

There is something unmistakable about Claudio Pino's designs, the spark of which originated in a struggle he had with a piece of his own jewelry. Claudio was taken with an Australian Fire Opal in one of his rings. For those unfamiliar, Fire Opals, true to their name, have a glowing irregularity of colour, like the shades within a flickering flame. Frustrated that he couldn't show the azure and heliotrope hues at certain angles, Claudio built a moving piece to facilitate the gemstone catching the light and showcase its natural beauty. Genius, right? In doing so, Claudio realized that this problem revealed a larger truth: there is something special that occurs only when the ring and wearer meet and interact.

"I created my first small mechanism so the stone could follow the hand's movement while always facing the wearer. I sought [to achieve a blend] of physical attributes and sculptural portability that would make the piece [appear and act as] an extension of the body... Over the years, the construction of the ring has evolved from a design with a simple pivoting stone to a series of very meticulous mechanisms, bringing [new] possibilities for interaction."

Small and sleek, Pino's pieces belie their complex construction process and structure. For his collection of kinetic rings, over 120 solderings were required, with calculations specific to the weight of each stone. Like a dance between the pieces, each element plays a role, their subtle movements allowing for the interplay of colour, depth, shadow and light. For example, a one-of-a-kind piece entitled Magnificence Stellaire was inspired by the starry sky in the farthest reaches of the northern hemisphere.

The central stone features a black opal. Semi-transparent with bright blue and purple flakes, the gem emulates the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) with its vibrant and turbulent wisps of air. The result of a careful and complex design, the stone freely rotates 360 degrees, yet remains facing up at all times. Eight small freshwater pearls frame the opal and gracefully curve upward, symbolizing the lunar phases, and on either side of an

elegant open teardrop band, delicate golden drops delineate the Milky Way. Not surprisingly, this unique and extraordinary, celestially inspired adornment was selected as part of the exclusive exhibition for the Vancouver Olympic Winter Games Museum in 2010, just one of several prestigious awards it won.

Each ring tells its own story. Claudio immerses himself in researching both the materials and the history behind his craft before delving into a new collection. In 2009, to deepen his knowledge of the history of engagement rings, Pino went to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, which contains the largest collection of Ancient Egyptian jewelry in the world. For his latest collection, Black Velvet, he looked to the Middle Ages and embraced a more gothic aesthetic, juxtaposing dark and light elements.

"I am very attracted to asymmetry. I enjoy playing with the high contrast of complementary colours. For instance, I will jux-

tapose the coldness of silver against the warmth of gold, or calm green emeralds and vivid red rubies [against] the charm and freshness of white water pearls."

"During the Middle Ages, artists and designers were considered simply masters of their art – craftsmen – and did not have the freedom we do today in design. In the past, embellishment was often associated with the symbols of kingdom, identity and institutions. Today, one is free to explore any thematic subject or style that one wishes, and to fuse together any possible direction of expression; [and always at] the core [of adornment is the striving to be] oneself, and taking pride in uniqueness and originality."

Inspired by the Victorian Gothic era, Claudio sought a sublime tone that draws on classic symbols of the time such as stylized roses and lions, emblematic of love, power and victory. A standout hinged ring from the collection, named "Tactus", extends almost the full length of the finger, at once medieval and futuristic. Marrying the somberness of silver with glowing brass and copper, a red stone blooms unexpectedly at the base. Looking one part weapon, one part protection, and one part decoration, Tactus calls to mind suits of armor with its

beveled exterior and a small rounded cap at the top, which extends like a helmet over the pad of the finger.

"This dramatic collection emphasizes the sensual contrasts between darkness and light, hardness and softness, and toughness and tenderness... With my jewelry designs, I seek to pay homage to the historical grandeur of jewelry making, while at the same time letting the designs be animated by the contemporary. From concept to completion, each ring is handmade, piece by piece, in a continuous search for innovation and elegance, while seeking to create a bridge between the aesthetics of yesterday and tomorrow."

Claudio has dedicated himself to the creation of custom and one-of-a-kind rings since 1999. When pressed for the significance of rings over other types of jewelry, he is quick to note that a ring's placement on the hand calls to mind something evocative and timeless: "The importance of expression and the sensation of touch [has changed] over the centuries, especially with the influence of digital culture... [but nonetheless] rings endure as objects that have a direct connection to our body language."

"Whether being worn daily or on special occasions, rings are the most common and evocative pieces of jewelry. They are very personal, submerged in symbolic meaning. They can be worn as protective talismans or simply as beautiful, precious accessories. Often, people will refuse to go out, or even sleep without their rings."

Claudio is currently designing a collection of sculptural rings made with rare metals, such as platinum from South Africa. His goal is to play with the lush and sensual nature of the natural metals, and to interpret them in a way that speaks to the increasingly artificial aspects of our daily interactions. "I want to stimulate the senses and convey synthetic-like experiences."

Claudio, fascinated with jewelry boxes and their contents as a child, dreamed of the day when he could transform these raw materials into precious and wearable objects. A true craftsman, he is happiest when his art falls into, or onto the right hands: "Each time I start a new design, I imagine the day it will be worn. Thinking of this special relationship helps incubate the concept, allowing my creativity to flourish. I believe that [my pieces] become fulfilled and alive only when they find their owners." —

18