

artist jewellery

The thrill of the hunt for an artwork handmade by a modern master is only trumped by a chance to wear it, as Paula Weideger reveals

It's a relatively little known fact that the creative output of Picasso, Giacometti, Fontana and other celebrated artists often included jewellery. For a long time only their collectors knew about these miniature works of art. Now, however, others are discovering that they too can own a Picasso – and wear it.

Such pieces pack a double punch. "Wearing artists' jewels enhances both the woman and the work of art," says Diana Küppers. Based in Mülheim, Germany, the former art dealer has been collecting and wearing jewels by artists for more than 30 years.

The designs are often sensual, rather than glitzy, and can reveal a touching, romantic streak; this is art at its most intimate. Bernar Venet, the French conceptual sculptor and painter, one day picked up a length of thin silver wire and coiled it around the finger of his partner, Diane Segard. He didn't choose any old digit; it encircled the ring finger of her left hand. Mme Venet, as she became, has received many of Bernar's jewels, often models for his monumental sculptures, in the 27 years since. She has also become a leading collector of artist jewels, as well as the editor of a book and a curator of exhibitions on the subject.

In December, Venet's exhibition *Picasso to Koons: The Artist as Jeweler* opened in Valencia. Of the 227 pieces on view, 118 are from her collection. They include works by Braque, Man Ray, Picasso, Fontana and, of course, Bernar. The show travels to Miami Beach's Bass Museum in March and afterwards to Seoul, Tokyo, Busan and Turin. Her motive is to share her enthusiasm for these small works of art – but the success of her exhibition is likely to push up prices, too.

Carolyn Pastel, specialist and associate vice president at Christie's New York, reports that since the Venet show at the city's Museum of Arts and Design (from September 2011 to January 2012), artist jewellery has become a "hot ticket". While the range of artists whose jewels are offered is expanding, it's rare that works come up for sale, creating stiff competition when they do. Christie's, the most active auction house in this area, offers artist jewellery in its 20th Century Decorative Arts and Design, Post-War and

From top: Méret Oppenheim
Husch Husch necklace, 1985,
£68,000 at Didier. Georges
Braque brooch, c1962, part
of Diane Venet's collection.
Alexander Calder necklace,
1939, sold for \$602,500 at
Christie's in 2011. Picasso
Ovale brooch made by
François Hugo, c1967,
£22,500 at Didier



Calder hammered and twisted his designs with his own hands

Contemporary Art, and Impressionist and Modern Art sales. And, of course, the rocketing sums paid for paintings and sculptures by such masters as Giacometti, Picasso and other modern artists lift prices for their jewels. At Christie's in New York, for example, a necklace by Alexander Calder sold for a whopping \$602,500 in 2011.

Artists have actually been designing jewels for centuries. Hans Holbein the Younger made beautiful drawings for elaborate gem-set gold pendants as early as the 16th century; Sir Alfred Gilbert, who sculpted the Piccadilly Circus *Eros* in the late 19th century, made intricate wirework jewels. These pieces were also

intended to be worn, but nowadays very few survive in wearable condition.

And while dealers including Louisa Guinness and Elisabetta Cipriani in London and Esther de Beaucé (Venet's daughter) in Paris sell jewels by living artists such as Anish Kapoor and Jeff Koons, buyers continue to be drawn to pieces by the luminaries of modern art – seduced by the names whose enduring importance has been proven. Didier Haspesslagh, a leading dealer in jewels by modern artists, comments: "With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight we are able to say, 'That is the best, the signature piece – the museum-quality item.'"

Haspesslagh and his wife, Martine, trade as Didier and their clients include members of the British and Middle Eastern royal families as well as private collectors. Their recent experience at The European Fine Art Fair (Tefaf) in Maastricht illustrates just how interest in artist-designed jewels has shot up. Of the more than 250 international dealers who take part in Tefaf every March, not one was a specialist in artist jewellery – until last year, when Didier was asked

to exhibit in its one-off Showcase attraction. Ben

Janssens, the fair's executive committee chairman, was so impressed by the miniature artworks the gallery brought – and by the number of people keen to try them on – that he invited Didier to become a regular exhibitor at the fair. For its inaugural presentation next month, Didier will spotlight works by 22 women sculptors, including Louise Bourgeois and Méret Oppenheim.

In Paris, too, there is evidence that artist jewels have become *à la mode*. Les Visites Particulières, which provides bespoke chauffeured tours, includes Artists as Jewellers in its half a dozen offerings. A visit to the jewels in the Decorative Arts Museum is followed by champagne and jewellery admiring at de Beaucé's Galerie MiniMasterpiece, and concludes with entry to the private apartment of an important collector.

Those tempted to buy should be aware that some pieces were produced in small editions, others in very large ones, while those manufactured posthumously lack the input of the demanding artists who designed them. At Didier, multiples made on behalf of the artist start from £650, and prices rise to £150,000 for unique pieces. Not all workshops are equal: goldsmiths François Hugo and GianCarlo Montebello are prized. And it's worth noting that sculptors sometimes also made the jewels they designed. Some 1,800 jewels made by Alexander Calder have been identified and they command high prices because he hammered, twisted and riveted them with his own hands; each is a unique work of art.

Haspesslagh says people only buy what is wearable. This is not jewellery to squirrel away in the vault. Think of it: an art collection to dangle from the ears, pin to a pullover, encircle the wrist, ornament the fingers... ♦

WHERE TO BUY CHRISTIE'S, 20 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA, NEW YORK, NY 10020 (+1212-974 4525; WWW.CHRISTIES.COM). DIDIER, 66B KENSINGTON CHURCH ST, LONDON W8 (020-7221 1573; WWW.DIDIERLTD.COM). ELISABETTA CIPRIANI, SPROVIERI, 23 HEDDON ST, LONDON W1 (020-7734 2066; WWW.ELISABETTACIPRIANI.COM). GALERIE MINIMASTERPIECE, 16 RUE DES SAINTS PERES, 75007 PARIS (+336-6201 6306; WWW.GALERIEMINIMASTERPIECE.COM). LOUISA GUINNESS, C/O BEN BROWN FINE ARTS, 21 CORK ST, LONDON W1 (020-7494 4664; WWW.LOUISAGUINNESSGALLERY.COM). TEFAF, WWW.TEFAF.COM; MARCH 15-24. **WHERE TO SEE** BASS MUSEUM OF ART, 2100 COLLINS AVENUE, MIAMI BEACH (+1305-673 7530; WWW.BASSMUSEUM.ORG). LES VISITES PARTICULIERES, +331-5360 1772; WWW.LESVISITESPARTICULIERES.COM. MUSEUM OF DECORATIVE ARTS, 107 RUE DE RIVOLI, 75001 PARIS (+331-4455 5750; WWW.LESARTSDECORATIFS.FR). **WHAT TO READ** FROM PICASSO TO JEFF KOONS: THE ARTIST AS JEWELER, EDITED BY DIANE VENET (SKIRA BOOKS, 2011).