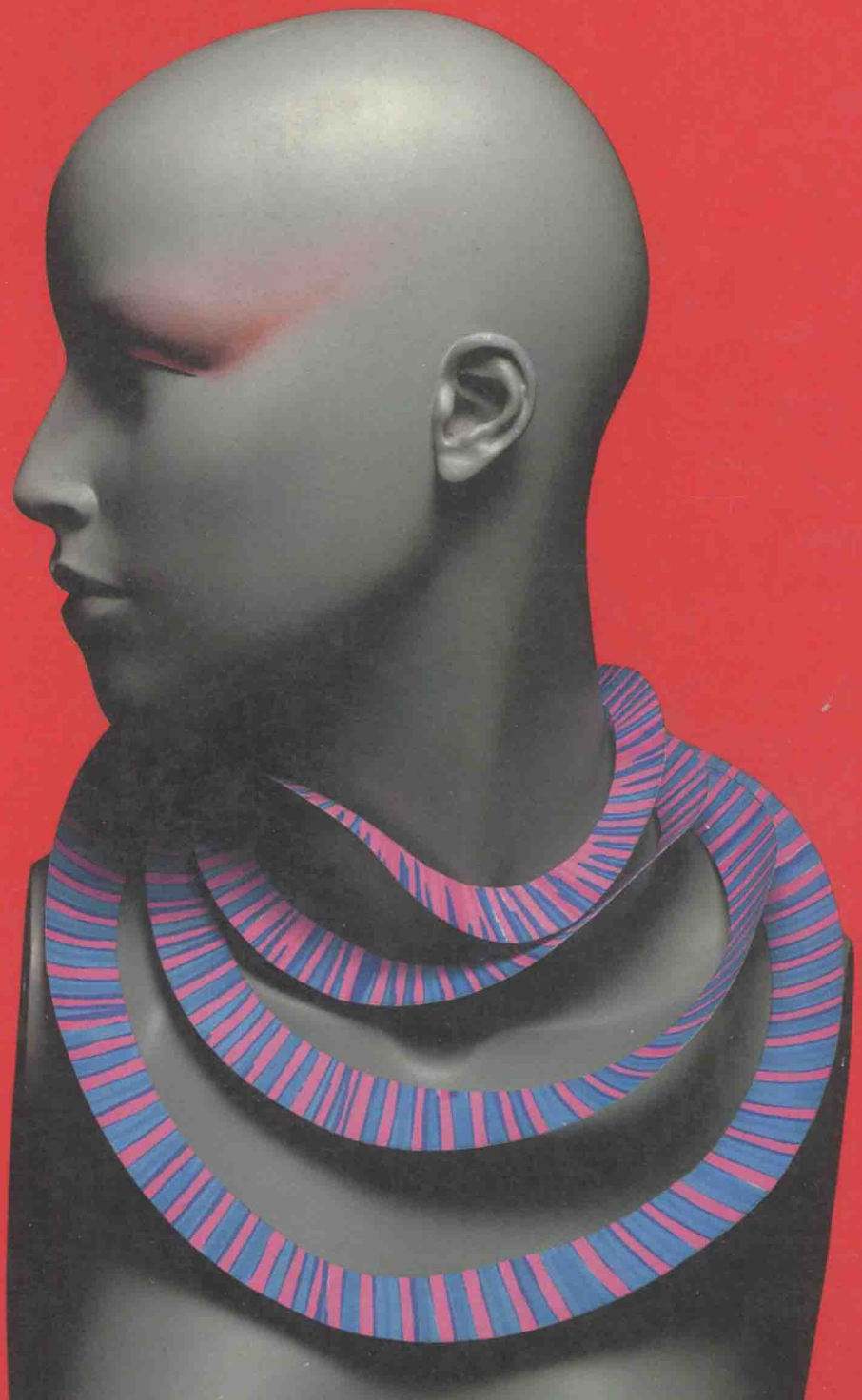
PETER DORMER RALPH TURNER

the new jewelry

trends+traditions



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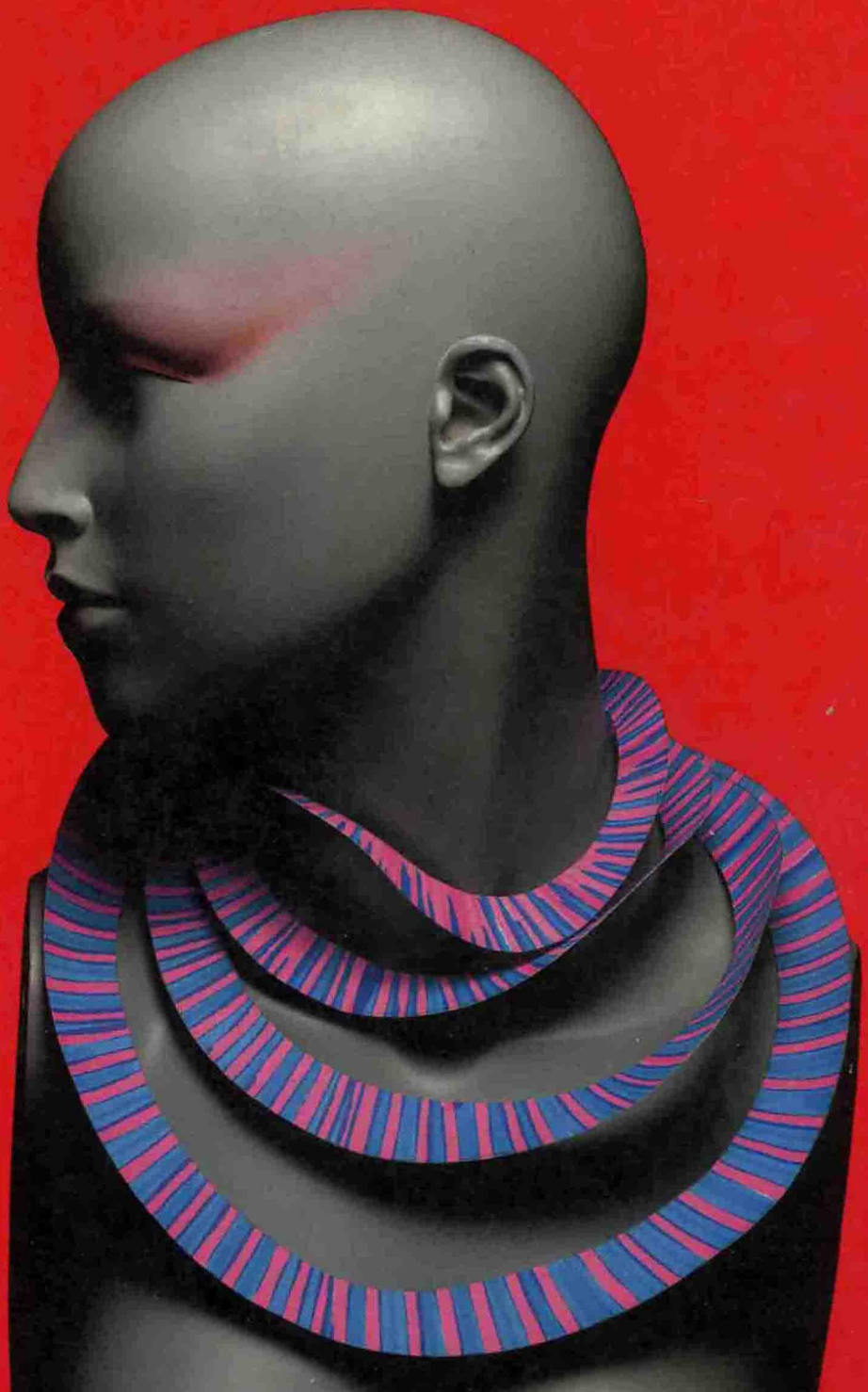

JEWELRY has come alive again. Less than twenty years ago a mere handful of jewelers in Europe and America were fighting the tired clichés of conventional design. Today, as Ralph Turner writes, there has been 'a dazzling burgeoning of many kinds of ornament, to excite a wide variety of tastes'. The aesthetic aspirations of jewelers, and levels of workmanship, have both been enhanced. Craft skills have been transferred to plastics and other non-precious materials, resulting in creative, personalized jewelry displaying considerable technical virtuosity.

Each of the three main divisions into which the book is organized reveals the inventiveness of contemporary makers: the section on mainstream abstract jewelry presents the diversity of modern ornament in materials ranging from gold to plastics; its counterpart on figurative jewelry includes artists who sculpt and model with precious metals, as well as those who turn everyday materials and objects into fun ornaments; and *Jewelry as Theatre* crosses into the world of the radical jewelers whose 'wearables' have created such controversy. What emerges is the growth not so much of an international style, as of international variety, in which ideas and themes rather than national cultures provide the common threads.

Complete with jeweler biographies, detailed information on galleries, museums, publications and exhibitions, this book is indispensable for anyone professionally concerned with jewelry. For a much wider audience – for everyone who takes pleasure in jewelry as decoration, or seeks to understand contemporary design – it is perfect proof that jewelry has never been more ornamental, more attractive, more mysterious or more exciting.

PETER DORMER, exhibitions organizer and writer, contributes to *Art Monthly, Crafts, Designers' Journal* and other magazines. He is co-author of *Art Within Reach* (1984) and author of *The New Ceramics* (1986), both published by Thames and Hudson.

RALPH TURNER was co-founder of the Electrum Gallery of modern jewelry in London, the first of its kind in Europe. He is the author of *Contemporary Jewelry: A Critical Assessment 1945-1975* and Head of Exhibitions at the Crafts Council, London.

'Beautifully documented . . . exuberantly crosses frontiers' – Harpers & Queen

'Excellent and lavish colour photography . . . well-written and well-organised' – Creative Review

'An essential buy for anyone involved in the art, but an equally beautiful and fascinating study for the rest of us too' – City Limits

With 231 illustrations, 115 in colour

On the cover: Paper neckpiece, David Watkins, 1983

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Captions to photographs: where one figure only is given this refers to the object's greatest dimension.

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This book has been compiled by Peter Dormer and Ralph Turner. The text, except for the introduction entitled *The New Jewelry*, has been written by Peter Dormer. Notwithstanding the inestimable guidance given by the editorial advisers listed above the responsibility for the final choice of material rests with the joint authors.

THE NEW JEWELRY
A Distinctive Signature

Jewelry is a decorative art and what matters is not the words that can be coined from it, but whether or not it gives pleasure to the wearer and spectator. Most of the works shown in this book are intended to do just that, although people who have not followed developments in jewelry may be surprised at the variety of design and materials now in use.

By the mid-1970s there was abundant evidence of new and exciting work in jewelry, as well as hundreds of art-school-trained professionals displaying considerable expertise – all very different from the situation twenty years earlier, when the number of innovative jewelers throughout Europe and America was small.

Today, we can see the fruits of a dazzling burgeoning of many kinds of ornament, to excite a wide variety of tastes. Some of the new makers have wanted success in the world of fashion, but others have aimed for recognition of a different kind from the world of art. The bid for art status has had several motivations – egotism may be one, but survival is another: art-conscious and design-aware people are more likely customers for the new jewelry. Most important of all, however, jewelers are engaged in a positive reaction against the sort of jewelry generally sold in shops and department stores throughout the Western world.

Most of the jewelry sold by large retailers is conservative in design, mainly because design is often the least important aspect of jewelry which is bought to celebrate or announce an event – an engagement, a wedding, a wedding anniversary. The principal consideration for people buying work for such occasions is that it should look ostentatiously impressive and expensive: this jewelry is a visible, tangible show of affection from one person to another. Much commercial jewelry is therefore designed within a narrow conception of what jewelry ought to look like. And ideas that were once fresh and lively have become clichés. In most commercial jewelry the design matters only as a vehicle for gemstones and precious materials.

Nevertheless, since the Second World War, many craftsmen and craftswomen, particularly in West Germany, have been working in precious materials and have sought to rescue their craft from clichés through good design. For example, the German goldsmith Hubertus von Skal explained his own commitment to goldsmithing by asking a question. Why did early cultures bother to decorate their pots? It was, he said, to give the pots emphasis and distinction, like a

signature. And it is the distinctive and the remarkable that Von Skal strives for in his own work. What is curious about commercial jewelry, on the other hand, is its lack of distinctiveness – all the 'signatures' look alike.

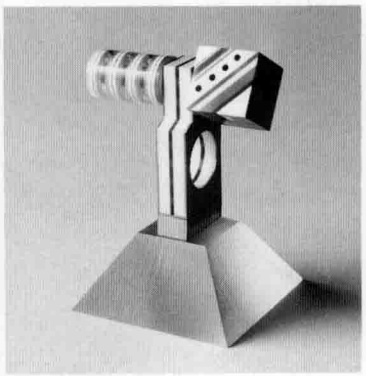
West Germany has had an important influence on the development of jewelry. Here the work and teaching of several key masters – notably Hermann Jünger, Friedrich Becker and Reinhold Reiling – has formed the foundation. Jünger, a superb artist in metals, whose experience spans thirty years, has raised the aesthetic aspirations of jewelers whilst promoting high standards of workmanship. His position as Professor of Goldsmithing at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and his influential teaching have provided him with an impressive list of former pupils now working in Europe, Australia and America. Becker, from Düsseldorf, has since the 1950s researched into motion and jewelry; he is an expert in kinetic jewelry. Reinhold Reiling, who died in 1983, was professor in the jewelry department of the art school in Pforzheim. Pforzheim is the centre of the jewelry industry in Germany, and has been since the twelfth century. As well as having many workshops and small factories, the town has a unique museum recording the history of jewelry. This Schmuckmuseum (Jewelry Museum) has attracted many craftsmen from all over the world and had an important influence on jewelry in the 1960s and 1970s.

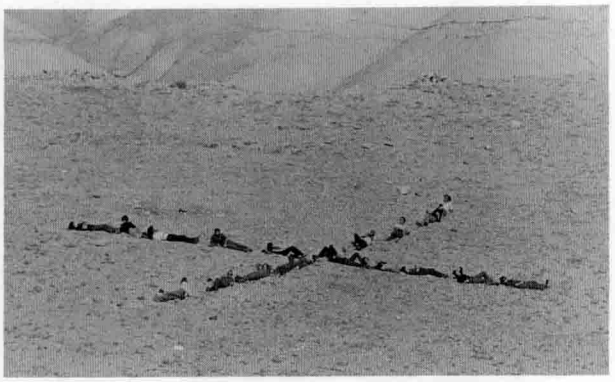
The early 1970s were an adventurous time. Two Germans, Gerd Rothmann and Claus Bury, and an Austrian, Fritz Maierhofer, contributed to an important exhibition in 1971 at the Electrum Gallery, London, which showed for the first time how acrylics could be used creatively. Since then acrylic has become popular with jeweler-designers for its many qualities. It is a rigid material, light, comfortable to wear and, above all, rich in colour. The 1971 exhibition also showed a use of imagery very much of its time, reflecting many of the stratagems of the Pop Art movement in painting.

Claus Bury, in particular, became a major influence, almost a cult figure, admired for his innovative ideas and skilled workmanship. He became fluent in English within a few months as a response to the many invitations he received to teach in England, North America and Australia. Bury's early work combined gold with coloured, translucent acrylic, but in 1975 he began experimenting with non-ferrous metals, eventually finding a way of enriching them with a rich colour palette.

Then he was invited to teach at the Bezalel Academy of Art in Jerusalem, where the desert landscape of light-and-dark contrasts inspired new works – a series of photographs taken of some desert 'sculptures' subsequently became the basis of three-dimensional metal 'drawings'. After these early experiments in Israel, however, it was clear that he would abandon jewelry, and since 1980 he has worked as a sculptor in the United States.

Naturally, there were other German-speaking jewelers whose work was influential in the 1970s, among them the Germans Rüdiger Lorenzen, Norbert Mürrle and Ulrike Bahrs, and the

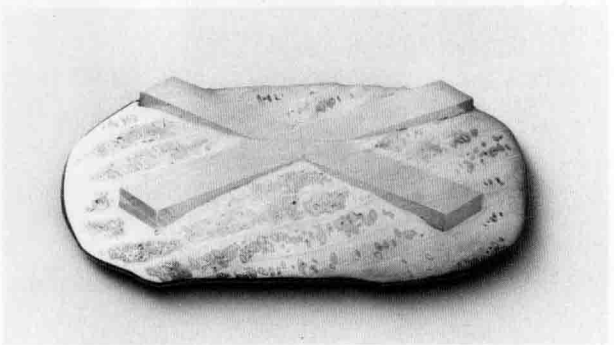




Above, Ring on plinth. Fritz Maierhofer. Acrylic sheet, gold. 10 cm. Austria, 1973

Above right, First landscape project, Israel. Geometrical Formations, part 1. Claus Bury. Israel, 1975

Right, Diagonal. Claus Bury. Copper, silver, gold. 10.5 cm. West Germany, 1977



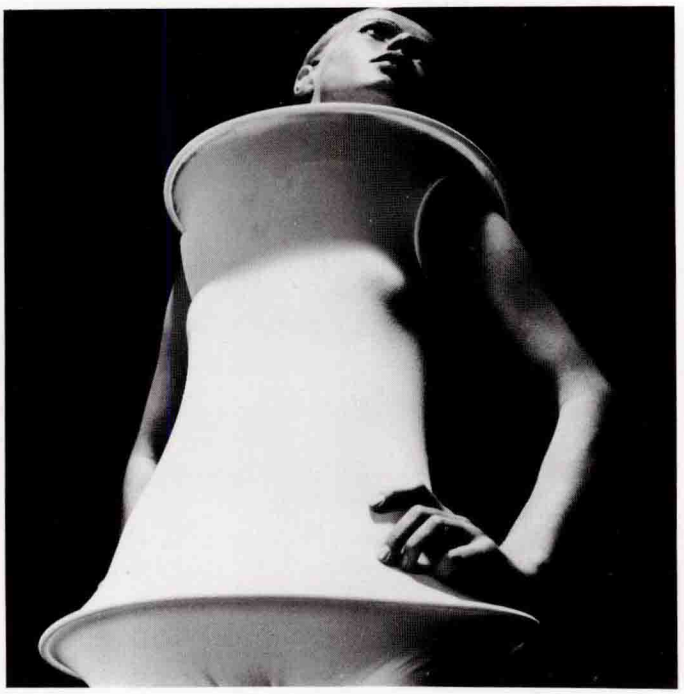
Austrians Waltrud Viehböck and Peter Skubic. More recently, serious German jewelers have begun to reconsider the assumptions underlying their work because of the intelligent, sceptical questioning of the Swiss-born jeweler Otto Künzli.

The most noticeable aspect of modern jewelry is the variety of materials used, and in this the Dutch influence has been significant. The history of achievement in modern Dutch jewelry falls into two parts: a highly inventive period from 1965 to the early 1970s, dominated by the rational, radical ware of Emmy van Leersum and Gijs Bakker; then, in 1974, the formation of the B.O.E. group, which rebelled against the rational aesthetic of these jewelers and tried for a freer style, B.O.E. being *Bond van obloerege edeelsmeden* – jewelers in revolt.

Emmy van Leersum and Gijs Bakker had a traditional training in goldsmithing, but both wanted to break with the past. In the mid-1960s, they designed and made a collection of collars and bracelets from aluminum. The use of this material had in part a practical basis, related to its lightness, relative malleability and strength; but it was also a deliberate social-aesthetic choice. The new work was first shown in 1965 at the Galerie Swart in Amsterdam and, the following year, at the Stedelijk Museum. Later in 1966 it transferred to the Ewan Phillips Gallery, London. Significantly, Van Leersum and Bakker have always had a practising interest in industrial design.

Above, Shoulder piece. Gijs Bakker. Blue anodized aluminum. 60 cm. Holland, 1967

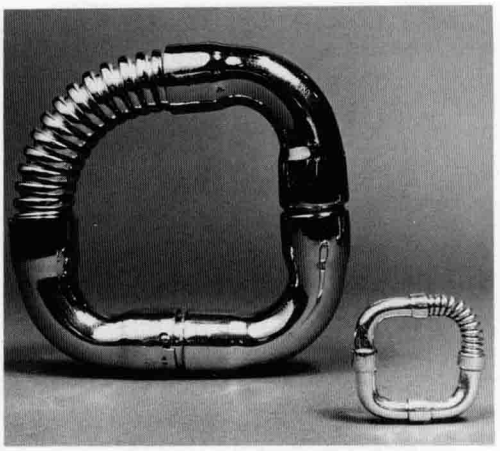
Right, Experimental clothing. Emmy van Leersum and Gijs Bakker. Holland, 1971



Bakker in particular has concentrated on work in this field, rather than in jewelry, in recent years. And several young Dutch men and women who have worked in jewelry have followed his example – among them, Frans van Nieuwenborg, Martin Wegman, Marja Staajes and Maria Hees.

In 1969 the Van Leersum/Bakker 'movement' was consolidated in an exhibition in Eindhoven called *Objects to Wear,* which also included work by three other notable jewelry designers – Nicolaas van Beek, Françoise van den Bosch and Bernhard Lameris. One principle common to all was that the jewelry itself had minimal form: the human body became an important part of the jewelry and not just the thing on which it was hung.

In the early 1970s practically everyone in Dutch jewelry (with the exception of Robert Smit) espoused the Van Leersum/Bakker approach, but one woman, Marion Herbst, while acknowledging the achievements of that strong partnership, none the less recognized that there was an alternative. She began her own 'revolution' and formed B.O.E., a group which included Onno Boekhoudt, Françoise van den Bosch (despite, or perhaps because of, her earlier association with the *Objects to Wear* exhibition), Berend Peter and Karel Niehorster. B.O.E. was short-lived, but it succeeded in reacting against the dominant clinical approach. For a while the group, as well as other Dutch jewelers, looked towards Britain, where jewelry design was looser



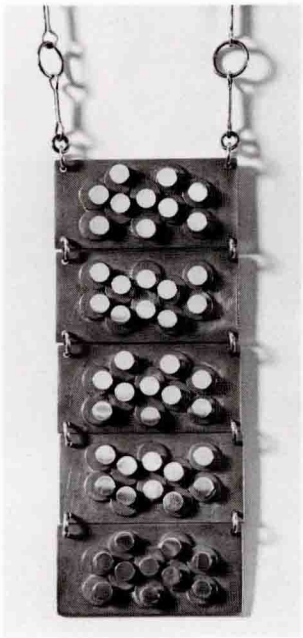
Bracelet and ring. Marion Herbst. Chromium-plated copper. 18 cm, 3 cm. Holland, 1971

and freer. Indeed, throughout the 1970s there was a stimulating exchange of ideas between Dutch and British jewelers, with the work of, say, Caroline Broadhead (using tufted nylon and making structures from monofilament) inspiring the use of textiles and colour in Holland. Similarly, David Watkins and Susanna Heron, the British makers, were much impressed by the work of Van Leersum and Bakker.

Although B.O.E. itself did not survive, some of its members, including Herbst and Boekhoudt, have gone on being innovative and influential. Well-designed work, with a restrained expressiveness and colour, has been a characteristic in recent years of other Dutch makers, such as Joke Brakman and Willem Honing. A newcomer, Lam de Wolf, has also made an impact; like Marion Herbst in the 1970s, she may have opened up yet another set of possibilities.

It ought to be noted that many young jewelers, especially in Holland, Britain and the United States, chose to work in non-precious materials to make their work inexpensive. Other designer-jewelers, in the spirit of equality, opted for non-precious materials because they hated the values of wealth, status and power which they thought were wedded to gem-encrusted, precious-metal jewelry.

The extent to which the new jewelry flourishes in Britain is especially interesting. For most of the twentieth century, British jewelry has been overshadowed and influenced by styles and fashions created on the Continent and in Scandinavia. (A deep-rooted misconception still exists in the British public's mind that modern jewelry design stems exclusively from the Scandinavian countries. Undoubtedly the tradition of fine designs there, together with some extensive promotion, has impressed the British market. It is also true that Scandinavia took the lead in exploiting the design market of the 1950s and, as far as jewelry is concerned, the clean, uncluttered lines of Scandinavian work have had a lasting effect on many British makers.)



In the 1950s Gerda Flöckinger, an important designer, was the lone alternative hand in British jewelry. After 1961, when she was appointed head of a new experimental jewelry course at the Hornsey School of Art, the position began to change. Among Flöckinger's pupils have been David Poston and Charlotte de Syllas. Poston was an influential, socially aware jeweler of some significance in the early 1970s (and, as Chapter 1 shows, his work is entering a renewed period of innovation). Charlotte de Syllas follows no trend, but continues to make her own way, producing superbly crafted jewelry of great quality.

For a while, in the 1960s, the British taste was for rough, uncut crystals. Uncut stones are often the preserve of the amateur, but Helga Zahn (born in Germany), in her early work in Britain with pebbles and stones, brought a radical change to jewelry design. Her later pieces, employing agate, were among the most striking jewelry produced before the 1970s. And in an analogous field, another major talent of the period was Patricia Meyerowitz, whose work with machine off-cuts and industrial waste produced surprising and engaging results.

Not many jewelers at this time knew how to get the best out of precious stones, but Peter Hauffé was notable for producing designs that managed to enhance the character of the jewel. And, as a fan of Friedrich Becker, he was one of the few British jewelers to take kinetic jewelry seriously. However, the most successful British jeweler using precious materials imaginatively was Wendy Ramshaw, an important figure in the early 1970s. She remains a leading exponent of

Opposite
Left, Pendant. Patricia Meyerowitz. Silver. 14 cm. UK, 1965

Centre above, Necklace. Helga Zahn. Silver, black pebble. 18 cm. UK, 1966

Centre below, Set of five gold rings. Wendy Ramshaw. Gold, inlaid with red enamel. 3.5 cm. UK, 1971

Right, Rings. Gerda Flöckinger. Silver, gold, pearls, garnet. 3.5 cm. UK, 1967, 1968

This page
Right, Necklace. David Poston. Limestone, hemp, mild steel, cotton, bronze. 150 cm. UK, 1975

precious-metal jewelry whilst sometimes experimenting with alternative materials and occasionally venturing into performance works.

The 1970s and early 1980s came gradually to be dominated by three names – Susanna Heron, Caroline Broadhead and David Watkins – while a fourth individual – Pierre Degen – is now contributing many new ideas to British jewelry. Others were innovatory, too, including Eric Spiller, Gunilla Treen, Julia Manheim, Catherine Mannheim (who studied with Friedrich Becker), Roger Morris and Tom Saddington.

Looking back, it can be seen that in Susanna Heron and Caroline Broadhead's work certain key forms and ideas stand out as important markers in the development of new British jewelry (although this is not to claim that they are exclusive to Britain). In 1976 Heron produced a collection of acrylic perspex bangles which, for all their simplicity, had character and verve. In 1977 she presented what she called the Jubilee Neckpieces, followed by a range of perspex works taking the theme of the curve, then by quadrangles playing with flat perspectives, by flexible armpieces and by various 'clip on' works. The linking principle, paradoxically, is one of symmetrical asymmetry. In the 1980s her work, with that of Caroline Broadhead and Julia Manheim, developed into 'wearables'. In Heron's case these took the form of 'hats' which were both expressionistic in their use of textiles or paper and minimal in their form – an Oriental quality was now discernible. As Chapter 3 indicates, her work is no longer within the realm of

'jewelry' because her ideas are better realized as sculptures. Caroline Broadhead's inventions of bracelets and necklaces made with tufts of nylon held in a frame of boxwood were very influential – they combined elegance with practicality and simplicity. She too has developed a collection of wearables, some of which are intriguing and idiosyncratic.

David Watkins has digested all the formalist principles of De Stijl, but over a period has produced work which is very much his own – his pieces are often large, highly coloured metal drawings. Of especial interest in his work, and that of Broadhead, Manheim and Heron, is the deliberate designing out of all fastenings, clips and chains which would inhibit and impede the creation of a purist design aesthetic. In terms of abstract composition and colour harmony Watkins, like Eric Spiller, is one of Britain's most mature new jewelry designers.

The influences that have shaped the new jewelry in Europe, especially in Holland and Britain, and with notable contributions from Germany, Austria and Switzerland, have been healthy: a desire to avoid clichés in design; a desire to make exciting, robust and, where possible, cheap ornament; a desire to make jewelry that can be worn by either sex; a frequently expressed distaste for jewelry which is vulgar and merely status-seeking; and always an interest in ensuring that the ornament works with and complements the wearer's body.

It should be an obvious enough point that jewelry is for wearing, but perhaps not that obvious. In the United States, for example, the *current* tendency is to regard jewelry as mini-sculpture rather than wearable ornament which has to be worn in order to be seen properly. Considering again commercial jewelry, we see that much of it has been designed with no thought about how it will work with clothes or move with the body: all manner of objects, from butterflies to vintage cars, perch on lapels or dangle around necks. In Western Europe, by contrast, the major influence in new jewelry is the idea that it must work with the body – a principle that is itself central to the original thinking of Van Leersum and Bakker.

A demonstration of this 'working-with-the-body' doctrine in design can be seen in *The Jewelry Project* (1983) – a selection of modern European work put together by Susanna Heron and a British photographer, David Ward, for the New York collectors Sue and Malcolm Knapp. Some work by Dutch maker Lam de Wolf and Swiss jeweler Pierre Degen takes 'wearability' to an extreme, and the non-precious materials used include nylon, rubber and polythene. Much of it, however, is discreet and designed to work quietly with the wearer – look, for example, at the pins by Joke Brakman. Such jewelry is designed for clothing and constitutes a simple, elegant ornament which enhances the wearer without overwhelming her or him. It is the epitome of the West European modernist aesthetic, rooted in the German Bauhaus and the Dutch De Stijl, if, at some remove, influenced by the far older spirit of puritanism. Puritan or not, ornament such as this is as much at home on a conventional dress as it is on the tee- or even the hairshirt. Discreet, tasteful ornament can be worn anywhere.

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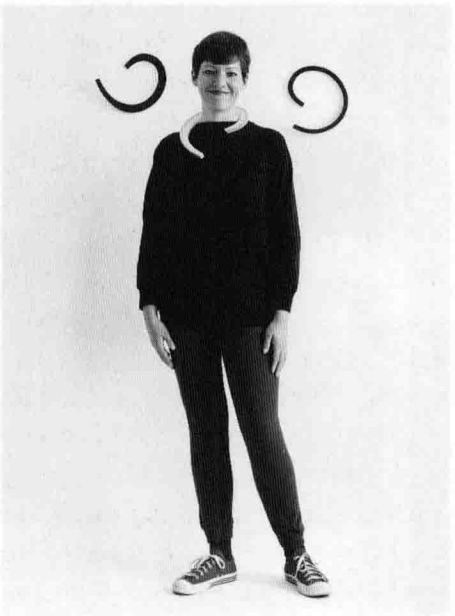


Left, Curved neckpiece. Susanna Heron. Acrylic. 18 cm. UK, 1977
Above, Armband. Pierre Degen. Cloth, wood. 8 cm. UK, 1981

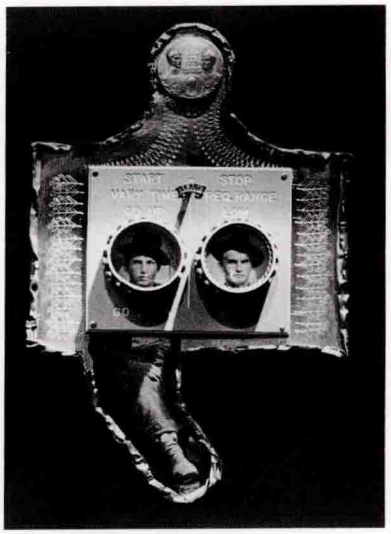
In the development of contemporary European (and American) jewelry, certain individuals who were particularly influential in the 1960s and early 1970s took their initial stance from Bauhaus/De Stijl philosophy but modified it. Emile Souply (Belgium) is an example. Primarily a sculptor, he produced jewelry in the early 1960s that was grounded in Bauhaus teachings: the forms he made were vigorous and undecorated. By 1965 his work had become almost expressionist, making use of gold and baroque pearls. Although Souply is not, currently, a dominant figure in the new jewelry, his earlier work had much merit, not least because it was almost perversely in opposition to new trends.

In Czechoslovakia two important figures have emerged: Svatopluk Kasaly and Anton Cepka. Kasaly was especially innovative in the early 1970s – he used glass, a medium in which the Czechs are expert and creative. His forms are simple and pared down but, though it has something of Emmy van Leersum's rational aesthetic, the work is also warm – a quality it derives from its rhythmic aspect. Anton Cepka's jewelry from the early 1970s is severer and more sculptural. It displays a highly refined sense of colour and draws its imagery from such technology as radar and radio installations, which, as he says, have their own appeal and aesthetic.

In the United States rigorous or pared-down design is currently a less noticeable attribute than in Europe. And it is Americans who remark on the difference. Gary S. Griffin (American metalsmith and sculptor) said about the *International Jewelry Exhibition 1900–1980* (Vienna,

Left, Come Alive, You're in the Pepsi Generation. Brooch. Fred Woell. Copper, brass, steel, glass, photo, silver. 10 cm. USA, 1966

Right, Brothers. Brooch. Robert Ebendorf. Copper, brass, tin, engraved acrylic. 9 cm. USA, 1972



1981, organized by Peter Skubic): 'The European work appeared far more minimal than the American. It represented a design distillation process which resulted in a reductivist aesthetic. Good design and, in most cases, inventive design, [was] an end in itself in the European approach. This was significant when compared to American use of imagery or narrative. Here the hierarchy changed. The image became important; concept displaced the formal elements. The artist's personal philosophy was predominant, not predicated upon a design idea.' (*Metalsmith* magazine, Winter 1981)

In much American work there is a concern with jewelry as separate sculpture, and this strand of American jewelry history goes back to the ideas of the artist Alexander Calder, born in Philadelphia in 1898. Calder, the discoverer of the sculptural mobile, was producing moving constructions powered by motors as early as 1931, though he was soon to discard these mechanical aids to create mobiles which relied upon air currents.

Calder succeeded with jewelry where other painters and sculptors failed (so many have produced watered-down versions of the work they produce in the media that principally interest them). For a while jewelry was an important part of his work. With few tools and none of the apparatus of the conventional jeweler's workshop he handled beaten silver and copper wire with dexterity; spectacular necklaces, bracelets, hair combs and brooches came from his work bench and his first jewelry exhibition was held in late 1940 at the Willard Gallery, New York.

A year after this New York show, the Hungarian-born polymath Moholy-Nagy gave a tutorial at Chicago's School of Design. A jeweler, Margaret de Patta, attended and was very impressed by Moholy-Nagy's ideas. His influence and the Bauhaus philosophy became the core of her