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Journalist and Curator to Direct Jewelry Organization

Melanie Grant, who spearheaded Sotheby's 'Brilliant and Black' exhibition, has been named executive director of the Responsible Jewellery Council.



Melanie Grant, the new executive director of the Responsible Jewellery Council, based in London. Ms. Grant, who made her name as a journalist and curator, sees her role with the council as “another way to love jewelry.” Credit...Jane Stockdale for The New York Times

By Tanya Dukes

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Melanie Grant, known in the jewelry world as a journalist, author and curator, is adding a management role to that list. Beginning on Monday, she will serve as the executive director of the Responsible Jewellery Council (R.J.C.), the London-based group that describes itself as the “world’s leading sustainability standard-setting organization.”

Founded in 2005 by 14 of the most influential names in the watch and jewelry industries, including Cartier, Tiffany & Company and the mining giant Rio Tinto, the council was formed with an ambitious directive. The R.J.C. aimed to create a “global standards body overseeing,

auditing and protecting all aspects of supply chain business practices from mine to retailer, and ultimately protecting consumer confidence,” David Bouffard, the organization’s chair and a Signet Jewelers vice president, wrote in an email.

The council has almost 1,700 members in 71 countries; the majority of those members have what is called “certified status,” which requires a third-party audit to confirm they meet the organization’s ethical standards.

Ms. Grant, 49, comes to the executive director post with a background in photography, art direction and journalism, having worked for publications such as The Financial Times, The Guardian and the BBC. Most recently, she worked at The Economist, which she joined as a researcher 16 years ago. When she left in December, she was overseeing its luxury stories and photography, along with the news and feature photography, while also handling reporting duties.

She is known in the jewelry world for writing “[Coveted: Art and Innovation in High Jewelry](#),” published by Phaidon in 2020, and for collaborating with Sotheby’s in 2021 on “[Brilliant and Black: A Jewelry Renaissance](#),” an exhibition featuring 21 Black jewelry designers that Sotheby’s described as the first of its kind by a major auction house. A second event followed in September 2022.

Despite her achievements, Ms. Grant acknowledged that she was not the obvious choice for a position that concerns policy, raw materials and manufacturing. “I was definitely a wild card candidate,” she said during a phone interview, but added that she views the role as an extension of her creative life and fascination with the category. “In the interview, someone asked me, ‘You’re a writer, why would you want to do this job?’ For me, it’s another way to love jewelry.”

Addressing questions of environmental responsibility is one way she wants to put that love into action. “The sustainability of jewelry is the biggest single issue we’re looking at as an industry,” she said. “One of the reasons I’m excited is because I want to know what I can do.” Part of her objective is to “simplify” the process of adopting environmentally conscious practices to make those practices “accessible to more people.”

Initially, she will be working on developing new guidelines for lab-grown materials, and tackling “an ambitious international project in the pipeline for this summer,” Mr. Bouffard wrote.

Ms. Grant said that, to facilitate her work, she planned to learn the technical side of the business, including mining and gem cutting. “I’m hoping for a bit of immersion,” she said. “I want people on the ground to tell me what it really is.” And, she said, continuing to promote diversity will be a priority because it is important to support “women, Black and brown people, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, people who don’t have the background, the connections, the family influence.”