



ROLLING FLASH

PHOTOGRAPHY
BY
**PIERRE
TOUSSAINT**

JEWELLERY BY
VENERARI

Words by
**JESS
SCULLY**

THERE ARE several ways you can deal with the issue of adornment, ways to use the exterior to hint at the stories inside; birthstone types present a chi-aligned catalogue of their experiences, the perspex pony set see it as a jangly celebration of their pop humour, the blingers as a billboard for their billfolds. Some are even more self conscious. They see jewellery as such a frivolity, it's practically a mark of poor taste. As jewellery designer Genevieve Lilley notes, "If you come from a functionalist background, well, jewellery doesn't actually do anything."

If you found one of these severe and serious individuals, even breathing a certain four-letter word at them would cause beads of sweat to form along the necks of their black Margiela sheaths. For anyone who has grown up in the past 30 years, opal is the tacky fodder of Gold Coast tourist traps.

"Opal has only ended up kitsch and tacky because of the way that it's been set," Genevieve's partner Kingsley Wallman says. "I think the stone itself can be absolutely magnificent. To my eye it's the most beautiful gemstone in the world. Nothing else can give you every colour in the spectrum and flash it at you when you move it. 95 per cent of it comes from Australia, but no one knows what to do with it. From a design perspective it's a very difficult stone to work, you are designing specifically around a particular stone. Every time it's different."

Looking at Kingsley and Genevieve, this enthusiasm seems rather unexpected. They look like the kind of people you'd expect to fall into the minimalist category; he, a former corporate lawyer and she, an architect. After working overseas for ten years, they needed change. Driving across the US with a baby (and another on the way) seemed like a good way to work out what was next.

"At some point it became quite obvious. We came back to Australia and began reinventing opals. That seemed to me that there was this fantastic product that had been driven down by poor marketing, poor brand association and horrendous design. We just kind of charged off into the unknown to see what would happen," Kingsley says.

The result is Venerari. Genevieve's design distills everything to direct forms, made playful with the flash of opal colour.

"Everyone disposes of their cars and their watches and their clothes every couple of years. The only thing that remains as a thread of continuity is the



jewellery that you got from your grandmother and the jewellery that you will hand down. Like a building, it gets passed on from generation to generation. It's this strange enduring thing in this world, where nothing is enduring," Genevieve says.

This new partnership is the coming together of years trawling the world together, honing an aesthetic, and Kingsley's own family history. It's an unlikely history passed down by his father, a city dermatologist who conscripted his war buddies to go bush, mining opal in the 70s and 80s.

"It was more than the middle of nowhere, the nearest town was six hours' drive, in Far North West Queensland. We literally made the road to get there, weeks of carving the road in with the bulldozer, then hooking mesh to the bulldozers so we could build an airstrip. We'd fly in fresh food and bring opal back. We'd also swap over men, six weeks on and two weeks off. People who know about these things say no opal seam like it was ever found again."

Venerari's design may have updated the look, but the raw process hasn't really changed. Opal mining has never become a corporate concern. Even before you create your own myths and memories around each piece, the stone has passed through the hands of a cast of characters hiding at the end of the earth, whose stories can only be imagined in the rolling flash of colour.

"It is in effect a cottage industry, either loners or a couple of guys who are loners that have got together, and there's certainly none of the younger generation coming through. Most of the miners in the 50s and 60s really got into it because they were, more often than not, Australian war veterans or Eastern European war criminals who had something to hide from. Out there, you do what you like. You are at the end of the earth," Kingsley says.

"You still get a lot of towns where you never see the people, but you see post boxes. Invisible towns with 2500 post boxes." sw