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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN;

FACULTY OF DESIGN, DEPARTMENT OF CRAFT.

**"THE ART OF WRITING AND ITS
INCORPORATION INTO THE WORK OF TWO
CONTEMPORARY JEWELLERS."**

(ROBERT EBENDORF AND KIFF SLEMMONS)

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INTRODUCTION

I have chosen to talk about letters and jewellery in this thesis. Jewellery fascinates me because of its scale, since it is most often miniture and so we can carry it with us wherever we go, if we wish. Jewellery, to me, consists of objects of companionship. These can be simply loved for their aesthetic beauty or can also be appreciated for other reasons. They can be close to us, not only physically, but also sentimentally, if we endow this jewellery with powers or good fortune, for example. Jewellery, in my opinion, can provide objects of protection from the outside world. We can wear it to feel less naked and less vulnerable. It can also have emotional properties, if someone who is important to you gives it to you, or if it represents the ideas of the maker which you find interesting or personal.

The aesthetic qualities of jewellery are not indifferent to me; however, I am much more fascinated by the meaning, the message or the story that can be contained in these small objects. It is by collecting images of jewellery which have meaning and are not merely ornaments, like amulets, talismans and certain contemporary jewellery (for example, that which contains a narrative), that I have discovered jewellery in which

letters and writing have been incorporated. This jewellery has caught my attention because I imagine that the letters, words, sentences and texts which decorate this jewellery are secret messages, indications of dialogue, extracts from a love story or a fairy tale, or simply representative of the desire to communicate. I like the idea of communication in jewellery particularly, because I am studying away from my native country of France and so writing is now a vital way for me to keep in contact with people.

Letters interest me as well because today they are all around us; it is not difficult not to see them. In the modern world, in particular, under the influence of media, letters invade our fields of vision. They are present in a multitude of different forms, in the street as well as inside our homes.

Because these letters invade our everyday life, I wanted to know how they found their way into the world of contemporary jewellery. One of the most important characteristics in the Art but also in the Craft of our time is its eclecticism. A lot of artists and designers today use many techniques, materials, shapes and kinds of expression all mixed together. So some jewellers

use writing and letters in their work. There are quite a lot of artists today who use letters. However there are too many to mention so I would prefer to concentrate on two important artists.

I have chosen two American jewellers, Robert Ebendorf who began to make jewellery in the 1960's and Kiff Slemons who began in the 1980's. I have chosen these two artists because they use mixed media in their work as well as assemblage and collage. These are innovative techniques in jewellery. I have also chosen them because they integrate writing in their creation in different ways and for different reasons. Ebendorf is interested in writing, particularly for its aesthetic qualities, while Slemons uses it in a narrative way. Because this thesis deals with writing in jewellery, I have chosen these two artists because of the different ways in which they use similar ideas.

Before I go on to discuss these contemporary jewellers, I think it is important to first look at the history and origins of writing in the content of jewellery, to see how they have been associated during different eras by looking at some examples. After this, to get a better understanding of the use of letters in the actual

jewellery, I will devote a section of my thesis to mechanical writing, (e.g. typewriters, an invention which revolutionised the word of writing). I will devote another part of my thesis to modernism in Fine Art and Craft because the work of that time works the origin of today's eclecticism, and to the use of letters in Fine Art and Craft today.

I THE ORIGINS OF JEWELLERY AND THE ORIGINS OF WRITING

As far back as we can go in history, there is evidence that man possessed jewellery sets that displayed various degrees of refinement, ranging from the rudimentary to the finely crafted. Man seems to have developed a taste for ornamentation before he even experienced the necessity to bear arms and wear clothes. In numerous prehistoric sites, archeologists have found parts of necklaces, bracelets and other pieces of jewellery. The oldest ones date back to the paleolithic period (25000 to 18000 B.C.). This jewellery, the earliest that we are aware of, was made of sea-shells, fangs, bones and small stones ... Gradually, man started to craft the raw material that he found, first by piercing and polishing it. Perhaps he was guided by an instinct for the beautiful or by a natural artistic feeling. This innate taste for jewellery seems to reflect there basic human characteristics: Vanity, Superstition and Hoarding. Ever since its origins, the jewel appears to have been perceived as decorative, magical and precious.

As opposed to jewellery, which existed in the most ancient times, writing only appears much later, about 6000 years ago. Before the appearance of writing, numerous other ways of conveying messages were used. These messages used drawings, signs and images. These methods go back to very early times. However, writing only came into being when an organised corpus of signs or symbols was constituted. By means of this system, those who developed and learned it could materialise and clearly crystallise whatever they could think or experience. The writing system was elaborated over a long period of time, very slowly and in a very complex fashion. Even to this day, we do not know everything about its history. The very first traces of writing were clay tablets (fig.1) discovered in the fourth millennium B.C., in the Great Temple of the City of Uruk, in the land of Sumer (Mesopotamia). The tablets of Uruk comprise lists of sacks of grain, heads of cattle, thus establishing an accountancy of sorts for the Temple. The first written signs are therefore agricultural records. It was difficult to keep oral counts and it is for this very prosaic reason that script was invented.



Fig. 1. Unuk Clay tablet, 4 millenium B.C., Mesopotamia.

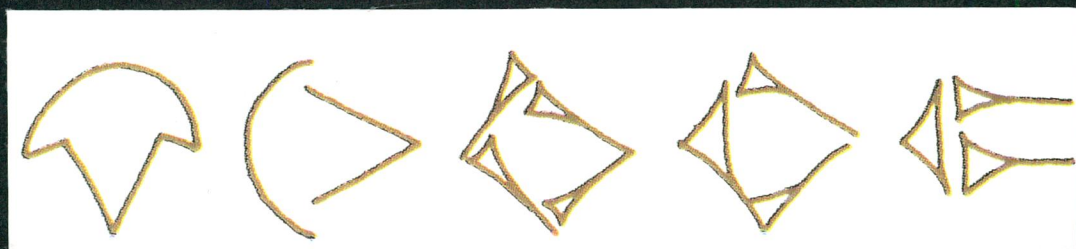


Fig. 2. Shema of pictograms of a head of an Ox.



Fig. 3. Hieroglyphics on the tombs of Ramses IX, 17th century B.C., thebe.

起牽堵波吾身
邏樹南有牽堵波迦膩色迦王之所達也迦膩色迦
王以如來涅槃之後第四百年居臨膺運統轄部眾
信罪福輕毀佛法因遊草澤遇見白菟王親奔逐至此
忽臧見有牧牛小豎於林樹間任小牽堵波其高三

This type of script, described as cuneiform. The first inscriptions in this type of writing, which is more of an *aide-memoir*, are simplified drawings that depict items in a stylised manner. The head of an ox, for instance, refers to the animal (fig.2). These inscriptions are called *pictograms* and refer to a specific being or object. By combining several pictograms, an idea could be expressed. Around 2900 B.C., pictograms disappeared and were replaced by a cuneiform writing consisting of signs that no longer bore any representative form. The signs only represented themselves and, consequently, they diminished in numbers. Decisive progress consisted in making the signs correspond to the sounds of the spoken language. At the origin of every proper system of script one will find the primordial invention of phonetics. Cuneiform script thus gradually became script as we know it. It is no longer a mere *aide-memoir* but a means of keeping a record of spoken language and, above all, a different way of communicating, even of thinking and expressing language.

While cuneiform script was developed in Mesopotamia around 3000 B.C., other systems of script were born and developed simultaneously in Egypt (fig.3) and China (fig.4). In

the third century B.C. the Egyptians designed a hieroglyphic system which can be qualified as script from the very beginning, as opposed to the Mesopotamian inscriptions which gradually became a type of writing. About 2000 B.C., China invented the script system which the country still uses today. Progressively these original script systems spread and evolved, and around 1000 B.C., a great transformation in the history of script occurred ~~the~~ invention. Whereas cuneiform script, the hieroglyph or Chinese ideograms all transcribe either words or syllables which require a knowledge of a great number of signs or ideograms in order to be able to read and write them, the alphabet enables one to write anything with about thirty signs. The alphabet of the first millennium B.C., evidently under went a great deal of transformation before it reached the degree of preconcision that is found in most Western languages today.

II CATEGORIES OF JEWELLERY WHICH INCORPORATE WRITING.

In the past, some jewels were decorated with signs and drawings, then writing as such appeared and gradually became an integral part of ornaments. In this section I will deal more particularly with rings, which often appear to have been combined with writing. Apart from their meanings, inscriptions on old jewellery are precious because they enable us to understand the use of the jewel on one hand and, on the other they provide information on dates and origins. The language in which the inscriptions are written also provides important information.

Among the jewels that integrate language, we find the seal-rings. This type of ring is very old; some of this jewellery was crafted at a time when script itself was emerging. A ring thought to have originated at the end of the third millennium or at the beginning of the second millenium, B.C., and which may have come from Eastern Iran also seems to have been used as a personal seal (fig 5). The whole ring (including the setting) is chiselled out of one solid chunk of a soft stone called serpentine which was particularly well suited for engraving. On the top side of the setting of the ring is engraved a sign representing an animal



Fig. 5. Serpentine ring. Iran Oriental, may be 2nd or 3rd millenium B.C.



Fig. 6. Merovingien ring, probably 17th century A.D.

the latter were to be found in the Middle-Ages. During that period of history, the line between religion and superstition was sometimes very thin, that is the reason why pieces of jewellery referring to religion and those referring to superstition are usually classified in the same category. It was believed at the time that rings had magical and protective properties derived from the stones embedded in them, or from the inscriptions that they bore. The magical power attributed to stones and script never seems to have been greater than at that time of history.

Sometimes, instead of stones, human teeth were used, as can be seen in a golden ring that may have come from England or France and dating from the thirteenth century A.D.(Fig. 7) The setting of the tooth is accompanied by an inscription engraved on the ring on which can be read: Buro+Berto+Bernet. These three words beginning with the letter B seems to corresponded to a magic charm intended to relieve toothaches. Other mediaeval rings were covered with simple religious inscriptions or verses from the Bible that were intended to protect the bearer.

During the Renaissance, in Europe, with the decrease in the interest in magic, a new fashion characterized by a taste for scientific inventions emerged. Functional jewellery therefore became very popular, so pieces would incorporate sundials,

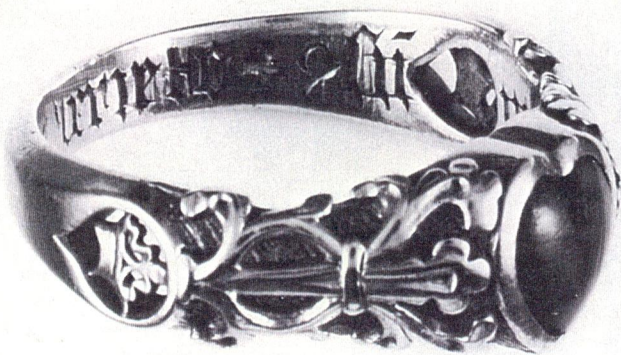


Fig. 7. Golden ring with tooth, England or France, 18th century A.D.

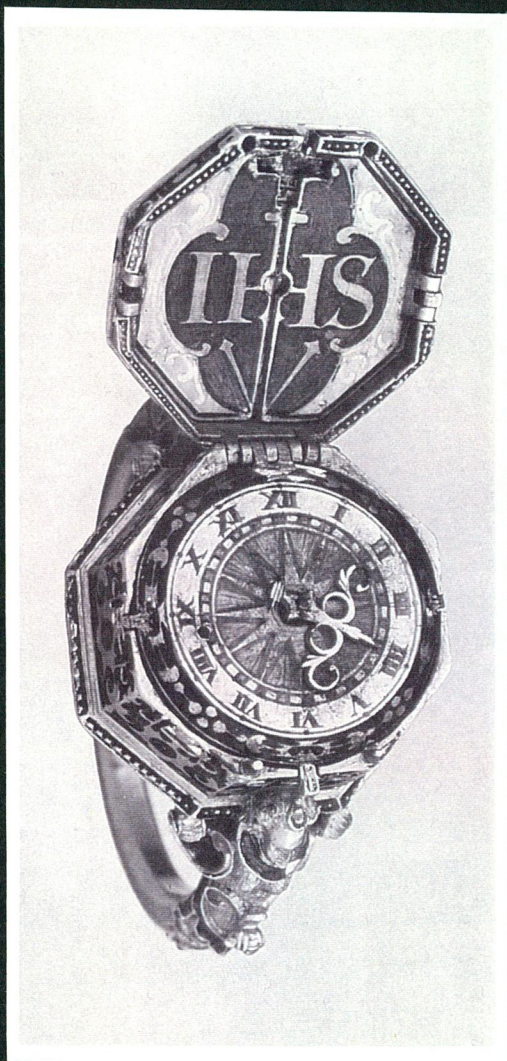


Fig. 8. Golden and enamelled ring, with watch, Germany, 1585 A.D.

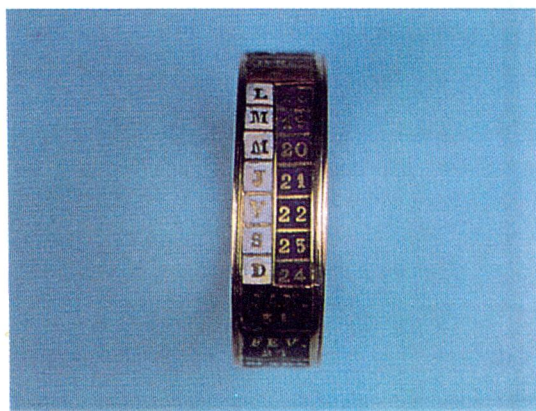
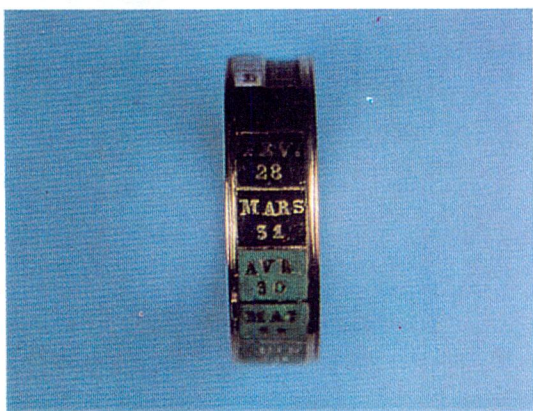


Fig. 9.

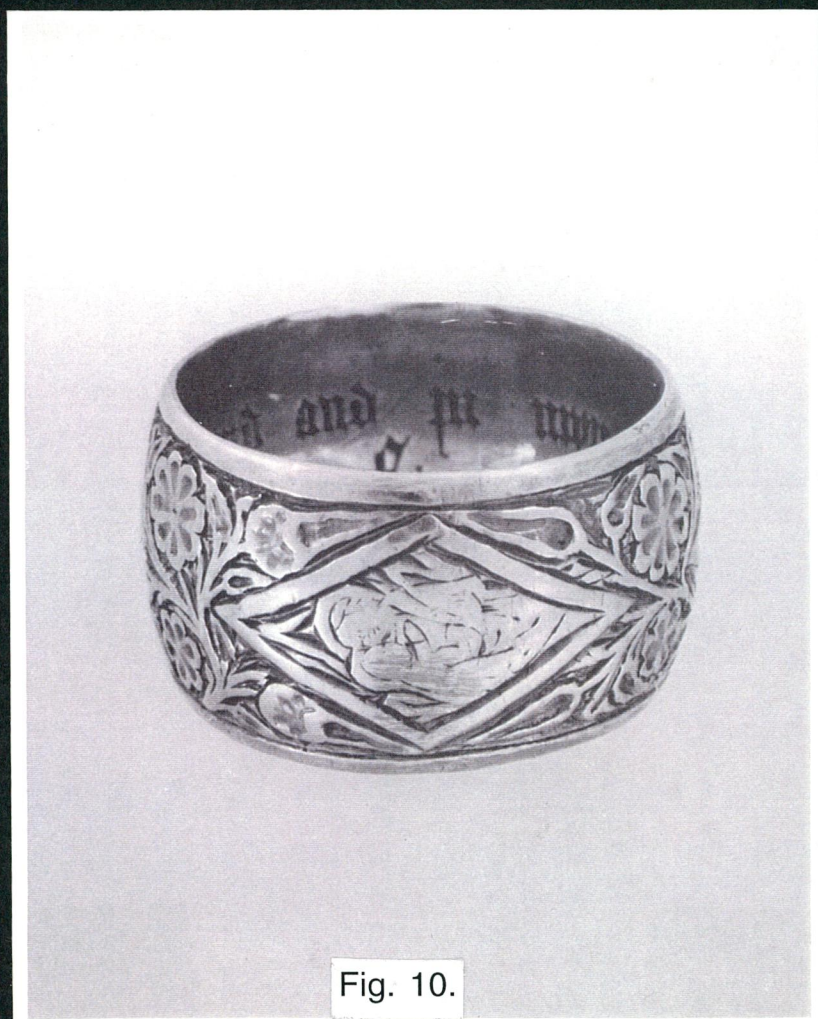


Fig. 10.

compasses or miniature watches (fig. 8). There is also an example of German or possibly French calendar-ring dating back to about 1820 or 1830 (fig. 9) This is a gold ring which consists of an enamelled band with letters corresponding to each day of the week, names of months in French and numerals (1 to 31) which correspond to the months. These numbers and letters are made in enamel.

Engraved writing was sometimes integrated in love or wedding rings since the 15th century, in Europe. These rings were exchanged between lovers or commemorated an engagement or a wedding. Posy rings (from the English poesy meaning poetry), for instance, are often simple rings engraved on the inside or the outside with inscriptions such as: 'UE MOST IN MYND AND YN MYN HEART,LOTHEST FROM YOU FERTO DEPART' as on a fifteenth century gold English ring (fig.10). The love inscription is engraved on the inside of this ring; it contrasts with the outside which it is decorated with three engraved religious pictures. One represents the Trinity, the next one Mary with the child and the last one a Saint. Flowers are engraved as well on the outside. The taste for rings decorated on the inside or in the outside with sentimental inscriptions was maintained in Europe, until about the middle of the nineteenth century. During the first half of the

nineteenth century, 'Arlequin' rings became fashionable; these were set with precious stones that formed words or first names; the most common words being 'regard' or 'dearest'. The rings bearing the word 'regard' were often given as presents on the occasion of a wedding or a birth. One of these types of jewellery, is a gold ring set with ruby, emerald, amethyst and diamond, dated from the first half of the 19th century (fig.11). Each of the letters engraved on the stones form the word 'regard'.

Souvenir jewellery constitutes another important category. A lot of is feature inscriptions. In this category 'Memento Mori' rings are notably found; just like German 'twin rings' of the sixteenth century, featuring a compartment that could be opened to display the relief of a skeleton or a foetus (fig12). Around the ring, inscriptions evoking the bonds of marriage could be read. In the 16th century, the themes of death and love were intimately linked; so that a ring evokes two themes , the inevitability of death and the necessity of remaining faithful in mariage .

Other souvenir jewellery may be distributed after the death of a person 'in memoriam'. Others have a commemorative nature, and may feature inscriptions testifying for a political or historical event as well assimply displaying portraits. One of the souvenir rings I find most fascinating is a ring in gold and enamel



Fig. 11. Arlequin ring



Fig. 12. Twin rings, German, late 16th - 17th century.

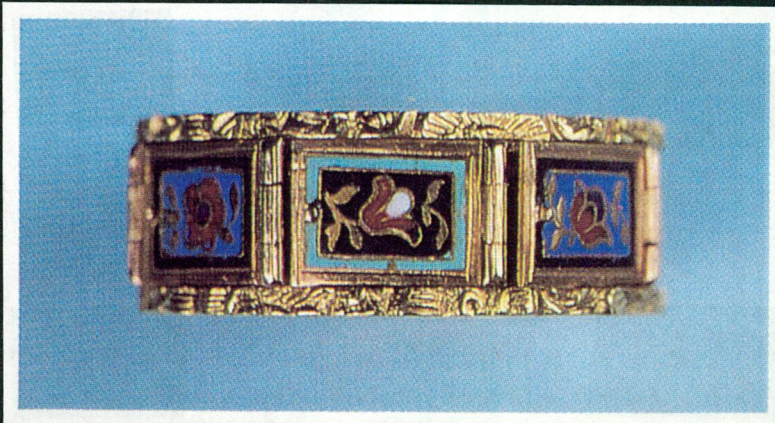


Fig. 13. Souvenir ring (gold enamele), French (?), about 1830

A.D.

comprising several compartments that can be opened (fig.13). This object may have been made in France around 1830. It was given as a token of friendship. Inside each compartment a letter can be found and the sum of all these letters makes up the word 'souvenir'. The compartment doors are decorated with flowers. The owner can therefore put what he wants inside that ring . I like to imagine that, in these little boxes, one could place parts of handwritten letters and traces of correspondence between two people.

III THE INVENTION OF MECHANICAL SCRIPT AND THE ORIGIN OF LETTERS THAT ARE KNOWN TODAY

Most of the jewellery that I have discussed above was made out of metal. Metal and wood were the two first materials to have been used in engraving techniques. They were used as patterns to set signs in certain materials. Roman potters, for example, would use bronze slab moulds to engrave into objects. This technique is at the origin of the European invention of printing. Hand writing had been used for centuries, developed with the invention of the increasingly convenient medium of paper as well as with the invention of increasingly precise and efficient writing tools. But the invention of printing was to revolutionize the history of script. However, researchers now date the first book ever printed in separate metallic typeface to 1390 in China. We do not know how this invention found its way into Europe but, from 1462, the Mayence printing machine began to be distributed to Venice, Antwerp, Lyons, Nuremberg, Paris and Prague. Later on in the 19th century, the first ever modern press was built in philadelphis in 1846. It could print 95000 copies per hour, which was a huge progress



Fig. 14.



Fig. 15.



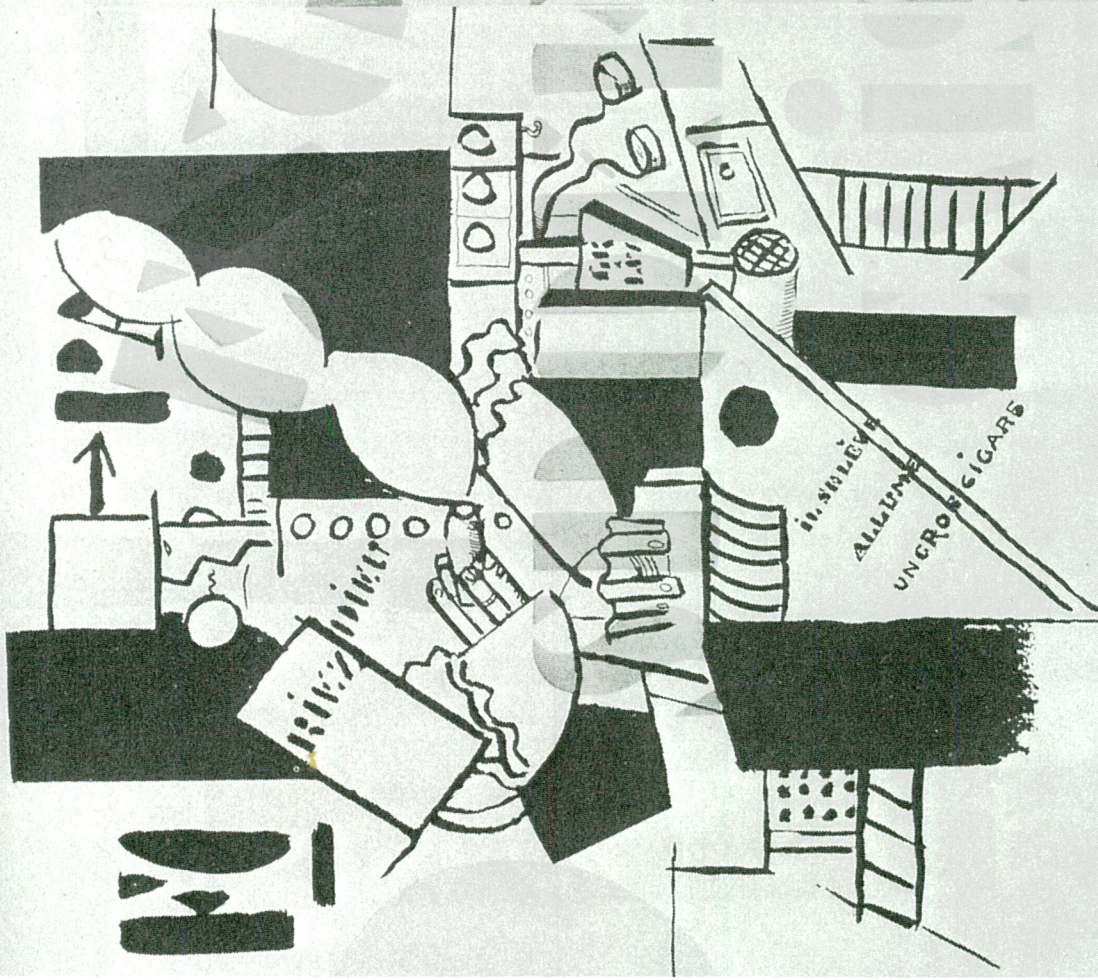
Fig. 16.

we are about to cross the street). These words give us orders, take us by the hand, forbid us from doing certain things (No Parking, Quiet Please, Post No Bill). Certain letters can also be transformed into pictograms reminiscent of primitive script, such as the international symbols we find in airport indicating toilets and restaurants. Planes themselves are covered in inscriptions, so we can even see letters in the sky when we lift our heads. Letters invade the vastest of spaces, and also infiltrate the smallest, the most intimate one, such as the insides of houses. Script can be found in instructions, on newspapers directions, on cassette boxes, in our mail, in theses, in books where we can see pictures of objects themselves covered in words; this creates a history within history very much in the manner of a set of Russian dolls

I am fascinated by the diversity of script. The alphabet seems incredible to me: with its 26 letters, the number of possible combinations would be 620 448 401733 239 439 360 000 ! 1



Fig. 17. Medieval painting. The Annunciation: Centre panel of the "Merode Altarpiece".



C'est le

Dieu le père est à son bureau américain. Il signe hâtivement d'innombrables papiers. Il est en bras de chemise et a un abat-jour vert sur les yeux. Il se lève, allume un gros cigare, consulte sa montre, marche nerveusement dans son cabinet, va et vient en mâchonnant son cigare. Il se rassied à son bureau, repousse fiévreusement

31
Décembre

IV LETTERING IN 20TH CENTURY ART

Letters are also present in the art of today. In the past, at many different periods, illuminators, painters and printers have incorporated letters into their works, but they have rarely made them the subject to their composition. Letters most often played an anecdotal role in their creations. They were a part of the decoration; for example, in medieval painting, writing sometimes appeared in a painting of an open book (fig.17). Sometimes letters also played a magical or emblematical role.

At the beginning of the 20th century some artists began to show a lively interest in using lettering and writing as the subject of their work. One of the first artists to give letters an important role in their work was Fernand Leger with the illustration of a text by Blaise Cendrars called "La fin du monde filmee par l'ange notre dame" which dates from 1919 (Fig.18). In this illustration, Leger, intermixed objects, faces and letters in a kaleidoscopic vision which reflected the aesthetic preoccupations of this time. The letters in this work are superimposed on the the text in certain places or escape form it



Fig. 19. Japanese print, Teaching of writing 19th century



Fig. 20. Paul Gauguin, The House of Pleasure, (woodcutting), 1901.

to monopolize all the space and appear alone.

There are many explanations for the interest of painters in lettering and writing in this century. First, because latin alphabet letters have a constructive value in the opinion of a painter such as Leger who was pre-occupied with geometric shapes. Another reason is that, at the beginning of the century, the Nabi painters, on the wave of the fashion of 'Japonnaiseries' gave artists an interest in Oriental calligraphy in which writing and drawing are generally very closely related (fig.19). Wood cuttings of gaugin as well proposed a new and decorative writing style from which new ideas for writing in art emerged, (fig.20).

The biggest influence on the use of writing in art today has been exerted by diverse artistic movements like cubism, orphism, futurism, suprematism, constructivism, not to forget the dada art movement, surrealism, and the Bauhaus. Dadaism and Surrealism have been a big influence in the work of the jeweller Kiff Slemons, which I shall discuss more later. Painters may use words in their works of art, they may also write poems of books. The bondaries formally established



Fig. 21. Robert Rauschenberg, Spot. (collage), 1963.



Fig. 22.

Fluxus, George Brecht, Water Yam.

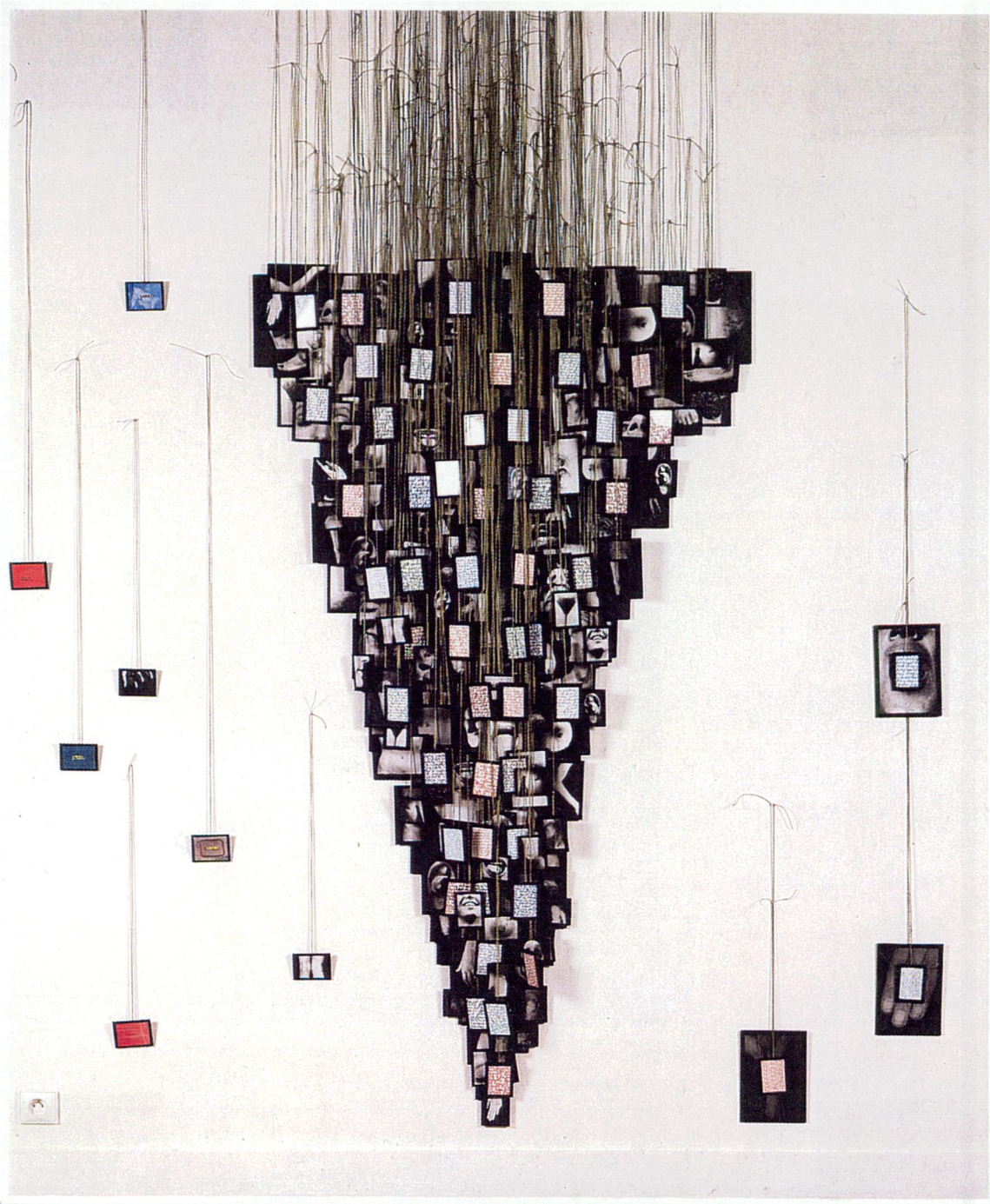


Fig. 23.

Annette Messenger, Mes Voeux, 1989.



Fig. 24.

Jeffrey Shaw, The Legible City, 1989.

between the different of expression, painting, sculpture, literature, poetry, calligraphy or typography have disappeared in art today. The 20th century artist tries to incorporate many different ways of expression into each piece. Modernism has opened the possibility to use any materials or techniques the artist chooses. Eclectisme has been one of the principal characteristics of recent contemporary art; movements such as Pop (fig.21) art or Fluxus (fig.22) give an important place to lettering in their work. Writing can be in manuscript form in contemporary art as in the work of Annette Messager (fig.23) who uses writing with colored pencils with certain words repeated in association with an assemblage of small photographs. Other artists like Jeffrey Shaw, use slide projections of computer writing (fig.24). One of his pieces is an interactive work which dates from 1989 and which is entitled "the legible city". In front of a screen, there is a bicycle on which the visitor can sit and can appear to travel in a city made up of three dimensioned letters. This effect is produced by a computer. These letters form sentences, so the visitor can take a textual journey. This work is very interesting to me because

the cities today are so invaded by letters that they themselves appear to become towns. The idea of virtually visiting words like we visit a place is a very fascinating idea for me.

V GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT LETTERING IN CONTEMPORARY JEWELLERY

During the 1960's, innovations which had taken place in the world of fine art at the beginning of the 20th century began to have repercussions on the design of jewellery. Apart from the experiences of a few craftsmen, most radical innovations in jewellery have been late compared those in painting and sculpture. In the 1960's, particularly in Western Europe and in the United States, an interest in unconventional and untraditional jewellery began to develop. This lasted to similar changes which occurred in the work of Art earlier in the 20th century, like the use of widely divergent mediums of expression, diverse techniques and materials and the use of various sources of expression, which also appeared in the field of jewellery.

This 'New Jewellery' can be seen somewhere between the domain of fine art and that of craft. It is also called 'Art Jewellery' because it tends to be close to fine art because it tends to be close to fine art in its ideas and the fine art concepts which inspired them. The work of Kiff Slemons and Robert

Edendorf, which I am to discuss later on, can be described as 'Art Jewellery'.

Although this new jewellery had its origin in the 1960's, the first half of the 1970's can now be seen to have the most innovative period in the jewellery history. A new generation of jewellers appeared who questioned the significance of jewellery in the past. Contemporary jewellery represents a revolt against tradition because it has become an independent means of artistic expression rather than simply a luxury item. It reflects the personality of the creator, so when a person acquires a piece, they wear it because they appreciate the style and the ideas of its maker. It is no longer simply a mark of prestige belonging to a particular social class, as it had been in the past. This jewellery is also innovative in its escape from conventional codes. For a lot of creative art jewellers, the question of whether their work is too heavy, too big or not comfortable enough is not the principle concern. They are not restrained by wearability; because of this, their creations tend to be less limited than they were previously; they can create more sculptural pieces.

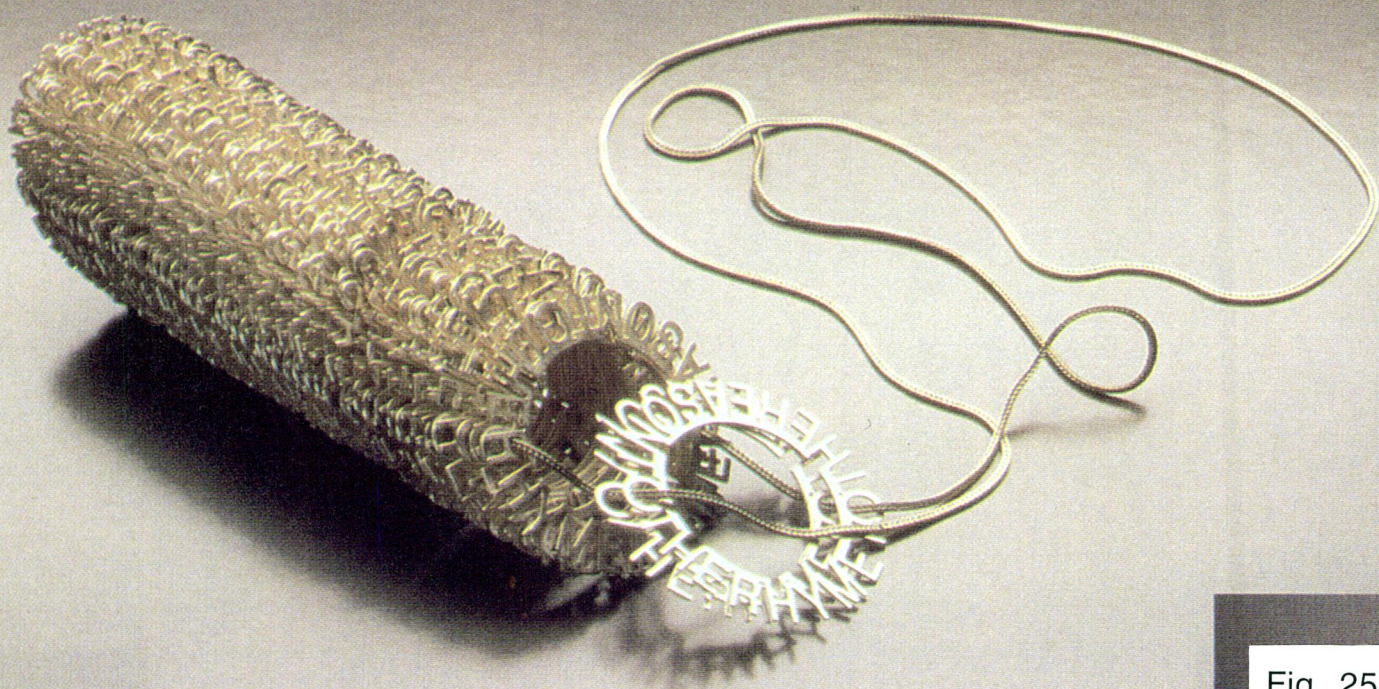


Fig. 25.



Fig. 26.

The materials used in 'Art Jewellery' are no longer made solely in precious metals and stones. But if some jewellers continue to use traditional materials, their ideas, their techniques or their forms are innovative. Alyssa der Krauss, to take an example of jewellers who use writing, often works with precious materials. Her pendant (fig.25) called 'Rhyme to the reason', dates from 1993 and is made with sterling silver. This piece is literally made from words and sentences. Frequently, Alyssa der Krauss takes passages of popular literature, fairy tales or common myths to integrate into her jewellery. This pendant tells is a story but not in the way of a traditional book. Sentences form circles as if they are never going to end and all these circles are piled up on top of each other. To be able to read the words, we have to turn around the different parts of this pendant so we are using a different gesture than the one we use normally to read a book.

One of the principal characteristics of contemporary jewellery is the desire to discover and explore new materials. This way, an artist like Robert Ebendorf uses in his work mixed media, as on this necklace (fig.26) dating from 1988. The beads of this

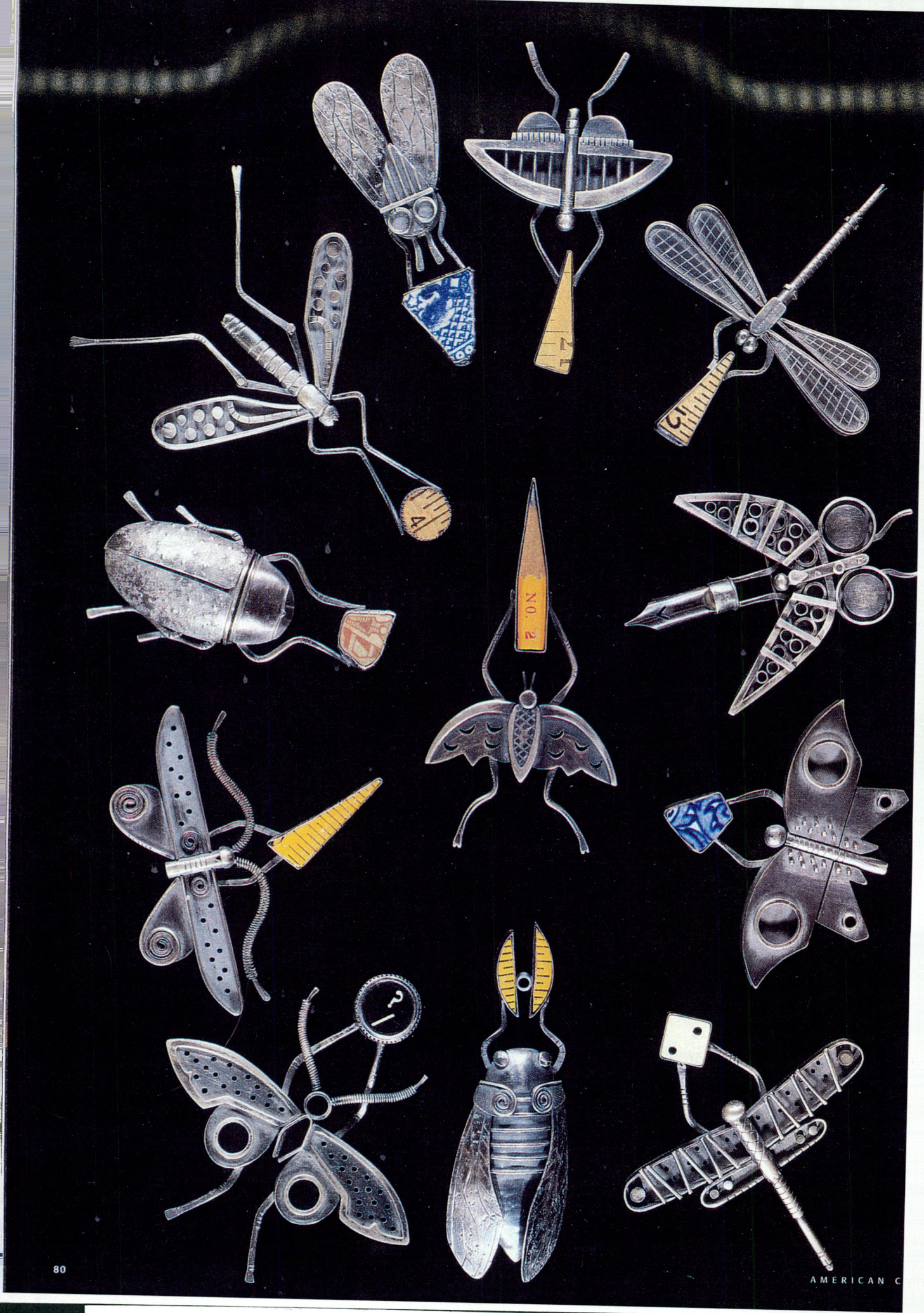


Fig. 27. Kiff Slemmons, Ambassadors, (12 pins), 1993.

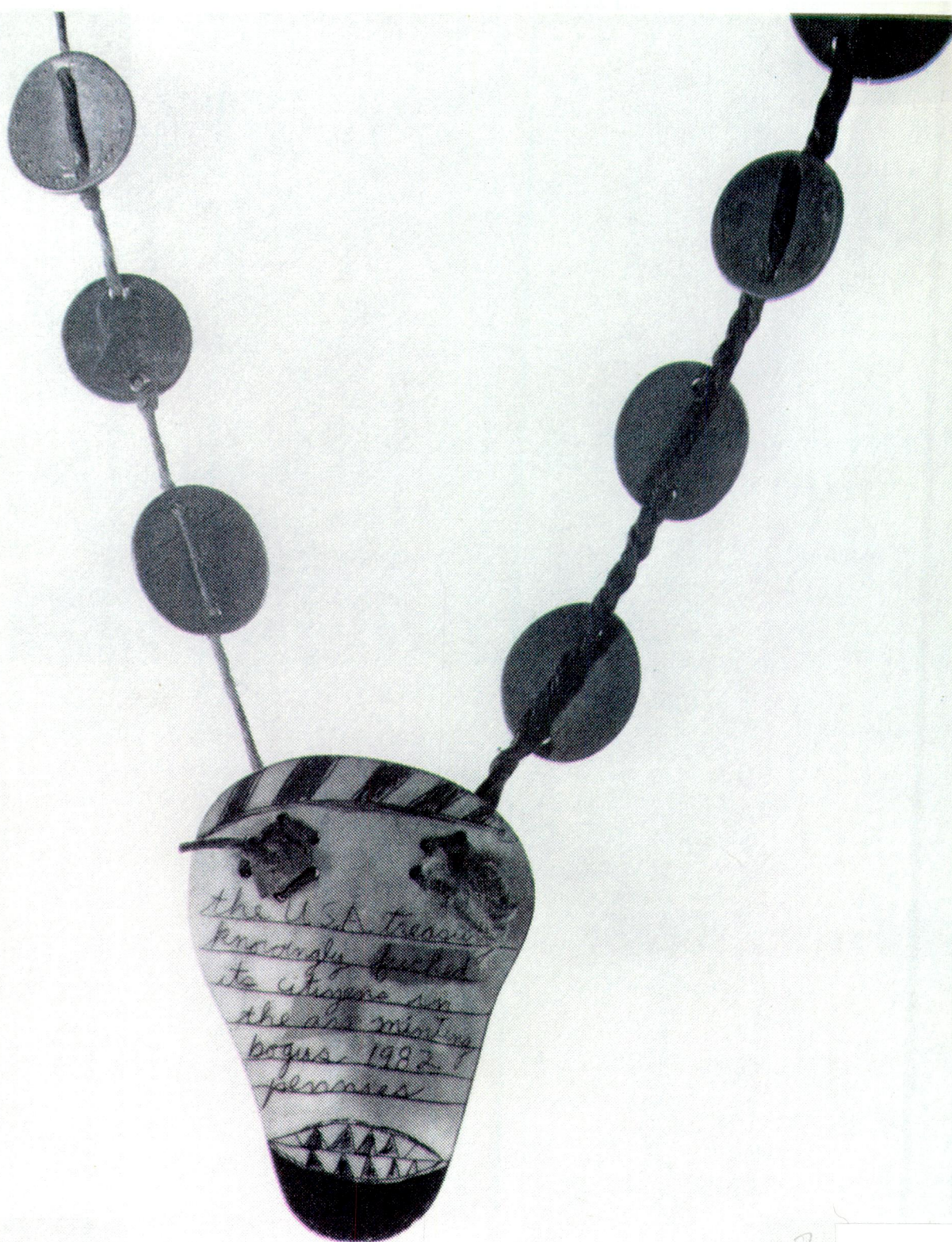


Fig. 28.

jewellery have an average size of 2 inches in diameter and are made, among other things, of shell, bone, photographs, Japanese handmade paper mixed with precious materials like gold foil. Kiff Slemons also uses all kinds of materials like pencils, rulers and silver as in her insect brooches which date from 1993(fig27).

Other artists, like Stuart Buehler, deliberately use only precious materials in some of their work. Stuart Buehler made in 1982 a necklace with bone, twine, copper, pennies. The title of his piece, called 'U.S. treasury', is written by hand on the jewellery itself.

*"It seems to tell us that traditional institutions and cherished beliefs are decaying; religion and economics are meshed. U.S. treasury could be an icon for a belief system of turmoil and greed"*¹

As I have discussed in the first chapter, prehistoric jewellery consisted of found objects like shells, bones or pebbles. These kinds of materials have been used, and are still used, in 'folk' and 'ethnic' jewellery. Nevertheless, the appearance of non-precious materials in non-ethnic jewellery is a new phenomenon. With the creation of contemporary jewellery,

1 Sophie Dunn - THE WORK OF STUART BUEHLER - Metal smith Summer 1993

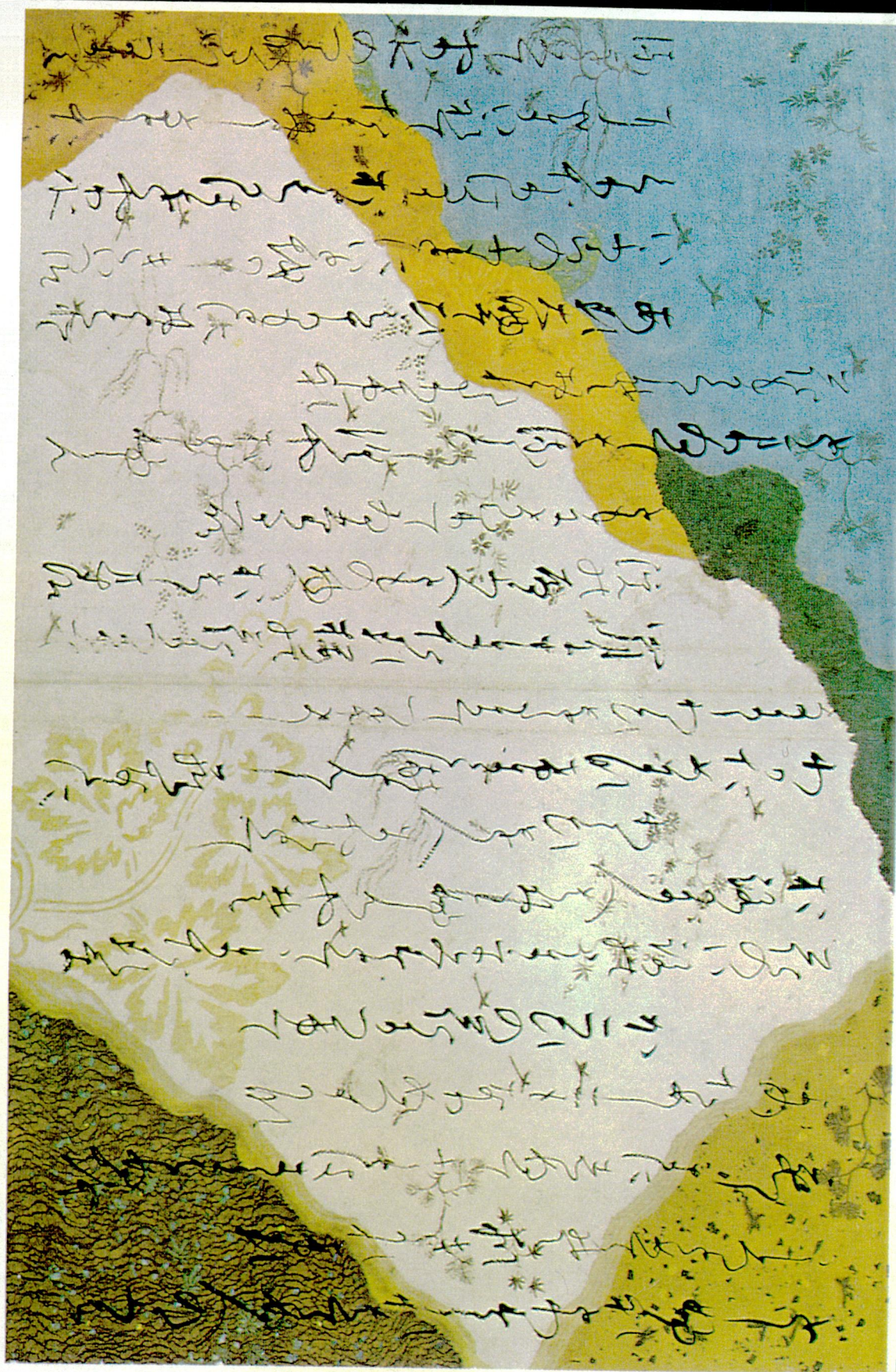
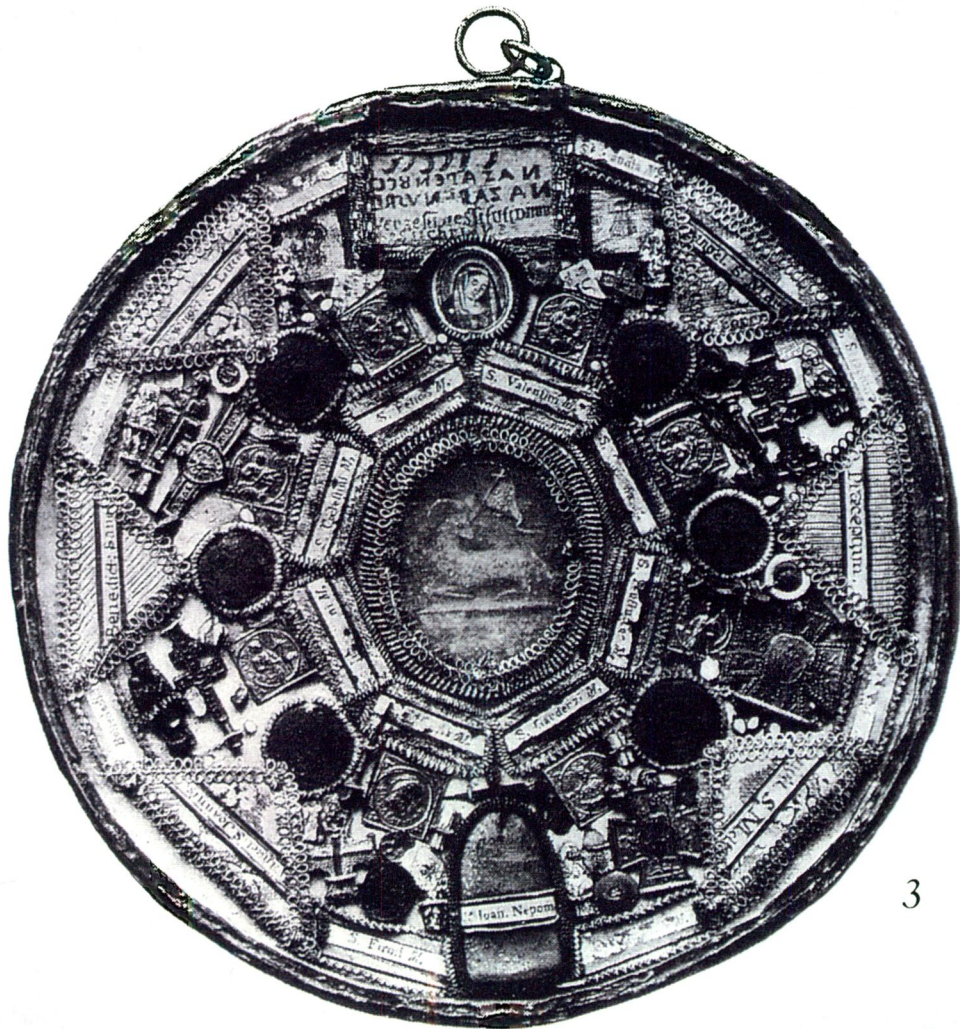


Fig. 29.

Japanese calligraphy (section of the Ise-Shu

manuscript known as Ishiyoma, Gire). Early

12th



3

Fig. 30. Folk art weather charm, religious medallions,
German, 18th century A.D.

boundaries between precious and non-precious materials have been abolished. The contemporary jeweller uses a wide range of materials and mixed media, without their work being classified as 'ethnic' or 'folk' jewellery.

The use of such newly contextualized materials goes well with the use of newly adopted techniques, such as collage and assemblage. Such techniques have been used since the 1960's by Robert Ebendorf and in the 1970's by Kiff Slemmons.

"Collage (from the French 'coller' = to stick) defines works in which components belonging to separate intellectual or perceptual categories are combined".

"Assemblage is the conceptual equivalent, applied to work utilizing three dimensional elements"¹.

Collage did not originate in the 20th century, but was only at this time that it was recognised as a conscious technique in the art world. Collage has many sources, including 12th century A.D. Japanese text-collage, (fig.29), embellished with foil papers, or German folk art weather charms (fig.30).

As a technique, it is one of the most important of 20th century art forms. The first artists to make systematic use of collage

1 Herta Wescher, *Collage* (New York: Abrams, 1968) pg. 163



Fig. 31. Pablo Picasso, Glass and Bottle of Suze, 1912.

Douces figures poignardées
 MIA Chères lèvres fleuries
 YETTE MAREYE
 ANNIE LORIE
 et toi MARIE
 où êtes-
 vous ô
 jeunes filles

MAIS
 près d'un
 jet d'eau qui
 pleure et qui prie
 cette colombe s'extasie

Tous les souvenirs de nague Billy Dalize
 mes amis partis en guerre Raynal

Jaillissent vers le firmament où sont les noms se mélancolisent
 Et vos regards en l'eau dormante ont les noms se mélancolisent
 Meurent mélancolique ment Comme des pas dans une église
 Où sont-ils Braque et Max Jacob Où est Cremnitz qui s'engagea
 Derain aux yeux gris comme la bête Où sont-ils morts déjà

De souvenirs mon âme est pleine
 Le jet d'eau pleure sur ma peine

CEUX QUI SONT PARTIS A LA GUERRE AU NORD SE BATTENT MAINTENANT
 Le soir tombe O sanglante mer

Jardins où saigne abondamment le laurier rose fleur guerrière

La Colombe poignardée et le jet d'eau, le plus célèbre des calligrammes d'Apollinaire.

Fig. 32.

Apollinaire, La colombe poignadee et le Jet D'Eau, 1918

were Picasso and Braque. From 1912, they began to incorporate newspaper articles and titles and pre-printed patterns into their paintings. Thus, pieces of reality were integrated into constructed works of art. Collage had two functions: it was, in its own right, a representative element of the real world, and it was also used as a formal element within the total composition. We can see it in a painting of Picasso dating from 1912 with oil painting and pieces of newspaper (fig.31). Collage broke the boundaries of the traditional two dimensional painting. It was the poets Apollinaire, Breton, Aragon, Tzara (fig.32) who first use the collage as a new language at the beginning of the 20th century.

"They saw it as an extension of their work experiments. Tzara, for example, was creating chance poems by ripping words and phrases out of newspapers and picking them randomly from a hat. Such a practice was designed not only to shock the establishment, but to free words from their confining and obsolete systems".¹

Since the 1960's, in the field of jewellery, Robert Ebendorf and Kiff Slemmons as well as others, used assemblage techniques which were developed in painting, to their own advantage and to integrate notably lettering in their work. The use of assemblage in jewellery was anticipated by Sam Kramer, who produced in 1958 in America a surrealist pendant of

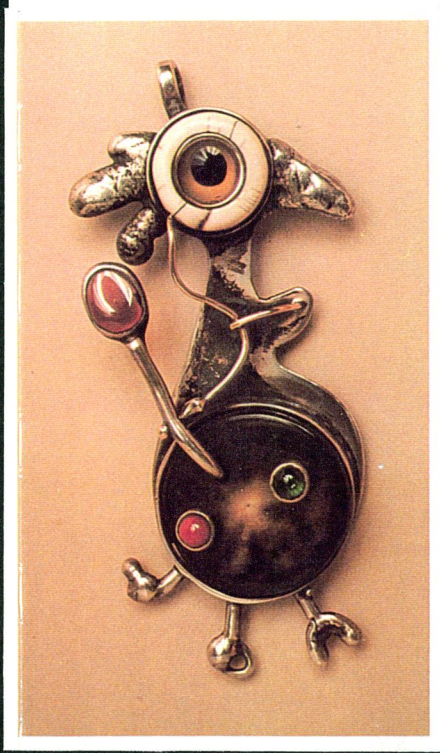


Fig. 33. Sam Kramer, Brooch, 1958.



Fig. 35. Fred Woell, Brooch, 1966.



Fig. 34. Joseph Cornell, Medici Slot Machine, 1942

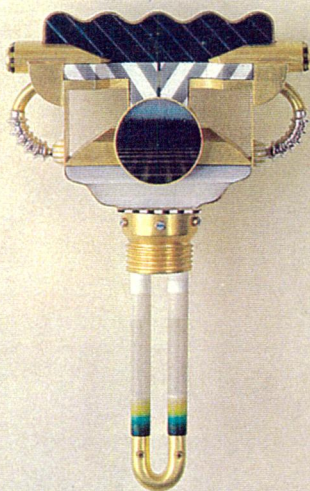
intermixed traditional materials like gold and silver with a yellow and black glass animal's eye acquired from a taxidermist, set in an ivory mount. The adoption of this technique is regarded as one of the most important advances in contemporary American jewellery. This interest emerged in an exhibition in 1961 entitled 'The Art of Assemblage', which took place in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. This exhibition was about 'mixed-media' sculpture made of objects, pieces of objects and diverse materials. It confirmed that this non-traditional way of making art started in 1912 with the collages of Picasso and Braque and the sculptures of Hausmann and Schwitters, was in the 1960's, practised by many American artists like Joseph Cornell (fig.34), Robert Rauschenberg or Edward Kienholz. These contemporary American artists were exhibited with less recent work of the surrealists or futurists. During the 1960's, one of the main users of assemblage in jewellery in the United States was Fred Woell (fig.35), while other American artists, like Arline Fisch, Marjorie Schick, Stanley Lechtzin and Robert Ebendorf, were developing this technique of collage in their work.

VI ROBERT EBENDORF

Robert Ebendorf is an American jeweller who was born in Topeka, Kansas in 1938. He was educated at the University of Kansas, where he received his Master of Fine Art degree with first class in technical excellence. In 1963, with the help of a grant, he continued his studies in Norway at the State School for Applied Arts and Crafts. Then, in 1965, he received a Louis Comfort Tiffany grant which permitted him to return to Norway to work, for one year, at Norway Silver Design in Fredrikstad.

At the end of the 1960's, he refuted the perfect craftsmanship which he had studied so hard in the past. Under the influence of Pop Art, the 1960's movement, he started to use found objects and prefabricated metals in his work. He reframed, for example, old types of old boxes and put a lot of work on to the surface by introducing images and words in to it, (fig 36). Instead of using solder, he connected the different parts of his work in a spontaneous way. This new aesthetic which took shape in Robert Ebendorf's jewellery was soon to be followed by his discovery of Collage. The technique of assemblage was for him, the best form of expression.

Since 1971 Ebendorf has been Professor of Art at the College of New Palz which is in the State University of New York. Before this, he had taught at Stetson University in Florida, at the University of Athens in Georgia, at the Haystack School in Maine and at the Penland School in North Carolina. His work as a teacher is very important to him. First, because he likes sharing his experiences and he learns a lot from students work as well. This job also permits him to meet international artists-jewellers. In 1970, he was one of the few educators to try to establish some contacts with his Europeans' colleagues. In 1973, Ebendorf was invited to America by the German jeweller, Claus Bury who, following his visit, had a big influence on Ebendorf's work. Claus Bury used at this time in his creations highly polished colored sheets. These sheets were rings and brooches which were inspired by pieces of machinery and his technique was close to perfection (fig.37). The contemporary approach of Claus Bury had some repercussions on the jewellery design of his American colleague's. For example, he also became inspired by machines and began to use plastic, but he used these techniques and materials in his own way.



Claus Bury

Fig. 37.

Claus Bury, Brooch, 1974.

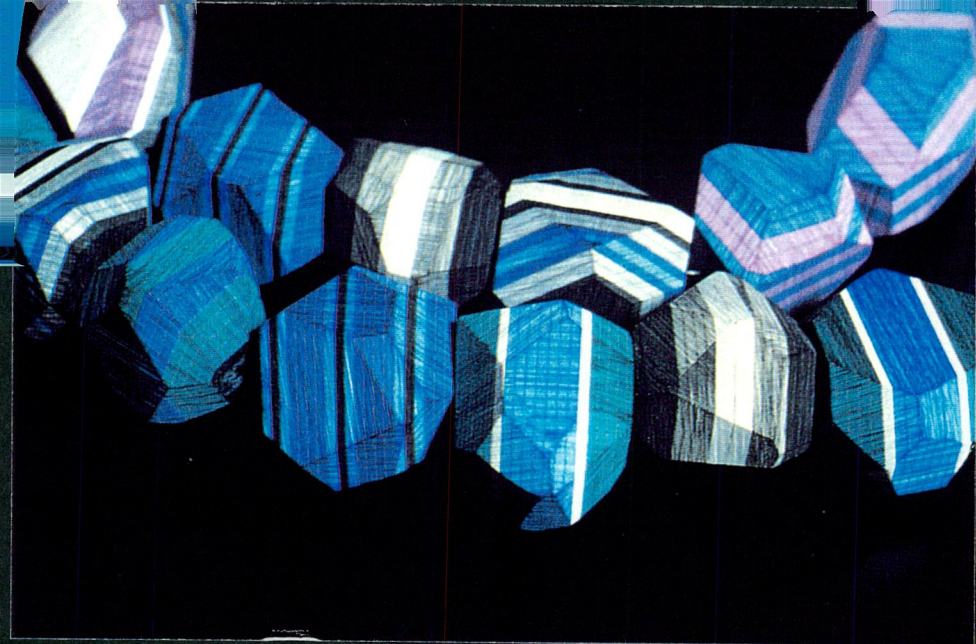


Fig. 38. Robert Ebendorf, necklace (detail) (layered colorcor), 1987.

He has also made huge efforts to promote an international dialogue in his profession through the SNAG (Society of North American Goldsmiths) of which he was one of the founding members and past president. This spirit which has brought him to try to communicate with other jewellers reflects itself in his work, from which a large diversity, a taste for experimentation and eclecticism, emanate.

In addition to his work as a professor, Robert Ebendorf became a designer in 1975 for the Zane Silver Company in Mexico City. In 1978 he designed for David Andersen in Oslo, Norway, then in 1986 for the Cleto Munari Design Association at Vicenza in Italy. He also has a studio in Boulder, Colorado, where he makes his own work.

Ebendorf's work is largely represented in museum collections in America, Europe and Australia. He has participated in numerous exhibitions during his career. His work has also won many awards. He has won notably (with the collaboration of his wife, artist Ivy Ross), The National Surface and Ornament Competition in 1984 by constructing beads with colorcor (fig 38). This material is a transparent plastic laminate product which is

made by the American Formica Corporation for the use of architects. Colorcor is one of the favourite materials of Ebendorf. He also obtained an A.C.C. fellows Award (American Craft Council) in 1994.

Because Ebendorf has integrated writing into so much of his jewellery, I have decided to orient my analysis on one of his pieces in particular, as it would be impossible to discuss all of them in any detail. I have chosen a collar from 1988, made primarily of Chinese newspaper and 24 karat gold foil over styrofoam as well as wood and plexiglas. This necklace is housed in the Society for Art in Crafts collection in Pittsburgh.

The collar is a flat circular shape and is covered in pieces of Chinese newspaper. A rectangular piece of gold foil is laid over one side. The Ebendorf taste for this flat format goes back to the end of the 1960's, when he had broken away from the techniques of the traditional vocabulary that he had learned during his studies. This format permitted him to make a more graphic work which interested him. This jewellery in a flat disk shape and covered in Chinese signs reminds me of a C.D. ROM which provides information and which represents a huge

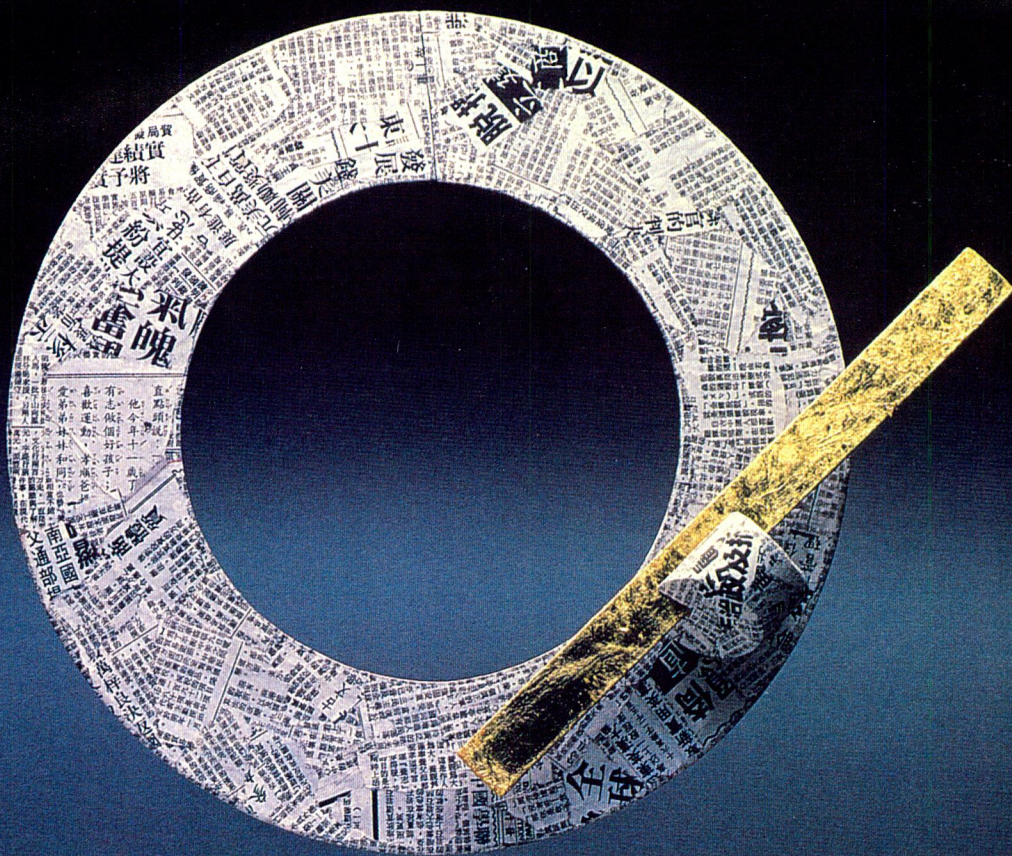


Fig. 39. Robert Ebendorf, collar (chinese newsprint, gold foil), 1988.



Fig. 40. Sieglindé Karl, bracelet (wood, dye), 1989.

progression in the world of writing. It also reminds me of a wooden bracelet by Sieglinde Karl, dating from 1989. This jeweller used engraved words, which were handwritten by Hazel Smith in this piece, in which the lines of writing follow a circular shape. In doing this she copied the words of someone else and made them personal to herself. This is different to Robert Ebendorf who used words which were printed (newspaper) which are not personal at all. (Fig. 39)

The constructed diameter of this object is 11 7/8 inches. Although when you first see this piece, it does not look like a collar, it is actually wearable. It is made in one piece and it cannot adopt the shape of the body. It does not contain any system which permits you to make it bigger or smaller according to the size of the neck. When it is worn, I doubt that it is practical and comfortable. However, I find that it is very interesting as an object. American jewellers generally do not design their pieces in relation to the body; Ebendorf is one of them. This collar is autonomous, it can exist without being worn like a miniature sculpture.

Ebendorf, in this work, uses collage as his predecessors have

done in painting during the first half of this century and like the American jeweller, Sam Kramer, had also done. In this piece by Ebendorf he sticks some gold foil and some newspaper sheet onto wood and plexiglas. Gold is a traditional material which is prized by jewellers for its exceptional qualities. Newspaper, on the other hand, is an everyday material. In his work Ebendorf uses collage to call into question the traditional definition of jewellery. That is why he mixes precious materials with found objects. This technique permits him to place an everyday object such as paper in the marvellous world of jewellery. Collage, as such, can assume a magical aspect. Ebendorf succeeds in integrating newspaper, which is a very common material with the most elegant material, gold, in his collar.

Newspaper in our everyday life informs us of daily events. But in this work we have only pieces of paper ripped and stuck, so it is not possible to read the contents of this paper completely. If we can read Chinese we can may be able to decipher some words but no more. One of the particulars of Ebendorf is that he is dyslexic. Dyslexia is a complex and misunderstood

learning disorder with many symptoms; it is sometimes called "word blindness".

*"The dyslexic's reading process is characterized by letter, word and sentence fixation and tracking difficulty ... the resulting scrambling will trigger the insertion and omission of words, the illusion of new words formed from words part ... the thinking brain, however bright, receiving drifting, scrambled input will have difficulty with interpretation, memory and concentration"*³

This learning disability troubled him greatly when he was at university, where the written word was dominant. During the 1960's he made jewellery which represented floating heads and encircled bodies; these figures seem isolated, as Ebendorf himself must have been feeling with his handicap. Ebendorf made figurative work until around 1971. At this time the expression of his personal problems as a dyslexic seemed to have come to an end; this permitted him to evolve in his work. He started to develop an abstract style which can be seen in this circular collar. This object is not in direct relation to his learning disability. However, these pieces of newspaper appear to me like an impossible puzzle to be reconstituted. The words that I can see on the paper's surface are in a foreign

language for Ebendorf as well as for me. Even if we can read Chinese, we can not find out the meaning of every word because the pieces of newspaper are torn. The sense of these signs escapes to us.

To create jewellery which is constituted of fragments is a characteristic of Robert Ebendorf's work. Making assemblages with disparate elements together is for him a way to appropriate to himself the exterior world and to understand it. In making objects from his own everyday life and in integrating them in his jewellery, Ebendorf has created his own language. Like the poet Tzara, who had attempted at the beginning of the 20th century to liberate words from their traditional yoke, Ebendorf "needed to liberate words from standard conventions, those of everyone else. He needed to see himself as their master, in control of their ultimate manipulation. And he did so, by incorporating them into his Art".⁴

For Robert Ebendorf, writing is a visual abstraction, and he uses it as such. As we have seen previously, chapter II, jewellery in the past integrated writing primarily for its meaning. Ebendorf changed its primeval function and used letters only to

4 Vanessa A. Lynn "Speaking With his Hands: The Art of Robert Ebendorf" (Catalogue Robert Ebendorf retrospective Exhibition, College of New Paltz) 1989, Pg. 1

create a decorative pattern. This gold and paper collar is decorated with words. He has made several pieces using surfaces of torn paper. In doing so he wishes to "create the metaphor of the page in progress"⁵

I would not wear this collar every day but I find the way that Robert Ebendorf uses newspaper by ripping it up, and sticking it together to make the meaning of the words confused, very interesting. This work makes me think of all the letters and information which are around us in our everyday life. There are so many that a big part of their meaning escapes us. Newspaper, for example, is like a sea of information. When we read it we select and remember only a few articles and it is quite difficult to make a difference between important information and that which is not.

5 Vanessa A. Lynn "Speaking With his Hands: The Art of Robert Ebendorf" (Catalogue Robert Ebendorf retrospective Exhibition, College of New Paltz) 1989, Pg. 1

VII KIFF SLEMMONS.

Kiff Slemmons has simply always loved words, and thus , is quite different to Robert Ebendorf who seems to love words and hate them at the same time. Ebendorf's dislike for words seems apparent in the way that he rips them up and takes the sense out of them. At the same time he seems to love these words as he constantly incorporates them into his work. Slemmons' work is also different to Ebendorf's in that, as well as using actual writing in her work, she also uses tools and images which are related to the act of writing. Slemmons is an American jeweller born in 1944 in a small town in Iowa. In 1962, she enrolled at Scripps College in Claremont, California, planning to major in comparative literature. Then she went to study in Paris at the Sorbonne for a year before returning to the University of Iowa to continue with comparative literature, French and Russian. When she was in Iowa University she started to take Art classes for fun in addition to her literature studies. She enjoyed the Art classes so much that she graduated from the University of Iowa in 1968 with a B.A in Art and French.

During her studies Kiff Slemmons started to make fashionable

jewellery to sell. She made, notably, earrings out of twisted wire in order to finance a trip to Mexico. Her taste for jewellery comes from her childhood. The profession of her mother had an enormous influence on her. Her mother was a pharmacist and Kiff Slemmons was fascinated by the delicate tools she used to mix the medicines. Her love for literature and the use of lettering in her work comes from her father. Her father was the editor and publisher of a small town newspaper. As a child she used to go to visit him where he was working and she:

*'loved everything about the place. the presses, the smell of ink, the feel of paper, the intricate plates of type with the words upside down and backwards. The Linotype machine was a special interest a real contraption where hot metal was turned into type.'*⁶

The first jewellery Kiff made during her studies were purely decorative. It is in the mid-seventies that she started to incorporate more of her own personality into her work. She banished the notion of purely decorative ornamentation. In the 1970's her pieces were made of found objects like antique dominos, pre Columbian spindle whirles and roman glass beads. This jewellery was made to honour close friends and family. They were close to the function of ethnic jewellery, such as being talismanic or powerful for the person it represented. Her discovery of ethnic jewellery in the 1970's helped her to go forward with simple ornamentation. However, these early works



Fig. 41.



Fig. 43. Kiff Slemmons, brooch, Scholl, 199

Fig. 42. Kiff Slemmons, brooch, Friend, 1991.

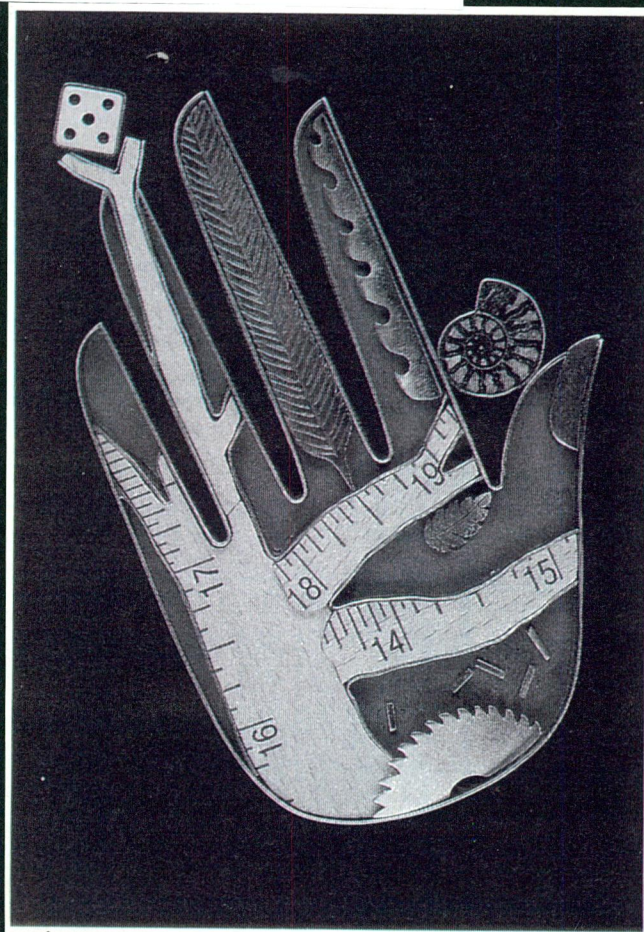


Fig. 44. Kiff Slemmons, brooch, World 1, 1991.

made of antiques and beads , in the first half of the 1980's, began to frustrate her. It since the end of the 1980's that her work became very personal as she began to integrate her literary interests into her jewellery.

As the jewellery of Kiff Slemmons since the 1980's is closely related to writing, I have chosen to discuss her work with one piece in particular. The piece that I have chosen is a hand-shaped brooch, dating from 1991, called Self. This piece of jewellery is made of silver, brass, part of a ruler and pieces of mirror (Fig. 41) and is part of a series of ten brooches by Slemmons which she has entitled Measuring Up. This series all dates from 1991 and was commissioned by the Washington State Arts Commission to be exhibited in public schools throughout the United States. The theme of this series is about the way people are expected to measure up to oneself, friends,(Fig. 42) school,(Fig. 43) parents and the whole of society. (Fig. 44) The brooch I have chosen , called self, is a part of this set.

This piece of jewellery represents a hand. The hand shape has appeared in previously in Slemmons work in a series of brooches from 1989, called The Hand of the Heroes. This series contained about sixty pieces which memorialised and celebrated people who have qualities that Slemmons admires or who have been described as strong people by their friends. She created these brooches by filling them with associative imagery, including found objects

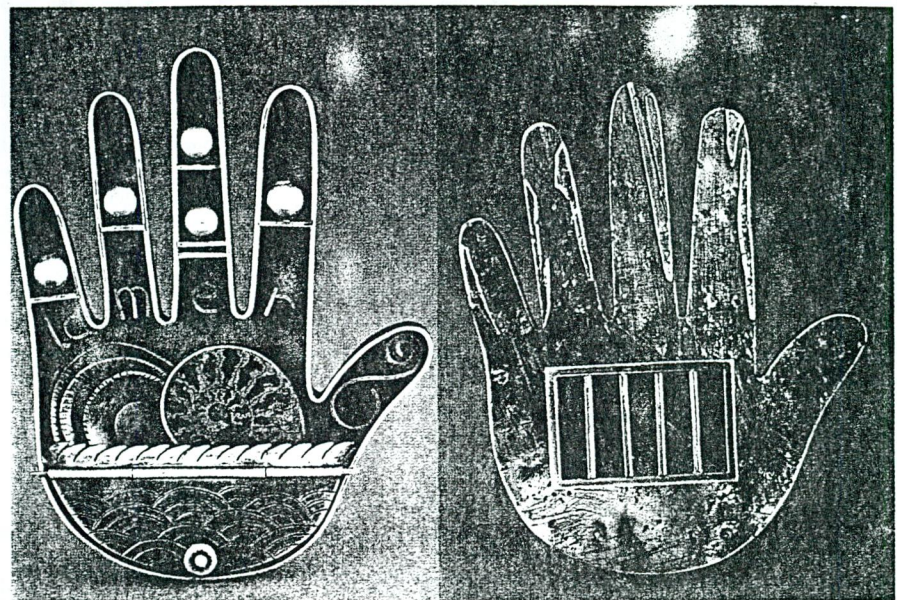


Fig. 45.

Fig. 46.

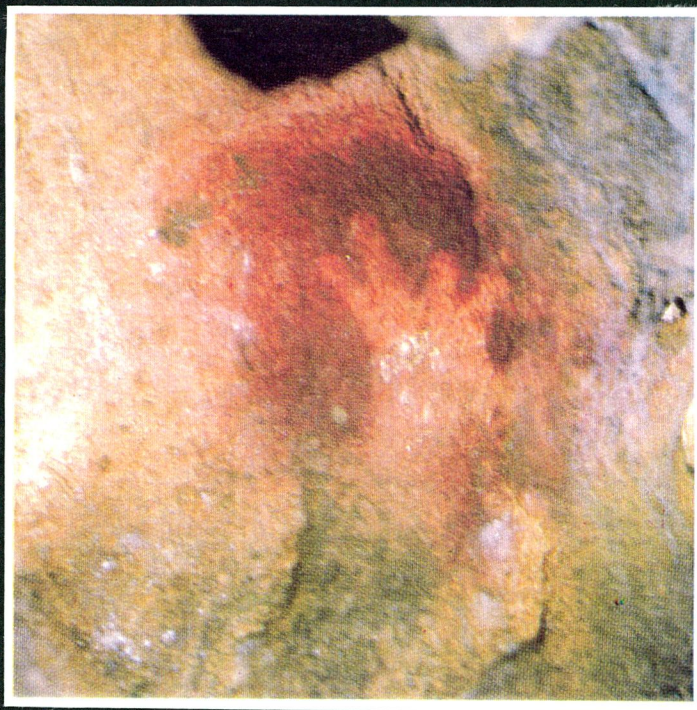


Fig. 47.

Negative hand from the cave of Gravas,



Fig. 48.

Muslim pendant, end of the 19th century A.D.

and writing, which was unique to each of her heroes. Heroic figures such as Joseph Cornell (Fig. 45) and Nelson Mandela (Fig. 46) were represented here.

The image of the hand has been used by artists since prehistoric times. One example, which dates from about 25,000 years ago, came from the cave of Gargas and represents a painted red 'negative' hand. (Fig. 47) This kind of cave drawing of a hand seems to have represented the demarcation between the private (inside the cave) and the public (outside the cave), and it also seems to represent both a warning and a greeting sign.

The hand is a symbol which has long been used in folk jewellery, especially in North Africa, where it plays the role of an amulet. One of these hand shaped pieces of jewellery is a silver pendant from Meknes in Morocco which dates from 19th century. (Fig. 48) This piece is decorated with a floral composition and a pink flamingo. Muslims believe that this type of pendant protects the wearer and repels evil spirits. The hand also symbolises the bond of marriage and the relationship with God through the intermediate of prayer, during which hands are stretched towards the sky. For the Muslims, the hand is also associated with the law of their religion. These laws contain five fundamental dogma which are represented by the five fingers. Each finger is joined to the hand, the base, which represents unity. The base of the hand corresponds to unity with God, where the religious laws take

their source. As a consequence, all such laws are concentrated in the hand.

The shape of the hand in Self is very close to the ones found in the Islamic pendant. Kiff Slemmons has always had an interest in folk and ethnic jewellery and as such are a great source of inspiration for her work. She likes to work with images which have been used in different cultures and also those which have been used throughout history like the hand, the eye and the human torso. She also likes to transform these banal symbols into the world of today. For her the hand is a symbol which protects the wearer. It also represents her handwork and the fact that jewellery is so tactile when it is worn and when it is placed on to body. In this particular brooch called Self, which was destined for exhibition in schools, she chose the shape of the hand because it is easily recognised by children from a visual point of view as well as from a metamorphic one.

The hand of Self also has an eye on its palm made from a piece of mirror; when it is worn this eye reflects the outside world. If the beholder of the brooch takes it in his hand he can see his own real eye reflected in the eye on the brooch and the hand brooch is held in his own real hand. In trying to create this evocative work, Slemmons is closely aligned with the aims of the early symbolists and surrealist artists. In 1934, for example, the surrealist painter Rene Magritte made an oil painting called The



Fig. 49.

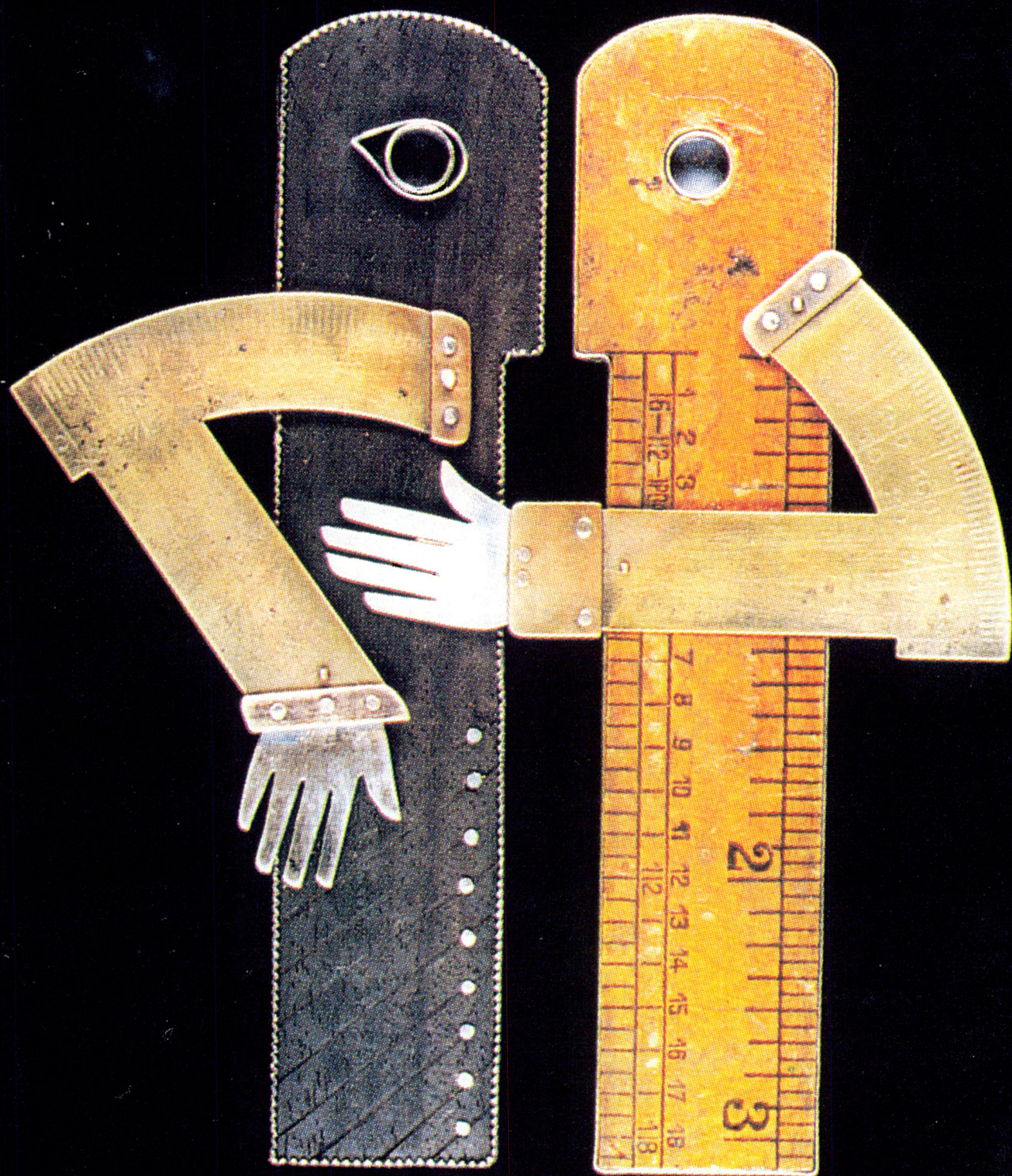


Fig. 50.

Human Condition (Fig.49) This work of art is a painting which represents in itself another painting. Kiff Slemmons plays with similar ideas in creating jewellery in the shape of body parts to place on the body.

Kiff Slemmon's jewellery is narrative in the shapes and materials that she uses to communicate her ideas. In Self , the eye is placed in the center, on the palm, and as such it is the principal element. The eye represents the outside vision of the world as well as the vision inside the human mind.

Four of the fingers are covered with pieces of yellow wooden rulers. Kiff Slemmons has chosen to use rulers in this work because she wanted to integrate objects into it which were related to school. This material is also one of her favourites and she used it in a series called Allies which she began in 1991. (Fig. 50) The pieces in this series are made of rulers set in silver to form a geometric, robotic figure. These Allies make reference to :

"the need to constantly measure, to compete and to move from the unique to the conventional and back again".⁷

In Self the ruler is used in a metaphoric way. It represents the way that we evaluate and measure ourselves. In the thumb of the hand brooch the word 'identity' is written in volume with a metal band put vertically. The letters follow the shape of the thumb. Kiff Slemmons' typographic letters in this work are close to mechanical writing even though she has written them by hand.

She has not used her own writing but has created round lettering which follows the curve of the brooch. This word reinforces the idea of evaluating oneself. It also helps us to understand the meaning behind the jewellery. Unlike Robert Ebendorf she uses the lettering so that her piece makes more sense. The word identity alone in this brooch allows us to imagine the meaning of the sentences around it. The jeweller represents her own identity in this work and forces us to question our own identity.

I like this work very much because there is a serious idea behind it. This jewellery asks us to look at who we are; but the shapes, colour and materials make it humorous as well.

This exploration of the hand shape mixed with writing by Kiff Slemmons has also been extended to hand tools. In 1995 she made a tiny silver toolbox which contains four rings, one with a protractor, another with the tip of a pencil and one with two erasers and the last one with a ruler. As these pieces of jewellery are wearable, I like the idea that we can carry writing and drawing tools everywhere we go. Pencils are magical objects to me because they permit me to draw what ever I have in my head and to transform it into something real on the paper.

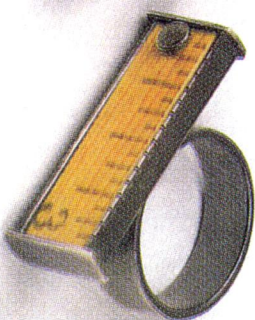
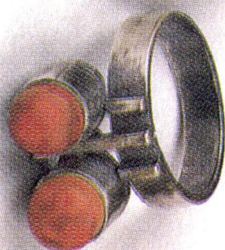
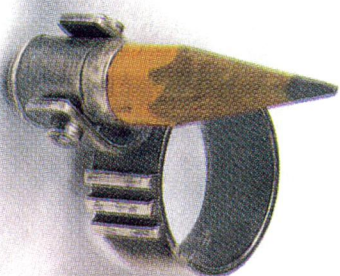
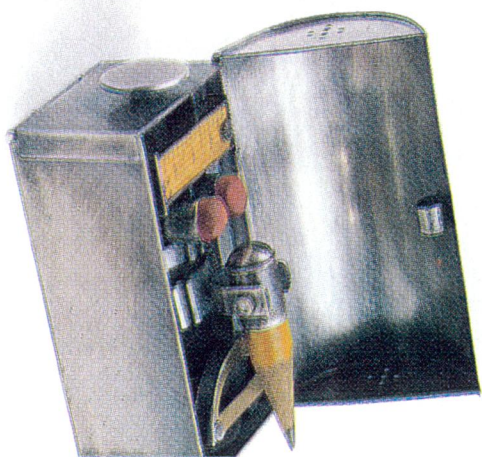


Fig. 51.

CONCLUSION.

Many Contemporary Jewellers use some form of lettering or writing in their work. Robert Ebendorf and Kiff Slemmons were interesting artists to discuss because of the very diverse ways in which they both use the idea of writing in their work; Ebendorf with his non narrative jewellery, using torn newspaper and Slemmons with her narrative jewellery in which she uses writing and parts of writing utensils.

I think that the historical aspect of writing is an interesting topic and relevant to the work of these contemporary jewellers since writing throughout history has been an important artform. In many eras it has been incorporated into jewellery.

In the western world there are more and more different types of letters that are used in every day life. There are also a wide range of writing tools and new ways of presenting the written word, like in neon and the electronic screen, are constantly being invented.

Nevertheless, in our society, there are still people who are unable to write or read and because their world is so full of words, life must often be very confusing for them. Writing represents knowlege, memory and history, but the same writing is not shared by all parts

of the world. Some countries still have no writing skills whereas ours are so advanced and we have so many ways of producing the written word. The invention of mechanical writing was a huge evolution from handwriting and perhaps the future will hold even more advanced ways of keeping records, and the written word may be replaced by tape recordings of the spoken word. As it is, writing is going farther and farther from the elegant art form that it once was as computer lettering takes over. I think that by incorporating writing into art and jewellery as Slemmons and Ebendorf have done the art of writing may be saved from extinction.

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