

# findings

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# Are You Ready To Wear It?

**It is so often that we talk about jewellery and jewellers, exhibitions and conferences: our roles as makers and viewers are always at the centre of attention.** And yet, most objects are born with a function that renders them alive. Even those that *allegedly* do not “advertise” any content and are marketed purely as “decorative” or “design”, need a space to exist as distinguished from others: a lamp needs a room to illuminate, a vase a surface with which to dialogue. And so it is for jewellery: without a body, it is but another cultural object, available for visual consumption but devoid of the landscape it was made for, like a building without its ground. This feature wants to go some way to bring the wearer back into the spotlight: the person who buys jewellery and fulfils its ultimate function.

My intention, however, when gathering material, interviewing and editing, was not to critique the role of the wearer or to discuss collecting per se. Mostly I wanted to highlight the joy of wearing contemporary jewellery while, at the same time, dispelling a few myths and discussing practicalities such as wearability and, quite importantly, budget. Last but not least, I wanted to pay homage to our outgoing Leading Editor Poppy Porter, an avid buyer and wearer of all kinds of jewellery, which she proudly mixes and matches following no other rule than her taste and mood, and to thank her for her support and encouragement over the last few issues we have worked on together.

*Lieta Marziali*

Poppy Porter wearing a brooch by Fliss Quick and her own Guitar Distortion ring playing bass painted by herself.  
Image: Thomas Lisle Brooker



Juan showing off some of his brooches. Image: Juan Harnie

## JUAN HARNIE, jeweller and collector (Hasselt, Belgium)

**In 2011 I started studying jewellery design at the PXL-MAD University in Hasselt, Belgium.** This is where my passion for contemporary jewellery started. In my second year in Hasselt we visited Inhorgenta in Munich where I bought my first piece, a ring by Christian Brueger. Years later my boyfriend also started to show an interest in jewellery and now we collect together and have around 120 pieces, made by students, established and starting designers from all around the world. We have a lot of smaller works because we can't always afford the larger unique ones. We are always happy to find affordable pieces during an exhibition. (This should happen more often!)

However, because I try to wear a piece every day, it is sometimes easier to wear a smaller one and I'm afraid I might damage the bigger pieces by accident. But I also think, as a maker, that it is very important to wear jewellery as much as I can! This way I promote jewellery designers and the pieces really are a conversation starter for people who don't know this kind of jewellery yet. There are so many makers who don't wear jewellery themselves!

I also try to promote jewellery with my Instagram profile 'The Jewellery Update', where I started posting pictures of pieces from our collection.

In the future I would also love to create an exhibition of our collection, but I need to find a way to fund this kind of project.

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### ATTY TANTIVIT, founder of ATTA Gallery and collector (Thailand)

**LM: How does Atty/Person and Atty/Gallerist influence each other's choices when wearing jewellery?**

AT: I don't think I can split myself into two parts ... Atty/Person is Atty/Gallerist and vice versa when it comes to buying. I wear what speaks to me on a personal level and that's what I want people, my clients, to be able to do as well. I express myself through the pieces I wear. I might be mixing and matching contemporary and fine jewellery, but I have to take into consideration how appropriate it is for the occasion. I like to have a bit of a twist or dark humour/irony and some pieces might be too off-putting in a professional setting. Also, I have pieces from artists I don't represent at the gallery so wearing those to work might not be appropriate, so I tend to wear them on non-gallery-related events to get people exposed to different types of contemporary jewellery. It's a good way to test the market as well. If they get a lot of compliments, then I might consider reaching out to those artists for future collaboration.



Loving aunty's David Bielander pin. Credit: Atty Tantivit

**LM: You like to wear contemporary art jewellery in so many different contexts, from family gatherings, to business meetings, to alumni reunions and so on. How important is it for you to wear jewellery in day-to-day life?**

AT: It's very important to me as I think I might be the only 'face' of contemporary jewellery here in Thailand! If I don't feel comfortable wearing the pieces I promote, who else would be comfortable and confident enough to do the same? And I think the more people are exposed to it on a regular basis, the more they will feel familiar with it and warm up to idea of wearing it themselves one day. However, I don't wear jewellery when I travel on the plane out of practicality and I definitely don't want to lose my pieces as I toss and turn in my seat!



Driving in Dorothea Pruhl's neckpiece. Credit: Atty Tantivit

**LM: How do you choose what to wear outside of the gallery? For example, the message it gives out, visual stimulation, starting conversations, showing off your pieces, educating the public ...**

AT: For serious meetings, I like to wear something a bit cheeky. I want people to look at my pieces and turn their frowns into smile, even if it's out of pure curiosity! It's also a way for me to keep my mood light. For weddings, I like to mix contemporary and fine jewellery to show people that you don't have to conform to the norm and that one does not have to pick one over the other! I wear contemporary jewellery to art openings and exhibitions, in a way, to pose a question about what people should consider to be art, and whether art should only be shown in a room and on a wall.

**LM: Many people, including both makers and potential customers, believe that contemporary art jewellery is for rich collectors? As a person and as a gallerist, do you think this is true? And, if so, to what extent?**

AT: Define the word 'rich' ... it is such a relative term. I don't think contemporary art jewellery is only for collectors, however wealthy. There is a wide range of contemporary art jewellery out there both in terms of practice, use of materials, styles and, of course, price. When I first started buying contemporary jewellery, I started with a piece that I could afford, in the range of 150-300 USD and I still enjoy those early pieces as much as the more pricey, collectible ones I acquired later on. Contemporary art jewellery is all about self-expression. There's no need to buy expensive collectible pieces if they don't speak to you.

People tend to compare prices of contemporary art jewellery with those of more traditional jewellery. They could see themselves buying a one-carat diamond ring but not a piece of contemporary jewellery because it's too expensive. Is a one-carat diamond for the rich? It's for special occasion maybe, but so are certain pieces of contemporary art jewellery! They could see themselves spending the same amount of money on a painting but not on a piece of wearable art. Is art reserved only for the rich? I don't think so. It's just their perceptions, and their excuses for not daring to be confident enough to find something that speaks to them in their price ranges.

**LM: Some people say they are scared of contemporary art jewellery because they think that wearing it would put them too much at the centre of attention and start conversations they don't necessarily want to have. I personally believe that wearers need to practise as much as the makers in finding their voice. What are your thoughts on this?**

AT: I have heard that from some people. And that's why I think it's important to choose pieces that are truly expressive of who you are. No one should be forced to wear contemporary art jewellery if they are not ready or have not found what they are comfortable with. Education helps with this: when people understand the value, concepts and so on, they can be more inclined to talk to others confidently about it.

I wore a David Bielander 'Banana' pendant and walked around town. Sure people looked at me with curious expressions, but I was comfortable and confident in my choice of jewellery that day. I did not wear it to get attention: I just wanted to have some fun. And again, there are pieces that are not too 'out there' that can be worn on a daily basis. People should and start looking deeply inside themselves at why they do not want to wear it. There are too many excuses out there.

**LM: Contemporary art jewellery comes in so many materials, forms and sizes: why do you think so many people still associate wearing it with having to wear a super-size statement piece? Why, do you think, are there still so many misconceptions about wearing contemporary jewellery?**

AT: At the moment I think we don't see enough images of 'everyday' people wearing contemporary art jewellery, and most are of collectors, and indeed old collectors, wearing big pieces to big events. It gives us a misconception that contemporary art jewellery is only reserved for them and, because of their small numbers, on which we have been relying to sustain the field, they have been given too much 'air time'. This needs to change. That's why I started a little Instagram/Facebook campaign a few years back asking people to post photos of themselves wearing jewellery on a daily basis and using the hashtag #whowearscontemporaryjewelry. I want people to see that we can all wear it.

**LM: Do you think this is also because people are still unaware, after so many decades, of what contemporary jewellery is?**

AT: Ours is a really closed field. In a way, we act a little bit snobbish ... like yeah, if they don't get it, they are not sophisticated enough. We need to reach out to more people if we want to survive in a sustainable way. We need to push ourselves beyond our comfort zones here. And what is contemporary art jewellery really? This is a term that not many people outside of the field know of!

**LM: My favourite photos of you wearing jewellery are those with your nephews interacting with your pieces. They show how natural wearing contemporary jewellery can be. How important is it to you that people wear more contemporary jewellery?**

AT: I love jewellery. Period. Contemporary jewellery has been my choice in the last 15 years or so. It is my way of expressing myself. I can only hope that there are more people out there wanting to express themselves with contemporary jewellery as well. I gifted my mum and my sister-in-law contemporary jewellery and they enjoy wearing it when opportunities allow. My mum actually wore some with a modernised traditional Thai sarong! I also got a few of my close friends, both male and female, smaller pieces that they could wear to work. Imagine if there were more people like me out there introducing

and encouraging people around them to wear contemporary jewellery ... we wouldn't be worrying about the future of the field!

**LM: Is there anything that frustrates you about wearing contemporary jewellery?**

AT: Mechanical problems. Pin backs that don't catch properly, for example. Many contemporary jewellery pieces are large and heavy and some artists don't really put enough thought into how the pieces would sit best on the body/clothing. I have worn some pieces that came undone unintentionally and I almost lost them. Rust and possible allergies to certain metal alloys are also annoying, so full disclosure is important so that buyer/wearer can make a decision to buy or not to buy.

We know that certain materials can break or disintegrate. If it's part of the concept, then it's fine. But when it's not, it's frustrating, even when knowing full well the risks. But I know I can talk to the artist and get it fixed somehow. Can you imagine a customer spending a considerable sum on a piece that didn't meet their expectations? And it is I, the gallerist, who has to mediate and deal with the issue.

**LM: And finally, what makes you most happy about wearing it?**

AT: It's a way for me to interact with others without even speaking a word to them. It's a veiled way for others to have a glimpse into my psychology. And also for me to provoke theirs!

## LINDA LAMBERT, ACJ Director

**I love wearing these particular pieces by Karola Torkos.** They are light and comfortable and the variety of colours means that they will go with most outfits. And, best of all, you don't need the excuse of a 'special' occasion to wear them. They are super for everyday wear and they are so much fun! They also gather a lot of oohs and aahs. Definitely one of my favourite sets of jewellery!

Linda Lambert - portrait. Image: Linda Lambert



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### JEROEN AND SARA, art jewellery enthusiasts (The Netherlands)

**Although we do have quite a few pieces of jewellery, we don't feel we are collectors at all.** I sometimes compare it to reading books: I really enjoy reading, and over the years I have acquired a substantial amount of books, not in order to collect them but in order to read them and read them again (and again). The same goes for jewellery. Every single piece is worn. Sara enjoys wearing them and I enjoy watching her wear them. In our apartment we are always surrounded by jewellery. We have pieces hanging on the walls, as sculptures, and often we wear jewellery indoors. Often Sara happens to be wearing a particular item of clothing and I think of a piece of jewellery that would look great on what she is wearing at the time, and I ask her to wear a certain piece for a moment. We pick the jewellery up, think about the pieces, talk about them, show them to other people who take an interest in jewellery and we invite our visitors to try the pieces on.



Sara  
wearing  
Dana Hakim.  
Image: Mieke  
Oosterman



Jeroen  
wearing  
Sophie  
Hanagarth.  
Image: Jeroen and Sara

In terms of budget, our income is even below average, but we don't have any children and we lead a very simple life. We pay the rent, we feed ourselves and our cat and what's left we spend on art jewellery. I don't think we are the big exception. Of course there are the wealthy Americans, who set the tone of voice in the field, but, at least in the Netherlands, 'collecting' art is not seen as an investment but is done for sheer enjoyment and appreciation, seems to be largely a more proletarian activity.

Have you ever seen the documentary film about Herbert and Dorothy Vogel? I think they are much more the hoarding type than we are – we're not hoarders at all – but we relate a lot to their way of looking at art.



Interior detail of  
Jeroen and Sara's  
home.  
Image: Jeroen  
and Sara

## MARIANNE GASSIER, collector and blogger at [bijoucontemporain.unblog.fr](http://bijoucontemporain.unblog.fr) (France)

**LM: Who buys contemporary jewellery? Who are the collectors? Can we try to dispel the myth of the fine art world super-rich investor?**

MG: Well, I don't come from "that" kind of fine art world, and I am definitely not a super-rich collector.

My father was an art critic and cultural attaché to countries including Spain, Morocco, Italy and Switzerland, and in the evenings he spent his whole life researching Goya [Ed. Note: Pierre Gassier is considered one of the foremost experts on the subject]. Until I was 18, my life was filled with visits to archaeological sites, churches, museums. At the weekend it was common for us to have artists visiting (pianists, painters...) and to show them the sights. Then there would be weekends in Rome where I would be taken to spend time on a terrace or to have coffee in Piazza Navona with cinema personalities like Fellini, Mastroianni and Comencini, or the sculptor Pomodoro, to have dinner with De Chirico in his home, or posing at Villa Medici for Balthus. So, in this sense, my life was completely steeped in "fine art", but all these artists were for me, first of all, people I used to spend time with...

Then, at 30 I began working for the European Commission, building databases of institutions that taught art and crafts subjects, detailing the type of qualification they offered and at what level, in order to create an educational programme to allow youngsters to move around countries and specialise in their discipline and build a sort of "European passport" of cumulative experience and qualifications. It is here that I discovered these "art crafts" and, continuing my father's tradition, I visited studios and workshops each weekend with my own children. My favourites very quickly began to be the jewellers and it is here that I had my *coupe de coeur* for contemporary jewellery! Of course I had already started collecting ethnic jewellery, jewellery from the 40s-60s, Victorian jewellery and English charms, but the difference was that with contemporary jewellery I discovered its people.

From the very beginning, jewellery did not have the same "distance" as art in a museum or gallery, but involved meetings, discussions: what do you mean, what do you wish to express, why this way, this form, this material, this colour, this size...? And this exchange, this encounter, was as precious as the jewel, and even more. I always needed beauty in my everyday life and the fact that contemporary jewellery can be made with materials from everyday life brought it closer to me (diamonds, gold and all the "precious" things are NOT my everyday life).

But it was meeting a woman who had a little jewellery gallery in Paris, Eva Kausel from the (alas now disappeared) Black & Kausel in Montmartre, that had me sold. I used to go to her gallery and she always told me: "You can open all the drawers, touch, and try all you want!". It was like a little girl's dream, an Ali Baba's cavern, or my grandma's attic. A world of treasures to explore! And this woman used to explain to me everything: who the makers were, why they had made the jewel in that way, why they had used that material, what they wanted to express. It was magical. And it was also this woman who encouraged me to start my blog in 2010.



Marianne wearing Mona Louison. Image: Marianne Gassier

Marianne riding away wearing Seul-Gi Kwon. Image: Marianne Gassier



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Marianne doing a spot of gardening wearing Isabelle Molenaat

My father had died in 2000 and had left me a lot of money, so in the beginning, yes, I was rich but I felt much richer because of the encounters and discoveries than because of the money. Now I only have €500 per month to live on but I put aside 400 maximum to buy and, depending on the price, I can get a few pieces each year. Luckily, sometimes I have been able to agree exchanges with some artists for writing about them and promoting them, for which I am extremely thankful.

So I began as a simple buyer, just for the pleasure of making these beauties mine. The notion of “collecting” came later. With my European Commission work we had a monthly exhibition of arts and crafts in Paris and I felt the obligation to show these jewels and to make them known. At each event I transformed myself into to a “model”, a sort of shop mannequin, dressed well but neutral to show off the jewels and, of course, always explaining who, why, what... and especially where to buy!

**LM: How and where do you enjoy the pieces you buy? Is a special occasion needed? Or is there another trend of wearing contemporary jewellery in what could be perceived as a more “casual” way?**

MG: Well, now I am that “crazy” French (half Spanish) lady going to the Sunday market in the next village on my moped to buy my vegetables, eggs and bread... with my jewels!! Sometimes, no-one notices them, but sometimes I have great discussions about them. I may not have much money to buy my salad and fruit, but I might still wear an Issey Miyake dress (although I wouldn't want it to be damaged if I fell off my moped!) and my beautiful jewels. Mainly, for everyday use, I put on a ring and/or a bracelet or pieces that are easier to wear. And I love really big earrings, but it is difficult with the helmet. And necklaces and brooches can also have a “dangerous life” on the moped: a brooch can come off my dress or jacket or, as

happened once, a very light fabric necklace can flip up in the wind and stop me from seeing the road any more!

Contemporary jewellery needs the body! It is not for showcases and drawers. My jewellery is for everyday life. Of course, when I am going to the supermarket or walking in the vineyards or in the countryside [ed. Note: Marianne lives in rural France], I prefer more simple jewellery (a ring or two, a bracelet). And if I'm going to a concert or an exhibition, this allows me to wear bigger things. But I always need to be careful if I have a long trip on my moped because these jewels are often fragile (for example, I have a lot of paper, ceramic and fabric pieces). Also, summer here is very hot and of course one tends to sweat, so I have to think about materials, for example paper jewellery and direct contact with the skin (I recently had to repair a papier maché bracelet).

One thing I would like to say to the makers (and the teachers in jewellery schools) is please test the wearability of your jewels. New materials sometimes react in an unknown way. For example, a brooch with a copper pin in the summer might be worn just on a t-shirt and the pin, in contact with the skin, will produce nice green spots on that t-shirt which you can't remove. If dyeing a necklace, again make sure the dye won't run on somebody's dress. At the very least, just warn and advise the buyer: we have the greatest respect for the jewels but we need to know.

Still, and I will repeat this, the most important thing is that these jewels need their public. Sometimes people won't notice them, or dismiss them as “funny” (by which they mean – how I hate this! – costume jewellery, or *bijou* fantasie). No! This is NOT costume jewellery, and sometimes, when I realise that people are not ready to understand, I get tired of beginning this conversation. Contemporary jewellery must always be taught and explained. And yet, when I organise an exhibition, my first words are always “try it on! Feel the size, weight, connection with your body... Try it on, please!”