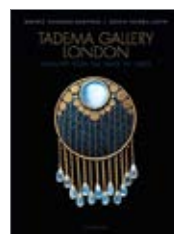


Tadema Gallery London: Jewellery from the 1860s to the 1960s

Reviewed by Clare Phillips



Tadema Gallery London: Jewellery from the 1860s to the 1960s.

Beatriz Chadour-Sampson and Sonya Newell-Smith.

Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2021, £75.00.

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Tadema Gallery, on Islington's Camden Passage (fig. 1), was so loved and long-lasting a landmark of the London jewellery world, and so respected a source of expertise, that it had seemed immortal. Although the business continues to flourish online under Sonya Newell-Smith's direction, this book makes tangible once again the glorious jewel box that was the shop's physical presence while also celebrating the life partnership and joint endeavours of Sonya and her late husband David. Their rigorous approach transformed both general perceptions and detailed knowledge of jewellery from the decades around 1900. In truth, as the book demonstrates, their interests ranged even more broadly than the date span given in the title. For those who are mourning the Gallery's disappearance, Beatriz and Sonya's book allows the memories to linger on.

The opening premise that the history of Tadema is 'inseparably linked with the life and work of its extraordinary founders' is fair. Sonya and David's life before jewellery makes an interesting read, and the warmth and vividness of the many personal tributes, from the jewellery world, friends and family, stress their unique contribution and the validity of the biographical strand. We learn of their shared interest in spiritualism, of Sonya's dressmaking skills that caught the eye of Princess Margaret, and that the Gallery's name comes from Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema's house in St. John's Wood where they moved on their marriage in 1965. Both pursued careers in photojournalism, and googling reveals a wealth of black and white headline shots, and, incidentally, David's joyous 'Portraits of Sonya 1961-1966'. The foundation of Tadema Gallery came in 1978 when, after a brief appearance at Camden Lock market, they took possession of 10 Charlton Place. Beatriz Chadour describes them as starting out on a 'shoestring budget', but crucially with an 'exquisite eye for what was unusual and important'.

The book operates on many levels. Like the Gallery, it is a labour of love, featured pieces are thoughtfully selected, images from Tadema's archive show David's skills as a photographer, and it includes both master jewellers and many less well-known artists. The text encompasses a wealth of material in its thematic approach to the history of jewellery, and the appendices provide valuable photographs of makers' marks and signatures and, magnificently, over 350 biographies. With so many little-known and elusive makers, particularly from the Arts and Crafts Movement, these are a brilliant resource, and there is much within that cannot easily be found elsewhere.

The narrative divides into The Natural World; The Human Figure; Faith, Mythology and Symbolism; and Art Movements and Design Styles. Illustrated with past and present stock, these chapters celebrate the individuality of different makers and contrast the distinctive characteristics of particular movements or workshops. There is exquisiteness, whimsy, humour, spirituality, and romance. Nature is celebrated in infinite variety from the elegance of an Ashbee peacock (fig. 2) to a charming *pâte-de-verre* mouse by the French maker 'LG'; from the Gaskins' carefree garlands of flowers to the poignant suffragette pendant



Fig. 1. Sonya and David Newell-Smith at the entrance to Tadema Gallery, around 1985. © Tadema Gallery.



Fig. 2. Brooch in the form of a peacock, Charles Robert Ashbee (1863 – 1942) / Guild of Handicraft. Silver, gold, opals and peridots. 8.7 x 4.2 cm. © Tadema Gallery.

with enamelled crocus by Ernestine Mills. The human form follows on naturally from personifications of night and the stars, with interesting examples from the end of the period, by Picasso, Braque, Tapio Wirkkala and Line Vautrin. Serpents, from the docile to the terrifying, appear in 'Faith Mythology and Symbolism', alongside Christian devotional images, themes from Classical mythology, mythical creatures and expressions of love. A more chronological approach guides the final section which superbly outlines the changing styles of jewellery within the history of design.

This substantial and lavishly illustrated book charts just over a century of jewellery as art. It is a wonderful serenade to the Newell-Smiths' remarkable partnership, and the beautiful jewellery they championed.

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