Roberta Bernabei
Contemporary Jewellery

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Additional Information:

- This is an exhibition catalogue. This solo touring exhibition was hosted at the Italian Institute for Culture, Stockholm, May-October 2003 and Alternative Gallery, Rome, September-October 2003. 35 works were displayed that were the culmination of research investigating one of the fundamental aspects of the formal language of jewellery: the display of fiscally or sentimentally precious objects through ring settings, clasps, and lockets etc. This act was initially developed by instead setting various 'non-precious' objets-trouvés after which a process of subtraction prompted the discovery of intriguing 'memory spaces', i.e. the void left by the absent stone removed from the 'traditional' ring. A systematic study of these memory spaces was transposed to those spaces surrounding the body through an intuitive cataloguing of specimens, including the spaces surrounding the hands, feet, face, torso and between interlocked bodies. By analysing, limiting, and objectifying the presence of this absence the aim was to encourage a reading of the macrocosm to emerge from the microcosm. The latter was achieved by encapsulating a series of these memory spaces in cast transparent silicone forms, aided by alginate that recorded the original volume. These pieces of jewellery effectively reconsidered a primordial font of archaic methods of measurement, that is to say, the human body, to use its surrounding spaces as a parameter of measurement in objects that enable the wearer and observers to understand and reconsider the confines of their bodies and the surrounding world. The exhibition was accompanied by an illustrated 24 page catalogue with critical texts that contextualised the work by the art critic Bruno Cora - and Professor of Fine Art at the University of Gloucestershire, Dr Andrew Stonyer. The exhibition was reviewed in the Spanish Journal Arte y Joya (Spain) no. 156, pg 144-147 and in Next Exit. (Rome, Italy) September, p33. Laurenti, C.

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contemporary jewellery
ROBERTA BERNabei: UNA GIOIA EMBLEMATIZZATA

Il polso, il collo, la caviglia, le dita, ma anche altre preziose articolazioni del nostro corpo sono ‘luoghi’ per i quali Roberta Bernabei, immagina e realizza da alcuni anni le sue creazioni. Le quali, prima ancora di essere gioielli in virtù della loro congenita capacità di produrre stupore e dunque ammirazione e autentica soddisfazione e lievità per i sensi, sono elaborazioni plastiche di notevole qualità e autenticità.

Infatti, un aspetto del suo lavoro che mi ha subito colpito, sin dagli anni in cui ne potei seguire la promettente iniziazione allo studio dell'arte nell'Accademia di Perugia, è stato il piglio determinato e la passione ideativa. Quell'immaginazione che rendeva ‘preziosa’ ogni cosa che fosse caduta sotto il suo sguardo così ‘sognata’ trasformata o inclusa in una forma, le consentiva di giungere con grande immediatezza all’intuizione di un insieme, al suo concepimento e al suo disegno, prudendo alla realizzazione di un gioiello. Un particolare modo di immaginare qualsiasi piccolo residuo di materiale metallico o lìfico, qualsiasi elemento obsolete, decaduto, ormai abbandonato, recuperabile entro una forma che avrebbe avuto il giusto risalto se indossato. Inoltre, il suo modo di partire riflettendo, cioè immaginando la microscultura su di sé, le consentiva di pensandola e formarla con la più grande libertà.

Le cognizioni relative a tante forme storiche del monile, dell’oggetto prezioso di diverse epoche, non le impediscono le congiunzioni di quelle linee, di quei disegni e di quelle forme con le sue concezioni, onde ottenere nuovi organismi il cui carattere rivendicano così fortemente l’appartenenza al nostro tempo, come pure la consapevolezza di una tradizione da innovare.

Ma, la cosa più rilevante, e perciò elemento distintivo della sua arte da quella di altri pur bravi artisti orafi, è la proiezione di senso che ogni creazione possiede. [...] Le ‘cavigliere’ (fot. 1,2,3) e il ‘ciondolo’ della Bernabei, perciò, ancor prima di decorare parti così elette della figura femminile, suscitano nella nostra percezione un segnale eloquente e la voglia di carpire le ‘chiavi significative’. [...] È il caso di affermare che seppure la strada da percorrere per una giovane artista è lunga, il promettente inizio delle esperienze compiute fino ad oggi rivela che quell’estensione di tempo sarà teatro di un piacere in divenire, quello creativo, che Bernabei sa già cogliere oggi e trasformare in ‘gioia’ formalizzata.

Bruno Corà
Direttore Artistico
Centro per l’Arte Contemporanea ‘Luigi Pecci’ di Prato

July 1995

ROBERTA BERNabei: A SYMBOLISED GEM

The wrist, the neck, the ankle, the fingers but also other precious joints of our body, are the ‘places’ for which Roberta Bernabei has conceived and made her creations for several years. Even before becoming pieces of jewellery they were, due to their congenital ability to produce wonder and therefore admiration, authentic satisfaction and a lightness for the senses; plastic elaborations of remarkable quality and authenticity.

In fact, an aspect of her practice that immediately struck me from the time in which I could follow her promising initiation in the study of art at the Academy in Perugia, was her determined countenance and ideative passion. Her imagination, so disposed to dream, rendered ‘precious’ everything falling under her gaze by transforming or enclosing it in a form. This allowed her to arrive with great immediacy at an intuition of the ‘whole’, at its conception and design, the prelude to the realisation of a piece of jewellery. A particular way of imagining any small residue of metallic or lithic material, or any obsolete, declined and already abandoned element, recoverable in a form that would regain just prominence if worn. Furthermore, her way of starting working reflexively, that is to say by conceiving micro-sculptures on herself, permits her to think about her work and shape it with the greatest freedom.

A knowledge of the various historic forms of the jewel and the precious objects of diverse epochs does not prevent her from combining those lines, those drawings, and those forms with her conceptions in order to obtain new organisms whose characteristics make a strong claim to be of our time, in addition to recognising the traditions of innovation.

The most relevant and therefore distinctive element of her art, that which distinguishes it from other equally good artist jewelers, is the projection of sense that every creation possesses. [...] Consequently before the ‘ankles’ (photo 1,2,3) and ‘pendant’ by Bernabei decorate such select parts of the female body, they arouse in our perception an eloquent signal and wish to understand the ‘significant keys’. [...] It is the case to affirm that, even though the journey is long for a young artist, her promising beginning of accomplished experiences reveal that the continuance of time, will become an ever expanding theatre of creative pleasure; one that Bernabei already knows how to exploit and transform into a formalised ‘gem’.

Bruno Corà
Artistic Director
Centro per l’Arte Contemporanea ‘Luigi Pecci’, Prato, Italy

July 1995
rame, raso/copper, ribbon 1
argentoo/sterling silver 2
ferro, raso/iron, ribbon 3

cavigliere/ankle bracelets 1995

1

2

3
7 object, 2002: 8 particolare foto 9/detail of, 9 object, 2002

silicone, alginate 7
silicone, alginate 8
silicone, alginate 9
ROBERTA BERNABEI: A SCULPTURAL PERSPECTIVE

The work of Roberta Bernabei operates in that intriguing region between sculpture, and what is usually referred to as jewellery. At its most profound the latter can exceed the conventional expectations of the craft, and become more than a mere accoutrement to the human figure. By so doing it can enhance our understanding of the human form, and create original and poignant interpretations of its physical and psychological being. Bernabei's art does indeed offer us original and poignant interpretations of the human form. It is part of a distinctive lineage stretching back beyond prehistory, involving artefacts of gold and bronze that were made to be worn. Pre-eminent in this endeavour are the Mycenaeans. But although their architecture informs us about how they built their cities, it is the surviving artefacts they wore that give us deep insights into how they projected various psychological states, such as the readiness for combat; and how they envisaged and enhanced beauty, through the crafting of a necklace, or other forms of facial and bodily adornment. These artefacts also give us very accurate anthropometric information, relating to their size, weight and culturally prescriptive actions. The result of this is that although we will never be able to see these people, we can develop an informative picture of them through some of the artefacts they wore, we do this by filling in the spaces, as it were, that reside under and between these artefacts. This notion of the artefact relating to key aspects of our anatomy, can give us just enough information to construct the human figure, is of vital importance to Bernabei's work. Perhaps one way of describing how she presents her work would be to call the artefacts 'samples', they represent the essence of something much larger, which they enable our imagination to create. For instance 'Ice Ring' (photo 21) becomes an affirmation of the female hand, to which the finger is the key, the latter framed by the almost visceral and translucent quality of the surrounding ice. In works such as 'Object' (photo 8,9,18) the human body becomes the subject, and actual physical impressions of anatomical detail, are transposed into alginate; and then held in suspension by the surrounding silicone from which it seeks its release. Never obvious, always ineffably subtle. Roberta's creations are compelling, giving us deep insights into our physical and psychological being, its potency, and its vulnerability.

Andrew A Stonyer
Professor in Fine Art
University of Gloucestershire, UK

April 2003
RENDENDO LO SPAZIO INDOSSABILE

Lo spazio attorno al corpo umano e la sua trasformazione conseguenza del movimento della persona, nonché lo spazio generato tra corpi vicini, è l'oggetto delle mie attenzioni. Dalla memoria dell'aspetto estetico funzionale delle imponenti “linguette-griffes” situate lungo il perimetro degli indumenti di carta delle paper dolls, la loro analogia con il ruolo del castone nell'orficeria tradizionale, nasce la prima serie di lavori che vede proteggere e mostrare oggetti trovati. Un processo di sottrazione ed ecco la scoperta del fascino dello ‘spazio memoria’. Il suo studio sistematico, la sua intuitiva catalogazione, e la sua giustapposizione sono state trasportate sullo spazio che avvolge il corpo. Analizzare, limitare, oggettivare la presenza di queste assenze, combinandole con gli stati estremi della natura, affinché dal microcosmo possa emergere una nuova chiave di lettura per il macrocosmo. Creando così “datori di vita” per trasmettere protezione attraverso fragilità e solidità. Quei “datori di vita” di cui Lévi Strauss parla descrivendo i Boraboro del Brasile centrale: “Per loro, la vita è connotata dall'attività e dalla durezza, la morte dal rammollimento e dall'inerzia. [...] Gli ornamenti fanno diventare duro ciò che è molle: essi si sostituiscono a quelle parti del corpo che sono rivestite perché prefigurano la morte”. Il corpo umano primigenia fonte di arcaici metodi di misurazione, viene riconsiderato nel mio lavoro come parametro di decodifica, lettura dei confini del corpo e del mondo che ci circonda.

Roberta Bernabei

Maggio 2003

RENDERING SPACE WEARABLE

The focus of my attention is the space surrounding the human body and its transformations due to the body’s movement; in addition to those spaces generated by the proximity of multiple bodies. The memory of the aesthetic and functional aspects of the domineering claws situated around the perimeter of paper dolls, and their analogy to the role of settings in traditional silversmithing, inspired the series of works that protect and display objects found. A process of subtraction prompted the discovery of intriguing ‘memory spaces’. The systematic study of these memory spaces was transposed to those spaces surrounding the body through an intuitive cataloguing of specimens. Through the analysis, limiting, and objectification of the presence of this absence, and by combining it with extreme states of nature, the key to reading the macrocosm may emerge from the microcosm. By creating ‘life givers’ the intention is to transmit protection through fragility and solidity. ‘Life givers’ were described by Lévi-Strauss when writing about the Boraboro tribe of central Brazil: “For them, life is connoted with activity and hardness, and death with softness and inertia [...] Their ornaments make hard that which is soft so they substitute those reprehensible parts of their bodies that prefigure death.” By reconsidering that primordial font of archaic methods of measurement, that is to say, the human body. I use its surrounding spaces as a parameter of measurement in objects that enable the wearer and observers to understand and reconsider the confines of their bodies and the surrounding world.

Roberta Bernabei

May 2003

didascalie pagina centrale

10 Punto di Vita, medaglia, bronzo, 2003
11 cubi, silicone, 2002
12 spilla, silicone, rame, 2002
13 dettaglio foto 19
14 spilla, cioccolato, argento, silicone, 2002
15 finger space ring, cotone, 2003
16 spilla, capelli umani, cotone, plastica, 2003

photographic key to central pages

10 Punto di Vita, medal, bronze, 2003
11 cubes, silicone, 2002
12 brooch, silicone, copper, 2002
13 detail, photo 19
14 brooch, chocolate, sterling silver, silicone, 2002
15 finger space ring, cotton, 2003
16 brooch, human hair, cotton, plastic, 2003
BIOGRAFIA / BIOGRAPHY

FORMAZIONE/ EDUCATION

1982-88  Istituto Statale d’Arte, Sansepolcro, Italia
1990-91  Fachhochschule für Gestaltung, Schwäbisch-Gmünd, Germany
1988-93  BA (Hons) Sculpture, Accademia di Belle Arti, Perugia, Italia
2001-02  MA Metalwork and Jewellery, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

MOSTRE PERSONALI / SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1995      Sir Robert Young Gallery, Dean Clough Galleries, Halifax, UK
2000      Palazzo Pretorio, Sansepolcro
2003      Alternatives Contemporary Jewellery, Roma*
           Istituto Italiano di Cultura C.M. Lerici, Stockholm*

MOSTRE COLLETTIVE / GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1989      Young Italian Designers, Expo 89, Basel
1990      IV Biennale d’Arte Orafa, Museo Civico, Sansepolcro*
1992      On d’Arte, Galleria ‘La Roggia’, Pordenone*
1992      Affinità Centrifughe, Palazzo della Penna, Perugia*
1994      Variante Plastiche, Galleria Moretti, Deruta*
           Le bijou en 3 temps, Atelier Chéret AAM, Paris
           Applied Arts Centre Design Yard, Dublin
1996      Art in Progress, Anya von Gosseln Gallery, Dublin
1999      Contemporary Jewellery, Design Yard, Dublin
1999      Radicequadrafaditè, Atelier d’Arte, Roma
2000      Manschettenknöpfe, Schmuckwerkstatt Galerie, Berlin
2000      Papier, Museum für Kunst und Gewerb, Hamburg
2001      Hilde Leiss Galerie, Hamburg
2001      The Arts Institute at Bournemouth, Poole
           L’immagine del Gioiello, Alternatives Contemporary Jewellery, Roma*
2002      A2AA, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham
2003      Sheffield Design Works, SHU Gallery, Sheffield
           New Designers, Business Design Centre, London
           Open Sculpture, Royal West of England Academy, Bristol*

* catalogo / catalogue

PREMI / PRIZES

1987-88  Premio Moreno Ballerini, Sansepolcro
          Premio S.Figlio, Arezzo
1988      III Mostra del Corallo, Torre del Greco
1992      Borsa di studio Comunità Europea / EC Scholarship
2002      Armours and Brasiers Award, Sheffield
2003      Pangolin Editions Casting Prize, Open Sculpture, RWA, Bristol

DOCENZE / LECTURING

1995-     Docente di Storia del Gioiello Contemporaneo,
           Le Arti Orafe, Firenze
2002      Guest Lectures, Sculpture,
           University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham
2002-3    Visiting Lecturer, Metalwork and Jewellery,
           Sheffield Hallam University
2003      Guest Lecturer, Metalwork and Jewellery,
           Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, High Wycombe
           Visiting Lecturer, Metalwork and Jewellery,
           De Montfort University, Leicester

SITO INTERNET / WEB SITE

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