

## Susanna Heron Jewellery, The First Decade 1971-1982

I graduated from Central School of Art & Design in 1971 at the beginning of a radical period for contemporary jewellery. That same year the Crafts Advisory Committee was formed and Electrum Gallery opened, London's first art gallery specialising in jewellery, co-director Ralph Turner came to my degree show and offered me my first solo exhibition in 1972.

### The early years

My family had a profound influence on my practice. I always knew I was going to be an artist, I never considered anything else. We lived in a wild and beautiful place in Cornwall and although it was isolated there was a flow of interesting people passing through and lots of talk about painting and politics. There were no hierarchies between art and life, men and women, we were expected to do something and encouraged to do what we wanted to do. I was interested in jewellery as a way of making art that was accessible and part of everyday life.

I had started exhibiting jewellery at Arnolfini in Bristol and Bear lane Gallery Oxford during my sixth year at school. It was at school that I discovered Nova magazine a politically radical, beautifully designed and intellectual women's magazine. Unusually for a state grammar school the library had a regular subscription that I avidly consumed alongside a determined attempt to read Joyce's Ulysses. By 1965 I'd found a connection to pop culture and swinging London.

When I went to Central it was the only jewellery course in London that had the National Diploma where I could get a full grant. I used to sign in to college every day and work at home because I was working in resin. The course tutors considered enamel and silver to be inferior materials so the use of resin was completely outside and beyond any guideline and there were no facilities to use it. There was a disapproval of mixing with fine art students, it's hard to explain just how isolating it was. I was fortunate enough to flat-share with the sculptor Meryl Thomas, who was working in resin and introduced me to this innovative medium.

It was at Central in 1969 as part of the Royal Academy's major Bauhaus exhibition that I saw a projection of Oskar Schlemmer's original 1921 black and white film of the Slat Dance and wrote my dissertation focusing on his definition of 'ambulant space'. The live body and the personal activity of wearing were to become my primary concerns. I made jewellery derived from and activated by the movement of the body in space.

The Perspex Multiples were a series of multiples that I made in 1976. The geometry was based on the shape of the hand and the arm in the act of putting on and wearing. The desire to make work accessible continued to preoccupy me and I wanted them to be sold in ordinary shops. At £3 each they were too expensive for the high street, so I doubled the

price and sold them through galleries as a multiple. In all there were at least 600 arm pieces in 6 shapes and 8 colours, they were cut by an East End signmaker and I finished the edges by hand. I still think they were one of my best works. The Perspex Multiples were re-issued with Tatty Devine in 2011 in a limited boxed edition.

### **Early influences and support**

During this period Ralph Turner was a significant mentor to me, originally at Electrum Gallery and then exhibitions organiser for the Crafts Council, he curated and toured group jewellery exhibitions and also made international connections with museums, placing my work in public collections, including the Stedelijk Museum in 1972. I owe my early professionalism to him.

At this time interest in jewellery was driven by particular people: Ralph Turner at Electrum Gallery and later at the Crafts Council, Sarah Osborn at Arnolfini in Bristol and then Paul Derrez at Galerie Ra in Amsterdam who were passionate about it. My work went all over the world: the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Canada, USA, Australia, Mexico, Iran, Switzerland, New Zealand and Japan; my main exchange being with Amsterdam.

The most interesting practitioners to me in this decade were: Caroline Broadhead [UK]; Otto Kunzli [German Swiss]; Joke Brakman, Emmy van Leersum and Gijs Bakker [Netherlands] and Judith Shea [USA] who was working with clothing.

In the 1970's I formed an important relationship with artist David Ward. They were formative years for both of us in our independent practice and in collaboration to combine object and photograph.

In 1978 I won a Bicentennial Arts Fellowship to live and work in the US for 12 months it was at this time that I experienced site-specific and performance art, minimalism and photography all of which had a significant influence on my work.

### **The making of The Wearables**

The Wearables was a group of works that I made between 1981 and 1982. A Wearable could be both worn and exhibited- it was exhibited hanging on the wall alongside a black and white photograph of the object being worn or it was worn much like a hat, reminiscent of a circular brim set on the side of your head, or against your back like a sunhat. The photographic images were taken for me by David Ward for this purpose and became integral to the exhibited work. The combination of object and photograph originally arose out of a desire to give the viewer a personal experience in a public situation where the piece could not be touched. You could look at the object on the wall and look at the photograph and know how it could be worn.

I invented the term 'Wearable' as a result of a solo exhibition at the Van Reekummuseum, Netherlands titled The Recurring Theme. The exhibition comprised a group of objects in the form of spirals, discs and ties attached to the wall. These objects were intended to be

exhibited only and not to be worn, the idea of wearing had ceased as a function and become the subject of the works. It was only during this exhibition that I decided to reintroduce the wearable function to some of the works and invented the 'Wearables'. I was so excited by the name that I waited until I could publish it alongside an extended set of works. The term 'Wearable' was first published in the press release to my exhibition at the V&A Craft shop in 1982.

Caroline Broadhead documents my use of the term in her exhibition catalogue for New Tradition in 1985 <http://www.worldcat.org/title/new-tradition-the-evolution-of-jewellery-1966-1985/oclc/12919915->

In 1982 David Ward and I curated The Jewellery Project - New departures in British and European work 1980-83 at The Crafts Council Gallery. This exhibition together with Jewellery Redefined at The British Crafts Centre were seminal exhibitions. By this time I could see no more to do that hadn't already been done, so for me it was over and I made a fresh start in sculpture.

Susanna Heron, 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2015