

THE EXHIBITIONIST



PRETTY AS A PICTURE

Louisa Guinness, photographed on April 20, 2010, at Ben Brown Fine Arts, London, wearing a necklace by Max Ernst and a ring and earrings by Anish Kapoor.

It's very good value compared to contemporary art," says Louisa Guinness with a smile, "but at prices comparable to Bond Street." Guinness is referring to her very particular and enticing niche in the world of art: jewellery created by artists. She obligingly tries on a witty, minimalist Michael Craig Martin Lightbulb necklace made of a flat ribbon of gold that loops around the neck with the bulb's screw cap resting on the sternum. "I think this works really well and looks great with a black polo-neck underneath," she remarks.

Having established herself over the past six years as one of the leading dealers in "artist jewellery", Guinness has a permanent display area at her husband's gallery in London. And so it is that at Ben Brown Fine Arts in Cork Street, alongside an Alighiero Boetti canvas of an embroidered alphabet in primary colours, sit pieces of jewellery created by leading artists like Marc Quinn, Anish Kapoor and Antony Gormley.

"It was when I started collecting jewellery from artists such as Alexander Calder, Picasso and Niki de Saint Phalle that I

realised that there were no new pieces being made. So that's why I started approaching contemporary artists and asking them to make pieces for me," explains Guinness. "I don't like to inhibit the artistic process, but there is a practical side to jewellery. For example, cufflinks have to work, and so I steered Anish Kapoor in the right direction. He knew what he wanted, but I did the practical side. When Tim Noble and Sue Webster came up with their Fucking Beautiful necklace, it was spiky and uncomfortable to wear, so we toned it down by softening the sharp points."

The pieces are as much sculptures as jewels begging to be worn. Take Marc Quinn's luscious Strawberry pendants or delicate Orchid rings. They would look equally at home sitting in a glass display case as on the body.

"This is a very, very new world, and people are starting to take an interest," reports Guinness. Proof of which is an upcoming exhibition of artist jewellery at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York in 2011, to which Guinness intends to lend items from her growing collection. "But the best thing about artist jewellery," says Guinness, "is that you don't have to leave it on the wall." —MARIA COLLIER

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD ANSETT