

Narrative Illusion: Jewelry from Painting

BY LENA VIGNA



MAISIE BROADHEAD
Which Weight To Go, 2009
digital c-type print
16 1/2 x 15"

Big Fake Little Real Chain
(from *Which Weight To Go*), 2009
18k gold, plastic

Big Fake Little Real Pearl
(from *Which Weight To Go*), 2009
pearls, plastic





Advertising poster for Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
PHOTO: DAMIAN SKINNER
COURTESY ART JEWELRY FORUM BLOG

A RECENT SERIES of advertisements from the Metropolitan Museum of Art raises provocative questions about the relationship between painting and jewelry. In one of the bus shelter posters, a detail from Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's lush *Princess de Broglie* (1851–53) depicts the subject's hands and forearms, which are festooned with jewels and set against a brilliant blue silk and lace gown.¹ Under the banner "Get Closer," a gold bracelet, gold ring, and pearl bracelet and necklace with a cameo clasp—worn by rounded, fleshy hands—beckons. The general assumption is that passersby should get to the Met and lay their eyes on something very alluring. But what? Jewels? Hands? Paintings? It is an eye-catching and clever visual, and the intent is admittedly not as weighty as it might seem to those interested in jewelry.

In terms of jewelry, it is not easy to categorize how this image functions. In the end, those who find the painting will not be looking at actual jewelry but two-dimensional representations of it. How does that matter? Jewelry is potent—and the suggestion is that the *idea* of it is as potent as the actual object. No matter how sumptuous the jewels Ingres portrays, they are only painted images (albeit painted images that embody the ability to suggest content and narration). This critical point underscores jewelry's ability to function in a narrative capacity, its historical connection to illusion, and the complex dynamic between painting and jewelry that is being further explored by contemporary jewelers.

A brief survey of contemporary makers can underscore the varied approaches to marrying these two disciplines within a contemporary context. Robert Smit, Thomas Gentile, Jiro Kamata, Shari Pierce, Helen Britton, and Marjorie Schick employ paint as a material with aesthetic and theoretical import, often tangentially referencing modernist artists. Maisie Broadhead, the team of Monika Krol and Danielle Rizzolo, Christina Goodman, and Diane Falkenhagen create works that recall historical examples and further explore the relationship between narrative and illusion.²

Writer Andrea DiNoto outlined a mid-to-late twentieth century "crossover" phenomenon that saw artists normally engaged in other disciplines—painting, sculpture, design, architecture—turn to creating jewelry. DiNoto states, "The ideas put forth by these 'crossovers,' from every major Modernist movement, from Surrealism to neo-Pop and beyond, have richly cross fertilized the cutting-edge art jewelry world..."³ In 2002, Mobilia Gallery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, invited artists to create jewelry based on paintings. Flora Book, Arline Fisch, David Freda, Mary Preston, and Todd Reed were just a few of the many artists who responded to work by Gustav Klimt, Andy Warhol, Hieronymous Bosch, Joan Miro, Diego Velázquez, and more. Whether a response to the overall composition or to the painting's subject matter, the jewelry was as varied in approach as might be expected.

Over the last several years, painting as subject matter or influence has been self-consciously addressed through



JIRO KAMATA
Arboreseque 03 (brooch), 2010
silver, camera lenses, acrylic paint
3 1/2 X 3 1/2 X 3/8"
COURTESY ORNAMENTUM GALLERY
PHOTO: JIRO KAMATA

adornment and jewelry. Robert Smit's work often incorporates intense areas of bright color, echoing the at turns playful and poetic paintings of modernist artists such as Piet Mondrian and Robert Motherwell. Significantly, Smit has often constructed a base in gold, which he then covers over with layers of paint, negating the precious quality of

the metal underneath. Both homage to earlier influences and a contemporary address of material value, Smit's jewelry is powerful as metaphor and aesthetic statement. Thomas Gentile uses color and form to create provocative, non-objective jewelry. Gentile's work stems from his appreciation of minimal

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sculpture and painting—where, in his perception, form is linked to “perfection and essence.”¹⁴

Using paint as an actual and metaphorical masking layer, Jiro Kamata, Shari Pierce, and Helen Britton create jewelry with opaque surfaces. Kamata's recent *Arboresque* brooches (2010) combine camera lenses, blackened silver, and paint. Swirling works in silver support spherical lenses awash in intense clouds of color. Kamata's use of camera lenses is derived from an investigation of the world through reflective and refractive surfaces: the application of paint obliterates the lenses' original function, changing its physical qualities and perceived value. In her “Cardboard Democracy” series, Shari Pierce constructed jewelry using cardboard coated in housepaint. By turning commonplace (and recycled) materials into neckpieces, Pierce challenged the material value of discarded and neglected materials while addressing jewelry as a sign of luxury. Helen Britton has been using paint to bring “riotous color” to jewelry that addresses the conflation of the natural and artificial or the “industrial baroque” of city life. Recent brooches, rings, and earrings are full of intense color, ambiguous shapes, and a variety of materials.

Marjorie Schick combines an homage to modernist painters with compelling structures that visually redefine the architecture of the body. Schick's recent large-scale neck and arm pieces directly draw on the work of modern painters, which she highlights with titles such as *Chagall's Circles*, *Monet's Circles*, and *O'Keeffe's Circles*. Each piece is composed of numerous canvas circles, joined together in a way that suggests fish scales; the drape of the works shelters portions of the body while accenting others.

Historically, painted jewelry (in this context, jewelry represented on a two-dimensional surface) often factored into a complex system of signs that framed the subject of the painting. Commissioned portraits or portraits included in larger narratives often served purposes beyond capturing someone's likeness; they gave tangible record of someone's existence and, through dress and adornment, the position they held in social, cultural, economic, and/or religious



SHARI PIERCE
Necklace from “Cardboard Democracy,” series 2007-09
discarded cardboard, left-over/found house paint, fake gold, silver chains
PHOTO: MASON DOUGLAS



HELEN BRITTON
Red Land (brooch), 2011
silver, paint
4 1/2 x 3 3/4 x 7/8"

DANIELLE RIZZOLO
Lady Lola, 2010
oil on wood
15 x 31"



terms. The goal was not to perfectly reproduce jewelry or fabric trim but to utilize those elements as part of a larger discourse of representation.⁵

When Velázquez painted Queen Mariana of Spain and the Infanta Maria Theresa in the seventeenth century, his command of paint and brush was applied to representing individuals and their adornment. Gilded collars, starched lace trim, metallic silks, gemstones, and metals were exquisitely rendered. Velázquez was not alone in his abilities, even if his appointment as a court portrait painter ensured his address of such finery. Flemish painters also had a knack for translating the three-dimensional into two-dimensional form. A recent article detailing conservation of the Ghent Altarpiece (completed 1432) further hints at one of the most romantic intersections of painting and jewelry: the translation of tangible object into illusion. Of portions of the Altarpiece, critic Peter Schjeldahl writes, "Each of the hundreds of pearls that fringe Mary's robes is just a dollop of gray hit with a spot of white, so perfectly judged in relative tone that, from any distance, it exudes pearlescence...[Jan] Van Eyck understood that realism doesn't require verisimilitude but only just enough visual cues to exploit the mind's credulity."⁶

Schjeldahl's words confirm something that we may intuitively recognize but do not always acknowledge. The object's particularities—in this instance, the exact size, shape, and color of each pearl, the way they are connected and attached to the robe, the details that reveal human intervention—are diminished. It is not just that they no longer contain the depth and dimension of their three-dimensional referents; they are (undeniably up close) just gestural dabs of paint. Arguably, rendering detail in minute form is not the point of such a painting. However, considering the accepted practice of converting jewelry as fashion or inclination suggested, and the loss of pieces over time for other reasons, there are certainly many instances where the signifying object no longer exists. All that is left is the representation—and this representation is an artifice. The full impact of this tension is a provocative avenue of inquiry that has been undertaken by numerous artists in recent years.

Maisie Broadhead addresses the notion of visual deception and material value as it relates to jewelry and painting in a recent

two-part project titled “Jewellery Depicted.” Beginning with a historical painting that included jewelry in its narrative as a referent, Broadhead staged the subject in a studio using contemporary actors and adornment she created.⁷ The end result was a compelling photographic parody and a body of jewelry, but there is a critical twist. Broadhead’s jewelry only resembles the painted work when it is in her photograph; the actual jewelry is abstracted. Her rings, gold chains, and strands of pearls look good for the photograph but are distorted when viewed in three dimensions. The gold chains combine links of different sizes and materials and rings have absurd settings, with gemstones perched at the end of elongated stems. Broadhead admits that she is first drawn to the jewelry in the paintings and allows that to determine which image she will interpret. She states, “In the flesh, the jewellery is a collection of distorted and hidden half truths.”⁸

With a series titled “Royal Loyals,” Monika Krol and Danielle Rizzolo embarked on a collaborative project that investigates the link between painting and jewelry as idea and concept. Using people the pair admire as subjects, Rizzolo paints their portraits in the manner of aristocratic court portraiture and

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When worn?

When depicted?

When exchanged?

When received?

When modified?

Krol constructs jewelry pieces that exist as objects in their own right but are also depicted in the two-dimensional work. The artists state: “Tangible objects connect the viewer to the paintings while the paintings provide a setting for the jewelry. The viewer becomes a part of the narrative when they become a wearer.”⁹ With this project, the royal portrait concept has been modernized by choice of subject and narrative possibilities. The series raises interesting questions about context: At what point is jewelry its most heavy with meaning? When worn? When depicted? When exchanged? When received? When modified? What is the relationship between jewelry and the construction of image and illusion (with image, in this context, referring to both what is depicted and to the sitter’s identity).

Christina Goodman creates miniature paintings that often take the form of pendants and brooches. Rather than portrait pendants of the type popularized in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, Goodman’s works are often more focused on the natural world, landscapes, or trompe l’oeil imagery. She uses Renaissance painting and manuscript illumination for inspiration to create brooches, pendants, and earrings as well as small-scale triptychs. Her *trompe l’oeil* necklaces that pair painted representations of stones with counterparts of the actual stones are a postmodern delight.

Diane Falkenhagen uses a variety of media to address her “enchantment” with what she regards as iconic and picturesque images. *Dalliance* (2009) is a glorious brooch



MONIKA KROL
Lo & La (brooch), 2009
gold, sterling silver, garnets,
delrin, vintage plastic
3 x 5 x 7/8"



DIEGO VELÁZQUEZ
Portrait of the Infanta Maria Teresa,
1652–53 (detail)
oil on canvas
50 x 39"
COLLECTION LOUVRE MUSEUM, PARIS

CHRISTINA GOODMAN
Trompe Loeil Pendant with Pearls, 2011
acrylic and gold leaf on resin with
fresh water pearls
1 x 1 ½ x ¼"
PHOTO: ERIC BOWERMAN



Diane Falkenhagen
Dalliance (brooch), 2009
mixed media image on sterling
silver, mirror
2 7/8 x 2 ½ x 1"
PHOTO: BILL FOGUE

that re-imagines Jean-Honore Fragonard's painting *The Swing* (1766) as the framing mechanism for a reflective central mirror. Falkenhagen's reverent yet delicious take on Fragonard's own cunning address of the frivolity of the upper classes pushes the painting to the edges. The "frame" is a literal and metaphorical construct for a mirror that implicates the wearer's companions. The frame also abstracts the original source so that view up the woman's dress that scandalized (and titillated) Fragonard's public is reflected on the "inside" of the brooch—in the same mirror that reflects the viewer. Illusions are multiplied and past and present are linked in a surprising and dynamic way, intimately connected in physical space and pregnant with meaning.

In addition to embodying emotion (whether that relates to the process of creation or the emotions inspired in the viewer/wearer/giver), both painting and jewelry can act as signifiers, reflect monetary value and status, and mark moments in time. They can, in their own ways, be narrative representations or formal compositions based on design elements. This survey is clearly not exhaustive but highlights some of the parallels of two types of objects that generally occupy very different types of physical space and cultural consideration. Neither painting nor jewelry has remained

static over the years; changes in size, purpose, content, and even ideological intent have, as a whole, been connected to societal and cultural transformation as well as personal taste. When the two disciplines are brought together, as material and as subject, narrative possibilities abound.

The work of Broadhead, Krol/Rizzolo, Goodman, and



CHRISTINA GOODMAN
*Trompe L'oeil Pendant with Garnet,
 Onyx and Amber, 2009*
 acrylic and gold leaf on resin with
 garnet, onyx, amber (14k gold cable)
 1 1/2 x 1 1/4 x 1/4"
 PHOTO: ERIC BOWERMAN



Falkenhagen highlights the complexities of jewelry especially as it touches on the concept of illusion. Jewelry's power as sign and symbol is foregrounded and the nature of how jewelry has functioned and *can* function is addressed. Connecting past and present, viewer/viewed, wearer/worn, two-dimensional/three-dimensional, ornament/ornamented, these projects weave webs that link jewelry as idea and as object, and that underscore a relationship between image and illusion.

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- 1 Thank you to the Art Jewelry Forum blog, who posted this photo under the title "Jewelry as Painting as Jewelry" on April 18, 2011.
- 2 There are certainly others creating work who explore the intersection of jewelry and painting. A few other noteworthy examples include: Steven Ford and David Forlano's references to the cubist trompe l'oeil paintings of Picasso; Anya Kivarkis and

Daniel Jocz using automotive paint; younger artists such as Maureen Duffy and Ashley Ernest using paint as references to both domestic and urban settings; and, in a fashion context, Sabina Kasper using neon paint stripes over 18k gold, tourmaline and diamond pendants, earrings, brooches, and rings.

- 3 Andrea DiNoto, "Crossing Over:

Jewelry by Artists, Designers and Architects," *Metalsmith* (vol. 28, no. 1).

- 4 Andrea DiNoto, "Thomas Gentile: Varieties of Perfection," *Metalsmith* (vol. 30, no. 5).
- 5 Historically, painting and jewelry have been linked in numerous obvious ways including portrait, historical, and genre paintings that included depictions of costume and toilette, and miniature portrait paintings on ivory or enamel. Inherently there are elements of working with enamel that link painting and gesture—this is significant but not the direct topic of this discussion. To note, several contemporary metalsmiths such as Jamie Bennett, who almost always employ enamel, acknowledge their own experiences with (canvas) painting in their formative years.
- 6 "The Flip Side," Peter Schjeldahl. *The New Yorker* (November 29, 2010): p. 46.

- 7 While this article addresses painting, Broadhead's work makes a link to photography and illusion, and other jewelers have made connections with drawing as well. Anya Kivarkis uses automotive paint to create a series of brooches based on drawings of works that were reconstructed—the drawing represents a nonexistent piece, changed either before or after the drawing. Although not exploring the direct relationship between painting and jewelry, Kivarkis has engaged in a similar investigation that connects representation, illusion, and object.
- 8 Maisie Broadhead, "Jewellery Depicted," (December 1–31, 2010 exhibition statement), www.siennagallery.com
- 9 Monika Krol and Danielle Rizzolo, "Royal Loyals," (July 3–26, 2010 exhibition statement), www.siennagallery.com.