REVIEWS

Jewelry in Europe and America: New Times, New Thinking

RALPH TURNER. Thames & Hudson, 1996. 144 pp., 222 illus., 157 col. £14.95 cloth. ISBN 0500 278 792.

Jewelry of Our Time: Art, Ornament and Obsession

HELEN W. DRUTT ENGLISH and PETER DORMER. Thames & Hudson, 1995. 352 pp., 586 illus., 458 col. £32.00 cloth. ISBN 0500 016 747.

Jewelry: From Antiquity to the Present

CLARE PHILLIPS. Thames & Hudson (*World of Art Series*), 1996. 224 pp., 175 illus., 55 col. £6.95 paper., ISBN 0500 202 877.

In recent years the history of the applied arts has become the focus of critical and incisive historical analysis benefiting from methodologies in neighbouring disciplines such as art history, sociology, and material culture. However, in relation to that branch of the decorative arts known as 'craft', there is often a terminal resistance to seriously informed critique and analysis that takes cognizance of critical developments in related fields. The extensive knowledge of both Ralph Turner and Peter Dormer, who collaborated in the mid-1980s on *The New Jewelry: Trends and Traditions* (Thames & Hudson, 1985, revised edn. 1994), suggests that their involvement in the new publications under consideration here would mark a substantial conceptual shift from the first-stage, information-gathering exercise of that previous text.

Ralph Turner's *Jewelry in Europe and America: New Times, New Thinking*, which accompanies an exhibition of the same title, is divided into four sections: 'America 1940–1980', 'Europe 1945–1970'; 'Recovery and Reconstruction, European Cross Currents 1970–1980', and, 'In Pursuit of Savage Luxury Now'. Turner states in the Introduction that the account is 'a personal and subjective selection of work I consider to have been seminal in the development of jewelry in the last fifty years' (p. 7). As one of the founders of the Electrum Gallery in the 1970s, and later as Head of Exhibitions at the Crafts Council, Turner himself must be seen as 'seminal' in promoting the status of 'studio' jewellery, 'a term now frequently used to distinguish the work of artists from work produced purely for commercial reasons' (p. 7). It is a sign of the disingenuousness of much craft writing that it eschews the concept of a 'system' within which reputations, objects, and thinking function; it looks to a modernist version of art which supports an avant-garde, innovative practice in which jewellery unproblematically goes 'beyond traditional notions of adornment' (p. 7). Turner cites links with Surrealism, Constructivism, and Primitivism, as inspirational to American jewellers, isolated from European ideas during the 1940s and 1950s. However, as is pointed out in the first chapter, the influence of the émigré Bauhaus contingent, especially Laszlo Moholy-Nagy at the School of Design in Chicago, must not be discounted. The work of Margaret de Patta is particularly germane in that she translates Moholy-Nagy's Bauhaus principles, 'Catch your stones in the air . . . make them float in space' (p. 10), that echo the Weimar heyday of the crafts at the Bauhaus. Although, *pace* Greenberg, American modernism constructed itself as self-defined, the links with European modernism are evident here. MoMA's exhibition of 1946 'Modern Jewelry Design', announced, in advertising sloganese, as a 'new concept in jewelry: wearable art', should be seen as part of the consumer culture that dominates American capitalism, rather than, as here, a recognition of jewellery's status as an art form.

The two chapters on European jewellery are similarly concerned with promoting an idea of jewellery as 'art', as 'conceptual', though what is meant by these terms is never made clear. Hence, Gijs Bakker's training as an industrial designer is glossed over, his choice of industrial materials seen as 'an onslaught against élitism and orthodoxy' (p. 22) (though the link with a late 1960s counter-culture is also underplayed). Bakker's work of the late 1960s (and his use of laminated photographs) needs to be seen in the context of the structural relationship between craft skills and industrial processes of reproduction which is one of the many reasons why Bakker's work remains convincing.

The book attempts to place the work within its cultural context but never goes beyond clichés such as '[American work is] larger, louder, and some might say, freer' (p. 14). A more concentrated effort is made with European work but this is also subject to generalizations that give too much importance to the work of single individuals, seen as heroic avant-gardists single-handedly changing the 'meaning' of jewellery. However, the book declares itself as a 'survey' and, therefore, can only provide generalizations, though as the early sections of the book make clear, there is a wealth of material that could benefit from close historical research. Although some of the work illustrated will be familiar, Turner's book/catalogue provides an opportunity to see work produced from the late 1980s onwards which is a useful resource for jewellery and metalwork students, although sometimes photographic effect is achieved at the expense of clear illustrations. This text's function, like the previous *The New Jewelry*, as a 'gallery without walls' is important since direct access to such work is not easy. However, if this work is to be taken seriously, the critical context in which it is discussed also needs attention.

The emphasis on jewellery as art, is one shared by Helen W. Drutt English in her introduction to *Jewelry of Our Time: Art, Ornament and Obsession*. Drutt English, gallery owner and collector, is a prominent figure in the

world of American studio jewellery, who makes much of the pivotal role that collectors play, 'whose spirit of adventure and passion have recorded the taste of their time' (p. 7), comparing her role to that of Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler, Picasso and Braque's dealer, amongst others.

The period under consideration in this survey is approximately 1960–95, based on the Helen Williams Drutt Collection in Philadelphia, and in that sense can also be seen as functioning as a museum without walls. The illustrations and captions are comprehensive, and provide a *catalogue raisonné* of the work supported by Drutt, with extensive biographies of jewellers, a useful chronology (1963–94) of world-wide selected exhibitions, as well as a comprehensive bibliography on contemporary jewellery which includes selected monographs and exhibition catalogues. This section of the book is exemplary and should prove useful to historians, curators, and students.

The main body of the text is made up of four chapters, each subdivided into a series of short essays, in the form of observations, by Peter Dormer. Rather than attempting to persuade that these works are 'art', these essays take as a given that they are at least 'art-like'. However, the question as to why artists should turn to jewellery from the 1960s 'as a means of expression' is not examined, as Dormer notes 'that history is too recent and too complicated' (p. 12). Too complicated for whom, one might ask? Dormer is too knowledgeable, and aware of the distinctions, to make glib parallels between art and craft. As he notes in the section entitled 'The Dialogue with Modernism',

> Modernism is a slippery word. It embraces many theories and practices. A book on modernism would need to consider far-reaching effects of political and allegedly scientific analyses such as Marxism and psycho-analytic theory, as well as principles of industrial manufacture and the organization and integration of labour and machinery. *But this is not that book.* (p. 16; my emphasis)

Presumably because of the book's association with the Drutt Gallery, the text alludes instead to jewellery's role as social anthropology, 'small things with large meanings' (p. 14). This is true of *all* material culture, and it is necessary to uncover *which* meanings jewellery is concerned with. Having hurriedly dispensed with 'abstractionism' and 'figuration and meaning', those hoary art-historical themes, the essays go on to focus on 'meanings' specific to jewellery. This is undertaken in chapters entitled 'Scale, Form and Content', 'The Body and Jewelry', and 'Jewelry and Identity'. All the chapters contain perceptive observations, and insightful comments from makers which clarify their particular interests and working methods. 'Preciousness as Content' is especially suitable for an introductory undergraduate text for jewellery students since it will enable them to see how such an idea is discussed by jewellers, and will suggest ways in which they might articulate their own position within that debate.

Jewellery's relation to the body is so central, and recent literature on the subject so vast, that it is surprising and disappointing that the text does not address some of the material in a more informed manner. 'The Body and Jewelry', despite reference to William A. Ewing's *The Body* (Thames & Hudson, 1994), merely skates over the relation of the body and jewellery: *'this is not that book'*. Moreover, the work of Caroline Broadhead which is such a key example in this debate, is not mentioned. Omissions, however, seem curious rather than deliberate, like the cheap shots at popular culture, which has 'killed off, for the time being, the literal representation of a range of human affections and emotions' (p. 169). This modernist antipathy to popular culture leads to a less serious scrutiny of certain works like Rebecca Batal's Mickey Mouse pendant, and an over-valuation of the work of others, for example David Watkins, which can, specifically, be formally aligned with a modernist aesthetic. However, precisely because the texts are personal, they provide an interesting starting point for art-student seminar discussions.

Distinctions need to be made, however, between subjective opinions, which abound in craft writing, and serious scholarship. *Jewelry: From Antiquity to the Present*, part of the Thames & Hudson *World of Art* series, is also a survey. One of the problems of having to cover such a large time span within a standardized format is that the text becomes a descriptive listing of 'important' figures and pieces. Nevertheless, attention is paid to social and economic contexts such as the discovery of gold in Australia in the 1850s. The relationship between jewellery, fashion, and cosmetics in the 1920s is considered in conjunction with a move to the machine aesthetic which inspired certain jewellers such as Jean Desprès in the 1930s. Context is also provided by the use of contemporary portraits to illustrate the ways in which certain pieces were actually worn. Close attention is paid to innovative techniques, as well as the use of materials, especially in the early chapters which no doubt reflects the interests of archaeological scholarship in this area.

The final chapter, 'Since 1960', covers the ground examined by Turner and Dormer/Drutt, and similarly makes claims for a radical break with the past, echoing Dormer's statement that the work is 'too recent for a definitive view to be possible on which new directions will have the most lasting importance, and what follows is of necessity a personal selection' (p. 195). Nevertheless, the protagonists of this selection include the familiar names, Gijs Bakker, Otto Kunzli, Gerda Flockinger, Giampaolo Babetto, Yasuki Hiramatsu, to name but a few. However, rather than describing these works as 'art', materials and techniques provide the context in which these works are considered. Inevitably such an approach raises the spectre of connoisseurship, and at times the desire to list people's names without including an illustration of their work (e.g. Line Vautrin, Simon Costin) does

raise some questions about the value of such a vast historical trajectory.

As an introductory text, like others in this series, the wealth of material that is presented in *Jewelry: From Antiquity to the Present* is an admirable feat of condensation. However, the book's focus on luxury items presents a somewhat unbalanced history. Liberty's 'Cymric' range, or Joseff of Hollywood are the closest to any examination of popular taste undertaken in this text. It is also surprising that even the modern period did not merit more discussion, or description of mass-produced jewellery. The use of new materials such as bakelite, celluloid, and acrylic was significant in jewellery production well before the 'radical' use of plastics in the 1980s. In a survey that is, for the most part, driven by technique and material, the omission of these popular materials serves to highlight the sometimes 'exclusive' nature of much applied arts research.

The bibliography covers certain standard introductory texts and it is a pity that full details could not be included, but this is some indication of the market for which this publication is intended: the general interested reader for whom a certain cultural capital cachet can be gained by the knowledge of the Etruscans' use of granulation, and the exact meaning of a *ferronière*—'a jewel worn on a ribbon across the forehead' (p. 142).

All three texts under consideration here are surveys which, of necessity, can only provide a brief, generalized mapping of the terrain which, in the case of the applied arts and crafts, is invaluable. However, if the decorative arts are to survive as an independent discipline, then the quality of scholarship needs to reflect the complexity of the terrain under review rather than continuing to imagine that its appeal lies somewhere between the 'Antiques Roadshow', or as a lesser sibling to Fine Arts. The absence of theoretical awareness reinforces the narrow focus of these texts—not even that most established of critical readings, the issue of gender, so obviously relevant to the history of adornment, makes an appearance except in so far as it is the preoccupation of a particular jeweller's 'theme' (Maria Hanson in Turner). Such methodological *naïveté* undermines the many sterling qualities to be excavated in these texts.

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The Politics of Women's Work: The Paris Garment Trades, 1750–1915

JUDITH G. COFFIN. Princeton University Press, 1996. 304 pp., 22 b&w illus. £28.50 cloth. ISBN 0 691 03447 8.

There are many refreshing approaches found in Judith G. Coffin's *The Politics of Women's Work: The Paris Garment Trades, 1750–1915*. One is that it covers all levels of clothing manufacture to be found within the city of Paris from the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries. To dress historians reared upon endless histories of the great Parisian designers from Bertin to Doucet, research based on the social and cultural place of the makers of clothing for all levels of consumers comes as a breath of fresh air.

This book covers the period when Paris first developed and then flourished as the international setter of style and the central provider of fashion's *articles de luxe*. Already by the early eighteenth century, Roche states that there were in Paris alone fifteen thousand master and mistress clothing makers and about twenty thousand workers in the industry (around twice as many as worked in textiles), accounting for more than 40 per cent of all Parisian employers and workers.[1] Coffin stresses the breadth of clothing manufacture in the city which included the cheap and luxurious, and men's and children's garments. The city still today is home to a small army of garment workers, as a stroll in the streets that run up from the smart Right Bank couture outlets to the cheapest manufacturing factories and workshops at the foot of Montmartre will reveal to any observant walker.

Coffin uses the Paris garment industry as her case study because 'it grew too rapidly to be classified as a traditional trade'. It provides her with a strong base for the study of the manifold roles of gender within the process of industrialization. Coffin makes it clear that: 'the history of the garment industry per se . . . is not the subject of this book; I am interested rather in aspects of nineteenth-century France which that history throws into relief: the character of industrial organisation, the sexual division of labour and changing representations of work, whether cultural or social scientific.'

Coffin's approach to her subject is broad and multi-disciplinary, combining the social history of women's labour with debate about the intellectual history of nineteenth-century social sciences and political economy. Coffin explains the overall aims of her study as follows: 'My project here . . . is to analyse the historically specific ways in which definitions of "male" and "female" shape the lives of men and women and to consider how these definitions change over time.'

She discusses questions such as what constituted women's work, whether women belonged to the industrial labour force, why women's work was equated with low pay, and why should a woman not enjoy status as an enlightened homemaker/consumer? She is deeply interested in 'issues relating to working women and how gender became fundamental to the modern social division of labour and our understanding of it'. Coffin, who is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Texas at Austin, therefore looks at patterns of consumption and production and discusses in detail the impact of the introduction of the sewing machine (including an analysis of visual images of women and their sewing machines in French advertisements from 1864 to 1915 which, she believes, reveal often unsettling visual representations of women, labour, and machinery).

Coffin's impressive range of primary research in Paris includes material from the Archives Nationales and the Archives of the Prefecture of Police