



Zeitgeist

A Century of Idar-Oberstein Costume Jewellery

Anne-Barbara Knerr

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- The present publication time-travels through a century of creative jewelry production in Idar-Oberstein, which has hitherto remained largely unexplored so that exciting discoveries are still to be made

From the latter half of the nineteenth century, Idar-Oberstein developed into an important centre of costume jewelry production. Numerous factories, large and small, produced costume jewelry for the world into the 1980s although today this trade has virtually lost its former significance. During that long time span, Idar-Oberstein was one of the four major German jewelry centres along with Pforzheim, Schwäbisch Gmünd and Hanau. Idar-Oberstein costume jewelry reflects each of the prevailing fashions in turn: Historicism, Jugendstil/Art Nouveau, Art Déco – to 1960s and 1970s Informel and Zero. Innovative handling of simple (inexpensive) materials soon led to an aesthetic that stood on its own merits, independently of “real” jewellery. Here the Bengel company – with its sophisticated Art Déco jewelry – exemplifies innovative models and business policy. The author was able to study many early documents and photographs in Idar-Oberstein archives as well as pieces of jewelry that, taken together, are highly instructive on the history of costume jewelry. A vivid image of twelve jewelry manufacturers is evoked; proprietors and employees, production conditions, models policy, pieces of jewelry in each period style and worldwide marketing and distribution. Costume jewelry from Idar-Oberstein was not usually marked (stamped) because it was sold through wholesalers; this is what makes attribution to specific makers quite difficult today. Text in English & German.

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