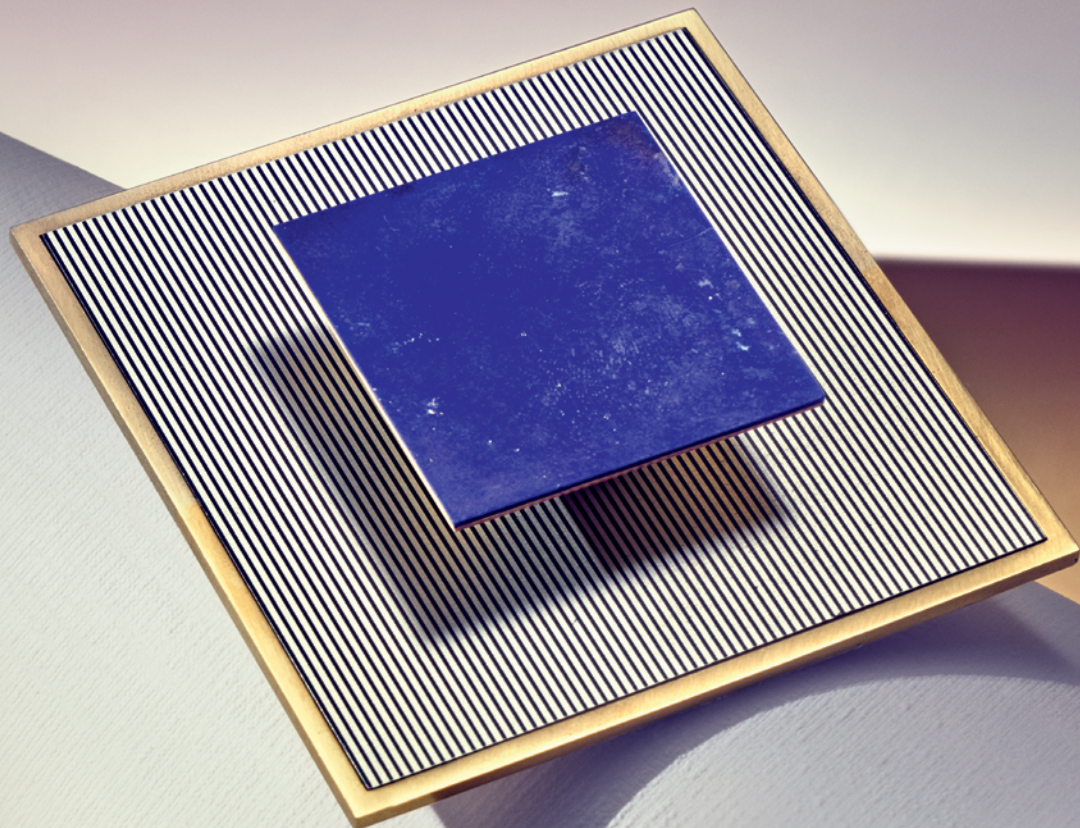


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The American sculptor Alexander Calder gave hostess gifts like no one else. When staying with friends, he would often sneak down to the kitchen in the early morning before presenting his hosts with a dramatic handwrought silver necklace fashioned from the contents of their cutlery drawer. Never without a piece of wire and a pair of pliers in his pocket, Calder had made jewelry since he was a small child, starting when he created pieces for his sister's dolls...

For the most part, Calder's work wasn't fashioned from precious metals and gemstones but from brass, silver, and discarded objects such as broken plates and bottles. Its value existed not in the materials but in the unique mark of the creator's hand in every hammered, manipulated curve. He was obsessed with tinkering with pieces of metal that come alive when worn on the body, just as his mobiles come alive when suspended from the ceiling. For this reason, he is "the king of artist jewelry," says the expert and dealer Louisa Guinness.

Fittingly, it was a Calder necklace that set London-based Guinness on her journey into the world of artist jewelry. Having begun her career in finance, she turned to the contemporary art world after meeting her art dealer husband, Ben Brown, and it was his mother's striking necklace that led Guinness to mount an exhibition in 2003 that included pieces by Calder, Niki de Saint Phalle, and Picasso. Since then, she has helped establish artist jewelry as a field in its own right, collecting pieces by twentieth-century masters and commissioning contemporary artists.

Artist jewelry had been little known and under-appreciated. Pieces are rare and often created as gifts for loved ones. Picasso, for instance, made an engraved stone amulet for his lover Dora Maar, while Giacometti created special buttons for the couture designs of his friend Elsa Schiaparelli. This is not jewelry made on a mass scale but, for the most part, a side project that offers an alternative, miniaturized mode of creative expression that doesn't require a coterie of assistants or even the foundry that might be required for a large-scale work. It is a tradition with a long history, however.

During the Renaissance, when classicism was reborn and all artistic expression was combined in a single, orderly, rational approach, great artists such as Botticelli and Brunelleschi served apprenticeships in goldsmiths' workshops. The intricate pieces they created were treasured for their artistic value rather than the value of the materials used in a break from traditional jewelry's preoccupation with showcasing precious gems and its role in signifying wealth and status. Similarly, in the twentieth century, the artist and goldsmith René Lalique pioneered art nouveau jewelry, opting for semi-precious stones, enamel, and glass over diamonds for his whimsical, lyrical designs.

While Calder created every piece of his jewelry with his own hands, many artists require professional assistance. Jewelry works took on new life with the modernist artists who had first emerged in the 1920s and '30s, thanks in large part to François Hugo, a trained goldsmith and the great-grandson of the French writer Victor Hugo.

It was in the south of France in the 1950s that Hugo persuaded his artist friends



Page 5: the design of Jesús Rafael Soto's 1968 *Square Brooch/Necklace*, in aluminum with silk-screen printed black-and-white stripes and a lapis lazuli central square, gives the impression of motion, an effect heightened as the wearer moves. Above: in 1949 Salvador Dalí designed an iconic *Ruby Lips* brooch. Opposite, clockwise from top left:

a 1973 pendant, *Le grand faune*, by Pablo Picasso and the goldsmith François Hugo; Man Ray's 1970 gold *Les amoureux* necklace, based on Lee Miller's lips, has a removable pendant that can be worn as a brooch; Pol Bury's 1974 *Tiges sur un carré* ring with sashaying rods mounted on a flat gold base; a c. 1940 swirling hammered brass brooch by Alexander Calder

to start creating miniaturized, wearable versions of their artworks. Picasso, who was already well versed in making jewelry, collaborated with Hugo to create large serving platters in gold and silver. Picasso would carve a design in wood, then Hugo would use the ancient technique of repoussé to hammer out a relief in precious metal. Later they

created miniature limited editions of the designs in gold medallions and pendants. *Le grand faune*, an instantly recognizable Picasso motif, is a particular favorite of Guinness's. "Part faun, part cloud, it recurs in Picasso's work often," she says.

A brooch by Jesús Rafael Soto is also immediately recognizable as the Venezuelan artist's work. He collaborated with the Milanese goldsmiths GEM Montebello to create a 1968 brooch/pendant that reflects his preoccupation with optical illusion and the manipulation of space and form. A square-cut piece of lapis lazuli appears to float over silk-screened lines on aluminum and gold. "It sits perfectly with the rest of his work," says Guinness. "The fact that it is a wearable jewel is irrelevant."

Montebello also created the few jewelry pieces designed by Man Ray. The surrealist artist's sense of humor and playfulness come through in *Les amoureux*, a 1970 necklace featuring an oversized pair of gold lips modeled on his famous 1932-34 canvas depicting the lips of Lee Miller, the fellow artist and his former lover. Fascinated by women and the female form, Ray always kept the wearer in mind when he designed jewelry. *Optic Topic*, his 1974 gold-plated sterling silver mask, also made by Montebello, is based on the aluminum masks worn by 1930s race car drivers. Ray's creation allowed the wearer to see out, while the viewer could not see in.

According to Guinness, sculptors often have an adeptness for designing wearable pieces. "They understand three dimensions and consequently tend to find it easier to make jewelry," she says. The Belgian sculptor Pol Bury had a career-long preoccupation with kinetics. Where, in his large-scale work, movement is created through magnets, in his jewelry, it is created by the wearers themselves. Guinness says the gold fronds atop her own Bury ring move like shafts of hair and "rattle like a wheat sheaf in the wind."

Traditional jewelers typically start with a desire to enhance the wearer's or gemstone's beauty. Since artists approach jewelry from a conceptual perspective and are free of a goldsmith's commercial or technical constraints, they bring a fresh perspective. "They make things that are more challenging to wear and interesting to see," says Guinness, who prizes her shoulder-to-shoulder-spanning brass necklace by Calder – the very definition of wearable sculpture. The king of artist jewelry would be proud. ✦

