SCULPTURE TO WEAR

Jewellery by Post-War Painters and Sculptors

DIDIER

66b Kensington Church Street, London W8 4BY

Introduction

That post-war artists made jewellery often comes as a surprise, but that an artist should wish to disseminate their art as widely as possible is only natural. By rising to the challenge to create miniature wearable pieces of art or 'sculptures to wear', their art can be seen and appreciated by a wider and sometimes new audience. In addition, they did not restrain themselves by just producing jewels made from precious metals enhanced by gemstones as the intrinsic value of their work was immaterial. It was their freedom of artistic expression that was paramount. These jewels were frequently made in the same materials and took the same forms and textures as their larger works of art.

This catalogue contains 107 jewels by 65 leading artists and demonstrates how widespread the practice was between 1940 and the end of the millennium. All the jewels were made or conceived during the artist's lifetime. This includes the limited editions, although some of these might have been completed after their deaths. Editions were not always completed for a variety of reasons such as bankruptcy in the case of Circle Fine Art or robbery in the unfortunate instance of GEM Montebello. The jewels have all been acquired through the secondary Art Market rather than commissioned directly from the artists.

For the early American artists like Alexander Calder, Harry Bertoia, and Claire Falkenstein, the 'truth of material' was important. In this they resisted the use of solder preferring rivets or other ingenious methods of fastening for their jewels. As sculptors, they were used to thinking in three-dimensions and to work with their hands so they could not help but create jewels for their friends and family. For other artists like Jean Arp and Georges Braque designing jewellery and expressing themselves in a new medium was a challenge they only undertook late in life. It was painters especially who needed to collaborate with a translator, a skilled jeweller or goldsmith such as Mario Masenza in Rome, Giancarlo Montebello in Milan, and François Hugo in Aix-en-Provence who could take the artist's ideas from concept and turn them into a functional reality.

Since the late 19th century some artists in Europe have designed jewellery. In Britain, the sculptor Sir Alfred Gilbert would spontaneously create wire-work jewels for friends, while Sir Edward Burne-Jones permitted the London jewellers Child & Child to produce in limited numbers copies of personal jewels that they had made for him. On a few rare occasions, famous works of art led directly to the creation of jewels like the enamel pendant of *Hope* (Fig. A) after the acclaimed Pre-Raphaelite painting by George Frederick Watts.

In the Art Nouveau period, Liberty & Co employed not only designers like Archibald Knox but also the Scottish book illustrator Jessie Marion King (Fig. B) to design jewels. On the Continent, the Parisian jeweller Fouquet used the Czech graphic artist Alphonse Mucha and then in the Art Deco period the Ukrainian graphic artist A. M. Cassandre and the Polish sculptor Jean Lambert-Rucki. Elsewhere in Paris, Raymond Templier used jewellery designs by the Hungarian-born émigrés Gustave Miklos and Joseph Csaky.

At the same time another Hungarian, Béla Vörös (Fig. C), was designing his own jewels as did Gustav Klimt and Gustav Gurschner (Fig. D) in Austria. They were not alone, in Germany the expressionist Karl Schmidt-Rottluff was producing primitive hand-made pieces as was the Spanish abstract painter and sculptor Julio Gonzalez in Paris. The Italian sculptor Alberto Giacometti's first jewels, however, were the result of an unsuccessful attempt to design buttons for the Italian fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli (Fig. E). Cast in thick bronze they were rejected for being too heavy so he turned them into pendants and brooches for his friends.

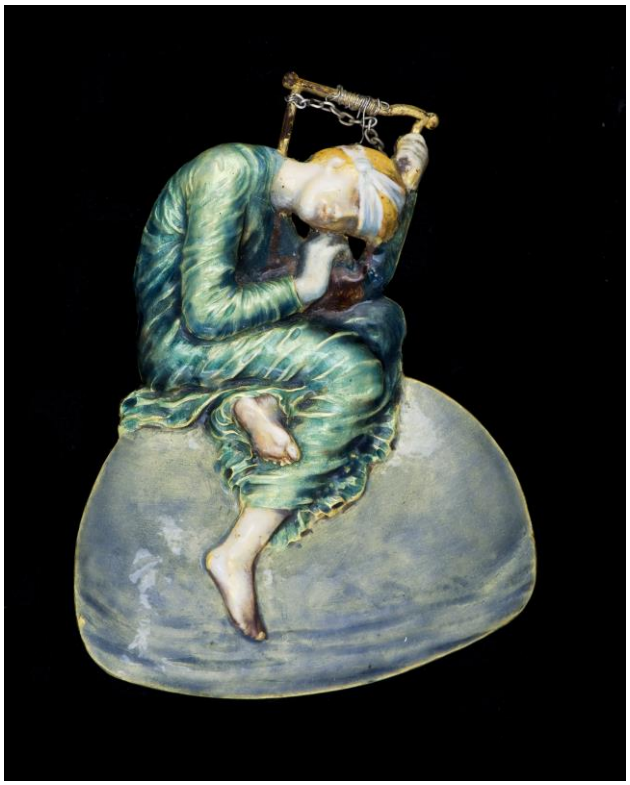

Fig. A. Enamel pendant of *Hope* by William Soper & Sons after the allegorical painting by George Frederic Watts RA, London, 1890s.

Fig. B. Art Nouveau gold and amethyst fringe necklace designed by Jessie Marion King for Liberty & Co., London, late 1890s.

Fig. C. Art Deco silver-plated cast bronze brooch with two stylized profile heads by Béla Vörös, Hungary, *c.* 1931.

Fig. D. Silver sculptural brooch of a female bust and set with cabouchon moonstones by Gustav Gurschner, Austria, *c.* 1900.

After the Second World War a number of exhibitions were conceived in the United States and Europe to promote the art of jewellery. The first, *Modern Handmade Jewelry* (1946), was held in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It contained 135 pieces of jewellery that acknowledged the 'wearable art' movement in America. It brought together artists including Calder, Bertoia and Lipchitz together with modernist jewellers like 'Mushroom' Sam Kramer and Margaret De Patta.

Three years later in Milan, Mario Masenza opened his exhibition, *Gioielli di Masenza* (1949), which in contrast included gold and gem creations by emerging Italian artists like Afro, Franco Cannilla, Lorenzo Guerrini, and Nino Franchina.

In 1961 the ground-breaking *International Exhibition of Modern Jewellery was* held in the Goldsmith's Hall, London. It was an attempt to revitalize the British industry and with 901 exhibits it was the first time that work by international artists could be compared alongside those by professionals.

The following year *Antagonismes 2, L'objet* (1962) was held in the Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, where jewellery was shown beside furniture, pottery and clothing by artists such as Lucio Fontana, Picasso, and Philippe Hiquily.

Almost twenty years after organizing their first travelling jewellery exhibition MOMA in New York arranged *Jewelry by Contemporary Painters and Sculptors* (1967-68) with 109 pieces by 71 artists many of whose work can also be seen in this catalogue. Then in 1973 the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston held *Jewelry as Sculpture as Jewelry*, with 131 pieces by 50 artists. Many had already taken part in the MOMA show but this exhibition also included for the first time many jewels made by GEM Montebello for artists like Arnaldo and Gio Pomodoro, Lucio Fontana, and Man Ray.

By now the artist's jewel had arrived, valued by both the art and jewellery worlds. Indeed, the trade show *AUREA,* held in Florence in 1972, 1974 and 1976 specifically commissioned jewels not only from Italian artists like Giorgio Facchini, Alberto Giorgi, Umberto Mastroianni, and Luciano Minguzzi, but also from international artists such as Wifredo Lam and Victor Vasarely.

Interest in the artist's jewel is currently undergoing a renaissance. In the last two years there have been four exhibitions in Europe devoted to the jewellery of post-war artists. *Bijoux sculptures. L'art vous va si bien* (2008), organised by Diane Venet and held in the Musée de la Piscine, Roubaix, *Bijoux d'Artistes* (2009) prepared by Clo Fleiss in the Musée du Temps, Besançon, *Künstlerschmuck Objets d'Art* (2009-10), which was formed from the collection of Diana Küppers, was exhibited in Cologne, Duisburg and Munich, and lastly, *Private Passion, Artists' Jewellery of the 20th Century* (2009), in the Stedelijk Museum 's-Hertogenbosch. These are in addition to the highly acclaimed travelling exhibition of jewellery by Alexander Calder, whose work is well represented in all four exhibitions, and which form the first two pieces in this catalogue.

Martine Newby Haspeslagh

Fig. E. Cast bronze pendant of a mermaid by Alberto Giacometti, originally designed as a button for Elsa Schiaparelli, *c*. 1935.

Alexander Calder (1898-1975)

It is not an understatement to say that Alexander Calder is the father of artists' jewellery, an artist whose designs have influenced and inspired generations of jewellers. For him, to put on a piece of his jewellery transformed the wearer into a 'living work of art'. He started early: in 1906 at the tender age of eight, he manipulated some electrical copper wire and beads into necklaces and other trinkets for his sister's dolls. He continued to doodle in wire throughout his life and is believed to have fashioned around 1800 pieces of jewellery, the vast majority of which were gifts for friends, family and especially for his wife, Louisa.

During the Depression and World War II, however, he sold some jewellery to supplement his income. The two most notable exhibitions of his jewellery were held at the Willard Gallery in New York in December 1940 and in the December of the following year, which coincided with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Neither exhibition was commercially successful.

Like his art, his jewellery is mostly large, bold and frequently playful, while demonstrating his confidence in design and his assuredness with a hammer, with the spiral becoming a recurring theme. He preferred humble materials like copper, brass and sometimes silver, but he only used gold sparingly after the War. His 'gems' were equally modest, mostly found objects ranging from pottery sherds and pebbles to fragments of coloured car lights.

The pair of silver cufflinks, below left, were each hand beaten from a single rod of silver with probably no more than a dozen deft blows of the hammer. Two similar pairs, still in the possession of the family, were illustrated in the recent catalogue accompanying the travelling exhibition of Calder jewellery. They were both made in 1940 for Calder's exhibition of jewellery and mobiles held at the Willard Gallery, New York, in December of that year but remained unsold.

The hand beaten brass comb on the following page was also exhibited at the Willard Gallery in 1940. It was formed from five separate lengths of brass wire, which were flattened and then shaped to form three simple narrow loops, one wider loop, and a horizontal bar with typical spiral ends. All the pieces were then riveted together to form a rigid comb with eight prongs. Calder never used solder in his jewels preferring rivets or ingenious wire fastenings so as not to compromise the purity of the medium used.

From an illustrated inventory notebook of 1940 it is known that the original selling price for this hair comb was $ 40. Indeed, it was one of the few pieces was that sold at the exhibition. This hair comb is also stamped on the reverse of the right hand spiral with his "SC" monogram (for Sandy Calder), an indication that this piece was made for an exhibition rather than as a gift. Calder also made hair combs for his wife, whom he nicknamed 'Medusa' because of her wild hair.

Harry Bertoia (1915-1978)

Whereas Calder trained as an engineer before turning to sculpture, Harry Bertoia attended the Cass Technical High School in Detroit and then in 1937 was awarded a scholarship to the Cranbrook Academy of Art. As part of his scholarship obligations he re-opened the Academy's metalworking shop and taught there until 1943, concentrating more on jewellery as metal supplies became scarcer during the War. He also exhibited his jewellery together with Calder at the Nierendorf Gallery in New York and the Alexander Girard Gallery in Detroit, and like Calder, he rejected solder.

The two silver brooches below date from this period. The one on the left is kinetic and has four inverted U-shaped strips that were inserted through holes in the central rod before being hammered flat, while the steel fastening pin was riveted through the body. The cast and hammered brooch to the right comes from the collection of a fellow Cranbrook alumnus, the architect Ralph Rapson.

While at Cranbrook Bertoia met Charles and Ray Eames and in 1943 he joined them in California to work on developing moulded plywood furniture. He then moved in 1950 to Pennsylvania to work with Hans and Florence Knoll for whom he designed five pieces of wire furniture including the famous 'Diamond Chair'. Royalties from the chair enabled him to concentrate on sculpture for the rest of his life and he only occasionally made jewellery as personal gifts for family and friends from then on.

The large necklace to the right is made in fused beryllium bronze and was a gift for his daughter Lesta on her 18th birthday in 1962. It was made in the same beryllium bronze as many of his sculptures although Bertoia was unaware at the time that this metal is not only poisonous but that working with it would lead to his early death aged 63 in 1978.

In his art Bertoia also explored the ways in which metal could be manipulated to produce sound - tap the silver gong pendant on the right and it vibrates.

George Rickey (1907-2002)

George Rickey originally trained as a painter and went to art school in Paris after attending the Ruskin School of Drawing in Oxford from 1928-29. Later in 1949 he changed to sculpture after studying at the Institute of Design in Chicago, showing his first pieces in New York in 1954 and in Europe in 1957.

Rickey only made a few pieces of jewellery and these were, for the most part, made for his wife Edie. She wore her long hair tied up in a bun, which she secured with a variety of silver hairpins, many of which had moving elements that behaved in similar ways to his kinetic sculptures. He set them into wooden blocks, which Edie displayed in her bedroom. The hair comb below was made from a continuous silver wire and soldered at two points so that it would retain some rigidity.

The necklace to the right, *Two Lines with Spirals*, is made from gilded stainless steel wire where the two long rods with spiral ends are kinetic. It is closely related to small scale kinetic table-top sculptures that Rickey started to make in the late 1960s using a single strip of stainless steel wire that was often gilded, twisting one end into a tight spiral to create a weighted end.

José de Creeft (1884-1982)

José de Creeft began studying sculpture in his native Spain before moving to Paris in 1905 to complete his studies. Ten years later and contrary to all the traditional techniques he had been taught, de Creeft developed the process of '*taille direct*' or directly carving in stone and wood. This was a move away from modelling in clay and then casting the finished piece up in bronze in a foundry or by having the work carved at a carving studio. Indeed, from 1911-14 he had worked in one of these studios that reproduced sculptors' models in stone. His new method of carving, however, allowed him to be a part of the whole process of creating a finished piece thus allowing for artistic spontaneity.

De Creeft moved to the United States in 1929 where his new style of working was instrumental in starting the revolutionary change away from academic classicism to direct carving and the modern concept of 'truth to materials'. He disseminated these ideas to the next generation of artists by teaching first at the New School for Social Research, in New York, from 1932-48 and then at the Art Students League, as well as in his Chelsea studio. Yet, although his interest remained in direct carving he continued to produce works modelled in clay and then cast up in bronze.

The pendant to the right is an extremely rare piece of jewellery, a pendant of a mother and child made in resin and covered with pure 24ct gold. It is signed and dated on the reverse 'J de C 1975'. It comes from the family and is a very private piece. Although the exact circumstances of its creation remain unknown, it conveys the optimistic philosophy full of the deepest and finest qualities of human feeling and love communicated in his expressive abstract art.