behind the 2014 peak of \$428M.

"Over three days the auction houses sold 1,341 cars at an average of \$92,500 each — up \$5,000 on the previous year, with a lower unsold ratio of 39% as against 41% last year, but comparing unfavorably with 25-30% in 2014-15. Top sales featured \$48.4M achieved by RM Sotheby's for a 1962 Ferrari 250GTO, and \$22M netted by Gooding for a 1935 Duesenberg S5J Roadster — the highest bid ever for a US built pre-war car."

#### **What about the European market?**

"The classic car market is essentially a global phenomenon nowadays, mainly driven by the US with 70% of the volume. That said, growth in the European market is really pushing the sector. In 2006, European collectors formed 10% of the market, today it's 23%. It's an important development that highlights the increased liquidity of an asset that investors have traditionally viewed as being very difficult to convert into money unless moved overseas for the purpose."

#### **What are the similarities between the classic car and art markets?**

"Just as paintings may be separated into contemporary, modern, impressionist or old masters, so also is the classic car market segmented by year of origin. Within the ADEMY report commissioned by AXA (see accompanying chart), the most significant sales increases are currently found within the Classic (1946-1964) and Post Classic (1965-1974) segments, with the best turnover results achieved within the Instant Classic segment (1997-today, limited edition series), increasing its transaction share from 3% in 2006 to 19% today.

"We can learn a lot from the contemporary art scene when it comes to steering collectors through

the jungle of expertise, evaluations, price guides, advertising etc. that bedevils the market. The period-built segments are changing, new buyers are emerging from the Far East... so many events have the potential to affect a classic car's value.

“In this respect, there are a few fundamental parameters to keep in mind. It is definitely advisable to follow a scientific methodology before committing to a purchase. Passion for an acquisition is all very well, but not at the expense of all reason. In an auction, the head must rule the heart. The fair market price for a specific car will be set between the minimum and maximum prices paid globally at auction for the same Make-Model-Series. Precisely where it falls will be determined by the following issues: originality, rarity (both in terms of numbers built and those still in existence), preservation or restoration quality, property continuity, main events eligibility

and of course, fame (either through competition history or celebrity connection).”

**Can we record an evolution of the taste of the collectors?**

“If we compare the 2018 top ten sales-by-make with those from 2006, we can see a strong change has affected the new collector's taste. Whilst the prancing horse of Ferarri has remained rampant and unassailable in terms of global appreciation, Porsche has vaulted from a lowly 18th into second place.

“Another important change over the past ten years has been a general globalization of collectors' preferences. In 2006, most of the top ten placings fell to the so-called American muscle cars. These days, high-end European marques sweep the board.”

| <b>Top 10 year 2018</b> |               | <b>Top 10 year 2006</b> |               |
|-------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| 1                       | Ferrari       | 1                       | Ferrari       |
| 2                       | Porsche       | 2                       | Chevrolet     |
| 3                       | Aston Martin  | 3                       | Shelby        |
| 4                       | Mercedes-Benz | 4                       | Packard       |
| 5                       | Bugatti       | 5                       | Mercedes-Benz |
| 6                       | Jaguar        | 6                       | Bentley       |
| 7                       | Bentley       | 7                       | Ford          |
| 8                       | McLaren       | 8                       | Duesenberg    |
| 9                       | Alfa Romeo    | 9                       | Maserati      |
| 10                      | Lamborghini   | 10                      | Plymouth      |

Source: ADEMY Ltd - Automotive Data Evaluation Market Yield [www.ademy.uk](http://www.ademy.uk)

**Finally, can you offer any particular good advice to new collectors?**

“A profitable investment in a classic car requires a great attention to market fluctuation. Typical recommendations for any investment would be to buy at the earliest signs of growth, and to pay a little more for a low mileage and a well-preserved car. Moreover, it's always a good idea to consult the best independent experts, who have a record of experience within the requisite Make-Model-Series segment. I would also recommend that you pay attention to new technology developments — specifically the digital certification of classic cars over the block chain. But maybe this is a matter for another time!”

# A world of interiors



## Survey Manager and Art Expert Andrew Davies discusses influences and inspiration with internationally acclaimed designer Francis Sultana.

2019 marks the tenth anniversary of the furniture designer Francis Sultana's emergence as an interior designer of extraordinary taste and vision. Previously our paths have always tended to cross at a mutual client's house or Art Fair but today we meet at his atelier and showroom in the heart of St. James's, London, above the David Gill Gallery of which he is Artistic Director.

Francis Sultana came to London aged nineteen from the island of Gozo. He thought about university but instead started as a gallery assistant at the David Gill Gallery, then, on the Fulham Road. One day a gallery client saw him sketching and was sufficiently impressed to commission from him a dining table; he was twenty-two and his career has not looked back since. Today, Francis is the go-to interior designer for international collectors of contemporary art and design.

As a child, Francis was fascinated by modernist architecture, especially the work of Frank Lloyd Wright for his all-encompassing design unity of house and interiors. Wright often designed both furniture and rugs to form a "Gesamtkunstwerk" (total artwork). The British designer David Hicks was one of his earliest inspirations, (aged only nine, Francis was already pasting magazine cuttings including Hicks' work into his own reference scrapbooks: and admired in particular Hicks' own masterpiece, the "Villa Verde" in Portugal). David Hicks dominated the international design world in the sixties and seventies and if he didn't like an object then he would simply redesign it himself. He pioneered table-scapes of objects and obelisk bookcases, and often mixed the finest antiques with the best modern pieces — a trend that is still prevalent today. Hicks employed color fearlessly, loved geometric motifs and placed great emphasis on symmetry.

### **Name:**

Andrew Davies

### **Role:**

Survey Manager & Art Expert  
A former auctioneer, Andrew advises clients on risk and collections management  
Joined AXA Art (see \* page 1) in 2000

### **Qualifications:**

Degree in Arts Valuation  
Member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (MRICS)

### **Interests:**

Architecture, ceramics, jewellery

For a man of such individual vision, Francis offers up the surprising thought that his most creative work is on some level a collaborative process. “In the early years I spent a lot of time in both London and Paris. When I decorate a home a lot of the ladies that I work for become muses because our rapport inspires me. I’ve known a few people in my life who were great influences and mentors because they’re people who have got a great sense of style.” Francis singles out one Anglo-Greek lady, a socialite and knowledgeable collector who could effortlessly host anything in her salon from a dinner for two, twelve or twenty to a buffet for fifty or drinks for one hundred and fifty.

Less surprisingly, Francis finds attracting clients to be relatively easy. Some read about him in magazines, some buy his furniture, and others contact him on the recommendation of mutual friends. Repeat commissions are also not uncommon (“Of course, once you’ve completed one home, they often ask for you to do others”). Amongst his earliest commissions was a furniture order for Madonna and a sofa for Annie Lennox, but now he rarely sees musicians or actors. His clients tend to be self-made individuals, most are from outside of the UK and are often contemporaries in their late forties, and so share a similar world-view to his own. A firm believer in the importance of good communication, Francis maintains regular contact with clients by phone, WhatsApp and email, even at 11 pm! As they support him, so he in turn supports them.

China is new territory for Francis. He doesn’t yet know if it’ll flourish or not, but a growing elite likes his work. He is currently working on a home in China that will house an important art collection on an almost unimaginable scale (the ballroom alone can seat 180 people to dinner). Francis notes that China’s last great stylistic moment (notably in Shanghai) was during the Deco period, and this chimes exactly with his aesthetic. By way of a contrast, he is also working with a delightful couple (no children, just a dog) furnishing an “ideal” period villa on the Welsh Marches.

It takes eighteen months to two years to create a home. Clients know that everything is bespoke and of the highest quality, but the process takes time as only a select few artisans around the world are making the materials and pieces that Francis favors. Successful interior design is a highly collaborative process, throughout which clients often require his ‘editing’; even to the extent of specifying towels and China.

Working with a peerless group of artists, designers and architects inevitably influences the course of his work. Francis says “An interior is successful when it’s capable of merging the residential requirements of a domestic space with often large-scale visual art, sculpture and installation pieces in the best way possible. I always pay close attention to the client; you need to know how they live and observe their habits to understand what they need. Beautiful interiors are projects that express a classic sense of elegance. I don’t mix surfaces with diverse motifs and fantasies. As I aim to create harmony between elements, less is often more.”



A portrait of Francis in his atelier in London

Francis's office has a 'partners' desk arrangement, one side with papers, notepads and a computer for business, but the other (creative) side kept clear save for the largest set of "Caran d'Ache" colored pencils imaginable; everything is immaculately placed.

Francis considers design as a fully immersive experience. His process is, aesthetics first (fabulous to see, surprising to the touch), but always functional. "The 'Anita banquette' is my best-selling piece of furniture, it is an oval stool covered in Kidassia fur that comes in a range of colors and was originally designed for a penthouse in St. Moritz. It has been featured in many fashion magazines which gave it huge exposure". The backbone of every project is his own design, but he

also produces annual collections of bespoke and limited-edition furniture and textiles, and often commissions artists represented by the Gallery to create one-off pieces. In 2019, he plans to augment his range with further accessories, such as vases and photograph frames.

Francis describes his style as "under-the-radar elegance". He doesn't do avant-garde for practical reasons ("I have to make money!"), and, while not being above occasionally flaunting a little "bling bling", is primarily concerned with creating a sustainable and lasting aesthetic. Perhaps unsurprisingly, his favorite building is the Chrysler Building in New York: the Art Deco sensibility that characterises much of his contemporary design is largely unchanged from that which brought



glamour and sophistication to the 1920s and 30s and exemplified the golden age of Paris and Hollywood. The reason for this is that Art Deco designs still employ a foundation of 18th century proportions and classical sensibility. The form of a bolster sofa, for example, has changed little from antiquity through to Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann, and onto Francis's designs today. And while he enjoys geometric decoration, his Mediterranean heritage occasionally surfaces in some typically Baroque flourishes.

Francis uses noble materials. Bronze is his favorite and he incorporates it in every furniture collection (sometimes reflecting Armand Rateau, a great favorite from the Deco era). He also employs rock crystal, marquetry, straw marquetry and scagliola in his furniture, as well as French leather work (including embossed leather). Francis delights in finding and working with small artisan ateliers and explaining to his clients why they are so important. He plants an idea, and more often than not his clients will run with it.

As I admire a couch covered with silver bullion thread and silk fabric (both luxurious and hard wearing) with cushions of cut-velvet (£900 per metre), he explains "You need to speak to artisans to make it all work. The loom is 62 centimetres wide, so the usable cloth is only 60 centimetres wide, which might constrain the size of a piece. Also, supply is very limited; they can only produce, say, 40 centimetres a day." Francis also researches the design records of companies such as Puiforcat and Luigi Bevilacqua, so that they can remake or adapt period designs for today.

Francis almost exclusively works with great collectors, and invariably they show him works that they are buying — but he tries never to get involved with art collections, as that is why clients employ Art Advisers. "People buy what they want to buy and don't worry or think about the placement of the art, so that's where I advise. You can't really decide where a painting will go before the house design is complete. Designing a house is like clothes — you don't design your whole wardrobe around one coat. I have a very relaxed approach, as interiors tend to evolve. People change, buy new things, rotate art in and out of storage. A low-key room should feature a colorful work, whereas a low-key work should sit in a more colorful room. The most valuable work is not always best displayed in the most prominent place; there can perhaps be more delight in discovering it in a corner."

Francis thinks that too much technology in the home can often be a bad idea as it prone to going wrong, but he acknowledges that people today want to be able to control their environment. "I believe in using and enjoying every room, so you need something in each room to make you go in there. I must use the grand blue salon in my London home, as that's where my desk is. The home must be comfortable and practical: if you have a dining table for sixteen people, you need

a reception room that can also seat sixteen. Always build in lots of good storage, and a laundry room helps keep a house orderly. You also can't overestimate the importance of good lighting."

Francis's personal likes include colored tiger print carpets — he has one in emerald green — and he recommends adding the luxury of silk and velvets to interiors. He remarks that one of David Hicks' design tricks was to use big pieces of furniture to make a small room feel bigger, and also references Sir John Soane's trick of hanging a painting on a mirror as being a great way to reflect light. Francis advises always to invest in a good sofa; you can reupholster a well-made one for a fraction of the cost of buying new, but no amount of new fabric will save a poorly made one.

His philosophy towards work and success is refreshingly simple: "I work hard because I want to have beautiful things in my life" he says. "There are a lot more people in the world with much more money these days. We don't buy much art now as it has got so expensive, and we can't afford to spend millions. So, for us, it's not about saving money but being wise and making the right choices. I would love to collect antiquities: I'm fascinated by them, especially beautiful Grecian and Roman sculpture. George Condo is my favorite living artist and Francis Picabia my favorite historically. I also have work by Yayoi Kusama; I like the idea of a one artist room, and our London dining room is dedicated to her".

Home for Francis is one of the largest sets of rooms within London's first apartment building, the Albany in Piccadilly. He also has a home in Valletta that he has restored — a Maltese palace dating from the 16th century that had been uninhabitable since the 1940's. Francis sits on the board of MICAS, Malta's new museum project due to open in 2021, which will house Malta's contemporary art & design collections. He concedes that he has a short attention span and is easily bored, which might explain his pouring his energies into so many areas — including co-founding the Design Fund for the V&A Museum and now sitting on its International Council. Francis is also on the Design Museum and Serpentine Councils.

"Artists and designers always need a gallery; it plays a crucial role as an interface with the public. Many of our furniture designers are architects of the highest calibre, such as Daniel Libeskind, who has filled the gap in our portfolio left by my close friend and collaborator, the late Dame Zaha Hadid." The David Gill Gallery has applied to TEFAF and would be delighted to exhibit there in the future.

To mark Francis Sultana's 10th anniversary as a brand he will be launching a book covering his inspiration and key projects; he is one of a select band of interior designers to currently feature within the Architectural Digest's AD100, House & Garden's top 100 and Wallpaper's top 20.

"I would love to collect antiquities: I'm fascinated by them, especially beautiful Grecian and Roman sculpture."



# Caught between authenticity and conservation



**Name:**  
Cristina Resti

**Role:**  
Claims Handler & Art Expert, dealing with the estimation of collections for insurance purposes and loss adjusting activity  
Joined AXA Art (see \* page 1) in 2000

**Qualifications:**  
Degree in Conservation of Cultural Heritages  
Contract Professor “Economics and Art Market” – Catholic University of Milan  
Member of ICOM, the Commission for Security and Emergency in the Museums of Italy

**Interests:**  
Old Masters, photography, art market

In the first of two articles on modern conservation, Cristina Resti exposes the conflicting priorities raised by degradation in contemporary art.

From the artistic “avant-garde” onwards, art has sought to break free of the constraints imposed by traditional materials (such as canvas, frame and oil colors, marble, stone and paper), to explore new means of artistic production and incorporate the contemporary world into the work itself. Such works increasingly utilise diverse materials, including everyday waste, creating new meanings and new aesthetic values. But inevitably, such liberation comes at a price — and more often than not, it’s the collector who picks up the bill.

By its nature, art created out of present-day objects and materials is fragile, likely to age prematurely and deteriorate, and thus to become a fleeting example of a disposable age and culture. Modern synthetics are often unstable and of low quality, and are used experimentally without any real understanding of how badly they might age. Many works were born out of a desire by the artist to see everyday materials in a new light, with no regard as to how they might degrade. The products used were not invented or ever intended for artistic purposes, and so are likely to be discontinued and become unavailable. Given their intrinsic fragility, any upheaval — such as transport to an exhibition or other new setting — might prove fatal. Or given enough time, they might just fall to pieces anyway.

For the contemporary art collector, the prospects of longevity aren’t all that encouraging. It’s starkly obvious that current works do not age in the same way that traditional art ages, and yet they can’t easily be kept “box fresh” forever. So in any case of damage or degradation, it’s down to the market to

make “before and after” judgements about preserving both condition and integrity, and ultimately about what constitutes authenticity, where traditional restoration techniques no longer apply.

It’s an area fraught with complexity, because by its nature, contemporary art breaks the mould and continually poses new questions. So if a contemporary work suffers life-threatening damage, then many art world participants — collectors, restorers, gallery owners, auction houses, museums, the insurer and finally, the artist’s foundation or archive of reference — stand to become involved.

“Many works were born out of a desire by the artist to see everyday materials in a new light, with no regard as to how they might degrade.”

Until recently, the importance of archives to conservation has been little considered — their role has been mainly to provide research scholars with proof of authenticity, and protect the moral right of artists by safeguarding the patrimony and integrity of their work. But now that the idea of integrity also extends to the materials employed in any act of restoration, the archive is beginning to have a bigger say in what goes on.

Of course, in any case of damage, it’s ultimately down to the restorer to decide on the appropriate technical and methodological courses of intervention (especially when a work’s authenticity might be irretrievably compromised by any attempt at intervention at all). But when it comes to replacing elements (sometimes with unoriginal substitutes), deciding on the appropriate level of cleaning or determining the proper aesthetic objective, then it’s the archive (or preferably, if still living, the artist concerned) that has the final say.

There is a growing argument for archives to become repositories of data concerning materials and techniques. They could then directly supply restorers with a background of up-to-date technical, scientific and methodological information and guidance as required. But more than that, they could also function as a long-term knowledge-base, building up conservation records over time and supplying research scholars with a pool of information on damage history, restoration and conservation interventions and materials and techniques of execution. Giving the idea a proactive spin, this level of data would in turn enable archives to discuss appropriate intervention with collectors and restorers, with respect to the artist’s original vision and the concept of integrity. So if your prized new installation piece suddenly starts to come apart at the seams, you’re no longer on your own with the problem: the archive-database puts a wealth of experience at your disposal.

New materials that have been used experimentally may become fragile with age — a condition likely to be exposed through their being handled or transported, especially if being relocated to different contexts and microclimates. Often, archives will allow minimal interventions aimed at arresting degradation, as well as modification of the constituent materials, if it might aid integrity in the long run.



**Stage of evidence, Loris Cecchini**  
2001, Scultura in gomma uretanica

Inevitably, that doesn't work in every case. Sometimes, degradation is intrinsic to the work itself. In the example of Loris Cecchini's urethane rubber sculptures, the artist has played with the intrinsic qualities of thermosetting polymers and thus a degree of deformity, shape-changing and inconsistency is part of the art. But that only holds until the material starts to degrade beyond the artist's original intention. In Cecchini's case, his sculptures are now losing their physical and mechanical characteristics. The rubber has become sticky, and is warping and cracking. Cecchini has therefore chosen to continue production with a much more stable rubber compound that ages better. For existing works, a restorer has been entrusted with slowing the decay and rescuing the material integrity in keeping with the original

artistic concept. In this case, it falls to the archive to verify that the intervention is not manipulation but maintenance, and is consistent with the artist's original intention.

From a collector's point of view, contemporary artists can, on occasion, be an impossible lot. Most will by their nature prioritise creativity and experimentalism over long-term issues of durability, a prerogative that does nothing at all for long-term market confidence. And although not much inclined to bear longevity in mind while creating art, most artists once alerted will quite reasonably insist that any intervention is faithful to their original idea. To be fair, some do anticipate degradation and either provide instructions for maintenance or justify the process of decay as being

integral to the art itself. The artist Valerio Berruti issues with every sale of his reinforced concrete “Genesis” sculptures a declaration stating that the works may develop changes in appearance (cracks etc.) over time, and that these should be considered not as damage but as by-products of the work’s natural lifespan. Talking it to another level, the artist Daniel Buren’s “Avertissement” imposes a contract on his buyers dictating strict compliance with precise clauses, otherwise the work suffers a loss of referability, with a consequent loss of “aura” and therefore of economic value.

From a conservative point of view, an essential aspect of knowing when and whether to restore, replace or otherwise intervene in a work of contemporary art involves understanding whether material changes constitute damage or are simply an inherent mutation. In the case of a “Kunstlerpost” by Joseph Beuys, chocolate and margarine contained in sealed plastic bags has over time altered unappetizingly in state, shape and position. The plastic has additionally degraded and torn, causing a total loss of adhesion between the wrappings and the chocolate bars, which are thus free to move and to change shape, and also to alter biologically as chocolate and margarine elements merge. While it’s not anything you’d wish to find in your fridge, a true appreciation of the work-as-art depends on understanding that this is not actual damage, but a natural and inherent process that is essential to its integrity.

Contemporary art can also present some nightmarish challenges to the insurer. Consider by way of example the wax sculptures by the Swiss artist Urs Fischer (life-size portraits transformed into candles that wear out slowly). Any policy must provide not only for theft, but also for any act of vandalism or damage that interrupts their slow decomposition, and thus invalidates their expected natural transition in form from realistic to shapeless. Suddenly, all the terms conventionally associated with damage (such as wear and tear, decay, decomposition and disappearance) no longer apply. They are exactly the conditions that the artist has intended to transform his work of art, ultimately, into no artwork at all.

Modern conservation is clearly something of a minefield. But in their different ways, the above examples all show that nowadays, there’s more to artistic integrity than a certificate of authenticity. It’s become an interdisciplinary affair, in which a healthy provenance of conservation and direct input from the artist in question play a central part. Both are essential to assessing the impact of any damage and evaluating how any given choice of intervention might affect value.

And the golden rule? In cases of critical damage or degradation, always seek the consent and collaboration of the archive or the artist on any questions of conservation or restoration. Of course, there is no specific obligation, but disputes on procedure and unsanctioned manipulation of creative intent are in no one’s interest. In these largely uncharted waters, the way forward is for all parties to work together in the cause of developing a unified approach to contemporary conservation that benefits everyone.

# Everything must go?



**Name:**

Dietmar Stock-Nieden

**Role:**

Claims Handler & Art Expert  
Former Art Expert in the Swiss Auction Market  
Joined AXA Art (see \* page 1) in 2000

**Qualifications:**

Academic Studies in Art History and Archaeology at the Universities of Giessen and Freiburg/Breisgau  
Doctorate with a thesis about “The buildings of Vitra Design GmbH at Weil am Rhein 1981-1994 – Studies about the history of architecture and ideas of an industrial company at the end of the 20th century”

**Interests:**

Old Master paintings, prints, ceramics

**Dr. Dietmar Stock-Nieden talks to restorer Anabel von Schönburg\* about the transience of art and how to guard against it.**

It maybe something of a truism, but the phrase “nothing lasts forever” rather ironically encapsulates one of the art world’s eternal problems. Degradation has always been an issue. However, it’s over the course of the 20th century that the invention and use of rapidly aging materials, plus the careless combination of incompatible ones, has confronted today’s restorers with a constant stream of new and increasingly complex challenges in their mission to preserve today’s art for future generations (and, not-so-incidentally, its commercial value for today’s collectors).

The restorer Anabel von Schönburg, who studied Conservation and Restoration at the “Hochschule der Künste” in Bern (HKB) and majored in Modern Materials and Media, is now a sought-after specialist in modern materials. I was interested to learn from her about those used in contemporary art, and how modern conservation techniques can restore accidental damage and help postpone degradation.

**How did you become a restorer?**

“I grew up in eastern Germany, in a castle that was owned by my family until 1945. On the floor below our former apartment was a museum in which furniture, pictures and furnishings were exhibited. So I had become familiarized with art and cultural historical objects from childhood on, and understood from an early age about the question of their preservation.”

**What work of art did you first restore and what was involved?**

“It was a work by Fritz Bruno Gottardi, a sculptor born in 1932 in Saanen, and it was a relief of

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\* Anabel von Schönburg, Dipl. Konservatorin-Restauratorin FH SKR® (www.restoreart.ch) is a freelance restorer who also works for the Kunstmuseum Solothurn in the areas of collection maintenance and loan management.

terracotta elements with a metallic glaze. After a fall, numerous elements were broken and it was necessary to glue the fragments together and replace missing parts. These were cast onto the original in plastic using a cast, and the glaze was retouched using airbrush technology.”

**In your opinion, which three materials or groups of materials used in contemporary art cause the most problems with decay?**

“In my top three of the most delicate materials, cellulose acetates or cellulose nitrates, which can be found in film material for example, take the top spot. They disintegrate over time, releasing acids that not only corrode the material itself, but also damage adjacent objects. The second is rubber, which becomes irreversibly brittle and cracked as it ages. Often surfaces end up looking like aerial photographs of parched landscapes.

“Third is latex, which also becomes brittle and yellow when exposed to oxygen. Oxygen cannot be avoided in an exhibition situation, but the life of these materials can be decisively extended in storage, for example by maintaining low temperatures and using packaging with oxygen absorbers. Heidi Bucher’s ‘moultis’ are particularly demanding: she painted entire rooms with latex, removing layers after drying and then hanging them freely in the room in question. The suspensions and the stability of the material have to be checked again and again due to its embrittlement and the weight of the sheets, and then modified if there is ever any doubt about their stability.”

**What basic protective measures would you advise for works made of plastic and other modern materials in order to preserve both their physical condition and their market value?**

“In principle, a climate without short-term fluctuations is best; the temperature should be as low as possible — which is not always feasible in a living environment, but every degree lower extends the life span of such artworks. Infrared and ultraviolet radiation should also be reduced. UV-absorbing frame glazing and window-films

are a big help here. It is also important to avoid installing works in sunlit spaces or close to radiators, and to avoid placing sculptures directly on underfloor heating. Reduce dust and air pollution as much as possible, and check objects regularly for pests and degradation.”

**What basic requirements does media art from audio or video tapes place on collectors and museums?**

“Audio and video tapes wear out during use. It’s therefore best to use tape copies or high-quality digital reproductions during operation. For long-term archiving, store the originals in a cool, dry environment free of magnetic fields, ideally at 8°C and 25% relative humidity. If they then need to be acclimatized, do it slowly so that they do not suffer a climate shock with condensation, which would damage the information-bearing gelatine layers. They should also be rewound regularly to prevent deformation in the spool, the copying effect and the tape layers sticking together, all of which are a hazard of long-term storage. Service tape or video players regularly and if necessary, store individual parts such as batteries and rubber drive belts separately. Holding a store of spare parts is helpful. In the case of works of art that use older lamps, keep the appropriate light bulbs or fluorescent tubes in stock.”

**What are some of the key issues you deal with when restoring pieces made from modern materials in particular?**

“While we have centuries of experience with traditional artistic techniques such as oil painting, we have no equivalent understanding of how modern materials behave when they age, and no tradition to draw on. It’s just how it is.

“Modern materials require complex chemical analyses and test tracks before parts can be cleaned or glued — because we often don’t know how these aged materials react to solvents or adhesives. Sometimes, materials or media are only on the market for a short time, either because they are discovered to be a health danger or because (like light bulbs, floppy disks and laser disks) they

become superseded. The rate of innovation in this field is therefore accelerating at a much greater pace than it used to.”

**How important is it in your experience that the artist concerned is involved in the restoration process?**

“In principle, the artist is an important source of information. What materials were used? What is the intention behind the work? Answers here can have a major influence on conservation and restoration decisions. Ideally, all artists should document their materials and if necessary, provide building and transport instructions.”

**Due to wear and tear, it is sometimes necessary to replace parts of works of art or to produce the whole work again. Should we therefore redefine the term “original” for works made of modern materials?**

“The term itself is problematic here. Often, works of art are industrially produced, while the artist has only supplied the design. Even here the term ‘aura’, coined by Walter Benjamin, no longer really applies. Nonetheless, it remains crucial for the restorer to preserve as much of a work’s original substance as possible, to restore readability and to preserve the artist’s intention. Art historical as well as technological considerations come into play here.”

**Which work in your career so far has been the most challenging to restore?**

“One that has so far not yet been restored. It is an early work by David Weiss: a holographic self-portrait from his student days. The information carrier is a water-soluble gelatine layer, which unfortunately has been left stained by an earlier cleaning attempt. It was not possible to clean it again by washing or to make a copy using the contact process, because the risks to the original were considered too high. The complexities involved eventually formed the basis for my diploma thesis; ‘Degradation phenomena on holograms’ and made me particularly sensitive to preventive conservation.”

“...Ideally, all artists should document their materials and if necessary, provide building and transport instructions.”



Pantone Chair, Vitra

# The value of expertise



## Guido Stier assesses the benefits of individualized risk management.

The more valuable collectibles and art works are, the greater the risk they represent. Special pieces need individual protection and the supervision of a skilled art expert. They know what is needed to secure clients art in the best way.

AXA XL Art & Lifestyle has a wide range of clients from wealthy private individuals to passionate collectors and commercial customers (such as galleries and art dealers) as well as museums and exhibition houses. We consequently focus on providing specialist tailor-made insurance solutions for sophisticated customers, covering everything from the major statistical risks of burglary, fire and water damage to natural hazards such as flooding, storms and earthquakes.

To some extent, every client shares these risks – but the contexts in which they might arise can differ in the extreme, and so require very individualistic approaches. For this reason, we have a global network of certified experts available to provide advice in every situation, and around the world. An expert will understand the true nature of the risk involved, and be able to conceive individual solutions to match. Through the benefit of knowledge and experience, they add tangible value to any scenario – especially as a first point of contact who really empathizes with the situation (invaluable in the event of a claim). From our clients' point of view, it's fair to say that personal expertise is the single quality that sets a specialist insurer apart from the mass market, and all the misunderstandings and uncertainties that await down that road. Whatever our clients seek to insure – jewelry, wine, classic cars or any other type of valuable – they can expect in all circumstances to deal with professionals who fully understand their individual needs.

### **Name:**

Guido Stier

### **Role:**

Director of Underwriting Central-Eastern-Europe  
AXA Art Versicherung AG  
Joined AXA Art (see \* page 1) in 2013

### **Qualifications:**

Degree-qualified engineer, building technologies  
Graduated economist for insurance  
Many years' professional experience  
as freelance loss-adjuster, underwriter and  
risk manager for industrial, commercial,  
private and art risks  
Member of different working groups  
German Insurance Association GDV  
Founder of the International Flood  
Competence Center HCK

### **Interests:**

Art, architecture, sports





St. Marks Square (Piazza San Marco) during flood (“acqua alta”) in Venice, Italy

One of the most critical — and sometimes overlooked — areas in which we have a wealth of expertise is transport. Collection objects don't always lead a secluded domestic existence in private premises: they may well be loaned to museums and exhibitions, sent out for restoration or for various reasons, be placed in storage. When art goes into transit, each situation creates its own set of logistical issues and potential hazards. With individual fragile and valuable items, these won't be the kind of issues that you'll find drawn up in a standard contract. Identifying and understanding this niche level of risk is where the scientific know-how of an experienced risk engineer becomes essential. That's why we provide an in-house engineering service dedicated to meeting this specific need.

Here's how this works in practice. Say for example, you're looking to buy an alarm system that complies with requisite standards and guidelines. Unfortunately, such systems aren't always a workable solution — in which case, things can get complicated. Therefore you need a proper practical evaluation of the risk situation that looks at the special nature of the assets (buildings, household effects, collectibles etc.) before coming up with appropriate loss prevention measures. During the planning stages of construction projects, independent expert opinions can be positive for the client — for example, in the case of “plausibility checks” (the subjecting of architect or company offers to expert review). Looking at such issues in the round is often a win-win situation, in that an architecturally based solution might well emerge that neutralizes the cost of installing systems that are not completely standard-compliant.

Likewise, if for either aesthetic or structural reasons you're looking to install non-standard fire protection equipment, experienced specialists can think creatively around effective installations that also work from an architect/client perspective. It's the same with flood hazard, which has grown as an issue with the onset of climate change, and is now recognized as a global phenomenon. (Climate zones previously classified as moderate are being affected by local major loss events such as intense heavy rainfall, which can often overwhelm any attempt at prevention measures by either private owner or emergency services.)

To protect assets and collection objects against damage in such scenarios, you need to make adjustment measures — but they don't always need to be expensive. Even small steps can have a great effect — provided they are designed to work within the space, are scientifically sound and are properly engineered.

Often, it's a question of thinking holistically and drawing together different technologies. One of our Risk Engineers, Malte Lautz, explains: "Measures that are coordinated in terms of construction and plant technology must be flanked by organizational concepts that have been defined or tested in advance. Only then does an individual risk management proposal become a comprehensive tailor-made solution. Many security concepts have only become fully enabled through the recent advances of smart home technologies and their interfaces with security companies and / or mission control centers." Often, the upshot is improved value for the client, either in the form of a reduced outlay or of greater security for the same spend.

For private lenders and customers (such as museums, trade fairs, exhibitors, shipping agents and custodians) who are dealing with the technical environments of assets in exhibition, transport or storage, risk management is an area of particular concern. That's where certified systems (such as the GRASP Global Risk Assessment Platform co-developed by AXA) prove their worth. They ensure systematically that risks are recorded objectively, and that the individual characteristics of a museum or warehouse are taken into account. The quality and risk standards of any building (its technical burglary protection and fire detection and control measures) are evaluated comprehensively. Significant hazards are catalogued and analyzed, along with many other aspects, such as maintenance and repairs, employee training, access controls, packaging, delivery and storage. Results are compiled in a clearly scored evaluation scheme, from which all parties can gain an overview of the risk-related quality standard (eliminating the need for extensive and opaque Facility Reports).

By utilizing such a broad network of expertise, we at AXA XL ensure that we can meet our clients' demands in a manner that fully reflects the value and individuality of their assets and collections. A specialist insurer can offer access to the knowledge and skills of specialized underwriters, claims specialists and risk engineers that are simply unavailable through mass-market alternatives. When it really matters, that translates into invaluable peace of mind.

"From our clients' point of view, it's fair to say that personal expertise is the single quality that sets a specialist insurer apart from the mass market."

# “It’s about passion. It’s about seeking joy..”



**Name:**  
Iris Handke

**Role:**  
Managing Director, Canada, Underwriter  
and Art Expert  
Responsible for all activities including risk  
assessment and fine art underwriting,  
counseling clients and business partners on all  
aspects of insuring and protecting their collections  
Joined AXA Art (see \* page 1) in 2006

**Qualifications:**  
Magister Artium in Art History,  
law degree Diplomjurist  
from the University of Passau, Germany

**Interests:**  
Modern and contemporary art,  
European art of the 19th century,  
iconography architecture  
and interior design

**Iris Handke talks to Toronto Jeweller  
Myles Mindham about the whos, whys  
and whats of jewellery collecting.**

“Collectors are a wonderful statement of humanity” says Myles Mindham with a warm smile. A jeweller, artist and designer with more than 30 years’ experience, Myles is the owner of Mindham Fine Jewellery, located in the heart of Toronto’s exclusive Yorkville neighborhood.

He developed his fascination for jewellery, rare stones and designs early, influenced by his grandmother who worked in antiques and encouraged his enthusiasm. Since striking out on his own in 1991, he has built a strong reputation for creativity and passion, recognized through numerous national and international awards.

Starting with probably my most difficult question when I sat down with him recently, I wanted to know what in his eyes distinguishes a true collector from the many other people who also own and enjoy jewellery. “There has to be immense curiosity. Collectors generally are people who are very knowledgeable or seek knowledge, who enjoy the process and love the context of collecting.”

Jewellery collectors can become hooked in various ways — perhaps through an interest in art of a certain period, or through seeing an exhibition about a particular designer or era. As Myles puts it, “collecting comes with exposure”. By which he means that any piece that sparks sufficient interest to look deeper can be the gateway to becoming more involved, and eventually to acquiring your first piece... then your second, and your third.

Many of Myles’ most avid customers also collect art. Both art and jewellery are expressions and products of the time, culture and society of their origin, and as such are fascinating creative statements of a specific moment in history.



Brooch, Myles Mindham

A collector of Renaissance art therefore might expand into collecting the very jewellery depicted in those artworks. A person attracted by the elegant geometry of Art Deco furniture will find a similar resonance in jewellery of the same period. And a collector of contemporary art, intrigued by the context in which an artist created a work as well as the thoughts that went into the specific piece, can follow those connections and influences through into contemporary jewellery.

Such collectors are always interested in finding authentic period pieces — one area in which Myles can definitely help. But they might also engage him to create a complimentary piece that draws inspiration from an original in their collection, and thus gives traditional design elements a striking modern interpretation.

Collectors of v differ in their motivation. Some are interested in certain periods or designers, while others are fascinated by a certain gemstone. These may be what Myles calls their specific “stones of interest” — that is, stones that hold a

special meaning and attraction, such as garnets, tourmalines or diamonds of a specific color. But for all collectors it is about finding the rare, the unusual and if possible, the unique.

Myles is positive that “collecting needs a theme”, and that this theme can be developed and expanded. “With exposure and knowledge, the theme often changes. And acquiring that knowledge comes through reading, through conversations and through shows such as TEFAF. It’s a lifelong process.” Experience suggests that the more immersed you become in an era, a stone or a technique, the more you are also learning about other, associated fields that you might in turn be drawn to explore. For the innately curious, it’s a never-ending quest.

Myles sums it up perfectly. “Collecting is really simple. It’s a human behavior and it has to do with passion and knowledge. There is no right or wrong way. I absolutely think it’s about passion. It’s about seeking joy. And it’s about really enjoying the mystery, the education and the context.” I couldn’t agree more.

# Daughter of the revolution



**Name:**

Andrew Davies

**Role:**

Survey Manager & Art Expert  
A former auctioneer, Andrew advises clients on risk and collections management  
Joined AXA Art (see \* page 1) in 2000

**Qualifications:**

Degree in Arts Valuation  
Member of the Royal Institute  
of Chartered Surveyors (MRICS)

**Interests:**

Architecture, ceramics, jewellery

Continuing the jewellery theme, Andrew Davies meets Francesca Grima, the London based designer and curator of GRIMA — the most important jewellery brand that you might not have heard of.

Francesca Grima is quietly spoken; she allows her work to announce itself. Her jewellery stimulates the senses — to experience not just the sight, but also the tactile physicality of her stunning, somehow otherworldly creations is to become enchanted, as Francesca presents first a pair of boulder opal earrings (2018) with gold coiled clips (£11,800), then the “Gherkin” ring (2017) in homage to one of Francesca’s favorite buildings, a dome of triangular faceted “lapis lazuli” with matching faceted gold shank which merges computer aided design and manufacture with hand finishing (£9,000). There follows a large ring carved out of solid tear shaped agate surmounted by diamonds, and then yet another made out of white agate and gold, the Yayoi Kusama-inspired “Dot” ring (2016). And so it continues — at the mention of a particular stone, yet another selection arrives: a further tray of exquisite artistry at which one can only marvel.

Francesca runs a thoroughly modern business. Commissions and sales are largely sourced via social media and the GRIMA website, and she also exhibits at leading art fairs and by appointment. Thirty to forty new pieces are created annually. These join Grima pieces from every decade of the last half century, about which Francesca is expertly knowledgeable. Because of course, the Grima story began many years before.

Auric Goldfinger notwithstanding, the man with the real-life midas touch in the 1960s was Francesca’s father, Andrew Grima. Charismatic, handsome and the epitome of style, Andrew had something of a 60’s James Bond aura about him — even his company car was (naturally!) an Aston Martin DB5.

Andrew Grima was born in Rome, his mother a scion of the Farnese family, his Maltese father an embroidery designer. The family settled in London in 1926, when he was five. After serving as an engineer in the army (R.E.M.E), he joined his future father-in-law's jewellery manufacturing company as bookkeeper — an occupation for which he was not long destined. In 1948 “two dealer brothers arrived at our offices with a suitcase of large Brazilian stones — aquamarines, citrines, tourmalines and rough amethysts in quantities I had never seen before. I persuaded my father-in-law to buy the entire collection and I set to work designing. This was the beginning of my career”.

With a talent for drawing but without any design or gemmology training, Grima was unencumbered by convention and didn't want his jewellery to look like the established jewellery of the day. Fifty years previously, the “Belle Epoque” style had created a vogue for white diamonds set in platinum. In the 20s & 30s, Fulco di Verdura (then jewellery designer for Coco Chanel), inspired by Byzantine mosaics, advanced colored cabochon stones set in polished gold. But Grima went further. He left rocks raw, large and rough, eschewed claw settings and favored matt, natural (almost native) textured gold. Grima wanted his futuristic jewellery to be fun and to be actually worn, not to be so intrinsically valuable that it either needed its own security guard or to be kept locked in a safe. He therefore favored semi-precious stones and used small diamonds only for accents. Grima continued experimenting until 1961 when he exhibited six designs in the landmark ‘International Exhibition of Modern Jewellery, 1890 — 1961’ at Goldsmiths Hall. These new, wearable works of art successfully captured the flamboyance of the age, and immediately brought Grima a great deal of attention.

Style guru Lord Snowdon had lately written a newspaper piece lamenting the state of UK Jewellery design. Ever the shrewd businessman, Grima spotted an opportunity and invited Snowdon to visit his studio. Suitably impressed, Snowdon purchased presents for his wife, Princess Margaret. As his star ascended, Grima became the only jeweller ever to win the Duke of Edinburgh's Prize for Elegant Design. So taken was the Prince that he bought a carved ruby and diamond brooch from the 1966 collection. Its almost starfish design has the central carved ruby surrounded with gold and diamonds and a further five carved rubies recycled from an Indian headdress. A Royal Warrant from H.M. Queen Elizabeth II followed in 1970. In total the Royal Family acquired over one hundred Grima creations, mostly as diplomatic gifts. These included the ‘textured wire’ brooch (an innovative signature technique requiring each wire element to be soldered to the next) with citrine starburst, given to Mme Pompidou by the Queen on a state visit to France in 1972, and the United States Bicentennial brooch, which again focuses on the Queen's cypher, given to Betty Ford in 1976.

1966 also saw Grima open his first shop at no. 80 Jermyn Street. It was designed by his architect brothers, George and Godfrey. The shopfront was a large screen designed by sculptor Bryan Kneale R.A., formed from slabs of Welsh slate on a steel frame. It was typical of Grima to select a textured natural material and use it in a new and innovative manner. The massive cast aluminium door was designed

“...two dealer brothers arrived at our offices with a suitcase of large Brazilian stones — aquamarines, citrines, tourmalines and rough amethysts in quantities I had never seen before.”



The “Gherkin” ring (2017)  
an homage to one of  
Francesca’s favorite buildings

by Geoffrey Clarke R.A. Inside, a Perspex spiral staircase, the first of its type, led down to the basement. For the reticent and staid community of gentlemen’s outfitters, the arrival of such a brash and sexy newcomer must have been a real shock. Lord Snowdon was at the opening party and the shop quickly became the grooviest jewellery playground and society hub. London and the second Elizabethan Age were in full swing, and musicians, artists and actors mixed with aristocrats, royalty, financiers and retail magnates. Visitors included Barbara Hepworth, Elisabeth Frink, Sir Alec Guinness and Peter Sellers. Jewels were endlessly borrowed and featured in magazines such as Vogue.

At the height of Grima’s popularity, over sixty goldsmiths based in Shaftesbury Avenue, were producing fifteen hundred pieces a year. In 1966 Grima won ‘The Queen’s Award to Industry (for export achievement)’, and by the early 1970s 75% of production was sold abroad, earning Grima £180,000 in foreign exchange, more than all his British rivals put together. America was the largest single market and Jackie Kennedy was a client. Around the turn of the decade, Grima observed “I think that the types of people that buy my jewellery are in fact people who collect art; sculpture, paintings. Obviously with a certain amount of thought towards the future value, for investment, but this isn’t their prime concern”.

Andrew Grima always incorporated nature into his work. He developed a technique of placing found organics in a can, filling it with plaster of paris and then heating it in a kiln so that the organic material burns away to nothing. Molten gold is then spun into the resulting negative space (originally a technique used in making gold false teeth) and the plaster then washed away, leaving an exact gold replica of the original. In 1967 Princess Margaret sent Grima some lichen that she had found at Balmoral. In only a week, Grima produced a gold lichen brooch with tiny diamond dewdrops, which he duly sold to the Princess for a token £1.

In 1969, Grima was commissioned by Omega to create the “About Time” collection — a daring and outrageous array of 86 one-off pieces including 55 watches (plus matching jewellery) fashioned by 64 craftsmen, each making one piece from beginning to end. These were effectively bracelets and pendants, displaying a watch face behind a precious or semi-precious jewel ‘glass’. The stones were



The “Greenland” watch  
part of the ‘About Time’ Collection (1969)

cut in Idar Oberstein, and the Omega movement was fitted in Switzerland. The collection was launched at Goldsmiths Hall in 1969 and opened by Princess Anne. Invited to choose one piece for herself, the Princess chose “Elegance” — a wide stepped, textured, almost “brutalist” bracelet with offset watch hands viewed through a rectangular smoky quartz. “About Time” was first shown at Expo ’70 in Osaka before being exhibited around the world — with the proviso that only one of each design could be purchased per continent. It speaks volumes for the culture of the age that ‘Greenland’, an irregular shaped textured yellow gold cuff with an irregular pink tourmaline glass, retailed at £6,000 — a crazy sum for a watch in the early 1970s. (Andrew Grima’s own watch, a heavily textured case with a rectangular cut citrine ‘glass’ on a leather strap entitled ‘Teak’, is worn by Francesca today.)

As chief designer and salesman, Andrew Grima spent half the year circling the globe, chasing sales and sourcing rare and unusual gems in Africa, Brazil and Australia. At first he sold through foreign department stores (including Seibu in Japan) and major jewellers. Both Cartier and Van Cleef & Arpels would stock Grima pieces for clients who favored his style. In 1970, Grima opened an Australian outlet in Rose Bay, Sydney, and in 1971 catered to his burgeoning customer base in America with his first New York gallery, in Georg Jensen’s store on Madison Avenue. In 1974 Grima opened in Zurich, in a store again designed by his architect brothers; this façade being made from the textured hull of an old clipper ship.

In the ensuing years, success followed success. Grima expanded his design ideas through a succession of themed collections, referenced to this day in subsequent Grima jewellery. The “Opal & Pearl” collection — which saw Grima break with the ideal of perfectly round and matched pearls in favor of irregular-shaped ‘Baroque’ pearls in a mix of colors — was launched on December 7th 1970. 1971 saw “Rock Revival”, a collection based upon the idea that nature’s works of art — chosen for color, form and texture above intrinsic value — were unimprovable, and that Grima’s task was simply to frame them in gold. 1972’s “Supershells” was a collection of jewellery and objects

“Grima expanded his design ideas through a succession of themed collections, referenced to this day in subsequent Grima jewellery.”



d'art incorporating shells studded with precious stones or highlighted with diamonds. For 1973's "Sticks & Stones" Grima went to Brazil and found crystal sticks. In 1974 "A Tale of Tahiti" featured large South Sea and Tahitian cultured pearls. In 1976 Grima designed a collection of watches for Pulsar, the inventors of the digital watch. In keeping with the revolutionary mechanism, it simply needed a touch to the case to activate the red L.E.D. display.

Andrew Grima was now arguably the greatest modernist jewellery designer. But tastes and markets changed as the UK economy worsened. Buyers now wanted multiples and large, impressive precious stones in claw settings over radical design. The nadir came in 1986 when a new business association collapsed. Grima resigned his Royal Warrant and closed the London shop, opening another in Lugano, Switzerland. In 1992 the family moved to Gstaad, where Andrew opened his last shop and continued to design until his death.

The Goldsmiths Company, which had formed a major collection of Grima jewellery, held a major retrospective in 1991 to mark his 70th birthday. Around the same time, the Brutalist style of mid-century modern architecture, which featured hammered and textured concrete and had come to be regarded as 'a bit naff', started to be re-evaluated — and so it was with Grima jewellery.

In 2007, the Queen unwittingly paid the designer a prescient yet fitting tribute by wearing her much-loved Grima ruby brooch for her Christmas broadcast. Andrew Grima died the following day, aged 86. In 2012 Jojo and Francesca moved the business back to London, and the Grima revival has gathered pace ever since. In 2015 a 2.97 carat step-cut greyish-blue diamond and sapphire gold-mounted ring (1971) set the record for a piece of Grima jewellery, selling for £1,482,500 (including premium) at Bonhams. Two years later, Bonhams sold some 55 pieces — the largest collection of Grima jewellery ever to come to market — for record prices. My personal favorite from the auction was the whimsical cast "Pencil Shavings"; a gold rosette brooch highlighted with diamonds (1968), which sold for £17,500. Famous collectors today include designers Marc Jacobs and Miuccia Prada.

GRIMA nowadays is distinct from many jewellery houses in that it does not recreate archived designs. But there is one notable exception: the "Lei" (a Polynesian garland of flowers) necklace inspired by the waves off Hawaii. Francesca's mother Jojo commissioned the original goldsmith, now in his late seventies, to recreate it fifty years after the original, and it took a full two years to complete. This fabulously intricate piece is fashioned out thousands of elements of yellow gold "textured wire", subsequently engraved, and finished with a scattering of diamonds. The original was modelled by Ursula Andress and won a De Beers Diamonds International Award in 1966 (Grima won three in 1964 and ultimately collected twelve, more than any other designer before or since).

Francesca's own designs are often less textured and simpler than her father's, but with such a broad and rich heritage of design concepts she isn't trapped or daunted. Francesca passionately aims to maintain GRIMA's reputation for excellence and exclusivity.

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