NATIONAL COLLEGE

OF

ART AND DESIGN

FACULTY OF DESIGN

DEPARTMENT OF CRAFT DESIGN

(METALS)

'CONCEPTUAL JEWELLERY'

an exploration

of the work of five artists

by

Fiona Mulholland

Submitted to the Faculty

of Art and Design

and Complementary Studies

in Candidacy for the B.des

in Craft Design

March 1993

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INTRODUCTION

In an introduction to the Study of Man (1971), the British scientist J.Z. Young stated:

> *"There is a case for saying that the creation of new aesthetic forms has been the most fundamentally productive of all forms of human activity. Whoever creates new artistic conventions has found methods of interchange between people about matters which were incommunicable before. The capacity to do this has been the basis of the whole of human history."*

In this thesis I shall examine the work of a group of five jewellers who have sought to break free from certain conventions traditionally ascribed to jewellery. This group has challenged the very values of harmony, unity and stability on which traditional jewellery has been built. Their search has been for an authentic means of expression, resulting in innovative jewellery that deals with issues of art and meaning rather than wealth and adornment. They are concerned with the 'concept', as much as the craft of making jewellery.

In the area of jewellery no clearly defined style or theory had evolved to describe this group of practitioners, as had happened in other media such as fine art, architecture or literature where terms such as conceptualism and deconstruction are applied to radical work. Jewellery's revolt against the inherent meaning of the medium was initially about freeing itself from stylistic responsibility. Traditional notions of history and hierarchy, design canons and even logic were no longer important. This group of jewellers have set about exploring the very concept of jewellery itself. They, like many other artists, are seeking and finding means of expression that are fresh, free and dynamic and which ask us to question our inherited, notions about the boundaries of artistic expression. In the Twentieth century, individuals in a variety of disciplines

have been searching for greater authenticity in form, feeling and concept through the honest exploration and interpretation of their areas. A visual language with deeper meaning has developed that is appropriate to our time.

> *"To be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction ... It is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world and, at the same time that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are."*
> (Marshall Berman).

The work of this group of jewellers crosses into the realm of 'concept'. The aesthetic qualities of their work serve to support the 'conceptual' title. This work has often been labelled 'radical' which I believe to be an insufficient term, as they are not seeking to shock or be 'way out'. Moreover this group's work serves primarily to provoke thought, by exploring ideas that materialise in the subject and final object. Their creations address instincts and conventions in society today. For example, Otto Kunzli's 'socio-political' pieces often emphase the narrowness of 'arbitrary' conventions; Caroline Broadhead creates wearable and unwearable pieces that only barely correspond to our ideas of dress and body movement.

According to Robert Atkins, Conceptualism in the mid '60s to '70s became an umbrella term used to describe art forms that were not specifically characterised by painting or sculpture, such as Earth art, Performance and Video art. The range of thinking on conceptual art is remarkably broad. Its roots can be traced back to the early Twentieth-century *Ready-Mades* of Marcel Duchamp, to Yves Klein's 'Action' paintings and to Robert Morris's construction of a box with the recorded sounds of its own making inside. (Atkins 1990, p. 63).

Conceptual art forms include Performance, a term that has also been applied to this type of jewellery. Some critics

such as Graham Hughes believe that the most effective parallel is that between 'radical' jewellery and theatre, that it belongs in the realm of performance art. *" Such work is really a statement for the stage, not real life".* (Dormer & Turner, 1985, p. 152). This comment was meant as a criticism and would have been valid had this jewellery claimed to be purely wearable ornament. This group of jewellers are primarily exploring concepts. Wearability is possible but of secondary concern, the idea is most important. These pieces challenge what we perceive wearable jewellery to be.

The jewellers Emmy van Leersum, Gijs Bakker, Caroline Broadhead, Pierre Degen and Otto Kunzli have not been defined as 'conceptual', but I believe this to be an appropriate term for their individual styles. They have certainly been influenced by the ideas of Duchamp and others, yet have interpreted and distilled them in an individual and contemporary manner. In conceptual art the idea rather than the object is paramount. Conceptualists use aspects as diverse as semiotics, feminism and popular culture to create works that often barely resemble traditional art objects. This group of jewellers feed their creativity with similar influences producing pieces that only barely correspond to our notions of jewellery. The writer and critic Robert Hughes looked at conceptual art and saw 'an emperor without clothes' (Atkins 1990, p. 65), meaning that when the tangible 'work' itself can no longer be experienced (the event or idea is considered more important than the product), it crosses into the realm of 'concept'. These particular jewellers have absorbed ideas from this earlier movement, which was also a reacton against the too-narrow limits of art, but unlike the Conceptualists, (who believed that the object itself becomes secondary to the concept), these jewellers give equal attention to concept and creation.

CHAPTER ONE

Jewellery

A new understanding?

Traditionally, the word jewellery referred simply to the adornment of the human body through the use of precious metals and gemstones. Jewellery was largely related to the history of costume. Jewellery was late in developing into a conceptual language because of its traditonally assigned role as body decoration. The notion of jewellery as a wearable object of value or investment was and still is a deeply held assumption. As a reaction against this, among other motives which I shall explain, some jewellers have broken out of their traditionally assigned position to occupy a new territory. The group of five jewellers I have chosen to discuss, Emmy van Leersum, Gijs Bakker, Caroline Broadhead, Pierre Degen and Otto Kunzli, explore their concepts in very individual ways and in different countries.They are a few among many, although I found their visual language to be the most challenging and honest and the most appropriate to our time.These jewellers stretch the boundaries of their medium, using it as a means of expressing intellectual and emotional concepts with objects that make direct body contact but go beyond the title of jewellery. In Holland in the '60s Emmy van Leersum and Gijs Bakker aimed to break from traditional conventions and explore new ideas. In so doing their clear concepts opened the way for the development of contemporary jewellery as we now know it. Jewellery came to be regarded as a medium of personal expression and hence an art form. The work of Caroline Broadhead or Pierre Degen bear little aesthetic or conceptual resemblance to the traditional notion of embellishment; Otto Kunzli's jewels are eminently wearable and innocent in appearance, but their underlying concern is to challenge the conventions of society. The full meaning of a piece is realised when the concept and energy is revealed.

As far as the general public is concerned precious metals and gemstones still play a dominating role in what people will buy. These jewels of monetary value are seen as investments which communicate a feeling of security. One just has to think of the wedding and engagement ring, the symbol of social bonds and status. The prototype has rarely changed over the years and few people have requested or have purchased an alternative. Otto Kunzli deconstructs the arbitrary myths of conventional jewellery and specifically deals with the wedding ring and its creation of an emotive response.

If one were to think of the style of jewellery most people wear on a day to day basis, it would not include a Pierre Degen *Wrap Around Bracelet*. It could be a small, discreet gold chain, or a gold ring with dot-sized diamonds.When buying jewellery there are still a lot of mistaken assumptions about tradition. Jewellery is still usually bought for decorative purposes or as an expensive gift. Most women today consider jewellery purely as decoration. This is reinforced by the amount of costume jewellery sold. For men today, jewellery is a token of affection or sometimes a sign of power. If one looks at the type of jewellery men choose for themselves, 'conceptual jewellery' does not have a hope. Men often select signet rings, something masculine and powerful in appearance, or a heavy gold chain. Traditional and even contemporary jewellery advertisements often link affection and power with precious metals and gemstones, making it very hard for 'conceptual jewellery' to compete.

A 1930s diamond necklace 'worth' ten thousand pounds will still sell faster than a contemporary tufted necklace by Caroline Broadhead costing one thousand pounds, even in these times of recession. For this reason most contemporary jewellers have to take on part-time jobs lecturing and teaching to give them the financial freedom to keep creating.

"Another role for the contemporary jeweller- that of artist. The word artist is over-used and it should be employed rarely and only for the handful of individuals who are able to create metaphors that give us a new way of seeing the world. Most jewellery does not attempt or succeed in altering our perceptions."
(Dormer,1987, p. 71, from the catalogue Joieria Europea Contemporania).

Up to now, in the process of trying to widen and deepen the activity of contemporary jewellery there have been inevitably many pretentious 'new practitioners'. Naively these makers think that jewellery of a conceptual nature is easy to create, a misconception shared by many involved in modern painting and sculpture.There is furthermore a frequent lack of understanding for the honesty with which 'conceptual jewellery' is created. Such feeling when communicated through a piece is often what makes it successful. Those practitoners who are too easily given the title of 'radical', whose work is homogenous and repetitive and often propped up by expensive catalogues, will communicate their insincerity and more likely appear absurd and uninteresting. According to Peter Dormer, new and interesting ideas are rare: *" for every clever concept, there has been at least a hundred copies in the new jewellery's short history"*. (Dormer,1987, p. 63, from the catalogue Joieria Europea Contemporania).

Contemporary jewellery is not always understood by the general public; it can be seen as intimidating and as a visual language bereft of any merit. The same parallel with Modern Art can be made. The majority of the population either see it as intimidating or misunderstand it. Modern Art is indeed often intended to disturb our accustomed ways of seeing. The 'conceptual jewellery' I am exploring is equally meant to provoke thought and response, to alter perceptions. This in itself is reason enough for this work to be valid. It is the case that 'conceptual jewellers' have found

their own fresh means of expression, communicated through the medium of jewellery. Art can be defined as a method of communication through a visual language. It should not be bound to any particular medium or material. In jewellery, one can find the means of expressing intellectual and emotional concepts in forms which make immediate body contact with the wearer and others with whom it comes into contact. In the second half of the century, public collectors and museums have been exhibiting jewellery, thereby showing that jewellery is accepted as an art form and regardless of its material value. The boundaries in jewellery have also been extended by the creation of larger pieces of work best seen in conjunction with the human body. Much of the work I shall examine allows space to create gesture and develop metaphor. Smaller objects have also been created which, though not primarily designed to be wearable, are functional pieces of jewellery with a strong emhasis on tactile qualities and the value of ideas.

The best practitioners of this conceptual jewellery have turned it into, according to Peter Dormer, an intellectual as well as an intelligent practice. (Dormer,1987, p. 61, from the catalogue Joieria Europea Contemporania). They are characterised by their diversity of concept and the ease with which they cross boundaries and break conventions.

ベッカー、ジジス

BAKKER, Gijs

リールサム、エミー・ヴァン

LEERSUM, Emmy Van

CHAPTER TWO
Gijs Bakker and Emmy Van Leersum

In Holland in the 1960s a new way of understanding jewellery developed. This was jewellery which wanted to shake free of tradition and explore new materials never before used by 'craftsmen', aluminium, plastic and steel.These jewellers threw out the gems, the precious metals and the big price tags. By using these new materials the new jewellers opened up possibilities and radical changes previously unimagined in the jewellery field. The years 65 – 72 marked the period in which this revolution in jewellery flourished. The pioneers of this new expressive form were Gijs Bakker (born 1942 in Amersfoot, Amsterdam) and Emmy van Leersum (born 1930 in Hilversum). They studied together between 1958 and 62 at the College of Art and Crafts in the Netherlands and worked together for many years. Though Bakker and Van Leersum collaborated on many projects, they also worked separately. They had been long-term companions until Emmy van Leersum died in 1984.

These two metalsmiths had grown disenchanted with the type of work they were expected to produce as trained artisans - the customary use of precious metals and their associated material value. It was their response to this ball and chain which gave quite a shock to the public and sparked off heated discussions among other jewellers. Their clear ideas about the changing role of jewellery led to an approach in design that influenced the formation of a new national style and opened the flood gates for contemporary jewellery as we now know it.

"Indeed I do not consider myself a jewellery designer in the traditional sense. 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".
(Emmy van Leersum Retrospective catalogue, 1980. Stedelijk Museum).

Their style involved treating the whole body as a potential canvas upon which to place the pieces. Bakker and Van leersum exploited the use of familiar industrial materials such as steel, rubber and aluminium. This was thought highly unorthodox at the time, the complete opposite to what was happening in the regular jewellery trade, making their work seem particularly radical.

Emmy van Leersum and Gijs Bakker were the first jewellers to use industrial materials such as stove piping, a material particularly appropriate to their ideas and designs. The result was Bakker's 'stovepipe' collar and bracelet of 1967. This piece was the first of many uncompromising and provocative designs worked on by the pair both jointly and individually.

The quality of the finish in Emmy van Leersum's and Gijs Bakker's work was always of the highest standard. They paid considerable attention to detail and construction, believing that good 'making' was eloquent in itself. Fastenings, for example, were treated as active elements in the design, resulting in the pieces' very precise aesthetic form. Their industrial feel and appearance was in fact largely due to careful and time-consuming handwork.

Emmy van Leersum's work was different in concern and detailing to Gijs Bakker's. Van Leersum would begin by solving a fixed design problem in relation to a given material or form, for example, the cylinder.

"... I was involved now with the body, so I wanted to dismantle all the old conventions and start afresh from the beginning: there is the human arm, and it needs

covering. An arm has roughly the same shape as a cylinder, so I took basic cylinders as my basic form."
(Emmy van Leersum catalogue, 1980).

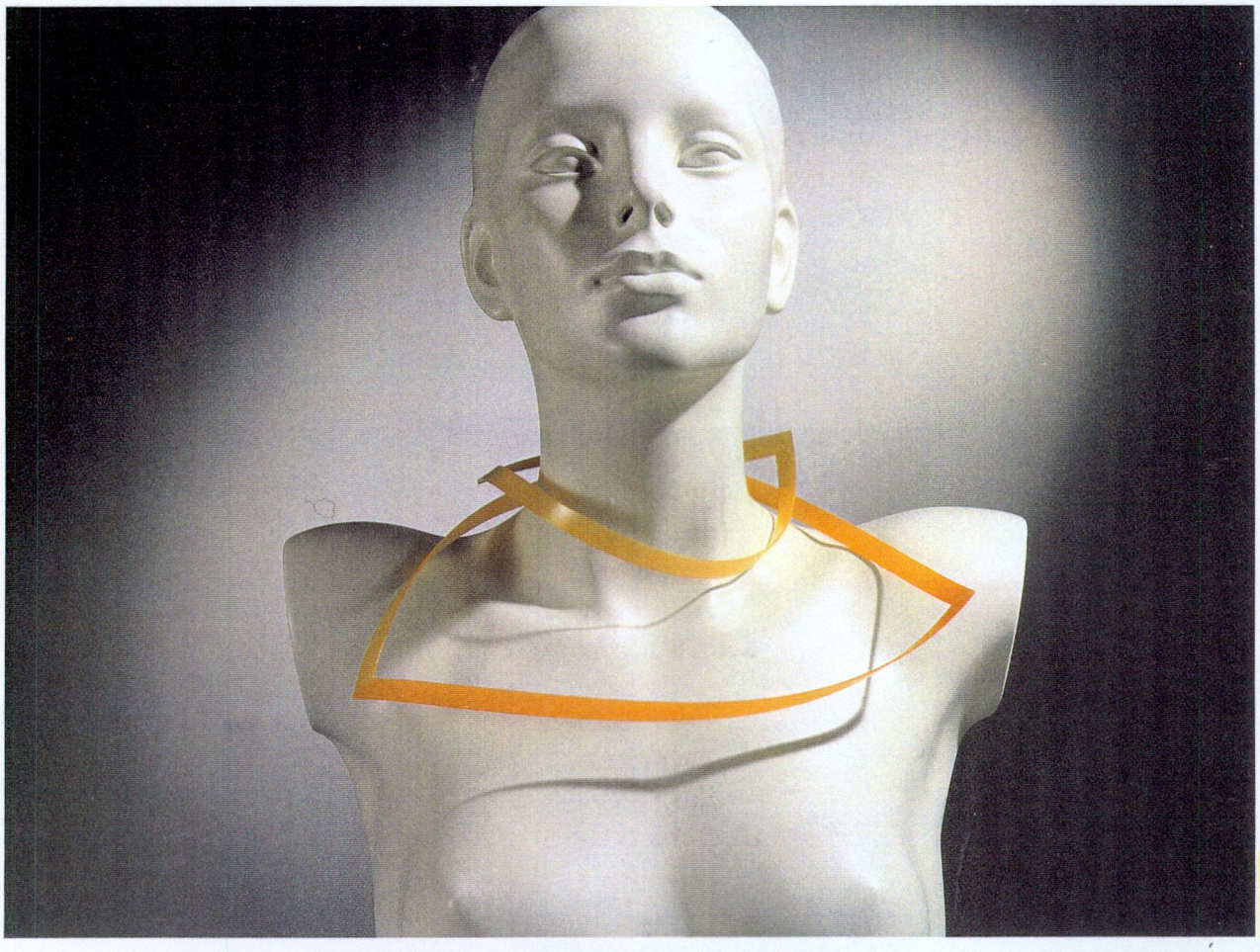
A number of alternatives would be realised which in turn constituted a series. Geometric abstract ornaments are oftern designed systematically by starting from the same set of requirements; a number of ornaments are designed resulting in a series of variations. (ill. 1)

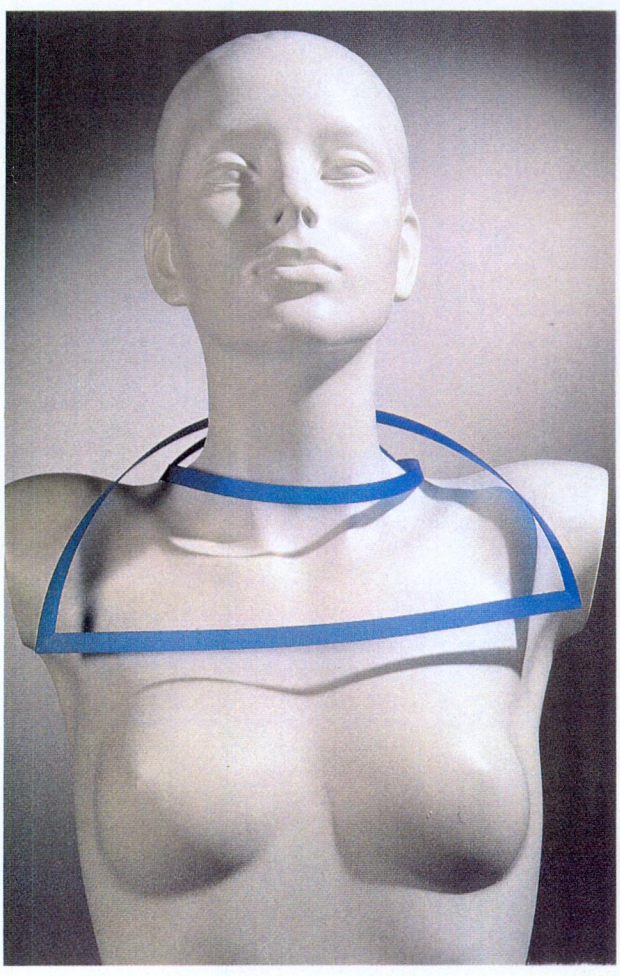
For Gijs Bakker, jewellery is an important outlet through which to realise and release concepts and ideas but which has ultimately led him into product and industrial design. Bakker worked the same themes of geometrically abstract form but found in them different means of expression.

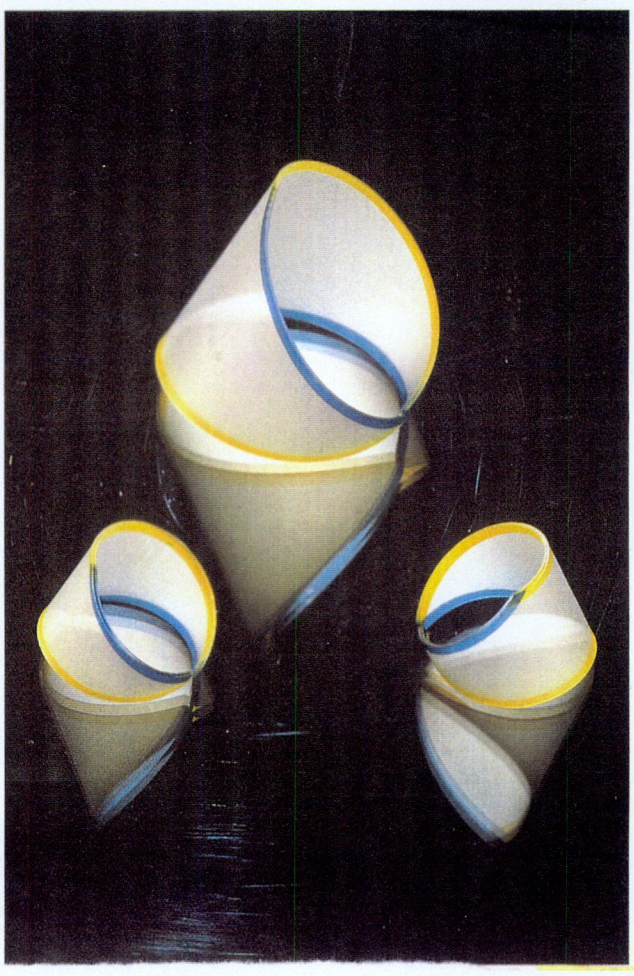
I want to examine closely their more radical and innovative work. Conceptual art and body art certainly influenced Van Leersum and Bakker's work and led them to design and produce more conceptual pieces. Their work grew to be concerned not only with the design but also with function; the function traditionally of ornament being to embellish and to confer distinction.

"My work can be traced to a continuous interaction between thinking and doing, accompanied time and again by the question 'Why?'".
(Emmy van Leersum catalogue, 1980).

Van Leersum and Bakker were concerned in these pieces with exploring the relationship between ornament, the body and clothing, and creating or dictating the space around the body. Conventional ideas about wearability were being called into question. Emmy van Leersum towards the end of the '60s was already exploring the possibilities of large metal collars attached to dresses and combining with them to form one unit. (ill. 2)







(ill. 1)

(ill. 2)

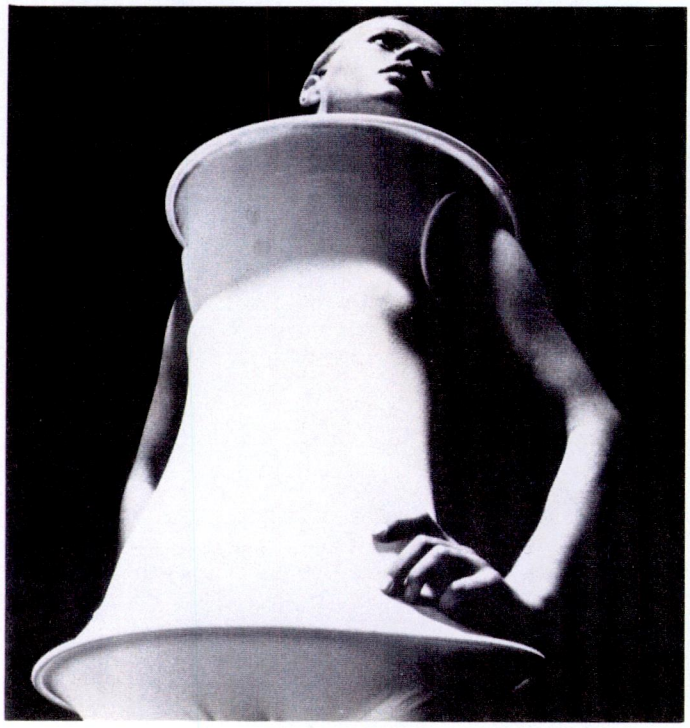
"Because I wanted to give jewellery the same importance as clothing, I made big objects which followed the shape of the human body. This resulted in the design of clothing and jewellery as a unified whole".
(Emmy van Leersum catalogue, 1980).

It was their *Kledungsuggesties* (suggestions for clothes) of the 1970s, first exhibited at the Art and Project gallery in Amsterdam, that charted their exploration of conventional ideas about wearability. These pieces involved the complete integration of metal and clothing. They were tight- fitting white nylon suits with hardened geometrical accents underneath the fabric that changed the silhouette of the body. In some ways it was both concealing and altering one's perception of what was underneath. (ill. 3, 4, 5, 6)

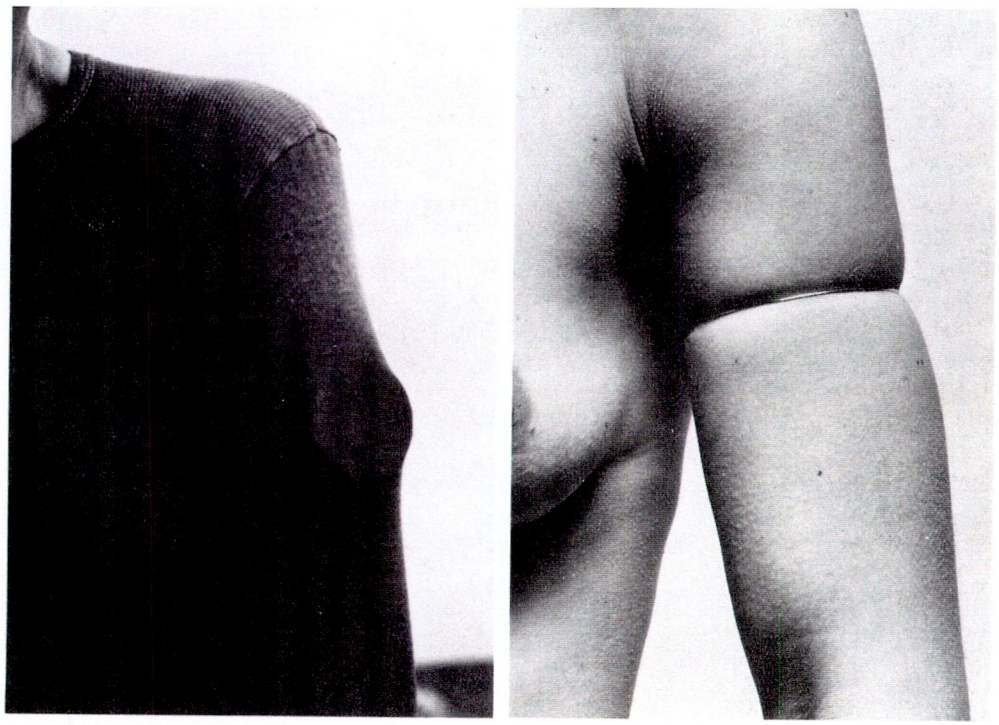
Gijs Bakker in 1973 pushed these ideas one step further with the use of a thin gold wire, tied on the arm as tight as possible until only the pull on the skin was visible (ill. 7), leading, as Bakker described, to the attention shifting from the object to the body itself (Turner 1976, p. 160). The next step was to invert the silhouette inwards to the body. The gold wire left its mark on the skin, which in turn he called an invisible piece of jewellery. This project was entitled *Schaduwsteraden*. Bakker described this work as 'organic ornament'. The ornament was no more than the impression left when the thread was removed. Bakker called this imprint organic because it was ephemeral. He described this piece as follows:

"The imprint has the function of a piece of jewellery. One could call it an 'organic' jewellery piece in the sense that a print is a growing process with a clear course."
(Pullee, 1990, p. 82).

This wire imprint, however, alienated some people as there was no tangible end product that could be worn. Bakker did exhibit this piece in a beautifully cushioned box with a



Top left (ill. 3), top right (ill. 4), below right (ill. 5).



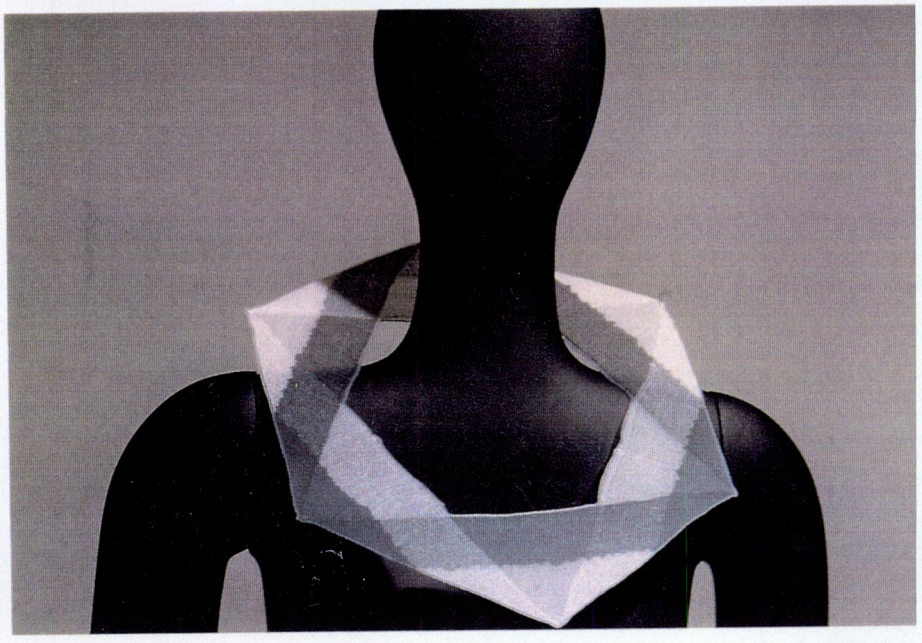
Left (ill. 6), right (ill. 7).

photo included of the imprint on the skin. This conveyed among other things Bakker's concerns with the traditional skills of Goldsmithing and its many connotations, about which he frequently made comment. According to Bakker, when designing jewellery he always had the industrial process in mind. He has never been interested in the aura of handmade things and is, in fact, suspicious of their charm. He believes that only the idea matters, whether it is produced by his hands or a machine, that nothing must distract from the idea (Bakker, 1982, p. 11). This attitude became a characteristic of his later work on design as ornament.

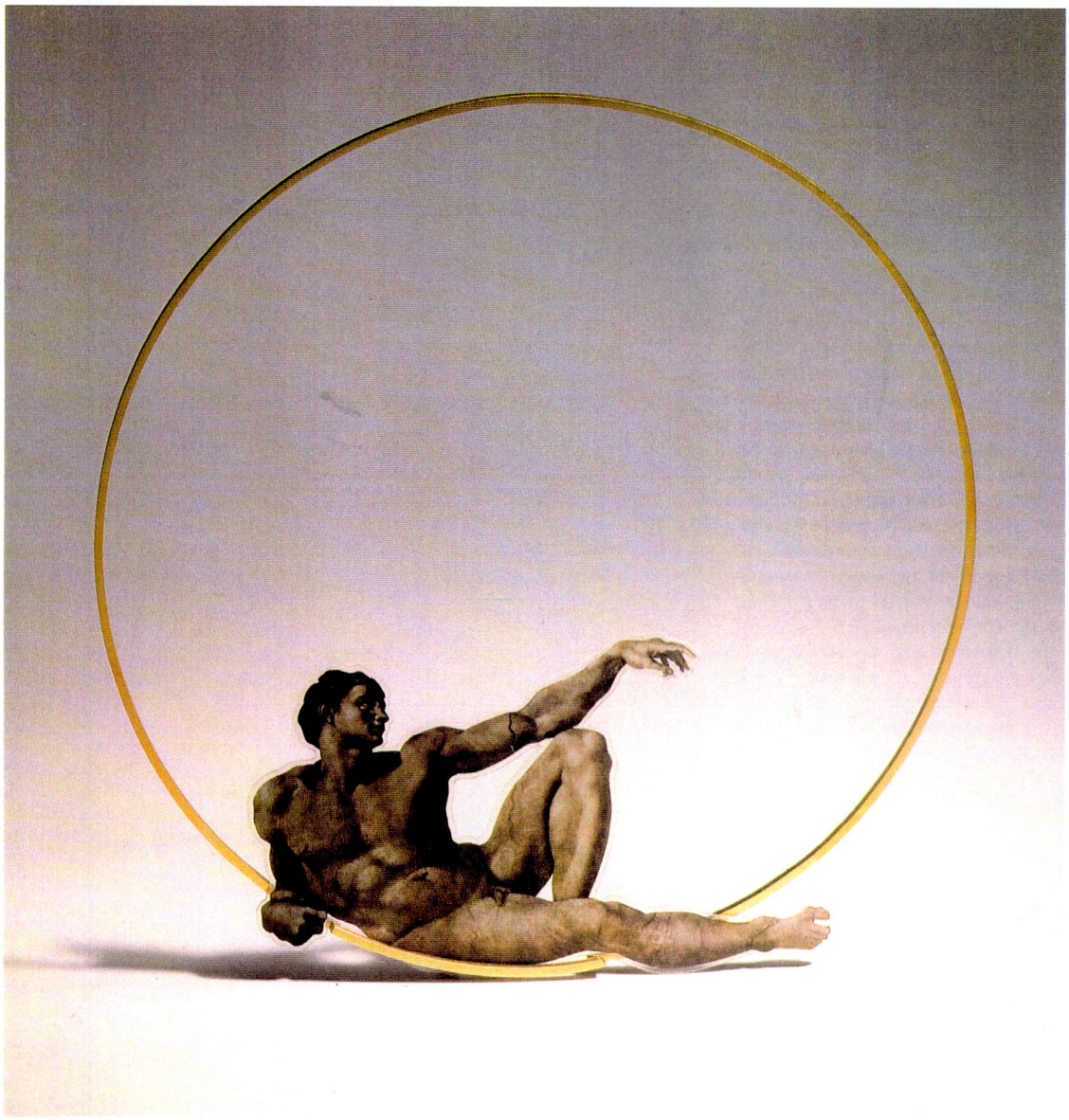
This 'invisible' imprint public raised questions about the function of jewellery, particularly about the roles of wearing jewellery and owning it. The intrinsic material value of such a piece was also in question as was whether such a 'conceptual piece' could be valid within the jewellery field. Where Bakker was successful, however, was in his ability to disturb and awaken responses not normally expected from this medium.

Emmy van Leersum and Gijs Bakker were the first 'craftspersons' to break away from stereotyped conceptions and to give ornament more content. They led the way for jewellery to be treated more akin to the liberal arts and as such as an independent form with more emphasis given to the concept.

Gijs Bakker later developed innovative jewellery made solely from synthetic materials. In attempting a profound reconsideration of the nature of craft, its relationship to art and to industrial production, his ideas, actions and their application intersected to create fresh, dynamic pieces. Bakker deliberately crossed the boundaries of what was acceptable with pieces made from photographs framed in polyvinilchlorid (ill. 9, 10, 11). The photographed floral bouqets with precious stones achieve a floridity reminiscent



Top (ill. 8), centre (ill. 9), below (ill. 10).



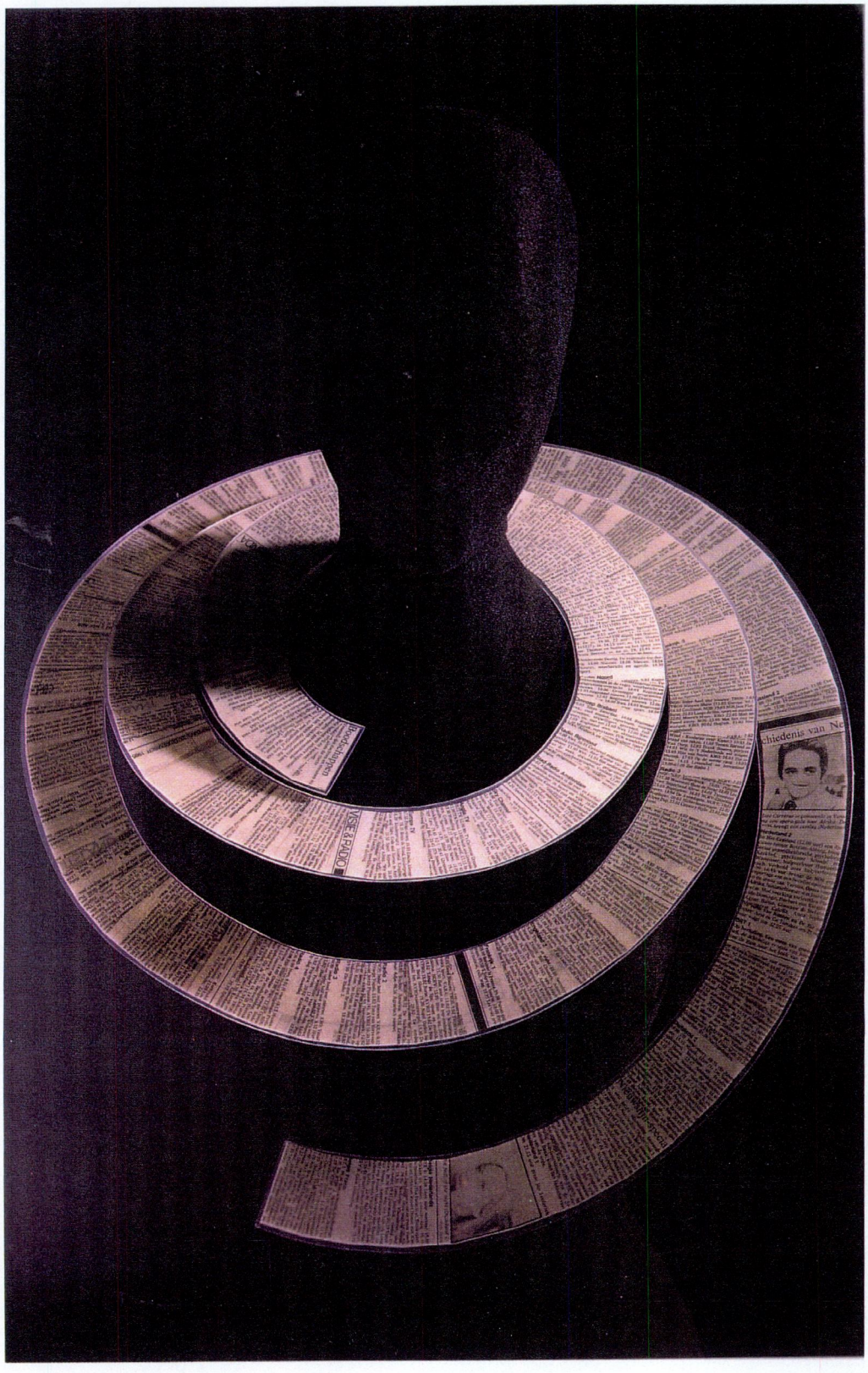
(ill. 11)

of a birthday card but that has real value-status, with the gem inserted in the heart of the flowers. Bakker said of this piece:

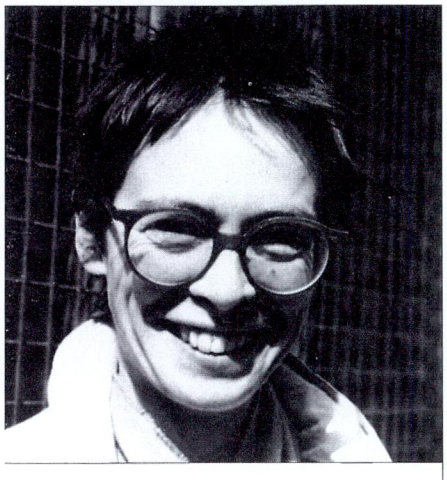
> *"... I knew that I was balancing on the edge with it. The gems should retain the equilibrium with the unrivalled colours, not through a tastful connection but just through the enormous contrast. The sapphire and turmalines almost fall down, they stand out so much against the flat photographs. Believe me, I died a thousand deaths because I am fully aware of the situation that I bring myself into, and I also know that no one waits for such pieces. This is the situation with jewellery. On the other hand,however, I enjoy the extreme price of these gems in spite of the considerable doubt. This is a provocation, inviting opposition. Perhaps not the social deed that stood in front of us during the sixties, nevertheless I consider this to also be a social statement. I am totally convinced that with this step I am moving in the right direction, even when someone observes that the environment can only accept it with difficulty. It offers me freedom, particularly from the so called artistic meaning in the jeweller's milieu".*
> (Staal, Art Aurea 4/1989, p. 67).

Subsequent to the *Queen* series in 1977-1978, many more variations followed, the most marked adaptations being the necklace from 1982 *Rose with dewdrops,* (ill. 8) and the series *Sports figures*, in which Bakker added gold to newspaper illustrations. (ill. 12)

Gijs Bakker and Emmy van Leersum believe in designs whose right to exist are not indebted to status but to clarity of concept; that is, headstrong jewellery.



(ill. 12)



ブロードヘッド、カロライン

BROADHEAD, Caloline

CHAPTER THREE
Caroline Broadhead

Caroline Broadhead is a jeweller-artist who has made a big impact on the contemporary jewellery scene. Born in Leeds, England in 1950, she studied at the Central School of Art and Design in London with Wendy Ramshaw, Gijs Bakker and Emmy Van Leersum as tutors.

In 1978, Broadhead started up with Nuala Jamison a business called, C & N which specialised in supplying commercial jewellery and buttons. It was this venture that allowed her to explore concepts fully with freedom from financial worries.

Caroline Broadhead makes objects which lean more towards 'clothing' for the imagination. Her objects raise questions about human nature's self-portrayal and redefines the body as a participant rather than a back-drop for display. Ever developing, Broadhead's most recent work has tended to collapse the distinctions between jewellery and clothing. She has progressively redefined her work, leaving traditional Jewellery behind to create more 'conceptual' pieces. Broadhead's earlier work had a broad appeal, commercial design-based jewellery, for example her ivory and silver collection. More and more she has developed her own particular style and continues to explores new hierarchies in materials and techniques. She is always developing new methods with which to soften and reduce the constructed element to her designs – replacing metal with ivory, ivory with cotton thread and coloured tassels, and in turn exchanging these for transparent tufts of nylon dyed in wooden or metal frames, (ill. 13). Then she discarded these frames, gaining greater flexibility and a more linear style. Broadhead made geometric bracelets from nylon line. She progressed to weaving three-dimensional pieces entirely in translucent monofilament, dyed to create extremely light-reflective sheens, giving the

(ill. 13)

impression of skin or hair when worn and when cast aside looking almost container-like.

> *"What excited me was this quality of expansion and contraction and the idea of a bracelet coming all the way up the arm".*
> (Houston 1990, p. 40).

Looking back at Broadhead's work as an individual jeweller-artist one can see preoccupations with specific materials and psychological modes. What is clearly evident is the evolution of techniques and images from the beginning of her career.

> *The work gets made in relation to feeling: nothing ever direct. It's more to do with knowing the sort of feeling I want from the pieces, and that's to do with the elements of simplicity, some sort of humour or wit, and something you can ponder upon: something that's an instant image and can also bear further looking at.*
> (Houston 1990, p. 20).

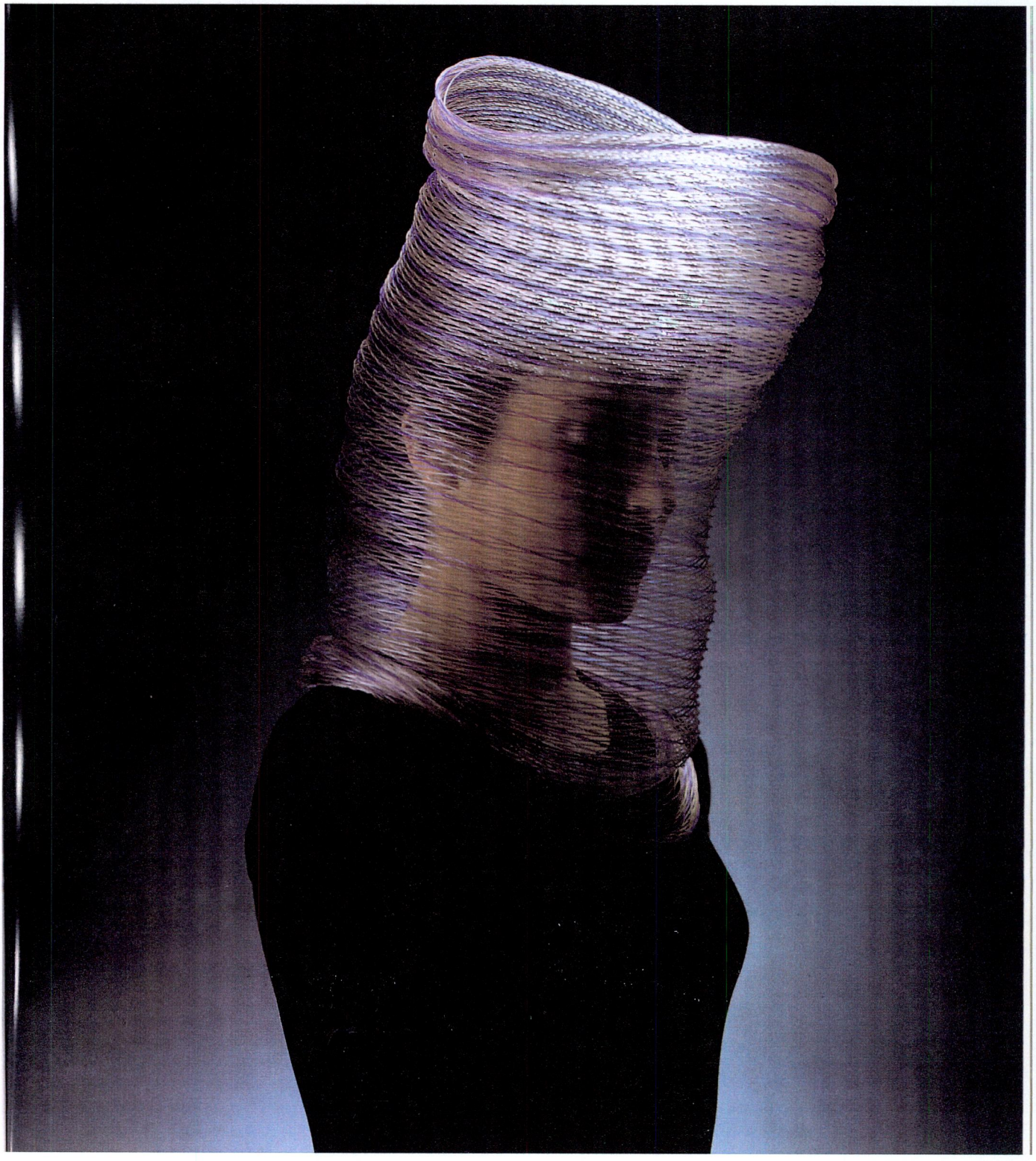
Broadhead's final small scale artefacts (before the first enveloping garments of 1982-1983) were becoming more abstract. They were already containers for the body, almost cloth-like but without a fixed form, transparent, flexiblible and with no material value. These woven nylon objects were also adjustable, their basic tubular structure capable of extension and retraction. They were visually strong enough to stand alone but also yielding enough to be worn. When worn, the most extendable of these pieces were transformed into a visual metaphor. An arm piece and a neck piece could each be adjusted into sleeve and veil. Both, and in particular the veil, become visual metaphors when worn, according to John Houston. He says that some imagined union of the synthetic and the organic refers the viewer towards the birth-caul, to tender membranes protecting the wearer, to cocoons and other more sinister

web-spun bindings. The woven nylon veil glistens in light. These associations exist faintly within the glamorous image of this piece, as is evident when one looks at the David Ward photograph that has established the image as an icon in Broadhead's career (Houston, 1990 p. 10), (ill. 14). Broadhead then developed her ideas further. The woven pieces were the stepping stone which led her to create more daring pieces.

The 'clothing proposals' began in 1983, when Paul Derrez of Gallerie Ra accepted the first individual clothing suggestion: that her material becoming fabric. More and more Broadhead challenged the boundaries of jewellery, creating objects which resembled garments more than jewellery. They questioned the very nature of jewellery, as Duchamp's objects had challenged the nature of sculpture earlier in the Century. At first Broadhead herself was unsure of the direction her work had taken and did not feel comfortable exhibiting her work as jewellery.

> *"There was a feeling from that exhibition that I had actually gone over the boundary. I was now doing clothes – so what was I going to do? It was a very difficult category. It wasn't going to be fashion: no question of things for each 'season'. And yet it wasn't jewellery, and there wasn't this thing called 'Art Clothing' or whatever my things are. I saw it in exactly the same way as I had all the other things, and yet it was a different thing."* (Houston, 1990. p. 40).

Two years later in 1986, these individual clothing proposals had developed into a collection, called *Seven Ages*. An exhibition then came about which allowed Broadhead to show this new work free from the preconceptions a straightforward jewellery exhibition would have placed upon her. The exhibition was called 'Conceptual Clothing', and was perfect for her work. Many of the garments Broadhead created were wearable and in my opinion still remain within the realm of jewellery. Examples of this are



(ill. 14)

her pieces that resemble extendable bracelets travelling the lengh of the arm, called *22 in 1,* (ill. 15) and *18 Cushions,* (ill. 16). Broadhead also made unwearables; shirts of altered proportion and scale that challenge our assumptions about dress and familiar objects. Through these pieces she amplifies the repetitive movements associated with dressing. One example is her *Shirt with seven sleeves* from 1983, which exaggerates a motion we all perform almost involuntarily. (ill. 17).

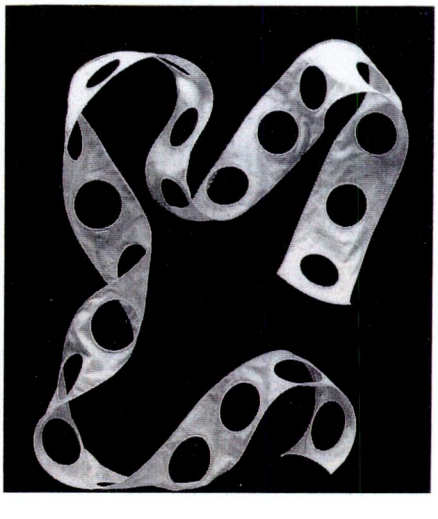
Catalogue statement from the 'Conceptual clothing' exhibition, 1986:

> *"I am using the characteristic scale, proportions and features of garments and the familiarity of these to make clothing forms and express movements, aspirations, dilemmas, states and so on. Clothing holds a visual memory of the person and it is this closeness to the human being that I am interested in".*
> (Houston, 1990 p. 44).

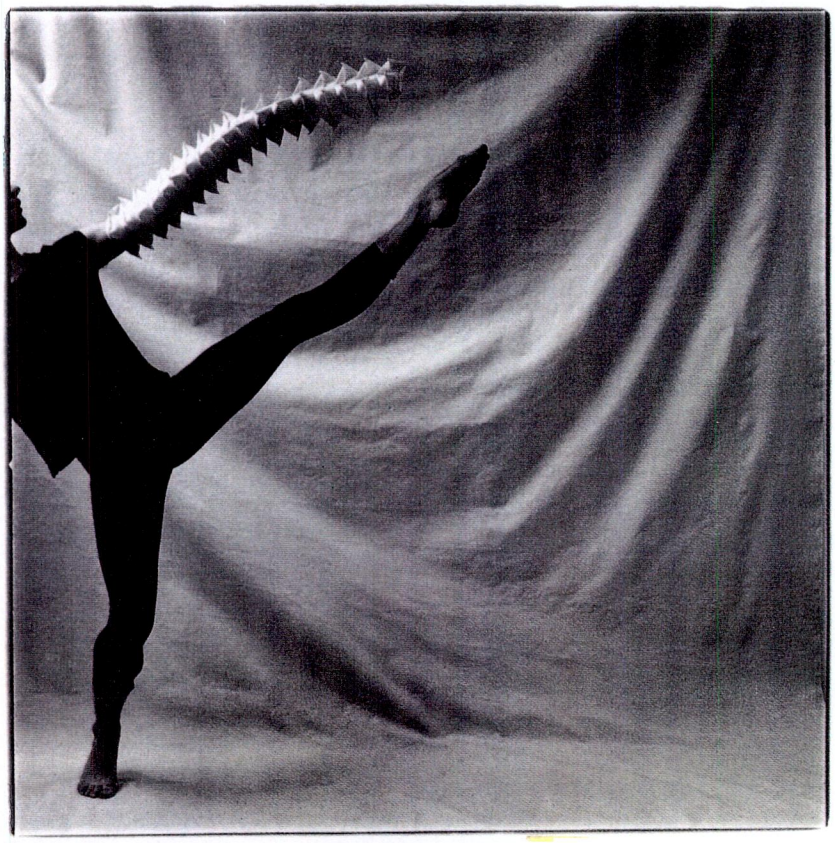
The exhibition is best summed up in Judith Duffey's review:

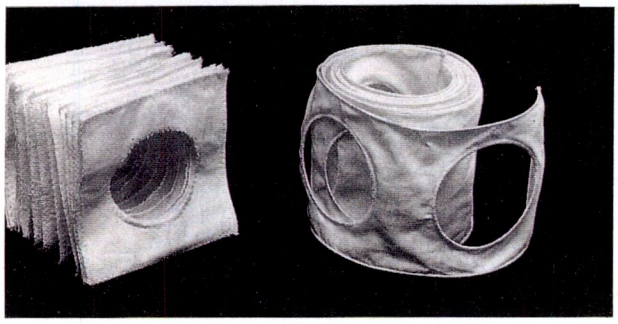
> *"Most successful in its sensitive fusion of technique and message was Caroline Broadhead's installation 'Seven Ages'. Traditional garment construction methods joined carefully different white fabrics to form metaphores for growth. Named stages – 'Cocoon', 'Stretch', 'Curling Up', 'Crumple', – described simultaneously quality, form and process. In three, the doubly-sleeved 'Unform, Carrying Other' (three progressively smaller shirts seamed into a continuous garment) and the ghostlike 'Seam', where substance disappeared and only the connecting process remained, the sewing techniques reinforced senses of entrapped regimentation, dependent reponsibility and final dissolution."*
> (Duffey, p. 53 Crafts No. 88, Sep/Oct 1987).

Caroline Broadhead herself described, in the following text, her attempts with this piece to challenge and draw attention

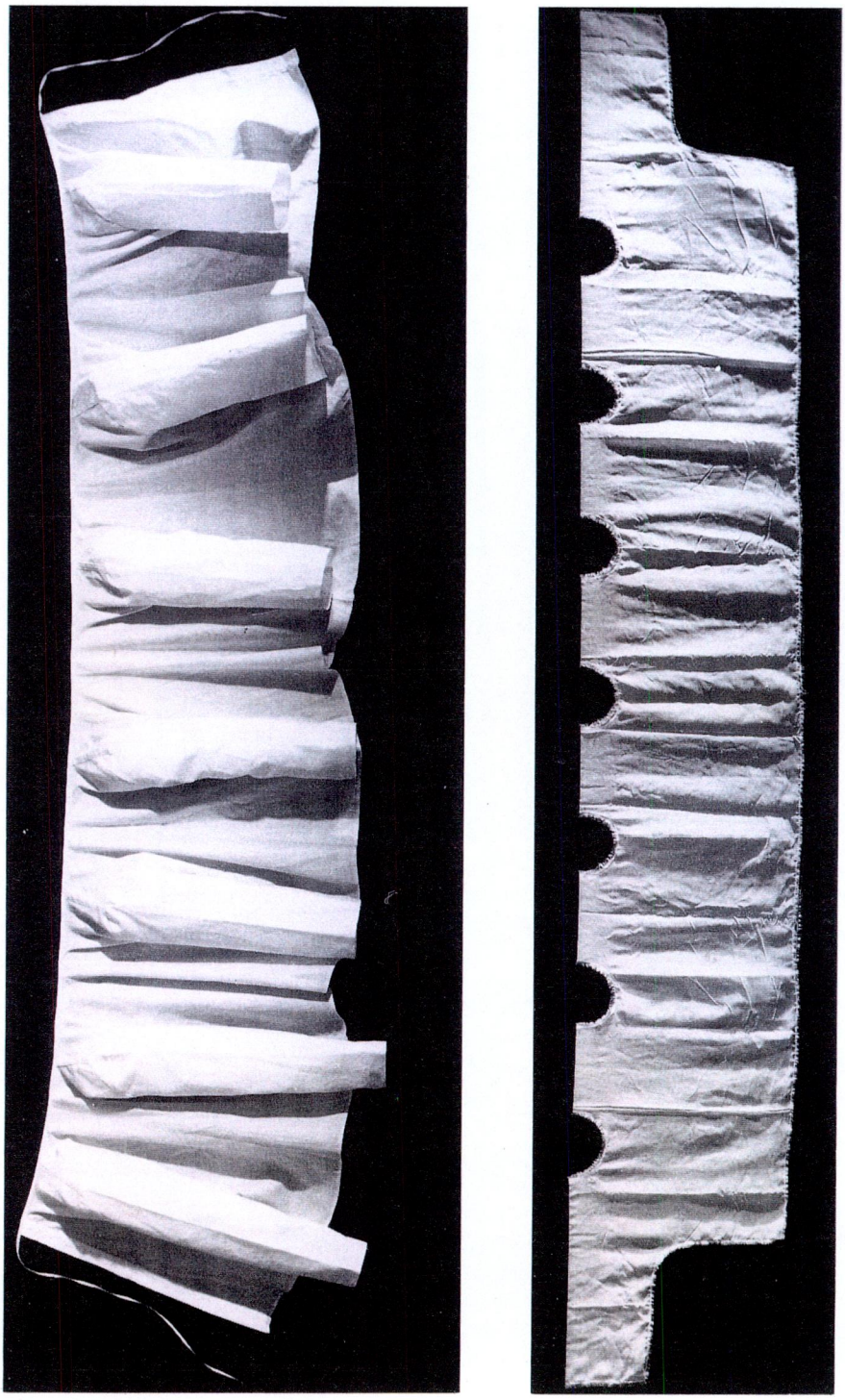


(ill. 15)





(ill. 16)



Left (ill. 17), right (ill. 18).

to social conventions of acceptability in dress. Broadhead is trying to deconstruct the myths associated with clothing and dressing. (ill. 18).

> *"My interest in the clothing is because of its closeness to the human being, but without being a portrait or a study or anything literal. For example, number 6 in the 'Seven Ages', it's called 'Crumple'. It was just really wanting to do something that wasn't troned – wasn't as people expected a piece of clothing to be seen. In realilty things are often crumpled and worn. It was trying to display something that wouldn't normally be on display. That's why the pins are there as well; its part of the making and so not normally seen. It's an embarassment – unacceptable"*
> (Houston, 1990, p. 50).

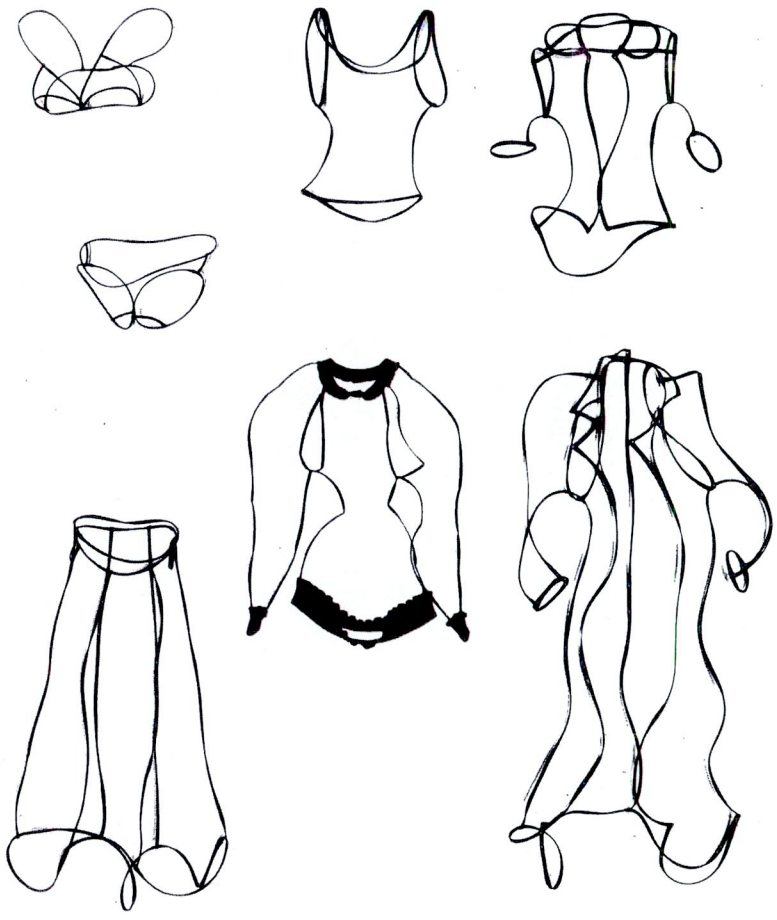
The *Seven Ages* collection was a continuous series of different wearable and unwearable works, that developed over many years with Broadhead exploring her many ideas through the use of clothing as language. She has arranged ordinary materials to portray points of contact, states of bodily presence and absence. Her most recent work, from 1989, has moved away from substantive content and towards allegory.

Broadhead did a performance in 1989 in the UK and the US with Fran Cottell called *Undercover.* It was an extension of the 'Conceptual Clothing' event, in which she puts on and takes off her designs, at once shaping and questioning our perception of them. This performance helped identify these pieces as funtional objects that also create metaphors. When unworn, the image remains potent yet inconclusive, with the garments representing the blueprint or memory of a person. But once they are placed on a living body the proir memory is cancelled. As John Houston said, absence trades places with presence, and the ambigous images become a diagram of real space, existing at the moment of dressing and undressing. (Houston, 1990, p. 10).

In the last of the series, *Seam,* from the collection *Seven Ages,* the pieces become even more formally precise, linear and transparent, perhaps an indication of Broadhead's ideas sharpening during the series' development. These pieces are closer to drawings or sillhouettes. (ill. 19). According to John Houston, they float ambiguously among dress patterns, axonometric projections and cartoon images of animated clothes; volume is implied by empty space. Being fabric, the edges have a soft curl and hang in a manner suggesting a virtual weightlessness that is almost sculptural. As they keep their shape while free-standing, the sculptural association of clothes-hanger as weightless plinth can be made (see Houston, 1990, p. 8). They are dynamic signs of a recent deviation in the Broadhead oeuvre. Caroline Broadhead is moving towards a greater degree of freedom in her work unburdened by social and aesthetic conventions.

It is difficult to catagorise these conceptual works as they do not easily wear the title of jewellery, craft, ornament or even artefact. They exist as objects of ambigous status, like flexible drawings, shapes without specific form, or as transparent signs, clothing as idea or language.

Her policy, consistently to dissolve whatever catagory, structure or image with which she is working, is a psychologically demanding process. The most recent of Caroline Broadhead's works takes the form of conceptual photographhaphy of clothing titled *Invisible people* (1989). Three garments,appearing as pale material on a dark background, are crumpled into a flowing ring of fabric, which at first glance is reminiscent, in cloth, of the Henry Matisse painting *Dance* [1st version, 1909]. But being a many-layered work, if one looks at the negative image, it defines another simple garment which was interpreted by John Houston as a classical torso, without head or arms (Houston, 1990, p. 11). But the main fact of its presence is that it is absent; a ghostly image of a garment in comparison



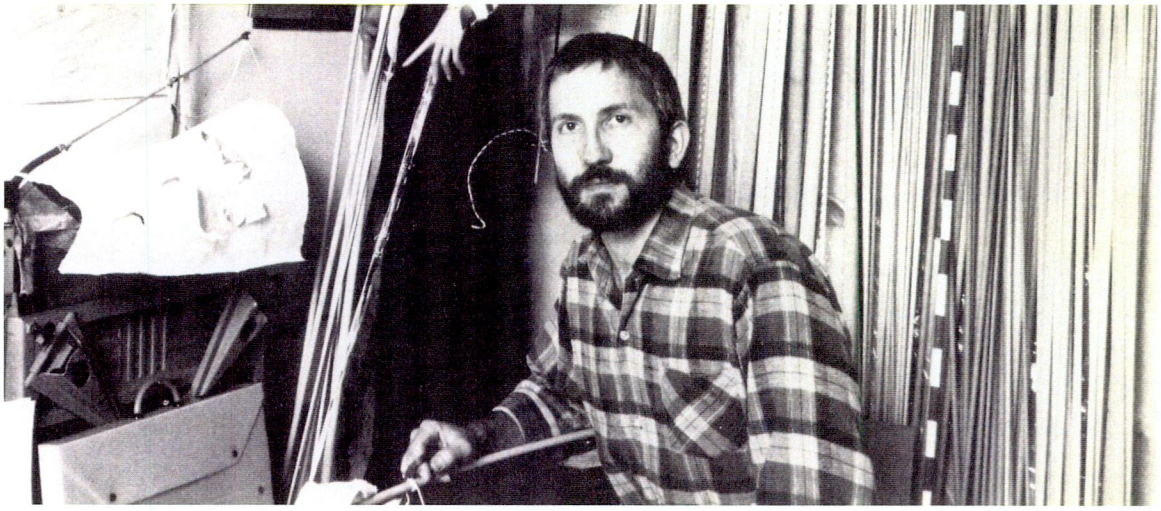
(ill. 19)

with the positively-defined *Three Shirt.* (ill. 20).
Broadhead herself said of this work:

> *"These photographs may still be in the middle of something themselves. They are actually a run-on from those skeleton garments (such as 'Seam' the X-Ray tunic from the 1986 'Seven Ages') in so far as the interest is the negative space formed by some surrounding garments. How is a person defined? How do you define the edges of a person? In this case, maybe it's other people, or what you wear. It's becoming ambiguous as to how you are made up".*
> (Houston, 1990, p. 57).

These words define what is, in fact, a varying image; one of classical visual ambiguities. The metaphors are evident; absence and presence, material and image. Do they constitute formal deception or representation? For example, a bracelet around the wrist is a material substance surrounding a tangible presence; a lifeless object given its full human meaning when worn. In terms of Broadhead's own development these notions are another step towards the deconstucting process that is the basis of her work. In literal terms, both the material and the principal subject of exploration in her oeuvre have been gradually deconstructed. She continues to explore and to convey intimate states of feeling and form from within ornament's invisible realm.

(ill. 20)



CHAPTER FOUR
Pierre Degen

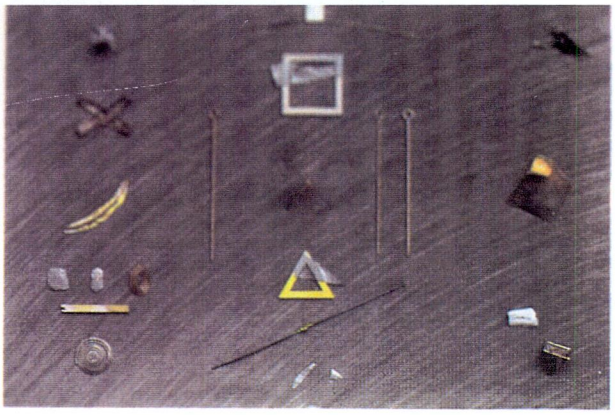
Pierre Degen is a very successful jeweller but he has the reputation, according to Christopher Reid, of being an unorthodox practitioner of his craft. At first sight his work seems to bear little resemblance to the accepted conventions of bodily adornment, either in concept, technique or even material. (Reid p.18, Crafts no. 59 Nov/Dec 1982). (ill. 21, 22, 24).

Degen was born in 1947 at La Neuveville in Switzerland and received a classical training as a jeweller at La Chaux de Fonds, also in Switzerland, up to 1968. Degen has exhibited and lectured extensively in Europe and the States, yet he is one of the most controversial craftsmen, showing under the inappropriate guise of craft, which is usually considered decorative art.

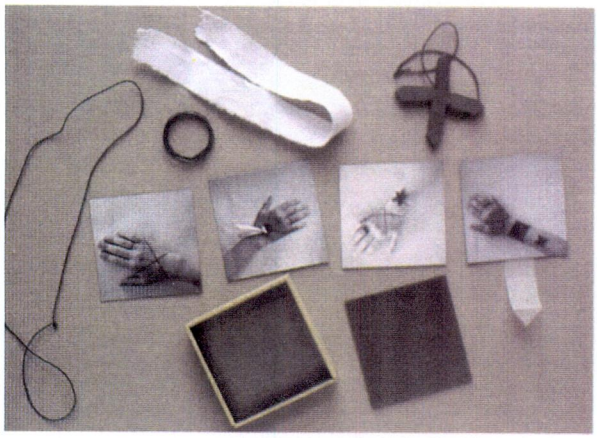
As with the other practitioners I have chosen to represent, Pierre Degen has turned jewellery into an intellectually rigorous activity and has been fundamental in altering the way in which we perceive the handcraft tradition of jewellery making. This group of jewellers have devised instead a visual language which questions and challenges the very premise of jewellery as a wearable object of monetary value.

Pierre Degen's work is mainly concerned with exploring human behaviour, people's relationship to their surroundings and the complexity of everyday life. Degen explores how his work and the human body can relate to each other. As do his drawings; his three-dimensional pieces communicate, with spontaneity and urgency, his need to express and push further the potential of our existence (ill. 21). Degen creates large gestural pieces which transcend the boundaries of jewellery to exist in the realm of sculpture, often taking 'wearability' to an extreme.

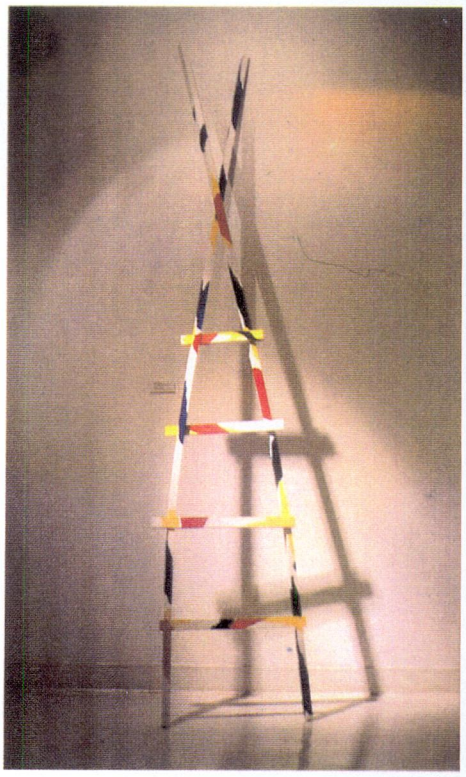
Clockwise fro top
(ill. 21, 22, 23, 24)



1980 19 Wearables
[on screen 54x50cm]

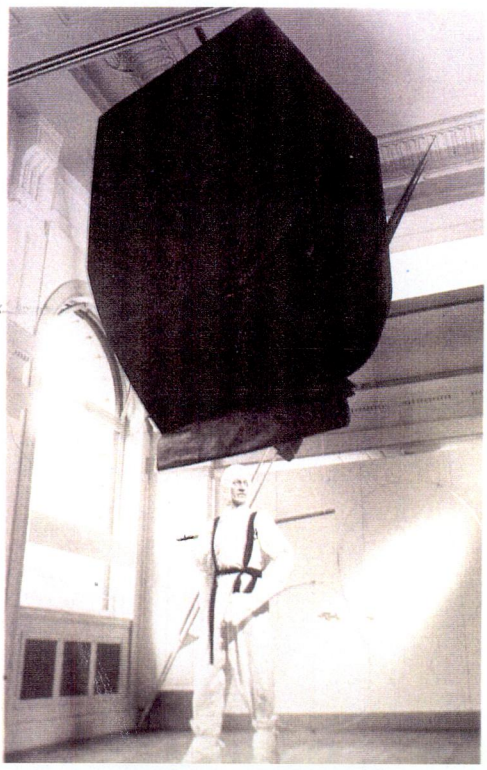


1981 Galerie Ra
5th Anniversary Piece
[80x5x5x2.5cm]



1984 Ladder
Wood/Cotton/
Corrugated Card

1982 Large Paper Bag
Paper/Graphite
[3x1.5x1.5m]



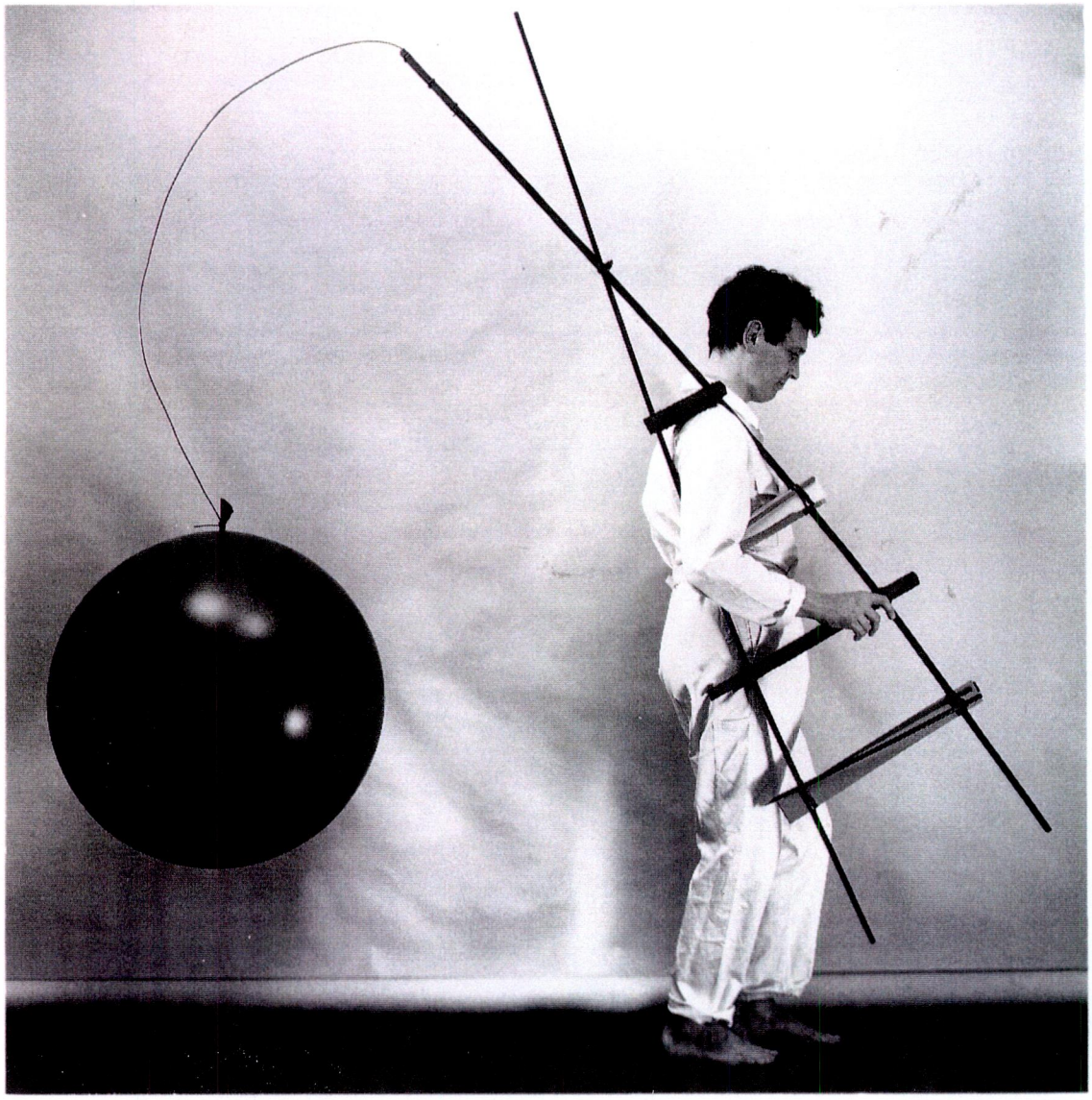
In his work he wants to break free of existing barriers by, for example, changing heavy garment-loads into lightweight ones. His 1982 *Large Paper Bag,* (ill. 23) is at least three times larger than the human body yet is suspended effortlessly above it. Degen also created a piece in which he floated a giant weightless balloon from a tapering ladder which then fitted neatly over his shoulder. Called quite simply *Ladder and Balloon,* from 1983, in its simplicity it looks almost commonplace (ill. 25). He created a work called *Personal Environment* in 1982 in which a large scale assemblage-type piece surrounded the entire body (ill. 26). Jerven Ober's poetic analysis of Degen's work was that:

> *"Together with him we can ascend an imaginary, tapering ladder that seems to hold a giant balloon and casts a magic cross-shaped shadow onto the reality of a specific movement and place".*
> (Ober from Degen catalogue).

From his standpoint as a jeweller Pierre Degen comments upon and challenges the ever-present gap between what we know a thing is and what we see it to be.

> *"Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled".*
> (Berger, 1972, p. 7)

Degen's work refers to everyday objects. When Degen uses or refers to normally ignored or 'found' objects in his work, one can look at these creations with a renewed interest. A found object is an existing object, often a mundane manufactured product given a new identity as an artwork or part thereof. The artist credited with the concept of the



(ill. 25)

(ill. 26)

found object is Marcel Duchamp. Degen, through the use of found objects, questions whether an art-work made of mass-produced components can be simultaneously functional, decorative and expressive. This technique is not usually associated with the jewellery field. The choice to use found objects challenges art's intellectual base and in the process shifts attention away from the physical craft involved in the creation of an artefact. Whether old or new, a found object infuses an artwork with fresh meanings associated with its own past use or intended funtion.

The following review was written in (Crafts no. 59 p. 18. Nov/Dec 1982) by British poet Christopher Reid, one of the 'Martian' Poets – who take their name from a poem entitled *A Martian sends a postcard home* by Craig Raine.

> *"Degen has told me how he delights in the appearance of ordinary objects – brooms, garden implements, or window-cleaner's apparatus, but not so much for the way they have been made, as for the spectacle they provide in their workaday context. A number of things he likes are being shown in exhibition, alongside pieces made by him. The point is that one is enabled to see these otherwise normally neglected artefacts with greater vividness in the ironic light that Degen's work casts upon them. I can say from my own experience that after watching their maker try on this piece and that in the seting of this studio, it was possible to step into the outside world and feel a surge a surge of innocent amazement at the great radiant sail-like contraption that we learned to call an umbrella ... or any of the other mysterious properties with which the inhabitants of our civilisation have chosen to extend or encumber themselves".*

Pierre Degen's work deals with these preoccupations in a spontaneous, uncomplicated manner. He chooses not to worry over technique or be overly concerned with material,

but chooses instead discreet, easily available materials that require no specific technique or skill to work with. The following statement Degen made in 1981 shows his 'all or nothing' approach:

> *"The spontaneous way in which I work puts me in a position to use almost all materials. I tend to opt for things that are easily available, such as wood, iron-wire, cotton, wax, steel ..."*
> (Ober, from 1985 Degen catalogue of sketches and drawings).

Such materials would normally never be associated with or considered for jewellery making. Neither would the scale of Degen's work, which is often on the same scale as, if not larger than, the human body (ill. 27). He sacrifices pratical wearablilty in order to fully explore his ideas, to create gesture and develop metaphor. Degen has taken it upon himself to take his work outside the realm of normal jewellery boundaries, and as a result his work embraces the wider catagories of speculation and interpretation usually associated with fine art and sculpture. Interestingly, Christopher Reid draws parallels in his article to the spontaneous 'assemblage'-like quality of Picasso's sculpture (Reid, 1982, p. 21). Jerven Ober believes Degen's Swiss colleagues, Jean Tingeley and Luginbuhl, share the same spirit in creating their objects.
Ober stated that:

> *"the use of every available material, the lucid way in which the latter are transposed into the language of images, objects, jewels, drawings, sketches and suggestions, bridge distances in time, attitudes towards art and place."* (1985, Degen catalogue).

The limit on size and scale is one of the criteria that keep jewellery an essentially decorative artform. Pierre Degen said himself of jewellery:

> *"... we can use many things to 'jewel' ourselves without having to first transform them into a piece of jewellery;*

(ill. 27)

it becomes jewellery only when in use. A flower in a buttonhole is a prime example".
(From 'Jewelery Redefined', Crafts, p. 49 Sept/Oct 1982).

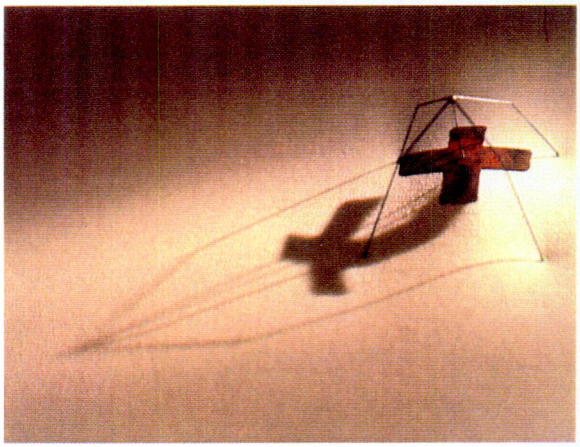
Pierre Degen also makes wearable jewellery that displays his craftsman's skills and his preoccupation with concept. Through its assemblage, spontaneous feel, this work resembles the three-dimensional counterpart of collage. Examples are his *disposable* piece made from Woolworths objects trouves and his *wraparound bracelets* from 1981, made of cotton, beeswax, graphite and copper, which one can eternally change and transform according to mood and taste. Similarly his 1980 *Drawing Braclets* of wood and steel wire transform a two-dimensional image into a three-dimensional object (ill. 29). These assemblages involve the transformation of non-art materials through a combination of techniques such as gluing or wrapping. As a result, some of the pieces communicate a disturbingly raw and sometimes poetic quality. Assemblage is a technique which shares a delight in everyday things and a critical attitude towards 'official' culture.

Degen made his *shadow brooch* (1978) form light, fragile materials that when worn casts a shadow on a surface, creating another dimension. (ill. 28). Degen also gave us an *edible piece* of jewellery in 1977, which he exhibited in the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol.

Though Pierre Degen's pieces often look randomly dynamic, his objects or choices are rarely 'chance' actions. These creations are always carefully considered. Degen's work possesses a conscientious fidelity to its originating concept and to form making. The most important function it fulfills is that of enriching the mind and refreshing one's perceptions through surprise and pleasure. Degen invites us to forget our preconceptions and accept the shifting boundaries of jewellery as art. According to Jerven Ober:

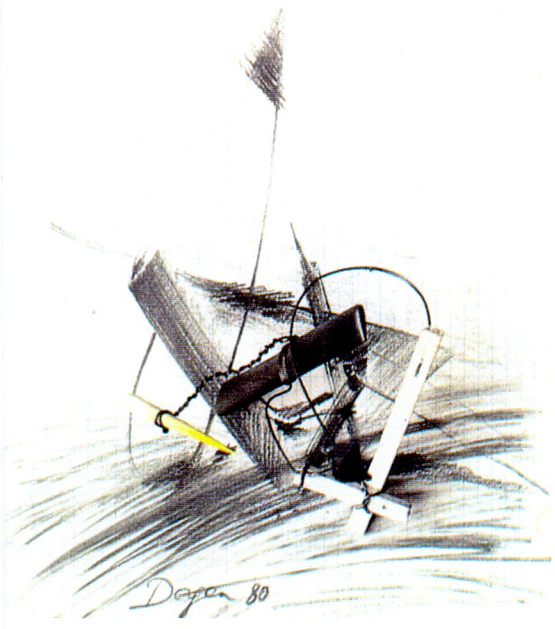
"The ladder of our imagination tapers and ostentatiously carries the balloon it holds; that is; provided we agree to fully enter the imagination of the essentially unlimited gesture".
(Ober, 1985, Degen catalogue).

(ill. 30).



1978 Shadow Brooch
Steel/Copper [5x5x4 cm]

1980 Drawing Bracelet
Wood/Steel-wire [A4]



(ill. 28, 29)

(ill. 30)

クンツリ、オットー

KÜNZLI, Otto

CHAPTER FIVE
Otto Kunzli

> *"The content of things' is what interests him primarily: the uncompromising criticism of things we take for granted, of the incidental, unmasking the ephemeral because it exposes the core".*
> (Maribel Koniger. 1991, p. 10. Otto Kunzli catalogue).

Jewellery is rarely used by jewellers to make remarks about the tradition of its making or wearing. There is one man who uses it so; the Swiss born jeweller, Otto Kunzli – One of the most challenging makers in the field today, but according to Peter Dorme and Ralph Turner, also one of the most sceptical (Dormer and Turner, 1985, p. 146). Born in Zurich in 1948, Kunzli presents himself as an artist who thinks and works mostly in social terms. He is the creator of many-layered works such as *The Chain, Gold makes you blind, the red dot, roof over one's head, the Gold house, The Deutschmark, Swiss Gold, Wolpertinger,* the *Everything goes to pieces collection* and the *From the realm of Symbolism* collection, among many others. Kunzli seeks out many different and original ways to criticise society in general and jewellery in paticular.

Otto Kunzli had a traditional training as a goldsmith in Zurich. He then studied for 6 years (under professor Hermann Junger, himself a much respected and influential jeweller), in Munich where he still lives.

An eminently intelligent maker, Kunzli, through his work, draws attention to the existence of traditional conventions as real and binding. Yet at the same time he wants to show how they are in themselves unpredictable and arbitary, how conventions will always change according to fashion and taste. Kunzli as a jeweller dislikes the power and status that conventional jewellery often accords through its use of precious metals and gem-stones. Through his work he

exposes the narrowness, at any given point in history, of what society finds acceptable or normal in dress. He does so by challenging our conventions, offering us thought-provoking works full of irony, scepticism, wit, absurdity and cleverness. According to Peter Dormer and Ralph Turner (1985, p. 146) he deals with the unthinkable in body decoration. Kunzli's work is often rejected, attacked and argued about. However it is also loved and supported. The point is that he is rarely ignored. In many ways this in itself is enough for his kind of work to be valid. According to Robert Hughes:

> *"Art discovers its true social use, not on the ideological plane, but by opening the passage from feeling to meaning – not for everyone since that would be impossible, but for those that want to try".*
> (Evans,3/1991, p. 66. Art Aurea).

In 1991 the Stedelijh Museum in Amsterdam realised the importance of Otto Kunzli's work and staged a one-man show comprising pieces made in different countries over the previous 12 years.

In sequence, the show was to begin with *Der Rote Punkt (The Red Dot)* from 1980. This piece was simply a red thumb-tack. It explored a specific subject, the art gallery as cultural supermarket – the red dot signifying a purchased object, or more particularly, signalling ownership. The plan for this project was to pin a red dot on every visitor as he or she entered the gallery, which itself was empty of exhibits. Thus the roles were reversed as the public became the exhibits. According to Robert Atkins, some conceptual artists including Kunzli deconstruct social stereotypes about gender and power that are communicated through media sign-systems. (Atkins, 1990, p. 143). Unfortunately this project was never realised as the gallery rejected the concept. But the red pins had been made in their thousands; as a result they ironically became one of

Kunzli's most circulated and sougt after pieces. The concept behind this piece has proved central to the development of Kunzli's work.

The next piece, made in the same year, was entitled *Gold macht Blind (Gold makes you blind).* It was a rubber tube bracelet with a tumour-like bulge. The streched 'pregnant' rubber concealed the true identity of this ball-like enigma. Kunzli claims that this bulge is a perfect sphere of gold. One must trust Kunzli's word not just at an artistic but also a monetary level. One is paying for a ball of gold which will never be seen. To cut open the bracelet is to ruin its value as a piece of jewellery and also expose the motives of its wearer (ill. 31).

Kunzli devises collections of jewellery which as much as possible are disassociated from material value and yet which adorn the body and are functional. Examples are his simple geometric brooches, in bright coloured wallpapers, of which around 400 had been made between 1982 and 1985. Kunzli believed that wallpaper was an appropiate medium for various reasons, one being that it expresses, as he says himself, the 'fear of emptiness' (Kunzli 1991, p. 34). Wallpaper is usually associated with covering an interior space. In contrast it is here used to overlay a three-dimentional volume. In this series different patterns relate to different forms. The other works include the well known *Cube, block and stick jewellery,* which are a play on basic geometric forms. Some critics doubted the wearability of these pieces. As a result, in 1983, Kunzli invited friends to take part in a photographic project in which they could wear the 'garments' in any manner they chose (ill. 32). Thereafter Kunzli used photography as a means of controlling such encounters between his jewellery and ordinary people, to focus upon what is arbitrarily acceptable and what is strange in every-day life. An example is Kunzli's image of a gentleman wearing a flower-covered brick called *Centifolia* from 1983. This image

(ill. 31)

(ill. 32)

juxtaposes a number of class and gender conventions; a brick brings to mind a masculine stereotype and flowers are normally a more feminine symbol. So the whole ensemble creates a vaguely lecherous image or, perhaps, a formal alternative to that of the flower in the buttonhole (ill. 33).

Kunzli also designed an ingenious and simple *Post-card brooch* in 1981 which functions as a card holder made from acetate, rubber bands and a brass pin. The post-cards are interchangeable according to the mood and taste of the wearer (ill. 34). In this piece Kunzli creates a personal language that communicates the fundamental characteristics of his jewellery, the expression of image,colour and ornament. Barbara Cartlidge has interpreted Kunzli's piece as a direct progression from the earliest body ornamentation through to pictorial representations – similar to the relationship of early body scarification and tattoos to later cameos and medallions. (Cartlidge, 1985, p. 162).

Postcards are one of the most circulated means of visual communication. Never has there been such a concentration of different images which can be so easily bought. This phenomenon can been identified as Semiotic, as defined by Robert Atkins: communication through the use of arbitrary and agreed signs. Langauage itself is the most universal of such systems; visual symbols follow as equally potent. Semiotics is the science of those signs, the analysis of their interconnection and capacity to generate meanings. Related to this process is the critical strategy of deconstruction. Deconstruction in one of its forms is the term given to the stylistic approach of certain conceptual architects. It is characterised by a semiotical inquiry, revealing the multiple meanings producable through the discrepancy between the outward grammar of a 'text' – be it a building or artwork – and the 'context' of visual, cultural and linguistic limits from which it springs.
(Atkins, 1990, p. 142).

(ill. 33)

(ill. 34)

The next piece I want to look at is *Das Schweizer Gold-Die Deutsche Mark (Swiss Gold, The Deutschmark),* from 1983 – of which Kunzli himself said:

> *"Swiss Gold – The Deutschmark is ... a work about exhibitionism, voyeurism, reception, exposition, consumerist behaviour, the arbitrariness of moral concepts, exploitation, vanity and illusion."* ...
> (Kunzli, 1991 p. 40).

This piece involves a brooch and a necklace. The brooch is made from the ultra-light packaging of quality swiss chocolates, and has the shape and appearance of a gold bar. The necklace is made from two hundred German One-Mark Coins, rendered worthless because of the holes drilled through each in order to string them together (ill. 35). These pieces reflect society's concern with consumerism and materialism. Kunzli 'performed' this work in a Munich gallery in 1983. In it, an elegant couple in evening dress relax and drink champagne in a small room. He wears the brooch and she the necklace. Beside them in a larger room a group of people are drinking beer. They are separated by a glass wall, and look across at each other. The divisions between them are further exposed by a third audience, those who pass by the gallery and look in through its window.

Those attending the performance are not free from accusation; as James Evans says, there are many views, but who is really seeing what? (Evans, Art Aurea p. 71 3/91).

> *"Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world".*
> (Berger, 1972, p. 9. Ways of seeing).

The following passage comes to mind when one thinks of Kunzli's endeavours to identyfy the myths ingrained in jewellery, particularly the symbols that assert and

(ill. 35)

communicate social bonds. According to Dick Heldige:

> *"[Kunzli] must live in an uneasy cerebral relation to the bric-a-brac of life – the mundane forms and rituals whose function is to make us feel at home, to reassure us, to fill the gap between desire and fulfillment. Instead they summon up for us the very fears which they alleviate for others. Their arbitary nature stands revealed: the apparent can no longer be taken for granted. The cord has been cut: we are cast in a marginal role".*
>
> (quote from James Evans article in Art Aurea, 3 / 1991, p. 66, about Otto Kunzli).

The following piece is, in my mind, one of the most emotive pieces of jewellery ever conceived. It is simply called *Kette (Chain)* (ill. 36). It began in 1985 with a small advertisement in a Munich newspaper, stating simply, 'I collect wedding rings' and a telephone number. Kunzli got a large response which resulted in a collection of 48 rings, the oldest dated 1881, right up to 1981. These stamped rings spanned 100 years and reflected the histories of many people from different backgrounds. Kunzli also collected the 'stories' behind each ring and documented them as part of the exhibit. These 'stories' were often tragic, and Kunzli discovered that the social or material value of these rings was not nearly as important to their donors as the emotional weight of the symbols they were passing on. According to Erika Billeter, these symbols finally stood for a wish 'that the union shall be as imperishable as gold and, like the ring itself, without end' (from the catalogue, Contemporary Jewellery from Germany, 1989 p. 6). In other words, these individual's were breaking away from the material symbol of their social bond which once represented happiness and commitment and now represented the individuals separation from a negative past. This highly charged collection indicts the folly that accords a particular material and social status to a ring and its wearer, while respecting the personal romantic impulses

(ill. 36)

behind their purchase. Something of this ambivalence is conveyed by the cutting of each ring band, in order to link them in a chain. Their often painful memories are symbolically freed, but their lost tenderness renders the chain virtually unwearable. One set of difficulties, one 'chain', is replaced by another. The piece exists in a curious state of suspended animation that was described thus by Roland Barthes:

> *"... we constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness, for if we penetrate the object, we liberate it but destroy it, and if we acknowledge its full weight, we respect it, but restore it to a state which is still mystified."*
> (quoted by Evans, Art Aurea p. 72 3/91).

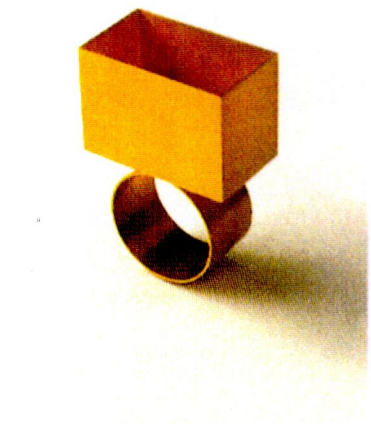
Kunzli's most recent work shows a progression from concern with material symbols to an exploration of the way we look at things and the physical act of seeing. This work he has called *"Augenblick" (Eyes/Mirror)*. Maribel Konigen wrote of these pieces:

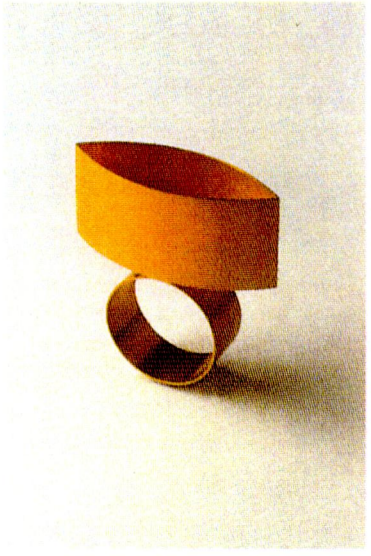
> *"The way you look at it - that's the way it looks in the role of the voyeur secretly observing himself, the observer actively participates in the concretisation of a piece of work which fulfills itself in a succinct mirror-like hole in the wall. The look which sees only itself is suddenly there quite unexpectedly. Walls and hands have eyes. Your own iris gazing tensely at the curiousity shining back at it, is suspended without lashes at the base of a ring's metal frame. This piece of jewellery becomes an instrument of self-observation, of an encounter with an isolated part of one's own body, a means of confrontation. Even in the age of retina transplants we find it hard to abandon the Platonic allegory of the eye as the mirror of the soul."*
> (Kunzli catalogue 1991 p. 128).

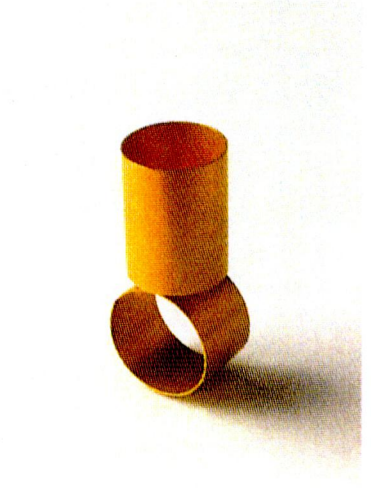
This collecton is composed of different pieces of jewellery which each have mirrors inserted in them. There are rings

that when one looks, one finds one's own eye reflected (ill. 37). The piece itself becomes an instrument of observation, and creates the illusion that hands have eyes. (ill. 38). Kunzli has also created a brooch entitled *Katoptrische Brosche (Catoptric Brooch)* in1990 which similarly reflects ones eyes. A further illusion within this piece is that, when one winks in this mirror, a third eye appears. Kunzli also created a photographic series of mirrored eyes, using adapted mirrored spectacles. The image is disturbing and surreal because in the sequece the 'natural' eyes are missing (ill. 39). Maribel Koniger found this particular work reminiscent of the Rene Magritte painting *The False Mirror*, in which an eye reflects the outer world (Kunzli catalogue p. 130, 1991). It is interesting to point out that Magritte and other Surrealists in the 1920s and '30s explored in a radical manner the science of signs and their relation to the unconscious. Kunzli and the other artist / jewellers examined here pursue a similar agenda through their work, focussing on the ever-present gap between perception, understanding and expression. Today they share the same concerns, aiming for a new understanding of the role of the sign in human life.

> *"The way things appear is determined by our changing attitude to the processes of invention, reproduction, destruction. Without invention there would only be tedious routine. Without copies there would never be enough of the things people manufacture. Without destruction or decay too many things would outlive their usefulness. There is no doubt the artist has a special role to play in the history of material things: Artistic inventions change human sensitivty."*
> (Koniger, Kunzli catalogue p. 9, 1991).

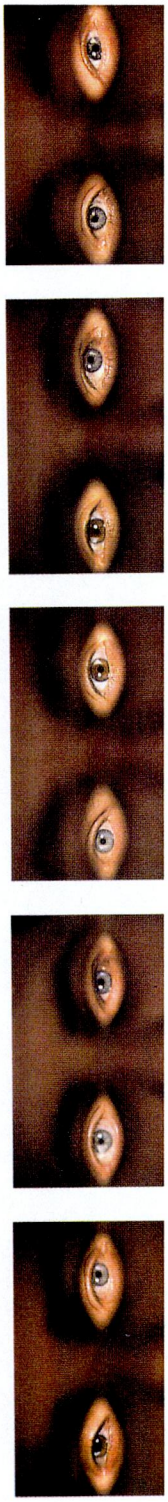






(ill. 37)

(ill. 38)



(ill. 39)

CONCLUSION

" Freedom equals self-determination equals man ... Art is at its most effective and scientific when expressed with a question mark."
Joseph Beuys. (quoted Turner 1976, p. 14.)

One may be struck by the diversity of trends reflected in these conceptual works and of the correspondences between their implied messages. This 'Conceptual jewellery' is not only characterised by a diversity of form, texture and material, but also by the challenging ideas it explores. From Van Leersum and Bakker's *Clothing Suggestions* to Broadhead's seemingly weightless forms, from Degen's *Personal Environment* to Kunzli's 'political' pieces, jewellery now demands a new sense of self awareness and assertiveness. This group have found an honesty in their work that makes it more original, cleverer, funnier. These artists explore concept and form and disregard the notion of jewellery as simply decorative craft. They are challenging and questioning our preconceptions about jewellery unburdened by social and aesthetic conventions. Each of the group explore these concerns in different ways. Kunzli and Degen atack the assumptions underlying traditional notions of ornamentation. Caroline Broadhead's work reflects her preoccupation with human instinct and specifically body movement. The creations of Bakker and Van Leersum bear little resemblance to traditional jewellery either in form, content or material. The practical realization of ideas differs from individual to individual. Certain tendencies in their work are more strongly evident than others. The central characteristic of such conceptual work is the sense of liberty gained through not only the ideas explored but the materials and scale employed. These jewellers have fully understood the modernist ethos of coupling idea and material and then making a form perfectly. The material and technique are the means, the tool by which concepts are communicated and ideals realised.

Complete freedom in the choice of material is one of the characteristics of this work. None of these jewellers place particular importance on the use of precious metals, silver or gold.Van Leersum has used aluminium and steel, Bakker's later work is made of synthetic materials. Kunzli might use precious metals in order to confront society's assumptions about them. Broadhead uses fabric. Degen chooses natural and simple materials like wood, cotton and steel. The traditional concerns of material value and smiths' craftmanship are no longer important criteria. Scale is related primarily to the concept being explored and geared to the creation of gesture and metaphor. Examples of Degen's work are often larger than their potential wearers, resembling 'installations' for the body. These artists have succeeded in breaking down barriers of prejudice regarding traditional materials and techniques, as well as persuasively entering the debate on whether or not jewellery is a valid art form. These jewellers have sought to explore and confound the hazy borderline between craft and art. As a result, conventional ideas about 'wearability' are no longer a priority. This is clearly evident in much of this work, particularly Degen's *Ladder and Balloon* piece and Broadhead's Seven Ages collection. Though it must be said, the functionality of these pieces is called into question. It is their defense that these jewellers do not allow such an issue to confine their expressive language. They have a valid point. The priority of their ideas travels beyond this concern. Kunzli has stated that:

> *"... one requirment of jewellery is its wearability. For me, as with others, experimenting means taking little notice of the requirement. And so from time to time I come up against the borderlines of jewellery. Experimenting is often the most intense form of work for me."*
> (Turner 1976, p. 130).

Some would argue that wearability is the primary quality of jewellery as body adornment and that this work no longer merits the title. Even if this is so I believe the term 'Conceptual jewellery' remains appropriate.

Photography is an important tool in relating these concepts and can also render wearability irrelevant. Caroline Broadhead's most recent work has led her to use photography as a medium through which to continue exploring her concepts. Kunzli uses photography to emphasise the strength of 'arbitary' social conventions, providing for us an illustration in which we can see ourselves. Degen employs photography to demonstate his pieces' action on the body, and when Gijs Bakker presented his organic *Gold Wire Bracelet* and its imprint in photo form he showed in faxt how vitally wearable this work was. Jewellery of this sort can and does make a decisive impact on both wearer and those with whom one comes into contact. It is unfortunate that one cannot experience these pieces haptically; I believe that, as with many artforms, only in this way can their full potential be realised. Through them these jewellers have transformed jewellery into an intelligent and sociologically conscious activity.

What will the future hold for contemporary jewellery?
Caroline Broadhead ended her catalogue from the 1985 contemporary jewellery exhibition New Tradition, by saying, *"The last twenty years have nearly exhausted this exciting and important phase of questioning the fundamental nature of jewellery"*. She went on to anticipate that the new direction for the late '80s and the '90s would include an exploration of the tension between *" function and non-function, inheritance and invention, conservation and innovation – Polarities in all art "*. (Broadhead. 1985, p. 69).

Whether or not Broadhead's prediction has come true is hard to say. So many diverse and contrasting concerns influence the progress of the medium; new technologies challenge the jeweller positively, while old gallery practices challenge them negatively. The 'conceptual' jewellers, though well regarded, remain ultimately on the margins of

jewellery practice. Contemporary jewellery over the last twenty years has been completely stage-managed by the practitioners in the field. The jewellers themselves have opened galleries, written books, had articles published and set up guilds. This movement has been until now very insular. Dormer has echoed Broadhead's concern by describing it as " *the tiny quasi-art world of avant-garde jewellery*", and stated that jewellery to continue developing will have to look far beyond the limitations of its own recent tradition. (Dormer, 1987 ,p. 71 & p. 63, from the catalogue Joieria Europea Contemporania).

To overcome and disintegrate such boundaries, jewellery must look to other visual languages such as fine art, design and architecture, that can inspire them both in terms of creative concept and commercial practice. Different museum and gallery venues and a wider availability of literature on the subject would raise jewellery's profile and status, yet the public demand necessary for such changes will only come through good work worthy of attention. Excellent examples of jewellery continue to be made; the problem is one of publicity. It may be unfair to ask a jeweller to deal with such pragmatic concerns but their marginalisation will continue until one does so more effectively: the conceptual jewellers are not the first artists to find their peers and public resistant to such innovation. Their achievement has nonetheless been great. Jens-Rudiger Lorenzen's statement about contemporary jewellery can easily apply to their work:

> *"... their legitimacy, importance and influence ... must be judged by the extent to which their new concepts, their innovations, their successes and even their failures continue to provide a basis for questioning established assumptions and, hopefully, for evolving new approaches". (Lorenzen, 1989, p. 16)*

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