



PHOTO: MARINCO KODANOVSKI

View of the Style and Revival section of “A Fine Possession: Jewellery and Identity” at the Powerhouse Museum

JEWELLERY AND IDENTITY

Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 24 September, 2014 – September, 2015

THIS spectacular exhibition of jewellery spanning different cultures and millennia is billed as the most ambitious jewellery project the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences has ever staged and, with over 700 exhibits drawn from public and private collections across Australia, it takes several visits to appreciate the full scale of the project and further visits to absorb all that is on display. It is presented as a series of themes

tion, 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 subdued lighting is not only to protect the fabric of the gowns used in some displays but also to facilitate the eye-catching wall projections, such as that of Nicole Kidman wearing the *Satine* necklace from the film ‘*Moulin Rouge*’.

The exhibition is installed with an antechamber where videos of some makers and collectors run continuously before you enter the main hall, which is arranged in a U-shape. The first “allée” features 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 sub-themes, such as Australian Style. Across the back wall is Modernity and Change, with sub-sections

such as Art Nouveau and Art Deco that brings us almost to the mid-20th century. The second leg of the U is entirely devoted to sub-themes within Evolution and Revolution showcasing the innovative work of jewellers from the mid-20th century to today. Included in the sub-themes of this section are Bold Statements, Identity, Values, Structure, Nature, Materials and Fantasy. All the sections contain spectacular works. There is also plenty which invites and rewards intimate engagement.

The exhibition spans some 7,000 years of personal adornment and begins with Belief and Magic in which can be found objects ranging from Egyptian faience “seeing eye” amulets, a silver breastplate from the Miao people of southern China with conical silver bosses to ward off evil spirits, through to attractive parcel-gilt Turkoman amulets set with carnelians. The second theme of Love and Death has sentimental and memento mori jewellery amongst which are fine exemplars of friendship, love and mourning. However it is the strength of a simple Aboriginal mourning armband made by the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land that draws one most powerfully.

Lady Glanville’s Beetle Parure with its exotic iridescent weevil carapaces and nod to Egyptian style accentuates the fascination for nature that engaged the mid and late Victorians.

However, western culture was not the only one fascinated with the bounty of the earth. The feather



Massive Tamil Nadu ear ornament, filled gold. Collection of the Daalder family

using works collected by, worn or made by or made for Australians. There is much striking imagery to be encountered in the theatrically lit, cave-like vaults of the exhibition hall. Sparkling vitrines display exquisite and arresting objects which tell us stories of civilization: of love and marriage, of celebra-

Hogarth & Erichsen (NSW), ‘*Australian Flora and Fauna Bracelets*’, c. 1860s, 18 ct gold. Collections of NGV and NGA



PHOTO: SOTHIA BOURN

Liv Blavarp, ‘Red Drop’, 2012, neckpiece, palisander and stained maple, *dimensions*



PHOTO: MARINCO KODANOVSKI

‘Satine’ necklace and Nicole Kidman graphic from Baz Luhrmann’s film ‘Moulin Rouge’



arm ornaments from Elcho Island, the tremblant kingfisher-feather hair ornaments from China and the turquoise and coral jewellery of Tibet testify to that.

Ancient Greece and Rome have inspired many generations to use their motifs to create revival styles and of these the Neoclassical is the best known. A fine portrait sets the scene for the section entitled Style and Revival wherein are displayed genuine antiquities set in



Earrings from Djenne, Mali, 1990, gold alloy and wool. MAAS collection, gift of Lindie Ward



'Warrior's Comb' from the Moluccas, wood with bone inlay. On loan from the Daalder family



Gijs Bakker, 'Dewdrop', 1982, neckpiece, enlarged photograph of flower petals encased in clear plastic



'Aboriginal Mourning Armband', c 1900, Yolngu people, cane bound with banyan fibre



Blanche Tilden, 'Capital Growth VII', 2012, DATE, necklace, material

PHOTO: GREG PIPER

gold or new works in the antique style created from the late 18th Century; in part inspired by the "Grand Tour" of wealthy young men such as Lord Byron bent on exploring classical sites.

Jewellery is often worn to denote status, wealth or power and some exhibits on display are spectacular. In the Status and Wealth showcase the Tamil Nadu ear ornament hanging singularly in all its glory and the huge gold ear ornaments worn by the Fulani women of Mali, contrast with works such as a rich and delicately decorated Indian

Gold and Identity – Australian Style with the model wearing the Christian Ludwig Qwist necklace belonging to the Queensland State Library

Happiness Necklace.

The Gold and Identity theme has a section called "Australian Style" in which eastern Australian gold-rush jewellery has fauna disporting itself on flora in wondrous 1860–70s Victorian confections. Woody pears, Banksias, waratahs, emus and kangaroos are all depicted in exquisite detail. Four magnificent bracelets by Hogarth & Erichsen are on display, including the one that had been found in Scotland, valued only at its meltdown price, and in danger of being destroyed. Visitors will notice the contrast between the High Victorian gold work of the east-coast gold rushes, such as the Lola Montez brooch now in the National Gallery, the

fine Schomburgk bracelet on loan from the Art Gallery of SA and the lighter more restrained mining implement brooches of the Aesthetic Movement-era that emerged in the Western Australian gold rushes of the 1890s.

Some of the most striking works are to be seen in Men and Adornment, which come from cultures where they were used to indicate or assert power and authority.

Such objects were worn by European nobles, Indian rajahs, eastern potentates, mandarins in China and chieftains in the Pacific. Interesting pieces include a warrior's comb from the Moluccas Islands, and a corset of tiny multicoloured beads from the Dinka people of

he Sudan. Highlights of Modernity and Change include the Art Nouveau elderberry tiara of horn and moonstones made by Frederick Partridge for Liberty of London and a stunning enamelled buckle from Dean & Francis of Birmingham, featuring flannel flowers and utilising the colours of the Suffragette movement – white, purple and green.

In the more open allee of Evolution and Revolution can be found many of the pioneers of the 1960s–1980s contemporary jewellery revolution. Some of the key 20th century figures with work on dis-

Dean & Francis, 'Art Nouveau Flannel Flower Belt Buckle', vitreous enamel on silver. MAAS collection.

play include the Dutchmen Gijs Bakker and Robert Smit, English stars Wendy Ramshaw and David Watkins, Germans Herman Junger and Gerd Rothman, Austrians Fritz Maierhofer and Jacqueline Lillie, Scot Peter Chang, Swiss Otto Kunzli and Therese Hilbert and Italian Giampaolo Babetto. Australians include David Walker Marian Hosking, Christel van der Laan and Robert Baines.

In a showcase of early works are pieces made by pioneers, others as artistic experiments from known artists, also various examples of Scandinavian modern, together with works from early studio jewellers. The names include those who have had significant influence in Australia, such as Watkins and Ramshaw who were influential by example during the six months they spent in Western Australia in 1978, and early pioneers such as immigrants to South Australia, the German Frank Bauer and Georg Jensen trained Dane, Vagn Hemmingsen. Also on show are works from German, Wolf Wennrich, a teacher influential in Victoria in the 1970s with examples from his former students Rex Keogh and Norman Creighton. Then there is the Dane Helge Larsen of Larsen and Lewers who was influential as a teacher in NSW along with native-born pioneers of studio jewellery, Matcham Skipper, Gary Bradley, Ray Norman and myself.

The Bold Statements section contains examples made during the 1980s, when there was an explosion of creativity in the jewellery departments of art schools. Many of the objects displayed were part of the influential exhibition "Cross Currents – Jewellery from Australia, Britain, Germany and the Netherlands" that toured in 1984 and was later given to the Power-

Yuri Kawanabe, 'Sunflower', 1994, neckpiece, anodised aluminium. MAAS collection purchased with funds from the Yasuko Myer bequest

Christel van der Laan, 'Priceless Neckpiece', 2003, polypropylene swing tags



David Watkins, 'Title?', year, materials and dimensions. Collection?



Robert Baines, 'The Spray Brooch: Bloodier than Black', 1998, stg silver, gold, titanium, stainless steel, ht 00 cm

PHOTO: PENELOPE CLAY



Lousje Skala, 'Correlation Bracelet', 2012, ABS, vacuum aluminium

PHOTO: JEREMY DILLON



PHOTO: DOROTHY ERICKSON

house Museum. It included works from pioneering Dutchman Gijs Bakker whose *Dewdrop* laminated-rose-photograph collar was a comment on "pretty" jewellery; Swiss Therese Hilbert's red painted steel and brass neckpiece; and Lyn Tune's *Land Rights*, wood, rubber and enamel tabard. In this section the late Peter Tully's *Urban Tribal Wear - New Age Business Suit* from 1989, stood out as did the yellow anodised aluminium *Sunflower* collar by immigrant Japanese jeweller Yuri Kawanabe who applied her love of traditional origami into metal, and Alice Whish's imposing wallpiece *Milky Way Constellation*.

With pressures such as migration, globalisation, rapid expansion of cities, use of new technologies and the question of climate change, identity has become very complex. Some jewellers seek to establish their artistic identities and aspirations by making jewellery based on personal journeys of exploration,

Peter Chang, 'Untitled', 2004, bracelet, acrylic, polyester, PVC and stg silver



PHOTO: MARINCO KODJANSKI



PHOTO: GEOFF FRIEND



PHOTO: MARINCO KODJANSKI



PHOTO: GEOFF FRIEND



Jacqueline Ryan, 'Untitled', 2002, brooch, gold and enamel. National Gallery of Australia

local imagery, family history or to make comments about people or place. In the Identity section Peter Tully's striking *New Age Business Suit*, made of found objects, is a fine example of this theme. As the artistic director for the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras from 1982–86 he helped to transform it from a political march into a cultural event. The 1998 outfit is a playful example of his urban tribalwear.

Contemporary jewellers inspired by nature, abstract, redefine, simplify or exaggerate essential characteristics. Examples include the floral-spray brooch of Robert Baines; the delicate manipulation of metal in brooches by Japanese jewellers Tomoyo Hiriawa and Mieko Matsue; and the complex enamelled brooch, with intricate moving parts inspired by fungi, of English woman Jacqueline Ryan.

Searching for new ways of artistic expression, some jewellers used their work to express or question social or political views frequently using humour or ironic comment to address topics such as greed, consumerism and environmental damage. In the category Values are to be found two of Susan Cohn's doughnut bracelets, Christel van der Laan's glistening wreath *Priceless Necklace* which on scrutiny turns out to really be priceless as it is made of polypropylene price tags no longer attached to a dress. However, the 300+ hours needed to make the piece would also make it "beyond price". Her intention being to challenge notions of preciousness in conventional jewellery and make people think and smile at the irony or humour. Another work in the Values section is the floral *Too much Sushi II* from New Zealander Niki Hastings-McFaull. An artist of Samoan-European extraction, her "Urban Lei" series, incorporating lots of the tiny soy

Rui Kikuchi, 'Comb for Otohime' (3 pieces), 2010, stg silver, "PET" bottles?, dimensions



'The Queen's Australian "Wattle" Brooch', 1954, diamonds, platinum, designed and made by William Drummond & Co, Melbourne. Courtesy of Royal Collection Trust/All Rights Reserved

sauce containers packaged with sushi, questions the impact of plastic rubbish on the Pacific Islands' ecosystems.

Modernist ideas and the principles of architecture and engineering are evident in the section entitled Structure. Artists have utilized

machine aesthetic, repetition and other parts of the repertoire to create complex structures such as Frank Bauer's 1981 silver necklace, Brenda Ridgewell's dense but airy 1996 *Changing Form* neckpiece, Wendy Ramshaw's 1988 "Spinner" group of rings displayed on one of



Sue Cohn, 'Safe no 7', 1995, neckpiece, 1995, sunglass lenses, anodized aluminium, Sony wind socks, silver, and stainless steel cord



PHOTO: COURTESY OF NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA

her signature stands, or Blanche Tilden's extended *Capital Growth VII* necklace. These contrast with the minimalist bracelets of Phoebe Porter which are juxtaposed with David Walker's 1984 titanium *Neckring Kit* and a Jane Bowden's 1996 woven silver and 24 ct gold brooch. In a nearby showcase are the delicate rings and brooches of Mari Funaki made in 1996 from blackened steel and 22 ct gold.

Today an extraordinary range of materials is used to make jewellery. In Material Passions we see work in substances as diverse as metal, glass, wood, porcelain, pearl shell, paint, paper, plants and feathers and various other materials such as CD discs. Senior artists Gerd Rothman, Herman Junger, Robert Smit and Giampaolo Babetto are all represented by works in gold while Jacqueline Lillie utilised tiny antique glass beads to craft her supple necklace. The remarkable technical skill of younger artist Giovanni Corvaja with his use of fine hairs and graded colours of gold has to be seen to be believed. Also requiring considerable technical skill is the necklace of maple and pallsander by Norwegian Liv Blåvarp. She makes flexible forms with different inner and outer structures which seem alive when they reconfigure with the movement of the wearer. In the nearby section designated Alchemy there is change indeed as "PET" bottles are transformed by Japanese artist Rui Kikuchi into colourful combs reminiscent of seaweed. Other alchemy is achieved by Gilbert Reidelbauch and Brix Dixon-Ward using digital tools and 3D printers to construct elaborate pieces with the aid of new technologies.

Some artists however create from their own world of Fantasy. Two stalwarts who fit into this category are Sue Cohn with her condom-holder *Safe no 7* neckpiece resembling a large butterfly and Peter Chang with his brightly painted bracelets which look as if they are from an aquatic Disney cartoon. A very arresting piece is the lacy oxidized silver neckpiece by Dutch artist Jacomijn van der Donk of a pair of hands enclosing a neck. It was first seen by the artist as a stranglehold but she now sees it as a loving gesture. There is much more to see but space precludes further description. It is a "must see" exhibition and I find it odd that there isn't even an e-catalogue that could preserve this valuable scholarship for wider Australian and international audiences.

Dr Dorothy Erickson

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