



Gedymin Jabłoński  
an historical survey



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**The Polish Cultural Institute** is proud to welcome Giedymin Jabłoński and his work to London for his exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, London in their project space in Peckham. We look forward to this first major presentation of his work to the UK public and were glad to be of help in getting this information out to them.

The exhibition covers various aspects of his work spanning over 40 years of making. His production includes sculpture, performance, photography and most importantly jewellery. He has been a world leader in the area of amber jewellery and was the founder of the International Amber and Jewellery Fair (AMBERIF) in Gdańsk.

His work has been showed in museums and galleries across Europe and he is also well known as an educator. He has been a guest lecture here in London at the Royal College of Art, teaches at the Vilnius Academy of Arts, Faculty of Telsiai and is currently setting up the jewellery course at The Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław.

Here at the Polish Cultural Institute it is our aim to create links and bonds between the UK and Poland and we are so pleased that work like that of Giedymin Jabłoński helps us to achieve our goals, while celebrating his own achievements as an artist. We are sure the exhibition will highlight yet another wonderful Polish artist and hope the exhibition will bring his work to an even wider audience.

**Anna Godlewska**

*Director*

Polish Cultural Institute London

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## Cast Your Mind Back

Giedymin Jablonski 44

Cast your mind back 300 million years when golden tree resin first began to be fossilized into amber. Cast your mind back 150 million years when spiders, flies and mosquitos first began to get stuck in that resin and fossilized within that amber. Cast your mind back to the time of Jurata, the legendary Baltic queen whose love for a mere fisherman caused her amber palace destroyed and turned into the foam of the sea. Cast your mind back to 1946, when a male child was born in Poland/Lithuania. Cast your mind back 44 years, when that boy, Giedymin Jablonski, as a young man, began his career as an artist.

Jablonski is an artist who often uses amber in his work.

Much of Jablonski's work can be worn next to the skin, it is tactile, it is haptic, and it calls to you like the sea calls to the fisherman, like the amber calls to the insect.

Jablonski never trained as a jeweler \*1 and came to start working in 1970, a world far away from today. Cast your mind back to that time in the Baltic region, when the cold paw of the Russian Bear held Poland and Lithuania and Estonia and Latvia and Romania and Bulgaria and Hungary and Czechoslovakia tight, as it now clings to Georgia and the Crimea. Cast your mind back when students went on marches as often as they made work. Cast your mind back to the time communism held capitalism in a seeming stalemate. Cast your mind back to idealism and artistic ideal and you will find a world in amber, a fossil in the now.

Cast your mind back to 2002 when Jablonski made his Solar Amulet, a Neolithic looking chunk of amber, part rough, part cut and polished into part of a perfect circle. It speaks of now and of then, past and present. It is marked with silver dots, it looks like the tattoo marks on the arm of man wrapped in animal fur, and the amber hangs from a rough flax cord. Amber has been traded from the northern shores of the Baltic to the sunny climes of the south for thousands of years. Cast your mind back to the moment when Phaeton the son of the sun (Helios) is said to have died and when his sister's tears were turned to the golden stones we now call amber and you can almost feel the warmth in their golden glow. In Amber Route (2004) a stone of amber is caught in the sole of a hiking boot like discarded chewing gum. Was the owner also walking to the south, were they too also going to trade one treasure for another?

Amber, in its raw state, or cut and polished into beads or gems or ground into perfume has been seen as something to be sought out, to be treasured to be given to a loved one. Amber Love – Postproduction (2008) is a small pendant with a heart shape cut into its centre. Again the shape of the natural piece of amber, its rough state, contrasts with the precision of the cut. Like love itself, it pierces the core and when

lost, leaves a hole that nothing else can fill. Cast your mind back to the loss of your first love. Please do not cry. Jablonski has amber tears of his own And this as if Somebody Was Crying (2003) is one of them. Here a found piece of amber that his daughter thought looked like a tear has been placed in a cheap plastic bag, her words forming the title of the work. If only collecting our tears was this easy, if only they could be turned into a treasure. Cast your mind back to sorrow.

Amber has also been used as an amulet, to ward off evil, used as a medicine to bring health, power, and robustness and yet it is so fragile. Miss Laska (2011) is such a fetish object; found natural amber from the Baltic has been co-joined with a broken porcelain doll's head. She could be from Africa or the new world, trash washed up on the shore re-used to make a totem. Cast your mind back to trade routes with tired walkers, with burdened beasts overloaded with goods, to the moment when such a fragile head broke from its body. What then of time, our time, which marks only seconds in the universe, what is love to the universe, what is love to time? Laska is the Czech word for love.

Cast your mind back to 1275 and the birth of another boy, a boy who grew up to be the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Gediminas. A little boy who as a man looked to Helios and Zeus and the ancient gods of his land and not those imported from the south. He fought to keep his country free from the ravages of Christianity, and founded the city of Vilnius and from his hill, Giedymin Jablonski took a stone and set it in silver alongside a diamond and hung it from Lithuanian flax to form a necklace called My Vilnius (2005). The raw stone is set on one side while on the other the mother of Christ radiates around the gem \*2. They are two sides of a coin, never quite touching merely co-existing. Mary makes another appearance in My Fair Lady (2011) a pendant shaped in the outline of the famous virgin as oft depicted on alter pieces and her covered breast has been fashioned from a striped flint stone, a stone that once struck, can strike fire. Cast your mind back to 1929 and the birth of a young Belgian girl, cast your mind back to 1964 when as a young woman Audrey Hepburn was cast as a street urchin, little more than a whore, who magically becomes a lady.

Gediminas like all medieval sovereigns would likely have had a court jester, an unholy fool who was allowed to tease and mock his lord, and Jablonski gives us Yorick's Hat (1988). Silver bells hang from its painted linen corners, alerting us to the merriment of the game that is being played out. A figure of fun and danger is the Jolly Roger (2009) that forms the pirate flag. Here it is the wearer's own skull that completes the aluminium crossed human shinbones that form the basis of the necklace. It is also the wearer's head that fits inside the hat; we are cast as the performer, the pirate, the fool, the child. Cast your mind back to sandboxes and sandals and playing games and speaking your mind and causing offense and never knowing why, or perhaps knowing why, but doing it anyway. Women play a big part in Jablonski's mythology; a Tahitian pearl is

set into what appears to be a golden scrap of paper which is inscribed "A pearl is a pearl is a pearl..." This broach For Gertrude Stein (2013) belongs aside Vermeer's girl with a pearl earring, yet A pearl with no Girl (2010) while also sporting a real black pearl, has only the memory of that young woman. Pearls traditionally represented purity and virginity and Stein, a lesbian, was almost certainly a virgin in a traditional sense, but few would have called her pure. A fiery mind, an author and art collector she gathered people like others collected pearls or pieces of amber, for her a rose was a rose. Mary's son Jesus is said to have warned his followers one day while standing on a hill that they should not cast Margaritas Ante Porcus (Pearls before Swine, 2014). Cast your mind back to all the good intentioned warning from friends, and parents and teachers and priests and scribes and judges and cast your mind back to how wonderful it was to ignore them.

Certainly an important date to Jablonski's universe is 1999, the date of the birth of another little girl. Little People for Emily (2002) recalls the happy moment when his youngest child was born, when a rough hewn man and woman made from found sticks marked her appearance in their world. Their eyes sparkle like the diamonds inset into the figures, like tears of joy, like the waters of the sea reborn with each new wave, like Aphrodite. If Emily is a queen she surely needs a king and King for Emily (2002) an odd ghostlike figure seems ready to transform into the man of her yet foreseen dreams, for she still is a young girl. The amber body of the king may soon shift and shape itself into her vision of a knightly partner, her courtly love, complete with sword to protect her and diamonds to provide for her, and if this is not enough Jablonski's Escapelibur (2008) is on hand to carve for her a romantic future. Perhaps at her next birthday she and all her friends will get a Diamond Inside(2014) ring, a simple silver band to which is attached a string holding a helium inflated balloon with a precious stone inside. Cast your mind back to children's parties and the tight rubber skin held in place with a knot and the lure of the sharp tack, the pin and the inevitable pop, and then imagine the scrabble on all fours, on a carpet, or wooden floor boards or in tall grass.

For Jablonski is like the Philosopher's Stone (2010), he is able to turn the basest of elements into gold, ideas into reality, for he has wonderful skills and rich thoughts. Alchemy is at the heart of transformation, like water into wine or bread into a body, such creation myths are there to be debunked, each story is only a story, is only a fiction told to children in the dark of night, lest they be too scared to sleep in their beds. A father knows this. But this is only circular thought; the story told again and again until it becomes true or at least is believed to be true. The job of the philosopher, of the artist, is to look at The Circle (2003) and see that the pattern is merely a maze for the mind to contemplate, not to resolve, for there is no answer, there is no 44. Cast your mind back to the beginning, cast your mind back to the end, to the nothing, to the eternal quiet of the moment before waking.

**Michael Petry** 2014

## Footnotes

\*1 Jablonski first studied physics, architecture, and art. The choice of making jewelry came with the birth of his eldest daughter as he had to earn a living. An artist in socialist Poland was expected to participate in "decorating the system" and to be obedient to censorship rules. The state censors were not concerned with "producers of women's adornments" so as an artistic means of production it provided him not only with a means of income but the ability to critique the state, though he was soon labeled an 'antisocialist element'. He was influenced by Karl Schollmayer's 'Neuer Schmuck – ORNAMENTUM HUMANUM', the periodicals Art Aurea and Die Kunst and Umberto Eco (Opera Aperta, and The Semiotic Landscape). Jablonski explored semiotic relationships and processes of communication in art and culture. The symbolic meanings of metals and stones and other materials, the direct contact of the work of art with human body, the communication chain 'maker – wearer – viewer' and many other aspects became a space of exciting artistic research. At the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk he established a program called the 'Studio of Small Sculpture in Metal' as 'jewelry' was considered only a secondary craft. He refused to join the communist party (as was the norm at the academy) and he soon suffered from his ethical decision.

\*2 Both the obverse and reverse sides of the piece represent the two most important symbolic places in Vilnius to Jablonski. The stone from the Giedymin's Hill and the Mary is a direct impression (in wax then cast in silver) of a repousse image from the silver plated frieze running around the interior of the Gate of Dawn Chapel. This chapel is the main cult destination for Catholic Polish visitors to Vilnius or for those Romans living there. It is situated in the upper part of the old city gate and contains a 'miraculous' painting of the believed Virgin. Over many years it has become surrounded by innumerable silver votive offerings. The chapel is one of Poland's most patriotic symbols. It holds a special place in Jablonski's memory as it was important to his mother who never saw it again after leaving Vilnius prior to WW2. She often told him about the chapel and only after the fall of the Soviet Union was he able to make an odd secular pilgrimage of his own to see it.

*“We put the thought of all that we love into all that we make.”*

The Elves in ‘The Lord of the Rings’ by J.R.R. Tolkien

When I began my adventure in jewellery almost half a century ago, I never thought it would last this long or that it would become so important to me. Back then, not only the year 2014, now in progress, but even the coming of the 21st century seemed like an extremely faraway future impossible to grasp for even a fertile imagination. Now, when I look back, this space-time, made hazy by the imperfections of memory seems to be saturated with recollections, images and flashes of events that are not susceptible to any attempts to fully assess or summarise them. What has remained though, is a feeling of a continuity of identity. Back then, people who were at the age I am now seemed so old to me and so different from me, young in body and soul, that they seemed as if from another world. Society and culture were also completely different. Today, it’s turned out that, although I have been a genealogical grandfather for years now and cognitive instruments have become so much better, I have remained in my mind the same child who strives to comprehend the world. And, although I have already travelled quite a long road for a human lifetime, I still feel that I am only at its beginning. I’ve just accumulated information stored in my memory and have a stronger awareness of the really limited maximum time I have left for further travel. However, instead of like the poet Julian Tuwim asking God to “Please, leave me for another life, like keeping me down in the same grade for another year,” I just ask for a little more time to finish my works in progress and to share the new thoughts I feel are important and good with my friends.



My ancestors come from the Vilnius region and Adam Mickiewicz was to them a fellow countryman and a poet of special importance. After my parents’ generation regained an independent Poland for twenty years after World War I and, after their self-sacrificing fight on the various fronts of World War II, found itself under Soviet occupation, hypocritically called the ‘Polish Peoples’ Republic,’ when dreams of breaking free from this yoke seemed almost utopian, Polish Romantic poetry returned to its role as an important medium of cultural continuity and national tradition and took on new, contemporary connotations. The mysterious ‘number forty and four’ from Adam Mickiewicz’s poetic drama became one of my childhood’s favourite riddles and has remained a special number even today, just like other memories from that time. That is why, when Legnica Gallery of Art Director Zbigniew Kraska offered me an opportunity to have an exhibition in 2014, the forty-fourth year of

my career, I enthusiastically accepted his invitation even though it was completely foolhardy from the point of view of preparing an appropriate collection.

The exhibition at MOCA London is a continuation of the exhibition in Legnica. In my childhood consciousness, London came to be a very special iconic place and remains so today. In the dark times of the Stalinist regime, London would broadcast the news from the other side of the Iron Curtain though the static and noise of the jamming stations. This was a source of hope for many Poles, including my family. After the War, London also became the home of my mother’s brother, airman, wing commander and then the commander of the RAF’s No. 305 Polish Bomber Squadron, a legendary hero from my childhood. London was where the Polish government-in-exile was based and kept up hope that Poland would regain its independence. Last but not least, London was where the king and then the queen reigned from, which conjured up associations not only of Poland’s historical heyday, but also of an imagined land of legend and fable. And so, a retrospective exhibition here has an additional, special dimension for me.

When I developed the exhibition’s concept, a key factor was my conviction that my life’s most important achievements are not material objects, but the messages they carry, spread out in space-time like the Indra’s Net in Buddhism, consisting of pearls placed in such a way that every pearl simultaneously reflects all the others and the entire universe. It seems to me that this way the collection makes a rather clear ensemble, although it is a long way from being complete. Which is just as well, because what is closed ceases to

live. Such incompleteness does not mean untruthfulness. My exhibition is like the flotsam and jetsam of a lone sailor’s boat washed upon the shore. The sailor survived the disaster and tries to continue his voyage, but can these fragments be arranged into a coherent whole? I’m sure of one thing – the common thread in all my works is that it they contain traces of thoughts about what I love, what is dearest to me. And this confession, which is already intimate enough, must suffice. Too detailed commentary destroys what Umberto Eco considers the *conditio sine qua non* of a work of art – a certain measure of mystery, a haze of ambiguity which allows the viewer to exercise their imagination and constant reinterpretation.

**Giedymin Jablonski**  
*Translated by Piotr Luba*



*The Circle*, 2003, object  
– set of jewellery (necklace, bangle, ring), sterling silver, granite

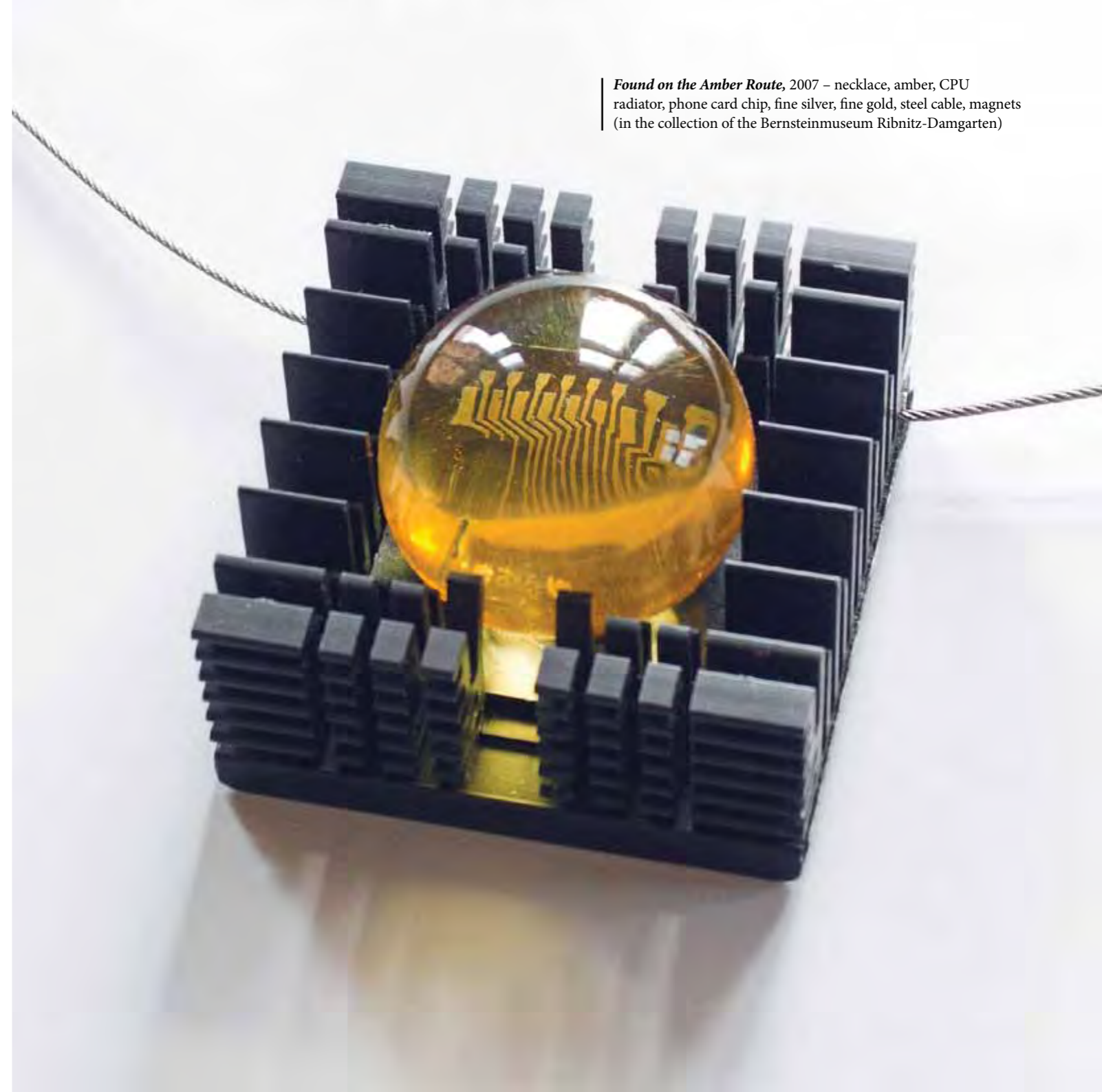
*Mobius Strip*, 1999  
– bangle, copper



*Pol-Nippon Strzeminski*, 1997  
– brooch, silver, white amber,  
mother of pearl, enamel



*Miss Laska*, 2010 - object, raw amber, found objects: porcelain head and a smashed head of a walking stick, sterling silver partly gold plated (in the collection of the Malbork Castle Museum)



*Found on the Amber Route*, 2007 – necklace, amber, CPU radiator, phone card chip, fine silver, fine gold, steel cable, magnets (in the collection of the Bernsteinmuseum Ribnitz-Damgarten)



*Clockwork Amber*, 2005  
- pendant, amber, rough diamond,  
silver, pearl, old clock parts



*Diamond Inside*, 2014 - ring,  
fine silver, rough diamond,  
latex balloon, helium



*Legs*, 1978 - object  
- pendant, mother  
of pearl, silver



**Amber Route, 2005**  
– object, raw amber,  
trekking boot, sand



**Amber Love Postproduction, 2009**  
– object pendant, raw amber (in the collection  
of the Malbork Castle Museum)



**Cinderella II, 2001**  
– object / pendant,  
high heels, gold leaf,  
amber, silver, decorative  
rope (in the collection  
of the Malbork Castle  
Museum)



**HARAKKA, *Gone with the Wind*, 1999**  
 – object, weather vane + earrings, different materials from aircraft wrecks, wooden pole found on the seaside, sterling silver, magnets, plastic foil, thread.



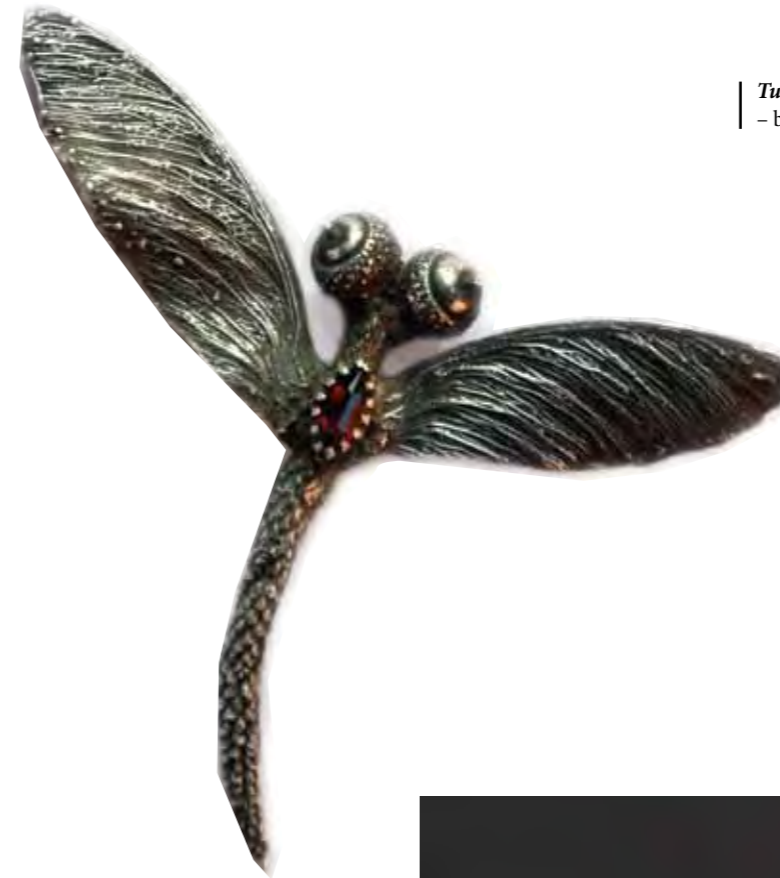
*King for Emily*, 2002 – object pendant,  
raw amber, pure silver, pure gold, pure  
platinum, rough diamonds



*Solar Amulet*, 2002 – pendant, amber,  
fine silver, flax string (in the collection  
of the Historical Museum of the City  
of Gdansk)



*UFO*, 2002 - pendant, amber, wrought gold, viewfinder from an antique camera (in the collection of the Historical Museum of the City of Gdansk)



*Turnov Laliquiana*, 2002  
- brooch, sterling silver, garnet



*HORA FUGIT*, 1973  
- pendant, sterling silver, sandglass, Swiss watch



*DVLCE ET DECORVM*, 1996 – object  
– ‘sugar bowl’, cast sugar, fine silver, leaf gold,  
aluminium teaspoon

*Jolly Roger*, 2009 – necklace, aluminum  
cast of human shinbones, fine silver, rough  
diamond, Swarovski crystal, fabric, steel



*EPPUR SI MUOVE*, 1984 – object clock,  
sterling silver, clock parts, quartz clock  
mechanism, mahogany wood



*My Vilnius*, 2005 – pendant,  
sterling silver, pebble, diamond,  
Lithuanian flax



*My Fair Lady*, 2011 – pendant,  
striped flintstone, fine silver gold  
and rhodium plated



*A Pearl with No Girl*, 2010  
– pendant / brooch, fine silver gold and  
rhodium plated, Tahitian pearl, stainless steel



*MARGERITA ANTE PORCVS*, 2013  
– brooch, fine silver gold and rhodium  
plated, Tahitian pearl, stainless steel

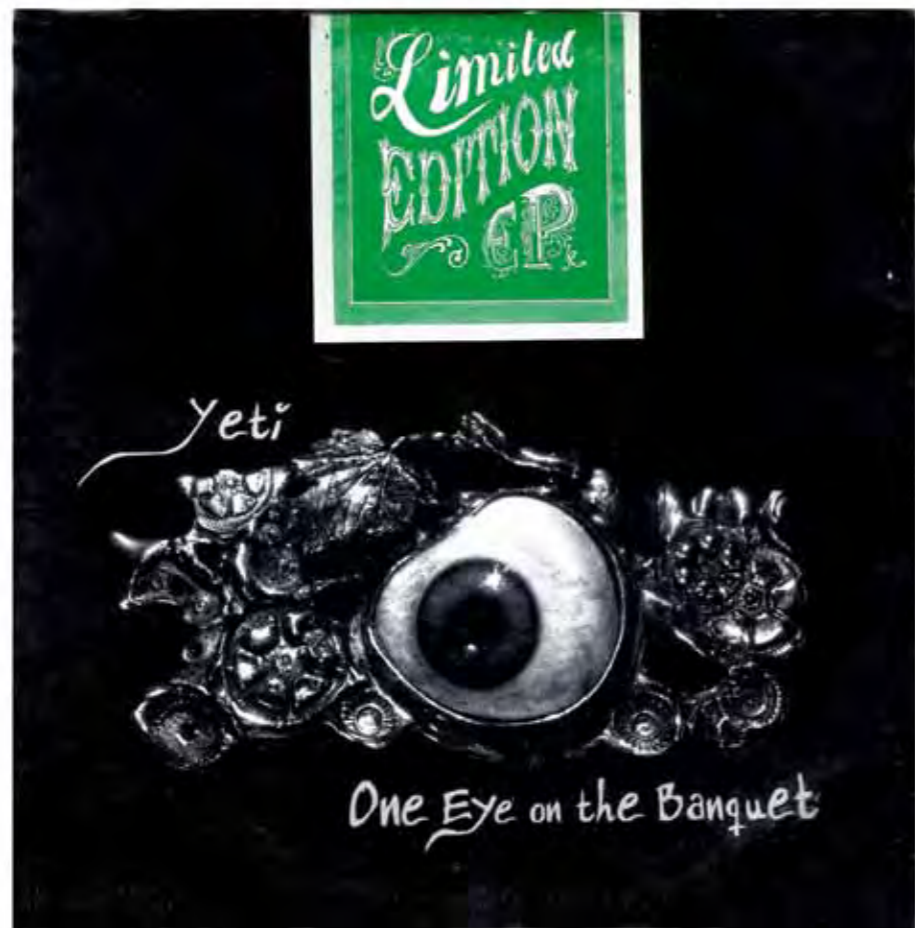


*Seaside Necklace*, 2003 – raw amber with a natural hole, sticks found on the beach, partly gilded, cotton string tinted in red wine, fine silver



*Little People*, 2002 – objects, sticks found on the beach, zirconia, rough diamonds





*I Can See You*, 1977 – brooch, silver,  
glass eye, reproduced on a cover  
of a British group Yeti CD



*Systems of Values*, 2011  
– contemporary European coins,  
9mm gun cartridge, cotton string



*Colour of the 1984*, 1984  
– object, silver, enamel



*Pact With the Own ID*, 2010 – object, human blood and watercolour on paper, feather found in a Lithuanian forest, steel key, flax



*A Happy End of the Eyor's Tail (Tale)*, 2011  
– object, found object, book



*And This As If Somebody Was Crying*, 2002  
– object, natural amber drop, paper, thread, plastic bag



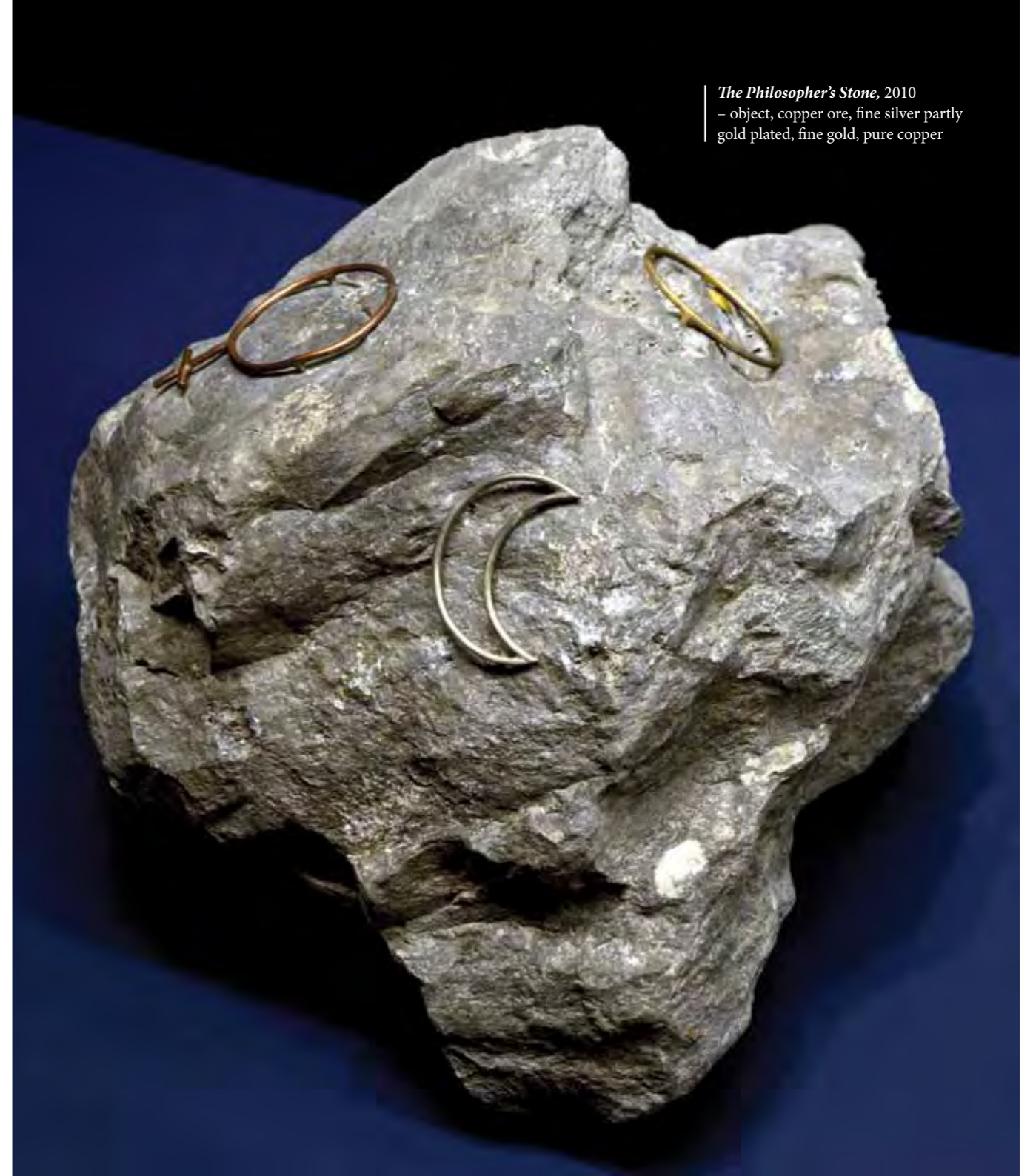
*OPERA CLAUUSA – Open Other Side*  
(to Umberto Eco), 1997 – object, wood,  
sterling silver, etching



*Yorick's Hat*, 1988  
– object, canvas, acrylic  
paint, fine silver



*Black Hole*, 2015 – object / pendant, amber,  
stainless steel, silver, neodymium magnets.  
Designed for the Art 7 - Black Dress collection

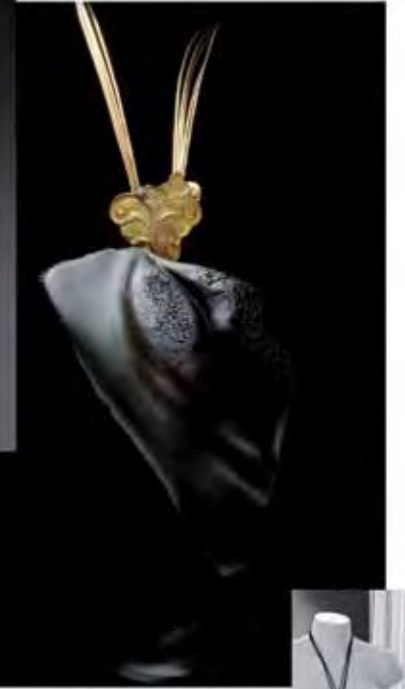


*The Philosopher's Stone*, 2010  
– object, copper ore, fine silver partly  
gold plated, fine gold, pure copper

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BLACK DRESS



## **Acknowledgments**

The preparation of this exhibition was a difficult task, completely impossible to carry out without friendly help and contribution of various people.

I would like to express my especially deep gratitude to:

- Michael Petry, the author of the essay *Cast Your Mind Back* and the curator of the exhibition
- Wojciech Kalandyk, who subsidized the catalogue and not only
- Anna Godlewska, Director of the Polish Cultural Institute London
- Dariusz Łaska, Deputy Ambassador of the Republic of Poland in London,
- Maciej Trybek, who collaborated devotedly at the catalogue graphic design
- Piotr Luba, who translated the texts

As well as: Agata Danielak Kujda, Monika Szpatowicz, Rafal Stepnowski, Tomasz Mikolajczyk, Zbigniew Kraska, Andrzej Pacak, Romualdas and Zita Incirauskas, Miszka Jablonski, and others.

I would also like to thank for lending the pieces from their collections to:

The Gallery of Art in Legnica

Bernsteinmuseum Ribnitz-Damgarten

Bożena and Maciej Grzywaczewski

*Publisher:* MOCA London

*Director and curator of the exhibition:* Michael Petry

*Texts by:* Michael Petry, Anna Godlewska, Giedymin Jablonski

*Translation:* Piotr Luba

*Graphic design:* Maciej Trybek, *cover:* Miszka Jablonski

*Photo:* Giedymin Jablonski, portrait photo of GJ by Ieva Sadauskaite, Solar Amulet and UFO courtesy of the Gdansk Amber Museum

Printed by JAKS Wrocław

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ISBN: 978-0-9569116-2-9