



This year began with a whimper. The global economic crisis is spreading, and affecting an ever-widening circle of people. In the absence of reports that prosperity lies around the corner, it can be expected that diamond, emerald and ruby jewelry will end up off the list of most popular gifts. All the same, it's too early to eulogize jewelry.

One of the latest trends is artistic, unique, limited-edition jewelry designed by some of the most recognized artists and architects of the 20th and 21st centuries. Straddling the fine line between art and jewelry, these pieces are typically sold at a fairly reasonable price, while enjoying the benefit of having artistic value, which also makes them attractive as investments. Their value derives from having been created by artists who have won recognition and respect in artistic endeavors other than jewelry making, and they are sought by passionate collectors of jewelry.

Artistic jewelry appeals to collectors as well as curators. Modern art museums such as the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London have discovered the potential of such jewelry, constantly adding pieces by such artists as Alexander Calder, Jasper Jones and Louise Nevelson to their art collections. And private collectors with unconventional, progressive tastes or those who find jewelry to be an added niche that enriches their art collections are following suit.

### A bohemian imprimatur

Jewelry has by and large not won well-known artists the same praise as paintings, sculpture or architecture. Of course, there are exceptions - such as American-born sculptor Alexander Calder, who is perhaps best known for his kinetic mobiles and three-dimensional artwork which changed the face of 20th-century sculpture. Calder's jewelry was the subject of an exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York that closed earlier this month. For admirers of Calder, whose sculptures sell for millions of dollars, his jewelry is a more accessible way of owning

# Wearable Artwork

What does the actress Jeanne Moreau have in common with museums of modern art and art collectors from all over the world? They own jewelry designed by well-known artists who are known more for their fine art than for their jewelry. Demand for this type of jewelry by museums and private collectors is on the rise / Dr. Daniella Ohad





ONE OF THE LATEST TRENDS IS JEWELRY AS WEARABLE ARTWORK - STYLIZED, UNUSUAL JEWELRY DESIGNED BY WELL-KNOWN ARTISTS



something created by the legendary artist.

Over the course of his lifetime, Calder, who lived from 1898 to 1976, created hundreds of pairs of earrings, brooches, tiaras and bracelets out of brass, steel, silver and gold. He began making them as personal gifts for his wife, then for female relatives and friends like art collector and gallery owner Peggy Guggenheim, actress Jeanne Moreau and artist Georgia O'Keeffe - women who were admired for their sense of style and were often photographed wearing Calder's iconic jewelry, giving the jewelry a bohemian imprimatur.

The sculpted jewelry was made from pieces of metal cut and folded into occasionally playful coiled or circular shapes. Like his colorful mobiles, which are part of art collections around the world, Calder's jewelry shares an esthetic that gives free rein to the movement, light and agility that became the defining characteristics of his work. The jewelry, which is designed with a degree of humor and surrealism, reminds us that, like many artists of his time, Calder was so captivated by ancient civilization that his jewelry evokes the ethos of the Bronze Age more than the style of contemporary Western jewelry.

### Not always impeccably made

The great Italian designer Ettore Sottsass, one of the pioneers of post-modern and pop-art design who was active in Milan and died in 2007 at the age of 90, saw jewelry as one of several means of expression - and expressed himself in his own avant-garde visual language. A necklace he designed made of huge brass and plastic links,

identical to the one on show at the Centre Pompidou, was recently exhibited at the Friedman Benda gallery in New York.

That exhibit - which bears the sensational name "zerocarart," in an apparent reference to the global economy - focused on unusual jewelry created by artists, architects and designers better known for their furniture than their jewelry. Zerocarart brought to light little-known works of jewelry by world-famous artists including Ron Arad, Louise Bourgeois, Lucio Fontana, Louise Nevelson, Michele Oka Doner, Kenny Scharf and Ettore Sottsass. "Each piece is an intimate object that demonstrates a genuine sensibility for the art of jewelry and the artist's desire for the work to be worn," said the curator, Sara Benda. Indeed, the fact that these artists are even involved in jewelry-making is itself surprising to those not familiar with the discipline of jewelry design.

I particularly liked the silver necklace by French sculptor Louise Bourgeois, whose huge spider sculptures can be seen at London's Tate Modern and the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. The necklace represents the artist's love for minimalism and reflects clean aesthetics and distilled beauty. Unlike Bourgeois, who isn't known for her jewelry but began making it in the 1940s, New York furniture designer Forrest Myers made silver and gold bracelets in his signature style just for the Friedman Benda exhibit. They were sold in the exhibit's first week for about \$5,000. Myers, who is in his 60s, is known for linking sculpture and design, and has won praise for sculpted furniture in which he intertwines a multitude of colorful strips of coiled metal. The bracelets he made for the exhibit are made of coiled metal that look like miniatures of his chairs.





FOR ADMIRERS OF CALDER, WHOSE SCULPTURES SELL FOR MILLIONS OF DOLLARS, HIS JEWELRY IS A MORE ACCESSIBLE WAY OF OWNING SOMETHING CREATED BY THE LEGENDARY

The writer is a researcher and lecturer in the history of design, and a consultant for private collections

The most surprising pieces of the intimate exhibit, which was itself a kind of jewel on the artistic landscape, is a series of 20 pieces of jewelry made by the artist Louise Nevelson (1899-1988), whose work has undergone a revival since her retrospective at the Jewish Museum in New York two years ago. Nevelson made black or white sculptures and artwork from objects she found, and the jewelry she made for her friends in the 1970s and '80s is just as intuitive and original as her monumental sculptures.

### Part of important collections

Harry Bertoia (1915-1978), the American sculptor of Italian descent known for his amazing metal sculptures and his unusual vision that combines shape, light and sound in a unique abstract signature language, also made jewelry that finds its way to the international art market every once in a while. Bertoia made minimalist jewelry in which the metal plays the most important role. Brass, steel and copper, in an unusual range of patinas, have become Bertoia's chief media. He not only taught jewelry-making but also designed the wedding rings of his fellow students at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, legendary designers Charles and Ray Eames.

Another artist who designed jewelry was a contemporary of Bertoia's, American pop art pioneer Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1977). Lichtenstein's jewelry items

are a sort of miniature of his monumental artwork, and some are part of important museum collections around the world, having long ago become symbols of the pop era of the 1960s and '70s. A brooch designed by Lichtenstein in 1968 was recently sold at Rago Arts and Auction Center in New Jersey for \$3,900, a modest price for what sounds like a small-scale version of his iconic artwork, whose subject matter was taken from the media of the consumer age. The brooch is made of enamel, and the layers of paint are partly covered by white strips with polka dots, meant to represent the distortion in enlarged newspaper photos, just like in his artwork.

Such jewelry, now decorating the bodies of some of the world's most elegant women, reflects an interesting thought process from a visual perspective and represents the esthetics and philosophy of its creators. These items are not made by professional smiths or even artists specializing in jewelry design, and so are not always impeccably made. They represent a fascinating niche, classified as artwork and sold in the most important design galleries in the world or at public auctions showcasing 20th century and contemporary design. The beauty and excitement generated by these pieces of art, which are not always designed in the accepted manner, are an outcome of the intellectual process underway in the plastic arts, of which jewelry is the latest reflection.

Courtesy of Shamenet 64