

**On Aesthetic**  
**Giovanni Corvaja: On Beauty and Art – simply and directly**

**Interview with Giovanni Corvaja by Maria Rubtsova**

*Heat cannot be separated from fire, or beauty from The Eternal.*  
*Dante Alighieri*

Giovanni Corvaja is doubtlessly one of the greatest exponents of beauty in our time. He creates pieces of jewellery that are **timeless** because their aesthetic value is **eternal**. Giovanni is among the very few modern jewellery artists who work exclusively with classical materials: gold and platinum. The creative process behind his exquisite unique pieces, made entirely by hand, may last for months, or even years.

I am convinced that Corvaja's jewellery is the embodiment of an absolute beauty in art. I do not even want to say **modern art**, because Giovanni, with his fascinating creations, does already belong to the **history of art**. And definitely – the **history of beauty**.

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**M.R.: What is beauty?**

G.C.: Beauty is something that creates a series of positive emotions, gives one a sense of well-being and stimulates a desire. Although beauty does not always provoke a desire, **the desire for beauty** is encoded in each person. Because, quoting Nietzsche, beauty is a “**promise of happiness**”.

**M.R.: Are beauty and art synonymous?**

G.C.: No. Beauty and Art are not synonymous for me. Art may be beautiful, or may be not. And very often beauty is not art at all!

**M.R.: Does art have to be necessarily beautiful?**

G.C.: I personally like it when art is beautiful. I prefer beautiful art. However, beauty is not the only condition for a piece to become a masterpiece. There is a lot of ugly art around. I accept ugly art only if the unpleasantness is important, crucial, inevitable, reasonable. I am against art that uses ugliness as a weapon to shock an audience. I consider it **pure laziness**. It is very easy to get attention in this way: hurting people by striking them with the unpleasant. It is much more difficult to impress with beauty – it is a skill, a serious job that requires concentration, dedication and knowledge. I have a feeling that the aim of contemporary art is very often to shock, because it gives a sort of guarantee of being noticed. Unfortunately.

I would choose to experience the failure of my project, rather than “enjoying” doubtful “easy” fame and success, making ugly things.

**M.R.: Kant's definition of the beautiful is *something that we like, regardless of whether or not it is useful to us*. He asserts that we do not apply self-interest or reason to appreciate beauty; *we simply like what we see*. Do you agree with his statement?**

G.C.: Yes. I believe that beauty gives one a strong stimulation, which is not merely intellectual. It is not a result of memory or conscious decision, but rather some strange sensation of **peace** or **fulfilment**... It takes place on a deeper, unconscious level because one important fundamental need is satisfied: the need for beauty. Pretty things attract attention without any explanation, they do not require any reason. One may ask himself why something is so inviting but, I think, the answer will come from neurology rather than philosophy.

**M.R.: Is gold beautiful itself or does its beauty depend upon the use of the material?**

G.C.: Gold is beautiful to me, itself. However, of course, not everything made of gold is automatically beautiful. Gold is a sublime material. It's a symbol of evolution and perfection of the nature. Gold and beauty are

synonymous for me. Gold is a material that stimulates, creates a desire. And that is exactly what real beauty does. Not every expression of beauty and not always, but often and in most cases.

**M.R.: Does a piece of art require a strong idea behind it in order to be beautiful?**

G.C.: No, I don't think so. I think that beauty is frank and direct.

**M.R.: “Beauty's voice speaks gently: it appeals only to the most awakened souls,” – these are the famous Nietzsche words. Could you comment on the quote, please?**

G.C.: I think, beauty **is** and **has to be** understandable for everyone, to a certain extent. **Pure beauty** is actually a **universal language**. However beauty, like art or like anything that stimulates the senses, is more appreciated by sensitive people. The same piece of art may be seen and interpreted by both a sensitive person and an insensitive person in completely different ways. The **nuances** make the difference, the detail speaks about the important. Understanding of beauty will be inevitably poor if a dull eye, ear, nose or tongue are not used to note the details...

**M.R.: Your lifelong project, The Golden Fleece Collection, is definitely a direct contact with beauty... Could you, please, talk briefly about The Golden Fleece in connection with our subject?**

G.C.: The Golden Fleece is **pure beauty itself**. It has both an alchemical and a philosophical meaning: an intellectual beauty and an aesthetic appearance. My aim was to create and show total, global beauty, using splendid materials – gold and platinum – “trans-forming” them into something that would look beautiful, be tender to the touch, giving pleasure and power to the owner.

**M.R.: Beauty and ugliness: the two opposites?**

G.C.: I do not share the philosophy of the Middle Age in this case. I do not agree with the theory claiming that the task of ugliness is to emphasise beauty. I do not believe that ugliness exists in order to create a balance in the world. Yes, the contrast between beauty and unpleasantness helps one to see the beautiful more clearly. A lonely wild flower in the drab main street of Milan surprises and rejoices the heart more than the same flower in a charming spring field...

Ugliness is something that wounds. The eyes, the soul, the mind. Humans are, first of all, sensitive to pain. Therefore, it is easy to hurt one with unpleasantness. Beauty, on the contrary, evokes positive emotions. Beauty serves humanity. “*Beauty awakens the soul to act*” (Dante Alighieri).

**M.R.: Beauty and power: friends or enemies?**

G.C.: Power would like to be a friend of beauty, but beauty is free. It chooses its friends carefully.

In the past, beauty was a tool of kings, the church and the rich to show their superiority over others. They needed to demonstrate their power and wealth in order to enjoy them more. Imposing buildings, fantastic interiors, luxury cloths and jewellery – those were all the symbols of the supreme. But were artists aiming to reflect power in their pieces, too? No. The aim of the artist was to create a magnificent piece of art. The beauty of a piece did not demonstrate the strength of artists, but the degree of their talent and skill.

**M.R.: Is that true even nowadays?**

G.C.: I think that the concept has not changed much, even now. The only difference is that power and wealth are **very seldom** held in the hands of people with refined taste. As a result, people tend to confuse what is **expensive** with what is **truly beautiful**. I would prefer the simplicity and beauty of a hand-carved, useful object to a pointless collection of expensive items. Maybe crafted by an idle shepherd, in the cold winter...

*From an essay on aesthetic “In Search of Beauty” by Maria Rubtsova  
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