

On The Way Emblème – Transcription EN

Introduction:

00:13:57:00 - 00:14:09:00: To extract one gram of gold, you have to extract one tonne of rock. So you can imagine the environmental impact that obviously has on the mining landscape. (...cut...) 00:14:28:00 - 00:14:34:00: With IT equipment, we extract ten grams of gold from one tonne of IT equipment.

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BNP Paribas Personal Finance invites you to discover On The Way, the podcast that explores the paths to responsible consumption. Entrepreneurs, people from the world of business and researchers: On The Way gives a voice to those who, day after day, are helping to develop more sustainable consumption. Welcome, and I hope you enjoy listening!

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Hello On The Way, my name's Agathe Gauthier. I'm a co-founder and the artistic director of the circular jewellery house, Emblème. So I started out my professional career at a business school, where I met my current partner, Laurent. Then I trained in graphic design and drawing, to satisfy my creative side, that had been there in the background but that I hadn't been able to satisfy at business school.

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So during my studies, I was lucky enough to get a very, very nice internship at Chanel, and that's where I discovered the world of luxury, and I started to develop my taste for it. I realised that the demanding codes of the luxury sector really resonated with me, as I have a demanding side myself.

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And I'm also extremely sensitive to details, to beauty, to everything that's handmade, and to craftsmanship. And so I found myself in a world that totally suited me. After having a look around, I actually realised that luxury was really the environment where I felt most comfortable.

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And so I returned to Paris, first to work at Dior, on avenue Montaigne, and then I had this really nice experience in jewellery, so I went to Piaget. And then I ended up working at Giorgio Armani. I was managing two flagship stores on Avenue Montaigne. I absolutely adored those years. I felt extremely lucky, and I was extremely well trained.

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Those brands are extremely demanding, and so I was lucky enough to be trained in sales, customer experience, and products. They explained how everything was made, and we got to visit the workshops. So I was so lucky to have had that great opportunity, and to work in a really dynamic job. I was working in a team, and I was meeting exciting people. It was a job that combined the human aspect with beauty. It was everything I loved.

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As with lots of people, my ecological awakening was closely related to having my children, but also to a pretty radical change in my life. I went to live in Africa, and, more specifically, in the Congo. And so I went from a classic Parisian life, being a consumer: living in the middle of Paris, working in the luxury sector, to living a village life out in nature, where the only products were utilitarian.

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So there you go, no more 100 different brands of yoghurt at the supermarket. I started making my own yoghurt, and I also realised where I was, the simple act of throwing things away was heretical. People don't throw things away there because they don't have access to the number of consumer products we have in Europe.

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Everything's reused, as there's no longer that abundance of products; you're not urged to consume as much as in Europe. It was really a sort of detox from the consumer society, which was pretty brutal, but little by little I ended up getting used to it. I lived there for five years. And I realised that in fact it gave me enormous freedom.

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And most importantly, I realised that it was an incredible chance to have my children grow up completely disconnected from the consumer society. For them, a weekend walk meant going to the beach, digging holes in the sand, being with their friends, and having barbecues with friends. We didn't have any extended family, being so far away.

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So our friends became our family. That might sound a bit simple, a bit silly, but we reconnected with the true pleasures of life, which were eating, because when we ate things they made us really very happy; we reconnected with the basic human pleasure of enjoying good times together.

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All our plans were based around spending time together. And also nature, because all we had was nature. So we spent lots of time outdoors. And of course the good climate helped, obviously! So all our activities were outside, and based around nature. And then the second aspect, our second discovery, was that all that nature was being spoiled by our consumption, as Europeans.

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When we went for walks on the beaches, there were some beaches, not all of them just yet, fortunately, but on certain beaches, we were walking on plastic waste, on textile waste, which had obviously arrived by sea. And it was heart-breaking.

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And most of all it really opened my eyes, because, living here, we consume and we consume, we're told about the environment, what's happening, but we don't actually see

it. So I think that until you see it, it's quite hard to understand the impact of our day to day actions on the planet.

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Of course things are improving with all the reporting we've now got access to. But over there, we experienced it in the flesh, you were actually walking on waste. It was really a shock, and most of all it made me understand the impact of our consumption, of our consumer society. You'd see plastic bags hanging from palm trees, things like that.

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So that's definitely when my ecological awakening really, truly happened. When I got back to France, I had gone through a profound transformation, obviously, and I felt this real need to get in line with my new mentality, with everything I had developed in Africa. So I started thinking about a project that would allow me to combine my experience in luxury: everything I knew how to do, everything I'd seen, everything I'd learned, which I still loved.

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Because in a way, luxury means rarity, it's about caring about things. It's actually the opposite of the excesses of consumer society. And I wanted to combine that with what I want for our future, which is reusing our existing resources.

The Emblème project started out in 2022. After coming back from the Congo, I reconnected with Laurent Berthuel, my friend from business school, who had set up a computer refurbishment company in 2006, called Printerre.

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At that time, he'd just discovered a process for extracting gold from obsolete electronics. And he wanted to start a jewellery brand based on that process. So when I heard him say that, it all added up. It added up on various levels, and I said: "Listen, this is a fantastic way of making the circular economy attractive, let's talk about this. And I'm totally ready to go for it."

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And so that's when we decided to join forces and set up Emblème. To give you an idea about Printerre: Printerre collects about 1,000 tonnes of IT equipment every year. And out of those 1000 tonnes, about half of it is ink cartridges, which are completely recycled and resold.

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So that's refurbishment. The other fifty percent are computers and other IT equipment. There are lots of printers too. The computers are separated into components, and each component is sent to a recycling circuit dedicated to it. Processors go to one, computer cables go to another. Right from the start, Laurent has always been looking to go further and further in the value chain.

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He's got a real engineering skillset. I'm very creative, but he's very much an engineer: he loves to understand how things work, how to recycle more, how to go further. And so he knew that there were rare and precious metals in electronics.

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He'd been looking for a long time, for four years, for a technique for extracting that gold and reusing it. He had that experience in the world of recycling, and I had the knowledge, the sensitivity, and the love for the world of luxury and French savoir faire, and particularly in jewellery.

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So we realised that we completely complemented each other. We had everything we needed to get together and turn the project into reality.

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That's how everything came together. We spent a long time working together on developing the design of the jewellery. I was heavily inspired by the world of electronics. In fact, when I was getting started, Laurent showed me around the Printerre factory. So I was able to see the tonnes of electronics he was taking in. I was able to take a close look, touch the processors, the motherboards, the sticks of RAM.

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And it was funny, as it wasn't at all my sort of world. And when you think about it, a stick of RAM isn't exactly sexy. It's not really what dreams are made of, but when you look at them closely, there's all that gold that people ignore. And in fact I realised there was a highly graphic side to it. There were a lot of dots and lines, and it made me think of the Morse code.

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That was where the idea of inscribing the word "love" and the word "eternal" on all our jewellery pieces in Morse code came from. So, when people see our jewellery, they don't immediately see that there's a secret message. But in fact it's a message that remains personal. It can be a message to yourself or that you send to the person you love when you gift them a piece of jewellery.

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So I developed a slim ring model, and a wider ring model, as I always liked the highly playful side of accessories, and I wanted people to be able to wear our rings, I wanted people to collect them. So in fact when you wear a thin ring, and then you also wear a wider ring, you create a new ring, and all of our rings also come in different colours.

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We've been working with jewellery lacquers. It was a deliberate choice, as every time I create something I try to make sure that it's in line with my values, and so it's eco-designed right from the start. The entire life cycle of jewellery is extremely meticulous, and involves the human touch at every stage. We start by collecting and sorting IT equipment.

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I'd like to point out that all of this is done by disabled people. Printerre is a specially adapted company, so sixty percent of its employees are disabled. It's an incredible opportunity for us, as well as for them. They're extremely meticulous and patient people, who spend an enormous amount of time opening up and sorting each element. So first the processors are sorted,

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and everything with connections contains gold. So we collect all those components. And then there's a machine that we developed in-house, that allows us to extract the gold ourselves. The electronic components are soaked, and the gold is dissolved. Then it's held in suspension. Next, via electrolysis, the gold is collected on a rod, and that rod holds the gold, which is then sent to the refiner.

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Because the gold that we recover is pure, it's 24 carat gold. So it's exactly the same quality gold as the gold that comes from a mine. The difference is that it's much more highly concentrated. But it needs to be purified, as there might still be remnants of other metals. It is this gold that is then used by the smelter.

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The smelter makes the alloy, because in France you don't work with 24 carat gold in jewellery, you have to make an alloy with silver and copper. All that makes it a little less malleable, because one of the particularities of gold is that it's extremely malleable. And then we work with family workshops, which are extraordinary.

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When they made the first ring for us, I was stunned by its quality. These are French workshops, I'm very proud to say. They make really good jewellery. And at the workshop there are various steps. So there's the mould-caster who creates the piece. We use the ancient technique of lost wax casting, so there's a plaster mould that they pour the gold into.

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The piece comes out of the mould completely matte. It looks really rough-hewn. And that's where all the expertise of the artisan jeweller allows us to make the piece shine. They spend hours polishing it. Various polishing steps make the gold shine, and reveal all of its beauty. Then the piece is engraved. After that, the lacquer artist delicately applies the jewellery lacquer.

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It's an extremely meticulous task, as the border between the lines and the dots and the edges of the ring (you can see the models on the [emblemefr](http://emblemefr.com) page), is extremely fine. So applying the colour is an extremely meticulous job, which is done in various stages. And then there's a second polishing stage.

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So it's extremely meticulous and extremely human-based work.

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To extract one gram of gold, you have to extract one tonne of rock. So you can imagine the environmental impact that obviously has on the mining landscape, with all the chemical products that are needed to extract it, of course.

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That's because in fact gold is found in minute quantities. It's gold dust, found in rocks. So it's extremely difficult to extract it. Even a very small quantity of gold has a very high environmental footprint. With IT equipment, we extract ten grams of gold from one tonne of IT equipment. That figure might seem crazy, but it comes from the Environmental Agency.

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That's on an average, of course. In France, every person throws away 17 to 24 kilograms of IT equipment per year. That seems huge, but again, that's on average. You need to remember all those major companies that renew their IT equipment, certain people who love to consume and have new things, and who regularly replace their computer equipment.

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And these days, in our homes, there's not just one phone, there are several computers, tablets, and so on. So there's everything we need to extract that gold, which is gold that's the same quality as mined gold, it's exactly the same, except that it's already had a first life, and more importantly, that gold is sourced just one hour away from Paris.

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The whole point is having a short supply-chain model. We can extract our gold one hour from Paris, and produce the jewellery, all very locally, and within a very short circuit. And we're constantly striving to go ever further in our circular strategy: when we needed to create the packaging for our jewellery - pieces of jewellery are precious objects, that need to be presented in a case to protect them,

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I found cases sourced from China, as well as very beautiful cases made in France, handmade, but with new materials. So I realised that didn't make much sense to have new packaging for Emblème jewellery pieces, which are totally circular. So I asked myself:

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"What other quality material can I find, that we could use to make an object that would also last, like our jewellery, and which would have the same story?" I remembered that in Laurent's factory there are bags full of pieces of plastic from computers, and I also remembered seeing a French company called Le Pavé, that makes recycled plastic panels by compressing them.

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They're heated and compressed. And the resulting panels have a very mineral-like appearance. They look like marble or quartz. It's very beautiful, it's very luxurious. They feel extremely smooth, and I was certain that we could create a superb object, a design object that people would want to keep, and which would be extremely disruptive in terms of the jewellery sector, as anyway we might as well be disruptive from start to finish.

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And so we created our own cases. We found a craftsman who works with these panels, and the silk we use is sourced from offcuts of fabric from major fashion houses. We're lucky right now to have access to that kind of stock, and so the interiors of our cases are constantly evolving, according to the offcuts of fabric we receive.

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So next we set up a pre-order campaign on Ulule.

Ulule is an online platform that lets you run crowdfunding campaigns. It's a platform where you present your project, something that the Ulule community is accustomed to, so it encourages new start-up projects and buys products that don't yet exist.

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So I was very, very nervous about doing that, as it's a rather particular project. It's a project that produces luxury jewellery, as it's made of gold, so by definition we're positioned in luxury, which isn't something very common on Ulule. I was very, very nervous, but it was a great success, and in fact that was our proof of concept.

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It was the first time we'd offered our jewellery for pre-order. We got thirty orders in one month. So that was extremely positive for a jewellery brand that was very new and just starting out. We were even more happy with our success as it opened up a lot of doors for us. Ulule actually has a lot of partnerships with major companies, such as Veolia, BNP Paribas, and many others, and they give you the chance to enter competitions that bring you visibility if you win, for example, and it's what that happened with us,

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we were chosen from fifteen environmentally impactful brands to have a stand at the Who's Next trade show in Paris. So that was a golden opportunity. We had our first stand at a trade show, which was paid for by Ulule, thanks to the fact that our campaign had worked so well.

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Today we're still being disruptive. You can find our jewellery on our embleme.fr website: the majority of our jewellery is available to order. We offer our customers meetings at the most beautiful luxury hotels in Paris. And these meetings give them a really different experience.

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They take them out of their day-to-day lives. They're a special moment, a little enchanted interlude, where they meet me and where they're able to try on the jewellery pieces, find the best ring size, choose the best colour, and think about compositions with different colours. So it's a really special experience. And now our customers can make an appointment on our website, and meet us like that, and experience our jewellery in that way.

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Because jewellery is special, it's very different from buying a garment. Purchasing jewellery is something extremely thoughtful, something emotionally charged. You plan it, you think about it, you look around, you try it on. It's the opposite of impulse buying. That's why I think the customer experience is extremely important.

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So for each and every piece of jewellery, there's a waiting time due to the way we create our jewellery. That time is six weeks. I think that expectation also contributes to the customer experience, it's part of the pleasure, that process of having thought about what was the best piece of jewellery for that occasion. That waiting period.

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I like to provide updates from time to time, I send a short messages to my customers explaining where we're up to. I think that's also part of the pleasure. It lets you reconnect with the pleasure of bringing a new object into your life. And I think that's really important, actually I talk about it a lot,

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and I'm a great advocate for it. When people have too much of everything, you lose the pleasure of having really chosen an object with your heart, because you really love it, of having really thought about it, and enjoying being really happy with it, something that really has meaning, and there's really a story behind that object that you've brought into your life.

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Because in the end you're much happier with objects that you've truly chosen and thought about, that you really like, rather than having several things without having really thought about them.

So currently the jewellery market is starting to see more and more players who are interested in the environmental footprint of their creations. Historically, the jewellery sector has always used recycled gold. Not in sufficient quantities, but as gold is infinitely recyclable, it's something that's always been done.

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Obviously there are some extremely interesting innovations that I'm focusing on and thinking about a lot. Of course there are synthetic diamonds. Since the 1950s, people have been able to make synthetic diamonds. And as often happens, it was in response to industrial requirements, and then it was taken up by the world of jewellery.

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Then there's the question of the energy needed to produce those diamonds. There are also some very interesting ideas around second-hand.

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So there you go, this is just the beginning. When I talk to my customers, I see there's a real interest. Our customers want to know the story behind their jewellery, as they're objects that they'll carry close to them, and that they'll normally keep all their lives, and, ideally, pass them on.

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The story behind a piece of jewellery and how it was made is extremely important to me. In my wildest dreams, Emblème is sold at Le Bon Marché, in the most beautiful concept stores in Paris, and, most of all, abroad. Because the message that we're sending through Emblème, I want to send to as many people as possible, and to get as many people as possible interested in the circular economy through jewellery.

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We also plan to extract other precious metals that are found in electronics. Because there's more than just gold in them. There's also platinum, which is an excellent conductor, as well as silver. So that's something I'd really like to work with in my collections,

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combining gold and silver. We're not able to do that just yet, and we're currently looking for a way to extract those metals.

So, if I had any advice to give, well, I don't really like giving advice, as I think you have to be very, very humble, and nobody's perfect. That said, just because we're all imperfect, doesn't mean we can't be open to new ways of doing things, and that we can't be open to constantly improving.

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And it's true that the detox I experienced in Africa allowed me to reconnect with the pleasure of choosing each object that enters into my life. And I realised that happiness doesn't come from accumulating things, or possessing lots of objects. Accumulating things doesn't bring you happiness.

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We're hearing that more and more often, but it's still so true. It seems rather simplistic, but it's so true. It's all about spending time outside, in nature, with your family, with your friends. It's about laughing. That's what's important, and that's what makes you happy. And people are made so that we're attracted by beauty and by creation.

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So we'll always end up choosing objects, and bringing them into our lives. And today that's the perfect opportunity to carefully choose each object that we bring into our lives, and to know why we choose them, to be interested in their story, who made them, and to ask yourself the question: do I truly love this?

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Will I love it for a long time? Will it go well with what I already wear? That's also a good question to ask yourself. So there you go, so if I had to give, well, it's not advice, but I think it's really very lovely to realise, it really feels good to realise that we feel better when we have fewer things.

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And it's a lovely discovery. So I invite you to discover that feeling.

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