

# how to spend it

## Artist-designed jewellery

A new generation of gallerists and jewellers are working with artists to create wearable sculpture. Claire Wrathall reports. Illustrations by Kathy Wyatt



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In October 1942, legendary art collector Peggy Guggenheim attended the opening of her New York gallery Art of This Century wearing one earring made for her by the American abstract sculptor Alexander Calder (currently the subject of a major exhibition at Tate Modern), and another by the French surrealist painter Yves Tanguy. It was a gesture, explains her biographer Anton Gill, intended “to express her equal commitment to the schools of art she supported”. A diplomatic one too, given that Calder was her friend, Tanguy her sometime lover. Judging by the number of photographs they appear in, those earrings were adornments she wore a lot.

“Such jewels were made as very intimate expressions of an artist’s art, often as personal gifts,” says Martine Haspeslagh, who with her husband, Didier Haspeslagh, has a gallery in Kensington, Didier Ltd, specialising in what they call “jewellery by leading postwar painters and

sculptors”, figures such as Calder, Georges Braque, André Derain, Salvador Dalí (Telephone earrings, £150,000, pictured), Pablo Picasso and Man Ray (La Jolie pendant, £150,000, pictured). “They were regarded by their creators as valid expressions of their art, miniature sculptures that were designed to be worn – ones that according to Calder turned the wearer into a ‘living work of art’.”

By the time of his death in 1976, Calder had made somewhere between 2,000 and 2,500 items of jewellery, says Didier Haspeslagh. “Initially he made them to sell, and even had an exhibition of them at his gallery just before the second world war, but it wasn’t a success.” After that he made jewellery only for friends. “There are stories of him turning up for supper with cufflinks for the host, or making jewels for people while they were talking. He always carried his pliers in his pocket.”

In contrast, the very limited line of bracelets (60cm version pictured, £44,500; 20cm, £22,900) launched last year by Ai Weiwei will be wrought with his own bare hands from a single length of what looks like a rebar, as the concrete-reinforcing bars integral to construction projects are known, though in this instance it’s been cast not from steel but 24ct gold, a metal soft enough to be manipulated fairly easily.

To anyone who saw his recent show at London’s Royal Academy of Arts, these undeniably striking pieces will immediately recall his massive installation *Straight*, the 90-tonne arrangement of once-contorted rebars gathered from buildings destroyed in the Sichuan earthquake of 2008 and then straightened, alongside which were displayed the names and dates of birth of the more than 5,000 children who died. So is there not something in poor taste about fashioning jewellery that evokes a work of art that’s essentially also a memorial, I ask Elisabetta Cipriani, the gallery owner who invited Ai Weiwei to create a wearable-art project. “Not at all,” she counters. “It’s a wonderful project because *Straight* is one of the most important pieces he ever created. These pieces are not just a memorial to the children who died. They signify the importance and the preciousness of life. The fact that these bracelets are pure gold will remind you of that,” she says, adding not quite seriously: “And not only because you will have paid so much for it!”

Cipriani is one of a new generation of gallerists working with artists to develop ranges of what she calls “wearable sculpture”: works of sufficient interest to hold their own as objects of veneration to be looked at and thought about, but which can also be worn. That said, not everything she commissions is as likely to court controversy as the Ai Weiwei pieces, but they are, without exception, replete with narrative and meaning: works of art, not mere adornments.

Take the Japanese sculptor Tatsuo Miyajima’s Time Rings: an edition of 10 small apparently spherical objects in different shades of 18ct gold, each inset with an LED screen on which a single digit counts down relentlessly from nine to one, or up from one to nine, at variable (and customisable) speeds to suggest, says the artist, “the perpetual continuity of time and life”. (There is no zero, says Miyajima, because that would signify death). Seeing them clustered together in a gallery, one might be forgiven for assuming they constitute a small installation, but they’re striking and surprisingly comfortable slipped onto a finger.

It was as a co-curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome (aka Macro) that Cipriani first had the idea of asking the artists she worked with on exhibitions to make small editions of miniature works of art. Miyajima, for instance, had a major one-man show during her time there, as did the South African conceptualist Kendell Geers. This led to a commission for a work by Geers named *Stella Maris (Mater Facit)* that may look like a string of irregular silver beads plated in rose gold, but has a deeper meaning in that each one has been cast from a pair of female nipples – the two hemispheres, so to speak, fused to form a single bead.

Since then Cipriani has worked with dozens of top-flight artists, among them Giuseppe Penone (Foglia necklace, price on request, pictured) and Jannis Kounellis, both celebrated exponents of Arte Povera; Ilya Kabakov (The Fly earrings, £15,500, pictured, designed for his artist wife, Emilia); Rebecca Horn (Shell ring, £15,500, pictured); Giorgio Vigna (a striking ring, £6,000, incorporating a subtle sound element Cipriani wears herself); and perhaps most impressively, the venerable Enrico Castellani, among the most important of Italy's living artists, whose distinctive three-dimensional works on canvas incorporating geometric patterns made by stretching, striking or indenting the fabric with a chisel or hammer, are recalled in the edition of bangles and a pendant (cast in matte-satinised white, red and yellow gold) he was persuaded to make for her. At £22,000 to £35,000, they are a steal compared with the £1.85m that a collector paid for *Superficie Bianca N 34*, a work in acrylic on shaped canvas, at Christie's in June 2013.

Not all artist-designed jewellery commands such prices, however. Emily Bradbury, co-founder of jewellery label True Rocks, launched the artist Rachel Howard's wire coat-hanger pendant, *Humble Hanger*, to coincide with Frieze Art Fair last autumn. Cast in 18ct gold, the 5cm version on a 20in trace chain costs £1,250. (There are 3cm gold-plated versions, as well as silver editions from £275 too). It is intended, she says, "as a celebration of the overlooked and the commonplace... honouring the workaday, elevating it into something more grand. The simplicity of the wire hanger is beautiful: a few bends and a couple of twists."

This was not Bradbury's first venture into artist-related adornment. A year earlier she collaborated with YBA Gavin Turk on a pendant called *Bitten* (£395), reminiscent of a marathon medal until you realise that it's actually a Rich Tea biscuit with a bite taken out, cast in silver and plated in gold. In 2006 she'd bought a work by Turk called *Bitten* – a biscuit that had been both signed and bitten by the artist. ("The bite disrupts the circularity of the biscuit, almost a loss of innocence, like the bite of the apple," he said at the time). "But then after nearly 10 years of living with it," she says, "I suddenly had a lightbulb moment when it dawned on me that it would make a stunning piece of jewellery."

Turk is one of several artists of the YBA generation to be making jewellery. This year Tracey Emin launched a collection (pieces from £400) with rock 'n' roll jeweller Stephen Webster, featuring words in Emin's familiar handwritten mofif and charms adapted from her animal sketches. Last year Damien Hirst launched a range of Pill necklaces and bracelets (available from his shop Other Criteria, from £2,250 to £25,000), on which casts of tablets, caplets and capsules in precious metals are hung from chains like charms (bracelet, £25,000, pictured). And Dinos Chapman, Tim Noble and Sue Webster, Marc Quinn and indeed Turk have all made pieces for Louisa Guinness, perhaps the best-known commissioner of "wearable art", as she calls it, who also numbers such stellar names as Anish Kapoor, Jeff Koons, Cornelia Parker, Grayson Perry, Conrad Shawcross and Yinka Shonibare among the artists with whom she works.

At last year's Pavilion of Art and Design (PAD) fair, one collector bought six pieces from a series by Nic Fiddian-Green, a sculptor best known for his monumental horse heads, notably the 10m-high one that stands at London's Marble Arch, while Fiddian-Green has tended to work in bronze, his jewellery (priced between £1,800 and £4,800), though still equine in its subject matter (Horse Head Cup necklace, £1,500, pictured), uses carved lapis lazuli, jade, amber, opal and soapstone. As Guinness herself puts it, "Nic captures more than his subject's form; he manages to capture its sense of being."

If evidence were needed that the market for such pieces is a growing one, hers was one of several stands at PAD selling work of this kind. Also displaying wearable works by four artists – Kayo Saito, Giovanni Corvaja, Fumiki Taguchi and British-born Royal College of Art-trained Jacqueline Ryan – was the dealer and art adviser Adrian Sassoon, better known as an authority on Sèvres porcelain and contemporary studio ceramics.

“I’ve been fascinated by the natural world since my early childhood,” says Ryan, whose exquisite essays in finely wrought gold (ring with moveable cones, £4,600, pictured) are informed by her interest in nature, specifically “the infinite combinations of form, structure, texture and colour that it has created”. Rather than mimic specific living things, however, her jewellery, which she bases on sketches made from life “in zoos, museums, aquariums, botanical gardens” aims to abstract it, to “translate the elements that most inspire me into tiny, sculpture-like models”, which she makes first in paper and then in precious metals.

What made her choose jewellery over sculpture as a calling? The short answer is that, as with Giorgio Vigna’s pieces for Elisabetta Cipriani, Ryan likes to incorporate kinetic and subtle sound elements into her creations, so that they are animated when someone puts them on. “Much of my work is made up of moveable elements that shake and vibrate as the body moves,” she explains. “They’re meant to be worn as well as exhibited because, while, of course, I want it to be visually stimulating and aesthetically exciting, I also want people to be able to touch it. It’s the tactile qualities of wearable sculpture that make it so appealing as an art form. Ultimately it’s the interaction of the wearer with the work that brings the piece to life and completes its function as art.”

**Adrian Sassoon**, by appt only, 14 Rutland Gate, London SW7 (020-7581 9888; [www.adriansassoon.com](http://www.adriansassoon.com)). **Ai Weiwei**, [www.aiweiwei.com](http://www.aiweiwei.com) and see Elisabetta Cipriani. **Damien Hirst**, [www.damienhirst.com](http://www.damienhirst.com) and see Other Criteria. **Didier Ltd**, 66B Kensington Church St, London W8 (020-7221 1573; [www.didierltd.com](http://www.didierltd.com)). **Elisabetta Cipriani**, 23 Heddon St, London W1 (020-7287 5675; [www.elisabettacipriani.com](http://www.elisabettacipriani.com)). **Enrico Castellani**, [www.enrico-castellani.com](http://www.enrico-castellani.com) and see Elisabetta Cipriani. **Gavin Turk**, [www.gavinturk.com](http://www.gavinturk.com) and see True Rocks. **Giorgio Vigna**, [www.giorgiovigna.com](http://www.giorgiovigna.com) and see Elisabetta Cipriani. **Giuseppe Penone**, see Elisabetta Cipriani. **Harrods**, 87-135 Brompton Road, London SW1 (020-7730 1234; [www.harrods.com](http://www.harrods.com)). **Ilya Kabakov**, [www.ilya-emilia-kabakov.com](http://www.ilya-emilia-kabakov.com) and see Elisabetta Cipriani. **Jacqueline Ryan**, [www.jacqueline-ryan.com](http://www.jacqueline-ryan.com) and see Adrian Sassoon. **Jannis Kounellis**, see Elisabetta Cipriani. **Kendell Geers**, [www.kendellgeers.com](http://www.kendellgeers.com) and see Elisabetta Cipriani. **Louisa Guinness Gallery**, 45 Conduit St, London W1 (020-7494 4664; [www.louisaguinnessgallery.com](http://www.louisaguinnessgallery.com)). **Net-a-Porter**, 0800-044 5700; [www.net-a-porter.com](http://www.net-a-porter.com). **Nic Fiddian-Green**, [www.nicfiddiangreen.com](http://www.nicfiddiangreen.com) and see Louisa Guinness Gallery. **Other Criteria**, 9 Newport St, London SE11 (020-7935 5550; [www.othercriteria.com](http://www.othercriteria.com)). **Rachel Howard**, [www.rachelhoward.co.uk](http://www.rachelhoward.co.uk) and see True Rocks. **Rebecca Horn**, [www.rebecca-horn.de](http://www.rebecca-horn.de) and see Elisabetta Cipriani. **Stephen Webster**, 24 Albemarle Street, London W1 (020-3298 0970; [www.stephenwebster.com](http://www.stephenwebster.com)) and see Harrods and Net-a-Porter. **Tatsuo Miyajima**, [www.tatsuomiyajima.com](http://www.tatsuomiyajima.com) and see Elisabetta Cipriani. **True Rocks**, [www.truerocks.com](http://www.truerocks.com).

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