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Contemporary Jewellery between History, Art and Symbol

Liliana CONDRATICOVA ¹

*There are so many jewels,
Hidden in the dark,
And earth,
Forever unexplored...
/Charles Baudelaire, Podoabele/*

Abstract:

The author has made a study regarding the place and the role of the jewel at the contemporary stage. The study is mostly based on the results of the first survey in the domain of jewellery art, carried out in the Republic of Moldova in March-April 2011, and compared to similar surveys from European countries and the USA. On the pages of the text, an analysis is made of the priorities and preferences in the way contemporary jewellery is worn, the main focus being placed on the study of the trends from the jewellery design domain, the developing conditions of the decorative art and the possibilities of affirmation of the jewellery autochthon school. According to our opinion, the description and analysis of the art of jewellery at the contemporary stage is very difficult, due to several reasons, though it is achievable. The new models elaborated by the young jewellers from the country, which go hand in hand with the fashion of the clothes and stylish accessories, the appearance of new names in the decorative autochthon art allows to conclude that in the Republic of Moldova, there are artistic and economic perspectives to rehabilitate the jewellery production domain. The author comes with certain recommendations and solutions, capable of restructuring and reviving the jewellery domain. These masterpieces, based on century-old traditions from the domain of artistic processing of the metal, need an analysis and appreciation now, in order to become in time a true history of the jewellery from Moldova.

Keywords:

Jewellery, ornament, jeweller, salon, atelier, survey, opinion, art, design, critic, exhibition.

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It is certain that the history of universal silver work represents an extremely valuable chapter in the history of arts. Since its appearance, the ornament has fulfilled the role of an amulet or talisman with profound apotropaic or symbolic significations, it has maintained the function of beautifying and pointing out the individuality, the function of establishing the socio-economic statute of the possessor in the society and a genuine means of hoarding and capitalization.

Because of these reasons we consider the realization of an objective analysis regarding the role and status held by the ornament in the contemporary society, based on industrialization and globalization, appropriate. This approach comes to answer certain questions that condition the entire evolution of the art of jewellery, no matter the space and time, emphasizing aspects regarding the place of the jewellery during the historical evolution, symbolic significance and artistic value. At the same time, the objective and adequate analysis of the art of jewellery at the contemporary stage faces serious impediments related to the vertiginous change of the fashion and artistic trends from the domain of jewellery, the limited access to certain private and public collections, the frequent refusal of the authors to collaborate and provide the researches with the necessary materials, etc. Despite these “small” difficulties, we keep on hoping that this approach will have an impact on the scientific and artistic environments, but also on the pragmatic ones, referring to economy and sociology.

Without a profound study on the historical evolution of the art of jewellery, its place, and role in the society in various historical periods, we cannot talk about edifying a genuine and complete picture of the development of the modern and contemporary decorative art. However, it can be said for certain that in some periods, the ornament could not have been considered a simple accessory of beautification, but an essential means of expression, identification of the social position and material situation, in complete chime with one psychological characteristic of the human nature – that of decorating oneself in order to be observed, noticed and, respectively, appreciated. The roles of ornament and distinctive element have developed in parallel, the ornaments being considered distinctive elements for certain social, cultural and national groups, along with the language, the traditions and the customs. (Symbols, 2011)

In the domain of the ornaments, as well as in all the domains of life, the process of creative taking over of the past realisation, the adjustment to the realities of time and search for new means of expression is felt. The jewels are met starting with prehistoric times, their appearance being stimulated by magical-religious rituals and the ceremonial behaviour, which imposed “what you must do and wear” in certain situations. In these conditions, the ornaments for the significance of marriage appear, christening jewellery or mourning ones, many of them becoming eternal ornaments due to their meaning. At the same time, the jewels represent an important component of the funeral rite, practiced from the oldest times.

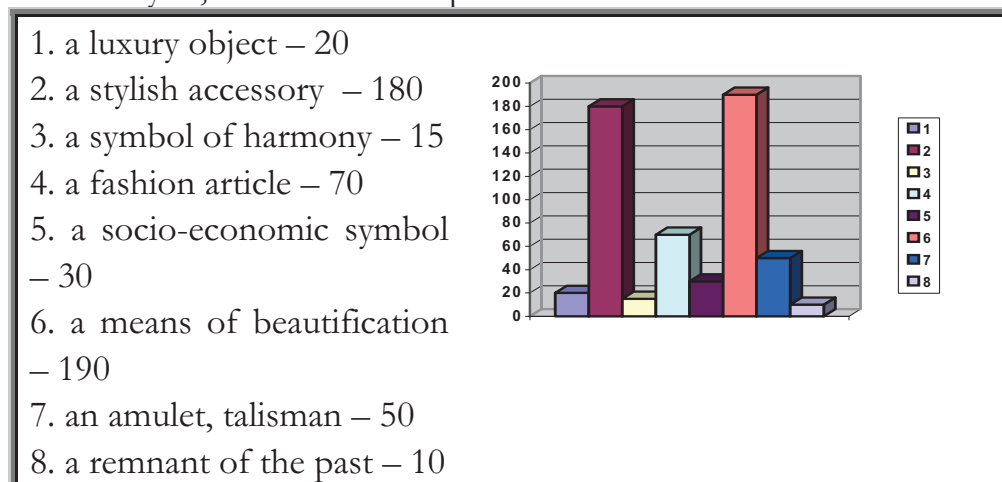
Considering the above aspects, we affirm that the contemporary jewellery creator, no matter if he is a designer, polisher or assembler, he must be up to date with changes in the art domain, as well as the customers’ preferences regarding noble metals, gems and their polishing/faceting. The jewellery creation domain, being at the interaction of the most incompatible, at first sight, sciences – physics and design, chemistry and ethnology, etc – represents a genuine interdisciplinary domain, cumulating knowledge regarding crystallography, optics, metallurgy, culturology, anthropology and history of jewelries. Therefore, it wouldn’t be right to treat the problem from one point of view only. This way, the achieved result would be tangential, univocal and far from our expectations. The key-questions like *who wears jewels, what is being worn* and *how are the ornaments used*, and the received answers, will allow to establish a complete picture regarding the jewellery domain in the Republic of Moldova, the author being aware of the fact that in such a study it is impossible to exhaust all the accessible documentary sources and to bear in mind all the formerly expressed opinions. Meanwhile, the analysis of the contemporary role of the jewel is a very difficult one, considering that the critic or the researcher in the arts’ study must prove maximum objectiveness, no matter their own predilections or attitudes towards a certain creator or jewellery saloon. Under these conditions, we have considered the execution of a comparative analysis regarding the up to date situation from the jewellery domain from the European countries and from the Republic of Moldova relevant, a study based on the results of the survey conducted in the period of March – April 2011, on a sample of 300 persons from the

urban environment, aged between 25 and 60 years, higher education and PhDs, mostly in socio-human sciences.

Psychologically speaking, the process of beautification of the human being with ornaments, clothes, accessories, and tattoo has its explanations and roots in the millennial history of the human community. Being initially an exclusive attribute of the military aristocracy or of the priests, in time the ornaments have become one of the main symbols, meant to make a difference from other people, to declare the individuality and personality. The psychologists also demonstrate that in the domain of ordering and purchasing jewelries the reason and the logics concede in front of the beauty and elegance of a genuine piece of jewellery.

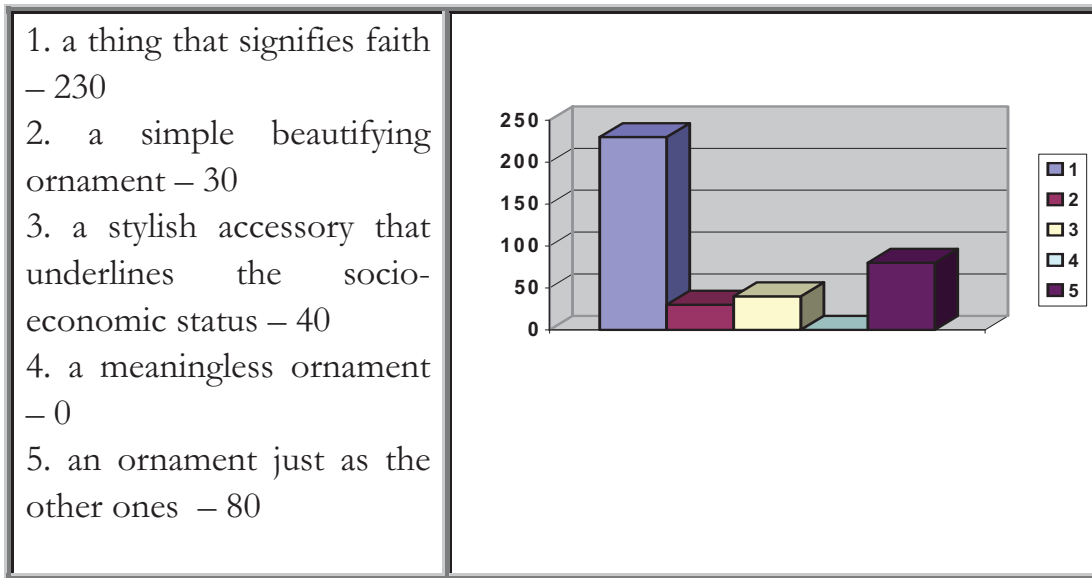
Not of a less significant value is the information regarding the reasons related to choosing a piece of jewellery. Among the reasons characteristic to the European space, the top factors are: the quality of the jewellery, the honesty and the professionalism of the seller, the courtesy, the image of the salon, the list being ended by factors like the decorative aspect of the salon and its location, the trademark and the publicity. At the moment, in the Republic of Moldova, regardless the age, gender or socio-economic statute, the ornament is the most preferred contemporary accessory, the results of the survey exemplifying it:

To you, the ornament represents:

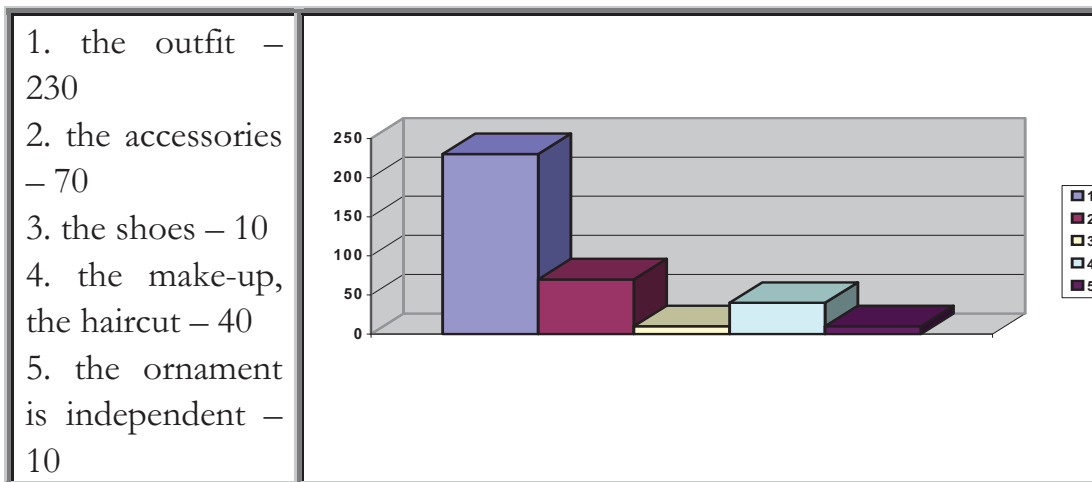


Another problem of interest to us was the attitude towards religious ornaments, to which our respondent answered as it follows, exemplifying the attention/interest towards this kind of jewellery:

To you, a religious ornament is:

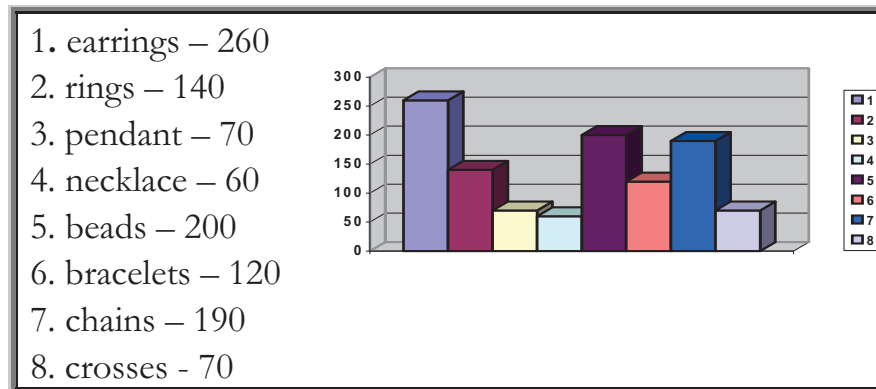


At the same time, according to the consumers' and jewellery creators' opinion, the contemporary jewellery can be associated with:



The study conducted by the specialized magazine *National Jeweller* (IDEX 2008, 70) has highlighted a few reasons which condition the wearing of the ornaments, among which the most essentials are: the

ornament worn as a memory; as a symbol of love; highlighting the individuality; significance of style and fashion; creating a certain impression or to be elegant; to impress the loved person; a demonstration of the socio-economic statute. As regards the preferences of a certain category of jewels in the Republic of Moldova, they have been distributed as it follows:

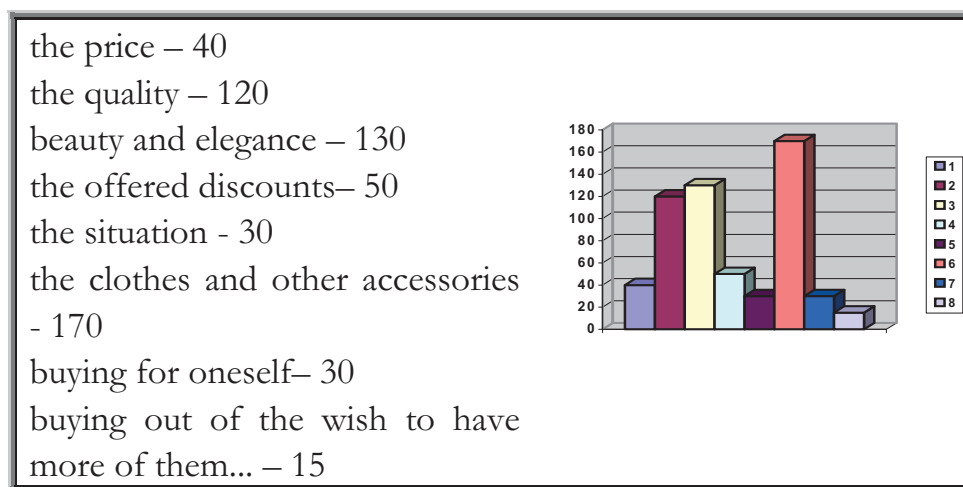


The observations made during a decade allow us to state that the ornament, as a gift, is attested most frequently on great holidays (in the decreasing order of importance): nuptial and family holidays, March 8, *St. Valentine and Valentina*, New Year and Christmas etc., these aspects being exemplified by the sales growth in both the autochthonous and the European jewellery salons, the holidays becoming a real paradise for the jewellery salons. One of the most interesting questions “Who wears and acquires items of jewellery?” challenged us to make an analysis to establish that the number of men who acquire net jewels prevails the number of women who acquire ornaments. And while the ladies acquire the items by themselves willing to have more of them or to be fashionable, in the case of the males, the answers to the difficult question “why, which is the reason for your purchase” were quite intelligible: 1) it’s a reason to celebrate a jubilee, a birthday, to make a present to the beloved person etc.; 2) these are presents entailing no serious obligations made to friends; 3) the ornament is a recompense. The issue regarding the wearing and the acquisition of the ornaments denotes a multitude of aspects that are worth envying, the most important being: 1) the ornament is ordered or acquired in connection with some events (baptizing, wedding); 2) the ornament is bought impulsively, people being attracted by the beauty from the jewellery salon (a fact specific to

the ladies' preference); 3) genuine the diamonds and the pearls are used due to the fabulous price and exclusivity in order to be hoarded or collected; 4) only people with great incomes can afford exclusive jewels and 5) jewels could be bought on hire purchase, as it is done in many European countries and the USA.

Thus, the research regarding the place and the role of a jewel, carried out by the American journal *Advertising Age* (IDEX 2008, 68), revealed several reasons which condition the wearing and the choice of the ornament, the most important being: a valuable item, demonstrating the financial status, a present, a reason for the self-expression, a tacit demonstration of its value etc. For an average collector/ buyer from the Republic of Moldova, these aspects are ordered as follows:

While ordering/acquiring an item of jewellery, do you consider

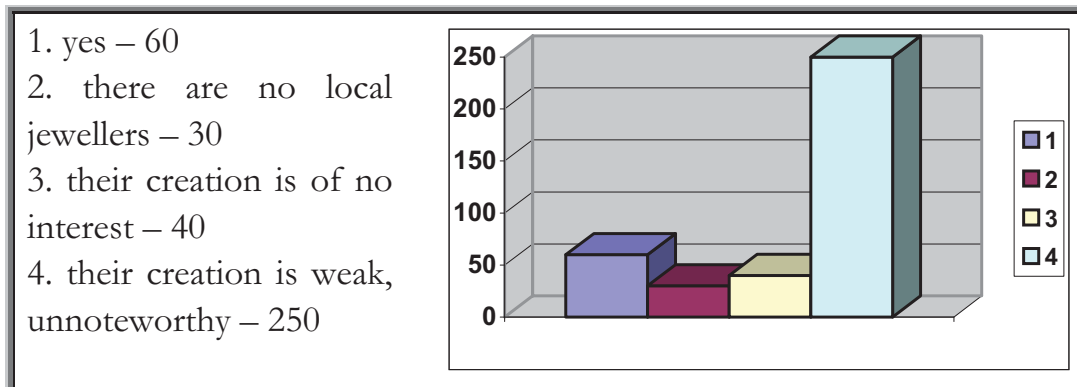


A significant aspect in the art of jewellery is related to the promotion of a certain brand. In comparison with the watch industry, in which there are centuries-old traditions and names to refer to, in the field of jewellery at the present stage there are not so many names which would promote the veritable art. *Tiffany, David Zurman, Roberto Coin, Hearts On Fire, De Beers* etc. are among the most famous and highly-appreciated salons; they offer exclusive items at a fabulous price with an original design, being ten times as expensive as the ornaments of a less famous salon, although it is economically stable due to its faithful segment of admirers and buyers with incomes compatible with the prices. Even though the contemporary market of the Republic of Moldova offers numerous items – works created by European or eastern

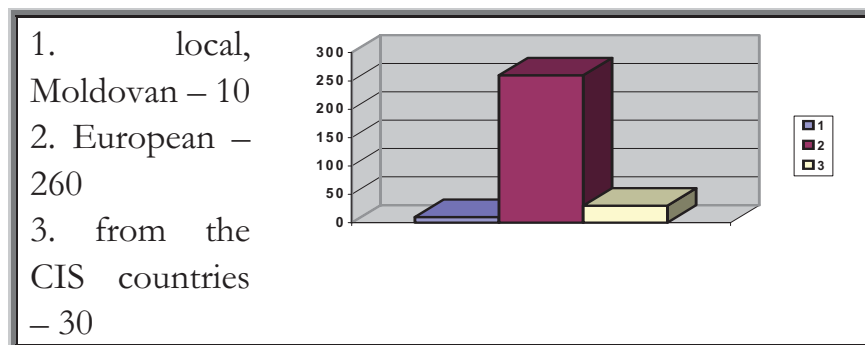
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artisans – the answer to the question regarding how known and appreciated the works of the local artisans are would make us ponder over the perspectives of the autochthon jewellery industry in the nearest future of the European model:

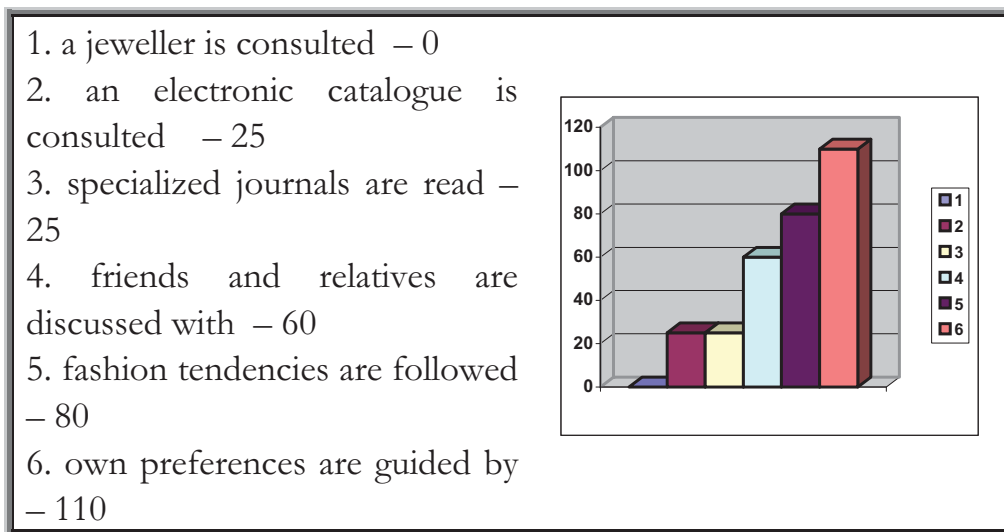
Do you know the creation of the local jewellers:



As regards the favourite jewellery salons, it was answered that the most frequently visited are:

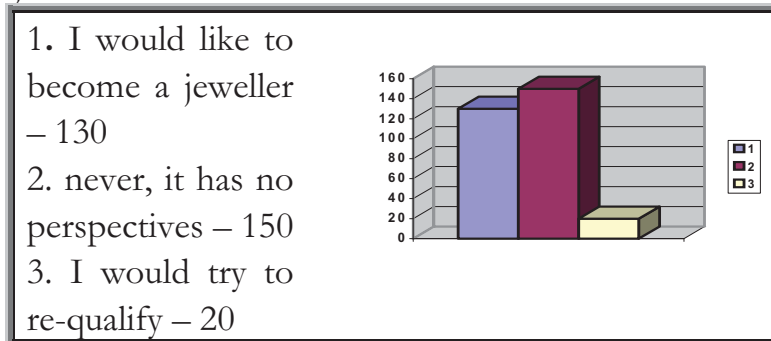


The tendencies in vogue from the area of jewellery dictated either by the creators from this area, or by some personalities, as well as by actors, singers, politicians etc. are aspects of major importance. Therefore, before the acquisition of a piece of jewellery, certain measures are taken in Moldova, however, it is regretful that the opinion of the specialist in the area does not matter at present.



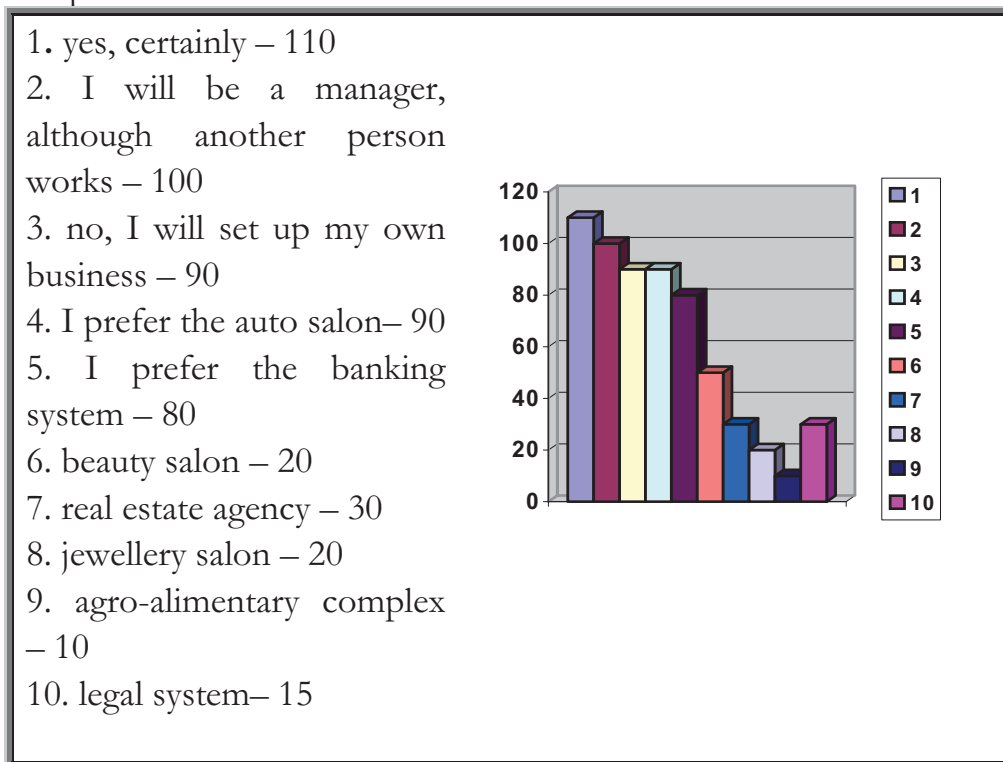
In our approach, we consider the analysis of a very significant segment such as the didactic process as regards the training of the future jewellers and the promotion of an autochthonous school of jewellery as being opportune. Thus, the opportunities to become a jewel designer and creator have extended lately, the specialties at the faculties of Fine Arts and Design of the State Pedagogical University *I.Creanga* from Chisinau and the Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts being a proof of that; in addition to this, the training at the Jewellery Factory *Giuvaier* from Chisinau and in the small and medium-sized workshops, as well as the establishment of some dynasties in this respect such as Evodianov, Pavlov etc. (Condraticova 2010) should be mentioned. We were interested to find out if there are people willing to practise the profession of a jeweller and how it is rated in the economic and artistic environment, because ideally the job should bring both income and satisfaction. The results surprised us, the contemporary man becoming very pragmatic and leaving aside the romanticism and the search of “beautiful” professions:

After graduating from the lyceum/university, do you agree to become a jeweller:

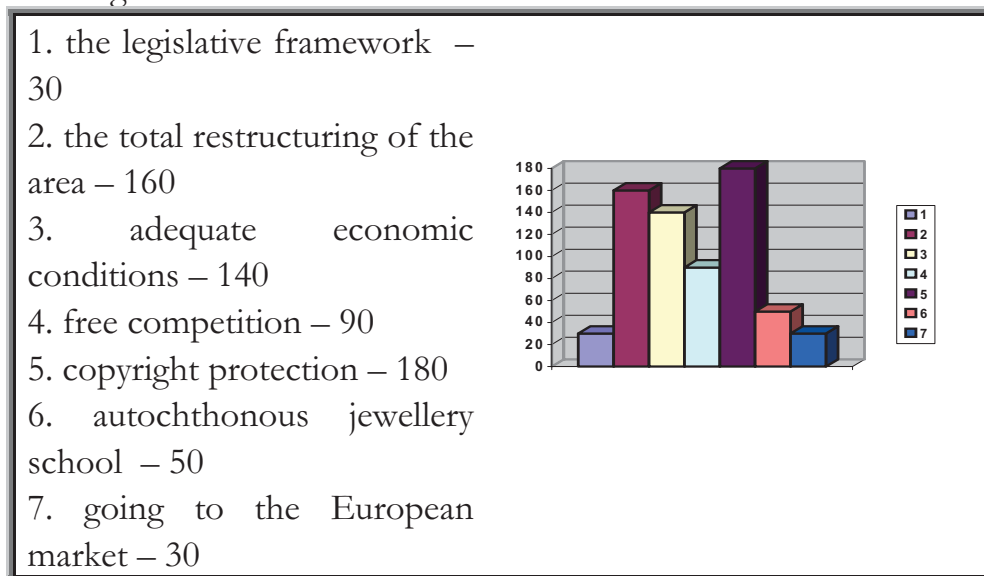


Even in the case of a family business, that is of a jewellery workshop or salon, the situation is not much more favourable, there are not so many of those who are willing to practise the profession, their preferences being of another nature.

Do you agree to work in a jewellery salon? Which business is more preferred?



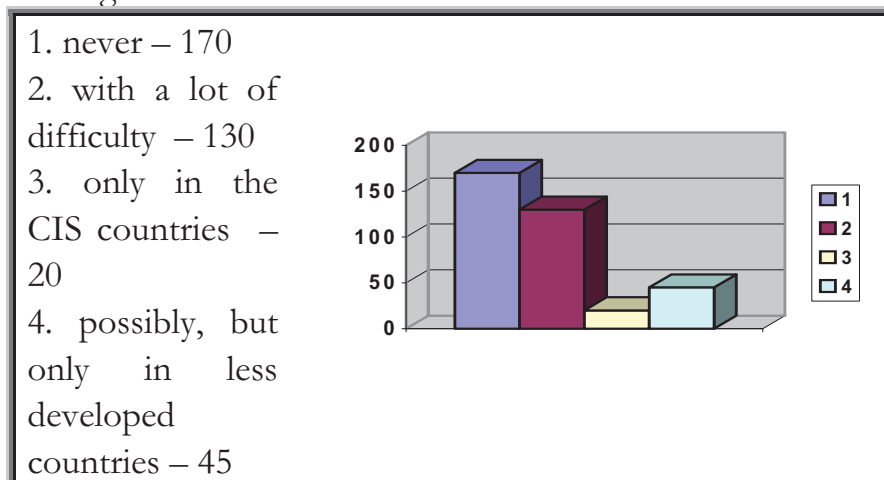
The evolution of arts depends strictly on the social-economic and political situation in the country. An economic stability, a legal framework and copyright protection would be the ideal conditions for carrying on the traditions in the area of the artistic processing of the metal within our space. Their lack led to the emergence of the salons that promote massively the jewellery production from Ukraine (Kiev, Odessa, Kharkov, Lvov, Vinita), the Russian Federation (Moscow, Sankt Petersburg, Yekaterinburg), Turkey, Uzrael, Italy, China etc. In such conditions, it is too difficult for the local artisan, who has a limited access to noble raw materials or equipment of high performance technology, to stand the competition and to thrive on the basis of his own jewellery workshop or salon. In the opinion of both local jewellers and the participants in the survey some normative acts are necessary in order to restore the jewellery industry in the Republic of Moldova; they should regard:



In the same context, an analysis, which will be as plausible as possible, of the possibilities of the local artisans to participate not only in the specialized contests in the European countries or CIS states, but also in the opening of salons for manufacturing and selling our products is necessary. It should be reminded that between 1945 and 1991 the artisans of the MSSR had the opportunity (although not all of them and not permanently) to exhibit some of their works at international exhibitions. Thus, Gh. Cojusnean participated in the jewellery exhibition in Iablonec, Czech Republic; A. Marco participated three times in the

same exhibition, to which the exhibition of enamel art from Limoges, France should be added; the artisans of the Jewellery Factory from Chisinau participated not only in union contests and exhibitions organised by *Soiuziuvetirprom* from Moscow (Condraticova 2008). Otherwise, the possibilities of participation were more than limited. After 1991, the situation did not undergo essential changes, an exhibition participation fee being introduced as well, the Moldovan ornaments were looked for only in the salons from Belarus or Kazakhstan (the series *Moldovan earrings*). Under these circumstances, the area of creation and appreciation of a jeweller's activity, no matter how difficult it is to admit, is obviously limited to the Prut-Nistru space, and the answer to the question asked to the creator and colleagues was more than pessimistic:

What do you think, would our ornaments be required in the neighbouring countries?



At the end of this study regarding the state of the art of jewellery in the Republic of Moldova, it is necessary to point out the following conclusions, may be even recommendations: the contemporary art in the republic is in an extremely difficult state and needs restructuring from the legislative, economic, artistic points of view, the accomplishments of the local artisans needing a connection to the European trends from the field. A restructuring of the educational system is becoming imperative; it would train professionals so that they would work in the conditions of the transition economy.

History is written day by day. History is made by ourselves and it is our duty to make contemporary art, with all its multitude of aspects

and manifested tendencies, become a component part of the history of arts from the Republic of Moldova. It needs now, in order to be appreciated and acknowledged, the objective opinions of the art critics, of the historians and culturologists from the country, who direct and shape, to a great extent, the field of the beauty such as the art of jewellery.

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