Reality and appearance

Apinya Boonprakob
A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

REALITY AND APPEARANCE

By

APINYA BOONPRAKOB

MAY 11 1995
APPROVLS

Chief Adviser : Mark Stanitz
Date.......................................................... 5/15/95

Associate Adviser : Leonard Urso
Date.......................................................... 5/15/95

Associate Adviser : David Dickinson
Date.......................................................... 5/15/95

Department Chairperson : Michael White
Date.......................................................... 5/18/95

I, ........................................................., prefer to be contacted each time a request for
production is made. I can be reached at the following address.

Apinya Boonprakob
64 Sukumwit 39
BKK 10110, Thailand

Date.......................................................... May 15/95
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................................... 1

THE ROLE OF JEWELRY IN SOCIETY ...................................................................................................... 2

THESIS EXPLICATION .................................................................................................................................. 5

CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................................................. 8

AFTERWARD .................................................................................................................................................. 9

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................................................. iii
ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE #1

FIGURE #2

FIGURE #3

NECKPIECE #1

NECKPIECE #2

BROOCH #1

BROOCH #2

BROOCH #3

BROOCH #4

CUFF #1

HAIR PIN #1

HAIR PIN #2

HAIR PIN #3

HAIR PIN #4 (FRONT)

HAIR PIN #4 (BACK)

RING #1

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25
INTRODUCTION

Art is centered around our relationship to the environment. An artist’s work reflects his/her perception of their environment. One of the things I see in society is that human beings tend to make judgments based on appearances. For centuries jewelry has been used as a symbol of social status and has become associated with the appearance of wealth and power. However, it is not only used to classify people, but also conveys artists’ perspectives in each era.
THE ROLE OF JEWELRY IN MY PERSPECTIVE

Human beings are born with innate needs. One of these is definitely the need of adornment. Therefore, as a body ornament, jewelry can be found in every known society since the beginning of human history. In addition to satisfying decorative purposes, I believe that jewelry is a communication art. It can reflect beliefs of people in each society. Additionally, jewelry is the statement from a jeweler in each era.

Since prehistory, human beings have believed in the spiritual and the supernatural. As a result, every shape, form, and material that is used has a spiritual significance. For example, the Iranians believe that the crescent moon is a symbol of the Muslim faith, therefore this shape appears in traditional Iranian jewelry such as pendants, necklaces, and charms. In addition, cross pendants appear in every Christian society. The Chinese believe that jade is a symbol of luck and good fortune, therefore it has been the most popular material used in traditional Chinese jewelry. In other words, traditional jewelry is a symbol which summarizes the relationship between human beings and their beliefs.

Contemporary jewelry, however, is not always an expression of spirituality. Nowadays science decrees that human beings are all powerful. The form of jewelry has thus changed. Contemporary jewelry has become a vehicle an artist uses to project an image of their world. For contemporary jewelry self-expression becomes of prime importance. Hence, there are varieties of forms in contemporary jewelry, each of which has a particular meaning for each artist. For example, George Dobler, the contemporary German jeweler, creates organic jewelry shapes, whereas
Andres Treykorn, another contemporary German jeweler, prefers a combination of geometric forms (see figure 1,2). In fact, contemporary jewelry explicitly talks about the experience of each artist. This trend in contemporary jewelry reflects the changes which have taken place in society.

Jewelry also classifies its owner as belonging to specific economic levels in society. For instance, the Thais have an old proverb which says “Having silver, you will be a little brother; having gold, you will be a big brother.” As a result, traditional Thai jewelry is made of precious metal such as silver and gold. Similarly, traditional Indian jewelry is made of silver coin which is a symbol of wealth. Indeed, designing for traditional jewelry has become a vehicle to emphasize how precious the material is.

Today the public view that the value of the material symbolizing wealth has changed. People respect others based on character and ability. Thus, a more sophisticated wealthy person might have the work of a well-known artist regardless of the materials used in the work. Therefore, contemporary jewelers are able to choose materials based on personal aesthetics not on the market value. Hence, all types of nontraditional materials, such as paper, plastic, and acrylic have become accepted in contemporary jewelry. For example, Nancy Worden combined sponged and brass, among other materials, in her ‘Bathroom Bowl Blue’ brooch (see figure 3). However, many contemporary jewelers still use gold and silver. The choice is based on the design potential of gold and silver, and not the market value.
All in all, the form and type of material used in jewelry has a purpose and meaning. These meanings change from era to era and culture to culture. Indeed, jewelry can be considered one of the keys to understanding the development of a given society. Moreover, the associations in the mind of the viewer create a connection between the forms and their meanings. Throughout the history of human beings, I believe that the most important purpose of jewelry is to convey the meaning and relay messages.
I believe that jewelry is one of the oldest forms of artistic expression. Whether as a symbol or as ornamentation, it enjoys the closest relationship a work of art can have with human beings. It is worn by the owner and often passes from one generation to another. Moreover, the contact between a piece of jewelry and the skin as it is worn becomes a constant reminder of one’s feelings and beliefs as they relate to the piece.

Thus, my body of work is an attempt to create jewelry that conveys the thoughts, that there is a difference between appearance and reality. The references in my work to the human figure and anatomy, together with the use of positive and negative space, are visual analogies I use to express my thought. The rich textured surfaces suggest a passage of time, which is another important element in the development of one’s perception of reality. My hope is that while wearing my jewelry, an individual will constantly be reminded of this fact.

Our reality is that we are made of flesh and bone, yet our various societies and cultures cause us to perceive each other as fundamentally different. Hence, the ways that we behave towards other people and our feeling about them very much depend on social groups to which we belong and the perspectives we develop as a result. For example, our interactions with a doctor, a janitor, a policeman, a homeless person, and a millionaire are different. We judge people as members of groups rather than as unique individuals. We tend to forget that without our role in society every human being is the same. I design my work to resemble
the part of the body the piece will rest on. My representation of the body part in contact with the actual body part emphasizes the difference between appearance and reality.

Neckpiece #1 suggests the vertebra and sacrum. I chose to emphasis the back side because I feel that mankind by nature focuses on the front surface more than on the back surface. Although the front is easy to see, looking only one side can create misunderstanding.

Brooch #1 suggests a scapula bone which is the part of the body where military personnel show their rank and consequently their position. My shoulder, by contrast, speaks of the real essence of human beings by emphasizing our bare bones.

Brooch #2 is a reminder of sternum. The sternum is the part of body where rich women display their precious jewelry. My piece is not a vehicle for the display of gemstones and precious materials, but a reminder to see beyond the precious appearance—we are the same—.

Brooches #3, #4 and Neckpiece #2 symbolize a clavicle bone. The clavicle area, similar to the sternum area, is another area of the body often used to display jewelry, one’s wealth, and social position. This series announces that whether we are rich or poor, we human beings still have the same structure.

Cuff #1 recalls our muscles. The muscles are often associated with power and strength. They are, however, just another part of body which everyone has.
For the above mentioned series of work, I chose materials which some ways suggest element of a human anatomy. Annealed silver with its matte white finish simulates bone. The pearl, one of my favorite materials, represents bone also. Bone is special for me in this series because I see it as the human equivalent of the pearl. Like the oyster forms the pearl, the human body forms the bone. In choosing to dye the antlers for Brooch#3, I was attempting to represent the hidden nature of bone—it is hidden from our view by flesh, blood, and muscle. The deep blue sapphire and the deep red glass used in both Cuff #1 and Brooch #3, represent blood vessels.

Negative space is another metaphor I used to express my thoughts on the difference between appearance and reality. In the five pieces I created for this series I started with a view of the human form. The form, whether it was the entire human figure (hair pins #1, 2, 3, 4) or a profile (ring) was articulated by the silver. The human form is the reality of this series of work. In hair pins #1, 2, and 3 the human figure, the negative shape, remains the same while the reticulated silver positive shape varies. Upon first sight, the negative space, however, is overlooked. Only after a more thoughtful examination does the human form emerge. In all of these pieces, especially hair pins #1, 2, 3, we see how humans not only tend to overlook the difference between appearance and reality, but also tend to interpret appearances differently.

Both the human anatomy series and the negative figurative series are visual symbols of my thoughts. Although the visual forms these ideas take are different, they all speak about the relationship between appearance and reality.
CONCLUSION

I believe that it is essential for people to pursue and explore areas of personal interest. Some people try to find answers through the study of space, oceans, and mountains. For me, human nature is the most intriguing course of study. Thus, my body of work is an attempt to interpret my perspective of life through visual forms. However, life is not something that can be understood in a day, it is a never ending discovery. I will continue to grow and my understanding will continue to develop. Thus, this thesis body of work is not the final word on this subject, but a beginning inquiry.
While I am working on a piece, I often ask myself “Is it wearable?” The next question that comes to mind is “What is the function of jewelry?” I believe we wear jewelry for two reasons: (1) personal adornment, (2) self-expression. With this in mind, the wearability of jewelry becomes secondary. Since our childhood we often played with flower crowns and chains. We wore them for the sheer pleasure of it. As adults our jewelry has replaced our flower crowns and chains. Jewelry in twentieth century American society includes rings and/or studs for any part of the body which can be pierced. Thus, once I complete my work, I believe that the question of wearability should be left to the viewer.
Figure 1. Brooch 1990

George Dobler

Silver
Figure 2. Brooch 1992

Andreas Treykorn

Silver Mesh
Figure 3. Brooch

Nancy Worden

Silver, Brass, Sponge, Tourmaline, Quartz
Neckpiece #1 Vertebra and Sacrum

Fine Silver

31.25 x 7.00 x0.50 inch
Neckpiece #2 Clavicle

Fine Silver

7.25 x 10.25 x 1.50 inch
Brooch #1 Scapula

Sterling Silver, Pearl

4.25 x 8.50 x 3.25 inch
Brooch #2 Sternum

Sterling Silver, Pearl, Steel

5.00 x 3.88 x 1.25 inch
Brooch #3 ClavicleI
Sterling Silver, Antler, Glass
4.75 x 15.50 x 0.50 inch
Brooch #4 Clavicle II
Sterling Silver, Boulder Opal
3.75 x 15.50 x 0.25 inch
Cuff #1 Muscle

Copper, Bronze, Sapphire

3.00 x 3.00 x 3.50 inch
Hair Pin #1 Human Figure I

Sterling Silver, 18K Gold

12.50 x 1.5 x 0.50 inch
Hair Pin #2 Human Figure II

Sterling Silver, Copper

10.00 x 1.50 x 0.50 inch
Hair Pin #3 Human Figure III

Sterling Silver, Amethyst

5.63 x 1.50 x 0.50 inch
Hair Pin #4 Human Figure IV

Sterling Silver, Copper

5.50 x 4.25 x 0.50, 8.13 x 0.75 x 0.50 inch

(front)
Hair Pin #4 Human Figure IV

Sterling Silver, Copper

(Back)
Ring #1 Double Profile
Sterling Silver, Ruby
1.75 x 1.63 x 1.00 inch
BIBLIOGRAPHY

