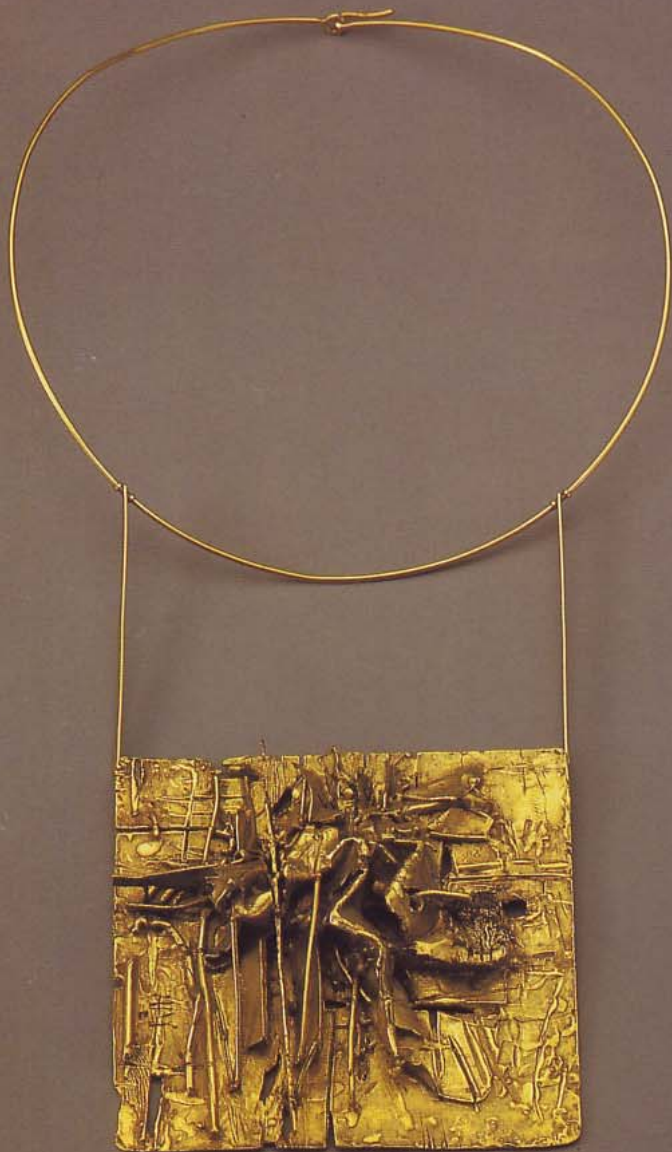


JEWELRY

in europe and america
new times, new thinking

RALPH TURNER

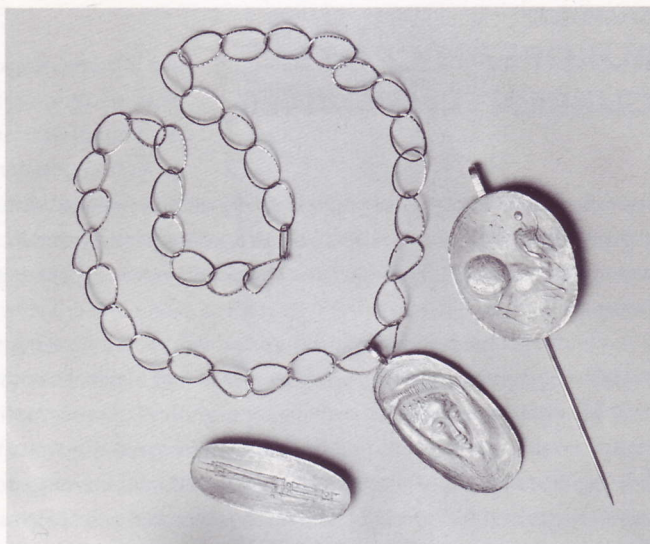




ANTON FRÜHAUF

Pendant, 1970

Gold. H 7.2 cm



MARIO PINTON

Brooch, pendant and hat pin, 1959–60
Gold. H 9 cm, 8 cm and 7 cm

whose work also strove to readdress the past, among them the sculptor Marino Marini, with whom Pinton had once worked. Marini's bronze horsemen echo Etruscan and ancient Chinese art.

Anton Frühauf, like Pinton, looked to the past and explored Greek mythology, dissecting pictorial elements and reconstructing them with stylized reliefs almost to the point of total abstraction. He eventually moved away from figuration altogether, towards an Abstract Expressionist style. In the 1970s, he compressed dense organic structures into jewelry; these pieces, despite their small scale, expressed massive energy.

Francesco Pavan was a former student of Mario Pinton. At the chance suggestion of his father's bookseller, Pavan entered art school in Padua to study goldsmithing at the age of twelve, graduating at eighteen. To earn his living, he became an assistant in Pinton's studio, but was smitten with modern sculpture, particularly the rhythmic, kinetic work of Jesús-Rafael Soto and the radical expressions of Lucio Fontana. He met Fontana one Sunday afternoon 'simply by picking up the 'phone'. A visit was arranged, and Pavan, who had brought along some friends for moral support, was greeted by the painter with 'great warmth and openness . . . Fontana's large white studio was full of his slashed canvases . . . I remember my heart thumping away with the sheer excitement of the place, it was inspirational.'

Pavan's passion for modern art in the 1960s became a strong influence on his own work; caught up by its liberating spirit, his designs developed a cool, simplifying ethos, a puritanical aesthetic more in line with Dutch or Scandinavian sensitivities.

European studio jewelers in the 1950s and 1960s attempted to rescue their craft from the clichés of traditional design. With the notable exception of Bakker and van Leersum, jewelers projected an inventive spirit but kept largely within the parameters of goldsmithing techniques and jewelry's conventional scale. But things were soon to change.

Not all activity promoting jewelry was focused in London. In Philadelphia, Helen Drutt established an outlet for American crafts which later also became a regular yet rare exhibition venue on the East Coast for American and European goldsmiths. Back in the UK, in Bristol, Sarah Osborn became the jewelry co-ordinator at Bristol's Arnolfini gallery, where she organized several provocative exhibitions and events. Arnolfini in fact had shown studio jewelry since the gallery's inception in 1961 (although they no longer do so).

Textiles have been used extensively for many centuries for spectacular ornament for either sex, whether as part of dress, ruffs and collars, or independently as jewelry. David Poston's use of fibre in the early 1970s, however, brought out other qualities in textiles that had hardly been recognized. He began to re-examine the social dimensions of jewelry with its emphasis on wealth and status. This led to tactile experiments intended to benefit the wearer, not the spectator. Abandoning most precious metals – rejecting gold emphatically because of South African exploitation of black labour in mining – he began working in string, hemp and cotton and in bone and leather. The results were not just warm and sensual, but had an elegance and frugal modesty born out of the maker's commitment.

Poston's explorations highlight the issue that the materials with which an object is made influence our evaluation of it. This is certainly true of jewelry where the intrinsic value of the material can get in the way of our aesthetic perception. As Dr Johnson said, 'You would not value the finest head if carved upon a carrot.' Yet what, I wonder, would the great man have made of Gijs Bakker's early work or others in this survey, who rate ideas and their realization above the cost of materials used? Perhaps there are double standards at work here, for this carrot-carving argument hardly applies to the fine arts, where the intrinsic value of materials is of little consequence.

This issue led to protracted arguments in the 1970s, particularly in Holland and Britain. But the democratic approach did not receive universal support. In Germany and Austria, for example, the spirited investigations of Bury, Maierhofer and Rothmann into non-precious materials were ruled more by aesthetic than ideological considerations. They had pushed acrylics to the limit, but that done, the goldsmiths returned to their precious materials as ducks to water.

In Italy, radical democratic arguments surrounding jewelry hardly arose. Its avant-garde jeered at design conventions chiefly through the furniture and ceramics of the Memphis group, egged on by Ettore Sottsass. In comparison with the rest of Europe, Italian goldsmiths often appear more retrospective. Certainly there is a consistency in the spirit of innovation that links Italy's past with its present. Frühauf, Pavan, Pinton, Martinazzi and the Pomodoro brothers contributed to international jewelry throughout this period. But the man who successfully reinvented Italy's long traditions in goldsmithing at this time was Giampaolo Babetto.

GIAMPAOLO BABETTO

Necklace, 1968

Gold. H 32.5 cm

