

Text by Lucia Pesapane, art historian, on the *Extravaganza* jewel-sculpture project by Joana Vasconcelos for MiniMasterpiece

The *Stravaganza* is a series of 12 baroque concertos composed in 1712-1713 by Antonio Vivaldi. This *extra-vagant*, *extra-ordinary* music reveals the technical mastery and experimental virtuosity of the Venetian composer, who was able to astonish the public of his time with new sounds. In a similar way to the unusual melodic intervals imagined by Vivaldi, the *Extravaganza* necklace by Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos is the result of deliberate and calculated excess, resulting in wonderfully shimmering splendour, combining precious modern decoration and craftsmanship that is both ancient and erudite.

*Extravagant* is what "deviates, goes beyond the limits, the commonplace, the usual or normal". By creating her first necklace-sculpture, Joana Vasconcelos goes off the beaten track from a technical and formal point of view to surprise us with a magmatic work of decorative exuberance. *Extravaganza* is a baroque jewel that conveys the idea of ascension through the movement, growth and circular dance of the silver spheres around the neck and on the chest of the person who wears it.

The term "baroque" comes from the Portuguese word *barroco*, which originally referred to the irregular shape of a particular kind of pearl and, more generally, an exuberant artistic production characterised by the use of flowing forms, curved lines and spirals, and by open and moving compositions.

The spheres that make up *Extravaganza* are like champagne bubbles, or soap bubbles that inflate, transform and float away, always different from each other. They are at once the instability of equilibrium, cells that come into being and grow, and the sunny, sparkling side of life. In short, they are life.

This object compositional complexity found a synthesis and final perfection thanks to patient and progressive adjustments carried out by hand. The uniqueness of this necklace is even more impressive when you consider the many interventions required – including modelling, casting and assembling the 285 spheres, as well as soldering and polishing. The work on the solid silver microspheres, some of which are only three millimetres in diameter, recalls the ancient and mysterious Etruscan technique of granulation, which consisted of applying tiny gold spheres (granules) of no more than one millimetre in diameter to the inside of particular decorations in the jewellery.

Having trained as a goldsmith, Joana Vasconcelos is perfectly at ease with working on extremely small pieces, even if she is best known for her monumental sculptures. For her, there is no difference between working on a large or small scale, as all her works start from a preparatory drawing and she brings to each of them the same level of concentration and attention. In her work, the relationship to the human body is a constant that we can perceive whether in passing under and through her large installations, or else wearing her *Extravaganza* jewel around the neck. Her works give rise to a physical experience, involving the body while expanding into the external and surrounding space, as is the case with the seven large spheres of her necklace, playing on the idea of baroque movement and change. The person who wears the necklace is thus turned into someone *extravagant* and unique. The

roundness of the spheres recalls the curves of the female body and the shape of the baroque pearls which have fascinated and inspired the artist.

In this jewel, the simplicity of the sphere and the sophistication of the composition, the monochrome aspect of the metal and the colours of the lacquers, the preciousness of the silver and the modernity of the rubber, the private dimension of an exceptional jewel and the public dimension of its being shown all coexist in perfect harmony.

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