



Lucie Heskett-Brem's exceptionally beautiful jewelry is painstakingly hand-crafted.

The Gold Weaver of Lucerne

Lucie Heskett-Brem changed her job frequently in her youth. She was a truck driver, masseuse, advertising copywriter, interpreter, and textile designer. She eventually found her true calling as a goldsmith. Her jewelry now attracts interest from around the world.

by Patrizia Manzocchi

A snake lies on a wooden table. It is about 164 cm long and roughly as thick as an index finger in the middle. The snake's skin is dry and smooth and takes on a gentle glimmer under the workshop's lights. Lucie Heskett-Brem lifts it up by one end, lays it on the parquet floor, and swings it rhythmically to and fro. The movement flows through the snake's body link by link, breaking into a wild, energetic thrashing when it reaches the head. "That's exactly what fascinates me so much about working with gold – this living, floating movement," she says. Heskett-Brem is not content to make jewelry that is merely beautiful. She is interested in the perfect interplay between the many hundreds of chain links and the sensation imparted by placing one of her chains around the neck and shoulders. The artist explains: "You don't have to see gold to understand it. It's something you can feel."

An indirect route to the goldsmith's art

Lucie Heskett-Brem felt no particular affinity for gold for a long time. At high school, she dreamed of being an attorney, a textile designer or a weaver. However, her gift for handicrafts became apparent during the long hours of lessons at the Töchtergymnasium school in Lucerne. "I remember," she says, "how I always needed something to tinker with when I was at school. I used to separate the silver foil from chewing gum wrappers and cover my desk with it, which didn't exactly delight my teacher. I'd also spin wool and knit gloves for my classmates."

Later, when faced with the need to choose a career, she had no clear idea as to which direction she wanted to head in. Her father, the sculptor Rolf Brem, talked her out of attending a four-month weaving course in southern France and persuaded her to choose a commercial training program instead, after which she got a job as secretary to a

newspaper editorial team. She later attended a specialist school for hotel staff, gained a truck driver's license, and worked as an advertising copywriter. After that, she added a diploma in interpreting to her résumé.

Heskett-Brem gets very animated when she talks about her past, making it clear how enthusiastic she can be. She was almost 30 by the time she found her way to the goldsmith's art, taking a gold and silversmith's course with Migros Klubschule, a cooperative organization for adult education. She immediately took to the craft. So much so, in fact, that she began a four-year apprenticeship as a goldsmith soon afterwards and completed it in 1992. "Back then, I thought I was unlikely to make a living from making jewelry," she recalls. But this did not dissuade her from opening her own workshop. Having other qualifications and talents to fall back on if need be, she was confident enough to go it alone. It was a move that paid off right away as her pieces were an instant hit.

Buyers in London, New York, Hong Kong, and beyond

Just two years after completing her apprenticeship, her unusual work was being exhibited by Bentley & Skinner, jewelers by appointment to the British Royal Family. A year later, in 1995, the renowned industry periodical *Jewellery International* published an extensive feature about her. The article referred to her as "The Gold Weaver", a title that has stuck with her to this day. It stems first and foremost from her silky golden snake but was permanently cemented by the intricate golden spiderwebs she later designed and painstakingly created by hand. Last year, the New York Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) bought her Large Spiderweb for its collection.

Royal jewelers Bentley & Skinner have given her another honorary title: "The Dream Weaver". The exclusive store on



Each individual chain link is crafted by hand.



The Gold Weaver's workshop is in Meggen, near Lucerne.



Lucie Heskett Brem was born in Lucerne, where she also grew up and went to school. After high school, she pursued a wide range of careers from translator to import/export secretary, advertising copywriter, editorial secretary, truck driver, and hotel worker. She then completed an apprenticeship as a goldsmith in 1992. Since then, she has enjoyed huge international success with her own workshop at the St. Charles Hall in Meggen, near Lucerne. Heskett-Brem's works will be on show at the Galerie Paul Lüdin in Basel from March 1 to May 14, 2011.

London's Piccadilly remains enthralled by Heskett-Brem's artistically distinctive pieces and mastery of her craft.

The Gold Weaver has now been running her workshop for 18 years and has established a global reputation. With her creativity and perfectionism as strong as ever, she is attracting ever more interest, and her sales are rising steadily. These days, she also exhibits her collections in New York, Seattle, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, and Zurich, spending at least five weeks of every year traveling the world on invitations to art fairs and museums.

The Heskett-Brem style

Lucie Heskett-Brem decided to specialize in producing chains – despite being advised against this by various experts. She remembers how they tried to drum into her: “Lucie, forget about gold chains! Even the chains they brought back up from the Titanic were made with machines. Nobody buys handmade gold chains any more.” But she trusted the view of her teacher Mauro Morson and her own intuition more and worked on her own very special style, making elaborate gold chains that often looked as if they were woven. She was fascinated by the almost meditative character of her chains, which intelligently arrange and combine lots of identical or very similar elements. As with the snakes, movement is important to her in her other works as well. “I want the elements of my chains to move as much as possible but still make the chain look substantial,” she says.

Her repertoire now comprises some 20 different chain patterns. The best seller, Troubadour, features small spirals interlinked with each other and finished at the ends with gold beads. Each centimeter of Heskett-Brem's creations represents between thirty minutes and two and a quarter hours of work. In addition to necklaces, she also produces delicate woven pieces from the finest gold chains, studded with diamonds and topaz and worn either around the neck or on the forearm.

She is never short of work. At the moment, she is making bracelets to order in her latest pattern, Waterballet – a two-tone version in silver and gold. The idea for this creation came to her when she visited a friend who had been given a silver bracelet from Mexico by her grandfather, which she seldom wore for fear of losing it. The bracelet looks like a form of loose crochet twine in which strands of silver are built up into an open-weave pattern. The links are actually connected by “barbell” pins that have gold beads at

both ends. These beads are the only gold on this particular chain. It seems that the high price of gold right now is causing some customers to favor pieces that also feature silver.

A masterpiece in 1,380 parts

The Gold Weaver has made jewelry for herself in the past. “I made myself Gold Snake Number 5 as a reward for years of dedicated service,” she tells us with a wry smile. It is a true masterpiece: 1,380 individual parts, the largest the size of a staple, the smallest measuring no more than a millimeter. It takes her about a year to make a gold snake 164 cm in length with some 330 grams of pure gold.

Her own snake did not remain in her possession for long. She wore it while visiting an interior designer friend in New York who happened to be meeting with a client. “I had my snake chain wrapped around my neck, and I noticed that the client kept staring at my chest,” she recalls. The client eventually

Lucie Heskett-Brem takes between 30 minutes and two and a quarter hours to make 1 cm of gold chain.

asked how much it would cost to buy the snake. Heskett-Brem replied that it was her own, but she would be happy to make a new one to order. The friend stared at her, horrified. Her wide eyes appeared to say, “You’ve got to be kidding – there’s a buyer in front of you, and you’re telling her you don’t want to sell her the chain?” In the end, the American client did snap up the gold snake, but Heskett-Brem has not made another one for herself since. The snake we see on our visit to the workshop is Number 15.

That is how many she has made to date – or at least almost, since Number 15 is not quite finished. When complete, it will be as long as Number 5 but a little lighter. There can be no doubt, however, that this latest work of art will fit perfectly into the long chain of sumptuous jewelry pieces from the Gold Weaver of Lucerne.