

MEMENTO

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Chapter 1 describes my previous jewelry work related to my interest in body parts and other materials as medium and lockets. The questions in the statement of problem deal with how the use of a specific body site, color and incorporation of body parts in my jewelry make my work more intimate to the wearer.

Chapter 2 discusses the work I focused around the questions proposed in Chapter 1. Important points are: a more focused way of using specific body sites to support my ideas, the use of different skin colors in my work, and the physical effect of my jewelry to the wearer.

Chapter 3 expresses my own criticism about the work and my future goals after this project.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Historically, jewelry around the world has incorporated not only precious and semi-precious materials, but also found objects. I have integrated organic materials such as chili peppers and shells into my work. My attraction to these materials was due to the interesting character of forms and their fragile, rather impermanent characteristics in contrast to the permanence of metals. Some of these materials change in while the others act as a metaphor for growth and transformation. The influence of these forms is still apparent through my current work. Although I blend alternative materials, my work is strongly rooted in the tradition of metalsmithing. Precious and semi-precious materials have been re-used and recycled and most of the techniques applied have been developed throughout time. By retaining the use of traditional materials and processes, I maintained my link to the history of metalsmithing. By using non-traditional materials in conjunction with ones that carry inherent values, I tried to give equal aesthetic weight to the alternative ones.

Recently, I began incorporating human hair into my work. When I started making lockets in the spring of 2000, I wanted to see how the space within the locket could be used to contain material that would suggest personal time, growth, and memory. I felt that personal routines, such as getting my haircut, kept me in my cycle, helping me to adjust myself from one calendar year to the next. Historically, human hair has been used for jewelry, such as *mourning jewelry* during the Victorian era. I have been interested in *hair jewelry* having multiple functions such as personal adornment as well as social significance; announcing status and wealth, signaling deep affection and the

bond with another person, commemorating an event or induction into an organization or making a family legacy or religious conviction. My work has been sculptural, but one of my interests in creating jewelry rather than sculpture is in its intimacy to the wearer, both physically and spiritually. I feel that hair jewelry especially emphasizes these characteristics of jewelry. Hair jewelry was very personal, but it also had strong bonds to the social condition at the time.

My interest in employing body elements also lies in its relationship to the wearer. Stefanutti & Griffin (1994) describe, “at the earliest stage of cognition, an individual’s cognition and self-awareness is predicated on their apprehension of objects which are not a part of them, those things which are other” (p 34). I find the use of body elements in jewelry interesting because what was once part of the body is being used to decorate the body, and thereby blurring the boundary between the body and the object itself. On a trip to Boston to attend a Metalsmith conference in 2000, I saw a parade of interesting jewelry displayed on people. As I was waiting for a bus to go on a gallery tour, I mistook a person’s hair strand for her earring. Then I started to question if the use of ornamental hair could be included into the realm of jewelry. What is it that makes an object a piece of jewelry? Is it the materials and forms or in how we use them? Can a person’s ornamental hair or aging skin be part of jewelry, or does it have to be extracted from its original location? Can jewelry change in time as we age, and can a locket’s space hold the memory of our transformation?

My work is rather exaggerated in scale as compared to conventional commercial jewelry. I wanted my jewelry to be functional, but not necessarily functional for everyday use. Because of this, I felt it was important for the work to have visual interest when it is

apart from the body.

Statement of Problem

The focus of my work was the study of combining material derived from the human body, such as hair and skin, with precious, semi-precious, and alternative materials. Different forms of jewelry were made to see how the placement of each form would help to support the idea of the work. In some of them, I used hair and skin, to see if I could incorporate body elements as part of my wearable work.

Questions Addressed

1. How can I blur the boundary between my work and the body by incorporating body elements and mimicking skin colors to make my work more intimate to the wearer?
2. How does the placement of jewelry on the body help in supporting the ideas of the work?
3. How can I create jewelry that is not too uncomfortable to wear physically, but still retains visual interest when it is apart from the body?

Methodology

Upon completion of three sets of jewelry in different formats that were centered on the problems and ideas discussed above, I held an exhibition of these works along with other recent jewelry, as partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Fine Arts degree at Cora Stafford Gallery, 1120 W. Oak Street, Denton, Texas, 76201 from January 27-31, 2003.

CHAPTER 2

DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK AND ANALYSIS

Upon beginning work on my thesis projects, I had three sets of works in my mind. My goal, through answering questions for this project was to create jewelry that emphasized the intimacy of its nature. My way of investigating these questions was to incorporate elements from the human body as part of my work. During the process, I have tried to stay within what were considered to be the traditional materials within our discipline. I always liked the way these materials brought out the preciousness of the work.

One set I had in my mind was bracelets that collect dead skin over time as one wears them. The idea for this work came from an article that I had read. It stated that most of house dusts were actually our dead skin. I wondered if I could create lockets to house one's dead skin. The first body site that came to mind to work with was the wrist, as it is used for a watch. The time these bracelets would keep would be more personal; depending on how often the owner would wear them or how much skin she/he would shed.

Once I had the idea, I was not quite sure what materials to use. I wanted these bracelets to be a form of locket that had space to hold our change in time and to include hinges. The use of hinges is part of the history of lockets, to reveal what is inside. The outside of the bracelets would appear to be quite simple, and inside of the bracelets would have grooves that would collect the dead skin. As for the design, I looked into the tree rings and textures inside of plants. I was interested in how a tree or plant leaves marks as it grows. First, I chose to use wood, since it directly related to the idea. I chose

purple heart and blood wood, because their names related to the body. Having little experience working with wood, and anticipating how hard it would be to work with these kinds of hard woods resulted in the first two wooden bracelets, which turned out too large. The criticism was made that they almost looked like torture devices, that the use of wood was too direct conceptually, and the wood had too much historical baggage in itself.

I redesigned the bracelets made from metal, which I felt technically more comfortable working with. I kept the same idea of using the tree rings and the texture of the inside of a plant. I also kept the use of hinges and simple surfaces on the outside walls. The first one that I completed in metal had multiple concentric layers that became smaller at the top. I gold plated just the inside. The second bracelet had many slices of tubings inside of the walls. So, as one wears them, the viewer would only see the simple bands, and inside were secrets for the wearers. This set of bracelets was named *Telling time with one's fragments #1 and #2*. Over time, a part of the wearer becomes part of the bracelet.

The second set of jewelry was locketts that went on the back of the neck. This idea came from reading a book called *Dance, Dance, Dance* by Haruki Murakami. The author used many interesting expressions, but the one that really stuck in my mind was when the main character described that the back of women's necks aged like tree rings, and he could tell approximately how old a woman was by looking at the back of her neck. I always thought it was interesting that, "Napes are a primary erotic focus of the female body in Japan, fully the equivalent of breasts in the West" (p.197-198). I thought it would be an interesting part of the body to work with, also because it is a site that the

wearer would never be able to see without a mirror.

As I worked on this jewelry, I wanted the lockets to be part of the necklaces. I wanted the lockets to look like cosmetic compact containers. In my lockets, one would look at the wearer's skin instead of make-up powder. In researching the design for the lockets, I went to some cosmetic departments and looked at several make-up containers. Currently, most of the cosmetic containers are made of plastic. I marveled at how their mechanisms were similar to what we use in our discipline. I made a locket of silver and copper with a hinge and a catch similar to what I saw in cosmetic containers. It ended up too heavy, and I could not come up with a design for the necklace. The locket was designed to be worn on the back of the neck thus could not be too heavy due to practical issues. Because of these issues, this project was put on hold.

In beginning to work on this same idea again I began with the chains for the necklaces as a starting point so that I would know the design and what the weight of the lockets could be. I liked the idea of a chain symbolizing a link with ancestors and the past. I cut rings from yellow heart wood; starting from smallest to biggest, with the locket positioned at the end having the biggest of all the rings. Each wooden ring was connected with silver rings and was hand curved in such a way resembling cell. I dyed each ring with peach fabric dye creating an appearance of having been brushed with cosmetic powder. I electroformed the mold of my nape for the cover of the locket, and enameled it with similar color as the wooden rings. As the locket opened, I needed to have something inside so that the viewer would get the feeling of looking at something. First I thought about using either glass or plexi-glass, as they were used to cover biological samples. Instead, I chose to use panty hose stretched over silver. I liked the

use of panty hose because it was a modest ornamentation, and one could almost see the actual skin into which it blended. Also, I like the soft visual effect that it gave.

The next necklace was a chain, which also started from smallest to biggest at the end, but instead of wood, stretched panty hose was used over silver. This evolved from the first locket. I painted the fabric of the panty hose with nail polish for strength. The locket had a silver cap that was connected with a chain. These two lockets were called *Where it ages like tree rings #1 and #2*. The wearers' skin inside of these lockets is integral part of these necklaces. Every time a viewer looks inside of these lockets when they are on the body, they look different due to the aging of the wearers' skin.

The last series of work was three rings called *Holding onto one's jewels*. I have always wondered how rings have evolved, and have been amazed by the variations of rings that are now present. Ward, Cherry, Gere & Cartilige (1981) pointed out, "It seems far more likely that the earliest types of jewelry were those that could be seen and enjoyed by the owner himself when he wore them, and of these the ring is the most obvious choice – a reminder of personal status, beauty and distinction to be savored with every movement of the hand." I always thought that the ring was the most intimate of all jewelry, partly because it was something one could feel with his/her hand and could hold onto. I wanted to take advantage of this tactile nature. I enameled small-electroformed copper rings with different skin tones. For the bezels, I knotted the shapes of drop, marquise faceted stones, and one pearl shape out of human hair. Then I connected these bezels with tiny gold chains to the enameled rings. The bezel of the ring can be held inside one's palm. I liked the use of enamel because it softened the metal and added the color effect. For these rings, enamel emphasized my idea because

of its fragileness and permanence. I applied colors of enamel that allowed blending into the skin, but they were permanent, unchanging as one's skin ages. Enamel is fused glass on metal, and it can be cracked easily. Due to this, the wearer has to be very careful when he/she wears them, not to crack the enamel. The gold chains that I made to connect bezels and rings were also fragile. The strongest parts physically in these rings were actually the bezels, although they seemed very fragile. I hoped to use the sensitive characteristics of enamel and small metal chains on these rings to commemorate one's past beauty and memory.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I will discuss the work completed in relation to goals that I aspired for myself in the proposal. I will also discuss how I felt about my work in general.

I have answered all the questions proposed throughout the work. I was very pleased how the scale of my art became smaller and was very conscious about how they would look and feel on the body. For my invitation card, I had my friend model for my necklaces, since it was very important for the work to be seen on the body. Necklaces were worked on a mannequin. One occasion that really made me think was when my friend from the fashion department told me that it was very important for her to create clothing that she could wear, because it was part of her pleasure in making garments. Before working on this project, I had put too much emphasis on the visual effect of my jewelry when it was off the body, and most of the time, they became sculpture-like, while referencing jewelry. But it was not my intention to create symbols of jewelry; therefore, in trying to answer my questions, I felt that I went back to the very basic nature of jewelry as being wearable.

During the process, I was very conscious about how the visual forms of my work were becoming looser and looser. In the statement of problem I questioned if I could blur the boundary between my work and the body by incorporating body elements and mimicking skin colors to make my work more intimate to the wearer. I like both geometric forms and organic ones. When thinking about this question, I worried that the use of geometric forms was not very effective. At the same time, I did not have the confidence to totally change my work. I went back and forth with different visual effects.

As a result, I felt my work lacked visual consistency. Also, for me there was not much success in trying new materials. Instead, I liked using traditional materials. The more I worked with them, the more I discovered that I had a lot more to learn, technically and historically.

Concerning the use of body parts, one of my committee members questioned if it was important to use my own hair in my work, and what would it mean to wear someone else's body part as jewelry. My answer to this question was that if I did use human hair, I would like to create jewelry that was commission. I was very much interested in the Victorian sentimental jewelry. It went through different stages: first as mourning jewelry, second, as an exchange of love, third, as exchange of friendship, and finally, just became decorative. When I imagined my jewelry with my own hair being worn by somebody else, I felt that it would relate to the final stage of Victorian jewelry. I did not like that idea very much. Employing the wearer's own skin was my way of answering this question, since my bracelets and necklaces did not have to rely on someone else's extracted body part. The nature of these bracelets and necklaces' function necessarily relies on the wearer. I liked the expression that was made by Sassen (1995) in her book *Ouroboros*, about Dutch goldsmith Ruddt Peters' ring series, "By bearing these rings, by living with them, the bearer's history, his or her existence in time, is conveyed to the object" (p. 6). I would like to pursue this kind of intimacy that jewelry can have with the person who owns it.

APPENDIX



Figure 1. Bracelets-Lockets



Figure 2. Telling Time with One's Fragments #1 & #2



Figure 3. Telling Time with One's Fragments #1



Figure 4. Telling Time with One's Fragments #2

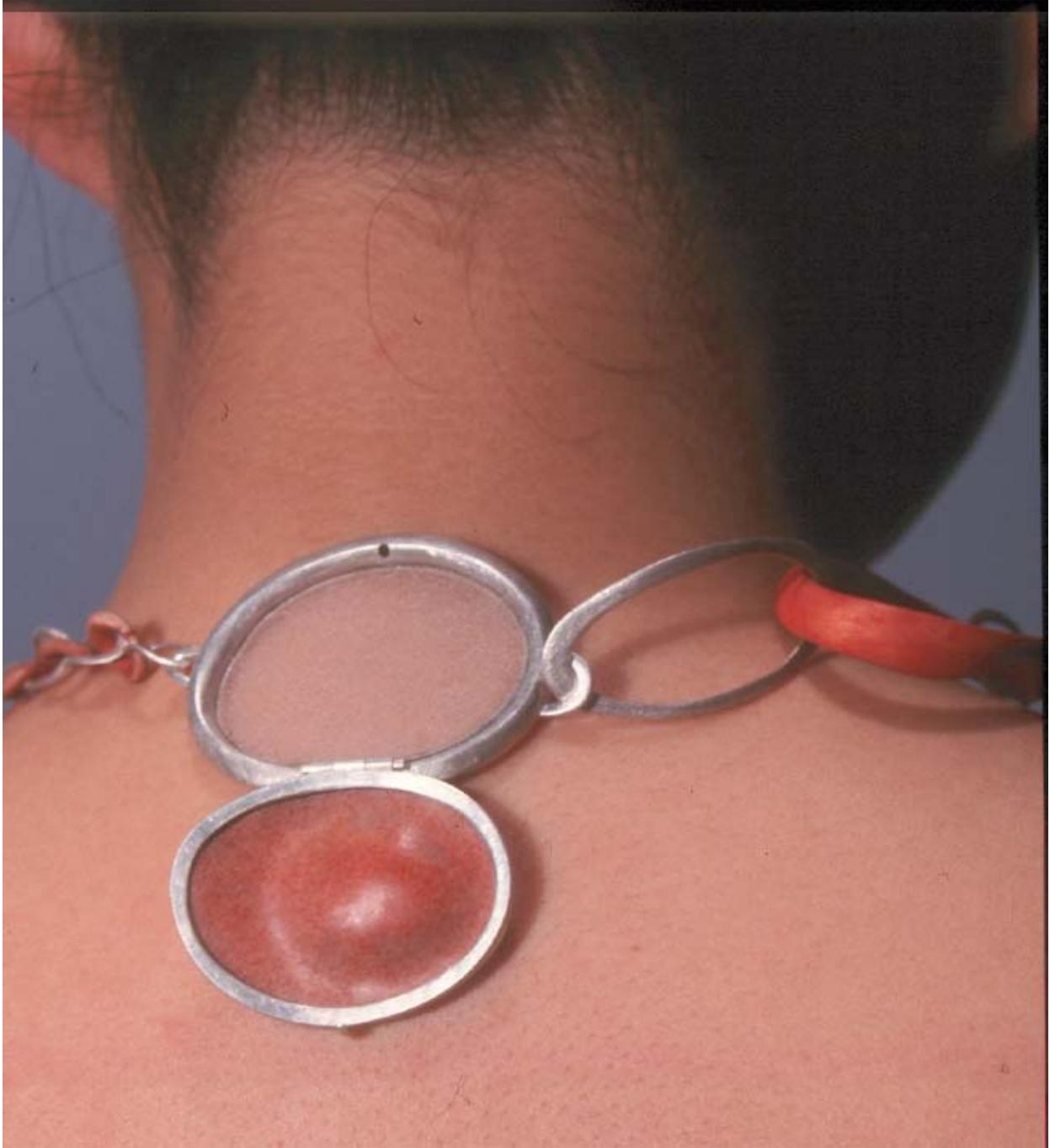


Figure 5. Where It Ages Like Tree Rings #1 (Detail)



Figure 6. Where It Ages Like Tree Rings #1



Figure 7. Where It Ages Like Tree Rings #2 (Detail)



Figure 8. Where It Ages Like Tree Rings #2 (On the Body)



Figure 9. Where It Ages Like Tree Rings #2



Figure 10. Holding onto One's Jewels

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