Introduction [Contemporary Jewellers Interviews with European Artists]

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Introduction

The introduction aims to distinguish the objects we now refer to as contemporary jewellery from past examples of the medium. This entails clarifying some of the key characteristics of contemporary jewellery’s approach to function, content and materials. These characteristics have then been used to distil the practice, ideas and philosophy of twenty-five of the most prominent European contemporary jewellers through the interview format. However, in order to understand what contemporary jewellery might be and its history, it is useful to commence by exploring the broader history of jewellery and how and why it came into being. Therefore, the first section of the introduction explores why humans have chosen to decorate their bodies with jewellery, whereas the second part focuses on a contextual and historical analysis of its production. Given the geographical locations of the participant jewellers, these discussions predominantly centre on the history of European practice. This is not however intended to diminish the role and influence of non-European and non-Western practice on the development of the jewellery language.

Decorating the Body

Without the curiosity, desire or need to decorate the body, jewellery would simply not exist. So, the original human act of placing some kind of pigment or object onto the body gave birth to jewellery. Beyond the initial curiosity of playful experimentation, the early motives prompting human adornment may well have entailed self-embellishment for its own sake or perhaps even to help procure a partner. Other innate reasons become manifest at an early age; it is possible to observe in very young children their joy whilst creating impromptu bracelets by inserting their hands into open objects. They appear to enjoy the sensory pleasure of how the object moves when they move, its balance and momentum and the sensations it induces on the body. These reasons for body decoration extend into adulthood where sensual pleasure and embellishment combine with the role of communication.

Alongside the personal stimuli for wearing jewellery, an altogether more public, contextual and functional set of reasons have evolved whereby jewellery is explicitly about the transmission of meaning. Certain kinds of jewellery have conferred status; declared fidelity and betrothal; or manifested faith and belonging. In all these cases, the jewellery can set up expectations on both the wearer and observer of how they should respond. Accordingly, if the act of wearing jewellery can change us in some way, it then follows that through this act of adornment we also contribute to a transformation, subtle or otherwise, of the meaning carried by the object. This relationship becomes increasingly sophisticated in proportion to the intricacy and complexity of the communicative role that one demands of the piece of jewellery. Therefore, a symbiotic relationship between object, wearer and observer exists.

Evidently, throughout human civilisation and beyond, many reasons for wearing jewellery have developed, but when did this instinct commence? Current research supports an extremely long history dating back tens of millennia. In 2005, three ancient shell beads were found in two different locations; two at the Skhul Cave in Israel and one at a site in Oued Djebbana, Algeria. Each of the mollusc shells was pierced with a small hole to enable them, it is supposed, to be threaded into a necklace or bracelet. Analysis of fossils found in the same rock strata indicates a chronology of between 100,000 and 135,000 years BC. This suggests that jewellery’s nascent function and meaning is timeless.

As human civilisation gathered momentum a documented history began to emerge and can now shed light on the function and social significance of early jewellery. Generally, the latter has remained steadfast for centuries; with ongoing examples including the engagement and wedding ring and their service to betrothal. Other somewhat less venerable examples now include the ubiquitous diamond stud on the pop star or footballer’s ear lobe. Yet, the latter is not so far removed from how ancient Roman gold rings glorified the wearer by confirming their status and power in society. For instance, in
the late third century AD the right to wear gold rings was reserved for certain classes of citizens such as senators and knights, and not simply determined by one’s financial ability to purchase.3

Roman jewellery was not only inspired by symbolism and status, other more pragmatic functions existed including the key ring. It was a practical solution for securing one’s keys; a tricky problem given togas had no pockets. Fashioned from bronze or iron, they enabled the wearer to access store rooms and strongboxes. Placing the key on the finger meant access was immediate and security was kept safe at hand. Jewellery has also protected wealth by serving as an investment; however the invention and broad dispersion of coinage eroded this function.4 Perhaps the most lasting Roman heritage is the engagement ring, which as Shirley Bury observes, marked a shift in thinking whereby; “gold rings came into increasing use not only as symbols of status and as seal-rings, but as tokens of betrothal.”5

Whilst the betrothal ring was a Roman invention, using a ring to confirm one’s identity is believed to have originated in Mesopotamia, prior to widespread adoption by the ancient Egyptians.6 Seal-rings invariably consisted of a metal band holding a metal, stone or shell form on top, into which a moniker, symbol or image specific to the wearer was engraved or carved. These could then be used to sign and validate documents by mono printing or impressing them into clay tablets or soft wax. In other words, they stood for, and attested to, identity. Seal-rings became widespread in ancient Egyptian society, and were often engraved with scarabs that had a dual function of amulet and signet. Later, in Roman society they could also represent symbolic allegiances to aristocratic identity, and therefore bear a likeness of someone other than the wearer.7

Roman rings often signified the power of status; however, other pieces of jewellery ascribed higher powers. Certain jewels that included emeralds, rubies, sapphires and diamonds amongst others, were believed to have religious, spiritual or even magical powers that fortified the wearer.8 In this way, adornment exceeded mere decoration in favour of talismanic protection. For example, in traditional Italian jewellery, amulets containing red coral served this purpose, and even now the practice of protecting the newborn with gold and red coral jewellery continues.9 Alongside the more spiritual and quasi mystical manifestations, jewellery has also emblemised the teachings of religion. Since Christendom, biblical inscriptions have been engraved into jewellery to protect people, or in the case of Memento Mori, to remind them of the precious brevity of life, and the inevitable day of judgement.10

There are therefore a broad range of reasons for wearing jewellery ranging from the socially complex to the purely decorative, from the talismanic to the commemorative, from investment to communication etc. Some of these reasons seem innate and others have developed due to social conditions. Certain motives are public and others private, but what remains consistent is the human desire to change or reaffirm appearance, identity, perceptions, expectations, behaviour and feelings through the use of objects that decorate the body.

Jewellery as personal expression

For jewellery to exist, someone has to create it; be it through the selection and adoption of a found object or entirely from scratch. This section of the introduction is therefore concerned with the realm of the maker and the potential for self-expression through jewellery. I contend the latter is one of the defining characteristics of contemporary jewellery and the following text therefore charts the history of makers in developing their creative identities. Central to this development was the recognition that the act of conceiving jewellery could be a distinct phase, separate from its subsequent manufacture. The factors contributing to this are complex and intertwined, and their occurrence over many centuries clouds matters further. One of the first catalysts of change was drawing, which became a vehicle for the artist’s thoughts, a guide for craftsman and a means to communicate with any commissioner.
Drawing

During the Renaissance, drawing became an important research tool that aided understanding in science, as well as the arts. Its effect on jewellery led to developments in form generation, style and the juxtaposition of materials; thereby expanding the confines of the language.

The subsequent invention of the printing press was similarly influential because it enabled a broad disseminating of jewellery designs through print. The latter provided a stable and portable means of cataloguing designs, which were then collated into pattern books that formalised preconceived actions and individuated distinctly personal styles. No doubt previous makers had given consideration to what they might make before picking up their tools, but these engravings bear first witness to what we would recognise today as evidence of a design process. In other words, a distinction between the thinking of planning and the action of making jewellery. A contention further supported by the recorded appearance of known designers throughout Europe, including Hans Colleart, John Hayward, Erasmus Hornick, Daniel Mignot, Jakob Mores, Virgil Solis and Pierre Woeiriot; alongside artists such as Albrecht Dürer, Hans Holbein the Younger, Hans Mülich and Giulio Romano, who also produced some designs for jewellery that are still in existence.

Named Designers

An artist who consistently produced jewellery design of the highest calibre was Hans Holbein the Younger. His rendered designs were not those of the dilettante who lacks practical insight into the implications of actually producing the works. Quite the opposite according to Hackenbroch, who maintains his drawings, “show Holbein’s complete understanding of the nature of precious materials and their handling.” So much so that during his life his designs became popular with a number of London based jewellers including Hans of Antwerp, Cornelis Hayes and Peter Richardson.

Holbein was first and foremost a painter, and whilst it is difficult to establish the precise influence of painting on his design process some osmosis evidently occurred between Holbein’s documentation of existing pieces, his designs for fabrication and the jewels he sometimes invented to personalise a sitter’s portrait. Intriguingly, the challenges of downsizing from large scale portraiture to the micro dimensions and fine detailing required for jewellery would not have unduly perplexed Holbein, who being an accomplished miniaturist was capable of exquisite circular portraits not exceeding 5.5cm in diameter. Indeed, perhaps operating within such limited spaces influenced the reductive nature of Holbein’s jewellery designs, which are often characterised by elemental linear arabesques that sinuously twirl around a small number of stones, set in regular patterns, as in Fig. 1. In fact, his abstract designs might be described as compositionally compact, restrained and devoid of overtly decorative elements. Holbein evidently preferred to give prominence to the cut stones in their own right rather than making them the servants of narrative, as Erasmus Hornick did in his designs.
One of the most prolific designers of jewellery was Erasmus Hornick, who originated from Antwerp, but operated a workshop in southern Germany for many years. He published pattern books in 1562 and 1565, in which his pendant designs regularly featured asymmetric structures with human figures at the centre, all circumscribed by an architectonic framework, as in Fig. 2. The sides of the designs are limited by two columns, which are often adorned by precious faceted stones, as in the pendant in the style of Hornick, Plate 2. Stylistically, the designs are dense and geometrically complex, and may therefore be considered early forbearers of Baroque decoration. Through this complex geometry, Hornick sought to balance all the elements into harmonious compositions whose figurative content was derived from the designer’s knowledge of mythology, literature, religion and science. This was significant because it meant the work could not be effectively improvised during its production, but was instead preconceived and driven by the intellect. In other words, it was a reassertion of the ‘storytelling’ that had previously featured in Classical and Roman jewellery, though with Hornick the narrative was conceptually formalised through drawing, before the making commenced: the mind, therefore preceded the hand.

In conceiving his designs, Hornick influenced the realisation of jewellery by the manner in which he deconstructed them into constituent components. Whilst the architectural framework was almost a structural given, the inner content could be personalised according to the client’s desires. In some ways, this might be considered a precursor to the Industrial Revolution, where objects were produced in series, with the possibility of interchangeable parts.

The aforementioned deconstruction of designs through drawing was taken further by Hornick’s production and use of lead patterns, similar examples of which can be seen in Fig. 3 and 4. These were either for complete works or parts such as pendant surrounds. The latter allowed greater input from the end user, because they could be moulded and recast enabling additional modifications, or simply used in their original form if so desired. Interestingly, working from one of Hornick’s drawn designs still required a very high level of craftsmanship, whereas the use of a three dimensional pattern slightly reduced the required virtuosity because the base structure and its geometry was pre-established. In other words, the design possibilities during manufacture were reduced. In addition,
the introduction of lead patterns around this time may have conceptually devalued the act of making, and by consequence increased the kudos and control ascribed to the originating designer.

Fig. 3
Maker Unknown
Jewellery Pattern
Late 16th C
Lead
Germany

Fig. 4
Maker Unknown
Jewellery Pattern
Late 16th C
Lead
Germany

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In Germany, towards the end of the sixteenth century, a new approach to pendant design emerged that lessened the influence of Hornick’s architectural motifs. Instead, lighter, spacious and more structurally open designs were championed by designers such as Daniel Mignot.20 This reduction in physical mass may have been in part due to economic conditions that required materials be used more judiciously. Alternatively, experiments in drawing may have influenced the creation of the scrolling openwork jewellery, typified by linear explorations of objects in silhouette, all overlaying tendril-like linear patterns. Certainly, these designs would have enabled a relatively speedy translation from drawing to object, because the planar base of the pendant could almost be cut out of metal sheet or formed independently, using the drawing as a direct template. Afterwards, any three dimensional figures could then be screwed in, to complete the composition. An example of this nimble touch and weightless suggestion of volume, can be observed in Mignot’s design for Pendants, Medallions and Studs, 1593, Fig. 5. Whereas, the rear of Cupid Drawing an Arrow, C. 1600, a brooch in the style of Mignot, confirms the immediacy of transforming this kind of drawing into jewellery, Fig. 6.

Fig. 5
Daniel Mignot
Pendants, Medallions and Studs
1593
Engraving

Fig. 6
Daniel Mignot (in the style of)
Cupid Drawing an Arrow (rear)
C. 1600
Enamelled gold, rubies, pearls
Pendant
Southern Germany

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The exploration of open skeletal structures may have emerged through drawing; most probably through printmaking because the sharp points of engraving tools would have inevitably lent themselves to the articulation of line. Further parallels between print and jewellery making can be identified, primarily through their shared use of engraving. Indeed, the technical skill required to achieve certain imagery would be virtually identical irrespective of whether engraving plate for printing purposes or the metal surface of a piece of jewellery. An example of this is Virgil Solis’s design for pendants bearing a linear arabesque pattern, Fig. 7. In this case, one could envisage the means of creating the design, the engraved printing plate, actually becoming the work itself.

Fig. 7
Virgil Solis
Two Pendants with Arabesque Ornament
1530-1562
Engraving

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Pattern Books

If drawing was becoming an important part of the jewellery making process, then the emergence of pattern books gave currency to the cult of personality. Pattern books were a drawn synthesis of a given designer’s taste in jewellery; tantamount to a manifesto of their aesthetics, sensitivity towards materials and technical preferences. Consequently, they could also be devices for self promotion. For instance, according to Yvonne Hackenbroch, the jewellery designer Jakob Mores sent his sons from Germany to Sweden and Denmark to solicit new commissions based on his designs from 1593 – 1608; which were included in his book, Das Kleinodienbuch des Jakob Mores. Pattern books therefore facilitated the commissioning process, whilst also accelerating the role of jewellery trader; a forerunner to the modern day gallery owner. Some of these traders even speculated by commissioning designs themselves, primarily as it was a cheaper and more secure alternative to keeping large stocks of actual jewellery.

The drawings of Mores present an interesting case because some of his designs were rendered in colour; this obviously indicated to the maker the colour of stones to be used in each piece. By contrast, jewellery designs made through engraving were monochrome and could therefore only prescribe form, proportion and surface decoration. Consequently, this left some scope for selecting materials and the colour of stones, whereas strict adherence to Mores’s drawings would have
meant the complete relinquishment of any choices during the making process. The completeness of the designs, as in Plate 1, gives them currency as conceptual substitutes for jewellery, whereby the draughtsmanship is sufficiently adept to make them valued as works of art in their own right. The latter is important because it gives added impetus to the distinction between conceiving jewellery and the act of its making.

The vibrant qualities of Mores’s chromatic drawings are indicative of the potential lustre and luminosity of metals and stones. The fact they remain appealing now, and indeed must surely have seemed even more striking in their day, derives from their lifelike portrayal. The potential for drawing to be a believable substitute for reality had already been aided by Piero della Francesca’s invention of perspective and its subsequent diffusion. The illusory projection of three dimensional space could aid communication between any commissioner and the chosen craftsman, enabling design developments during the process of making. In fact, the importance of drawing is recognised by Cellini’s discussions about a potential commission for a medal, recording how Michelangelo said, “I will gladly sketch you something; but meanwhile speak to Benevuto; and let him also make a model; he can then execute the better of the two designs”.24

During the sixteenth century it already seemed accepted that a drawing was a complete entity, which could instruct how to complete a work. In other words, drawing became analogous with the process of making and thus evidence of the distinction between the act of conceiving an artefact and its subsequent execution. This meant that one person could design a jewel and another could manufacture it. Confirmation is again provided by Cellini, this time in the introduction to his treatise on goldsmithing techniques where he discusses the attributes of his various contemporaries. One such individual was Antonio Pollaiolo, of whom Cellini noted how he, “was likewise a goldsmith, and a draughtsman too of such skill, that not only did all the goldsmiths make use of his excellent designs, but the sculptors and painters of the first rank also, and gained honour by them… This man did little else besides his admirable drawing.”25

This multiplicity of roles in the creative process had advantages and disadvantages for the emergence of self-expression in jewellery. From a positive perspective liberation from making meant that the designer was no longer necessarily inhibited by the extent of their own manual dexterity, but were instead free to lay down extravagant and complicated challenges to the eventual makers. As John Haywood suggests, Virgil Solis, “understood the needs of the goldsmith, and also how to tempt him to practice a surprising variety of techniques and to adopt new patterns.”26 Naturally, there were also disadvantages from this division; mainly that makers might have become fabricators who just copied with little or no artistic input. So much so that we now have antique jewellery from this period that is not identifiable in relation to a particular country or school, let alone an individual. The stylistic homogenisation of jewellery was further encouraged by the standardisation of skills sought by the guilds.

**Guilds**

Whilst the advent of pattern books may have aided the burgeoning development of the jewellery language, an opposing force had sought its restriction. The inception of guilds throughout Europe gained precedence until the fifteenth century when their influence increasingly began to promote the homogenisation of style and this inevitably had repressive consequences on the possibilities for personal expression in jewellery.27 The guilds sought to protect members’ rights through monopoly; however, enrolment also carried responsibilities to conform to both technical and assay standards and relatively uniform aesthetics. The latter meant individual nuances were generally unwelcome and therefore any distinction between artist and artisan was also considered undesirable.

During the Renaissance, goldsmiths in Italy came under the auspices of the silk guild, together with practitioners of gold beating and gold thread making. Members underwent long apprenticeships which included training in multiple workshops, all organised by the guild to diffuse and guarantee technical skills. Progression would have required conformation to the guild’s standards, which
probably discouraged self-expression. Existence of the latter would have made an equitable
distribution of work around the various workshops that much harder. To this end, guilds also limited
the number of apprentices or journeymen a master might employ to control the quantity of work they
could take on.

Counter to the guilds' stranglehold on style were alternate voices such as Cellini, who argued that
practitioners should possess intellectual and theoretical competences, as well as the customary
manual abilities.28 The desirability of this dual capacity seems borne out by the apprentice jewellers
who eventually became painters or sculptors of note, such as Andrea del Verrocchio and Lorenzo
Ghiberti.

Cellini further distinguished himself by ignoring the jealous guarding, prevalent to his age, of the
secret knowledge of goldsmithing, which was normally restricted to familial relationships. Instead, he
openly described the intricacies of his technical expertise, perhaps admittedly for purposes of self-
aggrandisement. However, the publication of this knowledge in a lengthy treatise on goldsmithing
techniques,29 whether altruistic or not, signified a relinquishment of technique as the prime value of
artistic merit. Perhaps, by revealing everything about the ‘how’, might Cellini have been asserting that
the creative driving force behind an artefact was the will and vision of the individual? Were this to be
the case, it would have been another important step towards contemporary practice, where jewellery
becomes a vehicle for self-expression.

As well as setting out his stall as a major theoretician, Cellini was a gifted virtuoso maker who
according to John Hayward, introduced, “conceptions that are fundamental to Mannerist philosophy:
the duty of the artist to express noble and beautiful ideas, the importance of the conception
(concetto) underlying the work.”30 Naturally, the latter is most important to the subsequent evolution
of contemporary jewellery, though Cellini’s vision had to wait almost two hundred years to be realised
with the industrialisation of Europe, which brought the next groundbreaking developments.

The Seventeenth Century

In the meantime, the wider dispersion of pattern books throughout Europe continued apace in the
seventeenth century. This meant that a given style of jewellery could simultaneously become diffuse
in many countries, leading to a greater homogenisation in the production of jewellery. This did
however, spread the work and influence of the originating designer. One example of this was the
diffusion of the floral style schotenwerk, which was first documented in 1621 by the Strasburg
jeweller Peter Symony.31 The style originated in the low countries, having developed out of tulip-
mania, but spread far beyond these geographical borders. Overall, pattern books became a visual
story of the evolution of design and showed how jewellery had become ever more abstracted from
the source of its inspiration, as in the 1626 designs for jewellery by Balthasar Lemercier.32 Even then,
as now, these books would have provided a research tool for the study of jewellery, which in effect
gave impetus to the medium and its history.

In contrast to this reduction in variety, was the continued existence of popular traditional and folk
jewellery. The individuality of those items became stronger through the significance of their cultural
identity, the latter fortifying their continued existence.

The Industrial Revolution

As with most trades, the advent of the Industrial Revolution influenced the production of jewellery in
Northern Europe. The changes were initially most acute in Britain, beginning from the mid-eighteenth
century and subsequently affecting manufacturing in France and beyond. The primary change was of
course mechanised production, which enabled the mass production of jewellery. Combined with new
techniques and the incorporation of hitherto unused materials, it assisted the boundaries of jewellery
to rapidly expand. These developments were accelerated by the emergence of a middle class with
disposable income; keen to purchase the latest fashions of what became known as costume
jewellery. The latter marked a significant shift in the values ascribed to jewellery from symbolic,
economic or functional towards qualities more readily associated with fashion.
Whilst the transition towards aesthetics denoting value was a major shift in thinking, it was less likely to have incorporated self-expression. This was mainly because early machines were fairly rudimentary, requiring designs to be conceived accordingly. Therefore, any drawing had to be readable by the pattern maker or engineer and consequently explicit in form and dimensions. So, even though aesthetics had become one arbiter of value, it remained at the service of the machine. This stricture would no doubt have been enthusiastically enforced by the industrialist keen to ensure the efficacy of his workshop machinery. Design and its communication through drawing had to foresee and accommodate technical problems, both to minimise losses during production and to enable speedy manufacture. Inevitably, this resulted in some regression in the general virtuosity of craft artefacts.

Another development that could be perceived negatively was that unlike handicraft production, with the machine there would have been little or no opportunity for intuition and chance to intervene in the shaping of the finished object. What emerged was absolutely preordained during the design process, cementing the distinction between the design and manufacturing phases that had begun with Renaissance pattern books. An early example occurred in the 1750s, when the invention of transfer-printing was embedded into enamelling. Some of the resulting jewellery and trinkets are still known as Bilston enamel after the Midlands town in England, which became a centre of production. The photographic reproduction of the source image meant that brushstrokes and the signs of the hand with all its warmth and idiosyncrasies were eliminated. Consider for example the chatelaine in Fig. 8, where the quality of enamelled image is pristine to the point of perhaps being soulless. Intriguingly, it is a decorated ornament, but not decorative. In fact, chatelaines were waist hung objects that contained a range of tools often including bodkins, tweezers, knives, nail files, toothpicks and other assorted sewing or grooming implements. These complex and functional assemblies were effectively tantamount to modern day Swiss army knives or travel sewing kits.

Fig. 8
Chatelaine
1760
South Staffordshire Enamel

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**Material Developments**

The increasing mechanisation of many jewellery techniques broadened the range of materials available to jewellers and the ways in which they could be used. The most notable innovations included both cast and cut steel and the increasingly sophisticated application of glass paste stones in costume jewellery. This may have led to a kind of jewellery that I describe as having ‘metaphorical value’, whereby the metaphor was not sustained by a narrative or figurative equivalent, but rather
stood in for a more precious material. Consequently, it signalled a re-democratisation towards jewellery’s earliest origins.

One example of this metaphorical jewellery aimed to simulate precious cut stones using highly polished faceted steel. Attempts to replicate the visual qualities of diamonds and their response to light were central to this form of jewellery, which responded to the prevalent taste for diamonds in courtly jewellery during the eighteenth century. Commonly referred to as cut steel jewellery, it was inspired by the use of marcasite to substitute diamonds. Mechanisation greatly speeded its manufacture and enabled this hard alloy to be worked with surprising dexterity; as can be seen in the glinting and bejewelled head of the pin in Fig. 9. The designers of these pieces deliberately attempted to enable their steel jewels to sparkle brightly, thereby appearing to trap light in a similar way to diamonds. This dazzling effect was achieved by firstly cutting crude facets at varying angles, and then polishing the steel heads to a high sheen. This process, along with the close packing of multiple heads, meant that light could be directly reflected back to the observer or wearer from a variety of viewpoints; a phenomenon much enhanced by the movement of either party.

Fig. 9
Hat Pin (detail)
1700s
Cut Steel
 Probably Wolverhampton, UK

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The development of cut steel jewellery was aided substantially by advancing mechanisation. For example, according to Clare Phillips, the Birmingham firm of Matthew Boulton was the first to use steam power to drive the polishing machines in the 1770s. Boulton was a new breed of design entrepreneur and industrialist, and the title he gave to his centre of production in Handsworth, Birmingham around 1765, gives an indication of the scale and ambition of his enterprise: namely, the Soho Manufactory. Its professionalism was mirrored in the extensive pattern books developed over decades by the firm’s designers. The delicate and beautiful drawings in these books, give valuable insight into the preconceived design of objects; as well as the consequences of the separation of hand and mind. The designs for jewellery often included indications for the plethora of steel ‘gems’ to be used to decorate a piece, as can be seen in the brooches, buckles, buttons and pommels in Fig. 10. Boulton eagerly sought innovation to help refine his manufacturing processes, including those for jewellery. Whilst the steel ‘gemstones’ were initially produced individually, subsequent developments in machinery meant that multiple runs of heads could be produced in batches, thereby eliminating the laborious need for individually fixed rivets. This obviously accelerated the mass production of jewellery.
A second example of ‘metaphorical value’ in jewellery involved the reintroduction of glass, albeit in a much more sophisticated manifestation than its previous incarnations. Glass had previously featured in Roman and Anglo-Saxon jewellery as threaded beads, but the type developed by George Frédéric Stras was particularly hard and therefore receptive to faceting and polishing.38 This meant it could imitate the brilliance of precious stones and take the sophisticated cuts used on diamonds, all at a relatively low cost. Machine cutting meant that glass stones of regular form and consistent dimensions could be produced in large quantities, thereby providing real choices that consequently accelerated jewellery design as a profession. Indeed, according to Judith Miller, in France, “by the 1760s over 300 jewellers and designers belonged to the guild of faux jewellers.”39

Additionally, the mechanised production of glass paste stones at an industrial level reduced costs through economies of scale, with the result that this jewellery became affordable to a larger proportion of the population, especially the burgeoning and relatively wealthy middle classes. Of course, luxurious jewellery of the highest quality continued, as did symbolic jewellery that celebrated birth, baptism, marriage or marked acts of heroism, and ultimately death. Intriguingly, their continued existence partly liberated costume jewellery from fiscal, symbolic or investment responsibilities. This jewellery could be entirely for decorative purposes and the embellishment of one’s appearance. With increases in consumer spending, designs could be updated more frequently, meaning costume jewellery became associated with fashion and clothing. The high turnover of designs and reduced expectation that the finished pieces should last a lifetime, helped liberate designers, encouraging them to be more experimental and extravagant.

Another relatively affordable material that was commandeered for the purposes of jewellery was iron. Berlin iron jewellery sought to replicate the geometry and qualities of one medium with another material: in this case, using cast iron filigree to simulate lace. The designs took inspiration from sources including architectural tracery, fruits, flowers and cameos. The delicacy, intricacy and sophistication of the resulting lattice designs meant that in order to successfully sand cast them the designer had to foresee the eventual placement of runners and risers and to moderate their designs accordingly to ensure the molten metal would flow throughout the mould.40 Subsequently, the sand cast components could be mechanically assembled and varying juxtapositions of parts could be made.41 This sophisticated production elevated a relatively cheap material through technical mastery and the design process. This enabled the designs and artefacts of individual designers such as, Siméon Pierre Devaranne and Johann Conrad Geiss to become fairly widespread. Works such as Geiss’s bracelet from about 1820 - 1830, Fig. 11, demonstrate the proficiency of casting that had been achieved and the effects resulting from combining voluminous forms and more delicate filigree elements. The willingness to pursue hitherto unseen designs in unusual materials through Berlin iron and cut steel jewellery, may partially have derived from their evolution from existing trades and the involvement of skilled craftspeople who were not originally trained as jewellers.
As previously indicated, the invention of costume and steel jewellery marked a shift in thinking whereby the value of a piece was not exclusively defined in monetary terms. Rather, it subtly shifted to the veracity of the simulation of using one material to stand in for another, which therefore meant value was partially defined by what was done to a material. The production of, what I describe as, ‘eye candy fakes’ was also accompanied by events that almost seem like antecedents for the contemporary use of so called poor materials. A case in point was that of the renowned Berlin iron jewellery issued in Germany between 1813 and 1815. The Prussian royal family beseeched their subjects to surrender their gold jewellery to fund the uprising against Napoleon’s occupation. Donations were met with exchanges of iron jewellery, sometimes inscribed on the back with Gold gab ich für Eisen (I gave gold for iron). Filigree iron pieces were transformed into symbols of loyalty and patriotism through their connection with gold. Similar looting of golden heirlooms has undoubtedly persisted throughout history, but perhaps not without anything quite so symbolic given in return.

The Industrial Revolution obviously laid down vital foundations for contemporary jewellery by giving authority to jewellery design. What began centuries earlier with the emergence of pattern books was fortified by the advent of mechanisation, whereby the machine stood in for the human act of making in the distinction between mind and hand. The potential for design to blossom was also greatly accelerated by the mechanical production of a huge range of glass paste stones and the invention of the gold substitute, Pinchbeck. These technological developments continued through the nineteenth century, further increasing possibilities through electro-plating, jet; a black glass enamel and Parian Ware; a type of mouldable porcelain. It was also a period in which mechanised production meant it became advantageous to reinvigorate antique techniques such as filigree. The latter for example, meant that large quantities of voluminous and visually heavy gold jewellery could be produced quickly and from relatively small quantities of gold.

The consequences of these technological developments were widely disseminated throughout Europe through the growth of international expositions in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Notable amongst these were of course London’s Great Exhibition of 1851, followed by the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1867. These events provided a showcase for the promotion of new materials, forms and techniques across a broad range of crafts, design and industries; promoting new typologies such as mourning jewellery, initiating intercontinental trade and further validating mechanised production. Notwithstanding these developments and the advances they brought in jewellery, the initial fascination and wonder for non-handmade ‘authorless’ products eventually led to concerns relating to authorship and ultimately rejection by some critics and makers, including John Ruskin and William Morris, followed by the protagonists of Art Nouveau.
René Lalique

One reaction against the perceived lack of humanity of mechanised production in comparison to lovingly hand crafted artefacts was heralded by Art Nouveau in the 1880s. Its protagonists sought to elevate the decorative arts through a mastery of hand techniques. The jewellery of its leading light René Lalique was for instance the antithesis of the mass produced, and was instead the pinnacle of handmade and exclusive luxury. Lalique excelled by uniting traditional goldsmithing with glass elements to incorporate translucency and light into fantasies of his personal virtuosity. The sinuous whiplash lines in his jewellery are symbolic of his visual language, which constituted the personal expression not of socio-political or autobiographical signifiers, but aesthetic preferences.

1920s and 1930s

In the late 1920s and early 1930s several jewellers in France including Gerard Sandoz, Raymond Templier and Jean Després evolved distinctly personal styles. Sandoz was particularly intriguing because he represented a new figure in jewellery: a champion that not only made jewellery, but also undertook research, created manifestos and wrote about its production. Admittedly, centuries earlier, Theophilus Presbyter and Cellini had written treatises on goldsmithing, however these focused on technique and the ‘how’, whereas Sandoz was more concerned with context and the social role of jewellery. One of his contentions about the value of materials effectively pre-empt one of contemporary jewellery’s core principles; namely, that the object as an entity should guide the selection of its materials, rather than any canonical or economic prejudices. Sandoz wrote forthrightly on this matter in 1929, stating, “let us have no preconceptions as to materials. Personally, I consider that before everything else, one must think of the line and the general volume of the piece of jewellery to be created.” This is mirrored in a broader context by the manifesto of Uniones Artistes Moderne, a group of jewellery artists who counted Sandoz amongst their founding members, in which they asserted that, “a beautiful material is not necessarily rare or precious. It is above all a material whose natural qualities or whose adaptability to industrial processes are pleasing to the eye and to the touch, and whose value derives from judicious use.” In other words, the value of jewellery could derive from the actions of a sensitive maker, irrespective of any intrinsic material worth.

Examining Jean Després’s jewellery, it seems he too, shared Sandoz’s opinion because the constituent materials appear to have been selected for their chromatic values and the compositional relationships they could establish. Després departed from the floral and curvilinear influences of Art Nouveau, inspired instead by his mechanical past as an aeroplane designer. The allusion to cogs, gears and other machine parts can be self evident, as in the Crankshaft brooch of 1930, Fig. 12, which features an asymmetric design atop a pitted surface that is synonymous with sand cast engine parts.
One final figure of note during this period was the jeweller Naum Slutzky, who had worked in the precious metals workshop at the Bauhaus. The influence of Bauhaus design ideology is evident in the lack of ornamentation in his elemental pieces, which are often typified by movable parts. Central to Slutzky’s innovation was his virtually unprecedented use of materials such as chromium plated or silver plated base metals. Aesthetically, his work seems synonymous with industrial units or prefabricated parts, where the repetition of an industrial tubular unit results in a refined and simple composition. This effect is visible in Slutzky’s 1930 necklace, Fig. 13, where the simple geometry of the orthogonal pendant contrasts the angularity of its chain.

Intriguingly, Slutzky’s jewellery would seem to be acutely affected by being worn or not. So much so that dual states exist: when disconnected from the body it may seem cold and somehow jagged, yet this seemingly harsh appearance is softened by contact with the body. In fact, it actually provokes a dynamic contrast between the sinuosity of the body and the geometric rigidity of Slutzky’s work. Much in the same way as a Renaissance grid provides a harmonic counterbalance between curve and orthogonal geometry; the straight, zigzag and dotted lines of Slutzky’s work overlay the body’s fluid curvature. Whether simply a by-product of his fascination for the geometric and mechanical, or specifically intended, Slutzky produced pieces indicative of a jeweller concerned with corporeal relationships and how jewellery could shape them meaningfully. The latter is indicative of certain types of contemporary jewellery that followed.

What unites these jewellers is how their work seems to reflect the broader context of its time of manufacture. The movement of line and resultant geometry is dynamic and complements the accelerating velocity that permeated life in the machine age. However, whilst the imbuing of social resonance is another step towards the expressive ethos of contemporary jewellery, these pieces still appear conditioned by traditional precepts of what beautiful jewellery should be.
Post War Developments

The following section of the introduction explores the history of jewellery after the Second World War, prior to discussing how the jewellery practice that is generally considered to be ‘contemporary’ emerged from the rebuilding of Europe. Inevitably, the ravages inflicted by the war affected all aspects of society and creative production within it. Whilst the resurrection of physical infrastructures could be initiated almost immediately, the reconstruction of artistic pathways took somewhat longer. After the inevitably slow recovery an increase in makers occurred in the 1950s and a range of subtly hybrid works emerged. Nonetheless, certain key practitioners initiated an approach that diverged from the functional notions of jewellery being wearable, valuable and decorative.

Whilst expectations about jewellery were not fully subverted in the post war period, considerable challenges were laid down to traditional values. In the case of Sigurd Persson and Torun Bülow-Hübe, this often involved the production of sinuous abstract forms that were synonymous with Modernist sculpture and produced predominantly in silver rather than gold. Max Fröhlich also created abstract jewels; in his case through elemental, curvilinear and sometimes kinetic geometries that seem indicative of mathematical figures. The ‘value’ in these jewellers’ works derived from the geometry and qualities of their formal languages rather than the commodity of its materials.

Another subversive strand of activity came from the wide range of fine artists who began to produce works in jewellery in the decade following the war. Amongst these numbered Afro, Arp, Braque, Dalí, Fontana and the Pomodoro brothers. Being primarily painters or sculptors, these artists were not preconditioned by the rules of the medium, and this encouraged an expressive freedom and spontaneity of form in their jewellery. This, as in the case of the Pomodoro brothers, often manifested itself through the translation of the qualities of drawn, painted and sculpted marks into metal. Similar qualities are also evident in the jewellery of makers such as Ebbe Weiss-Weingart; her abstract jewellery during this period is often typified by fluid textural surfaces that allude to molten alloys or even scrunched up foil.

As the 1960s progressed, the initial signs of a new kind of practice emerged in which the traditionally accepted norms of fiscal value, permanence, wearability, unrelatedness to the body, aesthetic beauty and decoration were directly challenged. Jewellers such as Friedrich Becker, Hermann Jünger and Mario Pinton began producing jewellery that subverted these precepts. This led to a gathering momentum that achieved critical mass with the addition of other jewellers in the late 60s, who further confronted the previously sacrosanct characteristics of jewellery through content driven work; exemplified by Gijs Bakker. At this stage in history, the work of certain jewellers loosely coalesces to imply two distinct branches of evolution. The first projects self expressive content often relating to socio-political conditions, world events, body relationships or autobiography. The second group incorporates personal feeling, achieved through a sensitive manipulation of materials and the formal relationships within a piece. I describe these approaches as ‘Jewellery as Content’ and ‘Sensitised Jewellery’.

Jewellery as Content

As the title suggests, this category of contemporary jewellery is characterised by the meanings it encapsulates and projects. The integration of the makers’ ideas and sensibilities about socio-political conditions, world events or autobiographical musings became central to defining the work’s appearance; to the extent that some traditional values of jewellery, such as beauty and function, were almost discarded. Indeed, some of the jewellers appear to have deliberately adopted a
confrontational and radical approach to the previously accepted norms of jewellery practice. That said, the reincorporation of content also returned body decoration back to some of its signifying origins, when jewellery communicated specific information such as rank, allegiances or acts of heroism etc. Generally, the constituent materials of ‘jewellery as content’ have been selected according to the underlying concept, and to facilitate its successful communication.

Consequently, as the range of meanings in the work diversified, so did innovation in the selection of materials. An exploration of the human body also began to condition the work, placing increased emphasis on the relationships between the piece and the wearer. This has often manifested itself through jewellery of large dimensions, which extended beyond the traditional comforts and convenience of small scale objects. A complementary exploration of jewellery for unexpected parts of the body has also persisted. The earliest exemplars such as Gijs Bakker, Emmy van Leersum and Peter Skubic, helped bring this new kind of jewellery to fruition from the mid to late 1960s onwards. They were swiftly followed by makers such as Onno Boekhoudt, Otto Künzli, Ruudt Peters and Bernhard Schobinger through to the more recent talents of Ted Noten and Christoph Zellweger. The following analysis of their works considers three themes: the body, value and jewellery as social commentary.

The Body

Central to the measured exploration of the body in contemporary jewellery was Gijs Bakker. Whilst his early work appears to show some influence of the modern jewellery designs of Sigurd Persson and Torun Bülow-Hübe; a significant departure was marked in 1967 by a series of large, almost oversize, collars which frame the wearer. They were raised from aluminium sheets, and whilst an unusual material choice, perhaps their most striking aspect is their sheer size. Conceived to assert the individuality of the bearer, pieces such as Shoulder Piece, 1967, were intended to focus attention on the wearer’s face through dramatic framing. Similarly theatrical pieces were conceived and made in union with his wife Emmy van Leersum, who described how she, “wanted to give jewellery the same importance as clothing, I made big objects which followed the shape of the human body. This resulted in the design of clothing as a unified whole.”

Together, the two went on to collaborate on the frontier work Clothing Suggestions, 1969/70, Fig. 14, which consisted of several full body costumes with growth like protuberances projecting from various body parts, such as the knees or elbows. Planar discs were also inserted into the body socks at differing heights to dramatically alter the profile of the body. The work commented on the role and value of clothing in ornamenting the body. van Leersum was actively aware of her radical approach stating, “I liberated myself from a number of restrictions concerning the traditional use of forms and materials... For me the idea is the most important element, the process of making the pieces comes second, too much emphasis has come to lie on pure craftsmanship in the course of time.” A comment which asserts how determined these jewellers were to breakaway from traditional approaches to jewellery.
Taking a prompt from the *Clothing Suggestions*, van Leersum’s subsequent works considered the body to be composed of simplified geometric solids. She drew particular inspiration from the conical nature of the forearm, describing how, “the conic form of the arm intrigues me tremendously. The basic prefabricated tube is cylindrical, so I find systems to transform the cylinder into a conical form.”51 The resulting metal tubular jewellery from 1970-1975 was mathematically defined in advance by controlling the placement of subtle cuts, which then enabled tubes to be folded or bent into conical sections. Aesthetically, they appear very different from her preceding jewellery, having little or no surface decoration and precise elemental geometry. This difference is heightened by the jewellery’s resemblance to autonomous and singular sculptures, and also its apparent lack of functional elements. van Leersum rejected the latter stating how, “fastenings bothered me – they struck me as disturbing features, both technically and visually, so I either avoided them altogether or made them an essential part of the design as a whole.”52 Her production of jewellery from non-precious metals and transparent plastics meant more affordable pieces, through which she announced her rejection of the status symbol in favour of a more democratic everyday product.53

In contrast to the physical presence of van Leersum’s jewellery, Bakker’s next notable innovation, and there are plenty, was his ethereal *Shadow Jewellery* of 1973, Fig. 15. An arresting work in which, the effect left by wearing the object is the ‘work’ rather than the object itself. A constrictive metal ligature is placed around the circumference of an arm, a leg or the torso, which upon its removal reveals its own imprint in the wearer’s flesh and reddened skin. Significantly, it is an ephemeral work, devoid of the generational permanence of jewellery that commemorates or serves as an investment. Bakker states it originated from the, ‘wish to make an invisible piece of jewellery, at last to find a form on the body which makes a change to the body. The changed body has to be more visible than the piece of jewellery.’54
Bakker’s subsequent evolution concerned personalised jewellery, which was achieved by tracing the silhouette of a person’s face, centrally, across its vertical and horizontal axes. Therefore, in the case of Profile Ornament for Emmy van Leersum, 1974, the resulting skeletal cage is not just made for an individual; it only truly fits one person, who of course is, Emmy van Leersum. His concern for the body in specifics continued with the Bibs he created in 1976; these bore a photo of the wearer’s naked chest, bringing the ordinarily hidden exterior to outside attention.

In some respects, Peter Skubic did the inverse of Bakker’s bibs, taking what ordinarily remains external to the body and literally taking it inside. As the title suggests, his 1975 action Jewellery Under the Skin, Fig. 16, entailed the insertion of a stainless steel implant under the skin of Skubic’s forearm. This took the role of the body as a location for jewellery to an extreme, before a subsequent operation seven years later reversed the procedure. As well as referencing jewels that mutilate the body, Skubic’s gesture also explored jewellery’s frequent lack of visible presence. A matter about which he wrote: “Jewellery can be invisible, when either worn in a concealed place, buried, or locked in safekeeping, or even be surgically placed and worn under the skin surface… The physical state of jewellery can be achieved by means of injury, such as through ornamental scars, tattooing, the filing off of teeth and today even through piercing – and lastly through an operation such as surgically inserting a decorative element.”

In 1976, the following year, David Watkins dealt with the body in its entirety by producing large ornaments such as Hinged Interlocking Body Piece, Fig. 17. It interacts with and encapsulates the upper body, treating it as the fully three dimensional object it is. This contrasts the jewellery typologies that rest on the surface of a specific body part as bracelets and necklaces invariably do. The hinged linear structure jerkily maps out the solid components of the body, passing around, over and behind the upper torso, taking jewellery on a journey around the body. This roving quality was further emphasised by the wearer’s movement.
Overall, these varied key works testify to the increasingly dynamic and charged relationship between the wearer, their body and the jewellery that began to emerge after 1967. Of major significance was how the jewellery actually started to do something physically to the body or affect the wearer’s perception of their own body, rather than merely resting where it was placed.

Value

The jewellers that can be associated with this group appear quite aggressive in confronting the traditional value of precious metals and stones, and perhaps understandably so given the length of time they had been held sacrosanct. Bakker’s previously discussed aluminium collars of 1967 were a portent of the relatively poor materials to follow. In fact, his Stovepipe Necklace of the same year was fabricated from standard units of industrial ventilation pipe, which to say the least subverted conventional expectations of what materials jewellery should be made from. The latter achieved a kind of apotheosis with Giuseppe Uncini’s works from 1968, which feature silver cages that were oxidised to look like steel and then filled with concrete. Their rigorous aesthetic and materials derive from the reinforced concrete used in buildings.58

Industrial materials are also crucial to the jewellery of Peter Skubic, who began working in stainless steel in the early 1970s. The constituent parts of the resulting works are often held together under the tension of springs, magnets and tied steel rope. These functional elements also give the work a theatrical nature and because there is no solder or welding, the act of making becomes a kind of conceptual revelation of its own production. Consequently, as interesting as his work undoubtedly is, it is not instantly recognisable as jewellery. It could easily be something else, and this is one of its distinguishing qualities. For example, consider the brooch Münchhausen, 1980, Fig. 18, which might well be a mechanical part or found object.
Perhaps Lous Martin took the democratisation of jewellery to its inevitable conclusion by selling a jewellery kit that the purchaser had to assemble. *Do It Yourself*, 1974, consisted of a flat aluminium necklace and bracelet each with pre-drilled holes and a number of pipe cleaners. These were then to be threaded by the buyer to complete the jewellery according to Martin’s instructions. Naturally, the owner could follow the suggested patterns or create their own.

In 1977, Bakker again contributed to developments with a series of large neckpieces that were each composed of a laminated photograph of a bejewelled queen; a process through which their sparkling and priceless jewels were transposed into almost throwaway materials, accessible to all. Bakker’s work dryly chides, as he notes: “I went to a shop selling royal memorabilia and got photographs of reigning queens… I then laminated the photographs in PVC and, for quite a reasonable price, you can have the feeling of royalty. You can be part of it.”59 Perhaps the most iconic attack on the status symbol in jewellery, and the indiscriminate use of gold, was Künzli’s *Gold Makes You Blind*, 1980, Fig. 19, which encapsulates a spherical bead of gold in an opaque black rubber bracelet. The patently cheap rubber contrasts the colour, lustre and value of that which remains hidden.60 Künzli describes the work as returning gold to the geological darkness from where it came.61 In some ways, it represents a re-appropriation of gold, but is also a sophisticated attack on preciousness; using gold to denigrate gold.
The durability of even relatively inexpensive materials still provides some sense of security. For example, whilst materials such as plastic or wood may not be indestructible or permanent they can last for a long time. So, perhaps in seeking to identify jewellery that actively opposes the notion of value, we should look to genuinely ephemeral works such as Pierre Degen’s self-explanatory *Ring in Bread, Jam, Elastic and Ribbon*, 1982. Other examples include David Watkins and Wendy Ramshaw’s paper jewellery and Susan Heron’s experiments with light projected onto the body. Finally, self-destructing works such as Bernard Fink’s ice ring *Eis*, 1996, or the *Siberian Necklace*, 2006, Fig. 20, by Ted Noten conclude the argument. Being made of ice they both melt when worn; the former disappears for good, whereas Noten’s necklace is irrevocably changed, revealing the mysterious content that was previously frozen within the giant beads of ice.

**Fig. 20**
Ted Noten
*Siberian Necklace*
2006
Ice and found objects (flowers, keys, flies and other insects, gold connectors, pubic hair)
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**Jewellery as Social Commentary**

There are some makers for whom jewellery has become a vehicle for the delivery of content that often relates to prevalent social conditions, politics, major world events, philosophical questions or autobiographical documentation. Early protagonists of note include Bruno Martinazzi, Bernhard Schobinger, Otto Künzli, Manfred Bischoff and Ruudt Peters.

The first significant creator of this type of jewellery was Bruno Martinazzi. His jewellery often includes reconstituted fragments of the human body, which are combined with methods of measurement to infer philosophical themes. These have included the creation of man, god and man’s intelligence for example. The bracelet *Homo Sapiens*, 1975, features a thumb and forefinger almost touching in a circle, as if pinching. The piece explores the evolutionary advantage man gained from having opposable fingers and thumbs, and how this has enabled us to create and use tools to shape the world around us. Martinazzi has also metaphorically used weights, rules and standard measures to stand in for geological timescales and molecular, continental and even cosmological dimensions, as in the necklace, *Misure*, 1977, Fig. 21. Literature has provided rich material too, including Greek mythology and tracts such as Homer’s *Odyssey*, alongside science and Kant’s writing on the sublime. These fertile and varied sources have influenced many of his pieces including the brooch *Mela*, 1972, which takes the form of an apple with a slice cut out. Figures, measurements and mathematical curves have been engraved into the polished inner faces. A complex work, it refers to notions of rationality and Newton’s ‘eureka’ moment of discovering gravity; one imagines it may also symbolically relate to the forbidden fruit of Adam and Eve.
The jewellery of Martinazzi appears to be nourished by a deep seated rationale; where the conceptual underpinning is implicit, rather than explicit. In contrast, the jewel as an idea was formalised by the League of Rebellious Goldsmiths (BOE) through their boxed manifesto BOE Box, where on its lid was written: “The BOE is a group of four goldsmiths and one sculptor who wish, through the more personal presentation of their work, including the necessary information, to broaden the normal manner of exhibition, to make it a manifestation of ideas.” It was in part a reaction against the prevalence of the so called ‘smooth jewellery’ by jewellers such as Emmy van Leersum, which they believed to be characterised by restrained and minimal geometry.

There is certainly little reductive anonymity in the work of Bernhard Schobinger; rather he seems a potent mix of shaman, storyteller, soothsayer and comedian. His works can often seem visually confrontational and have variously incorporated found objects such as a bicycle pump valve, miniature paint pot, toothbrush, colouring pencils or computer parts (see Plate 23 and Fig. 85-87). His assemblages are frequently composed of items and materials not readily associated with jewellery, even going as far as to include meteorites, saw blades, broken bottles or shards of glass if they could potentially contribute to the manifestation of a given concept. Meditations on the contradictory and often violent world that surround us have included jewellery made in response to the Cambodian genocide for example. Yet, despite the gravitas of this content, many pieces exhibit considerable wit and irony. The subject of his work can be as diverse as the materials that constitute it, including science, cosmology, belief systems and world events to name but a few. Overall, Schobinger’s jewellery is challenging, elusive, romantic and thought provoking in equal measure.

Another jeweller whose works can be as politically charged is Otto Künzli; perhaps more of a social analyst, he uses jewellery as a vehicle for his thoughts. His expressive language took shape in the early 1980s, and is evidently the product of cognition and preconceived design, whereby everything about the work is put at the disposal of the idea. In other words, manufacture asserts the initiating idea. One early piece from 1980, The Red Spot, Fig. 22, commented on the pressures to sell in commercial galleries. Despite the technical excellence evident in his later works, on this occasion Künzli used an existing throwaway object in the form of a red drawing pin. The resulting object is disarmingly simple, but effective, with the work’s production sustaining the idea of translating red dot
sales stickers into jewellery. Künzli has also extensively questioned the role of jewellery and the generally accepted conditions of its existence, as with the Ornament Brooches from 1983, Plate 14.

A distinct and individual language has also been developed by Manfred Bischoff, this time using a limited palette of gold, silver, coral and ivory to create metaphorical works that originate from drawing, as in Il Mio Casa, 1986. More recently, the role of drawing has become explicit with pieces of jewellery exhibited upon their originating drawing. The latter, in combination with the work and its title combine to narrate the story Bischoff wishes to tell. This tends to include historical figures and events, and philosophical considerations often explored through universally recognisable symbols ranging from the infinity symbol through to a television set. Were it not for the ever present narrative content, his work could easily be associated with ‘sensitised jewellery’ given the exquisite range of surfaces and textures he achieves in gold and silver; consider for example the exterior of the brooch Kun, 2005, Plate 6.

Beyond the synthesis of form and content, what is also interesting about this group of jewellers is how they have dealt with traditional notions of beauty. For centuries, jewellery had been synonymous with joy and beauty, largely achieved through a blend of gold and brightly coloured luminous stones. Whilst not necessarily rejected outright, these jewellers are by no means blindly adherent to the aforementioned doctrine. For the first time, a lack of harmonious proportions, brilliant surfaces or luminous colours, or what might even be described as ‘ugliness’, could be considered a desired quality if it helped encapsulate the work’s concept. In other words, even aesthetics was to be subject to capturing and communicating the source idea.

Sensitised Jewellery

Alongside the post war emergence of jewellers whose work is defined by the ideas it projects, a second group were developing another strand of contemporary jewellery. This second group is characterised by a mastery of technique; with the work often being self-referential. By which I mean
that the content or ideas portrayed by the work invariably, but not exclusively, concerns the internal relationships between its materials, colours and forms. Rather than being imbued with socio-political musings or autobiography as ‘jewellery as content’ can be, this work primarily deals with the sensitising of materials into poetic artefacts. It is less revolutionary and operates more in line with traditional conventions, particularly in terms of scale and the aesthetic values of proportion and harmony. Its senior practitioners include Friedrich Becker, Hermann Jünger, Reinhold Reiling and Mario Pinton; and subsequently Tone Vigeland, Giampaolo Babetto, Robert Smit and Wendy Ramshaw; alongside more recent jewellers such as Liv Blåvarp, Giovanni Corvaja, Karl Fritsch and Annamaria Zanella.

**Friedrich Becker**

One of the first major contributions to this category of contemporary jewellery comes through Friedrich Becker’s kinetic jewellery. Its first manifestation was described by Becker as ‘variable’ jewellery, which meant that by virtue of hinged and pivoting parts the wearer could manipulate and transform the appearance of the piece. The multipart works date from the early 1960s and could be configured into an almost infinite range of geometries. An example of this is the brooch *Variabler Ansteckschmuck* from 1962, Fig. 23, which consists of a series of circular gold discs that can be rotated in relation to one another by means of spindles, each marked by a ruby. Various configurations of crescents and circles can be revealed by moving the discs around.

![Fig. 23](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Friedrich Becker  
*Variabler Ansteckschmuck*  
1962  
Yellow gold, rubies  
Brooch  
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A subsequent development saw the kinesis in Becker’s jewellery derive from the movement of the body; with parts of a piece moving according to the orientation and speed of the adorned body part. The delicate balance and weighting of the internal mechanisms were synonymous with the precision engineering of watch manufacture. Therefore, he clearly employed machine manufacture at the service of his ideas. That said, his work follows the conventions of aesthetically significant jewellery, being of convenient scale and often incorporating stones and highly polished metals. Where it diverges and innovates, is in enabling the wearer and to some extent the observer, to enjoy a sensory experience of motion and the interplay of parts through technical wizardry. According to Becker his jewellery involves, “freely swivelling pieces, turning on vertical and horizontal bearings, with centric and eccentric axes, with weights, with impulse balls of platinum; these are the constituents of my jewellery. As the wearer’s body moves at random, the kinetic effect is heightened and new and varied sequences of motion take place.”64 Perhaps most importantly for the advent of
contemporary jewellery, they make the wearer an active and ongoing participant in how the work looks and behaves.

**Hermann Jünger**

Jünger’s work is a paradigm of how materials may be sensitised; in his case, through the successful translation of the sensuous qualities of his watercolour drawings into metals and enamel. The link to drawing was reinforced in his brooches by his frequent use of a planar base from which additional elements were then built up on top, as in the brooch of Fig. 24. The resulting intersections of planes create a play of light and shadows that extend over the surface to animate the source drawing. Jünger’s jewellery demonstrates a poetic humanity, achieved I believe, through a combination of its proximity to the drawn mark and painterly signs, the use of non-rigid outlines and the frequent union of multiple and seemingly unrelated elements in one piece. This unusual, unfettered and playful quality is evident in the necklace composed by multiple hanging elements in Fig. 25.

![Fig. 24](image1)
Hermann Jünger
*Brooch*
1998
Gold, amethyst, uncut diamond, uncut ruby, sapphire

![Fig. 25](image2)
Hermann Jünger
*Necklace*
Date Unknown – C. 1980
Gold, silver, ivory

A cursory look at his jewellery may suggest it is allied to traditionally mercenary preferences for precious materials, given the frequent presence of gold and stones. However, whilst gold is indeed often present, Jünger’s highly expressive touch subdues its appearance and softens its exuberance. This quality is often achieved through the application of enamel to gold surfaces. The resulting aesthetic, allied with the seemingly unrefined geometry and presence of imperfections such as holes, scratches and simulated wear, give an altogether different value from the merely economic or gold for gold’s sake approach. My observation concerning the restrained qualities in Jünger’s work appears to be confirmed by his following statement: “Agates, garnets or rubies, lapis lazuli, granite or haematite pearls… it is the traditional appeal of their colours that makes them so attractive… Provided one does not allow their commercial value to hinder an uninhibited choice of these
It seems as though all the materials in Jünger’s work have yielded to his humanity and the sensitivity of his touch. Confirmation of Jünger’s belief in, what might be described as, the ‘poetic soul’ in the making process is provided by his comments on technique, which he believed to be, “a far more complex matter than merely the practice and execution of perfect technique.” He went on to assert that, “there are no formulae nor tables, not even recipes for the decisions which finally give an artistic quality to any work. Here everyone is on his own.” Jünger was also influential through his teachings at Munich Art Academy, and together with Reinhold Reiling, his pedagogic ethos encouraged self-expression and the projection of identity through the jewel. Significantly, this philosophy has permeated the jewellery of many of their students including Manfred Bischoff, Daniel Kruger and Otto Künzli.

**Mario Pinton**

As with Jünger, Pinton is another exemplar of the jeweller who, through the sensibility of their touch, brings materials to life. The animation of surfaces was a vital concern for Pinton throughout his career, and there is a warmth and haptic lightness to his jewellery; one feels with one’s eyes that these are delicate objects. This is partly achieved through the sensitivity of mark making and delicate lines that often map his surfaces, shifting imperceptibly from the evident to the almost invisible. Despite their subtlety, these marks modulate light and shadow on the surfaces to make his pieces vibrate, as in the square brooch from 1988, Fig. 26. Similarly expressive qualities can also be seen in Pinton’s drawings; consider for example, the exploratory sketches in Fig. 27.

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**Fig. 26**
Mario Pinton
Brooch
1988
Gold

**Fig. 27**
Mario Pinton
Drawing for Brooch (detail)
1982

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The geometric figure was invariably employed by Pinton either as a starting point or a framing device. Yet, he often instinctively exploited Gestalt psychology by intimating a shape and allowing the viewer or wearer to perceptually close the circle or square, for example. Other characteristic devices include the subtle distortion of regular shapes or their surface division. The placement of a stone or two onto
his relief surfaces is also a common feature, orientated to assert a particular geometric configuration or to demarcate an axis or meridian. Despite them being precious stones, they have nothing to do with ostentation. Indeed, working with faceted stones can be challenging because their intrinsically rich colour and strong light are difficult to control, however Pinton, through subtle placement and the use of proportionally small gemstones, managed to stop the faceted stones from dominating.

In addition to producing jewellery, Pinton dedicated much of his life to teaching the subject. His influence therefore extended beyond the jewellery he made and into the practices of the students that passed through the school where he taught in Padua, Italy. His impact on the jewellers, collectively known as the School of Padua,69 promoted the principle that design commences from basic geometric shapes and employs geometric structures to restrain or counterbalance the demarcation of shapes and spaces. This was in part transmitted by the use of grids to design two dimensional shapes and boxed structures to project three-dimensionality onto the page during the design phases. This approach can clearly be seen in the jewellery of Francesco Pavan and Giampaolo Babetto, where their work is often contained by, or refers to, a geometric figure or skeletal solid inferred by structural lines.

What unites the jewellery of Becker, Jünger and Pinton is a curiosity for materials and a desire to animate matter through the consequences of working their chosen materials. Whilst, their specific working practices differed, each contributed to new and rich possibilities in jewellery, seeking evolution from within, rather than through referencing external events or ideas. In other words, the work’s subject or content is the work itself and the formal relationships that exist within it.

Summary

Several key events in the history of jewellery, such as the emergence of jewellery designs, pattern books and the Industrial Revolution in Northern Europe, appear to have helped set the stage for what is commonly referred to as contemporary jewellery. A brief synthesis reveals one major shift as the perception of value, which encompassed not only the commodity of precious stones and metals, but came to recognise that materials could be imbued with aesthetic, spiritual and narrative significance beyond their fiscal worth. This was prompted by costume and steel jewellery during the Industrial Revolution, and further postulated by Naum Slutzky amongst others in the 1930s. Another major shift was the gradual division of the goldsmithing profession into the jewellery designer and the jewellery maker. This was precipitated by the advent of printed pattern books during the Renaissance, in which jewellery designs were recorded and distributed via engravings. The existence of the jewellery designer was given further credence by the advent of mechanisation during the Industrial Revolution, which meant mass produced jewellery had to be pre-planned. This distinction between thinking and doing activities, which were not necessarily carried out by the same person, sowed the seeds for jewellery as personal expression; because without some precognition the possibility to imbue work with personal meanings is usually diminished. The latter almost certainly became central to contemporary jewellery, enabling the form of each work to be the expression of the artist’s concepts, irrespective of whether figurative or abstract. These ideas are then manifested through materials, which have been selected to accentuate the given concept, rather than for any monetary value.

Since the late 1960s, contemporary jewellery appears to have become manifest through two primary approaches: the sensitisation of materials and the imbuing of content. ‘Jewellery as Content’ reveals three primary subjects: the body, the perceived value of jewellery and its materials and finally socio-political, contextual and autobiographical meanings. ‘Jewellery as Content’ contains the most revolutionary work in terms of scale, medium, and technique, whereas the ‘Sensitised Jewellery’ operates closer to traditional precepts. The latter does however exceed these by heightening the investigation of internal formal relationships between geometry, colour, material properties and proportions.
Irrespective of which of the two aforementioned categories the jewellers adhere to, it is surely the case that contemporary jewellery commences when the expression of their concept, figurative or otherwise, becomes paramount. This means that the geometry, materials and aesthetic of jewellery is selected and developed with the sole intention of transmitting or capturing this concept.

I have discontinued my analysis of contemporary jewellery from the early 1980s onwards because my intention has been, as previously mentioned, to let the jewellers discuss these matters through their interviews. Therefore, readers seeking a more comprehensive chronology and critical analysis are recommended to consult the excellent anthologies by Peter Dormer, Helen Drutt or Ralph Turner that are detailed in the bibliography.

In the forthcoming section, consisting of the interviews, the reader can assess which jewellers, if any, share my contentions. As can be seen, these interviews commence by asking how and why each jeweller began making jewellery and then proceed to explore the working processes and techniques each jeweller favours. Whilst some questions are generic, others are focused towards the interviewee’s practice; aimed at understanding the various manifestations of personal expression and the formal and metaphorical languages that have been created. The discussions feature questions about the relationship between the body and the jewel, the relative importance of function and preferred jewellery typologies. Sources of inspiration, techniques and research methods are also considered, as are the influence of educators and the act of teaching, before the interviews close by soliciting advice for students of jewellery.

Errata corrigé: page 12 jet; fossilised wood

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5 “At the formal betrothal ceremony at which the father or guardian of the bride made a solemn pledge of marriage, the prospective husband gave his bride a ring (annulus pronubis) as his own form of warranty.” Bury, S. (1984) Rings. London, Victorian and Albert Museum. p15.


See Voillot, P. (1998) *Diamonds and Precious Stones*. London, Thames and Hudson. p20-27. Other items also incorporated into settings were believed to have special properties, for example, “the power to counteract epilepsy and dropsy were attributed to ass’s hoof and toadstone”, respectively. Scarisbrick, D. (2003) *Finger Rings: ancient to modern*. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum. p44.

Coral was also used to symbolise the passion of Christ and also rebirth through association with the mythological Greek character Medusa, whose gushing blood is said to have become coral on contact with the sea. The protective qualities of coral were believed to derive from its form, which often resembles multiple lances. Balboni Brizza, M. T. (1986) *Gioielli: moda, magia, sentimento*. Milan, Museo Poldi-Pezzoli. p98.

Christianity was adopted as the official religion of the Roman Empire in 313 AD during the reign of Constantine. This slowly led to an open manifestation of personal faith through jewellery, and particularly the ring. See Lambert, S. (1998) *The Ring*. Hove, RotoVision. p49-51.

Many drawings were executed through engraving and the hatching used to define form in two dimensions influenced pieces of jewellery, such as the tabernacle possibly attributed to Erasmus Hornick, late sixteenth century. Several of the architectural details on the rear of the item were hatched using parallel lines, curves or symbols. These engraved lines and marks often served the dual purpose of giving purchase to the applied enamels and providing hints of stylistic flourish. Hughes, G. (1972) *The Art of Jewelry*. London, Studio Vista. p95.

Pattern books can also bear historical testament to pieces of jewellery that were subsequently broken up for their constituent stones. Also, the fact that various custodians went to the trouble of conserving these books gives weight to the perceived value of the thinking constituted by the drawn jewellery designs.


Hornick was by no means unique in his use of lead patterns; it being a method in fairly broad usage at the time. See also: Hackenbroch, Y. (1979) *Renaissance Jewellery*. London, Sotheby Parke Bernet. p159.


A strong parallel already existed between engraved jewellery designs and jewellery because the latter would often feature engraved surfaces that heightened surface decoration. In these cases, the tools and marks used to produce both were often virtually identical. However, the same cannot be said for the inked and watercolour drawings for which Mores became known.


Matthew Boulton archive, Birmingham Central Library, UK. The original pattern books of the Boulton and Fothergill firm (1762-1790) were eventually sold on to manufactures Elkingtons. They subsequently cut up the originals and reorganised them according to their needs, which has meant some of the contextual information and keys to the objects have been lost.


The pattern book concerning jewellery and sword hilts was eventually purchased from the Boulton Soho Manufactory in 1895 by Samuel Timmins and given to Messers Tangye in 1896. Given the dislocation of contextual information (see note 35), it is difficult to say with any certainty whether the designs for brooches, buckles, buttons, swords and chatelaines were used by Boulton, or whether they had been acquired from another firm. Matthew Boulton archive, Birmingham Central Library, UK - reference MS 3782/21/11 Image 5418 B+W Vol 168a p62.

According to Judith Miller, Stras, “explored the potential of a glass developed by an Englishman, George Ravenscroft.” Miller, J. (2003) *Costume Jewellery*. London, Dorling Kindersley. p20. Miller goes on to describe how paste stones, as well as precious ones, were often foil backed to force the reflection of light back through the gemstones to enhance their luminosity and sparkle. Stras was no exception in undertaking this operation, but he became so adept at working the substitute glass that his jewellery was valued in its own right, not simply perceived as a cheaper substitute for the real thing. So much so, that he was eventually appointed a court jeweller to the French king in 1734.


42 Pinchbeck was invented by Watchmaker Christopher Pinchbeck in 1732. An alloy of copper and zinc, it was initially used to simulate gold in circumstances where theft might be a problem, such as stagecoaches. It eventually became valued in its own right. See: Bradford, E. (1953) Four Centuries of European Jewellery. London, Country Life Ltd. p169.

43 Perhaps the most famous objectors were John Ruskin and then William Morris, who, along with the wider Arts and Crafts movement, operated in parallel to the continuing production of costume jewellery. They rejected the anonymous look of repetitious forms to champion the role of the individual designer/maker in producing handmade artefacts. Many of the arguments central to their analytical debates were precipitated by the Great Exhibition in 1851, which showcased amongst other things, artefacts resulting from industrial mechanised production.


55 On removal the implant was inserted into the casket shaped bezel of a ring.


57 Around this time, another jeweller had begun to extend the potential for jewellery to flow seamlessly around the body. Tone Vigeland constructed neckpieces and collars similar to chain mail. Consequently, her linked works adapt to, and move around the body’s complex geometry, making light work of the complex joints that simultaneously move in multiple directions. Accordingly, it also follows that the wearer can modify the work by moving their body, thereby creating a symbiotic relationship between the work and any bearer. Therefore, Vigeland’s pieces often seem a universal response to the ‘body’ as a paradigm, rather than being designed for a specific individual. The same cannot be said of Gerd Rothmann, who in contrast, appears fascinated by the characteristics and geometry of the individual. His early works, such as the Ear Pieces of 1983, fill the inner ear cavity, or extend the earlobe with prosthetic like appendages. The site of display and the content of the work therefore become one. Subsequent works systematically mapped body parts synonymous with identification such as fingers and hands, often cast directly from the commissioner. Eventually, signature works emerged
where finger print impressions are cast from the client and translated into jewellery, albeit of a more conventional type.

58 Giuseppe Uncini noted how, “my pieces of jewellery remain distinct from the imagery of my sculpture... However, this is not the rule for artists wishing to make jewellery. The works of major artists like... the Pomodoro brothers demonstrates this; the techniques and imagery of their sculptures is found in all the techniques and imagery of their jewellery.” (My translation) - Cerritelli, C. & Somaini, L. (1995) *Gioielli D'Artista in Italia 1945-1995*. Electa, Milan. p163.


60 Künzli’s work has echoes of Yves Klein’s performance work *Zone of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility*, 1962. Klein sold a specially designed certificate to the buyer; he then bought gold with the money before finally throwing the flakes of gold back into the river Seine. It was a symbolic ritual, intended to return gold back to the earth from whence it came.


62 The founder members of *Bond van Ontevreden Edesmeden* (BOE) included Marion Herbst, Onno Boekhoudt, Francoise van den Bosch, Karel Niehorster and sculptor Berend Peter Hogen Esch.


67 Jünger, H. (1996) *Hermann Jünger: Uber Den Schmuck Und Das Machen Neue Goldschmiedearbeiten*. Munich, Anabas-Verlag. p125. In the same statement, Jünger goes on to castigate the technical doctrines of Cellini’s treatise on goldsmithing and Theopilus Presbyter’s *Schedula Diversarium Atrium* because they both imply, “making is reduced to the technical application necessary to give body to the artefact.” p126.
