

Jewelry That Sparks Conversations: Memento Mori By A. Codognato



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Before you could buy a skull print garment at any mall, the macabre imagery wielded as much fascination as it was taboo. In 1866, a visionary Venetian jeweler opened a workshop not far from the famed San Marco square. He began creating rings, bracelets, pendants and diadems featuring mythological snakes, skulls, skeletons and other striking visual metaphors for the brevity of life as well as the alchemic quest for eternal love.



Courtesy

A. Codognato Ring

Since then, the bold imagination of Codognato has transformed how we experience jewelry. The Codognato family became one of the most influential and relentlessly copied jewelry artists in the history of fashion. San Francisco's Serge Sorokko Gallery, 361 Sutter Street, has staged an unprecedented retrospective, a first solo exhibition of the elusive master Attilio Codognato whose own pieces are a subject of legendary stories.



Courtesy

A. Codognato Storefront

As a young apprentice in his great grandfather's atelier, Attilio himself had delivered a stunning snake-shaped bracelet to the hands of actor Richard Burton who had acquired it for Elizabeth Taylor while the world's most glamorous couple of that era vacationed in Venice. Designer Anna Sui won a fierce bidding war for it at the Taylor estate auction at Christie's. Very few Codognato items have been publicly auctioned in the past twenty years.



Courtesy

A. Codognato Necklace

The master is notoriously strict in curating the list of his potential clients and known to have bought back pieces to maintain their art value and exclusivity. With the rising interest in unique jewelry exhibitions from the general public and younger designers seeking inspiration in the more unconventional aesthetics and unusual craftsmanship role models, the timing of the Codognato showcase could not have been more fortunate.



Courtesy

Attilio Codognato

"I have always been reluctant to exhibit outside of my place in Venice," Codognato said. "Serge and Tatiana Sorokko, who are among my most dedicated collectors, have been encouraging me to bring my art to San Francisco. After more than two decades their persistence has paid off, and I have very happily acquiesced."



Courtesy

A. Codognato Bracelet

Recent royal British controversy over a Blackamoor brooch has added urgency to the display. Fifty iconic pieces in gold, platinum and precious stones reveal why the world's biggest style icons from Diana Vreeland to Jackie Kennedy Onassis, to the late Alexander McQueen were among the jeweler's avid fans flocking to his by-appointment only store during the Venetian Carnival, Biennale or the prestigious Venice film festival.



Courtesy

Attilio Codognato Earrings

Coco Chanel herself was often photographed with a string of beads on her neck. Due to black and white photography at the time it was assumed she wore pearls. In fact, it was a jade Codognato necklace that was one of her signature accessories. Tatiana Sorokko is full of fascinating art history insights such as this. "I've known Attilio for 25 years. Look, the inscription here says, 'She will love everything I love,' in Italian. The passion is evident," Tatiana shares her admiration. "Every Codognato piece guarantees that you have a unique *object d'art* that sparks conversations and curiosity. Great jewelry like great art takes you on a journey of a lifetime."