Sculpture to wear (metaphorically); Sculpture to wear as jewelry; Sculpture that wears jewelry

Juan Caballero-Perez

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

SCULPTURE TO WEAR (METAPHORICALLY)
SCULPTURE TO WEAR AS JEWELRY
SCULPTURE THAT WEARS JEWELRY

by

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14 August 2001
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations 1
Introduction 1
Section I 3
Wearability 4
The Metaphor 9
The Work 10
Conclusion 14
Bibliography 15
Illustrations 16
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plate</th>
<th>Illustration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plate 1</td>
<td>Antithesis (bracelet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 2</td>
<td>Bracelet (Metaphor I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 3</td>
<td>Levitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 4</td>
<td>Bracelet (Metaphor II)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 5</td>
<td>Pendant (Metaphor I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 6</td>
<td>Ring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 7</td>
<td>Spear I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 8</td>
<td>Spear II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 9</td>
<td>Spear III</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Thesis Statement

SCULPTURE TO WEAR (METAPHORICALLY)
SCULPTURE TO WEAR AS JEWELRY
SCULPTURE THAT WEARS JEWELRY

Sculpture and Jewelry

It is my goal to combine these two distinct disciplines that reflect a common interest. The work will combine a variety of traditional and non-traditional materials, creating sculpture and jewelry.

In this work, I will reflect some of the styles of primal ceremonial or ritualistic sculpture and body ornamentation from ancient cultures, or least a sense of reference to them, and give them a contemporary context. This work will reflect time past and present.
As I began creating this body of work, utilizing a minimalist approach and giving reference to the past was important to me. I was interested in using steel, which has a natural appeal for me. I began by fabricating hollow forms and quickly moved to the fabrication of minimalist sculptures. The use of steel, an industrial material, was a significant factor in this minimal work, as well as the use of simple geometric and pure forms. Together with steel, I chose copper, partly because of its regularity of use in ancient times. The incompatibility of steel and copper was a deliberate factor in my choice. I wanted to find a way to weld steel and copper together.

Another important component of the work for me was the use of color. I utilized chemical patinas: copper nitrate, ferric nitrate and ferric chloride among others. The reds and rust colors produced through the oxidation of the work as well as some of the dark patinas create earth tones, which in addition to the volume and shape of the work, relate to the ancient monoliths and ritualistic works of the past.

Duality, contrast and the mix of traditional with non-traditional are underlying themes throughout my thesis work, combined with an on-going reference to the past.
SECTION I

My work is an attempt to investigate elements that continue to advocate common interest between sculpture and art jewelry. This body of work is a creation of sculptures and jewelry that reflect primal, ceremonial and ritualistic elements in a contemporary context. At the same time, I hope to establish jewelry as an independent art form having equal status among other art disciplines.

While the acceptance of jewelry as an art form has increased in the last years, conventions and barriers still need to be broken. The acceptance of jewelry as an art form is an on-going struggle with the jewelry industry and its standardization of commercial jewelry. The passion and relationship of the artist working in this format (art jewelry) demands our attention. Art jewelry should be given consideration and legitimized as an artistic expression. The jewelry industry has contributed to the separation of jewelry from the cultural and artistic association through mass production.

Art jewelry has many qualities. One of the most prominent is its involvement with the issues in art such as vision, intellect and concept. In fact, it is more about art than jewelry. Traditionally, artists working in fine art mediums are reluctant to perceive art jewelry as an art form and grant it the same status. The liberation of sculpture and painting that took place since the Renaissance is just starting to take place in jewelry, ceramics and glass, traditionally viewed as “craft” not art.1

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1 Susan Grant Lewis, One of A Kind American Art Jewelry Today. (New York: Harry N. Abrams 1994), 12
WEARABILITY

There are still many artists who perceive art jewelry, regardless of how it has been conceived, as merely crafts (the making of functional articles). Much of modern art has put a shield in the idea of function, utility and aesthetic freedom, giving in to the idea that in order for jewelry to be in the realm of art it must give up function. One particular issue unique to art jewelry is wearability. Assumed by most of the people that jewelry is to be worn, the abandonment of the immediate acceptance of jewelry that cannot be worn or worn with great difficulty is final. Never the less contemporary jewelry and its conceptual nature demands unrestricted and free expression of such corporal concerns as: is it too big? Is it too heavy? Is it comfortable, etc? The artists themselves may not be concerned with specific function as to whether the jewelry can be worn at all.

We may ask ourselves, if it can’t be worn, it is really jewelry? The element of wearability is closely related to that of scale. This in particular has created for artists who work in this medium one of the most appealing aspects of this art form. In spite of this particular characteristic and defining factor, many artists have profoundly embodied large concepts in small-scale pieces, making small things with large meaning. The artist creating jewelry may expand over the small artwork to such a degree that the center of his or her world temporarily shrinks to a small physical space, but the imaginative and metaphorical space may be vast.²

² Helen W. Drutt English and Peter Dormer, jewelry of our time, art, ornament and obsession. (New York: Rizzoli 1995), 14.
The precision and detail of the small piece is an attractive element that cannot be found in a large-scale carved or welded sculpture. Even greater is the advantage that jewelry has over other art forms in its direct celebration, relation and continued engaging intimacy with the human body.

This body of work motivates and brings feeling for the spectator’s sensibility and participation. I also want to evoke and excite the imagination of the spectator through the use of a wide range of symbols. The sculptures are simple in design, mysterious in their possibilities, and evocative with symbolic references to concepts of place, space and time. The relationship between the whole and its parts associated with a visual balance between symmetry and asymmetry in their nature is continually represented in the work. These jewelry pieces and sculptures possess metaphorical characteristics, including their very present sense of time, the qualities of the mystical, ancient and religious and the symbol of status or mark of distinction. “Besides expressing themselves through oil paints, marble (or welded sculpture,) artists are capable of including personal symbolism in wearable works of art. The people who wear the jewels are in fact making a commitment to the artist’s views on art.”

This sculpture to wear and sculpture to wear (metaphorically) can draw attention to itself in all sorts of ways: by its shape, colors and size, relation to body parts on which it is being worn, and by the space in which it is being featured. The work that I present can only acquire a symbolic meaning through the special and spatial context in which it appears.

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The symbolic value of painting, sculpture, glass, jewelry, ceramics, etc. is part of the historical heritage of our culture. Early developments in contemporary art continue to model both contemporary art jewelry and sculpture. One in particular, assemblage, has radically changed three-dimensional art, defining fabrication as the prime sculptural method. This reflects a great impact on my work, as well as minimal sculpture, environmental sculpture, and public sculpture. These, among other disciplines of art, have deeply affected my work and I believe the works of my contemporaries as well. Assemblage and fabrication are common elements in my thesis work. Mass, shape and volume, in conjunction with the spectator’s sensibility, unique feeling and participation, are important as well in this work.

My thesis work includes 9 pieces. All these works are sculptures, either sculpture to wear metaphorically that adorns the space and the body, sculpture to wear as jewelry or sculpture that wears jewelry. The jewelry pieces are art jewelry that use the body as a stage or primary arena for presentation. The sculptures that I created are inclusive of an influential element of jewelry. Jewelry has tried to gain elements of sculpture as part of its aesthetic, and through these sculptures, I have attempted to do the opposite – bring elements of jewelry to the sculptures with a minimal approach.

These sculptures are minimalist in their configuration and yet they are related to primal and ceremonial forms. The use of a minimal approach with monolithic appeal adds

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more to this characteristic. The use of precious materials such as diamonds, gold, and silver are elements that bring this intimacy back to the world of jewelry in a conceptual view. By doing this, I am trying to humanize these sculptures in a way that jewelry has always done through its direct relation to the body. The name diamond comes from the Greek, “adamas” meaning indomitable and bears witness to its indestructible, everlasting qualities. The absolute hardness and sparkle of the diamond garners it the attention that no other gem has achieved. Traditionally, it has been a stone that was reserved for the rich and powerful. In addition, diamonds are associated with protecting against poison and disease. In the Middle Ages diamonds were worn as a stone of victory, a personification of the warrior and the ruler.\(^6\)

I have used diamonds throughout this body of work to convey the idea of material as part of the overall necessity of the concept. I envision sculpture that wears jewels. This becomes an important statement in this body of work. The work breaches the established idea that the jewel is a symbol of status in our society. By breaking this distinction, I have attempted to bring the idea of the jewel to a more basic human necessity by the association of diamonds set in a large body of fabricated steel sculptures.

These elements of precious material in the pieces become, in some cases, enigmatic. When approaching an exhibition of the large work, whether in a gallery or other

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environment, the viewer does not think that these works are jewelry pieces. By the assumptions we carry, we assume that the large works are sculpture. It is only upon closer inspection and the revelation of the precious materials: gems, gold etc. that the viewer is challenged to rethink their concept of sculpture and jewelry. This work is an attempt to establish an idea of how sculpture is, especially what "minimal" or "corporate" sculpture has become in the last decades.
THE METAPHOR

Janet Martin Soskice in *Metaphor and Religious Language* defines metaphor as that "figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms, which are seen to be suggestive of another."

In *A Short History of Linguistics*, Sir Herbert Read's definition of metaphor "is the synthesis of several units of observation into one commanding image; it is the expression of a complex idea, not by analysis, not by abstract statement, but by the sudden perception of and objective relation to."

During the creation of my thesis, I have touched upon different concepts and ideas within my personal search for meaning in my work. One of the concepts that has played a major role is the idea of function as a metaphor for jewelry. Even though I have worked with the concept of technique as a metaphor as well and tried to separate technique from function, there is still an element of ideological challenge within this exploration of the worlds of sculpture and art jewelry.

The idea of metaphor for jewelry is a process of imagination, which I seek. It is a kind of perception of an emotive response from the viewer I want to evoke. I have also tried to employ a symbolic relation or a fusion in the sense of jewelry that lives in a large concept: a JEWELRY-sculpture or jewelry for the landscape. The work is reaching for common ground to live as both jewelry and sculpture.
THE WORK

As I began this series of work, the first piece, *Antithesis (bracelet)* (plate 1) was intended to be a bracelet. It became a crucial piece for the development of this body of work. This piece, perhaps less resolved than the following pieces, is a result of an early search for the bridge between the realms of sculpture and conceptual jewelry sculpture. Fabricated from steel sheet, it has clear reference to that of the monolithic column or steele, even to that of the totem. It brings that ancient element to the work making the association of past in present. The verticality that elevates the piece brings it to a mystical level. This verticality at the same time is broken in two. The bracelet and the base are the elements of an aesthetic ambiguity within the piece. The base, almost like an altar, creates a separation and yet interacts with the composition and statement of the piece, bringing it into a different context. The vision for the work was to show a true separation of the two, the pedestal (altar) and the bracelet.

I felt that by creating contrast with color, the problem was somewhat resolved and the separation became more defined. The bracelet I see as a vertical, erect piece, which rises upon us creating an illusion of that of the “saint” on a pedestal. It is almost as if the piece is being elevated to another state of consciousness. This piece was the beginning of the conceptual jewelry sculpture, which continues throughout this body of work.

*Bracelet (Metaphor I)* (plate 2) fabricated of steel, is a work in which simple forms and the quality of lines gives it a strong character. The piece creates a monolithic effect by its volumetric simplicity. The visual perception is focused into one mass, yet the
opening becomes almost trivial to the form. It almost appears to present a window of opportunity to see the other side of two worlds. The use of symmetry and asymmetry are important elements of this piece. The use of copper inlay with two diamonds, one on each side brings a symbolic meaning and reference to the past. Eastern Buddhist sculptures often include large-scale figural works, which utilize precious stones. They have symbolic and religious meaning, which brings them to a higher level above the human world. In this piece, I am adding these elements not to bring a direct reference to religious activity, but to make a statement in a contemporary context. This statement is about the established idea of modern jewelry, old jewelry and sculpture as having a common interest and continual message transcending time. The viewer then interprets this idea in his or her own personal manner.

This next piece, Levitation, (plate 3) is closely tied to Bracelet (Metaphor I). This necklace, made of 18k palladium white and yellow gold with white and brown diamonds, is almost identical to Bracelet (Metaphor I). The piece allows me to bridge the worlds of jewelry and sculpture with more intimacy due to the size and attention to detail and precision not as evident in the minimalist approach to the larger work. Although the size leads us to consider the piece as jewelry, I think it can also be seen as an intimate sculpture. The work carries symbolic and religious meaning, the way amulets did in other ancient cultures. In many past cultures, the people built sculptures to represent their spiritual devotion, including monoliths to their gods. In an attempt to bring a representation of their faith with them, they wore amulets representing the large works. The amulets were smaller versions of the large works. Even though this piece is not an
amulet associated with the first piece, I want to refer to that spiritual bond in our contemporary society.

The next work is *Bracelet (Metaphor II.)* (plate 4) Constructed of steel, copper, and diamonds, it is also a minimal sculpture in which I have incorporated a monolithic sense through size. However, unlike a monolith, which is carved from a singular piece of stone, this piece is broken in two. This piece is a reflection of the duality of two worlds, and a sense of combining them into one, representing the union of the masculine and feminine with their longing to return to a primeval beginning. A clear tension exists within them. The piece is divided into two symmetric halves, which dissolve into a form, having a circle that acts as the center, yet the circle is broken. The setting of the diamonds in the copper is asymmetric breaking with the formality of the piece. The size of the opening allows the possibility for two people to place their hands through, one from either side giving the opportunity to interact with another in the sharing of space. Continuing with the theme of duality, the piece brings together two varying textures, symbolic of the joining of two very different worlds or worldviews. Through this mix of textures, one very rough, dark, hard, and almost intimidating, the interior's smoothness and brightness of the copper and placement of the diamonds brings a sense of balance as opposed to a break with the piece. This smoothness makes the piece approachable and lends a tactile quality again bringing a relationship between jewelry's tactile sensibility and the often untouchable sculpture.

*Pendant (Metaphor I)* (plate 5) is a large scale work nine foot long of fabricated steel, sterling silver and diamonds that is to be viewed hanging. The viewing of the hung
piece gives the work an almost mystical quality. The diamonds in the top are set in a specific pattern allowing the viewer to form a relationship or connection to the constellations or astrological signs. Again an approach to primal minimal art, it is tied to tribal art through the use of markings made by welding. This decoration almost resembles a landscape and adds another dimension to the work.

*Ring* (plate 6) is fabricated steel, 18k yellow and palladium white gold and diamonds. This piece to me is the most obvious of my thesis work in terms of bringing the worlds of sculpture and jewelry together. In this work, the worlds of jewelry and sculpture remain separate yet are bridged through the tension combining the two. A relevant factor in my work, and especially poignant in this piece, is the inability of the work to function as sculpture without the jewelry element. Upon removal of the ring, which is complete in and of itself, the sculpture, at least at this scale, becomes incomplete.

*Spears I, Spears II and Spears III* (plates 7 – 9) while all able to stand on their own, are an obvious series with a uniting theme. *Spears I* is constructed of copper, sterling silver and diamonds. *Spears II and III* are made of copper, sterling silver, 18k palladium white gold and diamonds. More closely related to primal and ceremonial works than the other thesis pieces, they are reminiscent of warrior dress or battle weapons. Interestingly, the pieces, while related to weapons, invite the viewer to touch them. Their form, length and roundness, combined with the color and subtle texture lend them approachability. *Spears II and III*, while they may be worn, are at the same time small, intimate sculptures. *Spears I*, a larger scale piece, is pure jewelry metaphor.
CONCLUSION

Throughout this body of work, I have attempted to find the common ground within the two distinct disciplines of art jewelry and sculpture. I have included a reflection of, or reference to, primal, ceremonial and ritualistic elements in a contemporary context.

*Bracelet (Metaphor I and II), Pendant (Metaphor I) and Spear I* are an attempt to create work with an anthropological look evoking the mysteries of long forgotten rituals or at least a sense of them. They are an evocation of both the ancient and the traditional. These sculptures along with the jewelry pieces, *Spear II and III* and even *Levitation I* are charged with a solemnity and mystery that borders the mystical. They are an attempt to bring back that wonder into contemporary everyday life. This body of work has a conceptual counterpart in the works of artists who exploit the basic functions of art forms by creating a metaphorical statement. Examples would be the works of Constantin Brancusi and Isamu Noguchi.

It may take more time to change the common social attitude of what is jewelry and what is sculpture, but it is my hope that this body of work will cause the viewer to stop and rethink their definitions. As a result, it may give the viewer an opportunity to reconsider their preconceived ideas about art in general and the role of art and its many different disciplines, leaving the viewer more open to the possibilities, which exist in this and other work.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


**Illustration Description**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plate</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plate 1</td>
<td>Antithesis (bracelet): fabricated mild steel, sterling silver, diamonds 8' x 16&quot; x 10&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 2</td>
<td>Bracelet Metaphor I: fabricated mild steel and copper, diamonds 20&quot; x 5' 3&quot; x 10&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 3</td>
<td>Levitation: formed and fabricated 18k yellow and white palladium gold, white and brown diamonds 3/4&quot; x 4&quot; x ½&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 4</td>
<td>Bracelet Metaphor II: fabricated mild steel and copper, diamonds 5' 3&quot; x 3' x 20&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 5</td>
<td>Pendant (Metaphor I): fabricated mild steel, sterling silver, diamonds 9' x 1' x 14&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 6</td>
<td>Ring: fabricated mild steel, 18k yellow &amp; palladium white gold, diamonds 9&quot; x 6' x 11&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 7</td>
<td>Spear I: fabricated copper, sterling silver, diamonds 6' 6&quot; x 7&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 8</td>
<td>Spear II: Formed and fabricated sterling silver and copper, 18k Palladium white gold, diamonds 24&quot; x 1 ½&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 9</td>
<td>Spear III: Formed and fabricated sterling silver and copper, 18k Palladium white gold, diamonds 24&quot; x 1 ½&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Plate # 9