Materiality, Body and Culture – Contemporary Jewellery

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ACQUISITIONS/MATERIALITY, BODY AND CULTURE – CONTEMPORARY JEWELLERY

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Fig. 1 Image from the exhibition Open Space – Mind Maps: Positions in Contemporary Jewellery, shown at Nationalmuseum Design at Kulturhuset Stadsteatern, 11 March–15 May 2016.
Identity and gender roles are issues that are discussed by a number of contemporary jewellery artists. Carolina Gimeno, who grew up in Chile but trained and now works in Europe, says that “reflecting different identities means to me that I am in constant change as well”.

The starting point for her series of brooches *Portable Pleasures: When Intimacy Becomes Public* (2014) was a collection of used socks acquired/materiality, body and culture – contemporary jewellery – city.\(^1\) *Open Space – Mind Maps* presented 160 works that challenged prevailing ideas about artistic expression, form and materials, created by 30 internationally noted jewellery artists, seven of them with links to Sweden (Fig. 1).\(^2\) The curator was Dr Ellen Maurer Zilioli from Munich.

Contemporary Swedish and international jewellery is situated in a field where the focus is on communication, boundary crossing and materiality. Gender norms and social issues are being explored in almost any other material than precious metals and gemstones.

In spring 2016, the Nationalmuseum staged the exhibition *Open Space – Mind Maps: Positions in Contemporary Jewellery*, which was the core display of Stockholm’s first combined jewellery event – *Art Jewellery 2016* – organised by the Museum in association with jewellery specialist Inger Wästberg. Exhibitions of jewellery were shown at many venues around the city.\(^1\)

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The growing importance of art jewellery in the broader cultural debate and, above all, in the current discussion about the applied arts is clearly in evidence in the Nationalmuseum’s collection. In 2016, 18 pieces of jewellery made after the year 2000 were added to it, and during the period the Museum has been closed for refurbishment, beginning in 2013, a total of 56 pieces created since the millennium have been acquired. These works will figure prominently in the display of the collection when the newly renovated Nationalmuseum opens in the autumn of 2018.

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A recurring feature of Yasar Aydin’s jewellery is a specific shade of pink, a colour symbolising the stereotyped prejudices he encounters as a homosexual. Aydin believes that femininity is often regarded in a homosexual culture as something negative and pathetic – perhaps in an attempt to gain respect from heterosexual groups?1 The question is relevant in his jewellery series *Layers of Pink* from 2011.

(Tobias Alm engages in a similar discussion about the complex relationship between jewellery and masculinity.)

(Fig. 3). The Nationalmuseum’s brooch refers to intimate organs, openings and bodily fluids, at the same time as the pink colour evokes associations with skin. From a leather-lined opening a drop is propelled, placed on a spring so that it swings when the wearer moves.

(Fig. 5). Sanna Svedestedt (b. 1981), *Brooch “Cameo series 2015”*. Tanned reindeer skin, black, 34 x 21 x 5 cm (h x w x d). Purchase: Ulla and Gunnar Trygg Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMK 239/2016.

(Fig. 4). Tobias Alm (b. 1985), *Chatelaine / Tool belt “The chatelaine no. 1”, 2015*. Sterling silver, leather, steel, 9 x 9.4 cm (h x diam). Purchase: Barbro Osher Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMK 21/2016.

(Fig. 8). Hanna Liljenberg (b. 1982), *Collar “Paper work”, 2011*. Paper, glue, shellac, 13 x 28 x 23 cm (h x l x w). Purchase: Ulla and Gunnar Trygg Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMK 240/2016.

(Fig. 2). This everyday and gender-neutral item of clothing is worn by both women and men. Gimeno reshaped the socks into sculptures with forms reminiscent of the most intimate parts of men’s and women’s bodies. By doing so, she wanted to investigate not only where the limits of intimacy go in the public space, but also how art jewellery can contribute to the debate about gender.
be worn by both men and women (Fig. 5). She obtains her materials, chiefly leather and wood, from the Swedish natural world. This choice of materials emphasises even more clearly that her jewellery is intended to be unisex. Svedestedt trained in art jewellery at the School (now the Academy) of Design and Crafts in Gothenburg, an institution that has actively contributed to – Mind Maps exhibition. Like several other Swedish jewellery artists, both Tobias Alm and Yasar Aydin trained at Ädellab, the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design’s department for jewellery and corpus (hollowware) in Stockholm.

Sanna Svedestedt’s oversized brooches, titled Cameo Series 2015 and made from moulded reindeer skin, are intended to be worn by both men and women (Fig. 5). She obtains her materials, chiefly leather and wood, from the Swedish natural world. This choice of materials emphasises even more clearly that her jewellery is intended to be unisex. Svedestedt trained in art jewellery at the School (now the Academy) of Design and Crafts in Gothenburg, an institution that has actively contributed to

Fig. 6 Hanna Hedman (b. 1980), Necklace "North", 2015. Reindeer skin, reindeer horn, elk horn, deer horn, linen, 52 x 33 x 15 cm (h x l x w). Gift of the Friends of the Nationalmuseum. Nationalmuseum, NMK 198/2016.

The Chatelaine is a leather tool belt with masculine references, decorated with a Rococo-inspired gold ornament reminiscent of a penis (Fig. 4). An ornate buckle on a belt could represent masculinity, but Alm’s decoration, which serves no practical purpose, moves the tool belt “dangerously” close to a feminine sphere. The Chatelaine was shown at the Open Space – Mind Maps exhibition. Like several other Swedish jewellery artists, both Tobias Alm and Yasar Aydin trained at Ädellab, the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design’s department for jewellery and corpus (hollowware) in Stockholm.

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Fig. 7 Márta Mattsson (b. 1982), Brooch "Frozen Fuchsia", 2015. Orchids, wood, glass, plastic, silver. Gift of the Friends of the Nationalmuseum. Nationalmuseum, NMK 97/2016.
the vibrant development of the Swedish jewellery scene.\footnote{Materials figure very prominently in Hanna Hedman’s necklace North (Fig. 6). Inspired by magic amulets and talismans, Hedman explores the antlers, skins and bones of a variety of Swedish wild animals. Here, she has cut spotted patterns into the surfaces of the antlers, which are carefully joined together with linen in similar patterns and colours. The piece references 17th-century cabinets of curiosities, which could feature objects such as shells with decoratively carved surfaces. It can also be read in the light of the problematic relationship of our times to the phenomena that threaten our natural environment, including global warming.}

Nature is also a source of inspiration for Märta Mattsson. Addressing the question of where the boundary goes between the beautiful and attractive and the disgusting and repulsive, Mattsson creates jewellery from branches, flowers and insects, which she treats with liquid plastic and decorates with colour and glass beads. The Nationalmuseum’s brooch Fuchsia was acquired at Mattsson’s exhibition Deadly Beautiful, which was also part of Art Jewellery 2016 (Fig. 7).

Hanna Liljenberg’s paper jewellery, too, refers to organic forms in nature, such as fragile lichens and barnacles. Her pieces often seem to be growing on the wearer’s body (Fig. 8). Liljenberg folds the paper into flower-like shapes which she joins together in clusters. Certain parts she lacquers, others are left matt. She stresses that “the paper is shaped so that one does not know what it is”\footnote{Plastics of various kinds are among the raw materials of many jewellery artists. Jelizaveta Suska, who in 2016 received the prestigious Herbert Hofmann Prize, has combined transparent polymer with acrylic and cyanate esters in her Collar “Backupfront”, 2011. Recycled plastic, steel, silver, 23 x 15 x 5 cm (l x w x thickness). Purchase: Ulla and Gunnar Trygg Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMK 255/2016.}

Fig. 9 Jelizaveta Suska (b. 1989), Brooch “Frozen Moment”, 2015. Polymer plastic, 14-carat gold, titanium, crushed marble, 8.5 x 8.5 cm (h x w). Purchase: Ulla and Gunnar Trygg Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMK 256/2016.

Fig. 10 Karin Roy Andersson (b. 1983), Collar “Backupfront”, 2011. Recycled plastic, steel, silver, 23 x 15 x 5 cm (l x w x thickness). Purchase: Ulla and Gunnar Trygg Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMK 255/2016.
Fig. 11 Beatrice Brovia (b. 1985), *Necklace “Necklace I”*, 2015. Sawdust, lacquer, rubber, silver, 61 x 8.5 x 6 cm (h x l x d). Purchase: Barbro Osher Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMK 17/2016.

crushed marble, resulting in ice-like shapes called *Frozen Moments* (Fig. 9). Karin Roy Andersson creates scale-like forms from pieces of recycled plastic, which she treats so that they glisten like mother-of-pearl (Fig. 10). Beatrice Brovia, too, makes jewellery from the things we throw away. The Nationalmuseum’s *Necklace I* consists of a rubber band with a pendant shaped from sawdust and lacquer and provided with a gleaming mother-of-pearl-like surface of blues and purples (Fig. 11). Brovia is interested in the relationship between jewellery and sport. Both require great commitment and a major investment of time, often with no financial return.

Karin Johansson is inspired by the materials she finds on city streets: strings, plastic things, foil and other trash. Her asymmetrical necklace *Lova* is part of a series called *Soundtrack*, in which she seeks to articulate sounds and rhythms (Fig. 12). As the wearer moves, the individual parts knock into each other and a variety of sounds are produced.

The city also provides inspiration for Sara Borgegård Ålgå, one of few contemporary jewellery artists that work mainly in metal. Borgegård Ålgå’s material, however, consists not of gold or silver, but sheets of base metal. Her jewellery is reminiscent of buildings or machine components, and is concerned with proportions, materials and the encounter with the body. Her necklace *Brick no. 2* was acquired from the exhibition *Wall Hollow*, which was part of the *Art Jewellery 2016* project (Fig. 13).

The Nationalmuseum’s acquisitions of contemporary jewellery include examples of both more traditional techniques and materials and conceptual art jewellery. In the latter, the choice of materials and the sense of materiality are equally important. No less crucial is a high degree of technical perfection and attention to detail. All these things combined mean that contemporary art jewellery embodies a host of contradictions and paradoxes.

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![Fig. 13 Sara Borgegård Ålgå (b. 1976), *Necklace "Brick no 2"*, 2014. Sheet metal, warptread, lacquer, 10.5 x 16 x 3.5 cm (h x l x w). Purchase: Ulla and Gunnar Trygg Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMK 90/2016.](image-url)
Notes:

1. The main exhibition was shown at NM Design at Kulturhuset Stadsteatern (Stockholm House of Culture & City Theatre) from 11 March to 15 May 2016. Other venues involved in the project were the Nationalmuseum at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, the Thiel Gallery, the Hallwyl Museum, Millesgården, the Royal Armoury, Sven Harrys Konstmuseum, Svenskt Tenn, Konstfack Ådellab (University College of Arts, Crafts and Design), the Finnish Institute, the Czech Centre in Stockholm, and a range of private galleries such as Platina, Konsthandverkarna, Galleri Lod, MadeBy, Galleri Sebastian Schildt+, Helena Sandström Studio, Smide och Form, Ahante Studio, PS2 and Daughters. Source: http://www.nationalmuseum.se/Global/PDF/smyckekartan.pdf (accessed 16 January 2017).

2. The participating artists were: Tobias Alm (b. 1985), Sweden; David Bielander (b. 1968), Switzerland; Maisie Broadhead (b. 1980), United Kingdom; Beatrice Brovia (b. 1985), Italy; Sungho Cho (b. 1975), Korea; Eun Mi Chun (b. 1971), Korea; Iris Eichenberg (b. 1965), Germany/USA; Cristina Filipe (b. 1965), Portugal; Benedikt Fischer (b. 1984), Austria; Kiko Gianocca (b. 1974), Switzerland; Carolina Gimeno (b. 1981), Chile/Sweden; Sophie Hanagarth (b. 1968), Switzerland/France; Mielle Harvey (b. 1971), USA; Hanna Hedman (b. 1980), Sweden; Jutta Kallfelz (b. 1975), Germany; Auli Laitinen (b. 1967), Sweden; Suska Mackert (b. 1969), Germany; Sally Marsland (b. 1969), Austria; Märta Mattsson (b. 1982), Sweden; Nanna Melland (b. 1969), Norway; Mikiko Minewaki (b. 1967), Japan; Karen Pontoppidan (b. 1968), Denmark/Germany; Janja Prokić (b. 1984), Serbia/Czech Republic; Miro Sazdlic (b. 1966), Sweden; Aud Charlotte Ho Sook Sinding (1972–2009), Norway/Sweden; Mirei Takeuchi (b. 1969), Germany/Japan; Ketli Tiitsar (b. 1972), Estonia; Tarja Tuupanen (b. 1973), Finland; Norman Weber (b. 1964), Germany; and Annamaria Zanella (b. 1966), Italy.


5. “Tobias Alm”, in Open Space – Mind Maps, p. 34.

6. The same exhibition also included pieces from the Nationalmuseum collections by the following artists: Beatrice Brovia (NMK 17/2016), Carolina Gimeno (NMK 18/2016), Märta Mattsson (NMK 96/2016), Hanna Hedman (NMK 198/2016) and Aud Charlotte Ho Sook Sinding (NMK 101/2009 and NMK 11/2010).


8. Ibid., p. 124.