

A Fine Possession: Jewellery and Identity Powerhouse Museum, Sydney



This spectacular exhibition of jewellery spanning cultures and millennia is billed as the most ambitious jewellery exhibition the Powerhouse Museum (part of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences) has ever staged. With 700 exhibits drawn from public and private collections across Australia, it takes several visits to appreciate the depth and breadth of the project, and further visits to absorb all that is on display and appreciate the global stories being told.



1.

"Satine" — Nicole Kidman wearing the diamond-studded necklace made for the film *Moulin Rouge* in 1999, with the stunt double, and one of the 'come hither' images of celebrity jewels expected to entice the public to visit

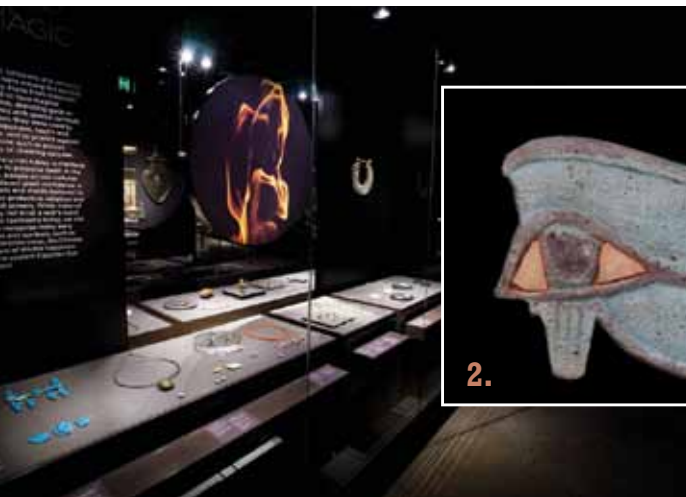
EXHIBITION REVIEW BY DOROTHY ERICKSON

There is much striking imagery to be encountered in the theatrically lit, cave-like vaults of the exhibition hall. Sparkling showcases display exquisite and arresting objects which tell stories of civilisation: of love and marriage, of celebration, of power and position, of death and religion, of technology, commerce and design and many other imperatives which have governed life across time and space. The hall is dimly lit, not only to protect the fabric of the gowns used so effectively in some displays but to facilitate the eye-catching wall projections such as that of Nicole Kidman wearing the 'Satine' necklace used in the film *Moulin Rouge* or of Queen Elizabeth wearing the Australian 'Wattle Brooch'.

The exhibition is arranged in a U-shape with the first 'allee' as you enter

the main hall having the themes *Belief and Magic*, *Love and Death*, *Nature and Culture*, *Style and Revival*, *Gold and Identity*, *Status and Wealth*, *Men and Adornment* and within them sections such as *Australian Style*. Then across the back wall is *Modernity and Change* with sections including *Art Nouveau* and *Art Deco* which basically brings us up to the mid 20th century. The second arm of the U is entirely devoted to sections within *Evolution and Revolution*, showcasing the expressive and innovative work of studio jewellers from the mid 20th century to today.

The exhibition celebrates the diversity of adornment across cultures such as African, Oceanic and Asian as well as the better-known Egyptian and European jewellery. There are spectacular works in all sections. There is also plenty that invites and rewards intimate engagement.



2. *Eye of Horus (Wedjat)*, faience amulet with shell inlay, Egypt, 187-725 BC. Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney

3. *Eye of Horus (Wedjat)*, gold amulet, Egypt, Ptolemaic period, 332-30 BC gold, h 18 mm. Collection: Nicholson Museum, University of Sydney NM 65.66, photo Phil Rogers

4. *Silver Miao necklace*, detail of the conical bosses, Guizhou, China, early 1900s. Collection: Truus and Joost Daalder, photograph Jeremy Daalder

5. Silver-gilt and carnelian 'tumar', (women's amulet container), Turkmenistan, early 1900s. Collection: Truus and Joost Daalder photograph Jeremy Daalder



Belief and Magic

Curator Eva Czernis-Ryl has drawn on her considerable scholarship and contacts to illustrate the story of some 4,000 years of personal adornment. She has achieved this in an unusual manner by investigating Australian collections both public and private to choose works collected by, worn or made by, or made for Australians, and has presented this as a series of themes.

This has led to unexpected and interesting juxtapositions such as seen in the first showcase – *Belief and Magic* – where ancient Egyptian faience 'seeing eye' amulets rub shoulders with European crosses beneath a silver breastplate, from the Miao people of South China, embellished with conical silver bosses to ward off evil spirits. Nearby is a silver-gilt and carnelian wedding 'tumar' with a good luck amulet worn by Turkoman women.



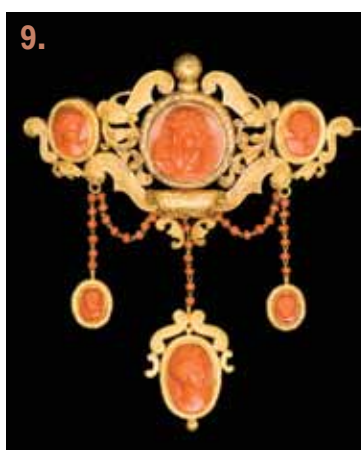
Love and Death

The second theme of *Love and Death* has the usual range of sentimental and *memento mori* jewellery among which are delightful exemplars of friendship, love and mourning – not least being the rings and brooches containing miniatures of eyes framed by hair and gems and Jewish communal wedding rings. However it is the strength of a simple Aboriginal mourning armband from the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land that drew me most powerfully.

6. *Mourning armband*, cane bound with Banyan fibre, Yolngu people, c 1900. Collection: Australian Museum, Sydney

7. *Brooch*, miniature on ivory with hair, gold and diamonds, English c 1800-10. Collection Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, gift of Anne Schofield AM through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program 2006





9. *Brooch from parure (matching set of jewellery) coral carved in Italy and mounted in gold in France or Italy, c 1840. Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, gift of Anne Schofield AM through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program*

8. *Lady Granville's parure, tiara, necklace and earrings, gold and *Lamprocyphus augustus* weevils, made by Phillips of London, c 1884. Collection: Hawkins family*

Nature and Culture

Lady Glanville's Beetle Parure with its exotic iridescent weevil carapaces and nod to Egyptian style highlights the fascination for nature that engaged the mid and late Victorians. The beetles had been given to Castila Rosalind, wife of the British Foreign Secretary, to mark the Anglo-Portuguese treaty of 1884 concerning the Congo Basin, and were made into jewellery by the London firm of Phillips.

The nearby grand coral parure, which would have set up any young bride for all occasions – provided she chose the colours of her clothes with care – is slightly earlier. This included a necklace, brooch, dress clips, bangle, and tiara and would

probably have been part of a 'corbeille' presented to a bride on her wedding day by her husband, as in the early 19th century unmarried women did not wear more than a pretty string of pearls or flowers in their hair even for grand occasions. The delicate gold and diamonds dog-rose tiara made by Pardonneau and Daumensil was most likely worn by a young married woman while the delicate golden ear of barley was perhaps a buttonhole for a wealthy brewer.

However western culture was not the only one fascinated by the bounty of the earth. The striking feather arm ornaments from Elcho Island, the tremblant kingfisher-feather hair ornaments from China and the turquoise and coral jewellery of Tibet testify to that.



10. *Tasselled armlet (Kun-bul-it), feathers, bush string, beeswax, Yolngu people, Elcho Island NT, c 1910. Collection: South Australian Museum*

11. *Ear of wheat brooch and acorn earrings, gold, England c 1870. Collections: Trevor Kennedy AM and Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney*



12. *Sir Edward Poynter's *Helen of Troy*, England, oil on canvas, 1881, gazes sorrowfully over archaeological jewellery. Collection: Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney*

13. *Necklace with 18th century Italian intaglios, set in gold, c 1870. Collection: Anne Schofield AM*

Style and Revival

Ancient Greece and Rome have inspired many different generations to use their motifs and forms to create revival styles and of these Neoclassicism of the late 1700s and the Classical Revival of the later 19th century are the best known. A fine Poynter 'portrait' of a demure Helen of Troy with her jewels sets the scene for this section. Here are displayed genuine antiquities set in gold as well as new works in the antique style, created from the late 18th century onwards, and in part inspired by the "Grand Tour" of wealthy young men such as Lord Byron bent on exploring classical sites. Necklaces made by the most notable of the firms making this work, the Castellani family in Rome and Carlo Giuliano in London, are on display.



Status and Wealth

Jewellery is often worn to denote status, wealth or power and some examples on display are spectacular. The large Tamil Nadu ear ornament hanging singularly in all its glory and the massive gold ear ornaments worn by the Fulani women of Mali projected on the wall contrast with the rich but delicate decoration on an Indian "Happiness Necklace".

14.

Massive *ear ornament*, gold, lac (insect resin), Tamil Nadu, India, late 1800s. Collection: Truus and Joost Daalder, photograph Jeremy Daalder

15.

Earrings, gold alloy and wool, Djenne, Mali, 1990. Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, gift of Lindie Ward

16.

Happiness necklace (tamania), gold, turquoise, rubies, from Rajasthan, India, mid 1900s. Collection: Anne Schofield AM, photograph Sotha Bourne



Gold and Identity

Australiana enthusiasts will be drawn to the *Gold and Identity* show case where, in a section entitled *Australian Style*, eastern Australian gold-rush jewellery has fauna disporting itself on flora in wondrous 1860-70s High Victorian gold confections. Woody pear, banksias, waratahs, kangaroos and emus are all created in exquisite detail. Four fabulous bracelets attributed to Hogarth and Erichsen are on display including the one recently acquired for the National Gallery of Australia that had been found in Scotland, valued only at its meltdown price and in danger of being destroyed.

The High Victorian gold work of the east coast gold rushes such as the Lola Montez brooch now in the National Gallery and the fine Schomburgk bracelet on loan from the Art Gallery of South Australia contrast with the lighter more restrained mining implement brooches of the Aesthetic Movement-era Western Australian gold rushes of the 1890s. Works rarely seen before include those lent by collectors (*see cover*).

The American goldfields brooches from the 1880-90s which can easily be mistaken for Australian work until the 'k', rather than the 'c' used in Australia to mark the carat of gold on work, is seen. For the first time, visitors can see Australian examples alongside pieces from South Africa, the USA,



17.

Gold and Identity - Australian Style with the model wearing the C. L. Qvist necklace

18.

Christian Ludwig Qvist, *the John Watt's necklace* 18 ct gold, Sydney, c 1867. Collection: John Oxley Library, Queensland State Library, Brisbane

19.

Hogarth & Erichsen (attributed), *bracelets with Australiana flora and fauna*, Sydney, c 1858, 18 ct gold. Collections: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne and National Gallery of Australia, Canberra



Canada and New Zealand. The delicate gold stamper brooch with an arch spelling out the WA goldfield name “Murchison” and the serpentine Coo-ee brooch designed by the composer Maude Wordsworth James are seen beside the spectacular Christian Qwist necklace made for John Watts, a prominent Queensland pastoralist, featuring motifs pertaining to his life depicted on five lockets containing portraits of family members. Also notable is the colourful Priora opal brooch.

20.

Joseph Pearl (attributed), “Murchison” stamper brooch, 18ct gold, Perth, 1890s. Private collection

21.

Maude Wordsworth James, “Coo-ee” brooch, gold set with pearls and turquoise, 1907 Collection: Trevor Kennedy AM, photograph Sarah Pointon

Men and Adornment

Some of the most striking works are to be found in *Men and Adornment*. They are drawn from cultures where they were used to indicate or assert power and authority. There are objects worn by European nobles, Indian rajahs, other eastern potentates, mandarins in China and chieftains in the Pacific. The most striking include a warrior’s comb of wood and bone worn in the Moluccas (Indonesia), Moghul (India) jade archer’s rings encrusted with emeralds and rubies, various gold diadems from South East Asia, a corset of tiny multicoloured beads from the Dinka people of the Sudan and a red-seed-encrusted neck ornament from Melville Island NT drawn from the extensive collection of ethnic jewellery owned by Truus and Joost Daalder.



22.

Warrior’s ceremonial comb (suar sair), wood, bone, from Alusikarwain village, Tanimbar, south-east Moluccas, Indonesia, 1800s. Collection: Truus and Joost Daalder

23.

Man’s corset, glass beads, wire, Dinka people, South Sudan, 1900s. Collection: Ann Porteus, Sidewalk Tribal Gallery, Hobart





24.



25.

Modernity and Change

Highlights of *Modernity and Change* which included examples from the Wiener Werkstatte and those in Art Deco style were the exquisite Art Nouveau elderberry tiara of horn and moonstones made by Frederick Partridge for Liberty of London and lent by the Hawkins family; the silver-gilt gum-leaf tiara made by Lefebure & Sons, Paris c 1900; a spectacular enamelled buckle from Deakin & Francis, Birmingham, featuring flannel flowers and utilising the white, purple and green colours of the Suffragette movement; and the opal necklace made by the teacher and artist-craftsman James W. R. Linton in Western Australia for Iris Moore, which was given to her by her fiancée on his return from the First World War.



26.



27.

24.

Frederick Partridge, *elderberry tiara*, horn and moonstones, Art Nouveau, England, c 1900.

Collection: Hawkins family

25.

Lefebure & Sons, *gum leaf tiara*, silver-gilt and topaz, Paris c 1900.

Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, photograph Geoff Friend

26.

J W R Linton, *necklace* for Iris Moore, gold silver and opal, Perth c 1917.

Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, photograph Geoff Friend

27.

Deakin & Francis, *flannel flower Art Nouveau buckle*, vitreous enamel on silver gilt, Birmingham, c 1910.

Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, photograph Geoff Friend

Evolution and Revolution

In the more open allée of *Evolution and Revolution* can be found the 'usual suspects' of the 1960s-1980s contemporary jewellery revolution. There are works classed as being made by pioneers, others which were artistic experiments from known artists, and examples of Scandinavian modern and works from early studio jewellers.

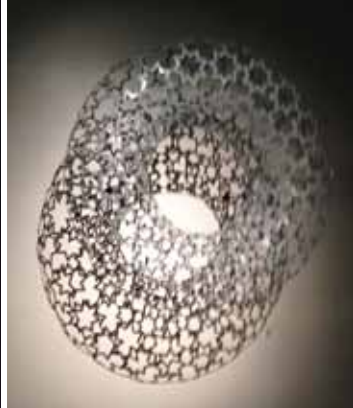
The names have an international range from English couple David Watkins and Wendy Ramshaw (who were influential by example during the six months they spent in Western Australia in 1978), Austrian Fritz Maierhofer and early Australian pioneers such as immigrants Frank Bauer and Wolf Wennrich, the latter so influential with his former students Rex



Keogh and Norman Creighton in Victoria in the 1970s. Then there is Helge Larsen of Larsen and Lewers, influential as a teacher in NSW and Vagn Hemmingsen along with native-born pioneers Matcham Skipper, Gary Bradley and Ray Norman. I found my own work in this company; time catches up with one!

28.

Evolution and Revolution – second allée with Peter Tully's *New Age Business Suit*, wool flannel suit and mixed media, Sydney c 1988. Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, purchased 1990



29.

Lynne Tune, *Land Rights*, tabard, wood rubber and enamel, Australia, 1984. Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney

30.

Alice Whish, *Milky Way Constellation*, mild steel, Australia, 1990s. Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, photograph D. Erickson

31.

Fiona Hall (b 1953), *Xanthorrhoea tiara*, aluminium sardine cans, 1990. Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, gift of Paula Dawson through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program 2014. Photograph Geoff Friend

32.

Bethamy Linton (b 1976), *Heel to throat*, 2010, pierced and coloured titanium with silver fittings, depicting endangered native *Euphrasia arguta*. Collection: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney. Photograph Bill Shaylor.

out, as did Alice Whish's imposing "Milky Way Constellation" wall piece – part of her master's degree work. Artist Fiona Hall, daughter of pioneering woman radiophysicist Ruby Payne-Scott and who will represent Australia at the 2015 Venice Biennale, created a tiara featuring *xanthorrhoea* (native grass trees) from sardine cans for her friend the artist Paula Dawson, who recently donated it to the museum.

To jump to more recent work, Sarah Roth's 2013 *Serpentine Anisoptera* (snake dragonfly) necklace has an explicitly Australian theme as does Bethamy Linton's 2010 "Heel to Throat" titanium collar which incorporates tics in its imagery. The artist, great granddaughter of J.W.R. Linton mentioned earlier, had recently purchased a farm in a forest and was bedevilled by the annoying creatures, so inserted them and other pests into a series of work for her first solo exhibition.

Major 20th-century figures with work on show were the Germans Herman Junger and Gerd Rothman, Austrians Fritz Maierhofer and Jacqueline Lillie, Scotsman Peter Chang, Dutchman Robert Smit and Italian Giampaolo Babetto. Australians included teachers Marian Hosking, David Walker, Robert Baines and newer artists such as Blanche Tilden using glass in 2013 and Christel van der Laan using polypropylene in 2010. Close observation will be needed to appreciate the technical expertise in the 21st-century gold work of Italian Giovanni Corvaja or Englishwoman Jacqueline Ryan.

There is much, much more to see but space does not permit. You will need to go and see for yourselves.

This excellent exhibition has had a long gestation but at last it is installed. I have a small quarrel with the designer's labelling.

The low light, low height, subtle colouring and point size often made the labels difficult to read in the first allee. However, they can be called up on tablets positioned at the end of each showcase, in which interesting additional information is available.

I remain distressed about the lack of a catalogue, which would have made available and preserved this valuable scholarship for a wider Australian and international audience. This exhibition is worthy of the attention of all of Australia, not just residents and visitors to Sydney. Perhaps it is not too late to construct an e-book from the informative theme labels and the extended notes in the tablets attached to each case.

Gripes aside, the whole team needs congratulating on the final result. This is a 'must see' exhibition and given that it is on for a year there is no excuse for Sydney-siders not to go often; other Australians will have time to plan a visit.

Dr Dorothy Erickson, artist and author resident in Western Australia, is represented in this exhibition with a work of her own from the 1970s and a work by Professor David Watkins lent from her collection.

A Fine Possession: Jewellery and Identity is on show from 24 September 2014 until September 2015. The Powerhouse Museum at 500 Harris St, Ultimo NSW is open daily 10 – 5 except Christmas Day, adult entry is \$15. Website www.powerhousemuseum.com, T 02 9217 0111.

Unless otherwise stated, objects are in the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences collection and photographs are by Marince Kodjanovski

Bold Statements

Some bold statements from the 1980s, when there was an explosion of creativity in the jewellery departments of art schools, included pioneering Dutchman Gjiis Bakker's "Dewdrop" laminated rose photograph collar of 1982; Swiss Therese Hilbert's red-painted steel and brass neckpiece of 1984; a handmade paper collar by Jenny Toynbee-Wilson – a textile artist who was part of a woman's exhibition group in Sydney in the 1980s; the yellow anodised aluminium "Sunflower" collar of immigrant jeweller Yuri Kawanabe of 1984; and the late Peter Tully's "Urban Tribal Wear - New Age Business Suit" from 1989.

Of the obviously Australian themed work, Lyn Tune's "Land Rights" wood, rubber and enamel tabard of 1984 stood