

The toy in jewellery – The toy as jewellery



- The *World of Toys* project authored by Iris Biškupić Bašić, Ph.D. included a series of thematic lectures related to specific segments in the displayed exhibitions and/or items on sale in the souvenir shop of the Ethnographic Museum. It also presented a part of the current goldsmith production in Zagreb and the design of jewellery inspired by traditional toys and national folklore heritage. Selected examples of established forms and art motifs on wooden and cloth children's toys, on gingerbread ware, and figures of favourite animals and/or objects of everyday use are recognised in the designs of specific jewellery and/or decorative home interior objects produced by some goldsmith's workshops and applied art designers. The national goldsmith production reflects the individual and social approach to the phenomenon of jewellery and adornment and more complex, inherited substantial-symbolic meanings. This article is a somewhat longer written comment of a verbal presentation on the same topic held at the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb in May 2013.

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CHILDHOOD

The blessed period of childhood! The spontaneous and powerful yearning to explore and get to know the immediate environment under the vigilant attention of the parents and family, to commune with the “grown-up” visitors, the time of cuddling and hankering after things, of all kinds of child's play¹ and toys within easy reach... The toy is the best friend, protector, teacher –

1 Very simple child's play.

it does not reproach, it offers the joy of new discovery, new perception, it promotes physical and spiritual activity, raises the awareness of intellectual potential and creativity. The friskiness of play and the fun of growing up is reified in toys, in the “world of toys” which (re)shapes the reality of living in specific ways. In the initial phase the spontaneous play of the child with toys gradually builds his/her individually unique, somewhat also mysterious rules, which are harmonised, during subsequent activities, with established and/or new social systems. In line with this, boundaries are defined, bans established, adequate/responsible behaviour suggested, failure to respect agreement sanctioned. Childhood stops being only interesting and carefree; multi-layered communication links with the external world of “serious” and unknown people are established with growing speed, going to school and learning is announced, there is less and less time for toys... But even in this announced “disaster” the child finds a solution in another kind of toy, in the world of electronic media and computer games. By carefully following the novelties in the world of communication media we agree (and stay!) with them not only in youth but also in the so-called “mature” (and “middle-aged”) world and the “third” (“retired”) age – if “we were lucky”, if “the cards were stacked right”. I want to say that we still want to play, that we still have our own favourite toys and that we have adjusted to social requirements and rules in spite of the fast changes of consciousness, responsibilities and sanctions. We wistfully remember the attractions of our own childhood, the toys and games that marked it. We still preserve memory of our own childhood in a “survived” toy “spent” a long time ago and/or in a still dear memory of play and pastime.

ON TRACK

The author’s project *The World of Toys* staged in the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb was a totally exceptional event in my entire volunteer and official career. I experienced such unity, working energy, responsibility and presentation of the exhibits from the Museum holdings, public interest, and the interest of the press and electronic media, way back in 1972² and, for the

2 In 1972 all the professional and attendant services of the Museum worked assiduously on the new permanent display which crowned the thorough and functional reconstruction of the whole building. It was solemnly opened on 12 October 1972. Along with some changes (the closing of the combination of the displays related to traditional economy and economic branches; exchange of some national costume sets), the author’s idea of Jelka Radauš Ribarić, Ph.D. has been

second time, only in 2012. The toys from the Museum collection aroused memories of play, amusement and leisure, of research and education about their features and meanings. Donations were accepted with great pleasure as well as temporary sharing of recent and newer toys. Late in summer and in autumn 2012 people kept bringing all kinds of their private toys. Out of the 1100 collected toys, 630 were exhibited in the exhibitions of the *World of Toys* project. Most of them were donated to the Museum and became a permanent part of the Collection of Children's Toys and Games. Of course, every donation, temporary loan or simply display was accompanied by reminiscences of childhood, intimate stories about each toy and play with it, and memories of the personality of the donor of the toy (friend or family member). The sound of many voices spread through the working and exhibition rooms of the Museum, voices expressing surprise; it was the place of unexpected encounters and new acquaintances, of melancholy and joy evoked by old and new perceptions. A special atmosphere was created by the visitors of the Museum throughout the special, thematic exhibitions, events, workshops, puppet shows, projections of new ethnographic-documentary films. The great interest of the public (children of all ages, adults of all ages) and of the media testified to the meaning and value of national museum activities, the activity of the Zagreb Ethnographic Museum in particular.

Few museum exhibitions permit touching the exhibits: at this exhibition children played with selected items among the traditional wooden toys. Toys stimulated the hands and the body to action, smiles and joyous squeals, questions, silent observation of the many-coloured and confusing abundance of toys; toys established communication among peers and (un)known adults, initiated the return of "good vibes", high mood, joy, patience, tolerance...

In different ways toys have always marked their presence in the life cycle of individuals, social communities and culture in past and modern times. They were designed in line with many frames of reference such as the process from idea to production, available material and decoration, choice of technique and production skill, basic use and possible additional functions, mar-

retained to date. The main part of the display refers to the professional ethnological, folklore and museum presentation of national costume. This is probably the oldest continuous museum exhibition in Europe. I would like to believe that the wealth of national costume, clothing and fabrics will also be professionally and responsibly interpreted/presented in the new display in virtual and object terms.

ket “rules of the game”. Occasionally toys also asserted with unexpected ease their mission in other creative and culturological fields, e.g., in the sphere of jewellery and/or adornment. The toy in jewellery and the toy as jewellery have the same objective-symbolic mark: impressive historic origin and continuity, the meaning of nonverbal communication, raised to awareness at the personal and social level. In both cases they are clearly linked with play in the individual world of phantasy and reality.

MEMORY

The roots of most European cultures are linked with the ancient period as confirmed by archaeological findings and written documents.³ In the light of artefacts, toys and jewellery are memorised as general cultural goods which have undergone many transformations of form during history. In spite of all contemporary changes of design, their original function, specific material valuation and features of spiritual-symbolic characteristics/sensibility – interpreted, of course, in line with selected views and criteria - were spared major shocks or disappearance. In this sense I consider the concept of heritage, national culture, in terms of time, space and creativity, as a stamp of traditional cartography in a personal passport.

FOCUS

The modern “blending” of toys into jewellery and of jewellery into toys is an interesting social aspect of identification and interrelationship between the producer and consumer/“user”. Long-standing economic indigence and socio-political shocks after the Second World War and the Homeland War have brought about a specific re-assessment of the traditional heritage and the creative production sector involving manual labour, skill and quality of manufacture. Although neither toys nor jewellery were a part of daily life in such circumstances, their production and share of the market (a market of

3 Research of and interest in social communities, cultural phenomena and preserved artefacts involve different scientific, humanistic disciplines – archaeology, history, history of art, ethnology, sociology. According to the customary current approach toys and jewellery are usually dated in ancient times (e.g., in the selection of data in the Croatian Wikipedia). Scientific knowledge, based on the working methodology and interpretation within single disciplines or in interdisciplinary analysis confirm a much older origin of objects of play and adornment. The appearance of toys and jewellery follows the development of ancient cultures of all civilisations.

modest scope considering industrial production and imports) are still present. Indeed, they are accepted as a special national value, and jewellery and children's toys are considered as "heritage" and as "Croatian" souvenirs according to the idea promoted by several small social groups!⁴ Isn't this exchange of significance and role an excellent illustration of our mental toying with economic, cultural and general social health?

Since I belong to the group of users/consumers, i.e., occasional buyers of children's toys and jewellery, my personal final choice and decision to buy a specific product are influenced by different factors such as use, kind, quality, design, mode of production or price. Of course, an important role is also played by the "code" of each object, the time, place and the producer (industrial plant, handicraft workshop, unique artist's item), and the confirmed time of its position during the 20th century. This is the basis of the experience and of the pragmatic interpretation of heritage, but also of modern creative efforts.

REVIEW OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY TOYS

TOYS

Our tradition and our modern age (of globalisation, electronic media...) also confirm that play (including the subsequent phases of entertainment, amusement, communication, creativity) is also immanent in human nature and focused by conscious will on its central object – the toy.⁵ Play need not always include and/or necessarily involve a toy as an independent and special object defined by meaningful design, material and production, and its ultimate use/

4 The controversies regarding souvenirs carelessly attributed the national/Croatian label are due first of all to the financial interests of specific social groups and resourceful individuals whose prestige is supported by socio-political, administrative and institutional partiality and justified by romantic and latter-day patriotism and "autochthonous Croatian origin". Such circles are not interested in subjects without whose work there would be no creation, skill or production in the national market supply. They are associated, in principle, only with verbal support and occasional diplomas/acknowledgements of few national institutions responsible for culture and tourism. This again confirms that they are left to the (self-)will of the official administration, chronic lack of money required for production and, ultimately, personal resourcefulness. Such positions make the popular catchphrase "political folklore" much more obvious.

5 Play is a process with which the still incompletely aware, instinctive being rises to familiarity with and conscious acceptance of its own environment. Let us remember that the beginning of play belongs to the physical world of the infant, his/her interest in his/her own body; he/she will reach for the physical toy as an object only in later stages of physical and intellectual development.

purpose.⁶

Traditional Croatian toys, also present in our time as 20th century heritage, include categories of different features depending on the selected criteria of analysis. The magic attractiveness of toys has been repeatedly confirmed in every group/kind:

- children's toys – toys for adults;
- traditional wooden toys of local provenance: handcrafted

and/or cooperative production, toys marketed at parish fêtes, fairs, market-places (now also in specialised souvenir or “heritage item” shops; the scope of established forms and colours typical of the culture of life in rural areas has been expanded by recent urban motifs; in a way this group also includes varicoloured gingerbread-waxwork products;

- a special group of traditional toys are toys produced in a
- home, family atmosphere from different materials (cloth,
- wool, pottery, maize stalks, wicker); these are individual hand-made products mainly offered as gifts;
- industrial toys made of paper, cloth (plush)⁷, plastic, mechanical toys, electronic media toys;

6 Every manifestation in the environment and in the social community may sometimes assume the role of a toy: soil (dust, mud, sand), snow, vegetation (grass, flowers, fruits), kitchen ware and pottery... In my memories of early childhood days I still wistfully recall the feeling of pleasure and happiness in play, from the barefoot scattering of dust, shaping of various objects and prints in/from mud (and/or snow), weaving of small wreaths from meadow flowers, flowers or straw to “cooking” and/or “laundry”. I got a “real toy”, made for my playing with it, from my “country” grandma from Kendelovac (parish and church district of Cirkvena), in whose loving care I grew up until I returned to my parents in order to start primary school. I don't quite remember the year in which I got two special toys, “dearly paid”: after returning from Paris, dad brought me a “toy the like of which nobody has” – a pink-white plastic coffee set. Grandmother immediately put it away in the kitchen cupboard, and I could only play with it by watching it or on saint's days. A similar fate was reserved for the “baby” that mother brought from Trieste; grandmother also used it as decoration on her double bed; I remember I had to wash my hands and wear a clean dress whenever I was allowed to play with it. One had to be very careful not to damage the mechanism of the “baby's” cry and call for mother.

7 Among plush children's toys the most popular and the top favourite is the “teddy bear”, the indisputable champion among all animal figures. The industrial production of plush “teddy bears” focused especially on that wild animal after a hunt organised for the US President Theodore Roosevelt in which he shot a female bear and spared her cub. What an example of interrelationship and indirect communication among individual, social, manufacturing and user symbols!

- toys used as an aid in child's development: educational, pedagogic, creative, therapeutic, recreational/physical exercise toys.

Any toy (or several toys from a specific group) has a potential age and complex influences on the formation of one's own habitus and, through subsequent pragmatic steps, all the way to the building of a collection.

The sorting of toys into categories/groups helps me to review the current fashionable scene in Zagreb – traditional toys often appear as the main visual element on children's and women's clothing, and as an attendant detail (women's bags, caps and shawls, gloves...). I find a new role of the toy more interesting – the “transformation” of the toy into jewellery, the kind of jewellery used for adornment by older children and the mainly female adult population. The “crown” indicator of the transformation of children's toys on the one hand and jewellery on the other is on display in the shop- windows of goldsmith's shops, at art exhibitions and at promotions of local jewellery production through the so-called “women's” weeklies, TV shows or social electronic networks.

JEWELLERY

Working activity includes in a specific form and to a specific extent elements of play or special pastime as a singular help and relaxation. The importance and significance of its influence is especially present in the creative aspect of professional work. It is built into the attractiveness of the final product, but it is not expressed in its ultimate (monetary) value; it is published in the domain of communication systems, especially at the verbal level.

Jewellery undoubtedly implies decorative objects worn as independent objects on the body; sometimes they are also used to adorn the interior of homes and offices. Mere facts about jewellery only list data and material features about jewellery and do not enter its multi-layered structure. The complexity of jewellery as cultural and culturological phenomena can be considered in terms of the categories of choice and ultimate selection of specific features and meanings, different criteria of approach, and the main boundaries governing the formation of the complex. The thematic framework of this note records only play (without conventional rules!) and the interrelationship between toys and jewellery, and I am going to interpret them in terms of distinctive references:

- goldsmith's jewellery – costume jewellery (trinkets);

- materials and techniques;
- design: cottage industry jewellery, original jewellery, goldsmith's workshops;
- market;
- types/groups, collections;
- functions and symbolic substance.

Even if one were, but only in line with latter-day conversational practices, captivated by commenting, analysing and judging the overall meaning of jewellery and jewellery, all its "value" would only be reduced to the decorative function (with a frequent obvious vision of kitsch!) rather than any other characteristics defining them. However, luckily, a more appropriate, reasonable and valid approach is determined by the protective shell of cataloguing and comparison of referent aspects.

The established and usual supply of "classic" jewellery in the goldsmith's workshops in Zagreb (with a trade licence and/or master's certificate) has been expanded, from the nineteen-seventies to date, by an interesting production of jewellery – produced from gold and/or silver, reflecting the spirit of traditional folk heritage and the visual outline of traditional folk creativity. On the other hand, mass-produced costume jewellery remained stubbornly aloof from the introduction of national traditional elements into design.⁸ The revitalised skill of traditional design and making of women's necklaces made of small, varicoloured glass beads, known as the woven *klaruš* or *grlinček*,⁹ or

8 Costume jewellery (trinkets) refers primarily to jewellery used for adornment. Such jewellery is produced by individuals, milliners or smaller industrial plants. Most of it is imported from European countries, China, India and Africa. National entrepreneurs/retailers and producers mainly import varicoloured costume jewellery materials: plastic, glass and metal elements, shells, horn, etc., of different form, colour and size. The design of ear-rings, necklaces, bracelets, rings and brooches follows trendy clothing, reacts promptly to current fashionable style and follows the popularity of various, mainly foreign "ethno-designs". It is also accessible to users because of the low market price (it is "cheap"!).

9 Credit for the revival of knowledge and skill in the production of such necklaces is due first of all to a number of experts (employed in museums or open universities, connoisseurs of folklore heritage, "field conditions", and their associates, who have organised appropriate "workshops" and "courses" at the beginning of the 21st century). Among many, particular mention needs to be made of Lela Rončević, M.SD., of the Samobor Museum, and Lucija Franić Novak, Ph.D., of the Dubrava Adult Education Centre. The activity of folklore culture&art societies intensified after the Homeland War. They are the main users of such necklaces produced by skilled local women. Let me also note the production of traditional jewellery replicas made of cheaper metals

other subspecies, produced in line with the native visual expression, is positioned somewhere between goldsmith's trade and costume jewellery.

Traditional wooden toys and gingerbread products are included in the list of the national intangible cultural heritage of the Republic of Croatia and inscribed on the representative UNESCO list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity: *Wooden toys of Hrvatsko Zagorje, 2009*, and *Gingerbread and waxwork products of Northern Croatia, 2010*. Among other things, this event stimulated a different understanding of/relation to the value of cultural and folklore heritage but also ideational views concerning its design in terms of modern social functioning. I shall illustrate how this is reflected in specific professions by examples of jewellery examples and review the production of professional goldsmiths in Zagreb.

The range of jewellery range offered by the Bashota Jewellery Shop is also distinguished by a visually especially attractive segment – *From the Croatian Heritage* – inspired by gingerbread jewellery, children's toys, national costume and elements from the natural and urban environment (Fig. 1/p. 327). It is marked by the basic red colour on the enamel (and other typical associated colours) on silver or gold. This class of jewellery is distinguished by the authentically designed and manually produced impressive range of ear-rings, pendants, brooches and rings. Every item is designed in accordance with selected traditional features and design elements. An appropriate accompanying brochure explains the symbolic values and folklore. This range of jewellery also bears witness to the rules of goldsmith's work, creative/artistic expression, and confirms the significance and importance of play and adornment.¹⁰

“JOR” is the logo for the author's jewellery produced by the Zagreb goldsmith Julijana Ozimec Rodić. A substantial part of her work is inspired by objects and motifs from the natural and cultural heritage. In her design of jewellery and decorative objects for special uses (key charms, banknote holders etc.) she also introduces figures of horses (Fig. 2/p. 327), bears, flowers etc. related to the world of traditional wooden, cloth and plastic toys. They are produced from silver and silver alloys, and mainly designed as ear-rings, necklaces, brooches and pendants.

(aluminium, copper, zinc) by Hrvoje Marušić in Zagreb. In principle, such jewellery is mainly produced by women, mostly in their own homes (cottage industry).

¹⁰ Deliberate or casual customers buy such jewellery either for themselves or as a gift to a child and/or close female friend (exceptionally a man), but also as a “Croatian souvenir” for a foreign guest.

Eva Lumezi Šimatović belongs to the younger generation of Zagreb's jewellery designers. She excels especially in designs implying intimate play. She expresses her professional and personal habitus in the design of silver earrings in the composition of which she chooses an object of everyday use, a small pot or cup (Fig. 3/p. 327). This is in my opinion an excellent confirmation of the change, "revamping" of the basic function of almost every object, showing that everything can be an object of child's play but also an inspiration in the design of jewellery.

Everyday duties, hurry and the continuous insistence on rational behaviour in time and space consequently influence the intimate sphere of "free time" – the component of life which harbours collective memory, symbolic tradition. The mysterious magic in which we abandon ourselves to the world of play, pastime and hobbies. And although it seems that man has neglected or lost the significance and importance of symbolism, it is indeed the line of force of our partnership, cooperation, protection... Various symbolic signs (whether single or arranged in groups) play the function of binding tissue in every aspect of culture and society. In most cases they are not expressed by words; they are embodied as an intimate "sense" of the different roles of our favourite things. Of course, there is no doubt about their iconography and universal presence in the atmosphere of play, toys and jewellery. The personal trunk of spiritual existence is filled with associative treasure, and is persistently available to everybody seeking "surplus" knowledge or at least some auxiliary answers to the riddles of life...

COMMUNICATION

Both the world of toys and the world of jewellery are networked into the spiritual dimension of every human being and, especially, in the associated social community. They move within the chronological boundaries of time and space, culture and art, creativity and perception. They readily accept changes of all kinds, with one exception – they never renounce the basic aspect of their mission, communication. Because the object itself has no value. The qualitative estimate of the value of an object – toy, jewellery – is determined by different factors relevant for the object's overall use and its final appearance, and for market conventions and rules of demand and supply.. All the considerations, analyses and attempts to explain the role of toys and jewellery in personal and social correlations coexist jointly in the sign of the message, speech (conversation) and mutual links of nonverbal nature.

Communication, as the indispensable need of our voyage through life, as a skill acquired by learning and adoption, is usually related to rational, linguistic-speech activities. Toys and jewellery are manifested in the light of nonverbal communication – of those free links that do not determine agreed social boundaries. Such a kind of nonverbal, instinctive pleasant talk with oneself is also an aid, a singular vital "crutch" and signpost pointing the way to the desired objective. It realises understanding and cooperation through associations and symbols, contact, look, senses of all kinds. Nonverbal communication of the body and mind harbours the selected area of primeval, intuitive interest to which speech is a complicating link rather than an auxiliary critical means.

We are not complete without communication. Whether nonverbal or verbal, graphic, written or electronic communication is the distinctive phenomenon of human existence, the core of the family, of the local community, nation, civilisation. Its ductus and its stamp also permeate this age, the 21st century – the age of links between the current and the former generations, between the preserved, traditional and modern, new toys and jewellery. The substitution of function/significance in the atmosphere of communication manifests the ease and the ways through which a toy becomes jewellery and jewellery becomes a toy. Thus, the material significance of toys and jewellery becomes an object of flirting, self-protection, one's many-sided personality. The complex structure and the relation of toys and jewellery are also illustrated by the photographs of the objects displayed at the *World of Toys* project.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

I like playing – good, peace-loving, alone and in company – with toys and jewellery. I feel comfortable in the fold of their rules and I am not concerned about defeat/victory. I enjoy new events, surprises, different objects of play. Just like jewellery!

TRANSLATED BY: JANKO PARAVIĆ

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