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National College of Art & Design

Metalwork/Craft

Four Contemporary Metalworkers and the Hallmarking System

by

Julie Spollen

**Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and
Complementary Studies in Candidacy for the Degree Bachelor
of Design in Craft (Metalwork)**

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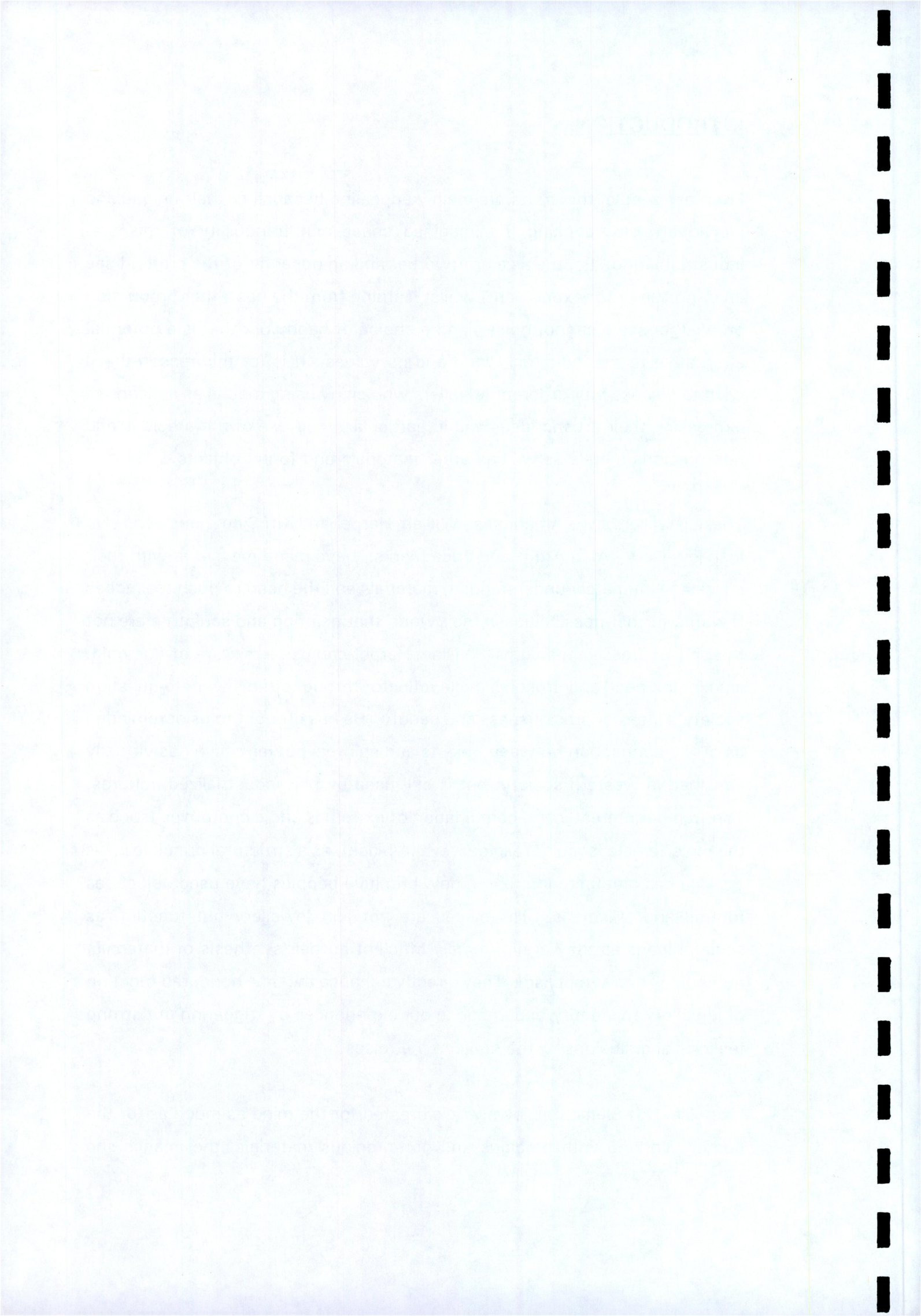
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INTRODUCTION

For most people, the crafts are mainly appealing because of their unique and individual skills, evoking the imagined peace and tranquillity of this pre-industrial world. For me as a craftworker and an observer of the crafts, I see an opportunity for experiment, whilst learning from the past, that production on a larger scale cannot oblige, and a choice of handwork that is a potential alternative to the industrial world and its values. It is for this reason that I wish to discuss four different jewellers who enjoy using metals as a means of expressing their artistic ideas and in particular, their use of the precious and non-precious metals as well as other materials and found objects.

These jewellers, two Americans - William Harper and Kiff Slemmons - and two Irish jewellers - Alan Ardiffe and Erica Marks - have made me aware with their interest in intimately understanding materials and the need to push their ideas towards further possibilities in their work, that painting and sculpture are not the only expressive mediums. William Harper can use a mixture of fine gold, aluminium, pearl and broken bicycle reflector throughout his work to question society's ideas of preciousness and beauty. He has brought to us or reminded us of the connection between objects and spiritual power which has virtually vanished in western society, but is still used by non-industrialized cultures. Through his interest in the combination of extremes and dichotomies (such as the male/female, secular/religious, white/black), as a structural principle in his art. He has a definite interest in how primitive peoples have used objects as totems and talismans. His pieces are not just jewellery but function as societal icons as they are extremely efficient in their synthesis of materials, technology and symbolism. They directly enhance the time honoured function of jewellery to identify and enhance our experiences by triggering our strong feelings and illusions to the subjects he raises.

Likewise, Kiff Slemmons jewellery is created for the mind as much as for the body. Working with precious and non-precious materials, the images she



creates convey greater importance to content and expression than to decoration or formal abstract concerns, giving us a sense that jewellery may surround us everyday. She reveals to us a reflective temperament and a well travelled body and a mind including more of herself and her literary interests in her jewellery, by the choice of materials and the poetic effect of her compositions.

Whilst these american artists are free to enjoy a wide range of interesting materials, I will comment on how the legalities of mixing precious and non-precious metals through the hallmarking system in Ireland prohibits the sale of work with mixed metals because of regulations applied by the Company of Goldsmiths. This is empowered by a 17th century statute to enforce standards of fineness in precious metals and has had a considerable effect on Irish jeweller's work.

While Alan Ardiffe's work may be considered sub-standard by the Assay Office, I believe his pieces transcend mere personal adornment rather, each piece has a background of stories and experiences that convey and portray his thoughts, being serious and humorous all at once. He likes to think of them as modern icons, considering the different colours and qualities of base and precious metals, not their commercial value. Based in Ireland, he is inspired by current controversies and literature, using his talismanic power of jewellery to satirize present day phenomena such as mobile phone users.

Erika Marks is another innovative Dublin based jeweller whose work refers to the past through ancient objects which have had functional use and delight. Whether through style or content, even though by its very nature is contemporary, it evokes a feeling of a very old age and importance. She uses a wide range of material in conjunction with metal. Her work shows evidence of her interests in the concepts of utility, function, form and cultural condition in which they were constructed. Through various techniques, she examines both her own personal history in metalsmithing and the history of

metalsmithing itself as a channel for material and social culture.

These four people have changed and encouraged my views of the possibilities of working small and in metal, showing me that jewellery is not merely about body ornament but can possibly be an expression of the innerself. It is not only a question of applying art to jewellery, but discovering a new form of expression through penetrating analysis of the nature of the medium and its context. To wear a piece made by one of the jewellers, you are empowered to become a narrator to interested eyes, to show the value of the piece is in its context and not its cost.

While the hallmarking law does not immobilize contemporary Irish jewellers, it does make their work illegal if they mix metals. This means that they cannot sell it. A lifeforce brought about by skill, knowledge and creativity is in danger of being crushed. I am interested in the statute as I feel it is an unjustified regulation for Irish jewellers as it poses a restriction to further development in artistic freedom. Hallmarking is not compulsory in the United States or in any other E.C. country. Why can Ireland and the United Kingdom not follow suit. If hallmarking was no longer necessary, jewellers interested in making artistic pieces could take full advantage of the mixing of precious and non-precious metals and materials, work which could be exciting and ingenious and which is rarely seen in today's sophisticated world of jewellery. I am interested in intelligent handworks that are not destructive to their makers or to the environment, that should not be throw-away objects but hold a special place in people's interiors as well as on their exteriors.

All four artists, Slemmons, Harper, Marks and Ardiffe used mixed metals and a range of materials from glass, wood and plastic to pebbles. A part of this aesthetic is a strong desire to avoid the commercial, traditional and conventional use of metals. Their work is highly developed and reflects an unusual energy and concern. As alchemists - cum - narrators, they can produce playful and provocative work that also has an underlying seriousness

which avoids the short term feeling of frivolity associated with so much jewellery today. Harper, Slemmons, Ardiffe and Marks all use mixed metals and their work may be viewed as modern icons as they are aware of the ancient talismanic power of jewellery. The recent growth in metal as an art medium may be attributed to their strong involvement with metal forming and research into ancient and contemporary art forms. Many of the forms - open ended, vertical, horizontal and bulbous - may have functional intent but command a sculptural presence. New dimensions achieved by the experimentation of mixing metals, precious and non-precious with other materials reveal an enormous advancement in the presentation of their ideas. Their excellent jewellery pieces are strong, inventive and narrative and show a wider range of materials and techniques than those explored ten years ago.

In well presented work, the silversmith will show convincing expertise in his skills but there is now even a greater artistic challenge for those who search for their individual direction in this malleable art medium. What makes a piece of jewellery precious? For commercial trades people, it is obviously the amount of gold or gemstones used while for the artistic mind it is the reason for making the piece, the concept behind the work and the artists sensitivity in his/her use of materials, for their beauty and not their commercial value. William Harper may use a squirrels tooth instead of a sapphire, Kiff Slemmons re-locates an old ruler into a work of art, Alan Ardiffe will use copper instead of gold if it is the colour he wants, while Erika Marks will oxidise silver rather than have its usual highly polished surface. How can preciousness be measured in artistic pieces? Tribes people in Africa have been know to swap precious stones to westerners for plastic beads because they found them more pleasing to the eye.

It was during the summer in 1993, when my attention was drawn to the headline in the Sunday Tribune newspaper "Sell it any we seize it"⁽¹⁾. As I work with metal, I was annoyed to find that Alan Ardiffe was being harassed by the Assay Office for the mixing of metals. In this case it was silver,

copper and gold. It is common for contemporary jewellers to mix precious and base metals and the National College of Art and Design encourages its students to further explore this technique. However, all is not lost, since the opening of the jewellery gallery. The Design Yard in Templebar as the first specialised jewellery gallery of its kind in Ireland stocking a wide range of contemporary jewellery from artists at home and abroad. The main objective of the Design Yard in Templebar is to act as a link between craft producers and the users and buyers of functional art products, thereby acting as a conduit for Irish craft/art products in Ireland and internationally. Officially opened in December 1993, the Design Yard is one of the cultural centres being developed by Templebar properties as part of its programme to establish Templebar as Dublin's cultural quarter.

CHAPTER 1 - WILLIAM HARPER

To try and understand William Harper the jeweller, we must look at the background of his education. Between 1950 and 1960, there was a heavy postwar influx of European artists and craftsmen who emigrated to the U.S.A bringing with them traditional working techniques and knowledge from their native countries. Students interested in craft used these techniques to suit their own personal styles and manners. There was a growing interest in intimately understanding the past and primitive functions of jewellery and materials. Students were given a whole new source of information from these artists and became aware of the need to push possibilities further. Harper was one of these students.

William Harper originally studied to become a painter but he too felt that he could not express his knowledge and interests on his subject matter through painting. He met Charles Mayer an enamellist, in 1962 and was introduced to the enamelling technique which plays a major part in his work. Harper began to use enamelling as an expressive medium, exploring new possibilities relating to his own interests and ideas. Harper reinvented the medium of enamel jewellery by questioning its premises.

Grotesque self-portrait of the artists as a Haruspex^(Fig 1), made in 1990, is a magical wand made from gold cloisonne enamel, fine 14C and 24C gold, fine and sterling silver, opal, pearl, coral, shell and carapace suggesting that Harper creates his work by self-evisceration.

A Haruspex was a Roman seer who saw the future by reading entrails. The fossil shell with its complex ridges, spills out from the open chest of Harper's long thin figure. A gold mouth grimaces as the eyes droop heavily in a painful expression. But the glowing scarab carapace on the Haruspex's forehead symbolizes the visionary powers of the mind. This beautiful brooch conveys the dichotomy between the pain of introspection and the beauty of revelations

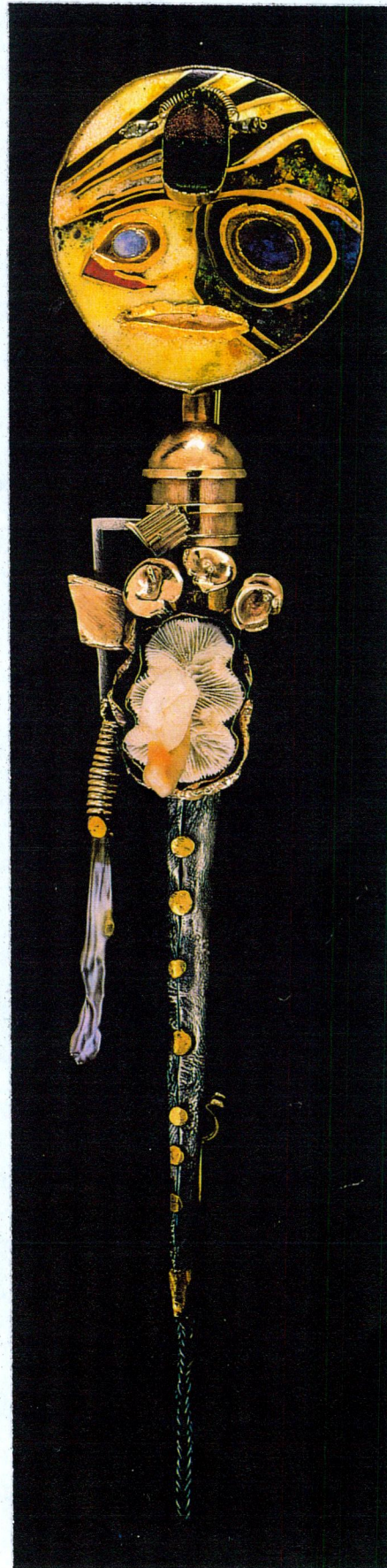


FIG 1: Grotesque Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Haruspex



that lie at the heart of the creative process. Harper decided that the combination of extremes and dichotomies would be the structural principles in his work.

Primarily a colourist, his interests include myths, religious symbolism, anthropology and the function and power of jewellery in primitive art. The connection between spiritual power and jewellery has been forgotten about in western society but with Harper's work there is a sense of ancient ideals in contemporary design along with his interest in how primitive peoples used jewellery as talismans rather than for the aesthetic. This also connects with his preoccupation with the idea of preciousness using found pebbles as another would use a diamond, a piece of aluminium beside fine gold or silver. His incorporation of found objects and non-precious metals with precious metals and jewels conveys to us that beauty can be found in societies discarded rubbish as well as precious stones and metals. Lead may incorporate gold when given the chance, broken bicycle reflectors look dazzling alongside rubies, as does gold on cloisonne enamel. It takes a moment or two to actually discover what materials he has used to such effect. The result strikes a sensuous balance between the richly coloured flat graphic areas and the antenna-like extensions of three dimensional form.

Harper's Grotesque self-portrait of the artist as the Goddess Kali (1990)^(Fig 2), is densely layered with Hindu mythology. An associate of Shive, the supreme lord of the cosmos, Kali embodies its creative energy. Her name is also the feminine form of the Sanskrit work "Kala" meaning time, hence the Goddess is all-devouring and annihilating. In Tantric art, Kali is often portrayed in red, the colour of primordial energy. She dwells on the island of Jewels, which is appropriate for Harper, as in Tantric painting she is surrounded by a golden circle. But in her destructive phase, Kali is black and her tongue hangs out to lick up the world. Harper has juxtaposed these two Kali myths in his circular mask/brooch, and has incorporated the Shiva Lingam symbol as well. Surrounded by a rim of gold, Kali's disc face is the incandescent red of a



FIG 2: Grotesque Self-Portrait of the Artist as the Goddess Kali



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bicycle reflector. Her black rimmed eyes are moonstones, her mind's eye is an opal. A pearl hangs from a piece of crudely modelled gold that emerges from her mouth, formed by Harper into a Yoni, the triangular symbol for female genitalia. The brooch personifies both male and female principles of creativity and destruction, life and death.

Harper's titles lead the viewer to connections and associations that the images alone do not communicate. The title may tell how cultured or well-travelled the maker is but the work itself tells more about Harper as an artist and as a human being. Using instinct, intelligence and conviction, William Harper has been ahead of the times in three areas that are proving crucial for the 1990's. These are:

- The swing towards a truly respectful pluriculturalism that recognises the contributions of African, Asian, Central and South American cultures to world art.
- The crossover between high and low culture and art and craft.
- The fight for an open expression of sexuality as legitimate subject matter for art.

CHAPTER 2 - KIFF SLEMMONS

Kiff Slemmons was born in 1944 in a small town in Iowa. Her father was the local editor and publisher and as a child she worked on the local newspaper doing odd jobs. Her experience with the linotype machine gave her a love for the written word and language in general. She credits the linotype machine as a catalyst which brought her to do metalsmithing. The old printing press was her first recollection of language and ideas made manifest through metal.

Inspired by literature, music, Russian constructivism, surrealism, extensive study of the global history of jewellery through extended travels through Europe, the Far East, Scandinavia and Mexico in the mid-seventies helped her technical skills as a self taught jeweller develop, as her ideas evolved. Her work is talismanic in that her materials are inseparable from her works content as she uses material to poetic effect rather than for pure aesthetics. She summons illusion and metaphor in her work, making familiar objects "yell" such as pebbles, zippers and rulers by elevating them from the commonplace and placing illusion and metaphor side by side.

For the past fifteen years, her work has included small beach stones and oxidized sterling silver. Other materials included a wide range of the non-precious, depending upon the content of the piece.

During a trip to Japan in 1983, Kiff studied the aesthetic and poetic possibilities of layering which pervades so many aspects of Japanese life, from Temple architecture to kimono design. Kiff made a number of brooches exploring the architectural and spiritual essence of temples and tall eloquent Torii archways which are built on both land and sea as monuments, portals and frames for sacred places.

During this eight week trip, she developed an attraction to pebbles which along with silver appears continually in her jewellery. Stones and pebbles are

scattered around the Torii gates and balanced precariously on their lintels - tossed into the air by people hoping the rocks will land on the horizontal beam, leaving the particular person in better Karmic shape.

Kiff's collection of shrine and gate brooches was the first time she worked in a series purposefully, using a methodology which was to characterize much of her later work:

"I was interested in looking at things in more depth and from different angles and I did this literally by making a number of pieces. Later, this changed a bit in my way of thinking - until I was actually creating a number of pieces for a specific show that would all be exhibited together - almost as though they were all one piece"⁽²⁾.

In 1991, she made a piece from an old ruler and brass. Attitude ^(Fig 3) is constructed from a ruler she found in a junkstore. Kiff thought a long time about what to make with it before she fashioned the hinged ruler into a figure. She was intrigued by the opening and closing mechanism and the craftsmanship of the tool. The brass edge from which the ruler hung was converted into a face.

The title Attitude refers to the arrangement of the parts of the body, a point of view and an arrogant disposition. This figure holds its arms confrontationally on its hips at right angles. The two sides of the ruler open to reveal a hidden equally dramatic second face which faces the first. Attitude is a witty portrait of two individuals joined at the hip, referring to ideal of multiple personalities or perhaps the merging of lovers. The folding ruler marks the increase with which one measures up, how we measure each other up, whether we are united or divided, open or closed.

Kiff's responsibility to the well-made ruler is a good example of her respect for

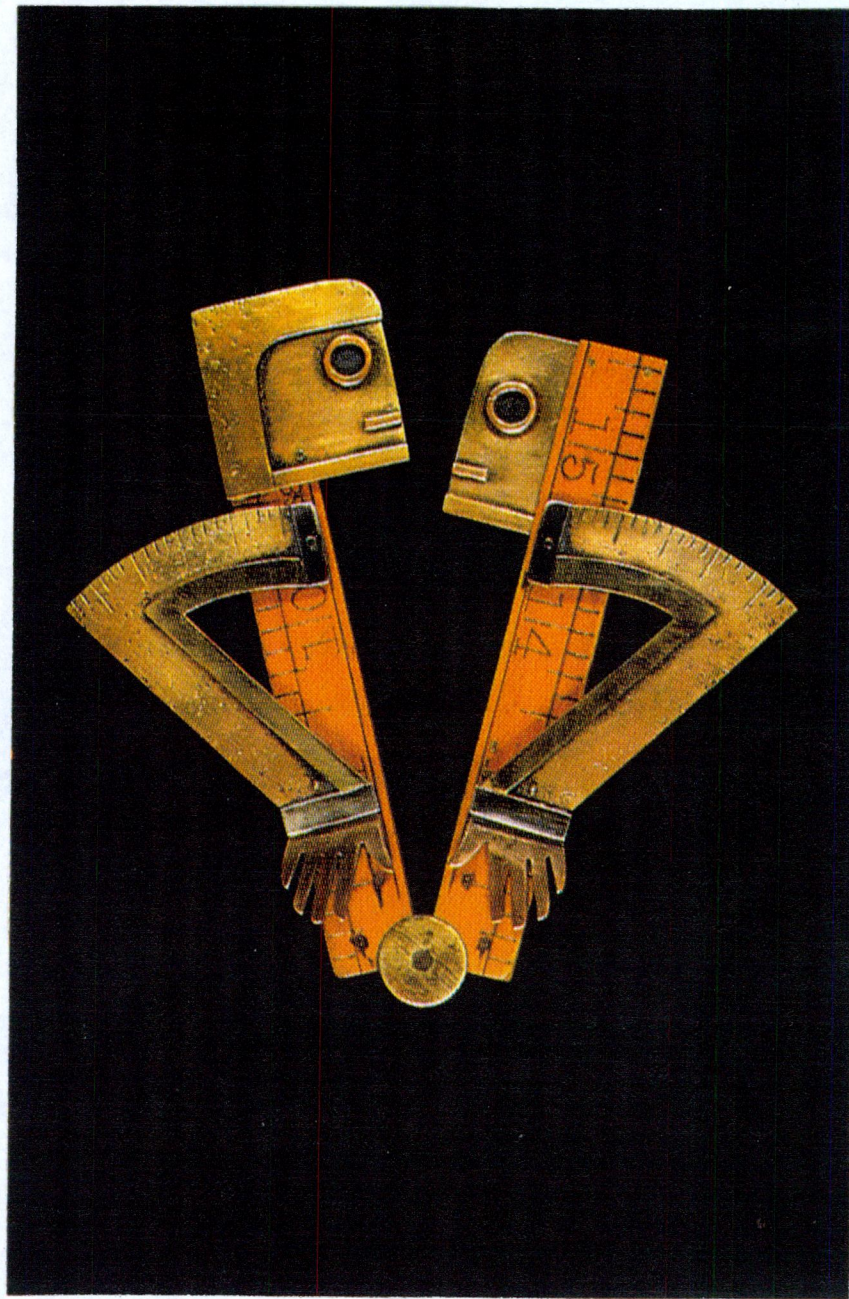
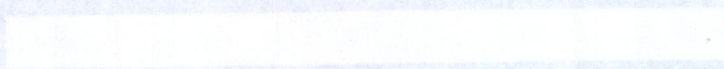


FIG 3: Attitude. Brooch - Kiff Slemmons

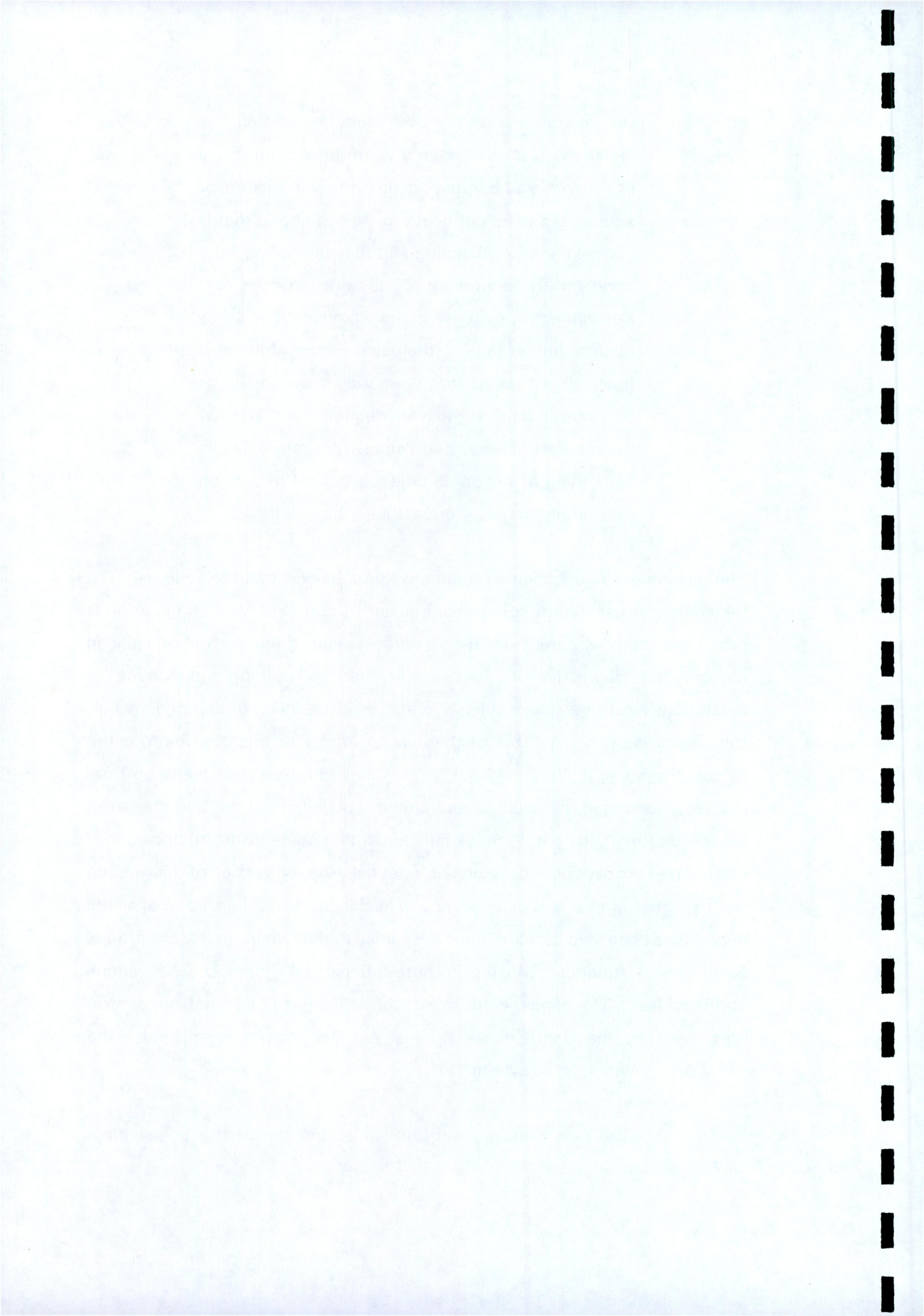


craftmanship in general, and for her own work in particular:

"I like my pieces to have a warmth to them I like it that you can pick it up and even bash it or scratch it and its not going to die somehow, that is can take a lot of handling and that the patina from handling it and wearing it does not diminish it. I like things to be sturdy and well made. There has been a funny kind of prejudice in the eighties, I guess about things that were well made - well, its only craft it its beautifully made. If a work is gutsy, it means its messy, and I guess I'm interested in something at the same time and a kind of tension that comes from different things happening".⁽³⁾

The tension of the unexpected figures weights heavily in Kiffs jewellery. The materials she uses are recognisable but out of context. What's going on is not immediately apparent because at first glance, there are only displaced objects and fragments of ideas. And there is nothing intimidating or mysterious about pencils or rulers. In a surrealist version of bait and switch, the viewer is drawn in. One of the best examples of this is to be found in Sticks, Stones and Words (1992) ^(Fig 4). This is a breastplate made up from erasers, horsehair, pencils, silver, copper, nickel, pebbles and deerskin, modelled after 19th century Sioux Indian armour made from bird bones. Kiff has created her own politically-tinged, poetically loaded version of this antique frontispiece from old wooden pencils in a necklace. The yellow paint of all the pencils has been filed off except for the names of the manufactures: Supreme, Sare, Choice, American, Master, Preferred, Balance, Colonel, U.S.A., Federal and Blackfeet. The pencil, worn to a stub, dangling front he bottom centre, was made by the Union Pencil Company. The shaved pencils raise the question - "Who scalped whom".

Four tiny, pastel pink erasers are bezel set at the top of the breast plate



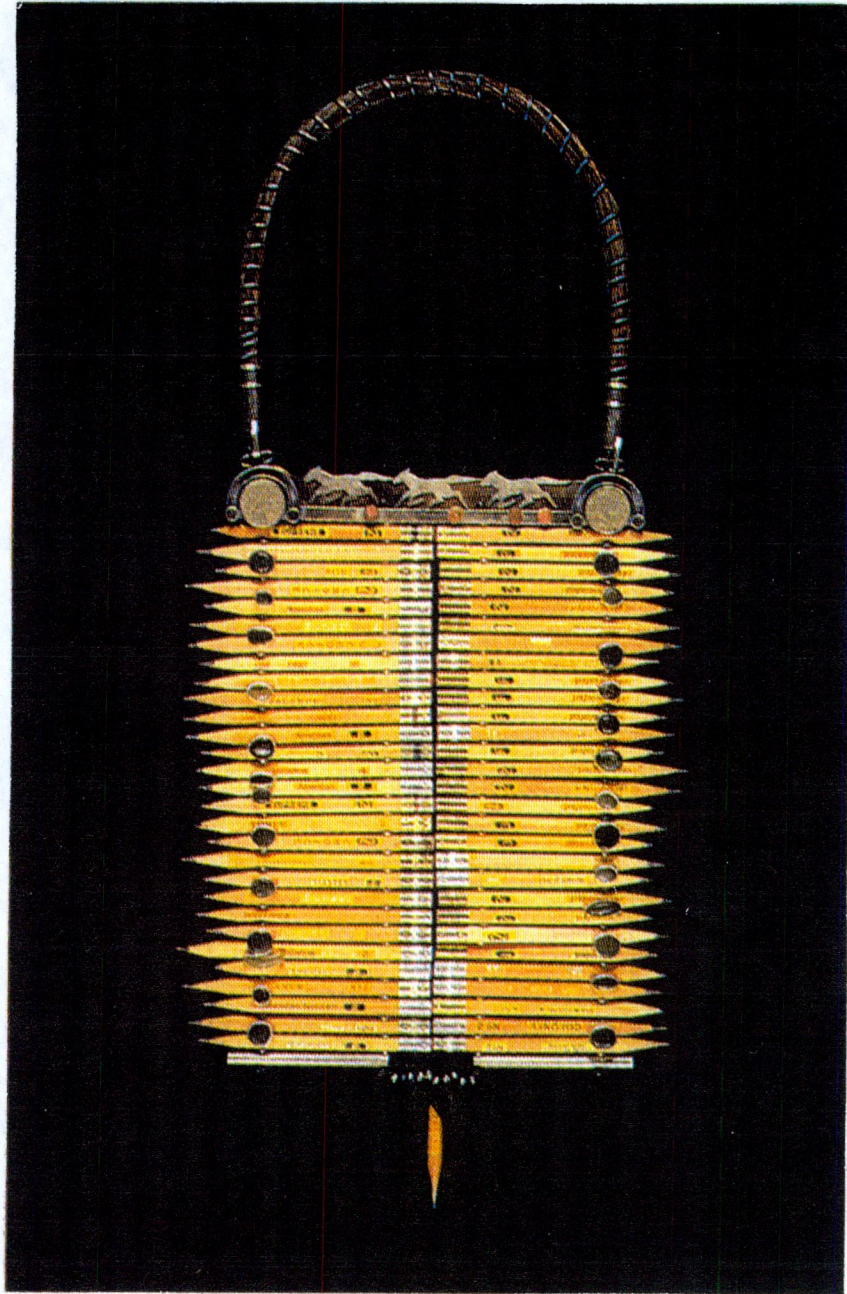
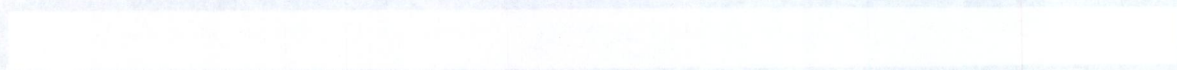


FIG 4: Sticks, Stones and Words (1992) Breastplate - Kiff Slemmons



beneath three galloping horses. The Plain Indians wore bones across their chests as a symbolic form of armour. Kiff's breast plate suggests the power, armour of the written word, writing as a form of protection, a means of establishing order and communication. It is funny to think in the context of the U.S. Government and the Plain Indians, one might think of broken treaties, and the efforts to erase native Americans and their culture from North America.

It is a talent of Kiff's to juxtapose images which give her most successful pieces the visual equivalent of an electrical charge. Not all her pieces are personal talismans or memorials with elaborate philosophical questions, as she also likes to work with fun, simple and witty pieces such as Eye of the Beeholder ^(Fig 5). This is a piece she made in 1986 from sterling silver and ebony. It is another hand pin, eye brooch. She works frequently with images that have been used by artists for thousands of years, as these images, although tied to particular faiths or eras are more widely accessible because of their universal appeal. Working with these images with a new content, she can reduce stories to symbols with strong personal associations.

"There is no spell more potent than that cast by mysterious symbols of which the meaning has been forgotten. Who can tell what ancient wisdom may be embodied in these enigmatic shapes and forms. The aura surrounding Egyptian hieroglyphs before they could be read is but one example of this appeal of the unknown to the human imagination"⁽⁴⁾.

Kiff Slemmons acknowledges these symbols and the connections between jewellery and sculpture. Jewellery's mobility and wearability makes it an ideal place for public art, as the metalsmith has immediate interaction with a wide audience. People have suggested to her "Why not make a sculpture"?,



FIG 5: Eye of the Beeholder. Brooch - Kiff Slemmons



implying that sculpture is bigger therefore better, but she feels that this is all the more reason to make jewellery as again it is an unexpected place to find such wit and metaphors.

"The problem is always to make something of the utmost quality and clarity with questions still inside it. Imagine wearing a necklace made of ice. After a warm evening, all that remains of it is a memory and a sensation"⁽⁵⁾.

You do not have to understand the sublime but at least to recognise it in the familiar. The materials are a part of the message and the message is what counts as well the ability to use a related story or personal thought. Kiff Slemmons has the ability to transform any material into something completely new and delicate with a poetic sense and a respect for the material.

CHAPTER 3 - ERIKA MARKS

Erika Marks is a jeweller whose work draws from the ancient, referring to the feeling of the past whether through style or content. She uses old materials for traditional reasons - gold to signify the sun and life force and metals generally because they signify the earth. Marks was born in London in 1958, later to move with her parents to Norway. As a child, she spent a lot of time with her mother visiting archaeological sites and museums in Norway which she credits as the beginning of her interests for old objects and history. While she wanted to do Arabic and Archaeology or go to art college, it was her practical side that wished to learn a skill/craft. She chose metalwork where the influences and interests of the former could be used in conjunction with her new found skills. Her interests include early techniques, archaeology, primitive art, the Pre-Raphaelites, ecology and travelling.

In 1976, she enrolled into the National College of Art and Design for a Diploma in Craft, Design and Jewellery. Apart from having done a toolmaking course in Isleworth Polytechnic in London in 1981, she has also done an enamelling workshop with the enamellist Joan McKarrell and has worked with Denis Newman, a retired jeweller, who makes obscure tools and cuts stones. Her quest for knowledge has brought her to travel extensively in the United States, Europe and Australia.

Her admiration lies with such people as William Harper, Edward Munch, Fredrick Burton, Giotto and Everett Mills. She is influenced by "made" things, concepts from ancient jewellery which she considers pure and therefore unspoilt to functional objects like viking spoons, tools, cloak fasteners and drinking vessels. Having lived in Norway, she carries vivid memories of viking ships and carvings, and of her impressions that the maker's presence was made real by the visible marks on the objects she saw. She frequently visits Newgrange and Lough Crew both for fun and research material. Erika dislikes artifice except for symbolism and humour where artifice can be a necessary



FIG 6: Pendant. (1993) - Erika Marks

element.

"I do prefer the representational and symbolic to the abstract, natural textures, or those which time and nature have rendered natural, like weathered stones rather than newly carved stone"⁽⁶⁾.

Erika appreciates the way ancient work appears to have no hidden agenda or sophisticated concept. Second hand things also appeal to her as they have a feeling of history and life to them, they have survived time.

"Although the work I do is not a reproduction of the past or of old work, and by its very nature has to be contemporary, I try to evoke a feeling of being of very old age"⁽⁷⁾.

Mark's use of materials varies. Glass, wood, bone, fossils, stones all in conjunction with metal. At present, she is preparing to do some egg tempera painting, going back to the middle ages again. While her interests and influences lie in objects and pieces of old, she believes in now, and how this moment has to be appreciated for itself to the utmost.

"Nothing is permanent, which would seem to clash with my feelings, that I am making and appreciating works which last a long time. I suppose I appreciate the illusion of solidity and permanence the physical world can have, while intellectually I realise that nothing is real but the present moment"⁽⁸⁾.

Most of her work is made pre-dominantly for her "mythical ancient self". She appreciates those who can enjoy and see what her aims are, and whose understanding and reactions seem to concur with her ideas.

"Sometimes people really make my day ~~be~~ suggesting something that ~~is~~ makes them feel or see, which I haven't overtly stated, but which was



FIG 7: Pendant. (1993) - Erika Marks

in my mind as an aim - thats very satisfying"⁽⁹⁾.

It has taken time for her to make a name for herself as she feels she wanted to be known for her technical standards, as it takes time to appreciate real quality and be prepared to understand the work involved. She believes that in the long run, a reputation built on peoples experiences and their recommendations to each other is much more valuable and long lasting. She dislikes artifice and dishonesty and a reputation spreading faster than the development of the work to back it. This is from an entirely moral viewpoint, as you can obviously make money faster using publicity or media exposure.

"The work is mainly very simple and honest, very like celtic work. The shapes are all very satisfying, like the shapes of viking ships which are a cross between a whale and a cow"⁽¹⁰⁾.

Her exhibitions to date include her Diploma Show in N.C.A.D. in 1980, a craft exhibition in Wicklow in 1987, H.Q's Christmas exhibition from 1990 to 1993, the 10 Jewellers exhibition at H.Q. in 1993 and her first sole exhibition in Chelsea, London in 1993. This exhibition was beautifully titled Archaic Gold Collection^(Fig 6,7,8,9).

Erika produces work which refers to the ancient. Perhaps this is why there is nothing superfluous in her designs, no empty exhibition of technical virtuosity. Her work has more in common with the expressible forms of adornment made from the past than the formal, abstract inclination of conventional western ornamentation. In attaching metal to metal, she uses the oldest methods, riveting, where technique and design are so interlinked as to be inextricable. Her latest jewellery includes black-patinated silver worked into mail-like chains, interlinked by yellow-gold sun symbols. This is an ideal that links the ancient spiritual expressions in Ireland with the more recent Christian rosary wheel. While Erika Marks work give evidence of her interests in the concepts of utility, function, form and cultural condition in which they

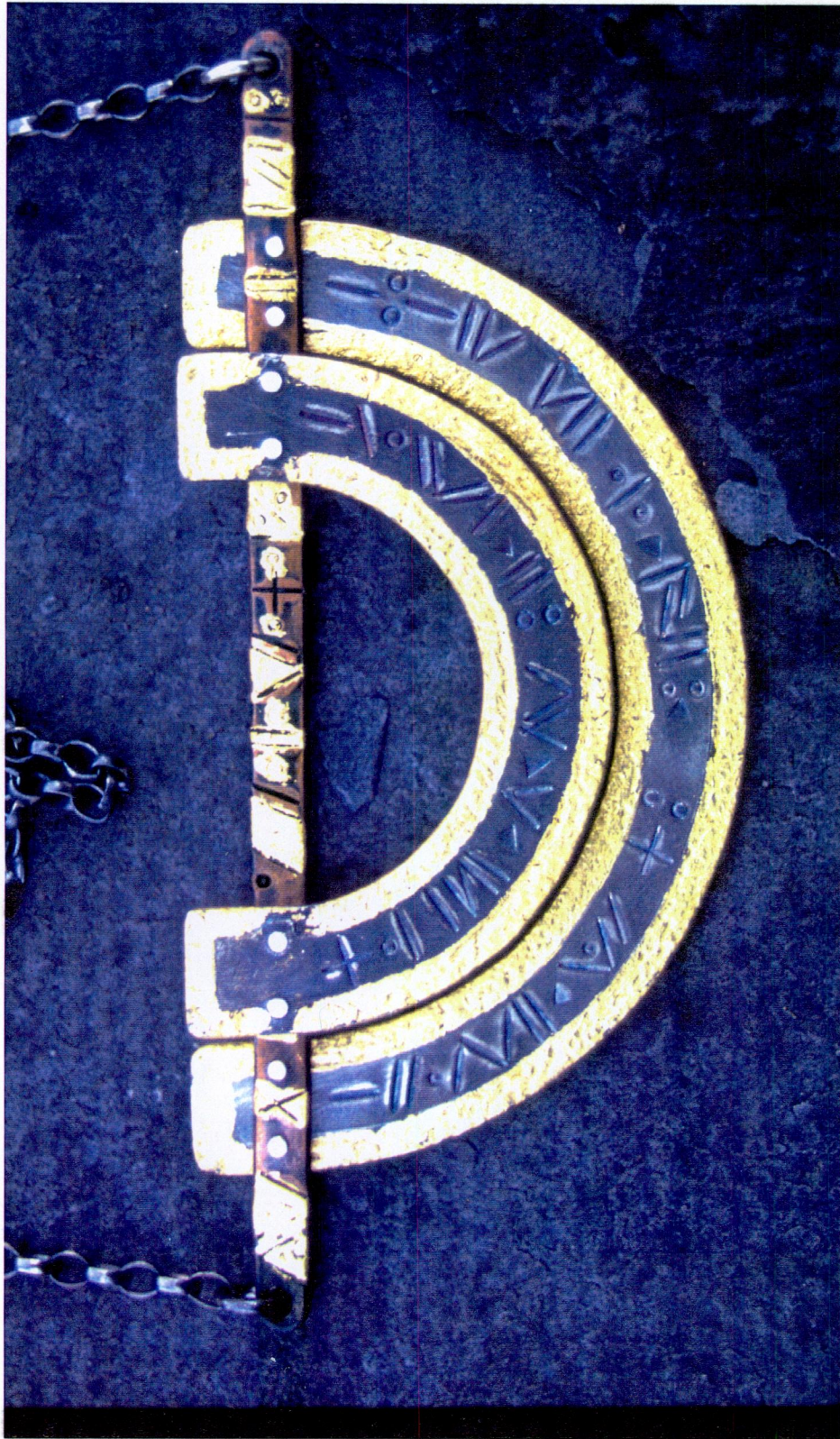


FIG 8: Pendant. (1993) - Erika Marks

were constructed, her points of departure remain rooted in the process. Through various techniques, she examines both her own personal history in metalsmithing and the history of metalsmithing as a channel of material and social culture.

Golden artifacts of the Celtic period are regarded as one of the high points of jewellery making and still represent a level of attainment to which jewellers aspire. Jewellers like Erika Marks, respond to this and bring something new to the ancient Irish aesthetic.



FIG 9: Brooch - (1993) - Erika Marks

CHAPTER 4 - ALAN ARDIFF

Born in Dublin in 1965, Alan Ardiffe at the age of 28, has become a master of both hammer and words. After two years of Industrial design in Limerick, he realised that he was not suitable for the course so he applied to the craft course in the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. The course, directing him to use metals, offered him a combination of designing, creating and making without all the constraints of industrial design.

It was in the metalwork department that he found perhaps his main influence, his tutor Michael Cunningham, whose enthusiasm for working and playing with ideas lifted him out of his industrial design days of depression and offered him a freer world of creativity. It was Michael Cunningham who introduced him to the work of the unconventional English metalsmith and artist Paul Preston. After numerous letters, Alan travelled to Wales to work with him during the summer months of 1990 and has since become a good friend. In that same year, he also worked with the Casimo De Lilla, Goldsmiths in Turin, a family run business which produces both commercial and avant-garde design. Having only graduated in 1989 with a Diploma in Metals, Alan has since had five group exhibitions and two solo exhibitions, besides being commissioned to make a piece that was presented to the President, Mary Robinson. It was Alan Ardiffe who was asked to represent Ireland in the International Exhibition of Jewellers, Schmuckzene '93 in Munich. He also produced a piece of work for the Mayor's Chain of Office in Maastricht in the Netherlands, representing Ireland as one of the twelve selected European artists, alongside the organiser Robert Smit of the Netherlands, Jean Lemmens, Catherine Muller, Christophe Burger and Michael Rowe. His work is included in collections in Turin, Sam Stephenson, Stokes Kennedy Crowley and the Danish Embassy. Billy Connolly is a fan, as is legendary U.S. publicist Eleanor Lambert. He has covered a lot of ground in the past four years and in my opinion, has been an ambassador for Ireland. As well as supplying galleries such as the Rubicon in Dublin and Electrum in

London, next year he hopes to show his work in the Trimetal Gallery in Germany. So it is safe to say that Alan Ardiffe informs a wide audience from Dublin with his highly narrative pieces which each tell a different story, showing his subversive special humour and original creative work. Calling himself a jeweller simply because it avoids confusion and because of his materials and scale, he believes if he were to work on a larger scale, he would be a sculptor. So is there more to his work than the average bauble or bangle?.

"My jewellery is soul jewellery, its an expression on the innerself as opposed to body jewellery which is about the outerself. These pieces are very personal and there is a story behind each one of them, its up to whoever owns them to tell that story"⁽¹¹⁾.

He has perhaps an irreverent attitude to precious metals,

"Because gold is a serious medium, you're not supposed to make fun of it, if you can overload the seriousness of the metal and do the unexpected thats what I like to do"⁽¹²⁾.

We all realise the expense of gold which perhaps makes it a serious metal, to be used only in a serious manner. Ardiffe has worked with it as a fun material, for example, on probably the most luxurious new fashion accessory - the condom case - a witty commentary on Ireland's views on contraception and perhaps suggesting a more realistic future for the country. Sparked off by the condom controversy between the church, government and the people, he fashioned this piece in 1991 for his first solo exhibition, A Touch of Innocent^(Fig 10), in the Rubicon Gallery. It is in the form of a bellshrine with a pocket watch type chain, aptly titled Box of Optimisims. He says that the gold winged motifs are condoms with wings, a play on "featherlight". Since his work is generally figurative, the composition is usually worked out before with paintings and drawings as it avoids waste and time loss.

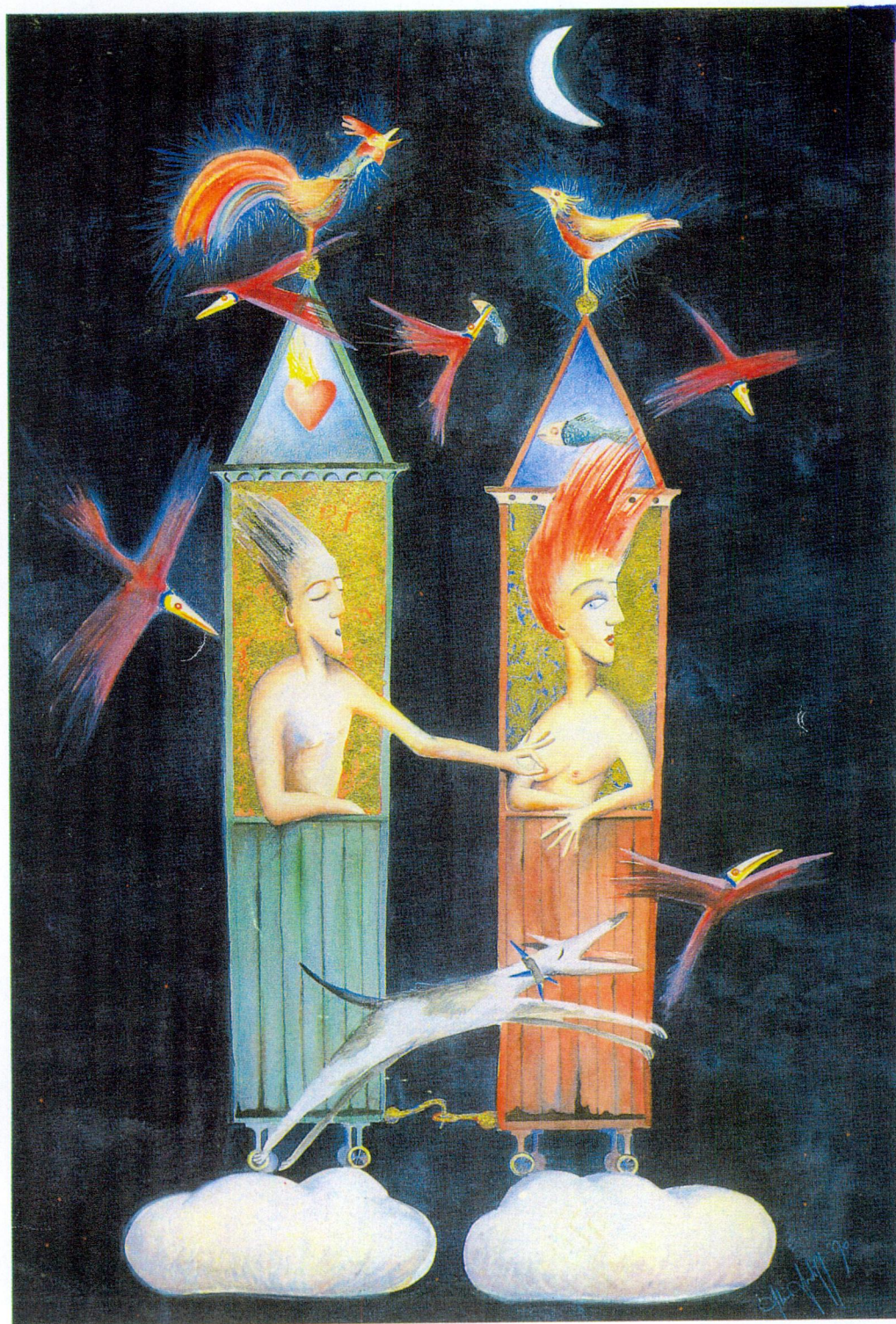


FIG 10: A Touch of Innocence. Watercolour - Alan Ardif

For his two solo exhibitions in the Rubicon, the large watercolours which accompanied Ardiff's jewellery are fanciful, humorous and relative to the comings and goings of people today, from adolescents to adults. Various fantastical figures against the beautiful blue/black backgrounds that he uses throughout. In 1991, with his first solo exhibition A Touch of Innocence, in the Rubicon Gallery, he showed a selection of work, which had never been seen before, displaying a range of comments from personal experiences and sightings. The watercolour A Touch of Innocence shows a young man reaching out to hold a young woman's nipple. Both are in separate huts on wheels attached by a hook mechanism while floating on clouds. Birds and a dog surround the hut in play. Waiting for the Tide^(Fig 11), featured in his second solo exhibition The Goldfish Maker in 1993 in the Rubicon Gallery in Dublin, is a brooch measuring four centimetres by fourteen with a naked woman waiting in a seaside hut for the tide to come in before she can dash into the sea. This humorous piece, is made from silver, copper and gold, being architectural in structure with decorative shells, panels, fish and wheels. Her hair shows movement, while she waits stationary and patiently. Above her head there are golden wheels and a fish. The front panels are made from gold and silver, underneath there are two gold wheels attached to silver legs. Fish and wheels are recurring motifs in his work.

"When I was in college, lecturers were forever telling us that we have to find a vehicle for our expression"⁽¹³⁾.

This explains the usage of wheels in his pieces. He also places his work in beautiful wooden cases so that when the brooch is not being worn it can be displayed on the wall while keeping it safe at the same time. Like his first, his second solo exhibition featured both individual pieces mounted in cases as well as paintings. This exhibition allowed Ardiff a free range for the expression of his recurrent motif, the fish, symbol of water, symbol of life, having read One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia.

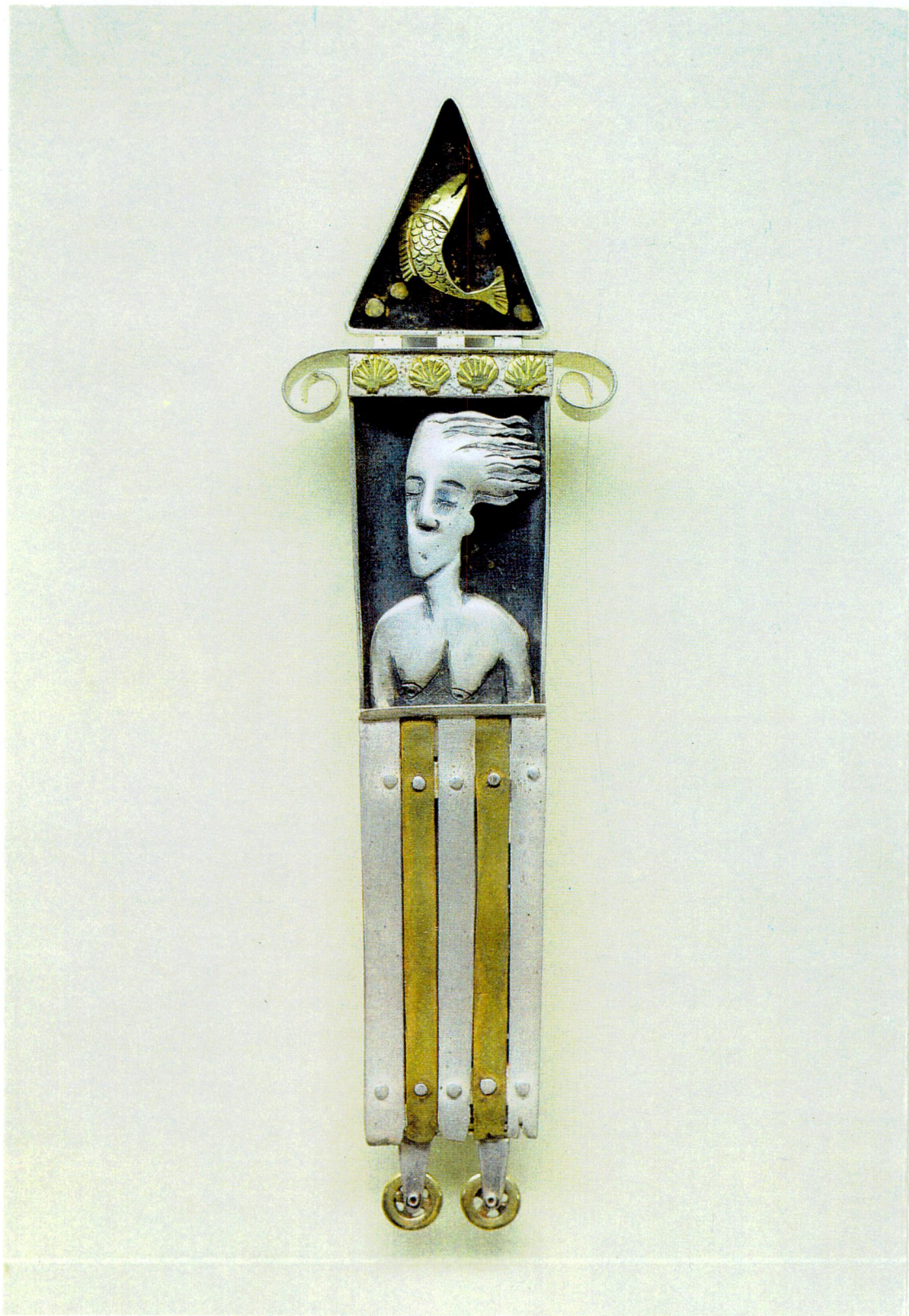


FIG 11: Waiting of the Tide. Brooch - Alan Ardiff

Once upon a time there was a great warrior. He fought many battles and won may wars and he survived to become a wise old man. He was famous for his green hat which it was said, made him fierce and brave. As time went on, he became sad at all the bad things he had done in the wars. "It is your green hat," said his friends, "that is what is reminding you of bad times, you must throw it away." "No", said the wise old warrior. "This hat made me strong in battle, it will help me find a way to live out the rest of my days in peace and happiness". And then one day, as he counted out his large gold coins (for fighting had made him very rich) a picture of a goldfish floated into his mind. And he set to work. He melted one of the coins and made a gold fish. Then he spent hours and hours fashioning tiny fins and searching for gems for the eyes. All his time was taken up with his new task and he grew solidary and alone. But he was happy in his solitude and took pride in his gentle craft. When all his coins were used up, he exchanged his pile of gold fish for more gold coins, and then he made more little fish. And when these were done, he again exchanged them for coins. Slowly his fame grew, and the more fishes he made, the more gold he needed. Strangers came from far and wide to see the wise old gold fish maker who always wore a green hat because, it was said, that it gave him the strength to make beautiful things⁽¹⁴⁾.

The gold fish maker is a retired warrior lord who settles to become a goldsmith, using his war-earned gold coins to make gold fish and exchanging a life of belligerence for one of solitude and artistry. Ardiffs piece The Goldfish Maker has two tapering posts made up from silver and gold decoration while between there is a fish shaped panel displaying a man with a hat surrounded by goldfish studded with sapphires and moonstones. Soul Fish reveals a tabernacle, also an expression of this study and elements of these piece constructions are similar to those of the Tara Brooch. It was during the finishing touches to his second exhibition, that a phone call from the Assay Office told him that they would seize his work if he tried to sell it. For a man who may possibly be our present day equivalent of the Tara Brooch maker to be harassed by a 17th century statute is not inspiring, nor is it inspiring to know that the Assay Office have the power to destroy work which has not been hallmarked.

It is common for contemporary jewellers to mix precious and non-precious metals. This statute was rooted in the 1637 Goldsmiths Charter to protect traditional trade jewellers but now condemns and penalizes Irish metalworkers who can show other countries that there is constantly a turnover and growth of innovative craftworkers in Ireland and not the standard traditional craftworker sold to tourists. It is the 20th century and for such a law to still exist is restricting the creative growth of our craftworkers use of expression. If protection of commercial manufacturing jewellers with hallmarks is the main concern, why restrict our artistic jewellers who are not harming anyone but adding richness and depth to the trade overall. The power to destroy such work is frightening and our artistic jewellers need to be protected. Ardiffe's work is not hallmarked because it would be impractical and he feels he does not need to prove that his pieces are of value. Using gold and silver, he plays with words and epigrams and blends both with consummate polish.

"People buy my pieces for ideas and colours, not for the quality and commercial value of the gold and silver. I'm an artist, I use the colours of gold, silver and copper"⁽¹⁵⁾.

Ireland is his home where he has been influenced and supported, it should not be his restrictive prison. In order to be legal, he has to bring his work outside Ireland. The thought of 17th century law raping Ireland of worthwhile artwork in the 20th century is insane.

CONCLUSION

The Company of Goldsmiths was established for the purpose of controlling the manufacture and sale of all gold and silver in Ireland. The company is obliged to test all such metals and if the standard of finess is correct, hallmark them. To sum up, hallmarks are there for the protection of the public, the goldsmith and the silversmith. But it is a difficult situation with regard to artistic pieces where the commercial value of the metal is irrelevant.

If a piece of work is made up from the mixing of gold, silver and copper it cannot be sold under the title of silver and gold, though they may be sold under the title of white metal and yellow metal. Considering the making of these pieces is time consuming and the expense of the gold, I believe that they should have the right to claim the metal for what it is.

In Germany, artistic work using the combination of precious and non-precious materials is permitted without the obligation to hallmark the work, they are liberal with artistic pieces and rely on the integrity of the artist. American artists Slemmons and Harper have no such restrictions to their combination of base and precious metals while Dublin based artists Alan Ardiffe and Erika Marks must compromise and work around the situation. As artistic craftsperson who consciously passes the limits of the traditional applications of their profession, using foreign materials with precious metals and mixing base with precious metals cannot be stipulated to use only precious metals or be asked to compromise and call gold yellow metal, when it comes to the sale of their work. Such a regulation is far from reality as the growth of metal jewellery as an art medium can be described as phenomenal. This regulation limits the artistic freedom of the jeweller in an unjustified manner. The interpretation of the existing regulations by the Irish authorities is unclear and therefore unjust, limiting the spontaneous experimentation of metal alloys.

As a craftsperson, my wish is simply that the regulations, whatever they may

be, should be published in full so that the ground rules are clear for metal workers and that the Company of Goldsmiths be more sensitive to artistic jewellers, as a tremendous amount of time and energy goes into their work and there is a lot to gain and to learn from each piece. The fact that a jeweller may attach a nickel pin to a silver brooch indicates some anomaly. If we limit our artists techniques, we are limiting their creativity and it appears that a full text of the ground rules as laid down in legislation does not exist.

"The art of the silversmith is one with that of a goldsmith, it is also bound inevitably to those of the jeweller, the enameller, the engraver and the modeller ~~nor~~ sculptor. The goldsmith and the silversmith in his simplest exercises as a craftsman must be skilled in manipulating the precious metals by hammerwork, annealing, soldering, casting and finishing. Beyond these fundamental skills he may, as an artist, design and create objects which for their realisation need embellishment with other materials"⁽¹⁶⁾.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE GIVEN TO ALAN ARDIFF AND ERIKA MARKS

1. What colleges/courses have you done?
2. Who have you worked with?
3. What do you admire in people and their work?
4. What and who are your main influences/interests, personal experiences/thoughts/other artists/traditions/symbolism/representational/textures/colours/theatrical.
5. What or is there a main theme that runs throughout your work?
6. What do you find humorous/serious?
7. What moves you to make certain pieces?
8. Do you consider yourself to be a sculptor/jeweller?
9. Who do you make your work for?
10. What are peoples reactions towards you work?
11. How did you become involved in metalwork?
12. Is there anything else you would like to do or have done (for example climb Mount Everest)?
13. How hard was it to make a name for yourself?
14. What was the process?
15. Where did you get support from?
16. What sort of problems have you come up against with your work? (i.e. design/financial/technical/inspiration).
17. What exhibitions have you had (past/future)?
18. Have you sold most of your work?
19. What market do you supply?
20. How do you see the future of your work in Ireland?
21. Have you ever used other materials besides metals?
22. Is it important for you to draw or paint alongside your metalwork?

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