Eight Contemporary American Narrative Jewellers

By

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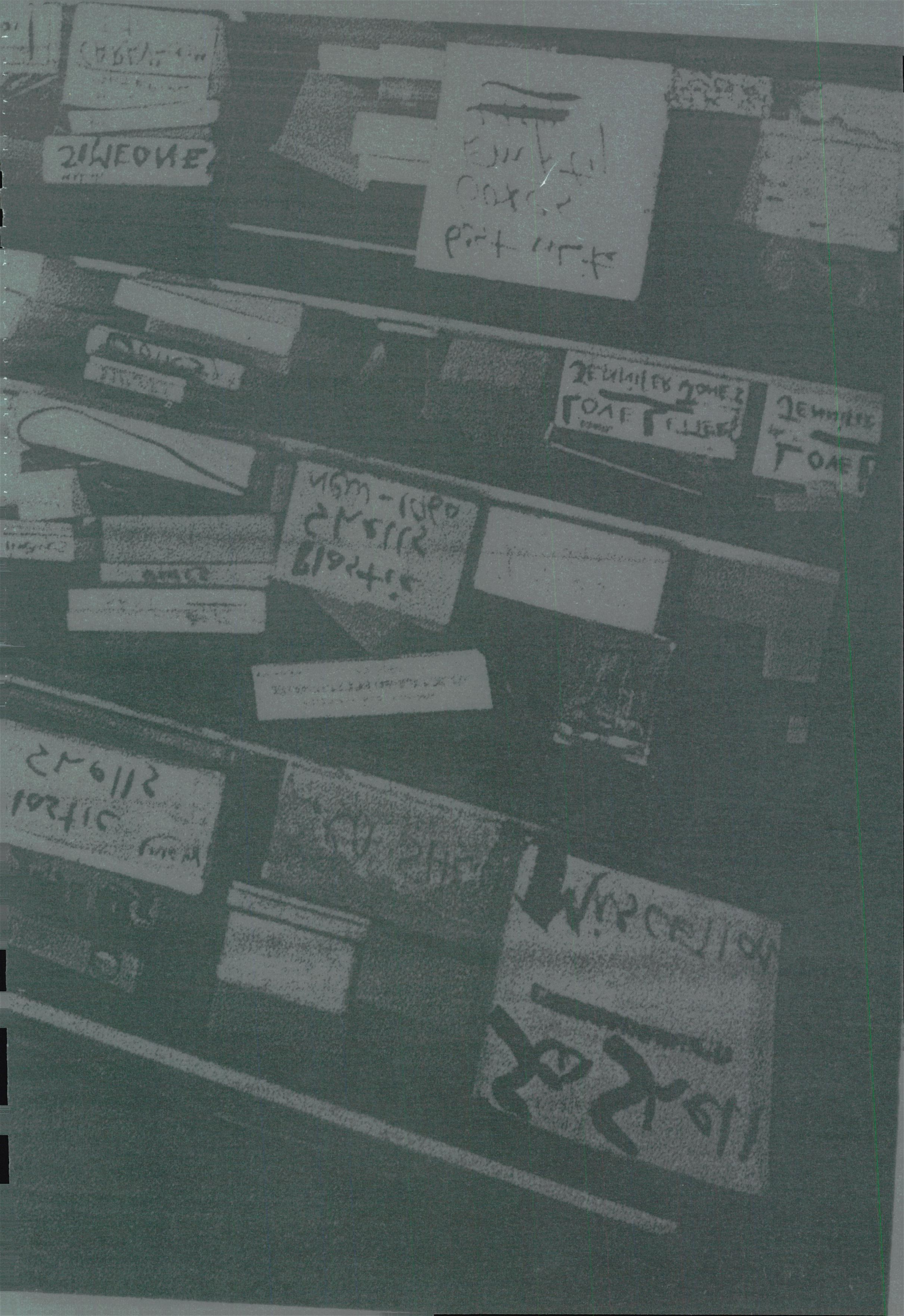

Introduction

The work contained within this thesis is intended to focus on a specific movement in the Contemporary American Jewellery scene. That this scene exists there is no doubt - it began to emerge in the late 1950's and early 1960's in an isolated and insular way with only a few art metalworkers working in this exciting and innovative way. Although still on a very small scale, it emerged as a international, rather than a specifically American movement during the 1970's. During this time the success of the contemporary jewellery movement was dependent on the activities of a relatively small band of art jewellers and their patrons.

By the 1990's, Contemporary Jewellery had entered a Renaissance; hundreds upon hundreds of art metalworkers have come to prominence, graduating from the numerous University and College courses implemented to feed the demand for students applying to do Craft Metalwork, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Publications[1] are entirely devoted to it. Numerous galleries specialising in Contemporary Jewellery have sprung up, and what is more telling, are surviving - the public has become aware of the individualism, originality and fine craftsmanship of Contemporary Craft Metalwork.

As with any art movement, the individuals working within it define it. There are many people working under the umbrella term of

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[1] for example Metalsmith, a quarterly American magazine, and GZ, a German monthly.

Contemporary Jewellery yet all of these people brings to their work their own style and aesthetic. Among them there exists a clearly defined group of jewellers who create work which is pictorial, anecdotal, and also conceptual. This jewellery has become known as Narrative, or as it was called previously 'Anti-Jewellery', because of its rejection of traditional materials and techniques, and the way it embraced found objects and non-traditional working methods. Lurking just beneath its surface, there is often a sting. There is more going on in this type of work than pure decoration - these pieces are an amalgam of excellent design, craftsmanship and each artists idiosyncratic means of expression. This is frequently emphasised by the title given to a piece, for example one of my selected jewellers, Betsy King's 1989 piece has an image of a small girl overlaid with barbed wire. The title of the piece is *Caught In A Trap* (Fig. 1), reinforcing the underlying theme of the piece. Some of the work is metaphorical, some whimsical, some with a dark twist.

Contemporary American Narrative Jewellery can be said to have its origins in the past with ancient Roman carved cameos being perhaps the first commemorative narrative jewellery. Victorian mourning jewellery could also be seen as an early incarnation of narrative jewellery, in that painted miniature portraits of the dead and locks of their hair were often incorporated into jewellery, acting as memorials to them. More recently, a factor which perhaps influenced this upsurge of jewellers to make narrative 'Anti-Jewellery' could have been the violence of events in the Sixties and early Seventies, such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the Vietnam war with its senseless disregard for life. Disillusionment may have acted as a catalyst for jewellers to eschew traditional techniques and materials. This may have been why jewellers expressed their reactions to both violence and apathy by using apparently worthless found and junk objects, for shock value and as a statement against the 'system', which had shown how little value it held for life, ergo they would display no obvious value in their jewellery. One of my selected jewellers, J. Fred Woell was creating pieces in the late Sixties which contained statements about the violence of the time; for example his *Come Alive You're In The Pepsi Generation* brooch (1966) (fig.2)

Fig.1: *Caught In A Trap* ; Betsy King, Brooch, 1989.

Fig.2: *Come Alive You're In The Pepsi Generation* ; J. Fred Woell, Brooch, 1966.

contains spent bullet shells juxtaposed with an image of a smiling teenager. He also[2] says about his current work that it is "a continuation of the Anti-Jewellery series of the late 60's"[3] which came about for him when the work he was making in sterling silver was rejected by the New York galleries. They told him that his work would not sell unless it was made in gold, and as a reaction to that he turned to working with non- precious materials in order to spite the galleries. "'No traditional Goldsmithing techniques, no precious materials'..... my mind kept muttering"[4], he said at the time.

I have a fascination for this kind of work because of its possibilities - it offers endless scope for an art jeweller. Nothing is considered too risque for use as a concept, because it does not have to be immediately apparent what exactly the piece is about. This medium also offers a bridge for artists: because the work is narrative, it can work on a sculptural level, and because it is relatively small and made, in part from metal, it also serves as personal adornment. There are also endless combinations of possible materials that can be used. This narrative form does not make a distinction between precious and non-precious, and so found objects are abundant in narrative work.

There is a huge number of jewellers in the American section of this field working in the Narrative vein, and so when I decided to write about Contemporary American Narrative Jewellery, I started to try and find out all I could about the work, ideas and materials it favoured. Because this field of specialisation is fairly new, there is little documentation concerning it and so I decided to conduct a lot of my research in the form of a questionnaire[5] to be sent to each selected jeweller, whom I selected from the catalogue of a landmark exhibition held in the Netherlands in 1990, called *American Dreams, American Extremes.* This featured the work of seven of the eight jewellers selected for this thesis. I wrote to the Society of North American

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[3]Questionnaire reply from Woell, returned 4th Nov. 1994. N.B: hereafter all questionnaire responses will be referenced with the jewellers name and date of response.

[4]Woell, 4th Nov.1994

[5]See Appendix 2

Goldsmiths (S.N.A.G)[6], and The Museum Voor Hedendaagse Kunst Het Kruithius, The Netherlands, which had held the show,[7] for the addresses of the people on whom I wanted to concentrate. I then wrote to each individual enclosing my questionnaire. Through the generosity of the eight jewellers featured in this thesis, I was able to learn a great amount about this scene, and this knowledge I have incorporated in my study of Contemporary American Narrative Jewellery.

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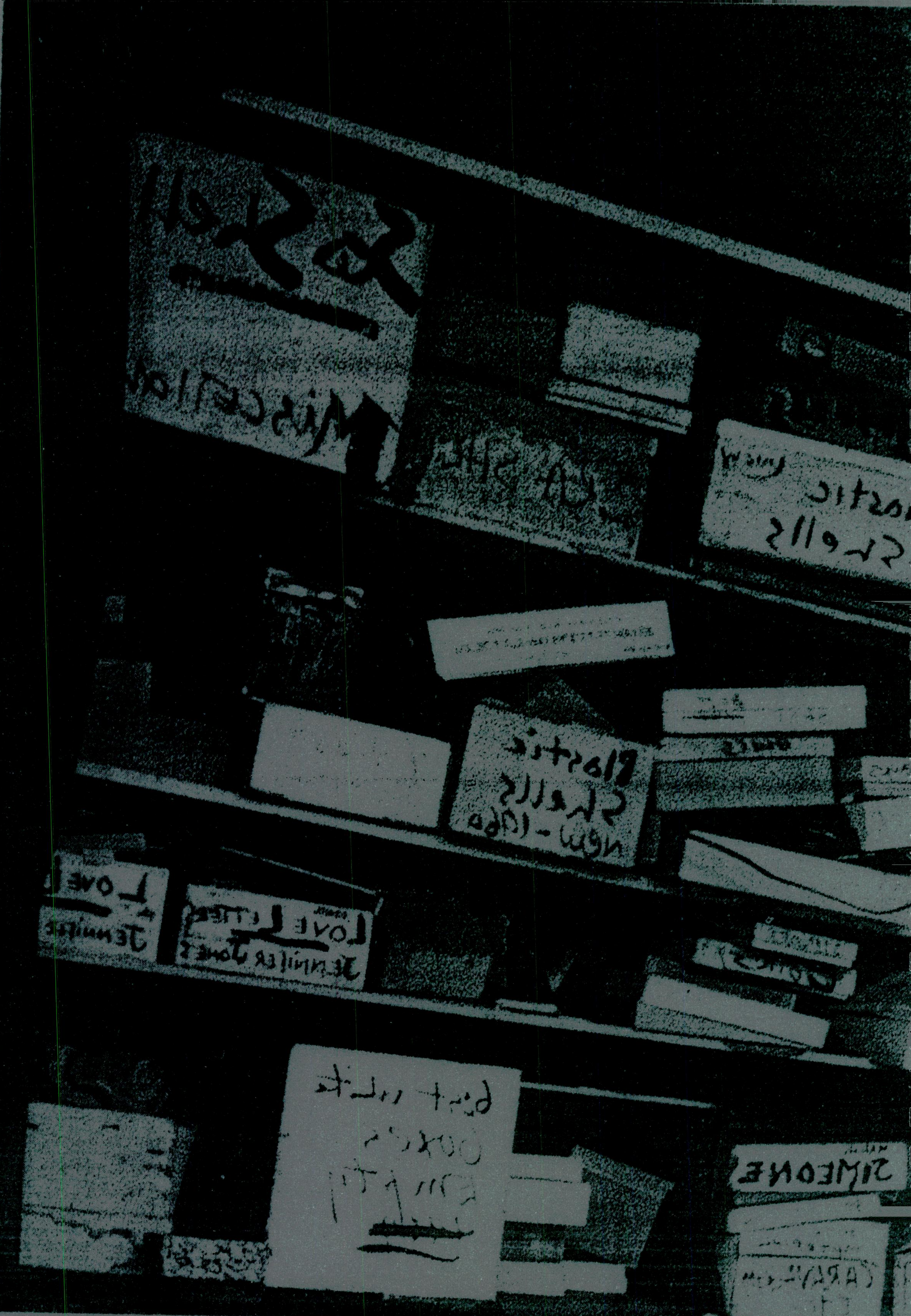
[6]See Appendix 1
[7]Ibid


Miscellaneous
Plastic Shells
Plastic Shells
NEW - 1960
LOVE LETTERS
JENNIFER JONES
JEMMIFER
SIMEONE
CARAVELLE


Plastic Shells
LOVE LETTERS
JENNIFER JONES
SIMEONE

Chapter 1
Identifying Narrative Jewellery As A Contemporary Genre, And The Jewellers Who Work Within It.

Contemporary Jewellery, American and otherwise, has many facets, and I am choosing only one of these as my topic of discussion. That particular facet is the Narrative style. As its name suggests, jewellery made in this style tells a story, the work is pictorial, anecdotal, it has a tale to tell. Sometimes these tales are obvious parables, comments on the social order as the jeweller sees it; other times the narrative is oblique, with a dark twist; and yet again, a piece may contain a childhood memento, giving the 'story' it tells a whimsical feel. Each jeweller brings to his or her work their own ideas, their own stories, and these they use to illustrate their pieces. Much of the work contains emotion - there is obvious humour in a lot of narrative jewellery, as well as sadness. The very nature of the style allows such references to be used as source material. Narrative jewellery differs from traditional jewellery in that it is concerned with injecting wit, emotion and metaphor into a craft that has traditionally been driven, in North America at least, by decoration and abstract formal experimentation.

There are many jewellers working in this field, each bringing to it their own personal interpretations, tastes, and means of working. It would be impossible to namecheck every one of them, and so I have chosen a cross - section of jewellers whose work I feel will make the best impact when discussed as representing a particular genre. The jewellers I have chosen are :

Kim Overstreet & Robin Kranitzky,
Judy Onofrio,
Betsy King,
Kiff Slemmons,
Elizabeth Garrison,
Vaughn Stubbs,
J. Fred Woell.

Each of these jewellers is American, and they are all (excepting Elizabeth Garrison, who returned to painting full time in 1992) constantly producing jewellery and exhibiting their work both in the U.S.A and abroad. All are highly respected in the American Craft community, emphasising the importance of the narrative style as an influential genre. Many of them lecture at respected Art schools in America, and all have received awards for their work.

Kim Overstreet and Robin Kranitzky, both female, have been working together in Richmond, Virginia, for nearly ten years, where they run a company named 'Lost & Found'. They met while both working in the advertising department of a large shop. Their friendship sprang from their common interest in collecting tiny objects.

Overstreet was born in Christiansburg, Virginia in 1955. She was educated at V.P.I from 1973 - 1974, where her major was Art, and at Virginia Western Community College from 1974 - 1976, when she studied Commercial Art as a major. She is currently attending Virginia Commonwealth University, where she is studying for a B.A in Commercial Art. Her background and schooling are mostly related to Commercial Art, Graphics and Advertising. Kranitzky was born in Richmond, Virginia in 1956. She has a B.F.A in Crafts, obtained from the Virginia Commonwealth University, which she attended from 1975 - 1979, and where she majored in Ceramics. Their work is held in several public collections in the Netherlands, in Canada, and in the Smithsonian Contemporary Craft collection. In 1993, they were invited to create a White House Christmas tree ornament. They have participated in many exhibitions, and their work has been widely seen in the U.S.A, as well as having been exhibited in Europe and the

Middle East.

Judy Onofrio did not go to college. She is, as she says, "self taught", a "collector - sculptor"[8]. Her jewellery work evolved from a lifelong affinity for knick-knacks, bits and pieces of beads, bone, shells, buttons, toys etc., from which she made sculpture. The move to small scale work was a big change for her, and has now led again, in a cyclical fashion, to working on a large scale. Her jewellery work, while not over, has been de- prioritised for the time being. She is currently engaged in creating a huge installation which encompasses most of her large garden in Rochester, Minnesota, and which she calls *Judyland.* This project pays homage to earlier traditions of American Folk art - to such monuments as the *Watts Towers* in L.A, and the *Dickeyville Grotto* in Wisconsin.

As a champion of the Arts she is well known; she was the founding president of the Minnesota Crafts Council, and she has constantly engaged herself in an intensive lecture and workshop schedule. In 1975 she founded a childrens art programme which she called the Total Arts Day Camp, and which she continues to direct ; she has also been invited to several Colleges and Universities as a guest artist. In 1977 she was a visiting artist at Mills College, Oakland, California, and in 1981 at the University of Northern Arizona as guest artist for the Arizona Clay Symposium. The diversity of Onofrio's career is astonishing - she seems to have done so much, her output of work is enormous, and yet, even though she has let the jewellery side of her work lie fallow for the moment, she has retained the essence of the narrative style in her large scale work - huge shrines and assemblages, all created from thousands and thousands of collected objects.

Kiff Slemmons needs little introduction. She is probably one of the best known American narrative jewellers working today. She was born in 1944, in Maxton, North Carolina, and was educated at the University of Iowa, 1963 - 1968, where she studied for a B.A in Art and French. Like Judy Onofrio, as a jeweller she is self taught, although in

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8 Onofrio, Oct. 94.

1983 she spent eight weeks in Japan, on a Parsons School of Design summer metalsmithing programme. Again, her creative output is enormous, and she tends to work in series rather than making many unrelated pieces. For instance, her famous *Hands of the Heroes* series, a thirty six piece body of work begun in 1987, is probably her best known. More recently, she has worked on the *Ambassadors* series (not pictured), a range of insect pins made, as with the *Hands of the Heroes* (Figs. 13, 14 & 26) series, from many different components: wood, type-writer keys, plastics, sterling silver, ceramic shards, pencils, bottle tops - the list is endless. Her work is also of a very high technical standard, because to her this is an important part of each piece she makes. Slemmons has been invited to lecture in several colleges, including the prestigious California College of Arts and Crafts, where she lectured in 1993, and Humboldt State University, California, also in 1993. She has been a resident lecturer at the Pratt Fine Arts Centre in Seattle from 1983 - 1985, and has also lectured in jewellery at the Western Washington University, Bellingham in 1980. Slemmons has a huge exhibition list under her belt; her work has been exhibited widely in museums and galleries all over the U.S.A, and she has had shows in the Electrum Gallery[9] in London in 1984 and 1985.

Elizabeth Garrison differs from the other jewellers discussed in this thesis in that she constructed many of the components that make up her work herself. Most of the parts of any given piece she will have previously fabricated or made by hand, and then assembled to form a narrative. She was born in 1952 in Elmira, New York, educated at the Ringling School of Art and Design, Florida, from 1970 - 1973, where she got a B.F.A in Painting, and then went to Mansfield State College, Pennsylvania, between 1976 - 1978, where she received Teacher Certification in Art. From there, she went to Florida State University and gained an M.S in Design. Originally and primarily a painter, Garrison turned to making Jewellery because, as she says,

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[9]The Electrum Gallery in London has been an extremely influential and respected London art jewellery gallery since the 1970's, showcasing hundreds of emerging and established jewellers in that time.

"I fell into Jewellery making at a time in my life when I was searching in my art. I saw William Harper's enamels in a show and, being a painter, was enthralled with the mystical feeling of his work. I felt that he was someone I could learn from".[10]

Garrison, because of Harper's[11] influence (she attended his Tallahassee Graduate Programme) used to use a lot of enamel in her period is over. She says "I consider jewellery making to be a past chapter in my life"[12]. She fell into the making of jewellery during a time when she had been painting, but has moved back to it, and is now solely concentrating on painting.

Vaughn Stubbs participated in the American Dreams, American Extremes exhibition of 1990 in the Netherlands alongside Judy Onofrio, Elizabeth Garrison, Kim Overstreet and Robin Kranitzky, J. Fred Woell and Betsy King. Out of all of those jewellers, it is perhaps Stubbs and Judy Onofrio who most perfectly embody the *American Extremes....* part of that title. His work is made in a very kitsch style, wonderfully and irreverently so, like Onofrio's; he truly bends the narrative style to his own whims, using concoctions of beads, cameos, jewel-bright plastic 'stones', cord and ribbon. He was born in Reading, Pennsylvania in 1946, attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, from which he graduated in 1972 with a certificate in painting. In the same year, he won a travelling scholarship to Europe.

Like Onofrio, Stubbs has also taken a very hands-on approach to the arts over the years, serving as an instructor on many Public Art schemes, including teaching children and senior citizens at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, from 1990 to the present. He has also instructed Art at the Philadelphia Art Alliance, and in

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[10]Garrison, 6th Oct. 1994.

[11]William Harper is a pioneer of contemporary art enamelling. Primarily a colourist, his jewellery work is painterly, sculptural and anecdotal. His work is also noted for its inclusion of found objects such as teeth, bicycle reflectors and hair. His work is not so much narrative as autobiographical, and this is reflected in the titles of his work.

[12] Garrison, 6th Oct. 1994.

1978 founded his own gallery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, although it only lasted a couple of years before closing down.

Among these selected narrative jewellers, J. Fred Woell is surely one of the movement's founding fathers. As an emerging jeweller in the late 1960's, he helped pioneer the movement. His contribution has not gone unnoticed; he is extremely well respected in this field. His route to a career as a narrative jeweller was more convoluted than that of the other jewellers discussed. As he says,

> "Since I didn't know what I wanted to be at first, I took courses in liberal arts, and then more specifically in economics (got a degree in economics) and then later courses in Art Education and got a degree in that"[13].

He also has a B.F.A which he received at the University of Illinois, Urbana in 1958, an M.F.A in metalwork at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1962, and another M.F.A in sculpture from The Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, in 1969. Born in 1934, he is older than most other jewellers working along the same narrative lines. As a narrative jeweller virtually without peer, Woell has been in constant demand at some of the best schools in America. He taught at the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater, 1971 - 1973, Boston University from 1976 - 1985, Swain School of Art and Design, 1985 - 1987 and, more recently at SUNY - New Paltz, which is widely believed to produce some of the best of Americas Craft Design graduates. He is currently teaching at The Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine. Woell's work is also held in many public and private collections, both in the U.S.A and Europe.

Betsy King provides another example of how radically different styles can flourish under the narrative umbrella. Her work differs from that of the other narrative jewellers discussed, because her work is literally pictorial - the story is apparent in most pieces. She 'frames' her work, further adding to its picture- like quality. King was born in 1953 in Washington D.C., attended the Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, from which she graduated in 1975 with a B.F.A in

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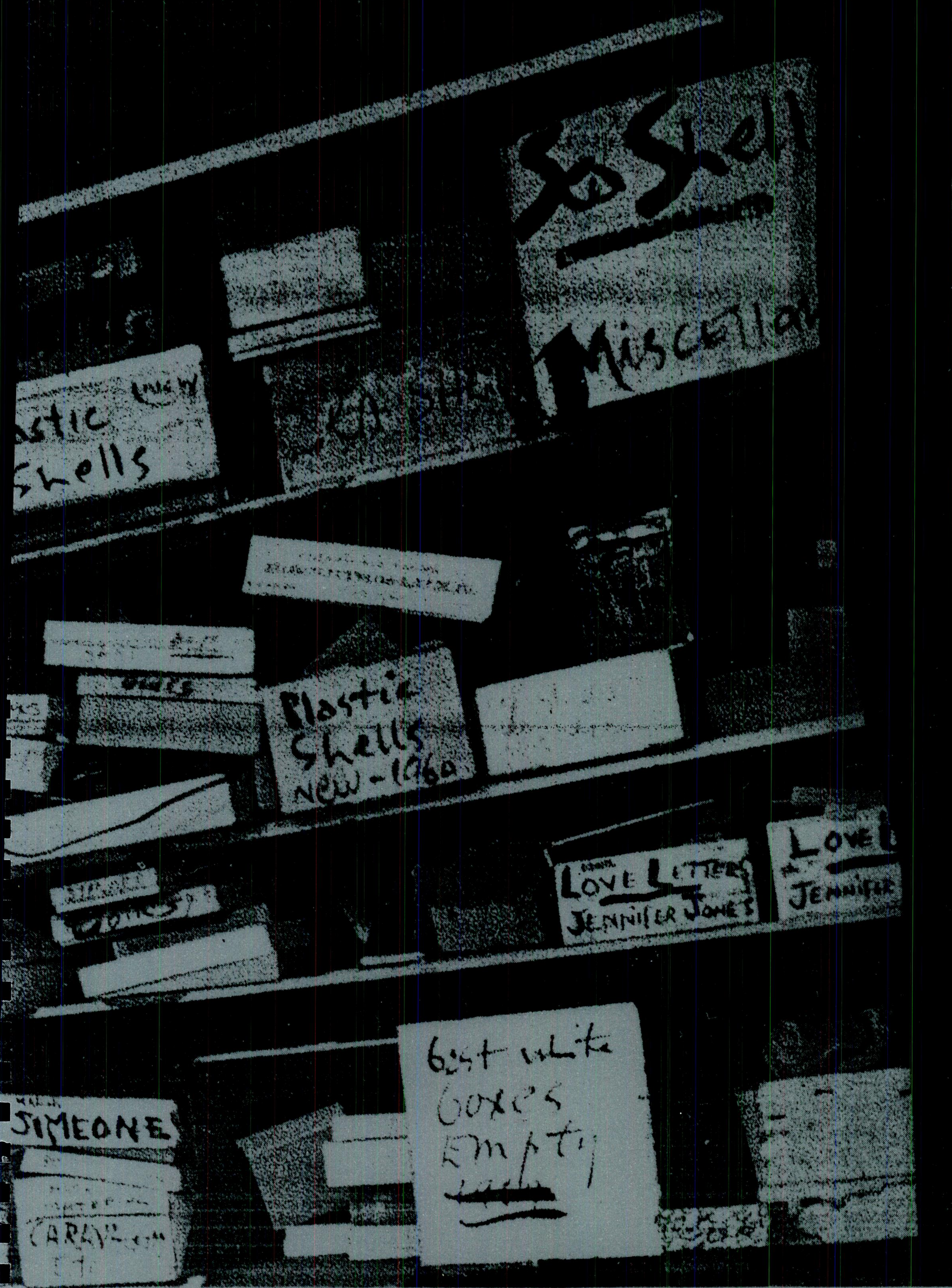
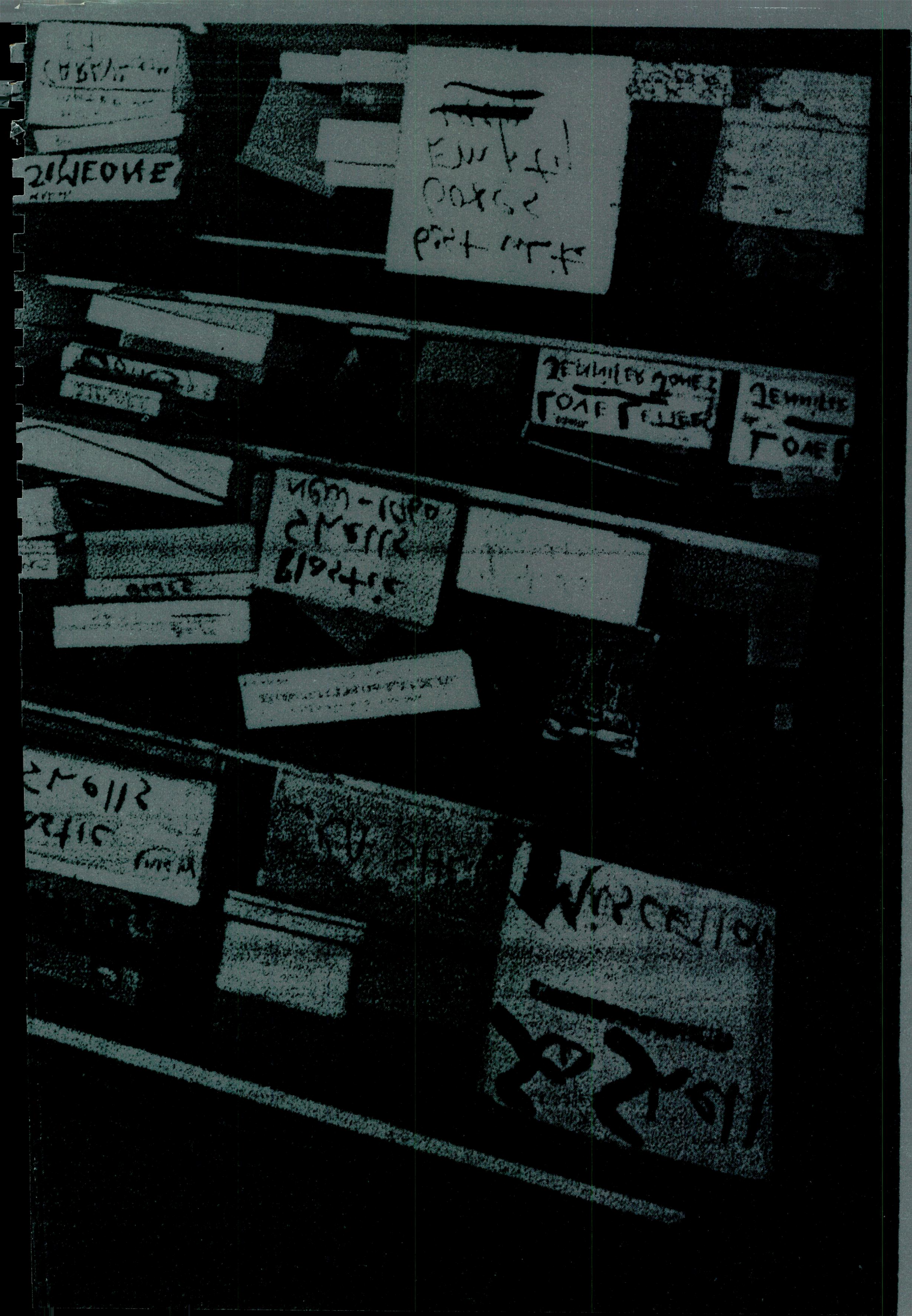
13 Woell, 4th Nov. 1994.

Jewellery and Ceramics, and the Gemological Institute of America, Richmond, Virginia, where she was taught advanced stone setting and jewellery repair. King worked for many years at the Best Products Co. Inc., New Jersey, for whom she was a craftsman jeweller, designer, setter, engraver and supervisor, but left in 1991 to concentrate solely on her career as a narrative jeweller.

Her work is held in several public and private contemporary art collections in the U.S.A, and at the Het Kruithuis Museum of Contemporary Arts' Permanent Craft Collection in the Netherlands. King has been exhibiting her work in public for the past nineteen years. During that time her work has been shown in many exhibitions, in the U.S.A, Asia and Europe, and has also received several awards and grants.


Plastic Shells New-1960
LOVE LETTERS JENNIFER JONES
SIMEONE
best white boxes Empty



Chapter 2
The Emergence Of Narrative Jewellery As A Contemporary Genre.

The idea of a piece of Jewellery as a narrative piece of ornamentation is a relatively new one which has gained more and more credence in the last twenty years or so, largely due to the upsurge of a 'New Jewellery' movement. This movement was pioneered in the late 1960's by American art jewellers such as Robert Ebendorf[14], Ramona Solberg[15] and J. Fred Woell. Jewellery which does more than add to or enhance the personality of the wearer is a new phenomenon of twentieth century personal adornment. Previously, jewellery was recognised for its fashionable design, settings of stones etc. But now, with the advent of the narrative style, it is able to tell its own story. It will not merely sit quietly on a coat or sweater, unobtrusively, but rather demand attention. As a jewellery form, its possibilities are endless. The eye is drawn back again and again, each time with a new discovery to appreciate, engaging the wearer and viewer in a way that a traditional, generic, mass produced brooch or earrings never could.

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[14]Robert Ebendorf is an American narrative jeweller who helped pioneer the movement in the late 1960's, by rebelling against traditional techniques employed by jewellers, such as goldsmithing and using instead of precious marerials eg. gemstones, non-precious materials. He is still active as a jeweller and teacher. He taught art metals for many years at SUNY New Paltz, New York.

[15]Ramona Solberg came to prominence in the late sixties when her found object jewellery was regarded as 'anti-jewellery', and was not considered to be art. She has, over the years consistently kept up this style of working and persists in using junk elements in her jewellery pieces, such as ceramic fragments and plastic souvenirs.

Narrative Jewellery has reached a level of refinement in America different from its European counterparts. This is not to say that the American form of narrative is better than the European version, only that there are differences, varying in subtlety, between them:

"Playfulness and sensual delight are more characteristic of contemporary American jewellery that the theory and design orientated jewellery of Europe".[16]

However, it is in the American field that we can most clearly see this exciting and challenging jewellery form at its fullest potential. There are several possible reasons for this: perhaps narrative jewellery has reached a zenith in America because of the diverse cultures and peoples who make up that country. Unlike Europeans, Americans do not have a uniform or coherent cultural history because so many cultures are mixed together - European, African, Indian, Asian and South American art have all met and mixed in the hodge-podge that makes up American nationality.

It would appear that this mixed tradition encourages or frees the American jeweller to work in whatever style s/he wishes, in a way that doesn't happen in Europe. The American cultural tradition is in its infancy compared with European culture, and so American Jewellers as well as Painters, Sculptors etc., seem not to find their cultural history as binding as European artists have done. They do not feel held back by the shackles of tradition. American narrative jewellers have been exposed to a welter of mixed information, ideas, cultural icons and symbols from which they can draw inspiration and references for their work.

Perhaps, for these jewellers, the old adage "Land of hope and opportunity" does ring true, for here are people who embody the sentiment - seizing opportunities, using whatever is available to them to create beautiful, memorable work from nothing: a broken pencil, a bicycle reflector, a wisdom tooth, a snake rattle, an old tin badge. Their sources are endless, and most of the materials used have no

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16 Ramljak, Suzanne, "The power of the intimate: on contemporary jewellery and sculpture", *American Art Jewellery Today*, 1994.

intrinsic worth until they are made into valuable pieces of work by the maker, through the making process, and the very combination of materials selected to tell a story increases their worth tenfold. The idea of using non-precious materials to create jewellery is a fairly new and revolutionary one; only since the 1960's have we seen jewellery made from non-traditional materials like plastics and junk with little or no actual worth, turned into precious, lasting pieces of jewellery, even though there may not be any actual 'precious' components in the piece.

Another reason that Narrative jewellery has reached a level of sophistication in the U.S. may be because European jewellery is so much more conceptual than its American counterpart. European, and especially Dutch jewellers are more concerned with the conceptual and cerebral aspects of a piece of jewellery, whereas American jewellers, while not abandoning concepts by any means, are more concerned with the visual aspects of a piece; even a quick look at the two styles to illustrate to this. The Gijs Bakker piece (Fig. 3), part of his *Botticelli* series made in 1990, is narrative in the European sense, but is obviously different from the work of American jewellers Kim Overstreet and Robin Kranitzky, for example. Their 1990 brooch *Egression* (Fig. 4) is a marked contrast to the Bakker piece which has a spare, flattened look to it than is not found in the work of these eight American jewellers. European narrative jewellery has a tendency to simply executed and two-dimensional, as this piece is, with little surface texture to lure the eye. Bakker's work is beautiful in its own right; with its clear, pure lines and ingenious use of gold, but it is completely different from American Narrative jewellery. His piece shows us this in the simplicity of the image used, and the overall blandness of the piece. Overstreet and Kranitzky's piece is full and rounded, a treat for the eye, with many surface decorations to appreciate.

That this field of specialisation exists in the larger sphere of American contemporary jewellery is beyond doubt. One only has to open a

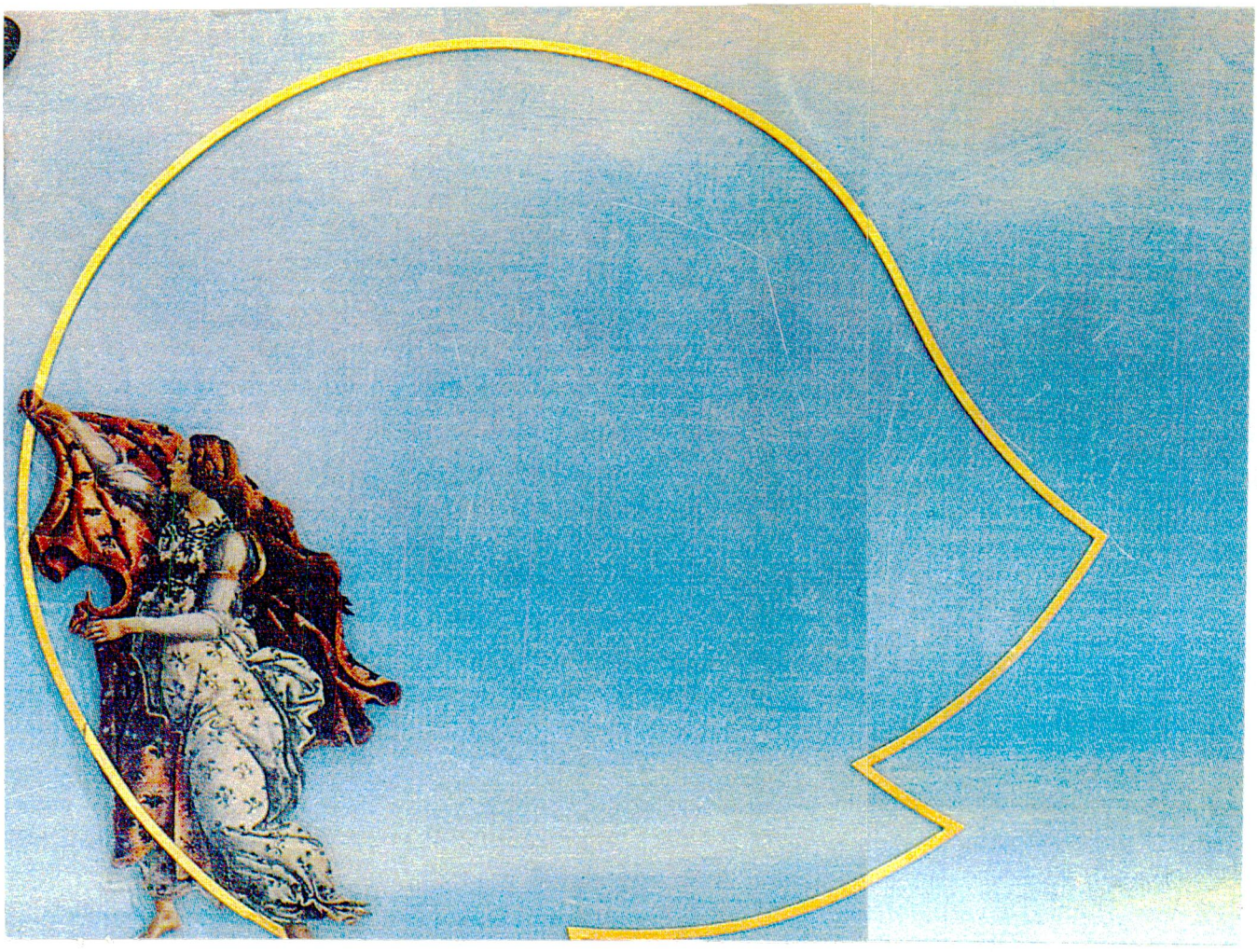

Fig.3: *Botticelli* ; Gijs Bakker, Brooch, 1990.

Fig.4: *Egression* ; Kim Overstreet & Robin Kranitzky, 1990.

book detailing a recent history of contemporary American jewellery[17] to see that the wealth of jewellers working in this field is outstanding.

For the purposes of this thesis I can only discuss a limited few who I feel perfectly encapsulate the spirit of this genre, all working in a narrative vein, yet no two alike. Each has a different slant, an originality that makes this genre so exciting with its combinations and permutations of materials that are used to make the work, and indeed the endless possibilities of materials to be used in endless combinations. What makes it so beguiling is its infinity, its boundless energy. The work leaves so much to say within the boundless limits of the narrative.

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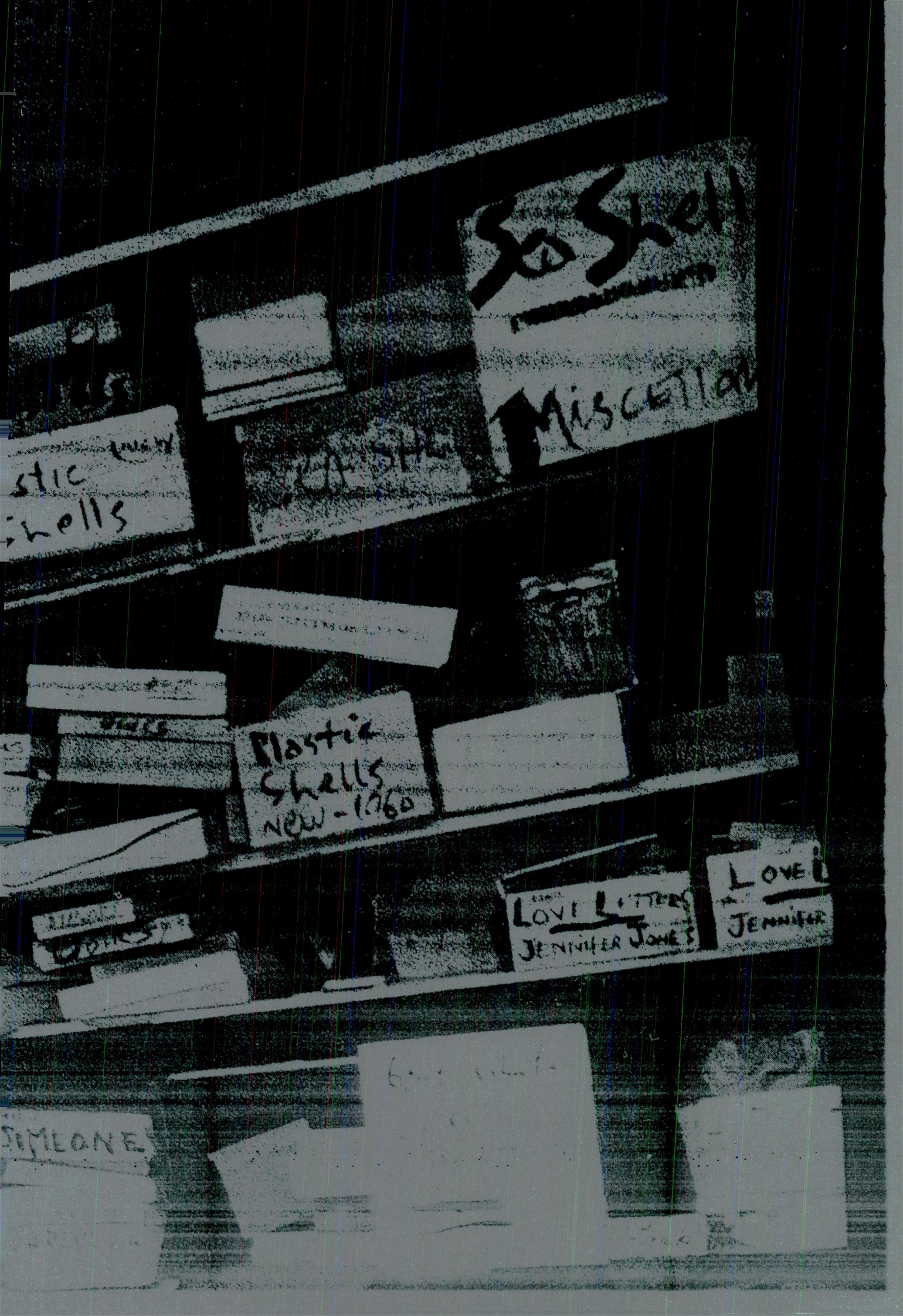
[17] such as Dormer, Peter, & Turner, Ralph, *The New Jewellery; Trends and Traditions*, 1974 (revised 1994), or Watkins, David, *Contemporary Jewellery*, 1994.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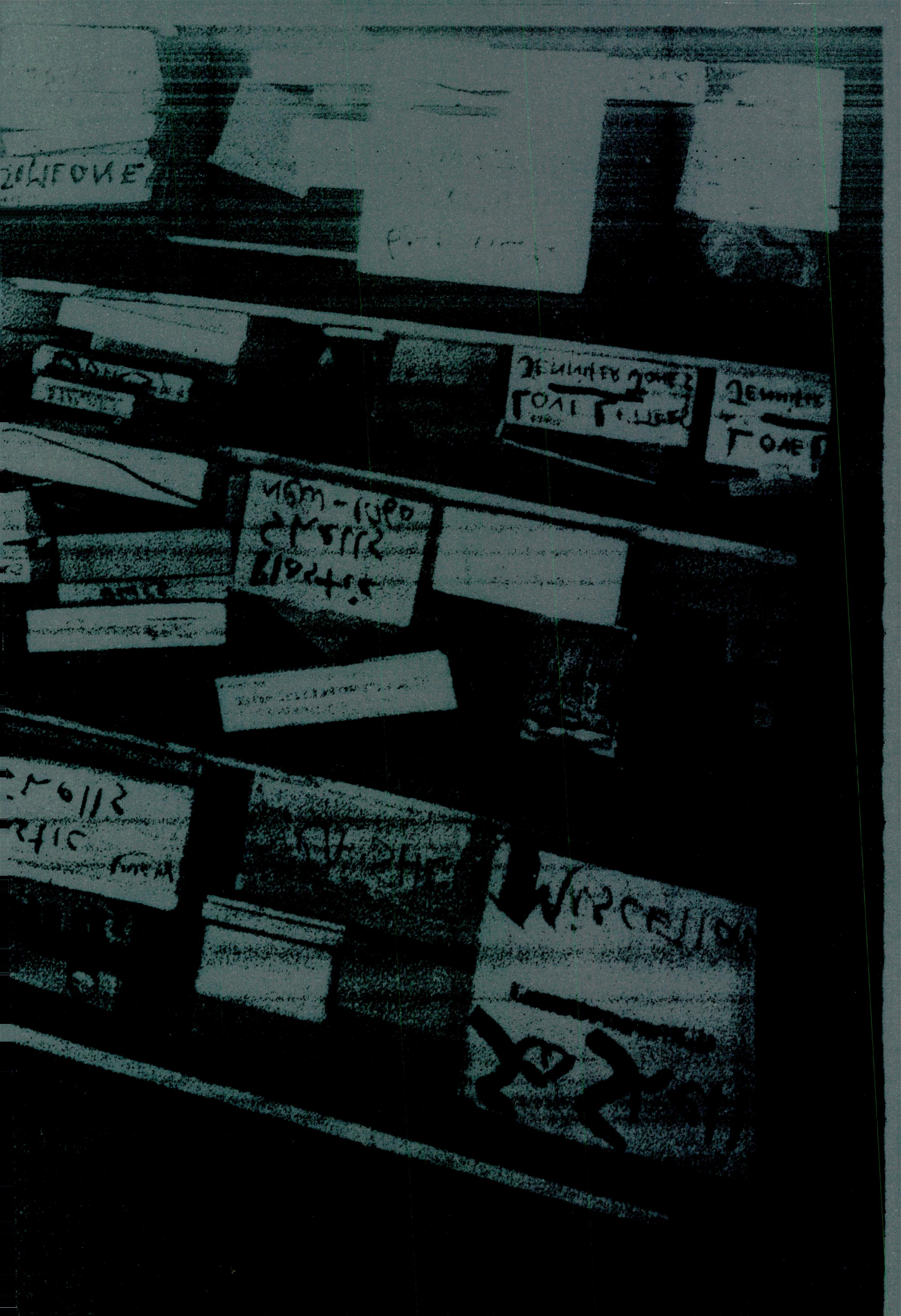
NEW - 1960
LOVE LETTERS
JENNIFER JONES
LOVE
JENNIFER



Chapter 3
Reinforcing Narrative Jewellery As A Genre

Narrative Jewellery has quickly become a respected feature of contemporary American jewellery. There have been many retrospectives and exhibitions devoted to contemporary jewellery since the early '80's, not only in America but also in Europe. An early exhibition of contemporary American jewellery was the *"Young Americans"* show of 1982, held in the American Craft Museum, which showcased emerging American contemporary jewellers including narrative jeweller Elizabeth Garrison. Among their other European counterparts, the Dutch are the closest to the American ethos in that much of Dutch contemporary jewellery is also very bold and innovative, but it differs from American narrative jewellery in that it is much more avant garde and 'ideas' orientated than its American cousin. A 1984 jewellery exhibition, *"Jewellery U.S.A"*, held in The American Craft Museum II, showcased the contemporary jewellery scene, and included work by Elizabeth Garrison and Betsy King.

The Dutch also held an exhibition of this type of work in June 1990; the *"American Dreams, American Extremes"* exhibition, held in the Museum Voor Hedendaagse Kunst Het Kruithuis, which became the starting point for this thesis, such was the thrall in which I was held on my discovery of this type of work. This exhibition attempted to show a cross section of the type of work being produced by contemporary jewellers in the United States, and it was successful in doing so, but it was the narrative jewellers, the *American Extremes* who really shone. Their work was exciting, innovative, colourful, full of visual information

and hidden meanings. Each viewing revealed something new, which had previously gone unnoticed. I felt a little sorry for the other participants in the exhibition, for how could could their puny feathers compare with the magnificent plumage on show?

Another important exhibition was the *"Brilliant Stories, American Narrative Jewellery"* exhibition, curated by Lloyd E. Herman, the founding director of the Renwick Gallery in Washington D.C., which toured the Middle East and the U.S.A between December 1992 and December 1994. This exhibition featured many of the same jewellers as did the *"American Dreams, American Extremes"* show: King, Onofrio, Woell as well as Overstreet and Kranitzky. It was entirely devoted to narrative work, featured the work of twenty five jewellers, and even more so than *"American Dreams..."* this exhibition showed us the limitless possibilities of this field. Lloyd E. Herman also curated another show entirely devoted to narrative jewellery in 1993; the *"Material Vision: Image and Objects"* exhibition at the Eastern Illinois University, featuring work from Slemmons, King and Garrison.

The work featured was made from hundreds of different sorts of things: Kiff Slemmons used a variety of metals: silver, bronze, copper and brass, as well as acrylic and watch faces. Kim Overstreet & Robin Kranitzky used metals, acrylic, polymer clay, Micarta[18] and numerous found objects. Judy Onofrio used very little metal, but rather drew from her vast hoard of beads, baubles and other collected objects. By contrast, J. Fred Woell's work was almost entirely in cast silver, with set pieces of found stone and ceramic fragments. His work was an amalgam of plastic and found objects, brought together in a unified form - the metal.

The exhibition cunningly showed these different ways of creating jewellery which is more than the sum of its parts, capable of telling a story, and able to make the viewer sit up and take note. Narrative jewellery stands on its own in the area of contemporary American jewellery, existing as a clearly identifiable facet of the wider sphere of American jewellery. As with painting or sculpture, one may subscribe

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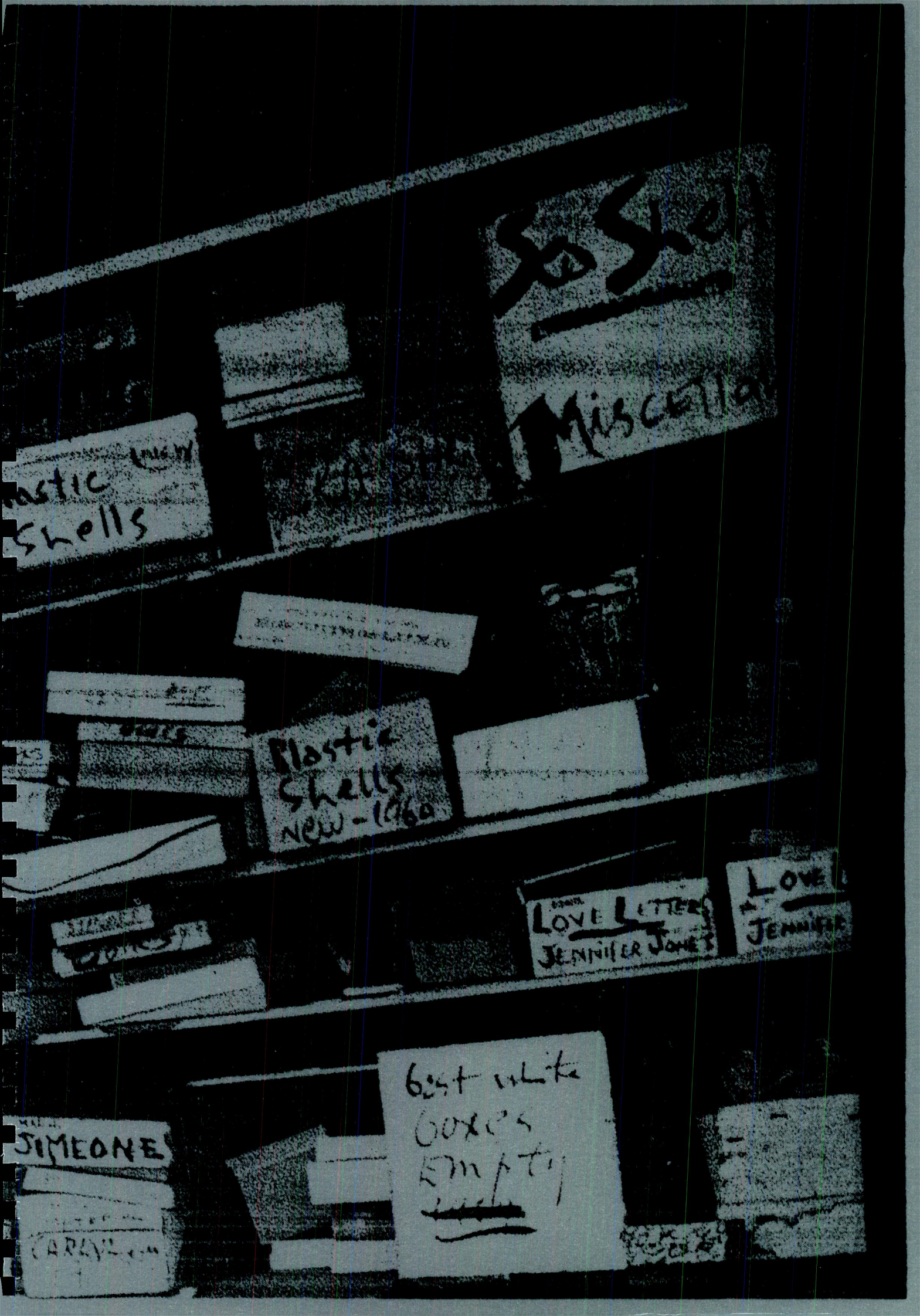
[18]Mircarta is a plastic used to make car and bicycle reflectors.

to whatever theory one wishes to, whether it be minimalist, deconstructionist or surrealist in its expression. This field of jewellery making now has many subscribers, due to its free ethos, its energy and its infinite possibilities.


Miscellaneous
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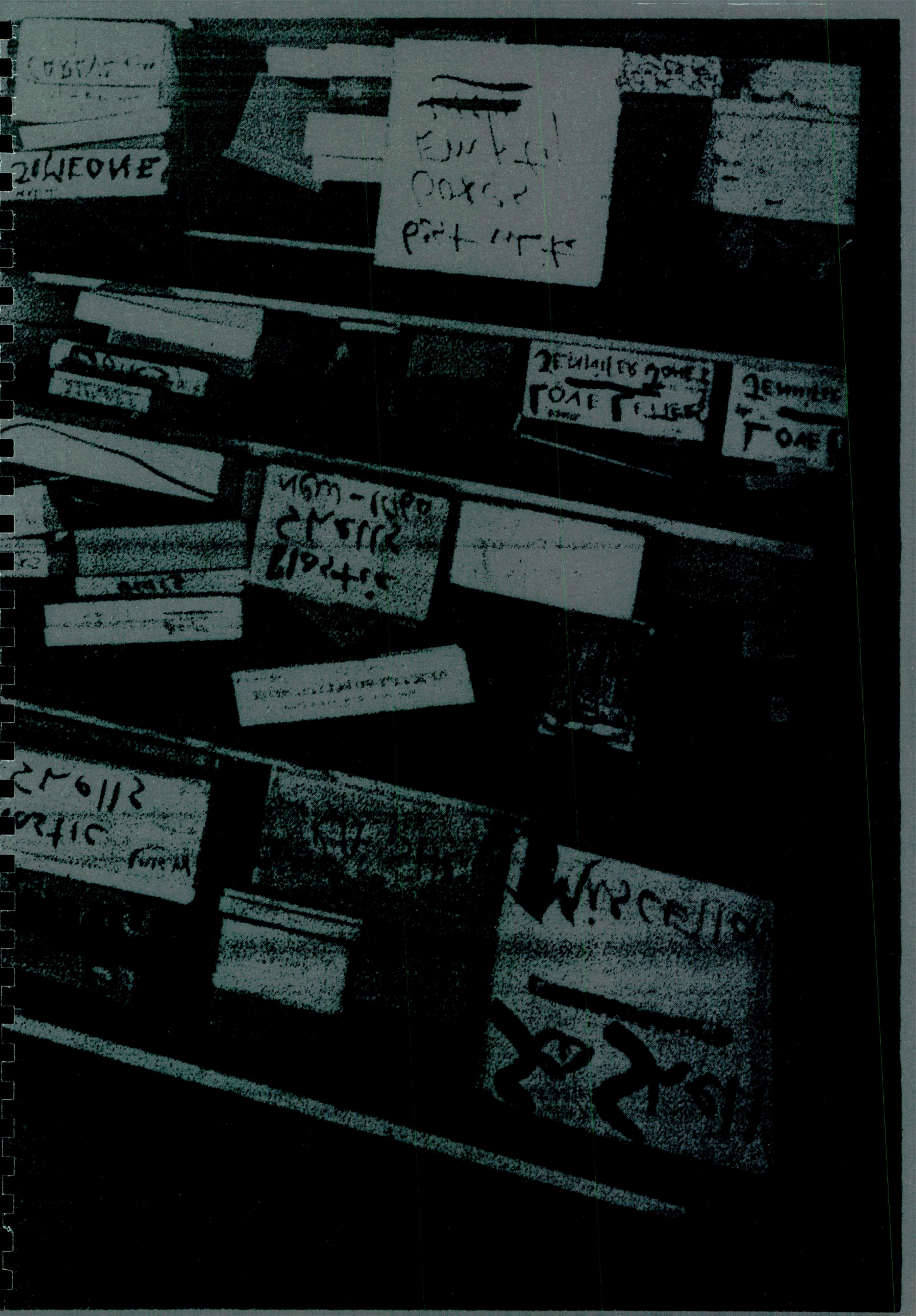
Plastic Shells NEW - 1960
LOVE LETTERS
JENNIFER JONES
Best white books empty
SIMEONE



Chapter 4
The Influence Of Influence

This Century has seen a complete revolution both in how art is made, and what we perceive to be art. This may be due to many factors; the bewildering amount of art movements that this century has seen, the continuing effects of the Industrial Revolution, the availability of new materials (plastics, fibreglass etc.), the relentless march of ever changing technology (computers, photocopiers, laser printing etc.), and also how much historical change this century has witnessed - two major World Wars, countries divided, Communism deposed.

Such factors have obviously contributed to what has made up Twentieth Century art. Assemblage, for instance, has almost taken over from modelling or fabrication as the favoured sculptural method. This radical turn around in what we perceive to be art has also affected what we now accept as jewellery. The jewellery world has changed so radically in the last thirty or so years that it is now accepted that a piece of jewellery does not have to be made from precious metals and stones, nor bound by the traditional mores of abstract decoration, understatement, elegance, essential vapidity. It has been said by Suzanne Ramljak that Contemporary American Narrative Jewellery is as much like small scale sculpture as jewellery.

"The dividing line between jewellery and sculpture is largely an imaginary one. Size notwithstanding, the world of the jeweller is the

world of the sculptor; they partake of the same rich cultural heritage and face the same aesthetic and material challenges".[19]

This raises the issue of links between the narrative and sculpture, a prickly connection to many jewellers, who find that sculpture is considered preferable or superior to jewellery.

> "Jewellery's mobile essence - its wearability - makes it an ideal forum for public art, and especially appealing for a metalsmith intent on interacting with a wide audience. However, (her) infusion of expansive, literary ideas into this intimate, often ornamental format has prompted more than one well-wisher to suggest, 'Oh. Well - why don't you make sculpture?' the implication is that sculpture is bigger and therefore better.[20]

While the eight jewellers selected for this thesis make 'jewellery', they do so in a sculptural way, sharing a kinship with sculptors in many of the qualities and ideals found in their work. Some of this appears to be directly descended from the work of the sculptor Joseph Cornell, as much as it is descended from any previous jewellery tradition.

Cornell has only been recognised as a true pioneer of modernist sculpture since his death in 1973. He is best known for his assemblages: boxes filled with often bizarre contents, stuffed birds, toys, buttons, eggs. He was a pioneer of modern sculptural movements due to his bravery and radicalism in the face of previous sculptural tradition. He eschewed traditional techniques in favour of assemblage, and traditional materials in favour of plastics and junk. Cornell's legacy can be best seen In the work of Overstreet and Kranitzky, as they too use boxed narratives which contain many disparate objects, all uniting to form a narrative full of symbolism and metaphor. Elizabeth Garrison told me[21] that one of her favoured making processes was assemblage. Cornell's influence on contemporary narrative jewellery can be seen in his 1942 assemblage *A Pantry Ballet.* (Fig. 5), which could have been made

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19 Ramljak, Suzanne, 'The power of the intimate: on contemporary jewellery and sculpture, American Art Jewellery Today, 1994.

20 "Uncommon Means of Measure"; The Jewellery of Kiff Slemmons, Metalsmith, Vol. 13, Summer 1993, pp 24-31.

21 Garrison, 11th Oct. 94.

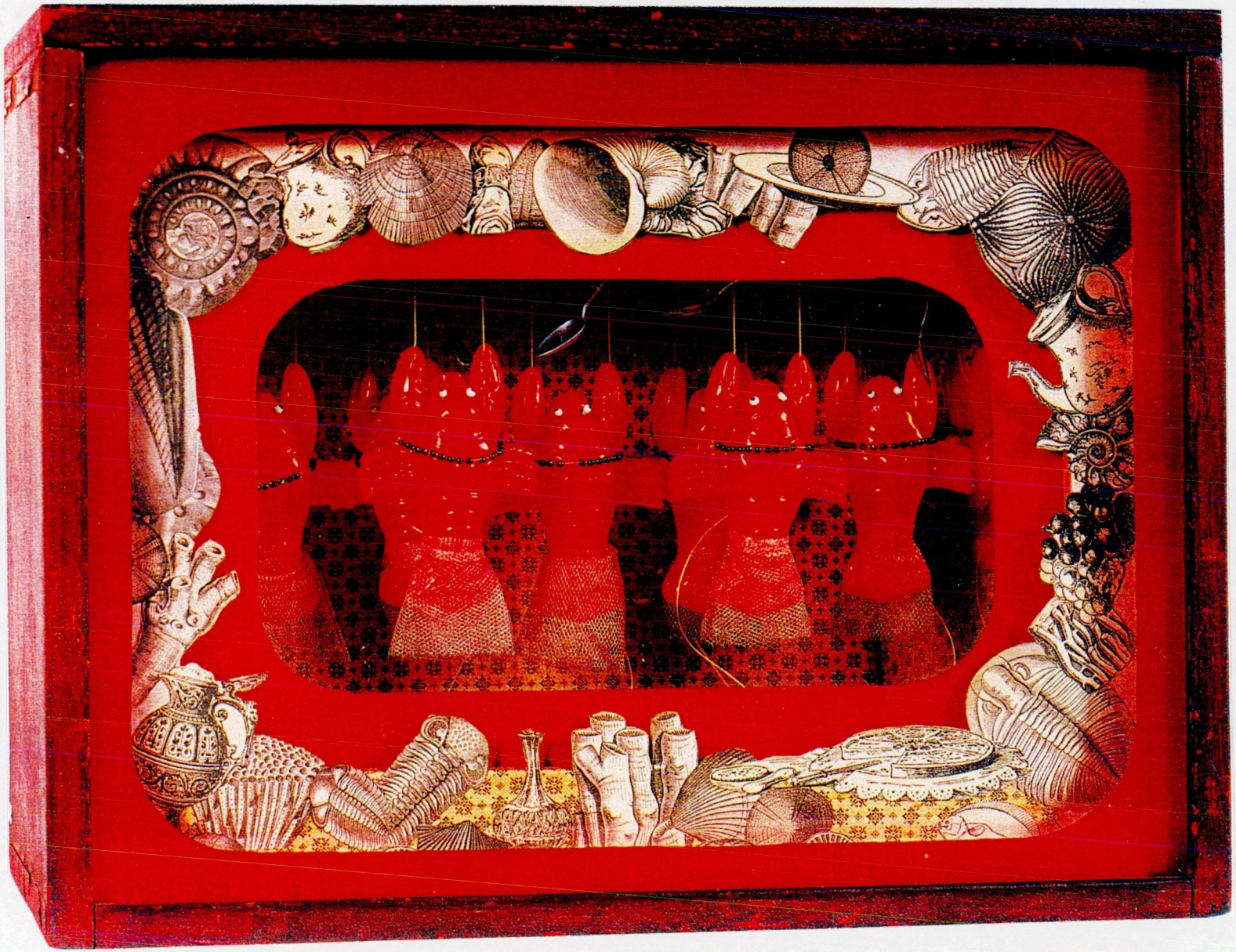

Fig.5: *A Pantry Ballet* ; Joseph Cornell, Assemblage, 1942.

by any one, or all of these eight jewellers. The assemblage is set in a deep frame, and uses plastics, metal, beads, card, wood - all the materials and characteristics that a narrative jeweller might use. This is a symmetrical piece, pleasing to the eye and well coloured. Like a lot of contemporary narrative jewellery it uses found objects. Cornell was active around the time of the surrealist movement, and he took a deep interest in the work of his contemporaries, which can be observed in *A Pantry Ballet*, (Fig. 5) with its bizarre juxtaposition of glossy plastic lobsters with jet necklaces and net skirts, and the collection of spoons suspended over their heads.

Surrealism is an influence on contemporary jewellery; both Kim Overstreet and Robin Kranitzky acknowledge its influence on their work[22], and Vaughn Stubbs cites Magritte, a surrealist painter, as an influence on his work[23]. To some extent, one can also see the influences of artists as diverse as Nikki de Saint-Phalle, to artists Joyce Wieland and Marcel Duchamp on contemporary American narrative jewellery. In de Saint-Phalle's 1964 piece *Ghea*, (Fig. 6) an assemblage on wood, we can easily see her influence on the work of narrative jewellers such as Judy Onofrio, and to a lesser extent, on the work of Vaughn Stubbs. Onofrio's 1993 piece, *Jan's Snakes*, (Fig. 7) seems directly related to de Saint-Phalle's *Ghea*, (Fig. 6) in that both artists use amalgamations of plastics in the form of flowers, dolls etc., and both often paint elements of their work also. *Ghea* (Fig. 6) has a woman as a central figure covered with plaster, paint and plastics. Onofrio's *Jan's Snakes* (Fig. 7 also has a woman as a central figure, and she is surrounded by a large collection of found objects, as is de Saint-Phalle's *Ghea* (Fig. 6). Like de Saint-Phalle, Onofrio also paints on top of her found materials, and also constructs pieces from plaster, the uses of which can be seen in *Jan's Snakes*. (Fig. 7).

Joyce Wieland's *Young Woman's Blues,* (Fig. 8) an assemblage made in 1964, is about the sick fascination that many Americans have with disasters and grotesque happenings; other themes that she uses

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22 Overstreet & Kranitzky, 28th Sept. 94.

23 Questionnaire reply from Stubbs, returned 19th Oct. 1994.

Fig.6: *Ghea* ; Nikki de Saint-Phalle, Assemblage, 1964.

Fig.7: *Jans Snakes* ; Judy Onofrio, Brooch & Shrine, 1993.

include that of isolation, which Betsy King also uses, as in her 1989 piece *Raised on Promises* (Fig. 9). This is part of a series dealingwith the theme of being trapped in situations in which there seems to be great disappointment or no resolution to current problems.

Wieland and King also share common technical features, preferring the same clean finish on their work, 'framing' their narratives, using photographs and old postcards in their work to tell the story of the piece, and placing objects outside the 'frame' of the piece. In Wieland's piece, *Young Woman's Blues* (Fig. 8) there is an aeroplane protruding from the frame, in King's *Raised On Promises* (Fig. 9) the frame is filled with small cast pieces, and behind it lies etched metal. The influence of Marcel Duchamp is manifest in the work of Betsy King, whom she cites as an influence on her work.[24] It is easy to see how Duchamp could affect the work of a narrative jeweller - particularly his assemblages made using many diverse components; King does this also assembling many different elements to form a piece, such as her 1989 brooch, *Raised On Promises*, (Fig. 9) or a 1988 piece, *Atlantic City* (Fig. 10) is an excellent example of her use of assemblage, incorporating plastic, silver, cord, tin, brass paint, paper and gemstones in one piece.

Such influences are easy to establish from looking at narrative work. but we cannot know the full extent of each jewellers influence's. From my questionnaire, I learned that the eight selected jewellers had influences as diverse as the animated films of Disney and The Quay Brothers, and Chagall, Man Ray and Matisse. The latter two artists influenced Kiff Slemmons because of the intellectual and literary traditions they represent. Other jewellers that they admired included

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[24] King, 5th Nov. 1994.

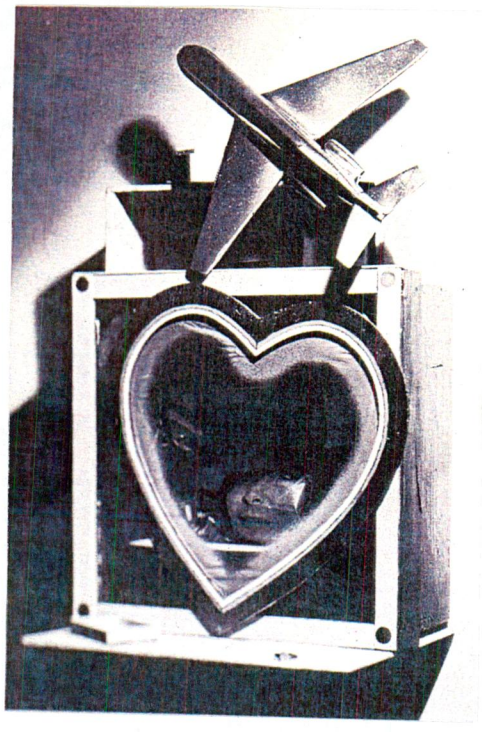

Fig.8: *Young Womans Blues* ; Joyce Wieland, Assemblage, 1964.

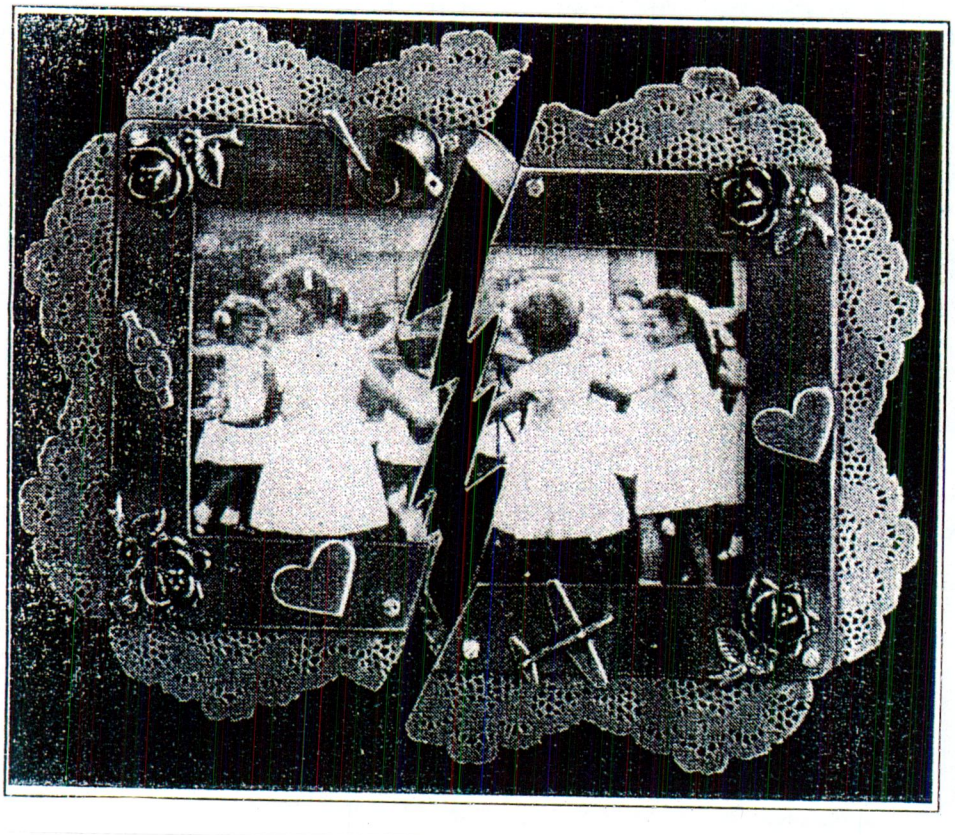

Fig.9: *Raised On Promises* ; Betsy King, Brooch, 1989.

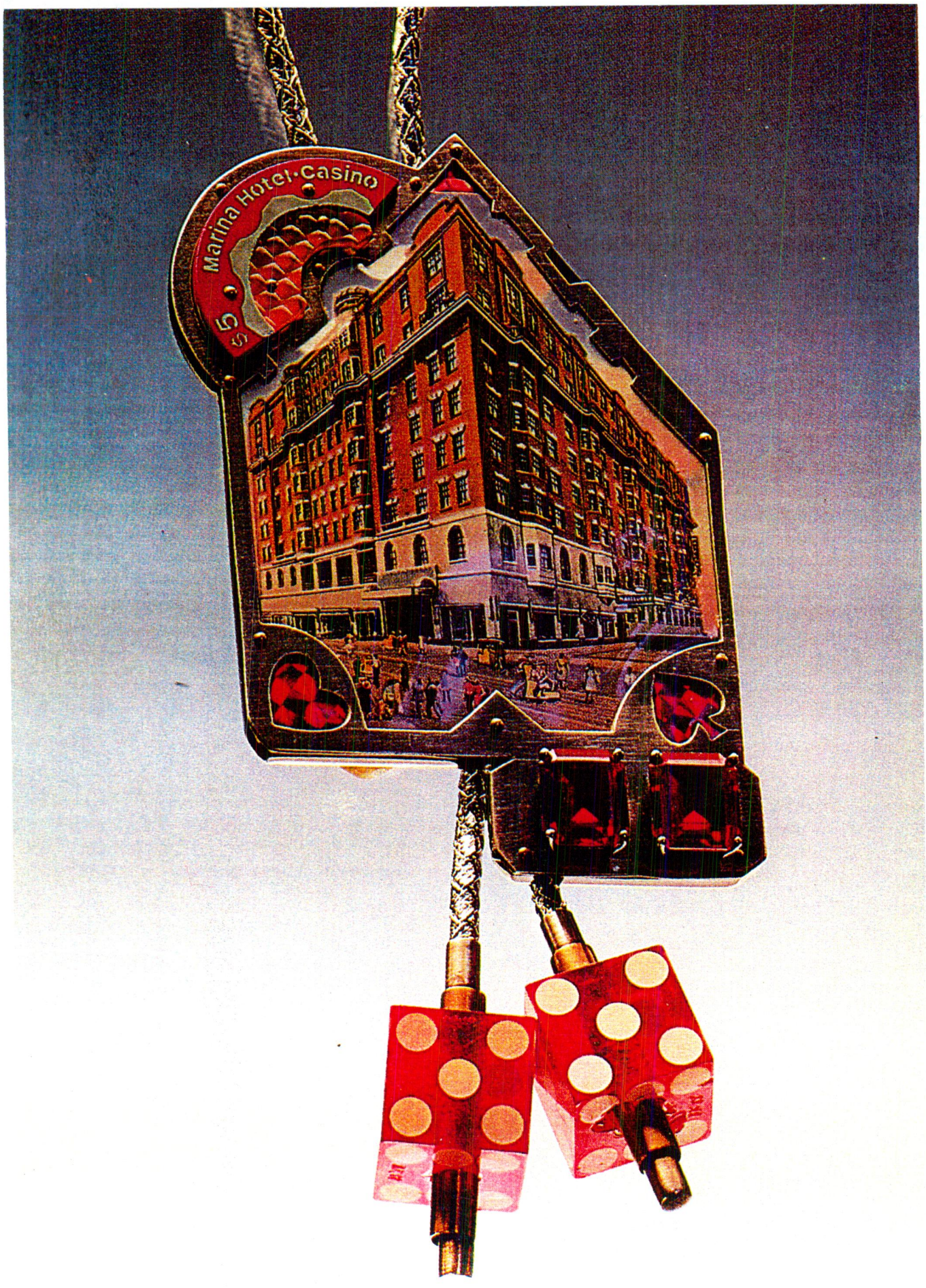

Fig.10: *Atlantic City* ; Betsy King, Bolo, 1988.

Gijs Bakker, Otto Kunzli[25], Allan Burton Thompson and Susan Hamlet[26]. Another big influence on Stubbs, Overstreet and Kranitzky is Faberge. In Stubbs' work, this influence is easy to recognise: the work of Peter Carl Faberge is extremely ornamented, encrusted in precious metals and jewels, and often highly coloured, with a high gloss finish. Faberge's *Lillies Of The Valley Egg,* (1898) (Fig. 11) has many similarities with Stubbs' work. Both types of work are highly, flamboyantly kitsch and although Faberge's work was considered to be elegant and tasteful, Stubbs uses kitsch images in a conceptual and whimsical way, aware of the reactions such images provoke, and also to poke gentle fun. The glossy textures and shining surfaces found in the work of Faberge can also be seen in Stubbs' *Wedgewood Lady* (1988) (Fig. 12) brooch. Faberge's influence on Overstreet and Kranitzky can be observed in several of their pieces, for example *Dandling* (Fig. 19). Faberge's eggs commonly had a secret interior into which was placed precious mementoes; jewelled daguerreotypes, golden carriages etc. This type of 'hiding' of precious components is also prevalent in Overstreet's and Kranitzky's *Dandling* : the found elements are shadowed by the exterior, hiding them.

Judy Onofrio's great aunt was one of the biggest influences on her work for the 'Folk Art' she created all her life, influencing Onofrio to use images and materials created from junk and other peoples cast offs. For Elizabeth Garrison, contemporary art jeweller William Harper was a huge influence on Garrison's choice of career.

Just as twentieth century art movements have played a big part in shaping the Narrative genre, one of the latest Sculptural trends influencing narrative jewellery is towards site-specificty, work purpose

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[25]Otto Kunzli is a well respected German contemporary jeweller who makes jewellery out of non-traditional materials: rubber, plastic, etc. His work can be austere visually, but there is usually humour in his work, which becomes obvious from the title of the piece.

[26]Alan Burton Thompson and Susan Hamlet are both American Narrative jewellers, creating pictorial work along the same lines as the eight selected jewellers. Burton Thompson's work uses enamel techniques, casting and found objects, and Hamlet uses more metal

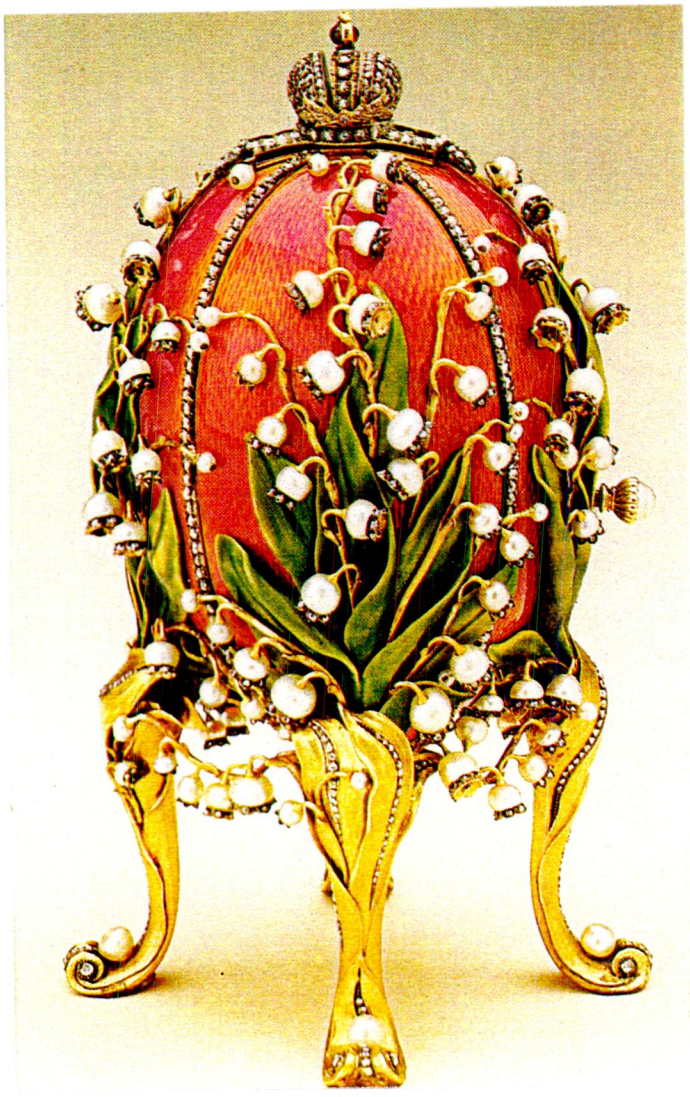

Fig.11: *Lillies Of The Valley Egg* ; Peter Carl Faberge, Object, 1898.

Fig.12: *Wedgewood Lady* ; Vaughn Stubbs, Brooch, 1987.

and found elements in her work. Both are currently producing work and participating in exhibitions.

built for a particular environment, which responds directly to the physical and cultural conditions of the area in which it is placed. also particularly relevant is interactivity, another recent tendency which actively involves the viewer. This is a prime area of exploration in both contemporary jewellery as well as sculpture.

Since jewellery is designed to be worn on the human body, it has always been site-specific in a unique way. Sculpture grapples with this concept that the jeweller has been addressing for hundreds of years. Especially relevant to contemporary jewellers is the question of interactivity since the nature of Anecdotal jewellery is to make the viewer / wearer observe the narrative and participate in the piece. Narrative jewellery solicits viewer involvement and is, therefore interactive in a novel way. Each of the eight jewellers selected produces work which forces the viewer into much more than a cursory glance. For example, the work of Kiff Slemmons or Elizabeth Garrison invites viewer participation and involvement because of its complex array of subtle meanings. Each of Slemmons 60 odd pieces from her *Hands of the Heroes* (Fig's. 13, 14 & 26) series reinforces this. The hand symbol is important: in Mexico it has been used for centuries by metalsmiths to form charms called *Milagros* (meaning 'little Miracles'). Slemmons uses the hand symbol to represent each 'Hero', for example *Don Quixote* (1989) (Fig. 13), and it holds the story and invites interaction from the viewer. *Don Quixote* is an ideal piece of narrative work in that Slemmons has observed all the best parts of this genre: the use of non-precious materials, for example leather, and a non-traditional shape, yet has still created a beautiful, wearable piece of jewellery. Her unique and personal take on this ancient symbol can be well observed in one of her later *Hands...* pieces, a 1991 brooch named *Parents 1* (Fig. 14).

Another contemporary influence important to many Narrative jewellers is that of the deterioration of the environment, and the need to recycle. Woell says of his work: "My work has a strong social-political content to it, and the things I find certainly speak to those issues".[27] He uses found pieces and other peoples rubbish, from

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[27]Woell, 4th Nov. 1994.

Fig.13: *Don Quixote* ; Kiff Slemmons, Brooch, 1991.

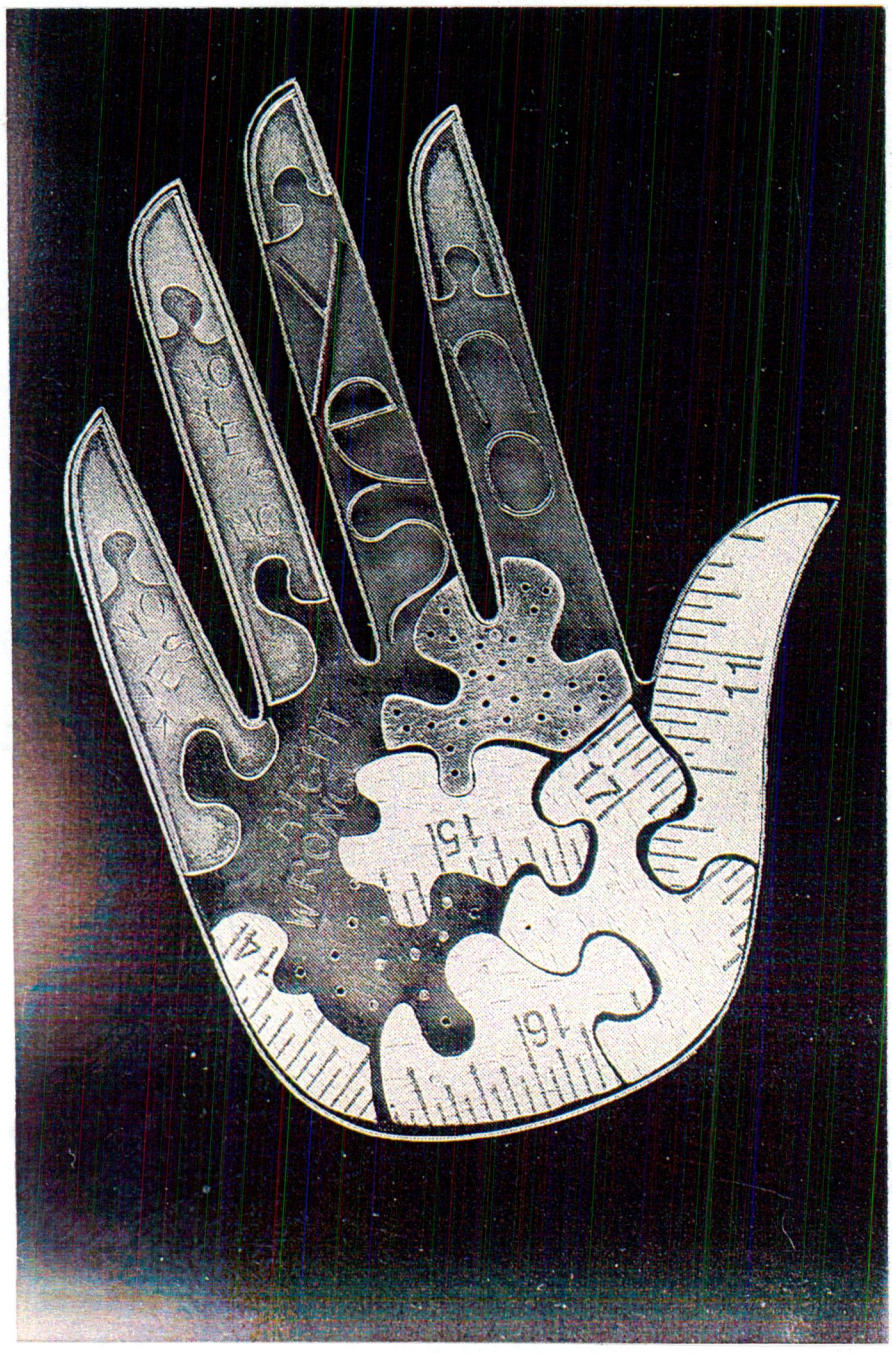


Fig.14: *Parents 1* ; Kiff Slemmons, Brooch, 1990.

which he makes his jewellery. A 1990 piece, *DO 17* (Fig. 15) illustrates his emphasis on recycling perfectly: it is made up of several different found components - a wheel, a figure a badge and a plastic face, joined together, and then cast into a piece of jewellery. This concept of re-using materials and resources, rather than utilising new ones has become a particularly contemporary issue. Woell doesn't just doesn't just recycle his jewellery components. He said: "I believe in recycling as much as possible - solar, wind energy etc."[28] Stubbs also feels the need to re-cycle. He and Kiff Slemmons both like to re-use discarded objects in their work because they feel that the references that these bring with them add poignancy and emotion to their work. Social issues influence J. Fred Woell's use of materials:

> "I remember back to when my first professor in grad school told me about diamonds and South Africa, and that's the first and last time I've ever used a diamond. I remember also learning about ivory then, and I still have some ivory scraps left over from the last pieces I did in that material. I can't seem to bring myself to use it up".[29]

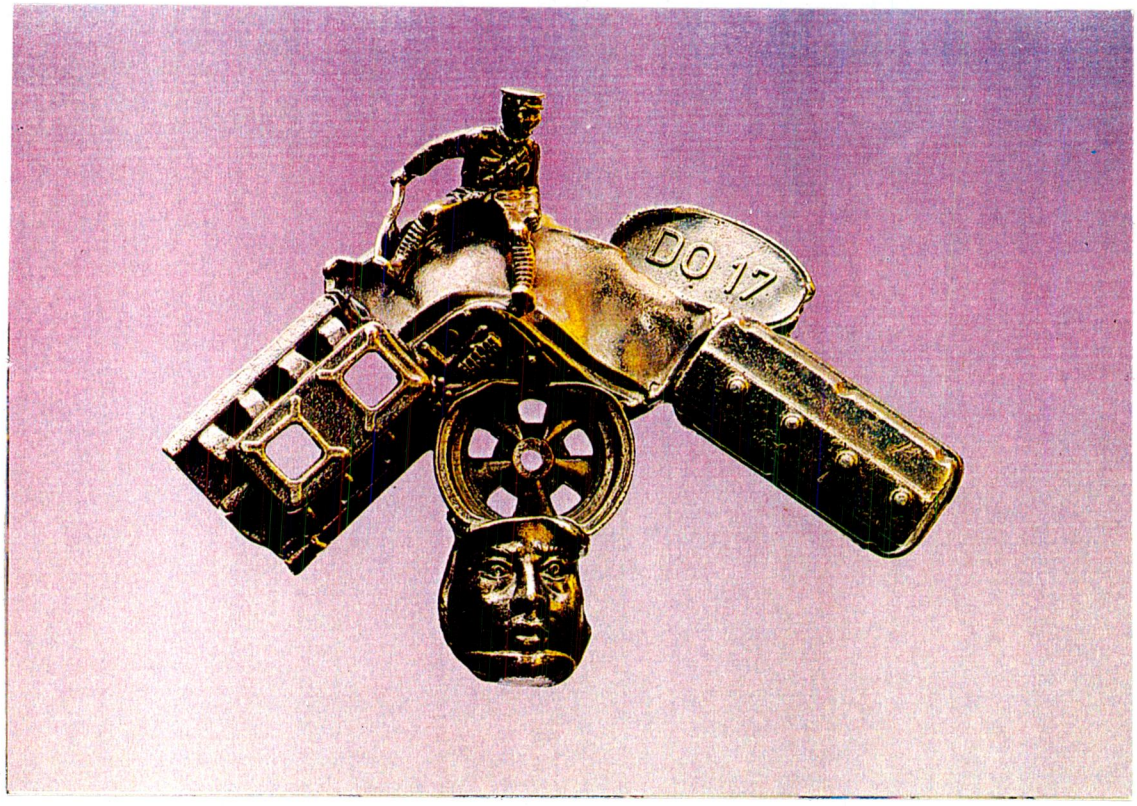
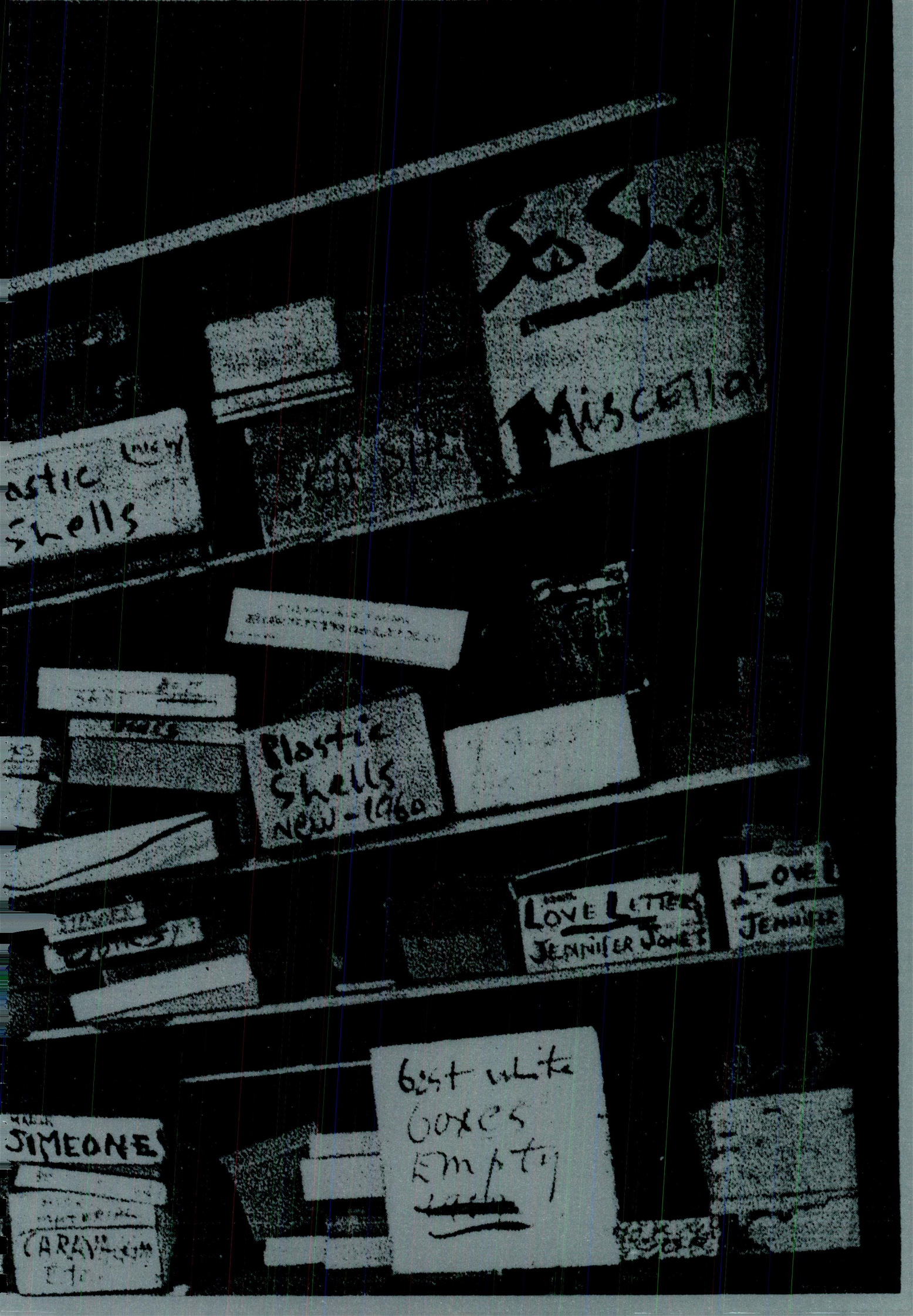


Fig.15: *DO 17* ; J. Fred Woell, Brooch, 1990.

[28]Ibid
[29]Ibid.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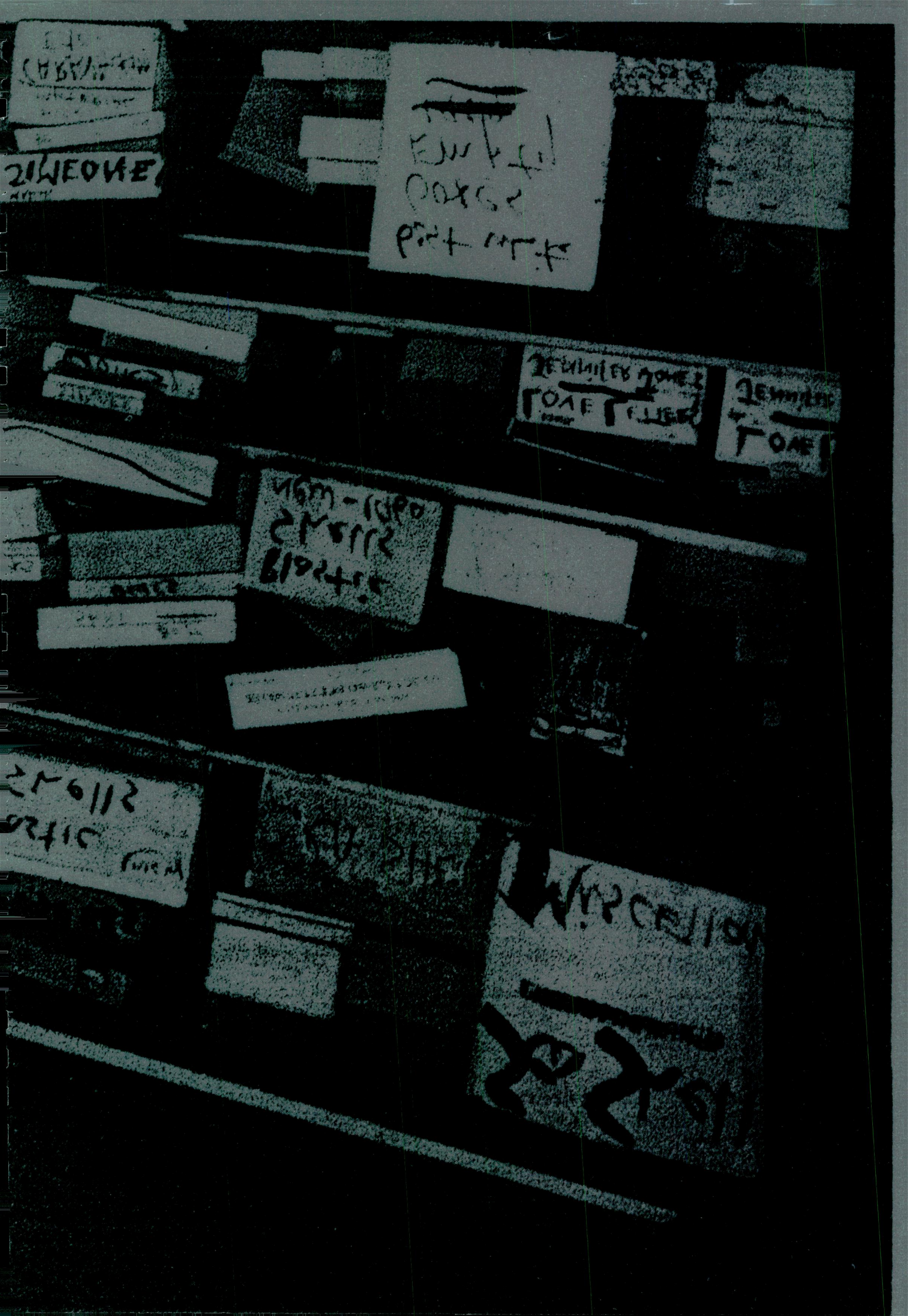

Chapter 5
Narrative Jewellery As A Career Choice

If the finished work of a specific genre in contemporary American Jewellery is identifiably 'narrative', then is the source material similar? The core of my research for this thesis was a questionnaire which I sent to each individual that I am writing about, because there is a lack of published documentation concerning this area from which to glean the information I required. One of the questions I asked each person related to their source material, another asked them to list their influences. There were eighteen questions in all, relating not only to the 'ideas' side of their work, but also to making procedures, time management, employment of technique, training, and availability of materials.

From these questionnaires, I hoped to establish shared links between each jeweller. I wanted to find out if, for example, they all were influenced by the same things, or taught by the same people. But in most cases, this was not the case. These people do share a similar style, but they cannot be pigeon holed. While they are all narrative jewellers and share some similar characteristics, like the use of found objects, or use of a similar form, (both of which are covered in more detail in later chapters), there are many more dissimilarities between them, like Kiff Slemmons' almost total use of metal in her work compared with Onofrio's eschewing of metal in favour of plastic. The fact that there is relatively little in common between most of them is the interesting link between them, yet their work can still be classified as narrative. This is an interesting paradox which made my

research all the more interesting.

Each of the eight jewellers selected revealed few common denominators and a number of other interesting points: for example, through the course of my research, I discovered that seven of these jewellers had no formal jewellery training; except for King, they all did other courses at undergraduate level when at college. So why did they choose Narrative Jewellery as a career? Fifty years ago, most of these jewellers would have become painters or sculptors. As for their College careers, J. Fred Woell took his first degree in economics; Judy Onofrio is self taught; Kiff Slemmons has a degree in French, Russian and Art; Elizabeth Garrison has a B.F.A in painting, and Robin Kranitzky's major in college was ceramics. Betsy King is the only one of the eight who has a degree in jewellery and metals. However, they all have backgrounds in art, and most took an art related subject as part of their course.

In several cases, blind chance seems to have taken a hand in their careers. Woell was introduced to jewellery making by a teacher on his Art Education degree course, when he was required to take two craft courses.

> "I first took ceramics and liked that, but the teacher in ceramics, who I liked, recommended that I get some breadth of experience and take for my second course, jewellery (Art Metal). The teacher of that course he told me (sic) was quite famous in the US... his name was Robert Von Neumann... so I took the metals course and liked it so much I decided I'd like to get a masters degree in Art Metals."[30]

Elizabeth Garrison is a painter, but turned, as previously mentioned to making pictorial jewellery in order to express herself after seeing an exhibition of William Harper's enamel and found-object jewellery. Again, almost accidently, Kiff Slemmons turned to making narrative jewellery "Out of a need", she said, "to be expressive intellectually as well as decoratively"[31], also because:

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[30] Ibid

[31] Slemmons, 14th Oct. 1994.

"Kiff credits the Linotype machine in her fathers workplace as being the catalyst which expanded her career to include metalsmithing; the old printing press was her first recollection of language and ideas made manifest through metal".[32]

Judy Onofrio turned to making small scale work in 1989, when she was confined following back surgery. She had always worked on a large scale previously, and so the move to small-scale work, because of her physical restrictions at that time, was quite a change. She began to delve into her private treasure stash to find small components to make her jewellery from. With the exception of Betsy King, it would seem to be down to pure chance that these people turned to making jewellery as their career. As Woell says, "I may have never have gotten into metals, if it wasn't required for my degree in Art Ed. So that requirement opened up a whole world to me that I didn't even know I'd like"[33].

A possible reason for their coming late into the contemporary jewellery scene may be because there are very few specialised, specific colleges for Art in America. Most colleges have an Art department, which will offer students all the usual courses like Craft, Painting, Textiles, etc., but, a student wishing to take an Art course is also required to take English, Maths or French etc., in addition, leaving little time to fully expand creativity. So students cannot work their way around the art department, testing and trying, because there are simply too many demands on their time to allow for experimentation. There are a only a few exceptions to this, like the famous California College of Arts and Crafts, or The Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine, (where J. Fred Woell now teaches).

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[32]Riedel, Mija, "Uncommon means of measure; The jewellery of Kiff slemmons", *Metalsmith*, Vol. 13, Summer 1993, p 24.
[33]Woell 4th Nov. 1994.

Chapter 6
The Importance Of The Found Object In Narrative Jewellery

One of the most fundamental characteristics of contemporary American narrative jewellery is the found object. The use of the found-object in anecdotal work is an intrinsic part of the process. The use of found materials in a piece of jewellery "involves the thoughtful relocation of found objects which, by their very presence, reference something besides the piece of jewellery at hand".[34]

All of the selected eight jewellers use found materials, scraps of their own and other people's lives in their work. Each uses small items to portray meaning and to tell the story of the piece. Where do they get their found objects? Does each jeweller have a secret stash or a stockpile of objects that they use? Stubbs told me that he got his found objects "from friends", and even better, by "creative trash picking".[35] Garrison finds the pieces that she incorporates into her work in flea markets and garage sales: "I always had a little collection of stuff to use around"[36]. Overstreet and Kranitzky say, "Years ago, when we first started making our jewellery, we used whatever we both had available (we were 'pack-rats'). Eventually, as people heard about our work, they were so intrigued they donated their 'stuff'"[37]. They also find suitable bits and pieces at "Flea markets, antique

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[34]Riedel, Mija, "Uncommon Means of measure; The Jewellery of Kiff Slemmons", Metalsmith, Vol. 13, Summer 1990, pp 26.
[35]Stubbs, 19th Oct. 1994.
[36]Garrison, 6th Oct. 1994.
[37] Overstreet & Kranitzky, 28th Sept. 1994.

shops, estate sales etc.". Through years of collecting, they have "a stockpile of objects, pieces and parts, somewhat organized and stored ready for use in our studio"[38]. King has "Always collected things, junk, toys, knick-knacks, pictures, antiques". Where does she get her junk?: "Sometimes I look for things in antique shops, but mostly I just find things on the street. I have an eye for seeing things that most people would ignore as trash"[39]. Another source of objects for her are her friends; people often give her, Like Overstreet and Kranitzky, things that they think she might use.

Woell has perhaps the nicest explanation of the source of his objects: "Well, found-objects are about 'miracles'. They come to you by accident. You don't go to the 'found-object' supermarket and buy them. It's true that you do sometimes, 'find' something in a store that becomes a 'found-object' in my work (sic), but generally I use things I 'find' laying in the street, or along the shores"[40]. Woell lives on an Island off the coast of Maine, and often finds useful things on the beach which have been washed up. He also has a stockpile of objects which he uses as he needs them. And where does he keep his collection?: "I have drawers, lots of drawers".[41]

Onofrio has probably the best collection of any of them; she has oil drums full of buttons and beads in her garage, and belongs to a button club, which allows her access to factory clearance and liquidation sales. When asked if she uses found-objects in her work, her answer was an emphatic "yes!"[42]. She has three storage spaces full of collected bits and pieces, and her devotion to found objects is evident in all of her creative output. Her *Abe and the Serpent*, (1991) (Fig. 16) perfectly illustrates her love for found objects. This piece is a marvellous array of trinkets which Onofrio has made into a shrine, which itself incorporates a brooch, also made from found materials, such as plastic flowers, American flags and ceramic figures. Kiff

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[38] ibid

[39] King, 5th Nov. 1994.

[40] Woell, 4th Nov. 1994.

[41] Freudenheimer, Betty, "An ambiguous art: the jewellery of J. Fred Woell", *American Craft*, april/may 1989, pp 32-5.

[42] Onofrio, 25th Oct. 1994.

Fig.16: *Abe And The Serpent* ; Judy Onofrio, Brooch in Shrine, 1991.

Slemmons also uses a lot of collected objects in her work, but she "More often use[s] found material rather than objects complete in themselves".[43] People, she says "Give me cast-off bits"[44]. She also finds a lot of her source material herself. This use of found objects carefully placed within the metal confines of her work can be seen in many of her pieces, notably *Sticks And Stones And Words*, (Fig. 17) a neckpiece made in 1992.

So what is the affinity that these eight narrative jewellers have for this sort of flotsam and jetsam? What makes them want to use the discarded 'junk' that someone else has tired of? Betsy King says, "I guess I just like combining old with new; precious with non-precious"[45]. A piece which illustrates this sentiment perfectly is King's *I Can See Paradise By The Dashboard Lite*. (Fig. 18). This piece contains an old postcard, new metal, in the form of the silver, and plastic is juxtaposed with the use of silver as a precious material. J. Fred Woell reckons that "found objects describe our culture (at least here in the US where we are a part of the great throwaway society). So the stuff that people throw away speaks a lot about who we are and how we live"[46]. He also has a strong affinity for found objects because "the things we throw away are quite visually interesting. They have interesting shape, colours, textures, qualities of material, transparent, (sic) etc". He likes the way that objects present themselves to him: "When I find them, they quite often are rusty or broken, weather (sic) etc., and that adds even more aesthetic charm and visual impact to them"[47].

Overstreet, by contrast, "has always had an affinity for teeny, tiny things"; she is "fascinated by minute detail everywhere - by a small interesting rock found in the street to a little insect egg-sac found under a leaf"[48]. Kiff Slemmons has other, more cerebral reasons for

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[43]Slemmons, 14th Oct. 1994.
[44]Slemmons, 14th Oct. 1994.
[45]King, 5th Nov. 1994.
[46]Woell, 4th Nov. 1994.
[47]Ibid
[48]Overstreet & Kranitzky, 28th. Sept. 1994.

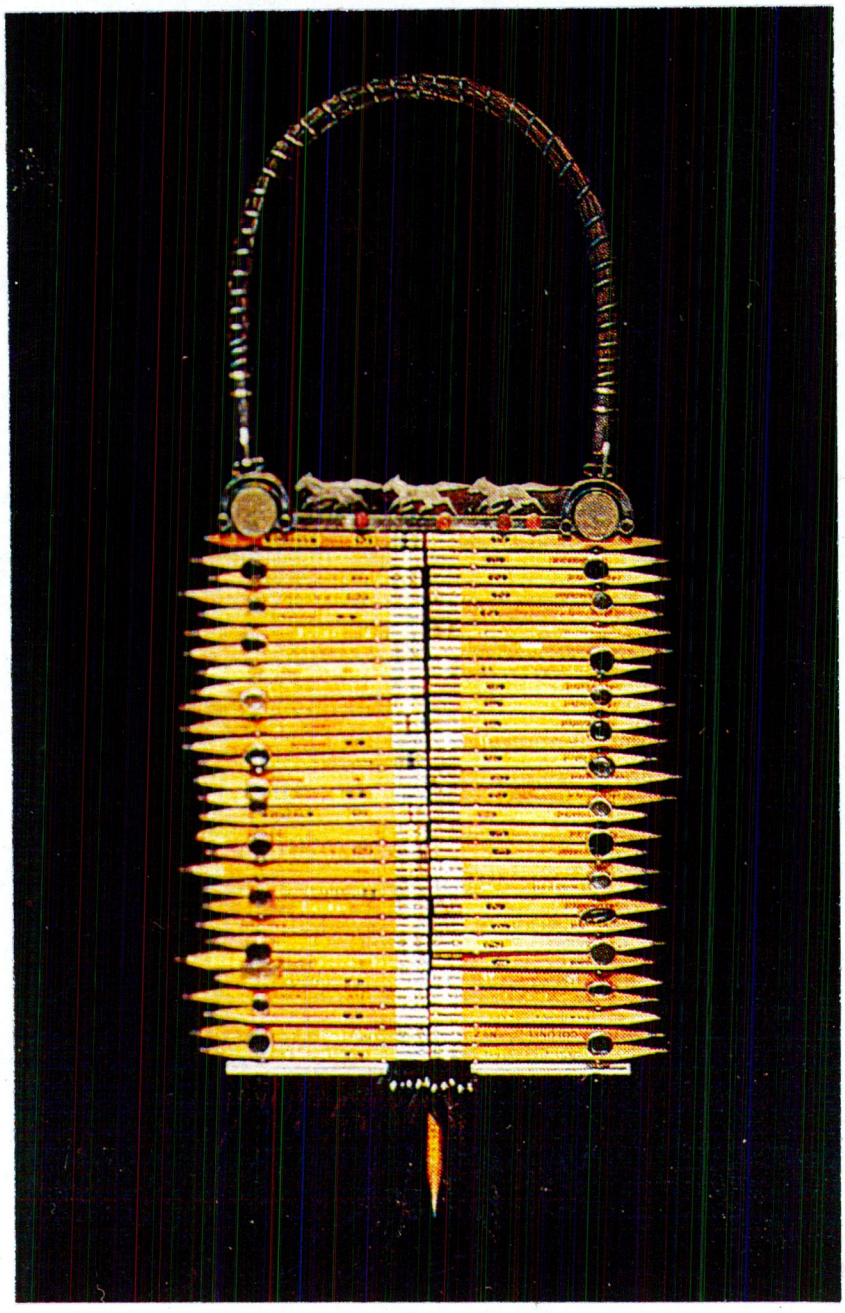

Fig.17: *Sticks And Stones And Words* ; Kiff Slemmons, Neckpiece, 1992.

Fig.18: *I Can See Paradise By The Dashboard Lite* ; Betsy King, Brooch, 1989.

her love of cast-off pieces of junk; she is "interested in the metaphorical possibilities of the materials, what they might already bring with them - cultural or functional references, etc."[49]. Found objects are "the discards of society that can be reworked into something with a new meaning and aesthetic"[50], for Stubbs' work. Elizabeth Garrison likes working with found components because, to her they represent the "Same concept as collage and assemblage - meaning, history, appearance, aura of object - triggers other things"[51]. Judy Onofrio's use and love of discarded objects was nurtured in her by her Great Aunt Trude who was seen as an eccentric in her family but fascinated Onofrio as a child, because she created art all her life from other people's cast-offs and forgotten junk.

This use of the found-object is one of the characterising elements in American narrative jewellery, both for structure and for strong personal reasons.

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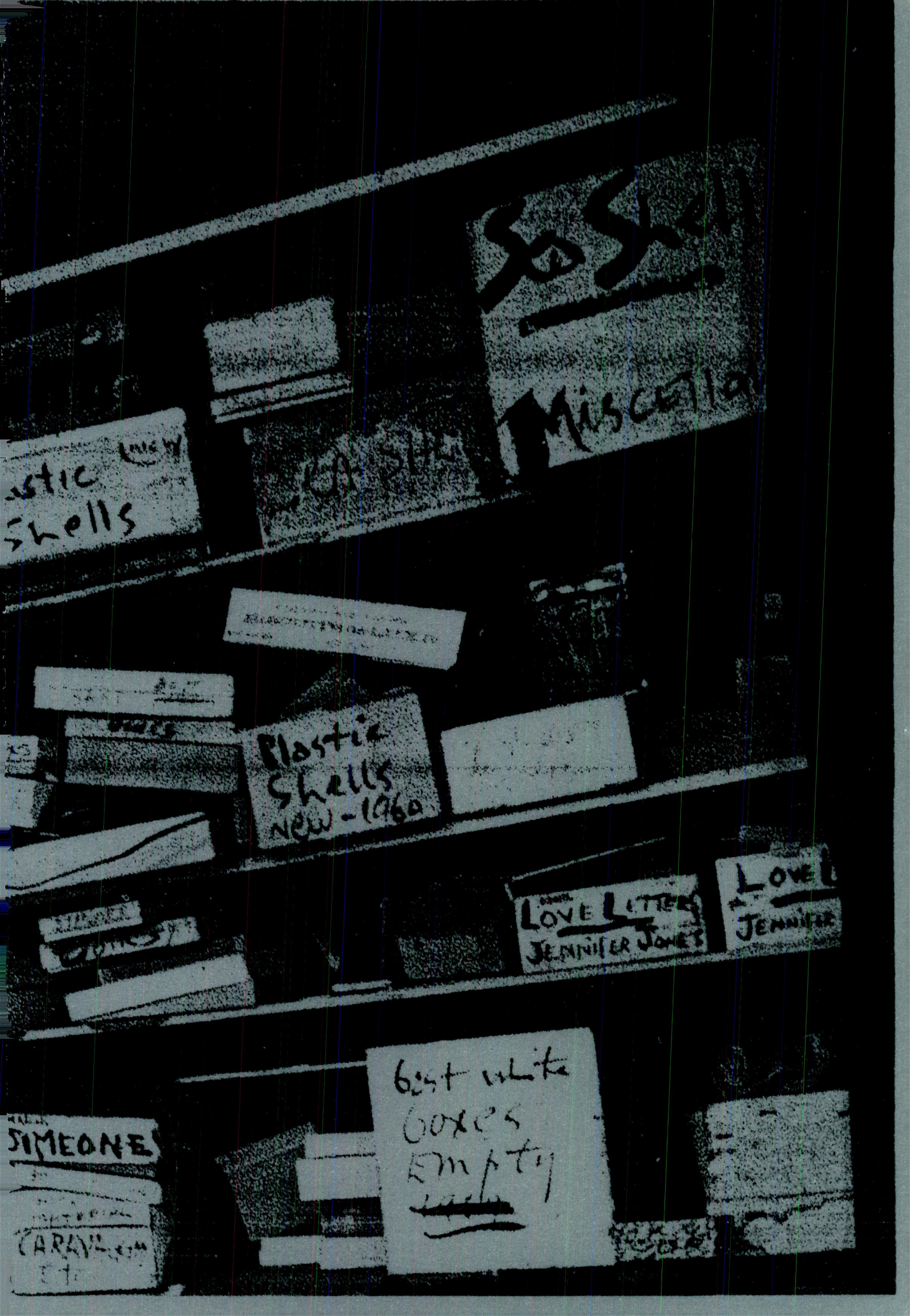
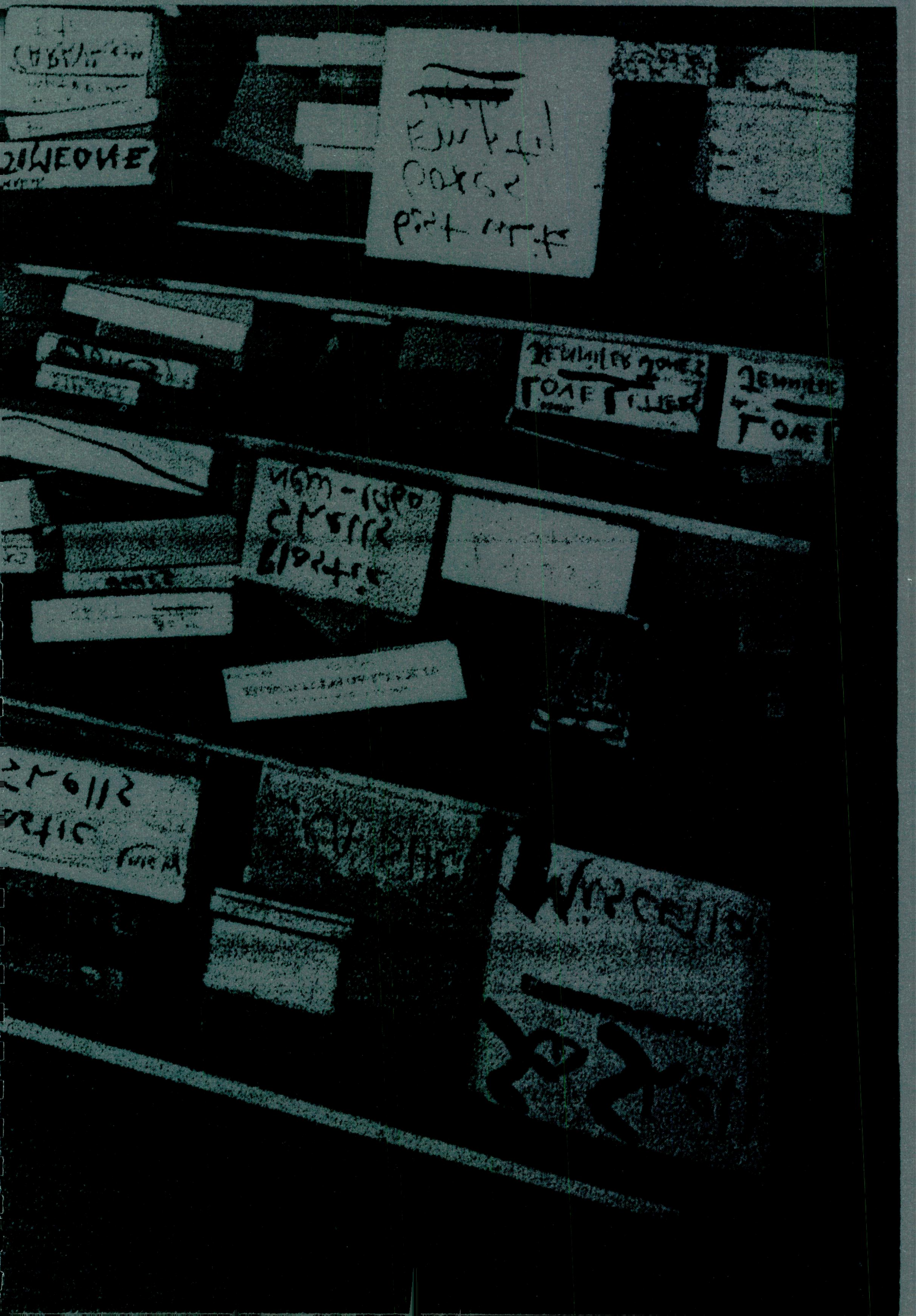
[49]Slemmons, 14th Oct. 1994.
[50]Stubbs, 19th Oct. 1994.
[51]Garrison, 6th Oct. 1994.


Misc
Plastic Shells
NEW - 1960
LOVE LETTERS
JENNIFER JONES
Best white
covers
Empty
SIMEONE



Chapter 7
Form, Content, And Meaning In Contemporary American Narrative Jewellery

A characterising element of contemporary American jewellery is that it is dramatic; the form in which the narrative is played out is a very important distinguishing element, and what goes into that form is also extremely important. Because the work is pictorial, anecdotal and it needs a fairly large area for its meaning to be seen effectively. The content of a piece of anecdotal jewellery one of the most distinguishing elements in contemporary narrative jewellery, and what each piece means plays a very important part in this form.

Form

The brooch is a suitable platform because size is not a crucial factor, it can be flat or three dimensional, it can open up to show a hidden interior or it can have elements suspended from it, out of it, or above it. The brooch form acts as a canvas or stage on which the jeweller plays out his or her fantasies, fears, desires, etc. much of Overstreet's and Kranitzky's work illustrates this, for example *Dandling* (1990) (Fig. 19), because of their use of the frame around the piece, acting almost like Theatre drapes, allowing the narrative to be played out within its protective limits. Most narrative jewellers tend to favour the brooch form as it is more versatile in that size is not that important if the piece is to be worn; a large ring would be an encumbrance, yet a large brooch would be a talking point. Size is exploited by the narrative jeweller beyond what would be accepted as traditional

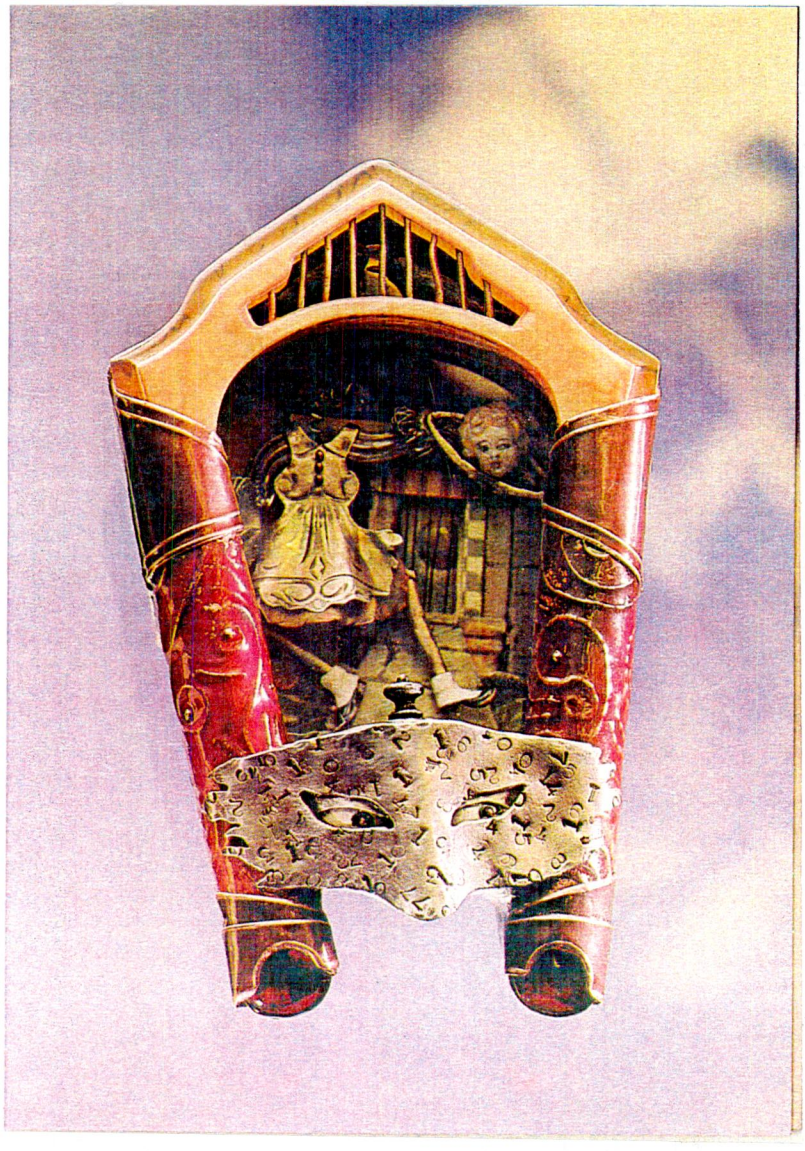


Fig.19: *Dandling* ; Kim Overstreet & Robin Kranitzky, Brooch, 1990.

sizing, but even so, a narrative piece is still wearable. It is not uncommon for King to make large pieces, for example *I Can See Paradise By The Dashboard Lite* (1989) (Fig. 18) is 3" X 5".

In order to make a narrative ring which would also be wearable, the jeweller would have to compromise the detail, which holds the meaning, and therefore one of the most important aspects of the piece. The sizing of narrative work is important in its modernist context - jewellery which is site-specific, responding to its environment, becomes the advertisement, and the wearer the billboard, reinforcing the idea of the brooch as the stage, and the jeweller the performer. To a lesser extent, the pendant form is also a suitable medium, as it can also be worked to quite a large scale. The brooch is an ideal canvas on which a story may be told, albeit with metals, plastics, glass and wood, giving many more possibilities to the narrative jeweller than any other form traditionally employed by jewellers.

Content

All of these eight jewellers commonly use the brooch form in their work. Betsy King's work is characterised by her use of large flat areas which are framed with a metal (usually steel or oxidised[52] silver) frame. She often makes brooches, or items such as pendants or bolos, as she has done in her 1988 piece *Atlantic City* (Fig. 10), all of which can be worked to quite a large scale. King also makes a range of boxes, which contain the same narrative elements as her jewellery work. In her brooch *And He Keeps Them Pearly White*, (1988) (Fig. 20) this is especially prevalent; the main focus of the piece is a laminated photograph of a woman dancing by a beach at sunset, while the frame incorporates a shark. In her 1989 piece *Don't Fence Me In*, (Fig. 21) also a brooch, we see King's emphasis on boundaries surrounding her work so that this piece actually has a fence around it, reinforcing the idea of the brooch form as a blank

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[52]Oxidisation: a chemical process used to colour metal, in this case, to blacken silver.

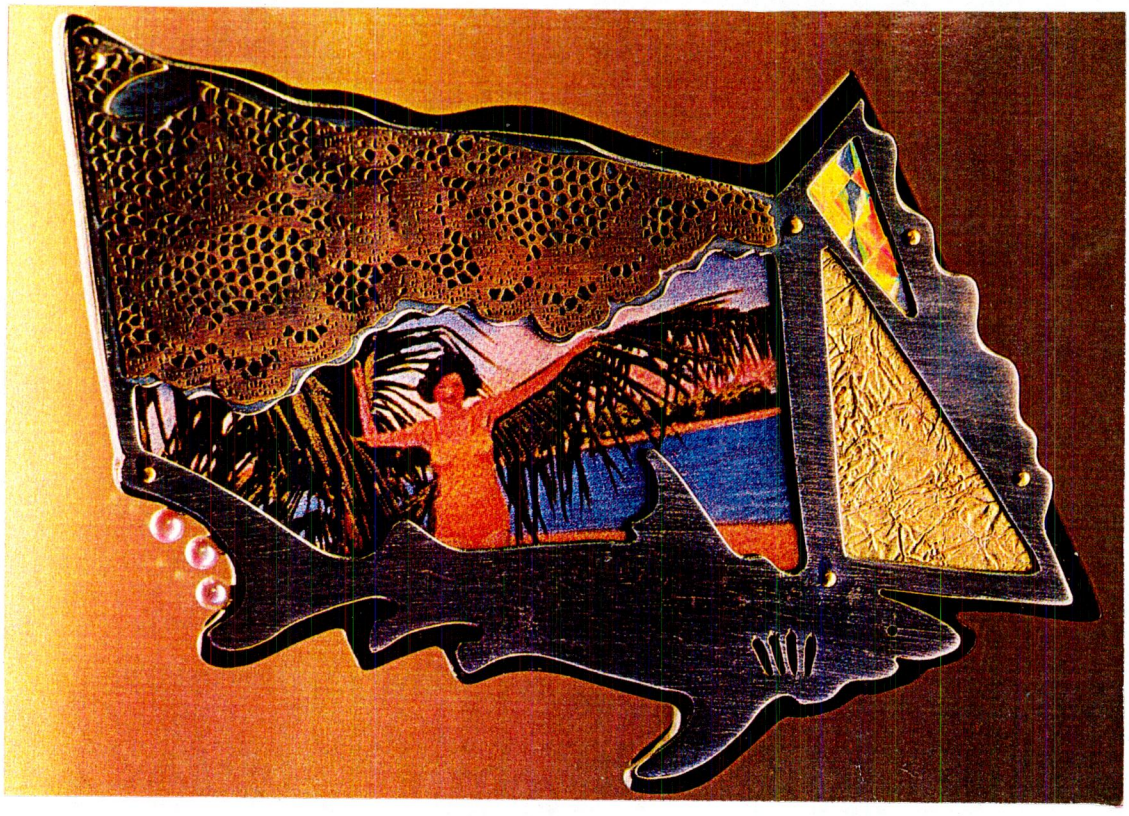

Fig.20: *And He Keeps Them Pearly White* ; Betsy King, Brooch, 1988.

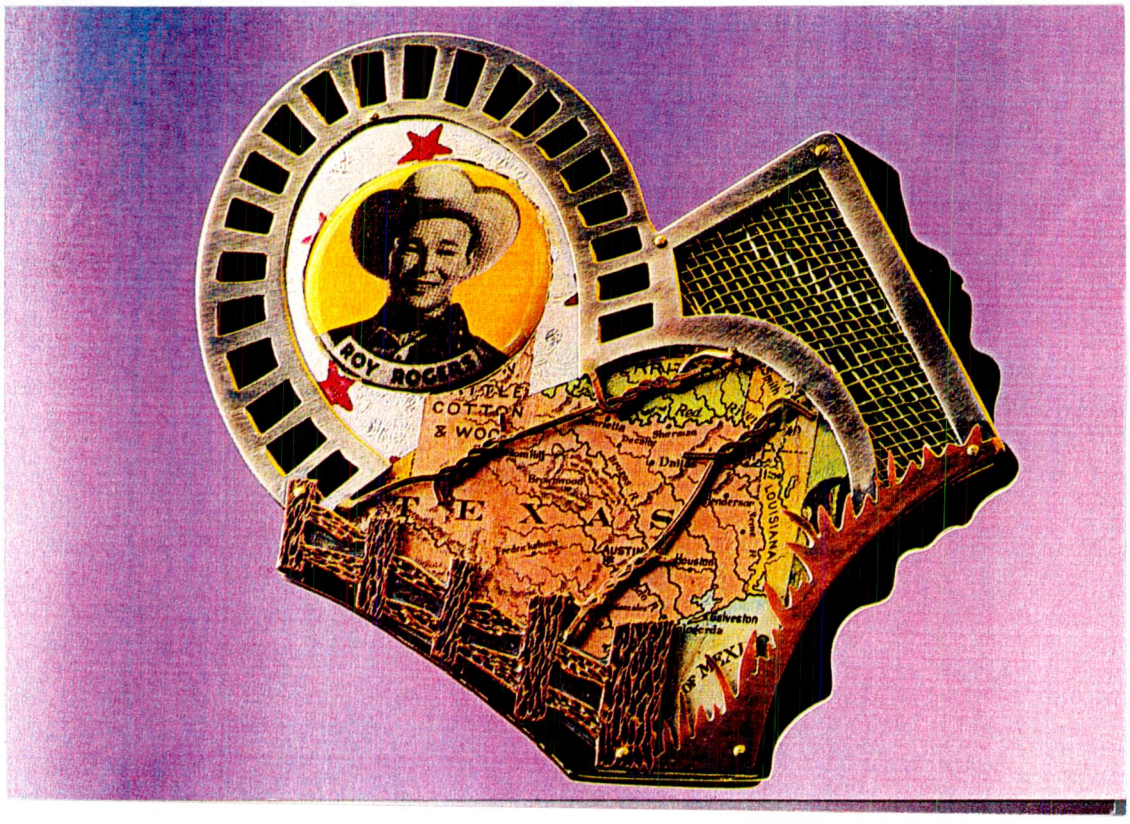

Fig.21: *Don't Fence Me In* ; Betsy King, Brooch, 1989.

canvas. King's frames are an intrinsic part of each piece, not merely demarcating the edge of the piece but being a part of it. This can be seen in a 1989 brooch *I Can See Paradise By The Dashboard Lite.* (Fig. 18) The frame on this piece is reminiscent of an old radio, with a pierced-out speaker grille, but also gives the impression of the dashboard of an old car. Her work often conveys an air of nostalgia, through the antique postcards and old photos which she uses, and at other times[53] humour and also sadness. "My work is my way of getting out how I feel", she says. "Most of my pieces are an interpretation of songs, poems, people I've met or places I've been or wished I could go".[54]

Similar to King's use of materials and traditional metal-working techniques are Overstreet and Kranitzky. Again, the brooch is a common form for them. While the three dimensional-qualities of Onofrio's work leap out at the viewer, one must delve deep into Overstreet and Kranitzky's work to read the story. Their pieces have a curiously inverted three dimensional quality. In contrast to Onofrio's *Get Along Little Doggie*, (1990) (Fig. 22) is Overstreet and Kranitzky's *Dandling*. (1990) (Fig. 19), which needs more insight, a deeper inspection, due to its shape and the way the narrative recedes. The heavy scroll-like frame shadows and protects the interior scene, giving it a dark aspect not found in the work of the other seven.

As with King's work, their brooches play host to their opinions, likes loves, fears, and "sometimes portray a 'dark' humour as well".[55] Robin Kranitzky finds that because she "was raised a Catholic"[56], she uses "this past religious influence in(to) my work".[57] Like King and Stubbs, they are also fond of using a 'framing' device in their pieces. In *Dandling*, (1990) (Fig. 19) and *Egression* (1990) (Fig. 4) both have prominent frames made from metals, found-objects, plastics and

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[53]King, 5th Nov. 1994.
[54]Overstreet & Kranitzky, 28th Sept. 1994.
[54]Ibid
[55]Ibid
[55]A cabochon is an oval shaped cut and polished precious or non precious stone suitable for setting in jewellery.
[57]Birkeborn, Susan, The Art of Kiff Slemmons, *Artists At Work*, Dec.

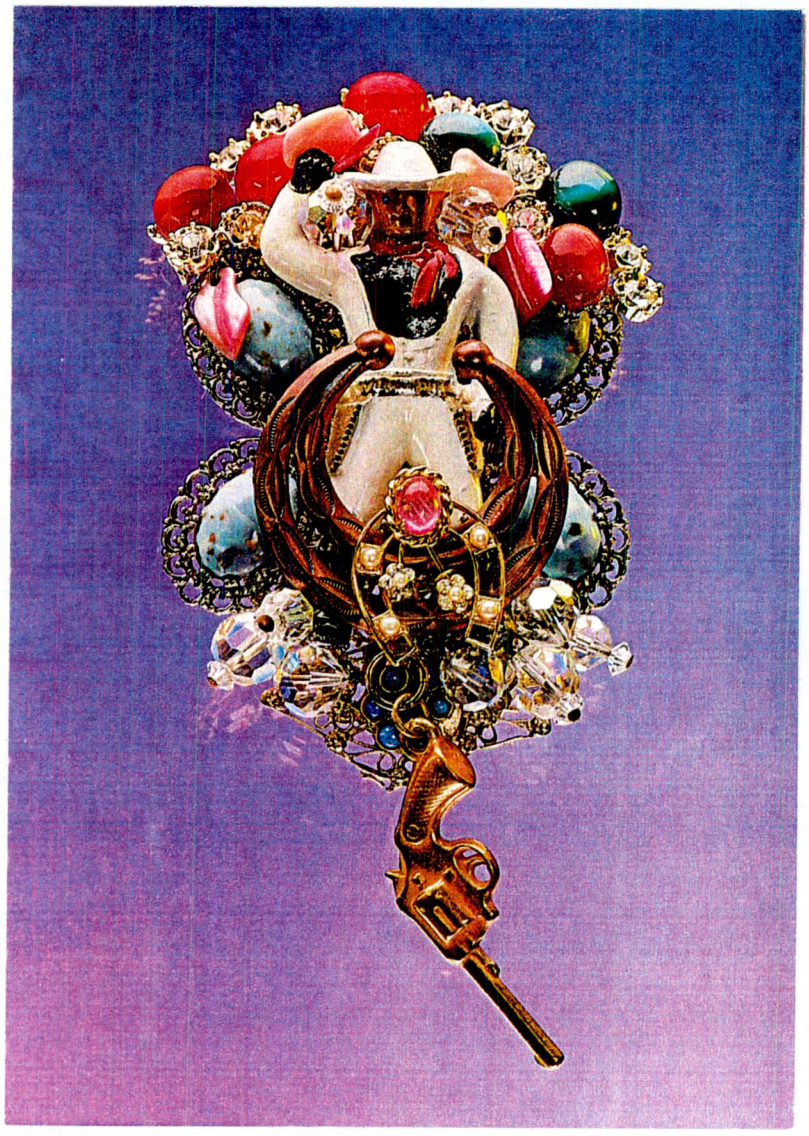

Fig.22: *Get Along Little Doggie* ; Judy Onofrio, Brooch, 1990.

stones. Like Betsy King, many of their brooches include old photographs or postcards, over which are laid cast components and small found pieces, as in *Dandling* (Fig. 19) which contains an old photograph and a porcelain dolls head, reinforcing the symbolism of found objects. They usually bring a framing device into play somewhere in each piece. In *The Story Told*, (1990) (Fig. 23) although the main focus of the piece is a human representation, it is cradling a frame to its torso.

Judy Onofrio always makes brooches from her store of found objects, unlike King's ordered and precise brooches Onofrio's are sprawling and random, incorporating many different bits and pieces. In *Temptation,* (1989) (Fig. 24) she has placed a telephone hanging down from the main body of the piece, a snake rears up from the top, and the body of the piece is made up of various pieces, plastic flowers, silvered leaves, diamante. Though Onofrio's pieces can sometimes appear disorganised, there is balance in them. *Get Along Little Doggie* (1990) (Fig. 22) has a symmetry to it because of the placement of the objects: a small plastic cowboy has been placed on four corresponding gilt-set turquoise- effect cabochons[58]. Over him is a copper horse shoe, to the rear of which clusters of faceted pearlised beads are placed.

Stubbs also uses brooches as the canvas for his work. Like Betsy King he seems to prefer to 'frame' his pieces, for instance his *Lady Of Flowers* (1988) (Fig. 25) piece, an oval-shaped form with a clear demarcation line around it. Unlike King, he doesn't use metal for his frames; he uses gilt braid in this piece, and he has also used braid in *Wedgewood Lady* (1987) (Fig. 12). Stubbs' work is similar to Onofrio's. If there were a found object supermarket, both would surely have made many purchases there! Many of the pieces that Stubbs uses in his brooches, Onofrio could have used equally as well. *Lady Of Flowers* (Fig. 25) has many components, such as the cameo, and coloured beads and the gilt chain, which would be equally at home in Onofrio's *Temptation* (1990) (Fig. 24), *Get Along Little Doggie* (1990) (Fig. 22), or *Row Row Row Your Boat* (1990) (Fig. 37).

1989, pp 117

Fig.23: *The Story Told* ; Kim Overstreet & Robin Kranitzky, Brooch, 1990.

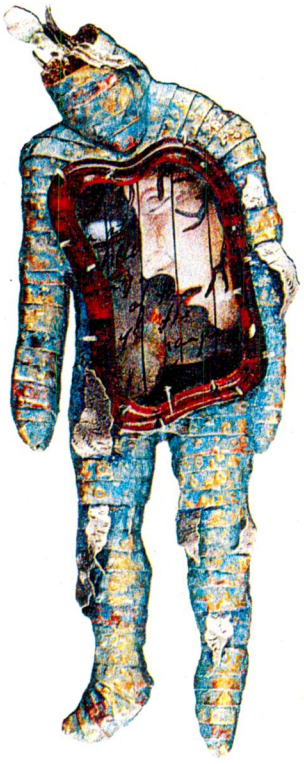

Fig.24: *Temptation* ; Judy Onofrio, Brooch, 1990.

Fig.25: *Lady Of Flowers* ; Vaughn Stubbs, Brooch, 1988.

Kiff Slemmons, in contrast to the other seven, is as likely to make pendants as she is to make brooches, although the brooch appears to be the form in which she makes her best work. Her *Hands of the Heroes* (Figs. 13, 14 & 26) series, sixty pieces strong has many of the characteristics of King's work: Slemmons also uses flat surfaces and uses metal in a way that is similar to King: neither uses highly polished metals, preferring a scratched or textured finish. Both are willing to colour silver black, which is considered sacrilege by some jewellers. Her use of found objects is also reminiscent of King's way of working with them. The *Hands of the Heroes* (Figs. 13,14 & 26) series was made in two lots, one part begun in 1987, comprises about thirty-six pieces, the other begun in 1991, after the artist had received funding from the Washington State Arts Commission. Kiff Slemmons uses found objects in a quite different way to the other seven. She generally uses a lot of metal, and many of her apparently 'found' elements she actually makes herself. For example, in one of the later *Hands...* pieces, *School*, (1990) (Fig. 26) many of the elements are metal, like the A, B and C letters, and the small mortarboard, pre-fabricated, and added to the basic armature along with the 'found' pieces of ruler and slate. The basic armature of any given piece is usually metal; silver, brass or copper, but it can be wood or even plastic, to which she adds an array of materials; ebony, wooden rulers, mastodon ivory, slate, porcelain shards, acrylic, mica. Other favourite found objects for her are beach pebbles which she began using after a trip to Japan in 1983. Again, the use of the framing device crops up in Slemmons *Hands...* brooches although she sets herself definite boundaries, and seems unwilling to cross these. In *School*, (1991) (Fig. 26) the piece has a definite rim, into which the narrative elements have been carefully placed. Although less that the use of found objects, this framing device would also seem to be a distinguishing characteristic of narrative jewellery. Woell proves the exception to this rule seeing no reason to confine his narratives to a set area. In *Fly Rite*, (Fig. 27) and *DO 17*, (Fig. 15) brooches made in 1988 and 1990, his tendency not to box in his narrative is apparent. A leg comes out from the top of *Fly Rite* and a wheel and an Egyptian sarcophagus from the base. He resists squashing the elements that

Fig.26: *School* ; Kiff Slemmons, Brooch, 1991.

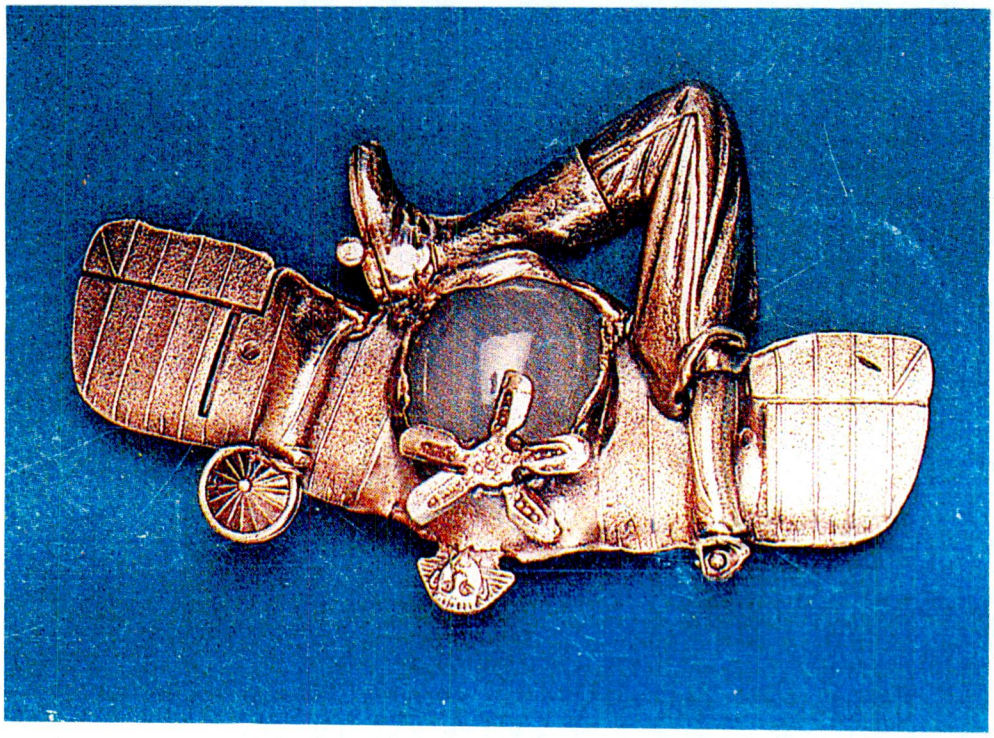

Fig.27: *Fly Rite* ; J. Fred Woell, Brooch, 1988.

make up his pieces inside the strictures of a frame, retaliating against order.

Meaning

Much of contemporary sculpture work is conceptual, and the viewer must delve deep into the piece to find the meaning. Narrative and anecdotal jewellery also offer this dimension to the viewer. What tales, then, does a piece of narrative jewellery tell?

Kiff Slemmons' work tells many tales. Her output is enormous, and she usually works in series with a linking theme, although each piece departs slightly from the main theme. *Her Hands Of The Heroes* (Fig's, 13, 14 & 26) series came about when she was asked in a survey "Who were your childhood heroes and who are your heroes now?". According to an article in a Seattle journal:

> "when Kiff Slemmons first scanned the survey, that question intrigued her, but when she sat down to answer it, she couldn't recall any childhood heroes. And that bothered her."[59]

Slemmons decided to create a series which would pay homage to people that she could remember from both her childhood and the present day:

> "It just occurred to me to use the hand image in thinking about the whole idea of heroes. And I said one day, 'Well, I think I'm going to do hands of the heroes and depict or refer to a person through that image of the hand'".[60]

The use of the hand symbol carries double meaning when looked at in craft and in anthropological terms. The hand symbol has stood, through the centuries, as a symbol for the crafts. In anthropological terms, the hand stands for many things to many cultures; in Mexico, representations of human hands are used as charms, and in the Middle East it is believed that the hand supposedly wards off the evil eye. She has used a stylized image, reminiscent of a child's.

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[59] Ibid
[60] Ibid

Slemmons said of her choice of shape "I worked for a long time getting the shape of the hand just right. I didn't want it to be too expressionistic."[61] Each hand was cut from the same stencil, ensuring a basic uniformity to the series, even though each piece is different from the last.

Of her *Allies* (Fig. 28) series, made in 1994, she said:

> "The *Allies* all have bugs on their shoulders that create a scale problem and also play off images of falconry. The bugs are simple and representational: the humans are generic and elaborate and reversible. In this context the insects function as jewellery on jewellery and have come to represent for me the importance of decorating the mind as well as the body, expanding the meaning of jewellery as 'ally'".[62]

Slemmons' work is laden with symbolism, wit and word play. Her 1986 *Eye Of The Beeholder* (Fig. 29) is a whimsical word play, as is her brooch *Self Portrait.* (Fig. 30), both being clever visual and literary puns, *The Eye Of The Beeholder* (Fig. 29) because of its ebony hand clutching a metal bee, and *Self Portrait* (Fig. 30), because of the capital letter I containing several stylized human eyes. Some of her other pieces have deeper meanings, such as *Sticks And Stones And Words*, (Fig. 17) is a 1992 neckpiece modelled after 19th century Sioux Indian armour made from bird bones and is composed from silver, nickel, copper, pencils, erasers, horse hair and deer skin. Each pencil has had all the paint removed from its shank, but the brand names have remained, such as Supreme, Choice, Preferred, Master. In this piece, Slemmons reinforces the power of words and references in her work. The naked quality of the shaved pencils raises the question, 'Who Scalped whom', and the placing of the pencils in much the same way that the Indians wore bones across their chests for protection, displays the power of the written word for protective reasons, and for establishing order and communication. Of metaphor and symbolism in her work, Slemmons has said "I once imagined

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[61] Slemmons, 14th Oct. 1994.
[62] Ibid.

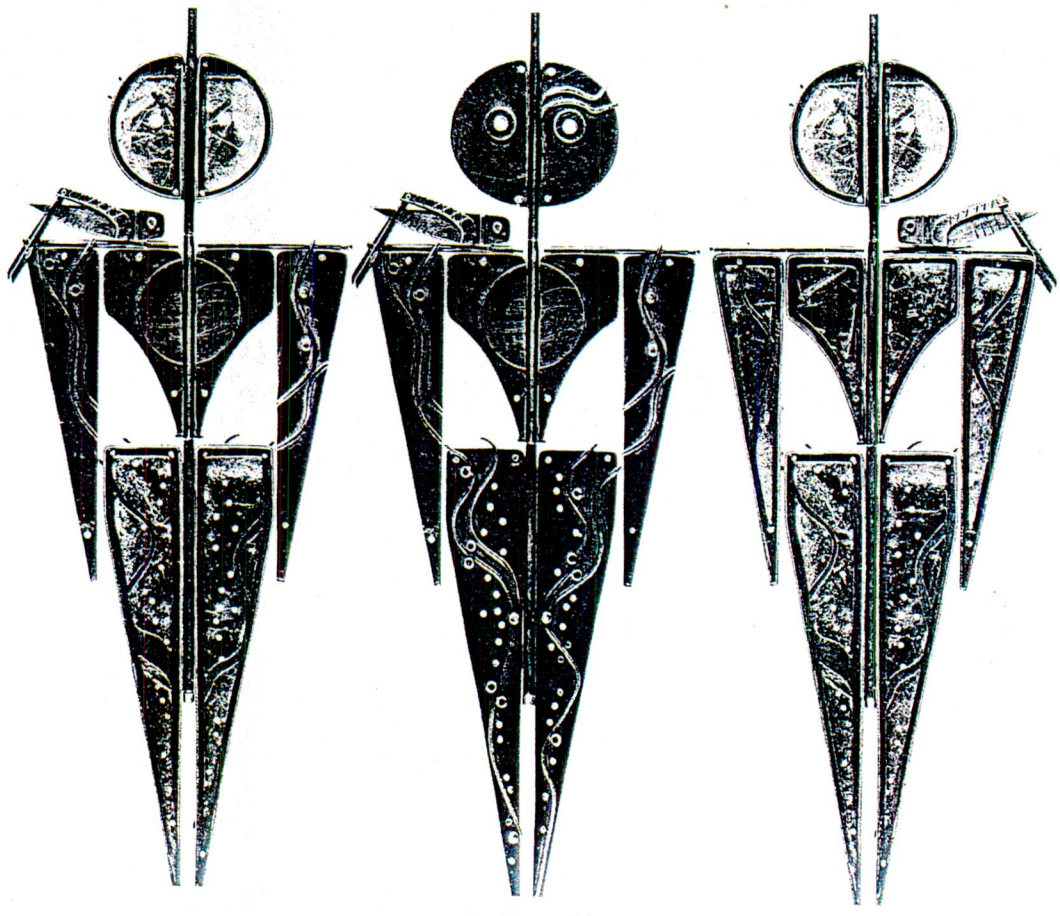
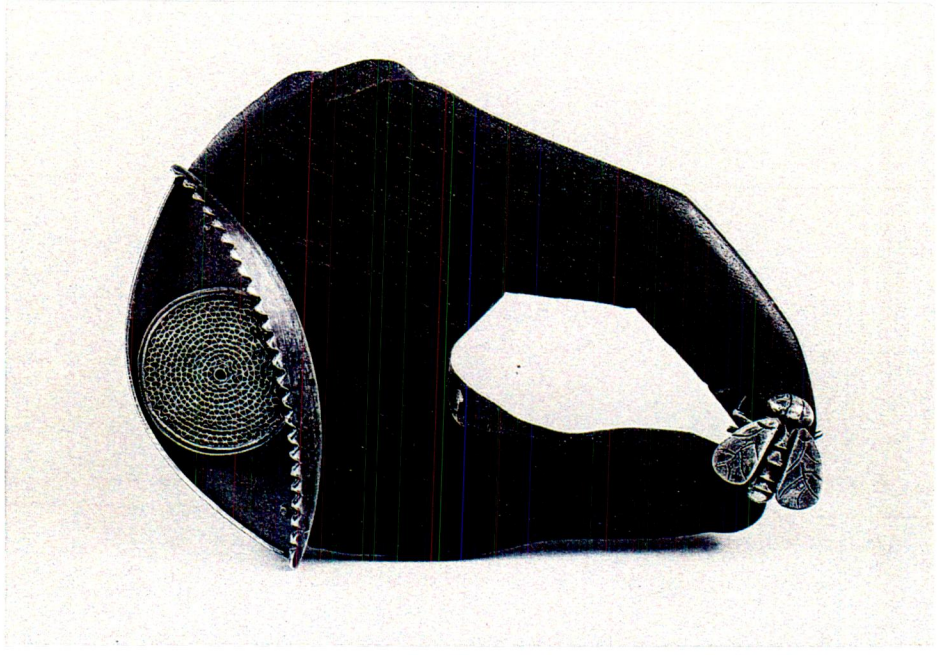


Fig.28: *Allies* ; Kiff Slemmons, Brooches, 1993.

Fig.29: *Eye Of The Beeholder* ; Kiff Slemmons, Brooch, 1986.



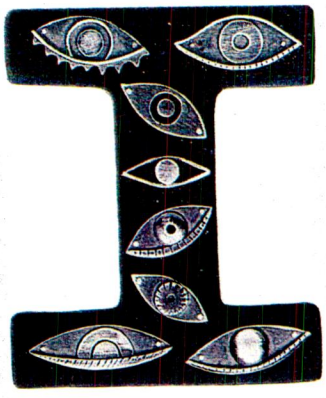


Fig.30: *Self Portrait* ; Kiff Slemmons, Brooch, 1986.

making a necklace of ice. After wearing it on a warm evening, all that would remain would be a memory and a sensation".[63]

Overstreet's and Kranitzky's *The Story Told* (1990) (Fig. 23) "was inspired by an excerpt from the novel *Eva Luna*".[64] The piece, which is a figure, is tattered and wounded and according to them[65], does not appear to have a past, and so he clutches to his chest a larger-than- life female representation, who is willing to share her past with the wounded figure so as to enable him to build a new life. This is represented by the budding flower on the head of the wounded figure. They say that "many concepts, stories, fantasies, dreams, emotions etc., are 'acted out' through our tiny 'stage sets'".[66] While Slemmons deals with fairly abstract symbols, metaphor and puns, the work of Overstreet and Kranitzky tends to have a specific story in each piece, a separate 'drama' for each 'theatre'.

Woell's very use of found objects is conceptual:

> "I began working the way I did because there wasn't anyway I felt I could fit into the culture. There wasn't a place or niche there for me. And rather than quit and become a plumber or dentist I started making 'jewellery' that had no intrinsic value. Made from junk. I was reacting against the system or culture".[67]

Typical ideas behind his work include strong feelings he has about the "Human condition";[68] he also uses references to:

> "The way we are as people and how we relate, hate, struggle with each other. We are at times pathetic creatures. We can make and create such marvellous things, and on the other hand we can destroy and execute such incredible violence, that it is mind boggling. It really is amazing on the one hand and repulsive on the

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[63]Ibid.
[64]From Arts America catalogue, Herman, Lloyd. E., *Brilliant stories; American Narrative Jewellery,* 1992.
[65]Overstreet & Kranitzky, 28th Sept. 1994.
[66]Overstreet & Kranitzky, 28th Sept. 1994.
[67]Woell, 4th Nov. 1994
[68]Ibid

other. My work is about all of these feelings I have about the above."[69]

As far back as *Good Guys*, (1966) (Fig. 31) Woell was saying that jewellery doesn't have to be made from precious stones and metals in order to be valuable. He says of *Good guys:*

"This pendant is an assemblage of three buttons of comic-strip heroes mounted as if they were sacred icons. The humour in such a juxtaposition of images and content I often employ in my work. I like satire. In this work I tried to intensify its bizarre, sacrosanct absurdity by use of commonplace materials which have little or no intrinsic value".[70]

Another piece, *Mono Plane To Nirvana,* (1990) (Fig. 32) is about Woell's feelings as his marriage of twenty-two years broke up, of the high hopes he had when he was first married. It is a bitter sweet piece about expectations versus reality.

In the work of Betsy King, themes of isolation, loneliness and fear lurk, such as *Raised On Promises*, (1989) (Fig. 9) a jagged split photograph of King's fifth birthday party with girls in white dresses playing ring around the rosie. To King, this piece represents "All the promises that are made to you as a child - love, money, success etc., that you realize aren't going to come true".[71] She also says that some of her pieces are political statements about certain issues, such as *China Land* (1988) (not pictured), about the Beijing massacre in China. It is a contrast between good and evil, dark and light, precious and non-precious. Nostalgia and humour often feature in her work also, evoked by the old postcards and mementos she uses in her work, as in *I Can See Paradise By The Dashboard Lite* (1989) (Fig. 18) which includes a postcard of Californian palm trees, evoking King's nostalgia for that part of America.

Judy Onofrio often incorporates country and western images into her brooches as in the piece *Get Along Little Doggie.* (1990) (Fig. 22)

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[69]Ibid
[70]Ibid
[71]King, 5th Oct. 1994

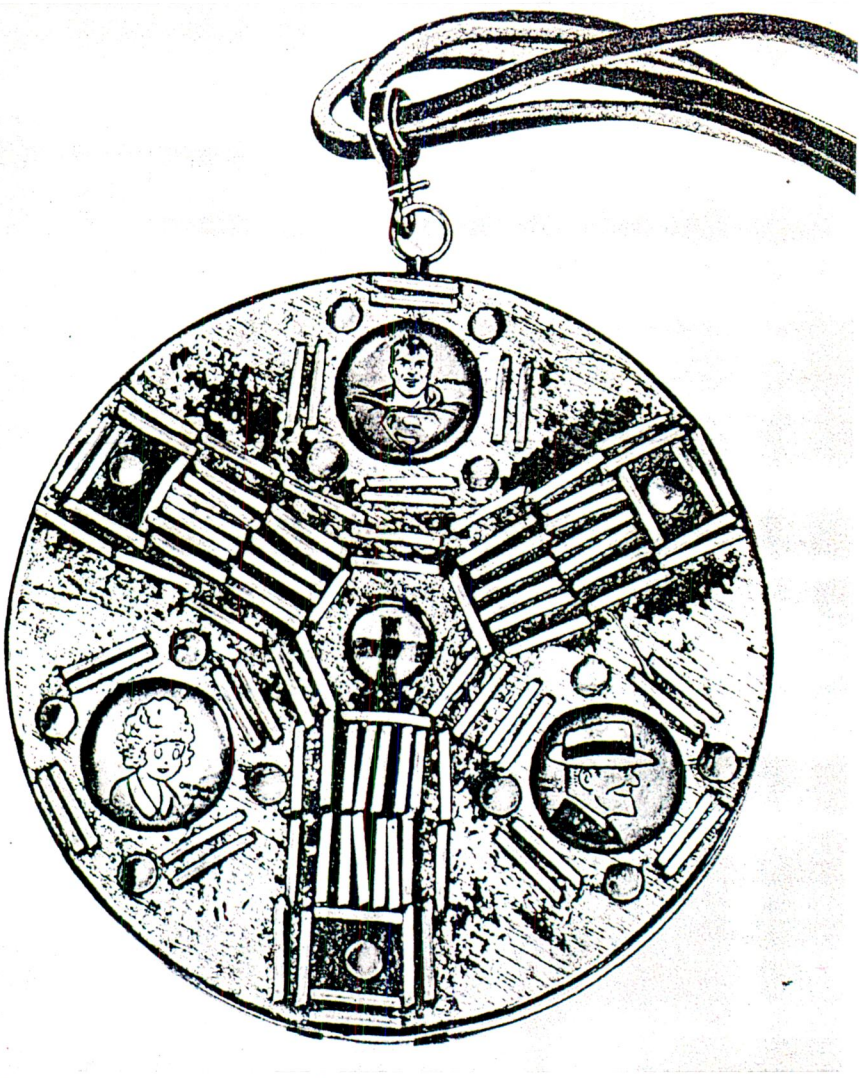


Fig.31: *Good Guys* ; J. Fred Woell, Pendant, 1966.

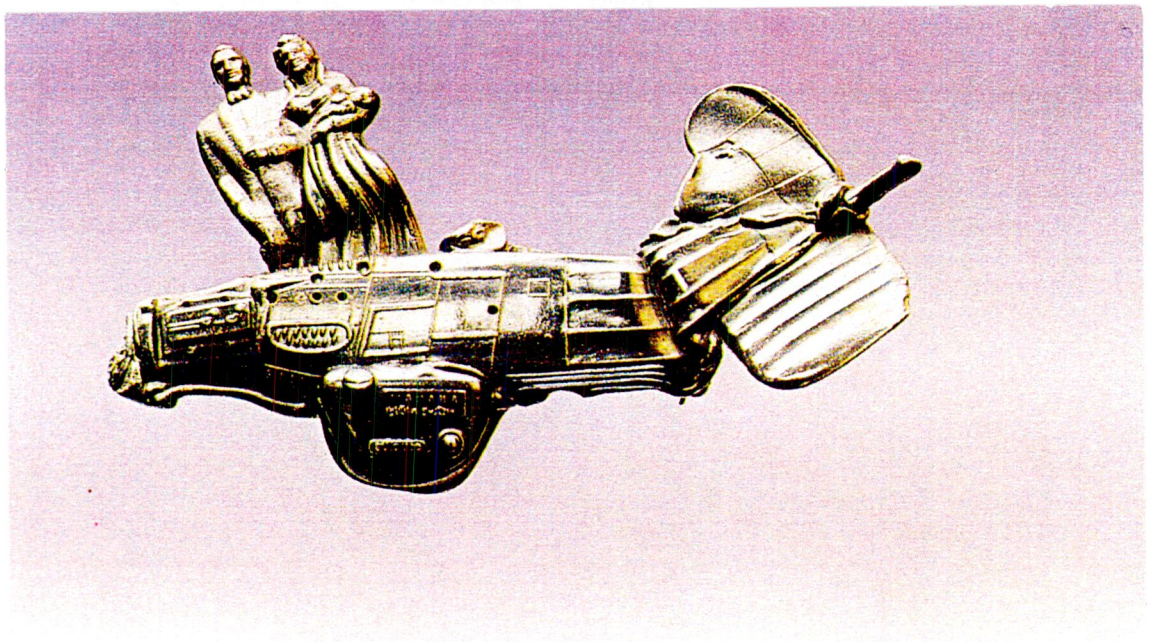
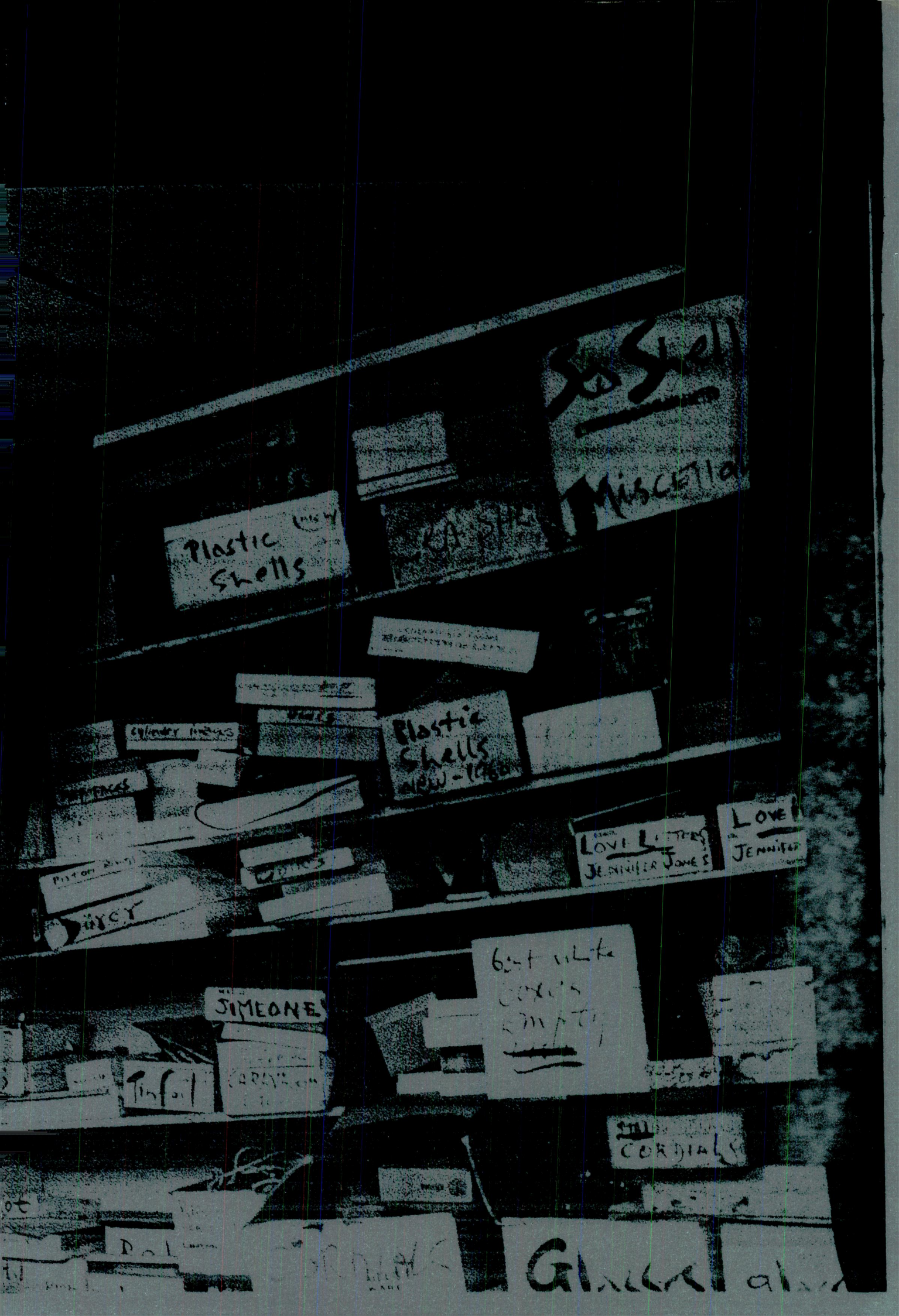


Fig.32: *Mono Plane To Nirvana* ; J. Fred Woell, 1990.

which has a cowboy standing to attention in the centre. To Onofrio, the cowboy represents freedom of spirit, and earlier times in American history when one could wander as far as possible without finding a fence of any kind, whether metaphorical or physical. Onofrio likes to explore elements of popular culture in her work, adding and juxtaposing often disparate items. She will often paint on objects also, using a variety of mediums: enamels, acrylic, emulsion and oils, further changing them, for example, in *Jan's Snakes* (1993) (Fig. 7), the female figure has been painted with acrylic paint.. In *Abe And The Serpent*, (1990) (Fig. 16) the underlying concept is one of temptation. Abraham Lincoln the archetypal American president, standing by the tenets of truth; honesty; dedication and purity of spirit. Onofrio has placed him in the Garden of Eden, where he is surrounded by temptation, forbidden fruit and snakes.

Each jeweller has his or her own particular thematic idiosyncrasies; King uses sad, often morbid themes and themes of nostalgia. Onofrio commonly uses cowboy images in her work, and other lighter hearted references. Slemmons' themes are concerned with metaphors and intellectual questioning. Garrison often made work from ideas that came to her in dreams, for example her 1989 series of brooches *In Many Dreams Strange And Beautiful Things Are Found In The Ocean* (Fig. 35). Each jeweller has radically different concepts going on in their work, and this is one of the most intriguing things about this jewellery form - the freedom and scope that it gives for expression, exploration and impression on the viewer.


Plastic Shells
Plastic Shells
NEW - 1968
LOVE LETTERS
JENNIFER JONES
SIMEONE
Tinfoil
CORDIALS

Chapter 8
The Importance And Employment Of Technique In Narrative Jewellery

One of the basic tenets of a Craft is that any given piece should be made to the very highest standard possible. Many crafts-people spend their entire careers constantly updating and honing their technical skills, so as to produce the very best work that they can. In the Craft area, technical skills can represent as much as 80% of the battle - not even design skills are as important initially as the fundamental basic technical skills. How would a crafts person / designer actually make their work if they did not have the necessary know-how? Does narrative jewellery follow this example? Can narrative work withstand close scrutiny when technique is called into play? The answer is that it can, and it cannot.

Of the eight jewellers, Elizabeth Garrison, Betsy King, Kiff Slemmons, Robin Kranitzky and Kim Overstreet and J. Fred Woell all have excellent technical skills when considered on a purely craft basis. Because so much of this type of work has a sculptural bent, it could be said that a high technical knowledge is not required or necessary. It would seem that some jewellers find it important to produce their pieces to a high craft-like standard, but that others are content with the effect of the finished image, while not paying that much attention to the actual finish of the piece, how components are attached, what it looks like from the back etc. Betsy King has a true craftspersons approach to her work, because she has a very good grounding technically. She says of her time in college "Basically, the first year I

was taught a lot of technical skills. Then design and creativity was (sic) emphasised"[72]. In any of King's pieces, her strong affinity with her craft is apparent:

> "I love to saw", she says, "I do a lot of piercing. Most of my pieces are riveted together but I do solder on a lot of elements. Some (of her pieces) are constructed and soldered together from flat sheet".[73]

In her 1989 piece *I Can See Paradise By The Dashboard Lite*, (Fig. 18) her technical skills come to the fore. While King's work is narrative, and she makes use of found-objects in her work, it is not cluttered with objects, and so we are able to see how good a craftsperson she is. This piece employs several traditional metalworking techniques: the frame is pierced out of silver sheet using a jewellers saw which holds a very fine saw blade to cut the metal. King has set two plastic 'stones' on either flank of the frame. On the frame are several letters, which have been soldered down with no trace of solder left on the frame to reveal bad craftsmanship. Also on the frame are two dice, again well set using a silver bezel. A laminated postcard scene takes up the interior space. Attached to the bottom of the piece is a large 'S' shape, again cut from silver sheet by hand with a saw, and textured using a hammer. Set into the top of this is a small pearl. King's pieces are usually made front and back, and assembled. She joins the two pieces together with tiny rivets, inconspicuous and neatly made. It is this kind of attention to detail that pronounces King a craftsperson.

Kiff Slemmons also places a lot of importance on the technical aspects of her work, obvious In *Figure Out* (1989) (Fig. 33) an oxidised silver piece. Slemmons fabricates all her pieces by hand, adding found-objects which she feels are relevant to the piece. Slemmons does not use found objects lightly in her work but makes sure that the object will 'fit' the piece that it is being included in: "Usually the found material is 'framed' or formalized by metal and attached in traditional metalworking ways - rivets, links, bezels

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[72] Ibid
[73] Ibid

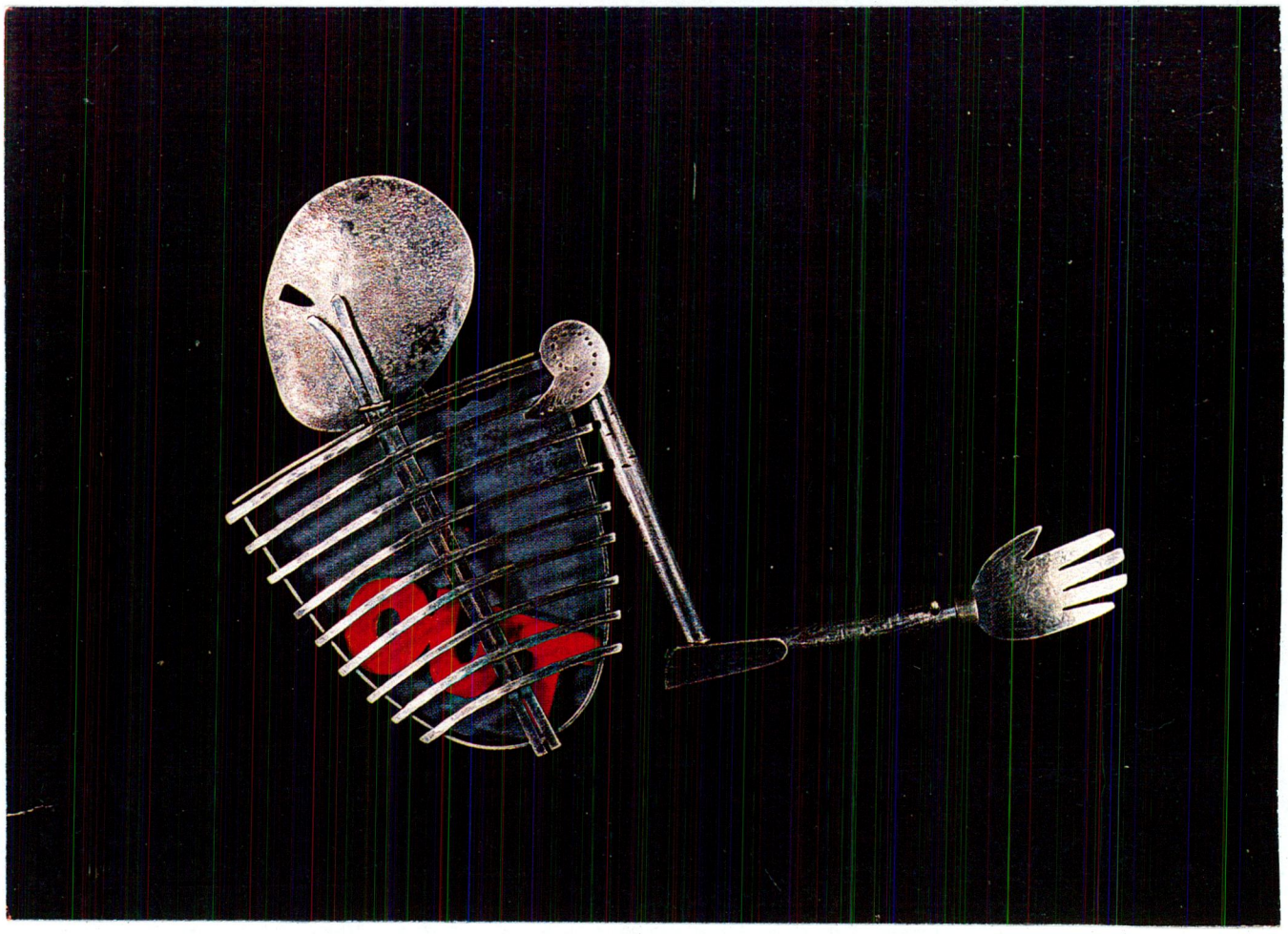

Fig.33: *Figure Out* ; Kiff Slemmons, Brooch, 1989.

etc."[74]. In this piece, the found component - acrylic, has been framed by the metal. The technical competence in *Figure Out* (Fig. 33) enhances its appearance to the viewer in a way that it would not if the piece were badly made.

Like King, Slemmons mainly uses traditional jewellery techniques to make her pieces, "Mostly basic fabrication with various metals"[75]. In *Figure Out*, (Fig. 33) the ribcage of the form is constructed from 'ribs' of sheet silver soldered to a central 'spine'. This ribcage has been manipulated by hand into a curve which is soldered onto a shallow U-shaped base. This base contains a piece of acrylic, shaped to form the word 'OUT', which is visible from between the ribs. The head of the piece is extremely stylized, just a rough oval shaped representation into which a small triangle has been pierced to represent an eye, which was made by cutting the silver with a jewellers saw. The head and main body have been soldered together with the 'spine' of the figure continuing up onto the head. From the right side of this piece comes an arm, again stylized, with an overlarge elbow joint and hand, which has been attached to the main body using tiny rivets. Like King, and indeed like Garrison and Woell, it is Slemmons attention to detail that marks her a craftsperson.

Garrison has to an even higher technical competence. Much of her work incorporates enamelled panels made to an extremely high standard, revealing William Harper's influence. Garrison, like Harper has broken free of the abstraction, stylisation and formalization of previous enamel traditions, as seen in the work of an enameller such as Mary-Lee Rae[76]. Garrison's enamel panels, while still extremely decorative, form a part of a larger narrative. The presence of an enamelled section in a Garrison piece is not purely decorative, but an important part of the narrative. In a 1987 brooch *Nightshrine*, (Fig. 34) the triangular enamelled panel adds focus to the piece, which

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[74]Slemmons, 14th Oct. 1994.

[75]Ibid

[76]Mary-Lee Ray is an American art enameller, who creates enammeled jewellery of a very high standard, usually depicting stylized animal or bird images in opalescent enamels. Her work is mostly decorative, and does not have a conceptual bent to it.

also incorporates a mother of pearl head from which spring five perfectly executed brass 'rays'. In *Nightshrine* (Fig. 34) one can see the subtle gradations of light and shade, and her use of colour to reinforce the areas of importance. The enamelling is clear and the image is easy to read, which is necessary as the piece is narrative, and therefore must be an understandable image. In another two of Garrison's enamelled and found-object pieces, her ability to project light and luminosity is evident. These brooches, numbers one and seven of her *In Many Dreams Strange And Beautiful Things Are Found In The Ocean* series, (1989) (Fig. 35) demonstrates her technique, in part achieved by her use of gold foil under the enamel, but also through her remarkable skill as a colourist, enabling her to infuse her pieces with light and colour.

On the other side of the technical fence are Judy Onofrio and Vaughn Stubbs. Onofrio is self-taught, and is "very 'Low Tech'"[77]. She builds a structure composed of a wire filigree backing, to which she adds on and on, using found materials taken from her collection. While her pieces have fantastic visual impact, technically they lag far behind the work of the above jewellers. This does not negate them, but it does serve to show how far the boundaries of the narrative genre can be stretched, visually and technically. Stubbs, like Onofrio, also makes pieces of a 'Low Tech' nature, using a polymer medium bonding technique as an armature to attach his found objects to each other and the base of each piece.

While it may seem that working in a reduced technical vein is easier or preferable to the intense effort and time it would require Kiff Slemmons, for example, to make a piece, this is not necessarily the case. Vaughn Stubbs' work is made from glues and resins, some of which are highly toxic. He told me that: "This summer I accidently poisoned myself while working with toxic chemicals in my studio and I spent ten days in the hospital"[78]. Stubbs' and Onofrio's technical methods can be seen in Stubbs' *Five Down* (1989) (Fig. 36) brooch, and in Onofrio's *Row Row Row Your Boat* (1990) (Fig. 37) piece. In

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[77]Onofrio, 25th Oct. 1994.
[78]Stubbs, 19th Oct. 1994.

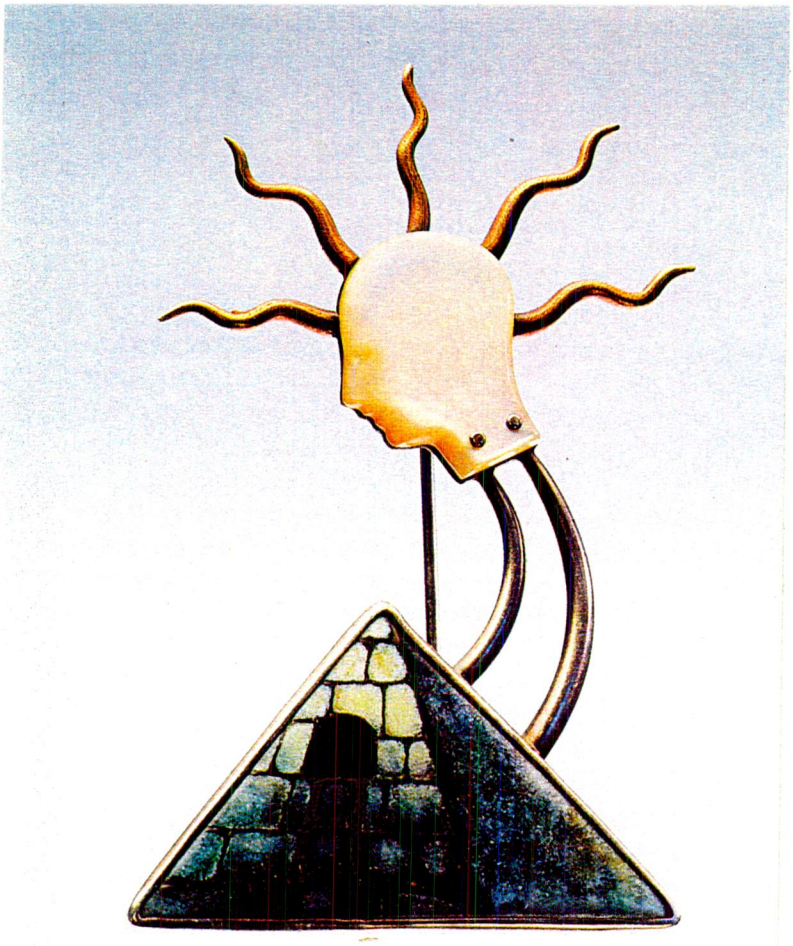


Fig.34: *Nightshrine* ; Elizabeth Garrison, Brooch, 1987.

Fig.35: *In Many Dreams Strange And Beautiful Things Are Found In The Ocean* ; Elizabeth Garrison, Brooches, 1989.

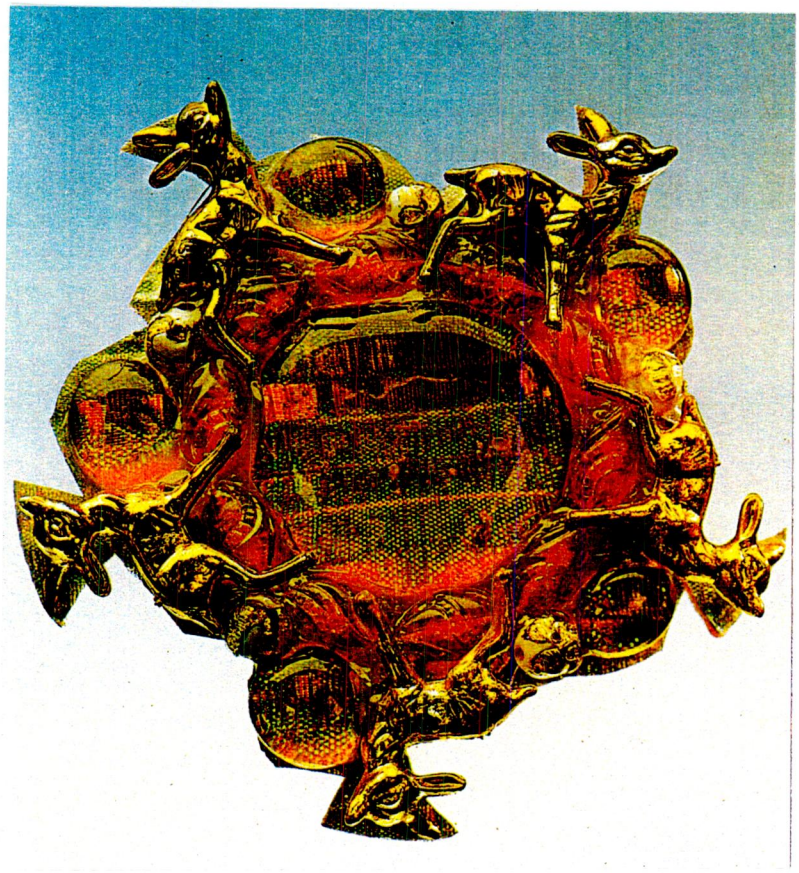


Fig.36: *Five Down* ; Vaughn Stubbs, Brooch, 1989.

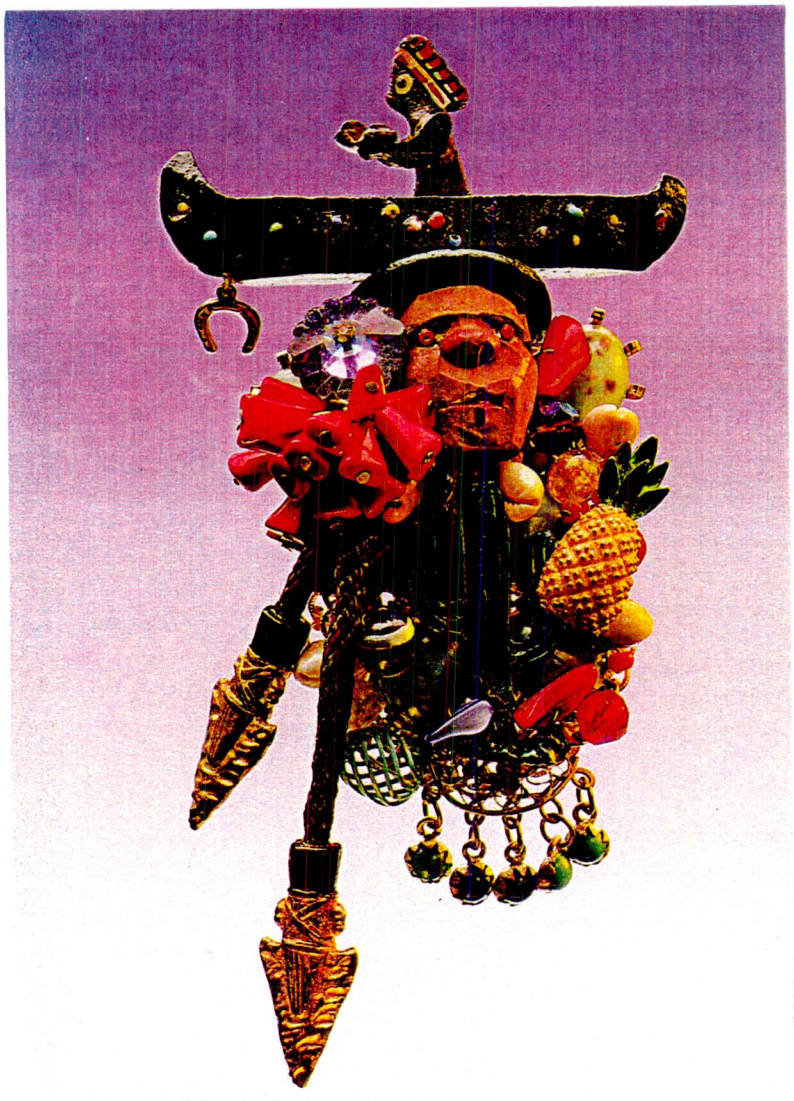
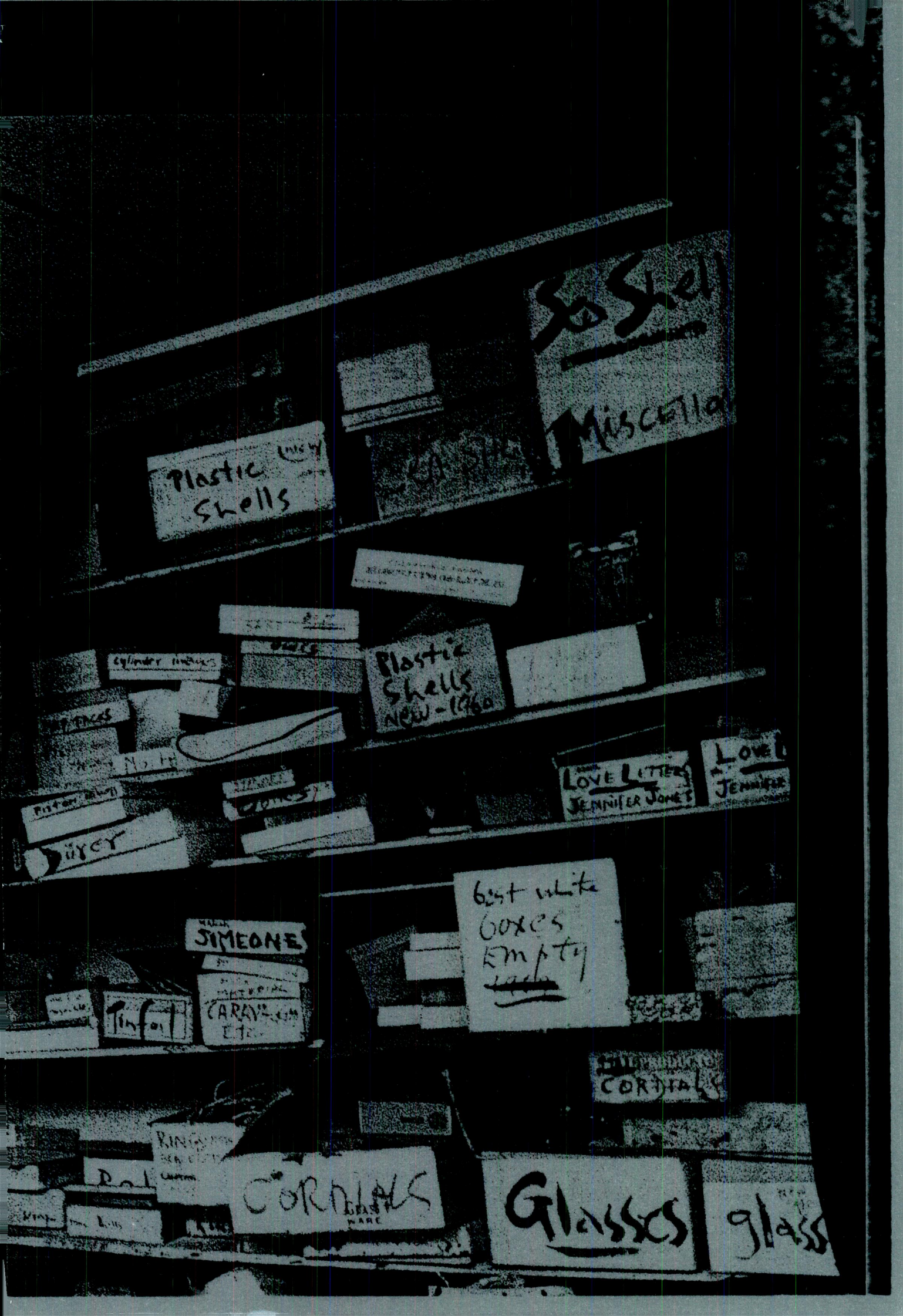


Fig.37: *Row Row Row Your Boat* ; Judy Onofrio, Brooch, 1990.

comparison to the work of Slemmon's and Garrison, the pieces seem sloppy at first glance, all rough edges and slapdash finish; a closer look reveals that a lot of work has gone into them; for example in Stubbs' *Five Down* (Fig. 36) the carved piece that the little deer rest on was hand-carved and resin-cast from a mould. But Stubbs' way of working is so original that a comparison of technical proficiency would not be fair or warranted. He uses many techniques that others do not - resin casting and polymer bonding being just two of his favoured techniques.


Plastic Shells
Plastic Shells NEW - 1960
LOVE LETTERS JENNIFER JONES
best white boxes Empty
SIMEONE
Tinfoil
CORDIALS
Glasses
glass

Chapter 9
Market Places, Prices, Buyers and Wearers.

Each of these eight jewellers aims to make a living from the sale of their work. Sales are very important, indeed essential, to a jeweller who wishes to earn a living from making contemporary jewellery, narrative or otherwise. Some narrative jewellers supplement their income by teaching in colleges and universities in the U.S., but they all must still sell their work if they are to continue to make jewellery. In some cases, especially just before a show, a narrative jeweller may be out of pocket often to the tune of several thousand dollars, because of the outlay on materials. Gold in particular is a very expensive commodity, costing hundreds of dollars an ounce, and gemstones can also be very costly. So it is imperative that the jeweller sells the work in order to live, make a profit, and continue to make narrative jewellery. So where do these jewellers sell their work? What sort of prices does a piece of narrative jewellery command? Who actually buys this work? And, very importantly, who wears it?

In order to find out these questions, I sent a fax[79] to several highly respected American art jewellery galleries[80], who sell a lot of Narrative work, as I felt that they would be the best qualified people to answer these questions. Galleries specialising in art jewellery attract a certain clientele and so the gallery owner would be acquainted with

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[79] See Appendix 3

[80] Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia, PA, Susan Cummins Gallery, Mill Valley, CA, Artium, New York, NY.

the sort of person who buys this type of jewellery.

Most jewellers sell their work through the many galleries which sell contemporary jewellery in the U.S.; These will often hold exhibitions and shows at which one or several jewellers will feature. However, a gallery will add an extra 100% on top of the jeweller's wholesale price onto every piece it sells, in order to realise a profit. This leaves the jeweller with a dilemma - if he sells privately and undercuts the gallery, they will probably refuse to show his work again. A jeweller needs the galleries to bring his work to a wider audience than he could possibly manage himself, so how to avoid this catch 22 situation? What most jewellers do is charge a private customer the same price as they would pay in a gallery. This does not antagonise the gallery owner, and it enables the jeweller to keep his wholesale cost to the gallery down, ensuring fair prices, as he gets enough money from a private sale to enable himself to do this. Not only do narrative jewellers sell privately and through the galleries, there is also a large craft show network in the U.S.A., such as the famous Rhinebeck Show which is held once a year in the summer in upstate New York. These shows give the narrative jeweller another outlet for sales. At these craft shows, huge orders can be picked up, providing enough work for several months.

The prices that a piece of Narrative jewellery sell for are wildly different. Claire Haggin of the Susan Cummins Gallery, California[81], told me that "The jewellery sells for $100 - $15,000 U.S dollars, with the average being $1,000."[82] Betsy King's lowest price is about $85 , while one of her more elaborate, and therefore more costly pieces will cost around $700. The people who actually buy this work can be both collectors or "Someone who discovers the work and wants to own

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[81]The Susan Cummins Gallery in California, along with the Helen Drutt Galleries in N.Y.C and Philadelphia have paved the way for contemporary jewellers, both narrative and otherwise, giving them support and a platform on which to show their jewellery to the public.

[82]From Fax reply, returned 12th Feb. 1995.

it"[83]. Some people buy this work to hold in private collections, and others buy pieces to wear.

A lot of this jewellery is in private collections, bought for decorative purposes and is never worn, emphasising its link to sculpture. Museums and galleries also buy narrative works to add to collections. People who have collections of contemporary jewellery include Helen Drutt, owner of the influential Helen Drutt Galleries in Philadelphia and New York City. The Museum Voor Kunst Het Kruithuis in the Netherlands also has an extensive collection of jewellery including many narrative works by

Betsy King, J. Fred Woell, Elizabeth Garrison, Kim Overstreet and Robin Kranitzky, Vaughn Stubbs and Judy Onofrio. Private buyers are, according to Claire Haggin, "Not commonly artists or jewellers themselves (as they usually cannot afford it)."[84] She also told me that: "Far more women than men buy this jewellery".[85] The sort of person who buys narrative jewellery is usually a young professional type - lawyers, doctors, surgeons etc., as they have relatively high earnings, and therefore disposable income. Who wears this type of work? "Those who buy this jewellery are typically women buying for themselves."[86] I had thought that it would require a person with a strong personality to wear a narrative brooch, for example, without being overwhelmed by the piece. Apparently this is not the case,

> "Their personalities vary with no one personality trait that stands out. Some are extroverts who wear the work to make a statement, or to engage others in conversation. Others simply want to adorn themselves with interesting, unusual, well-crafted jewellery."[87]

The beauty of a piece of narrative jewellery is that it does not have to be worn to be appreciated - for why would anyone shut a piece like Kiff Slemmons' *Sticks, Stones And Words* (1992) (Fig. 28) away

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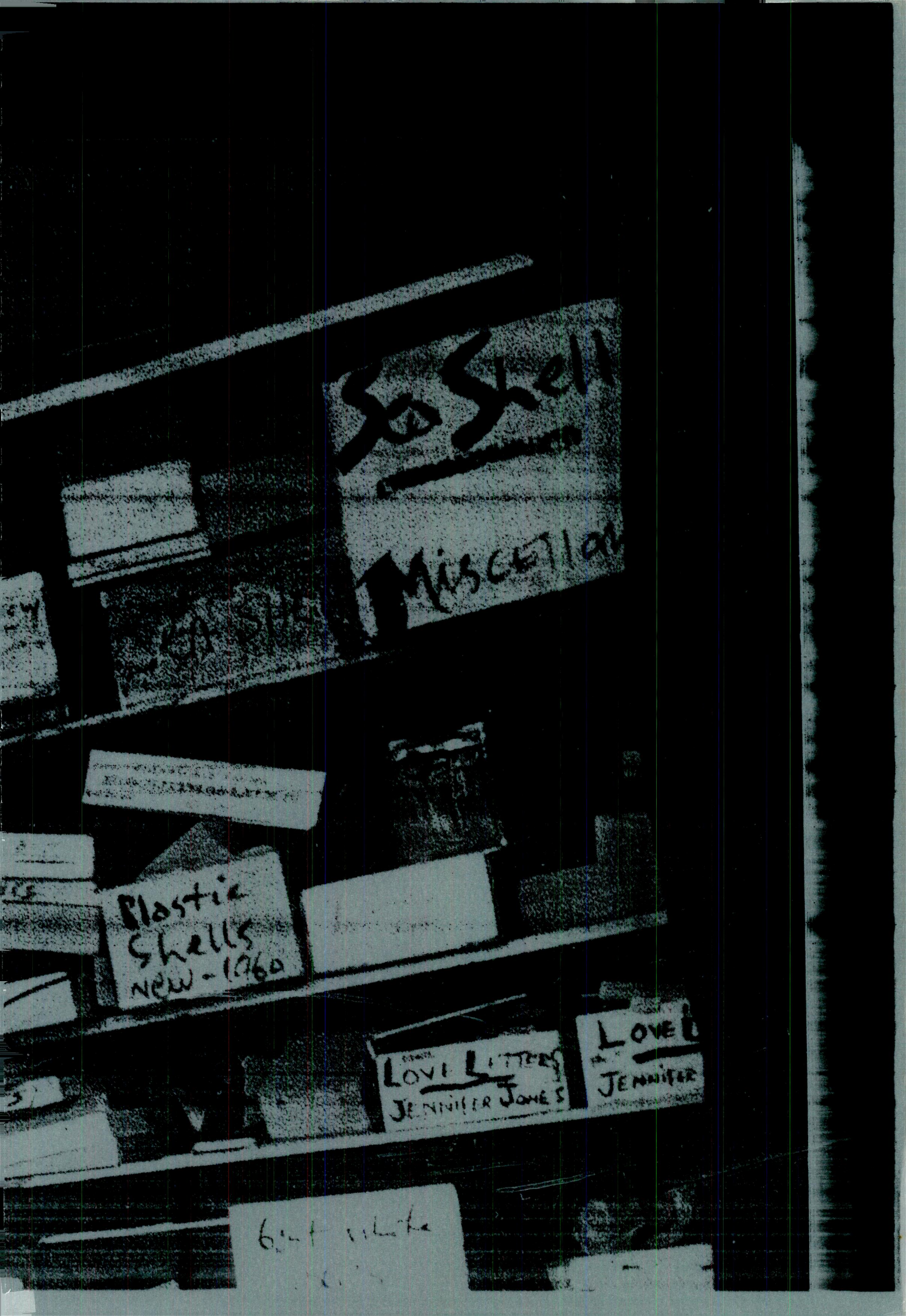
[83] Ibid
[84] Ibid
[85] Ibid
[86] Ibid
[87] Ibid

when it is just as capable of acting as a piece of sculptural ornamentation as jewellery?


Miscellaneous
Plastic Shells NEW - 1960
LOVE LETTERS
JENNIFER JONES
LOVE
JENNIFER

Conclusion

This thesis needs little in the way of a conclusion save a final summation of this genre. That the Narrative style of Contemporary Jewellery exists as a genre is beyond doubt, as the work of the eight jewellers has proved to us. This field of specialisation has proved unique in the wider sphere of American contemporary Jewellery, because of its scope to a jeweller: no material is outlawed, precious or non precious, and the final piece is just as valid made from gold or plastic. The jewellers who work in this area are free to explore their ideas and whims as they see fit, without the shackles of previous jewellery tradition to hold them back. One can only now anticipate the work that these people, and others following in their footsteps will create for our delectation in the future.

Appendix 1

The letter which was sent to Mr. Bob Mitchell and Ms. Yvonne Joris reads as follows:

3 Castletown Ct.,
Celbridge,
Co. Kildare,
Ireland.

Dear _____

I am a final year craft metals / jewellery student at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. As part of my course work I am required to write a thesis. My chosen focus for this is American narrative jewellery. However, I am finding it hard to find information relating to this subject, and so I am writing to you in the hope that you may be able to help me. I am looking for the addresses for several American jewellers, so that I can contact them and learn more about this field. The people I wish to contact are:

Kiff Slemmons,
Judy Onofrio,
Kim Overstreet & Robin Kranitzky,
J. Fred Woell,
Elizabeth Garrison,
Vaughn Stubbs,
Betsy King.

I realise that you must be very busy, but any help that you could give me would be gratefully received.

Thanking you in advance,

Kirstie McDermott.

Appendix 2

The questionnaire which was sent to each of the eight jewellers reads as follows:

1. If you went to college, what type of course did you do?
2. If it was a jewellery course, was it metals based?
3. If so,were you encouraged to use other materials, found objects, combine cast and sheet metals etc.?
4. When you were in college, was your work concept-based, or otherwise?
5. How has your work changed since you left?
6. Why do you work in the style that you do? Is it a cultural reference, influence of others or something that evolved for you?
7. What other jewellers / artists do you admire?
8. If you use found objects , where do you get them? Are you a hoarder? Do you have a stockpile of objects that you use?
9. Why do you find found objects / bits and pieces of scrap metals, cast components so interesting to work with?
10. Do you sit down and design / form ideas, or do you prefer to start making to get ideas?
11. How much of your time is spent designing / planning (if you do so), and how much time is spent making?
12. What technical processes do you use?
13. How do you attach components to each other- do you use bases for items to be attached to?
14. Is your work concept based?
15. What sort of concepts do you use in your work, and how do you illustrate them in a piece of jewellery?
16. Is your work in any way a reaction / effect of your upbringing etc.? If so, how is this manifested in your work?
17. Is your work political? If so, how do you portray political ideas in a piece of jewellery?
18. Does humour play an important part in your work?

Appendix 3

The fax which was sent to the Galleries reads as follows:

N.C.A.D,
100 Thomas St.,
Dublin 8.

Fax No. 010-353-1-6711748

Dear _____

I am a final year Craft Metals/Jewellery student currently studying at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. As part of my course work I am required to write a thesis and my chosen focus is contemporary American narrative/anecdotal jewellery. I am faxing you because through the course of my research, your gallery has come up time and time again as a champion of contemporary jewellery. I have previously written to several American jewellers, from whom I got a fantastic response, but now I find that I need to have a couple of questions answered. Time does not allow me to write to each jeweller again and so I am hoping that you can help me. I realise that you have a very busy schedule and that this must be an imposition on your time, but I would be extremely grateful if you could answer these questions:

1. What sort of prices does this jewellery sell for? How does this affect its saleability?

2. What sort of person would buy a piece of narrative jewellery? Are they commonly artists/jewellers themselves? Do more men than women, or vice versa, buy this jewellery?

3. Is narrative jewellery bought to be worn or held in collections?

4. If it is bought to be worn, who wears it? Is it worn by more women than men? Is it worn by people involved in the art world or other wise? What sort of a personality does a person who wears narrative jewellery need to have in order to wear such a strong piece of ornamentation?

I would appreciate any information that you can give me as I have little time left in which to finish my thesis, and these questions will answer important questions that I wish to address.

Thanking you in advance,

Kirstie McDermott.

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