

Elsa Peretti

1940 - 2021

Elsa Peretti was born in Florence on May 1st, 1940, as the youngest daughter of Ferdinando Peretti and Maria Luisa Pighini. Her father Nando Peretti (link alla pagina) was a distinguished businessman who developed Anonima Petroli Italiana (A.P.I.) into one of Italy's leading oil companies. Educated in Rome and Switzerland, at the age of 21 she left home and first made her living as French teacher and skiing instructor in the Swiss mountain village of Rougemont (Gstaad), before moving back to Rome and pursued a degree in interior design. Elsa Peretti then moved to Milan in 1963 to work for architect Dado Torigiani, and in the following year to Barcelona, where she decided to embark on a new career path as a fashion model. During that period, she was part of the liberal movement of intellectuals and artists known as 'Gauche divine' and she modeled for Oriol Maspons, Leopoldo Pomés and Salvador Dalí. After having spent a couple of years in Barcelona, Elsa Peretti followed Wilhelmina model agency's suggestion to move to New York in 1968. While walking under the limelight of Manhattan's most prestigious catwalks, she soon discovered her true passion for jewelry design. Her first items of jewelry were shown in 1969 alongside the collection of the fashion designer Giorgio di Sant'Angelo. It was during this period that she met US fashion designer and seventies icon Halston, who became her lifelong friend and with whom she collaborated in many different projects.

In 1968, during a trip to Catalonia, Spain, she fell in love with the medieval village of Sant Martí Vell and bought a mustard-yellow house overlooking the small square. Over the years, she restored the house and subsequently acquired and preserved further buildings in the village, including the church. Sant Martí Vell quickly became her safe haven between frequent trips to New York and the Orient, where she was taking inspirations for her future collections. Elsa Peretti quickly rose to prominence in the

jewelry field, she received the 1971 Coty Award for her "extension of jewelry into the realm of fashion sculpture" and had her first appearance in Vogue magazine. At the same time, her products started to be sold at Bloomingdale's. In February 1974, Halston and Fashion Editor Carrie Donovan introduced Elsa Peretti to Tiffany & Co., with whom she rapidly started working in an exclusive collaboration. Tiffany's first collection by Elsa Peretti was unveiled in September of the same year. In 2024, the 50th anniversary of Tiffany & Co. and Elsa Peretti's collaboration will mark an important achievement that demonstrates how Peretti designs continue to fascinate people many years after being introduced.

In 1981 she received the President's Fellow Award from the Rhode Island School of Design and in the following year the Spirit of Achievement Award from the Albert Einstein College. In 1996, the Council of Fashion Designers of America named her Accessory Designer of the Year. In 1999, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the collaboration with Tiffany, the jewelry brand established the Elsa Peretti professorship in Jewelry Design at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology. At Elsa Peretti's request, the endowment was dedicated to her long friendship and professional collaboration with Samuel Beizer, founding chairman of F.I.T.'s Jewelry Design Department. In 2001 she was presented with an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree from the F.I.T. In 2005, former President of the Italian Republic, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi conferred Elsa Peretti the Cross of Grand Officer of Merit of the Italian Republic. In 2010, former President of the Italian Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, received Elsa Peretti and awarded the Foundation with the prize 'Credere nella Ricerca' for its commitment to supporting medical research in Italy. Throughout all her life Elsa Peretti contributed to the conservation, dissemination and protection of Catalunya's cultural and artistic heritage. In 2013 she was the first

non-Catalan to be awarded the National Culture Award by the National Council for Culture and the Arts (CoNCA).

Other awards and honors include: Fashion Group “Night of the Stars” award, 1986; Cultured Pearl Industry award, 1987; Premi Global del JORGEC, Col·legi Oficial de Joiers de Catalunya, 2015; Andrea Palladio Lifetime Achievement Award, 2018; Florence Biennale, Elsa Peretti International “Leonardo da Vinci” Lifetime Achievement Award, 2019; Grand Cross pro Merito Melitensi (Order of Malta); Honorary member of the Circolo San Pietro (Holy See). Elsa Peretti lived the last part of her life in Sant Martí Vell, where she passed away on 18th March 2021 at the age of 80.

ELSA PERETTI, THE DESIGNER

A true pioneer of design, Elsa Peretti’s inspiration was often drawn from everyday items and from nature – a bean, a bone, an apple could be transformed into cufflinks, bracelets, vases or lighters, scorpions and snakes were turned into necklaces and rings. Though based on real things, Elsa Peretti designs evoke subtle abstractions and have brought a fresh attitude to jewelry, while setting the stage for a truly new era in design. She herself stated that ‘There is no new design, because good lines and shapes are timeless’. Her first collection for Tiffany & Co. in 1974, featuring “sinuous”, “sensual”, and “sculptural” shapes and forms, caused a true sensation in the jewelry world. Although Elsa’s designs are rendered in a variety of materials, she is best known for her works in sterling silver, which over the past fifty decades has elevated the precious metal to a new height in popularity in jewelry. In 1974 at People Magazine, Harry Platt, the great-great-grandson of C.L. Tiffany, then president of Tiffany & Co., said “We were looking for someone who could capture the mood of the young woman as well as the older woman, someone who could make jewelry that women could wear with jeans and sweaters as well as with their ball gowns”. And Elsa Peretti said in the same occasion at People Magazine: “What I want is not to become a status symbol, but to give beauty at a

price”. Indeed, by using relatively affordable silver, Elsa Peretti made the world of jewelry accessible to many women.

“The first thing I made in New York in 1969 was a fetish, a little silver bottle, and it made me famous. I liked the idea of walking around town with a flower in a bottle around my neck. People stopped me in the street to ask me where I bought it.”

Elsa Peretti

Atlanta Journal and Constitution, 1999

Elsa Peretti has brilliantly expanded the materials and repertoire of jewelry, combining modern tradition and ancient craftsmanship from different regions and cultures, such as Spain, Italy, Hong Kong, Japan and the U.S., and establishing a trusting relationship with artisans, many of whom she has worked with for decades. Nowadays, Tiffany & Co. is working with the next generations of artisans chosen by Elsa Peretti to keep her pursuit of beauty and quality alive. Among her acclaimed creations is the revolutionary Diamonds by the Yard™, a combination of fine, fluid chains and bezel-set stones that forever changed the role of diamonds in fashion. Her revolutionary Open Heart, Bone Cuff and Bottle, are a reflection of her own credo that beauty lies in the simplicity and continue to be contemporary even after so many years. In the early 1980s, Elsa Peretti expanded her collections for Tiffany & Co. to include china, crystal and silver designs for the home. Like her jewelry, these new designs were praised for their fluid shape and tactile quality. They represent love for life, the warmth of a generous host and the idea that beauty and utility should always be as one. These home designs are still available at Tiffany & Co. stores worldwide today.

In December 2012, after having worked together for 38 years, Elsa Peretti and Tiffany & Co. extended their partnership for another twenty years, making sure that her timeless design will remain accessible for the many, old and new, fans for the year to come. In addition, this agreement, together with Elsa Peretti’s last will and testament, has ensured that the Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation will be able to continue to use the annual royalties for a variety of charitable purposes.

The unique nature of Elsa Peretti's designs was wonderfully captured by Kate Betts, editor of TIME Style & Design: "I think Elsa actually designs for herself, which is what makes her jewelry so personal to people. Elsa's style and personality are all over her work, and that is what women look for in jewelry. They want to relate to and understand who has created this piece."

In 2009 the British Museum acquired 30 of Elsa Peretti's creations for its 20th century permanent collection. The British Museum describes Elsa Peretti's ability to create objects that originate from different parts of the world as unique, nothing that they combine superb craftsmanship and symbolic meaning in a modern age.

Elsa Peretti's designs are present in the permanent collection of: British Museum in London, England; The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City; the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Massachusetts; and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas. Notable exhibitions include: Fifteen of My Fifty with Tiffany, Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, 1990; The British Museum, display "Continuity and Change" of Peretti-designed jewelry, accessories and tableware from Tiffany & Co., 2009; Rooms dedicated to Elsa Peretti, La Fortalesa de Sant Julià de Ramis, 2019.

"I love nature but I try to change it a little bit not to copy it. Once I draw the line, it's there.

I don't touch it. It becomes my theme. Then I work around it, trying it out in different sizes and different pieces, as a pendant, then a belt buckle, until I've exhausted all my possibilities."

Elsa Peretti

New York Times, 1978

ELSA PERETTI, THE PHILANTHROPIST

Elsa Peretti has been involved in charity since a young age. Following her father's generosity, she aided those who were most in need, supported scholarships in cultural and creative fields and she was committed to defense human rights. Over the time Elsa Peretti developed an active concern over the future of our planet, that led her to establish what she has considered the most ambitious achievement of her life. In 2000 she put together a staff of motivated people to form a charitable foundation in honor of her father: the Nando Peretti Foundation, renamed the Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation (NaEPF) in 2015.

Elsa Peretti aimed to change the world and improve the living conditions of the most deprived. Since its creation, the Foundation faced two major challenges: the defenses of the environment and the empowerment of children through the protection of their right to education and health. The Foundation, which is based on a broad statute, has been engaged in numerous projects both globally and locally and has responded quickly to humanitarian emergencies to realize the founder's purpose over the years. In addition and in accordance with Elsa Peretti's ecological vision and the interdependence between human and nature, a special attention was paid to environmental conservation and to protection of endangered species. Promoting sustainable development, coexistence with the land, and the fight against inequality, Elsa Peretti, as a philanthropist, contributed to a radical and systemic change in the world, aiming to build a common future based on respecting nature, in her words "To care for and protect our planet, is not a choice: it is a necessity for all humanity. We are already behind schedule, we must act now and everyone, citizens, politicians, entrepreneurs. The climate change, habitat destruction are increasingly endangering the survival of thousands of animal and plant species globally. The balance overall Earth depends on their well-being and on our ability of responsible action." *Gazzetta di Parma*, September 2020.

The NaEPF, during Elsa Peretti's presidency, has supported a wide range of projects for the promotion of human and civil rights, with a special emphasis on the right to education, children's rights,

and women's rights and dignity. It also supported medical and scientific research projects to promote physical and mental health in partnerships with some of the most important International as well as Italian Universities and Research Institutes. For the same purposes, the NaEPF also supported specific interventions including the building of hospitals, schools, educational centers and other facilities in advanced, as well as poor countries. Promotion of culture and the arts is another pillar of the Foundation, from individual scholarships granted to talented artists, to the funding of public exhibitions and concerts, and to the recovery and restoration of ancient artistic works.

In July 2017 the famine in South-Sudan, caused by the four-year conflict, left Elsa Peretti sadly affected. The NaEPF committed EUR 2 million to support a humanitarian response plan for South-Sudan with 8 organizations to work towards the mitigation of predominant risks in the Country, by addressing the food and nutrition crisis, protecting refugees and displaced people of violence and providing more than 55.000 children access to education. This was the NaEPF's biggest single investment ever in a humanitarian emergency, which showed its intention to contribute to help alleviate massive suffering in the fastest growing refugee crisis in the world.

In twenty-four years the Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation has awarded grants to more than 1.200 non-profit projects in 83 countries across the world, for an overall value of over EUR 75 million.

“I wanted a foundation with a very broad statute. Every year we welcome and evaluate educational, cultural and artistic, medical research, environmental conservation and human rights projects. I wanted to keep a window open to the world, a very large one, to understand what is happening and how to do my part. As a founder, I have always participated directly in the choices and activities. I feel it as a responsibility, I think it is my duty to evaluate together with the board members and my team what projects to support.”

Elsa Peretti

New York Times, 1978

“For me to be a good designer is the simplest thing in the world. But to be a good human being, that is going to be hard. I'd like to try though.”

Elsa Peretti

New York Times, 1978