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By Alla Myzelev

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Jewellery Can Be Worn Too

Roberta Bernabei

Introduction

Jewellery has a dual existence in that despite being made to wear, it spends much of its life not being worn. This paradox can also condition the display of jewellery when not shown on the body. Therefore, this essay will explore the display of contemporary jewellery both on and off the body, focusing on the exhibition setting from the 1980s onwards. It will discuss how contemporary jewellery artists have transformed traditional modes of display by challenging the orthodoxies of the showcase and mannequin; detailing where this evolution has expanded the language of jewellery.

This analysis will entail charting the move beyond display cabinets to less predictable means of presentation including performative adornment by models and actors, alongside the contribution of installations. Central to this analysis will be the approaches of leading jewellery artists such as Ted Noten, Ruudt Peters and Christoph Zellweger, for whom the aesthetics and means of theatrical installation can be an important element that
frames the work. Investigations will explore other practitioners who have directly replicated the act of wearing in the display setting, as well as jewellery created with the aid of audience participation. The essay will also consider works that have stretched the conventions of what might constitute a showcase, including intrigues by Otto Künzli and Ted Noten. Finally, it will examine the role curators and institutions can play in developing innovative scenarios for exhibiting jewellery. The research has been based on primary source interviews with jewellers and curators, alongside the secondary sources of books, journal articles, websites and exhibitions reviews.

Consideration will be given to the motives for public display prior to ownership, including commercial needs, artistic prerogatives, curatorial programming and the institutional desire to communicate and educate. Establishing where innovations and developments have occurred requires the conventions of display to be charted, commencing within showcases and upon mannequins. Naturally, the showcase, or vitrine, places jewellery behind glass and in so doing, isolates the viewer from it. They do of course provide physical security for what are, more often than not, extremely valuable items. In contrast, a mannequin facilitates a more immediate connection with the physicality of the human body, whilst providing an indication of what it might be like to wear an item of jewellery or see it worn.

From The Showcase To Installation

Perhaps the most classic means of displaying jewellery is within a showcase, both in commercial and museum settings. Its origins lie in the human desire to acquire and preserve items of cultural and scientific worth, alongside the curiosities of everyday life from near and other, seemingly more exotic worlds. The wealth, breadth and age of present
day museum holdings testify to the long history of the collecting imperative. The earliest acquisitions of the artefacts of others may well have occurred through force, as a result of war and sacking invasions, rather than trade. Conquest was heralded on the return home by displaying any pillaged wares. Concentrated modes of display took shape within Renaissance Europe; where learned, rich, powerful and sometimes noble men initiated the fashion for so called 'wonder-rooms' or 'cabinet of curiosities'. Initially, these were not items of furniture, but moreover, entire rooms filled with flora and fauna specimens, objects of scientific endeavour and the artefacts of newly discovered continents and plundered colonies. An early example was amassed by Olaus Worm, a Danish physician. A year after his death in 1654, a catalogue *Museum Wormianum*, 1655, documented the collection and came with an etching showing the room full of objects.ii Wonder rooms were intended to demonstrate the intellectual prowess of the owner and to impress their guests. Given visitors would be low in numbers and of high social standing, the need for security was less paramount. Therefore, most artefacts sat on shelves or the floor, rather than behind glass, which allowed objects to be freely handled.

A gradual shift towards security and preservation occurred with the philanthropic intents of 18th Century patrons, who sought to share their collections more broadly. This philosophical aspiration to disperse knowledge was allied to the Enlightenment and its rapid pace of scientific discoveries and technological developments. Another catalyst was the increasing number of British nobility and upper class North Europeans who indulged in cultural tourism through the so called ‘Grand Tour’ of Europe. In Great Britain, the physician and naturalist Sir Hans Sloan for example, collected over 71,000 objects during his life that he bequeathed to the British nation, leading in turn to the inauguration of the British Museum, which opened in London to the public in 1759.iii This helped mark the advent of
modern museum culture; thereby necessitating the protective function of the showcase as collections became the property of institutional and state entities.iv

The showcase gained further ascendancy in Britain with the proselytising zeal of the Victorians to educate Britain's massesv; leading to the vitrine-filled Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 1852. The museum built on the success of the 1851 Great Exhibition, itself held in the giant glasshouse cum showcase of Crystal Palace, London. Similar institutions were being built throughout the industrialised world.vi In parallel, the growing industrial production of glass, rather than the previously hand blown production, increased the commercial usage of showcases in shops.

Given the pervasive history of the showcase, perhaps it was inevitable that jewellery artists seeking to reinvigorate Western jewellery practice through non-precious materials and the re-claiming of meaning from the 1960s onwards, would take exception to the norms of display. Above and beyond a rebellious catalyst, objections to the showcase are immediate, understandable and clearly explained by the curator and design historian Monica Gaspar: ‘The moment you put something behind glass, somehow you betray the nature of the object. You make it shareable... but the whole nature of use, and meaning and attachment with the owner or with the collector, somehow gets lost’.vii Equally persuasive from the maker’s perspective is Ted Noten, who cites a corporeal rebuttal, ‘jewellery, which has a body related language, clearly has more possibilities than only the vitrine’.viii

The showcase, for better or worse, provides a neutral environment where jewellery can be observed with few visual distractions. For this reason, it may actually be perceived as a non-space for jewellery; a place of isolation before it passes into the hands of a real person. However, it creates a neutral backdrop that can be manipulated by curator and jeweller alike if dissatisfaction provokes. The simplest way to reinvigorate the showcase,
without its entire abandonment entails a contextual shift, so that the showcase becomes, in part, the subject of a work. This occurred in Christoph Zellweger’s installation *Ossarium Rosé*, in the ‘Sala do Veado’ at the National Museum of Natural History in Lisbon, in 2005. A large number of unidentifiable bones, probably from animals, that the jeweller had flocked with pink fibres were ‘displayed under a cold light and orderly classified inside the only remaining showcase that survived a fire which destroyed the museum in 1978’. Prior to the fire, the room was filled with tightly packed showcases displaying the bones of prehistoric deer. By reusing the last extant showcase and placing it back in the original room that housed the skeletons, Zellweger exploited the iconography of the vitrine; along with the aura of cultural worth that a museum bestows and seeks to preserve. Or, in the words of the artist, the pieces ‘acquire scientific credibility, the solemnity of the relic or the fascination of the wonder-cabinet’. Despite being a deft proponent of the staged setting or installation, Zellweger cautions that there is no problem for me in presenting work as an installation if it is done well and makes a point about the work. If the jewellery work isn’t strong, displaying it as an installation usually won’t help. You can’t ‘upgrade’ work just by making it look more ‘arty’.

From the institutional perspective, showcases may be necessary because they mitigate the need to protect work from theft or accidental damage. Even so, with a sensitive approach, a certain work-specificity can be built into showcases, as underlined by Ursula Ilse-Neumann, the curator of jewellery at the Museum of Arts and Design, New York. She reveals how for the retrospective of jeweller Margaret De Patta in 2012, her team ‘built separate small cylindrical containers, individually lit from above, showing each single piece separately and allowing visitors to see the piece from all angles, enhancing the optical effects the artist sought’. In discussions, she continued to outline that when jewellery might ‘involve smell, hearing or taste’ she would seek to ‘create an open, visitor-interactive
It is therefore possible for curators and their institutions to be innovative in the creation of secure showcases, if desire and funds permit.

Another allied option entails the jeweller making some kind of prop that creates a protective envelope: spatial, conceptual, metaphorical or otherwise. A secondary object that gives setting and creates a protective aura, wherever the work goes on display. Sustaining this possibility are ring stands by Wendy Ramshaw that can take on great complexity of form, or the similarly protective, sculptural counterparts Marjorie Schick sometimes creates to cosset and display a jewel when not worn. Bruce Metcalf has specifically created objects to house jewellery. In his case, theatrical and architectonic backdrops for his humorous, cartoonish and often existentially anguished figures. Add to these, Esther Brinkmann’s elaborate and highly crafted jewel boxes and the drawings of Manfred Bischoff displaying his jewellery and momentum is created. Ramshaw and Brinkmann’s approaches are personalised versions of items already common to the commercial jewellery trade, whereas Bischoff’s tactic is more idiosyncratic. When asked to explain his decision to show his jewellery in this manner, he responded by explaining how he ‘saw that the pieces alone could not hold themselves within a space that is normally not a space. Therefore, I had to frame them, in a certain sense, through language and with drawing so that the viewer could have the possibility to enter from multiple points of view’. To achieve this, Bischoff places each piece of jewellery in an exhibition on a drawing that relates to the work or one that prompted its creation. A contextual framing is important to Brinkmann, who explains that a piece is ‘finished only when it has its own box. The box positions the object. It prolongs and Reinforces its character... The box can also be used as a display unit. The status of an autonomous object that an unworn piece of jewellery acquires is thus emphasised’.
Installations
Liberated from the institutional imperative to securely preserve, jewellers can play around with, or even disregard the showcase. Even in the 1970s, questions were being asked as to whether the ethos of the showcase was in keeping with jewellery that was increasingly being produced in non-precious materials. Early rebel Fritz Maierhofer noted in 1974 how ‘generally speaking, I refuse to have my jewellery displayed in show-cases. This, I hate. It reminds me too much of ‘valuables’’. It is unsurprising that the physical confines of the traditional showcase are perceived to be too restrictive; a reality subsequently overcome by Otto Künzli’s installation Swiss Gold and The Deutschmark, shown in Munich in 1983. In the display of the two pieces of jewellery of the same name, the showcase effectively expanded into an entire room that housed two people. Visitors could not enter the space and were also ‘acoustically separated from the couple by a pane of glass resembling a shop window’. The couple, looking like suave bankers, were dressed in evening wear, drank champagne and chatted through the opening event; ignoring the audience. The woman wore the artist’s necklace of 200 deutschmarks, whilst the man wore an oversize brooch in the shape of a gold bar, covered in chocolate foil wrappers. The observational nature of experiencing the installation shaped the jewellery’s meaning, which according to Künzli referred to ‘exhibitionism, voyeurism, reception, exposition, consumerist behaviour, the arbitrariness of moral concepts, exploitation, vanity and illusion’.

Künzli’s theatrical installation preceded Ted Noten’s 21st Century update by some thirty years. Invited to show in a visual arts exhibition at the Amsterdam Arts Club in 2004, the challenge for Noten, as he admits, was ‘how to exhibit jewellery in such a way that you can break free from conventional solutions like showcases or wall mountings. If you want people to look at the work fresh and unbiased, the presentation itself has to sustain that approach’. Noten’s ingenious solution was Robot and a Ring, in which a single plastic ring
was hidden from view in a safe. The audience were kept at a distance by a glass viewing panel, from where, by pressing a button, they could summon the robot arm to open the safe and transport the ring to them for closer inspection. After a brief pause for viewing, the robot then returned the ring to the safe. The whole installation effectively became a giant showcase. The elaborate ‘overuse’ of high technology to present a deliberately simple ring, heightened the theatricality of the viewer’s experience, whilst giving them some control over the course of events.

If the showcase continues to be required to meet a logistical need, then an alternate incarnation sees it removed from the gallery space. Which is exactly what Ted Noten did with Be Nice To A Girl, Buy Her A Ring, 2009. His intervention consisted of a vending machine placed in a shopfront in the red light district of Amsterdam. Display became less passive through a combination of surprise and quirky humour. It also heightened commercial possibilities by proffering lovers with the opportunity for a spontaneous romantic gesture for the bargain price of 2.50 Euros.

**Beyond the Institution**

The notion of display often implies a gallery or museum setting, but jewellers themselves are free to circumvent this dogma and the conventions of the showcase. The pop-up gallery, unexpected public interventions and impromptu happenings are common in the fine arts and increasingly so in the jewellery world. Perhaps the jeweller most noted for her guerrilla display tactics is Dinie Besems. Intriguing examples include Jewellery for Men, shown in the Museum Van Loon in Amsterdam 2003. Whilst admittedly within the confines of a museum, this show lasted for the single hour she could afford to rent the building. Continuing this ideology, Besems has also hosted shows and installations in her own home. Further
examples of impromptu and innovative display come with the pop-up store Op Voorraad. Initiated in 2009 by Ineke Heerkens, Jantje Fleischhut and Jeannette Jansen in Amsterdam, the portable and changing shopping bonanza sought to address the somewhat staid notions of what ordinarily constitutes a gallery space for jewellery. Its unconventional means of display entailed appropriating the aesthetics of a hardware store, replete with perforated hardboard walls upon which the jewellery was displayed in blister packs, threaded onto metal hooks. Supermarket trolleys, cash tills and price labels completed the ‘look’. The roster of artists changed according to the store’s temporary location and limited edition runs of each piece on sale gave added impetus to the allure of the event. Commerce and display therefore found a common impetus in innovation. According to Ineke Heerkens, jeweller and co-founder, the temptation of purchase was heightened because being ‘open for a short period is a way of being exclusive. It’s now or never; no time to doubt whether to buy’.

In the realm of guerrilla display, the lone individual is a kind of quick hit paradigm. At recent jewellery fairs and festivals such as Schmuck in Munich, several groups have been seen sporting handheld or wearable showcase bags that display the makers’ wares. Alternately, a solo and unofficial example was made and transported by Diogo Alves, who walked around the 2104 edition of Schmuck wearing a showcase backpack. The rear fabric was cut away to reveal a transparent box frame with a piece of his jewellery within. This made a new kind of mobile showcase, accompanied by the jewellery’s maker, who was able to discuss the work within. According to Alves, the backpack arose as a consequence of two prior projects. The first entailed him using ‘the city as the ‘body’ of the jewel’ and meant ‘placing small showcases in public toilets with a piece of jewel inside along with a sign saying ‘In case of personal desire, break the glass’’. Whereas the second, a ‘walking display’ explored distinctions between public and private space. For the maker, part of its
provocation was in ascertaining at which moment ‘people can deny me entrance to places for what I’m wearing, indeed, how can they deny me entrance to a gallery if I wear the gallery’.xxi

A recent institutional transgression of the museum’s architectural confines involves the exhibition of jewellery in the wider public sphere; thereby simulating private ownership on a day to day basis. An exemplar is once again Ted Noten, with his dispersal of 300 limited edition brooches to the taxi drivers of Middlesbrough, in the UK. The intention of Hermes Wings, 2011, was for the drivers to act as ambassadors for Middlesbrough’s Institute of Modern Art’s jewellery collection and to encourage members of the public, who might not otherwise visit, to attend the museum. It was an innovative performance and publicity vehicle, in which conversation promoted jewellery. The associated preview event included a ceremonial drive-through at the museum, whereupon the taxi drivers collected their individual lapel pin and dashboard brooch. The latter consisted of a winged form that stood on the driver’s dashboard to augur safe and speedy transport; and moreover helped ‘drivers engage passengers in conversation and debate’.xxii Intriguingly, it was also a piece of jewellery for the car. Consequently, Noten's intervention challenged the conventions of display on various levels, including the transformation of cars into mobile showcases for jewellery and the substitution of a human wearer for a mechanical one.

Another example of jewellery exiting the museum building comes with Liesbet Bussche’s street jewellery. One piece contributed to the exhibition Jewellery Unleashed! curated by Liesbeth den Besten at Museum voor Moderne Kunst in Arnhem, the Netherlands in 2011. Urban Jewellery, (brooch) transformed a tall post (holding up tram cables) into jewellery, through the addition of a giant pin. In so doing, Bussche decorated people’s environment, rather than their bodies. Further interactions with street furniture such as bollards and the chains between them have furthered this line of investigation.
Culminating in her witty installation *Pearl Necklace (tw)* in Taipei, Taiwan, 2011. It descends from a streetlight, using its spherical bulb as one of many in a luminous string of pearls. As well as transcending the confines of institution, Bussche’s work induces a symbiotic relationship between content, site and mode of display.

**No More Showcases**

Having manipulated the contextual ramifications, size and physical location of the showcase, the ultimate confrontation meant completely removing jewellery. Indeed, this act of abandoning the showcase effectively marked the emergence of installation as a *modus operandi* for jewellers to display their work. A pioneer was Ruudt Peters, one of whose early manifestations at Galerie Marzee in Nijmegen, the Netherlands in 1992, entailed each of the chalice-like necklaces from the *Passio* series being shrouded in dark purple gauze that was hung from the ceiling in low light. Resembling nomadic tents or veils, viewers had to seek an opening and push the fabric aside to enter and view the jewellery. Even more dramatic challenges were set in 1995, by the display of the *Ouroboros* jewellery high up in the rafters of Galerie Marzee. This required viewers to climb atop a series of stepladders placed around the gallery floor in order to see each piece of jewellery close up.xxiii

For Peters, display has a defined purpose, revealing how he has ‘the philosophy of the work and I try, through the installation, to offer a little bit of where it comes from; but not too much’.xxiv Consequently, display becomes a potential key to understanding the work; but never an easy one for the viewer. The clues are there, but effort is required to arrive at the intended meaning. Peters is entirely open about the necessary commitment, explaining how viewers ‘have to do something to look at me. I demand something from the people’.xxv Whichever scenario he conceives, certain factors are ever present and none more so than a human connection. He states how ‘it is very important that there is always a relationship
with a human being, like the size of a human or a meditation pillow I used, where pieces were on top of it’.xxvi

**Audience Participation**

With jewellery having become complicit in installation, the viewer may become an active participant who, rather than standing still, mesmerised by the contents of a showcase, circumnavigates a space and the elements contained within. The activation of the audience can allow them to become agents in how the work is displayed, where it is placed in the setting and whether it is worn or not. Indeed, they can even become complicit in the production of the work, whilst on show.

In this context, Ted Noten continues to be an archetype of invention with various projects that co-involve the audience in the act of display; to the extent that public participation drives jewellery production. Consider for example, *The Ring Thief*, 2000, which subconsciously enticed visitors to hit a large clay punch bag that Noten had suspended at the EKWC, European Ceramic Work Centre in ‘s-Hertogenbosch, in the Netherlands. Seeking a jewelled solution for clay, the answer was impregnated in the impressions left by the fists striking the punch bag; with imprints of various engagement, marriage and casual rings driven into the wet clay. Similarly, production and display intertwine in his *Wanna Swap Your Ring* project, first revealed in Tokyo in 2010, but scheduled for further outings around the world. 500 pink, rapid-prototyped *Miss Piggy* rings were hung from nails that had been laid out in a gun-shaped silhouette. Visitors were then invited to swap one of their own rings, for a *Miss Piggy*. Thus, over the course of the exhibition, the uniformity of monochrome display gradually transformed into a colourful and multifaceted vision that evoked the city’s identity through its jewellery. As the instigator acknowledges, the work is
self-sustaining because the substituted rings will inevitably provide the raw materials for other pieces of jewellery.xxvii

A slightly different premise permeates Noten’s *Three Star Bomb General*, 2010, which magnanimously allows purchasers to adopt the guise of high ranking military personnel. The piece consists of a candle in the shape of a cartoon-like bomb. Replete with a generous wick protruding upwards, it contains three bronze star pins within; the kind synonymous with generals’ epaulettes. What charms, is the wit of the conceit, along with the fact that at the time of purchase, the jewellery remains hidden. To reveal the general’s stars, the purchaser must light the candle at a time and location of their choosing. Consequently, they become the arbiter of the final audience and the display context. One could imagine the event occurring in an intimate domestic setting, in which the revelatory performance prompts a more cogent awareness of the passage of time; as well as providing a conversation piece as the melting wax bomb slowly reveals its contents. Thus, the work’s display shifts from the norms of the public realm to the private, personal and personalised.

If Noten’s jewellery bomb jolts display out of the happenstance of the everyday to the private, then the low cost multiple embeds display in its essence. The absolute affordability of works such as Mah Rana’s pin badge *Jewellery is Life*, 2000, or Benjamin Lignel’s dual pin badge set, *Support Your Local Jeweller*, 2006, not only democratise and challenge the notion of the jewel as status symbol, they also ensure a wider means of dispersal to an expanded public. Clearly, in this context, sales become a self-fulfilling prophecy, leading to increased exposure. Therefore, the multiple is one more tactic for the jeweller to dissolve not only the physical boundaries of the showcase, but also the institutional, contextual and metaphorical confines. It sits alongside installation, item-specific packaging and audience participation as new modes of display; with the humanity
of the latter providing a bridge to an analysis of the mannequin’s metamorphosis into 
performance.

**From The Mannequin To Performance**

If installation is considered a preconceived and static staging, then the inclusion of people 
instantly establishes animation, kinesis and a direct connection to the body through the act 
of wearing. In other words, performance provides a more lifelike form of display. To 
consider how this possibility has emerged and developed, it is salient to consider the 
premise of the mannequin and its challenges and opportunities in the display setting. In 
contrast to being placed on a stand or upon a shelf in a showcase, the mannequin roughly 
mimics the human body and gives an indication of what any item of jewellery might look 
like when worn. It can give three dimensionality back to jewellery, as in the chain element 
of a necklace whilst it moves over the shoulders and around the neck, or by establishing a 
sense of relative proportions in comparison to facial features and body parts. The 
opportunities do not end with the physical benefits, but also include the possibility of 
setting a scene with other props and clothing to infer social interaction. A foretaste may be 
created in the mind of the viewer of what it might be like to own, wear and be seen wearing 
the work. Consider Arline Fisch, who has been drawn to the use of more than one placed 
together because she ‘can group the mannequins so they become a conversation piece, 
rather than an isolated pedestal kind of piece. If you walk into a room and there’s a group of 
six mannequined people wearing different kinds of things, I think you can approach that 
group and imagine yourself there, and you could become part of that group’.xviii

Whilst mannequins can facilitate the humanised display of jewellery, not being alive, 
they lack the tactility of skin, and more importantly, the motion that can set jewellery free 
and animate it through changes in the light and shade falling on it. Furthermore, their
industrial serial production means they want for nuance and the idiosyncrasies that different human bodies exhibit. It may be for these reasons that many jewellers have incorporated real people into the means of display.

Various jewellers have used living models, amongst them is Ruudt Peters. According to the art historian Liesbeth den Besten, Peters is a jeweller who ‘wants to make the work enticing to people through the manner in which he shows his jewellery’. His desire to captivate through a performance based experience of his work gained momentum in 1992. Brooches from the *Interno* series were pinned to the lapels of 15 men wearing black jackets. The men stood next to clothing hooks spaced out along a wall, and were forbidden from interacting with the audience during the opening evening at Spektrum Gallery, in Munich. As den Besten observed, these installations require the audience to choose whether to participate or not. Passive viewing, as is the norm, was not a given. The static catwalk scenario questioned whether audience members ‘dare step up to these men and look at the jewellery on their jackets as though they were nothing more than a vitrine?’ Once the performance had concluded, the jackets were hung on the hooks with the brooches for all to see. Indeed, this final touch overcame in part, the temporal nature of performance, which can often mean the ‘main event’ is so short-lived as to not determine the aesthetics of an exhibition for its full duration. In Munich, the transience of the catwalk lived on through the placement of the jackets; as though someone could have come in at any moment and put them, and the jewellery, back on. Through an analysis of Peters’ exhibition installations, den Besten concludes her discussions by arguing that:

Ruudt Peters discovered what installations can do for jewellery: expanding the atmosphere already present in the jewellery through the right combination of
materials, props, constructions and lighting. Therefore, the word installation can easily be exchanged for the word scenography, which is also aimed at provoking the correct atmosphere in order to understand the work.xxxii

Other performances include Ted Noten’s *Tedwalk*, 2008. A full blown fashion catwalk of models displaying his jewellery at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. With glitz and glamour, lights and music, all contributing to an overtly exuberant event, whose finale ceremoniously left the objects on an empty runway. They were subsequently exhibited under Perspex simulations of Victorian domed glass bell jars. Having occurred in the YouTube age of instant online video uploads, a film of Tedwalk will be preserved for posterity, as long as the servers remain switched on.xxxiii

The inevitably transient nature of performance can lead to the accrual of memories and the building of what might be described as iconic momentum, sustained in part by the printed press, virtual blogging, photography and conversation. The displayed jewel becomes an event that lives longer in the mind, than it ever existed in reality. This, to a certain extent, is true of many experiences of art and artefacts, unless one becomes the owner. Yet, if the perception of the event can be heightened by some means, outlandish or otherwise, then the psychological power of the work or event may grow exponentially.

**Photographic Display**

Many iconic examples of jewellery owe their elevation and exposure to photography. To sustain this viewpoint one only has to think of the striking images of Gijs Bakker’s *Steel Profile Circle*, 1974, where the wearer, Fritz Maiehofer, has a Christ-like appearance.xxxiv
Other examples include shots of Gijs Bakker and Emmy van Leersum’s, *Clothing Suggestions*, 1970. The striking images of Peter Skubic’s surgical intervention *Jewellery Under the Skin*, 1975-82, even include X-rays showing the implant inside the jeweller’s body. Yet, in contrast to the significance accorded to photographs, the jeweller David Poston argued for the primacy of the object; believing that ‘jewellery is for the wearer, not the spectator, since I believe that people should be involved in their own existence rather than the image of it’.

Counter to Poston’s viewpoint is the fact that the vast majority of people can only know and experience most pieces of jewellery through the photograph. Indeed, its documentary capacity has had great value in anthropological and ethnographical studies; as well as recording the changing tastes and styles in jewellery around the world in varying socio-cultural circles. Prior to the invention of photography, painting held this role and painters exploited the presence of jewellery as a metaphorical device for communication. This continues to provide a valuable historical record, as much jewellery was melted or broken down into its constituent elements, with stones re-set in new pieces.

The relationship between photography and jewellery was explored in *Eye Catch: Jewellery & Photograph*, an exhibition curated by the jewellers Warwick Freeman and Octavia Cook at Object Space in Auckland in 2011. The show explored the position, role and communicative functions of the adorned jewellery, as well as photography’s potential within the jewellery maker’s practice. Writing in the exhibition literature Frances Walsh asserts a symbiotic relationship between photograph and jewellery, noting that ‘a photograph of an artefact is the next best thing to owning one, something that most of us will never do. Photography’s job when it comes to artefact is to capture them’. From Freeman’s perspective, the exhibition built on ideas he had already explored in his 1995 book *Owners Manual*, ‘which was photographs of people who owned the work, wearing the work’. Photography can play an important role in the dispersal of jewellery. Indeed,
certain jewellers have made it a central feature of the wider distribution of their jewellery. Christoph Zellweger’s book *Foreign Bodies*, 2007, exemplifies this approach, of which he explains: ‘To me, the book is a work in itself, a form of displaying and showing my work in another format and adding more layers to the possible reading of the work. This book was a way of talking to the many rather than to the few who will make it to see a physical display’.

Photography also provided the starting point for an innovation that graphically replicated the mannequin. In his 2011/2012 show, *Venus Adorned*, at the Snyderman Gallery in Philadelphia USA, Bruce Metcalf projected photographic images of friends and colleagues onto the walls at life-size and then painted their silhouettes grey. This created a frieze of shadow people, who seem caught in the act of conversing and socialising. To this cast of ghostly figures, he pinned the brooches and necklaces of the show. Rather than being flush with the wall, the jewellery sat proud and projected their own shadows back onto the figures, as if to acknowledge and emphasise the disjunction between reality and imagination. Overall, a narrative of interaction and implied wearing was created through a cartoon style, which was entirely in keeping with the forms Metcalf produces. It may well be a first in terms of display. A hypothesis shared by the jeweller: ‘I’m surprised that (as far as I know) I am the first to use this device. In retrospect, it seems so obvious!’

**A Hybrid Descended From The Mannequin And Showcase**

The penultimate typology of display is one where the descendants of the showcase and mannequin collide: an event where installation and performance merge through audience adornment. A prime example occurred with the *Touching Warms The Art* exhibition of jewellery at the Museum of Contemporary Craft, Portland, Oregon, USA, in 2008. Exhibitors were invited to participate on condition their works could be held, touched and worn
during the show. Thereafter, all works would enter the museum’s teaching collection, where further physical examinations would ensue. Intriguingly, touching was not only possible, but actively encouraged with camera facilities and a booth that allowed viewers to photograph themselves wearing the work. Images were subsequently uploaded to an online photo repository. As well as wearing the jewellery, it also encouraged the intermediary occurrence; namely, the joy of holding jewellery, feeling its weight and rubbing its constituent elements between the thumb and forefinger. The institutional drive behind the work is explained by Namita Gupta Wiggers, curator of the show, who elaborates on its aims and conundrum causation:

It was intended to address the fact that within a museum you can’t let people touch things, you can’t let them try them on – only the privileged few get that opportunity. It’s not possible to educate broader segments of the population to understand what it feels like to wear contemporary art jewelry... if they can’t touch it, handle it, put it on and see what they look like in it... It was about saying, ‘We need to find new models for presenting work that accommodates a haptic desire’. People have the desire and need for haptic engagement with certain objects. The museum environment – the White Cube environment – is not set up to offer that and it’s a problem.

Other museums and institutions extend the opportunity to hold and touch jewellery through the operation of lending schemes. One is run in Denmark by the Danish Arts Foundation and it permits items from their jewellery collection to be borrowed by state officials, those who participate in official events, and artists giving concerts, performances
or exhibitions. The intention of the scheme is ‘to provide Danes with an opportunity to become acquainted with jewellery of a high artistic quality.’ In this way, jewellery can leave the edifice of the collecting institution to be displayed in real life, and with living mannequins as models and advocates for the work.

Another interesting conjunction of audience, performance and installation was Monika Brugger’s Jeju, 2000. It projected a daisy chain onto the viewer when they stood in a certain position in an installation. People could effectively switch between being the viewer or wearer depending on their position in the space. The work was a tender reminder of carefree youth and the joy of using flowers to make jewellery with friends and first sweethearts. Moreover, display and object became the same thing. In so doing, it permitted the viewer to briefly wear jewellery that would have otherwise been hidden away under showcase glass.

**Digital Display**

The final means of display that will be discussed pertains to the digital technologies of rapid prototyping and the internet. Many innovative jewellers have already set up their own webshops where clients can view and order work directly from the maker. The advent of 3D printing bureaus like Shapeways and other similar companies enable jewellers to further supersede the traditional gallery system by bringing display direct to the viewer, wherever they may be. Unlike the previous modality of production, display and sale, this new technology means display becomes the trigger to manufacture via on-demand ordering. Display, production and sale become united through the digital interface. However, much like the old school mannequin and showcase, the web, whilst democratising access in terms of time, geography and wealth to some extent, still prevents the viewer from handling and
engaging with jewellery through their tactile senses. Whilst a powerful tool for the dispersal of jewellery imagery, it denies the physicality and sensuality of the act of wearing jewellery in the here and now.

That said, the digital realm can augment the audience for jewellery and in some ways, help reinvigorate its display. One such example was the recent project #wearmima, 2012, at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA). Members of the public were invited to attend a casting day after which selected participants were filmed wearing and discussing jewellery from the museum’s collection. The edited films were uploaded to The Space, a collaborative website from the BBC and UK Arts Council. Each film revealed nuances of the jewellery that might otherwise have remained hidden; with the wearers variously discussing prompts for its production, how it feels to hold and wear, what drew them to their chosen piece, how it fits them physically and psychologically, amongst other issues.

This approach has echoes of the aforementioned Touching Warms The Art project. However, given the limited numbers permitted to wear the work, the democratising element is lesser. The greatest innovation of #wearmima was in allowing viewers to see museum collection objects being handled and worn, all whilst the wearer talked about the jewellery. Seeing ordinary people, who were not necessarily trained in the jargon of arts and crafts ‘speak’, giving their responses was expansive and in contrast to the tightly controlled curatorial or artist’s texts that invariably accompany exhibits.

As well as personal websites, many jewellers and interested parties run their own contemporary jewellery blogs or repositories such as Klimt02 and the Art
Some of the most insightful come in the guise of conversational exchanges in which a visual and descriptive sketchbook accumulates to shed light on the inner workings of studio practice. One such example was instigated by the Grey Area Symposium in Mexico during 2010. The blog charted various dialogues between pairs of jewellers, with one being from Latin America and the other having a European background. A similar premise for exchange, the Handshake mentoring project in New Zealand, partnered up and coming jewellers with experienced makers such as Lisa Walker and Warwick Freeman. The resulting blog and book charts each pair’s blossoming relationship and gives insights into the practice of all participants. In this way, jewellery practice gains a virtual shop window onto the world through the internet.

Conclusions

It appears that contemporary jewellery practice since around the late 1980s has sought to challenge the conventions of display by dismantling the showcase to create expansive installations and by sidelining lifeless mannequins in favour of real people and performance. Much in the same way that jewellery itself has entered a realm where anything is possible in terms of materials, scale, form and content, so too, has its means of display. As jeweller Iris Eichenberg noted in 2006, ‘there are no taboos left, so everything is possible: every subject, every material, every way of working’. It would seem that the only limitations to display are those imposed by makers, curators, galleries and museums. Consequently, the adventurousness of the individual is paramount to the continued evolution of display, but with jewellers such as Ted Noten acutely aware of the potential benefits, it should be an anticipated outcome. As the artist himself acknowledges, ‘in order
to ‘open up’, we should use more mechanisms, systems or tools that are known by people who are not familiar with modern jewellery'. Ruudt Peters’ approach also exemplifies innovation from the norms of display, something he considers vital, explaining that ‘I don’t want to be in a showcase. I never did that and I never want to do it. When I can’t have an installation, I don’t want to have an exhibition’. 

One might even argue that display can become integral to the process of creating jewellery; as in the case of Christoph Zellweger, who notes how ‘the display and the communication and contextualization of my work matters a lot to me... Making my work goes hand in hand with creating a context for the work to be experienced, sensed or seen’. Equally, the curatorial and institutional perspective augers promise, when a curator such as Ursula Ilse-Neumann summarises an ideal means of displaying jewellery thus: ‘It should be shown within the context of various themes – accessible and if at all possible, not behind glass as in a fish tank’. For Ted Noten, the general requirements are even more demanding; imploring that ‘display should challenge the viewer’.

There have been many examples of jewellery display to jolt the viewing public out of any supposed apathy, with the most striking including interventions by Otto Künzli, Ted Noten and Ruudt Peters. As well as a device to disturb the happenstance of normality, display has also become a tool in the armoury of the jeweller wishing to influence the meaning and self-expression that is often central to contemporary practice. At its best, display can poetically guide and inform the interpretation of jewellery’s content; smoothing comprehension without resorting to didactic means. It can also heighten the anticipation of viewing and confirm artistic reputation through memorable and iconic events. Tempering this enthusiasm can be the commercial imperative of conservative curatorial approaches. A reality not lost on Christoph Zellweger who observes that
gallery spaces in the field of jewellery are often designed to cater for the direct interaction between customer and a piece of jewellery for sale, but only a few galleries are happy to help the artist to create a holistic display that allows a visitor to gain a larger experience beyond the individual artefact.\textsuperscript{iv}

Whilst enabling a broader dispersal of contemporary practice, display innovations have also directly extended the language of jewellery. The jeweller Ted Noten is responsible for several of these developments, with \textit{Hermes Wings}, 2011, making a strong case as an exemplar. The winged brooch for the taxi drivers of Middlesbrough, UK, was hung by some from the rear view mirror of their taxis. By seeking to use the brooch and individual taxi drivers as verbal ambassadors for the commissioning museum's jewellery collection, Noten invented a jewelled ornamentation for the car, whilst simultaneously converting it into a mobile showcase. Other examples whereby a mutually dependent relationship exists between the jewellery and its performance further substantiate the argument for display expanding the parameters of jewellery. Consider in this vein, Dinie Besems' performance \textit{Logarithm of the Grotesque}, 2012, in which a monk-like man gradually put on over 200m of a single necklace of threaded beads.

The performed jewel and the jewel as catalyst for communication are but two strikingly different interpretations of display concerning jewellery; obviously others exist, many of which are indebted to one or even both of these interpretations. They include low cost multiples, installations, item-specific packaging and audience participation. Each has ingrained display either in the production or interpretation of jewellery. These innovations have primarily been driven by the jewellers themselves and demonstrate how evolving modes of display can contribute to the extension of the jewellery language. Additionally,
with certain curators also acknowledging the value of innovation, it is surely inevitable that
evolving adventures in jewellery display will continue to surprise, delight and inspire.
Bibliography


The title of the essay is taken from an observation by Peter Skubic about the wearing of jewellery, in which he sagely and dryly notes:

‘Jewellery does not only have to be worn, but also needs to live long. Most of all jewellery is not worn, but lays around in factories, sits in the showcases of goldsmiths, hangs on walls, lays around in drawers, is locked in security containers, lays in galleries or degenerates in museums. Jewellery is also buried, thrown away, lost and fused again; but jewellery can be worn too’.


iii For further information on the formation of museum culture in Britain, see Lisa Jardine, *Ingenious Pursuits* (London, 1999), Ch.6. This includes discussions of the Ashmolean Museum of Oxford University, an institution prompted by Elias Ashmole’s bequest of his cabinet of curiosities; itself comprising objects acquired from the earlier collection of John Tradescant the Elder.

iv Another striking example is the Teylers Museum in Haarlem, the Netherlands. Built at the behest of Pieter Teyler van der Hulst, whose will stipulated the establishment of a foundation to help promote the arts and sciences and their inter-relationships. The executors commissioned a building to house a museum. As well as bookshelves, its central oval room holds several large showcases to display the scientific and mineralogical holdings. Designed by Leendert Viervant in 1784/85, the strikingly long central display cabinet incorporates a stepped and sloping glazed top, as well as glass covered draws
to augment display space. Two additional hexagonal glass and wood cabinets followed in 1792 to allow viewing in the round of the collection of celestial and terrestrial globes; along with pyramid cabinets for the display of mineral samples some 10 years later.


vi See also the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, with its plethora of elaborate draw-filled vitrines; an exemplar of public display under and behind glass.


viii Ted Noten via email to the author. 04.09.2012


x Christoph Zellweger, *Christoph Zellweger: Foreign Bodies* (Barcelona, 2007), pp. 126.

xi Christoph Zellweger via email to the author 14.01.2013

xii Ursula Ilse-Neuman via email to the author 26.07.2011


xviii Ted Noten, *CH2=C(CH3)C(=O)OCH3 Enclosures and Other TN’s* (Rotterdam, 2006), pp. 216.

xix Ineke Heerkens via email to the author 13.01.2013

xx Diogo Alves via email to the author. 26.02.2015

xxi Diogo Alves via email to the author. 26.02.2015


xxiv Ruudt Peters in conversation with the author via Skype 21.05.2013

xxv Ruudt Peters in conversation with the author via Skype 21.05.2013

xxvi Ruudt Peters in conversation with the author via Skype 21.05.2013

xxviii Arline Fisch in conversation with the author via Skype 10.02.2011

xxix Liesbeth den Besten, Change (Amsterdam, 2002), pp. 3 of essay All is not What it Seems – book is otherwise unpaginated.

xxx Liesbeth den Besten, Change (Amsterdam, 2002), pp. 4 of essay All is not What it Seems – book is otherwise unpaginated.

xxxi Liesbeth den Besten, Change (Amsterdam, 2002), pp. 4 of essay All is not What it Seems – book is otherwise unpaginated.


xxxiii www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7ufguFBBRE last accessed 16.02.2015

xxxiv Gijs Bakker discussed the production of the work, noting: ‘It was in the period around Easter time, so there were a lot of pictures in the newspapers of Jesus Christ. In those days Fritz Maierhofer often had long hair, a little beard and was very pale so he looked like Jesus Christ. And then and with great fun I made that piece, we took a photo and it came out in the local newspaper - it had a kind of title like ‘Here is the new Jesus!’, or something like that’. Gijs Bakker in conversation with the author, 16.05.2008.

xxxv Ralph Turner, Contemporary Jewellery, pp. 168.

xxxvi Stefania Macioce, Ori nell’Arte: per una storia del potere segreto delle gemme (Rome, 2007)

Warwick Freeman in conversation with the author via Skype 15.02.2011


This and associated issues, including the actual inclusion of photography as a material in jewellery and its role as a research aid, are extensively explored in chapter 2 of Liesbeth den Besten's *On Jewellery* (Stuttgart, 2011), pp. 33-45.

Christoph Zellweger via email to the author 11.12.2012

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1 Ted Noten via email to the author. 04.09.2012

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