



PREVIEW

JEWELER'S FANTASTIC BEASTS & BONES

By **Carolyn Zinko**

Watch any Hollywood awards show, and the cameras are sure to zoom in on actresses wearing glittering borrowed diamonds, sapphires and rubies from luxury purveyors like Tiffany, Bulgari and Harry Winston.

One name missing from those promotional parades is Codognato, an Italian jewelry house known for a grittier but still extravagant style of adornment — precious stones set in skull motifs — that date to the company's founding by Simeone Codognato in Venice in 1866.

A selection of macabre necklaces, rings, earrings and brooches by Codognato will shine in a local spotlight in an exhibition, "Coveted: Jewels by Codognato," that debuts this week at the Serge Sorokko Gallery in San Francisco. The show, with pieces of jewelry up for sale, opens with a private party on Thursday, Dec. 8, and is open to the public from Dec. 9 through Jan. 7, 2017.

The exhibition is billed as the first show of Codognato (pronounced coe-don-YAH-toe) to be held outside of a museum and marks the 150th anniversary of the jewelry house. Sorokko and his wife, former runway model Tatiana Sorokko, are collectors of the jewelry and count Attilio Codognato, the founder's grandson and a jewelry designer since 1958, as a friend.

"This exhibition is both culturally relevant and deeply personal," Serge Sorokko said in a statement. "Attilio is an influential contemporary artist who, for over half a century, has been creating unique objets d'art of astounding beauty."

The skulls, or memento mori, are reminders of the cycle of life and death. In recent decades, skulls have found their way into high fashion in the work of clothing designers such as John Galiano and Alexander McQueen. Codognato in recent years has been collected by pop star Elton John, model Kate Moss, actress Nicole Kidman and Princess Ferial of Jordan, according to an



Codognato photos

"Coveted: Jewels by Codognato" 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday Dec. 9-Jan. 7. Serge Sorokko Gallery, 55 Geary St., S.F. (415) 421-7770.

exhibition spokesman. Past clients have included opera star Maria Callas, Coco Chanel, author Ernest Hemingway and actor Richard Burton, according to Tatiana Sorokko in an article on Codognato for Harper's Bazaar in 2014.

Clothing and jewelry exhibitions have become an increasingly popular draw for museums, as evidenced by blockbuster fashion shows like "Savage Beauty," the Alexander McQueen retrospective that drew more than 600,000 visitors to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2011. Locally, the new de Young Museum's top 10 shows in the first 10 years of its existence included the retrospectives of Jean Paul

Gaultier (279,114 visitors in 2012) and Yves Saint Laurent (261,214 in 2009). Also popular: its "Cartier and America" show in 2009 and "The Art of Bulgari: La Dolce Vita & Beyond" in 2014.

It may not suit everyone's taste, but Codognato has dedicated fans of the fantastic. At auction, Codognato snake bracelets and necklaces with jeweled skulls have fetched \$10,000 to \$35,000, according to sales information on Sotheby's.com and other websites.

"Codognato is one of the few jewelers who have forged their own identity without pandering to commercial interests," said Simon Teakle by email, a longtime Christie's gemologist who now runs his own jewelry business in Connecticut. "Their jewelry is created with individuality, humour and style."

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