



Watches & Jewellery Jewellery Added

The art of adornment: jewellery that gave women a voice

From a spider brooch to a brass and fur bracelet, a show in Cologne celebrates historic pieces of female self-expression

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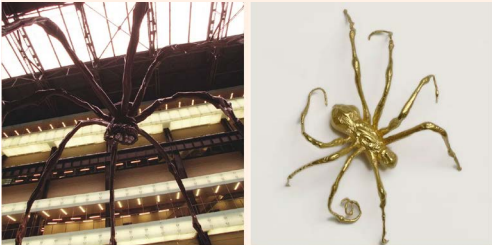
There is much to consider about the intersections between artist and jeweller and jewellery and female self-expression at an upcoming exhibition at the Museum of Applied Arts Cologne (MAKK). *From Louise Bourgeois to Yoko Ono. Jewellery by Female Artists* is a wide-ranging celebration of the jewellery produced by some of the most significant visual artists of the 20th and 21st centuries.

The catalogue that accompanies the show has two striking images that set the scene and invite the discussion that this significant exhibition should inspire. The first is an intimate photograph taken in 1957 of Pablo Picasso adjusting a necklace of ceramic faces around the neck of a woman, Jacqueline Roque, who in four years' time would become his second wife.

The great artist was in his mid-seventies, his muse in her early thirties. And whatever the realities of their relationship, the image projects a strong message of female passivity and a type of male proprietorship that the bestowing of jewels has historically included — “reinforcing these asymmetries of power”, as Louisa Guinness, a gallerist who specialises in artists' jewellery, notes in her introduction to the exhibition catalogue.

The second image is of Louise Bourgeois with her father, Louis, at Leon & Eddie's nightclub in New York in 1948. Around her neck is her silver shackle necklace. It is a shocking creation, not softened by the smile with which Bourgeois addresses the camera.

The exhibition includes a 1999 edition of this silver shackle neckpiece, made in collaboration with Spanish jeweller Chus Burés, that recreated the original design. But it was her mother who inspired Bourgeois' “most successful subject”, as she described her spider sculptures. The monumental nine metre-high steel spider, “Maman”, that opened the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern in London in 2000 is here reimaged in the form of a gold brooch, also made by Burés.



The exhibition also includes jewellery by Sonia Delaunay, the French artist who was a key figure in the Parisian avant-garde of the early 20th century. With her husband Robert she founded orphism, an art movement that was all about using colour and shapes as a universal language to convey feelings and momentum. This easily translated into vibrant dynamic jewellery. The exhibition includes two examples, both pendant-brooches, that use vividly coloured enamels.

Moving to the present day, a woman who matches Delaunay's colour and vibrancy but communicates a very different aesthetic and set of ideas is multidisciplinary artist Helen Britton. She was recently recognised in her birthplace of Australia as one of 10 artists selected by the Australian Design Centre in its *Living Treasures: Masters of Australian Craft* exhibition series, although she has been based in Munich for the past 20 or so years.

The MAKK show includes a bangle and two of her neckpieces, which are made using an eclectic range of materials such as silver, silk, vintage glass, wood, brass, plastic, enamel and pearls. The effect is of an explosion of energy, colour, and ideas, but with the visual language of folk art — full of light and life.



The exhibition features neckpieces by Australian artist Helen Britton

...and M  ret Oppenheim's bracelet made from brass and fur

Then there are the surrealists for whom jewellery played an important part of their creative output. The jewellery of Salvador Dal  , for instance, such as his ruby lips brooch — pav   gemstones with pearl teeth — have been endlessly copied. This show has equally iconic pieces by M  ret Oppenheim. She was born in Berlin and moved to Paris in 1932, where she joined the male-dominated surrealist movement. Her bracelet made from brass and fur is a highlight of the exhibition.

According to Lena Hoppe, one of the exhibition's curators, Oppenheim was inspired by the ideas of Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud. “From 1934 onwards, Oppenheim developed designs for surrealist jewellery and fashion accessories,” she says. “In 1936, fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli commissioned fur-covered rings and bangles, which were included in her winter collection. Other jewellery designs by the artist were only realised posthumously in limited editions.”

Also imbued with the spirit of surrealism is the whimsical ammonite seashell and ceramic brooch (c 2000) by Parisian artist Aube Ell  ou  t, the daughter of writer Andr   Breton, one of the founders of the movement.



Yoko Ono's 2004 'Imagine Peace' ring in the shape of a vinyl record

Polish-German artist Alicja Kwade's gold pendant is made from the cast of an eight-month-old baby's nose

Today, in Paris, the MiniMasterpiece gallery, founded by Esther de Beauc  , is one of a handful in Europe and the US to collaborate with artists to create art jewellery. She has contributed 12 pieces by nine women to the MAKK show. “What I really like about this exhibition is that alongside the big names there are also the less famous female artists,” she says. “It is very interesting to put them all in perspective and in dialogue because . . . to the more contemporary young female artists, Louise Bourgeois and M  ret Oppenheim are like origin figures and they are very moved to be in the same show.”

Probably the best-known name in the show is Yoko Ono, famous as a conceptual artist in her own right but even more so as the wife and later widow of John Lennon. Her “Imagine Peace” ring in yellow and white gold was created in 2004. It is designed in the shape of a vinyl single record as “an invitation to peace”.

Ono would almost certainly appreciate a piece from another acclaimed conceptual artist — a gold pendant made from the cast of an eight-month-old baby's nose, by Polish-German artist Alicja Kwade. It has been used to raise funds for an orphanage project in Benin.

'From Louise Bourgeois to Yoko Ono' runs from November 21 2025 to April 26 2026