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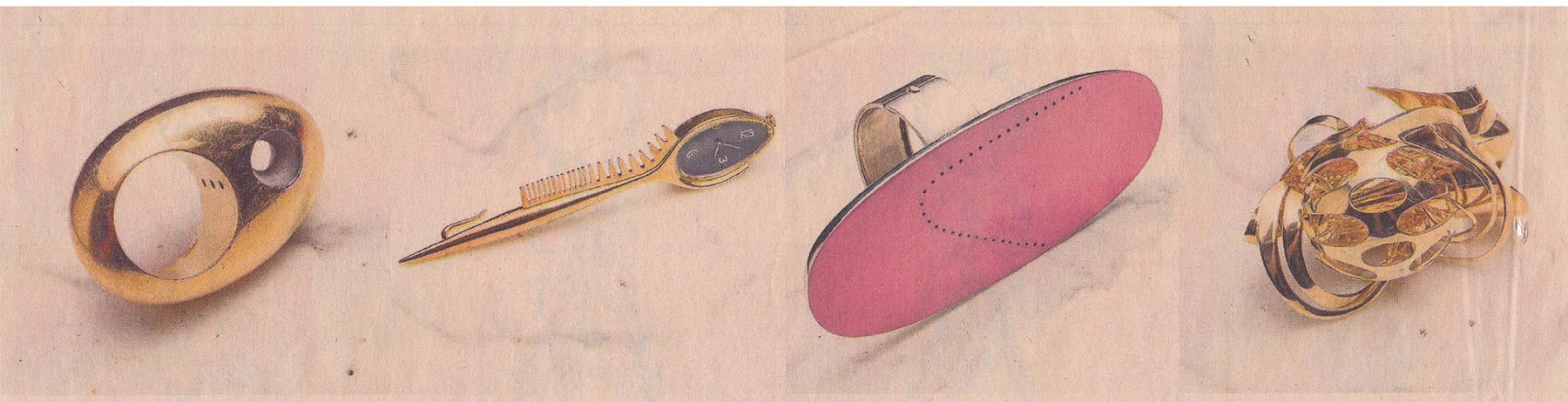
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'An intimate story'
Diane Venet's artist-jewellery collection

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My Favourite Pieces Diane Venet says artists often make gems for girlfriends, wives, mistresses . . . By Kate Youde

Artist jewellery starts as 'an intimate story'

Diane Segard's collection of jewellery made by artists began with her marriage proposal. The man who would be her husband, sculptor Bernar Venet, placed a twisted bar of silver on her finger as an engagement ring in 1985 — the first piece of jewellery he had ever made.

He followed his ring with Christmas and birthday presents of jewellery by his artist friends, starting with French sculptors César and Arman. This inspired (the by-now) Mrs Venet to start researching and collecting jewellery conceived by painters and sculptors "on the side" of their main practice.

"What I like in jewellery . . . is that very many times artists have been doing a piece of jewellery because they wanted to please a woman next to them," she says. "That was the case for Picasso; it was the case for many of them." Artist jewellery always starts "as an intimate story" rather than being produced for money or a gallery, she says, and is mostly done out of love or friendship.

Mrs Venet, a former radio and television journalist who comes from a family of art collectors, has amassed about 200 pieces of jewellery by artists including Picasso, Robert Rauschenberg and Georges Braque. She will curate her seventh museum exhibition of pieces from her collection in January 2018 at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris.

The collector says that while you can recognise an artist's practice and style in their jewellery, it is something different because they have to invent a piece that is wearable. "It's definitely not an artist making in small what they do in large as art," she says.

Le Trou ring, Man Ray (1970)

Mrs Venet collects jewellery made by artists themselves and pieces where artists have sought help from a jewellery maker in realising their idea. Her pieces are either unique or from small editions; her gold and platinum ring (*above left*), the 10th in an edition of 12, was designed by American artist Man Ray and made by the Italian jeweller GianCarlo Montebello. The two men were "very close friends", according to Mrs Venet, and visited one another in their homes in Paris and Milan.

She was attracted by the sense of humour displayed in the ring, one of three pieces she owns by Man Ray, who contributed to the Dada and Surrealist movements.

"Usually when you have a ring in gold it's made to carry or to show a diamond or a ruby or a sapphire, and here you have no stone — you have just a hole," she says. "I think it's great."

Brooch, Salvador Dalí (1957)

Mrs Venet, who does not make jewellery but sometimes collaborates with artists to produce small editions of pieces, believed that Salvador Dalí was one of the names she could not miss if she wanted to have a serious collection of artist jewellery. She had to wait a long time before finding something she could afford, however.

She spotted her gold and blue enamel brooch (*above*) in the window of an exhibition of Dalí's drawings at the Parisian gallery Messine about four years ago.

"I was very, very happy because it's a very Surrealist one because it's a spoon, a comb and a watch," she says.



The brooch was conceived as an edition of six, although Mrs Venet knows of only three pieces. "Many times the artist gives the authorisation for an edition of whatever — six, eight, 10, 20

Diane's stake:
she has bet on artist jewellery
Dan Stevens

or even more — and then [full] editions have not been produced," she says. "Maybe the six were made, maybe not."

10 Straight Lines pendant, Bernar Venet (2000)

As well as giving her pieces by other artists, Mr Venet has continued to make his wife jewellery and she estimates she has at least 15 of his pieces — all silver — from their 30 years together. "When he develops a concept for sculpture then he does a piece of jewellery for me usually," she says. He gave her this "very physical" pendant (*main photo*), which she wears on either a black leather rope or silver chain, when developing his Straight Lines sculptures.

In addition to unique pieces, Mrs Venet's husband also sometimes produces small editions of jewellery for her elder daughter, Esther de Beaucé. Ms de Beaucé opened Galerie MiniMasterpiece in Paris in 2012 with a focus on artist jewellery after seeing Mrs Venet's exhibition, "Picasso to Koons: Artist as Jeweler", at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York.

Ellisse bracelet, Lucio Fontana (1967)

Mr Montebello, whom Mrs Venet describes as the "father of artist jewellery", made another of her favourite pieces — a large bracelet by Lucio Fontana, the founder of Spatialism. "Fontana . . . came up with the idea to make a one-colour background on the painting, whether it's pink or white or black or blue, and he slashed the painting with a knife or he made holes . . . with an instrument," she says; it was his way of giving normally-flat pictures a third

dimension. Thus, the fragile silver and pink lacquer bracelet (*second from right*) is "very close to his paintings". She received the piece, part of an edition, as a birthday present from her husband.

Ring, Frank Stella (2010)

The collector cherishes her "gorgeous" gold Frank Stella ring (*above*) because it is the first of an edition of 10 the American painter produced with the Gallery Mourmans in the Netherlands. "For me, it's really a very intimate story," she says. "Frank is a very dear, darling friend and he didn't want to do jewellery and he accepted to do it because I think he likes my husband and maybe he likes me too."

Her husband had tried to convince their friend to make a piece of jewellery for her as a Christmas present a couple of times without success, but during dinner in New York in 2008 Mr Stella pulled out from a drawer a unique

Artists have to invent a piece that is wearable. It's not making in small what they do in large as art'

necklace "badly wrapped" in newspaper. Mrs Venet then persuaded him to work on a small edition of jewellery and helped him decide on his design for the ring.

She loves the originality of an artist's piece of jewellery and is not interested in wearing a diamond on her finger. "I much prefer to have something that, to me, has a profound meaning," she says. "It's a work of art."