

The Decorative Impulse

Jamie Bennett, Gésine Hackenberg, Rory Hooper, Anya Kivarkis,
Amelia Toelke, Jonathan Wahl



Jonathan Wahl, *Toad in the Hole*

VILLA TERRACE DECORATIVE ARTS MUSEUM
FEBRUARY 17 – MAY 20, 2012

This exhibition explores the decorative impulse in contemporary artistic production: how and why artists employ, reference, and cite the decorative arts. The Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum houses an extensive collection of Cyril Colnik ironwork, block printed panoramic Zuber wallpaper, various interior details, and a multitude of historical objects from the 15th to 18th century. The mansion—designed in the style of a 16th century Italian villa—is thus a perfect stage for dialogue between the artists’ work, and the histories that it examines. New and old objects are installed throughout the museum’s diverse spaces, intermingling traditional and contemporary work.

Amelia Toelke exaggerates the language of jewelry and decoration to a large scale, where inflated and silhouetted jewelry images become something in between decorative sculpture and interior detail. The resulting feedback loop between decoration and ornamentation is intended to evoke and examine the meaning invested in objects.

The subject of Jamie Bennett’s exquisite enamel jewelry is cultural representations of nature, a topic inherent to the decorative arts. His infinitely refined surfaces examine botanical images: nature as contained, domesticated and transformed by the decorative arts. By using enamel, an art material traditionally used to depict floral imagery, Bennett underscores the artifice of cultural representation and frames botanical image as jewel.

In Gésine Hackenberg’s work decorative objects such as ornate ceramic plates are the raw materials from which her jewelry is cut. The resulting pieces are somewhat lyrical, invested with the connotations of the original objects. They are also lighthearted and current, engaging such relevant topics as reuse and up-cycling. In this transformation of function and discourse, Hackenburg attempts to confuse jewelry and decoration, ornamentation and use.

For Anya Kivarkis, the decorative arts are an indicator of luxury, a device that initiates the conversation about opulence and excess. She sources two-dimensional images of jewelry from historical and contemporary moments when decadent ornamentation was, or is, celebrated. Kivarkis’ jewelry has a new kind of physicality, the kind that is only possible by these objects being distilled out of images and made solid by a careful examination of vision and visuality, as well as history of objects of luxury and our conflicted relationship to them. Kivarkis’ work is an effort to archive images in a physical form; her exploration of

jewelry as archaeology is especially resonant within the walls of a decorative arts museum.

While Kivarkis deciphers object from image, Jonathan Wahl distills a fresh image from a historical object. He produces stunning large-scale hyper-real charcoal drawings of Victorian Jet jewelry which, when rendered as two-dimensional images on a much larger than original scale, lose their traditional use association, and evolve into affective and less specific constructions. New and compelling qualities emerge in this transformation: Wahl’s works are minimal and exuberant, austere and lavish at the same time.

Rory Hooper relies on our familiarity with decorative, highly ornate jewelry. We recognize the crushed wafer-thin piece of metal as once valuable, desirable, and cherished, and see the repurposed jewelry, now in a puddle of resin, as abject. Hooper engages the capacity of decorative objects for signaling sentimentality, preciousness, tradition, heritage, and ritual. Drawing on these associations, he examines how decorative arts sometimes surface in our culture as kitsch. This strategy is how we get the joke: “Crushed Heart”, “Crushed Star.”

The Decorative Impulse both celebrates and intervenes in ornamentation as a rhetorical device. For these artists, the decorative object is the point of access, signal, and marker for examining material culture and our relationship to things in our lives. These makers explore the ways that the decorative arts are evident in our culture; in their work ornament becomes subject. The exhibition is about distilling decorative histories, synthesizing vibrant ideas with traditional forms, or, in Rory Hooper’s words, making “new ideals out of old clichés.”

BIO

Yevgeniya Kaganovich is guest curator for *The Decorative Impulse*. She is a Belarus born, Milwaukee based artist whose hybrid practice encompasses jewelry and metalsmithing, sculpture, and installation. Kaganovich earned her Masters of Fine Arts from the State University of New York at New Paltz. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Art and Design at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where she is Head of the Jewelry and Metalsmithing Area at the Peck School of the Arts.

—Yevgeniya Kaganovich

JAMIE BENNETT

Images from nature have been sustained through jewelry in all cultures and at all time, it was probably the first instinctive representation as a 'jewel'. Enameled jewelry particularly has been a primary medium for representing botanical and other natural forms. Various cultures at changing times have represented and mediated nature away from its natural state. These interpretations are done to make nature resonate; whether through oppression, perfection or imitation. It is clear that the mediation of nature has a transcendent capability, and in fact is a necessary act in our coexistence.

The floral images in the *Postpriori* series are far more dislocated and botanically inaccurate, which is a subjective quality and appealing. The liberty in concocting and unraveling is not unlike the satisfaction garnered in producing an actual hybrid.

The idea that the representation of nature was meant to be cathartic, in place of the experience of nature itself, is strangely satisfying and reassuring. We participate with nature for the best and worst of reasons, but we do participate.

BIO

Jamie Bennett lives and works in Stone Ridge, New York. He is head of the Metal Program at the State University of New York at New Paltz. His work was the subject of a recent museum retrospective that traveled the US from 2008-2010. His drawings, jewelry and wall reliefs are in the collections of over twenty museums internationally, including the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Hiko Mizuno School of Jewelry Collection in Tokyo, the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC and the Houston Museum of Art in Houston, Texas. In 2009 the American Crafts Council awarded him as an Aileen Osborn Webb Fellow of the Council. In 2011 he was awarded his third New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship. Jamie Bennett is noted for his influential works in enamel and jewelry.



Jamie Bennett, *Urban Traces #3*

Read Ethan W. Lasser's essay *Looking Back: A Brief Guide to Reference in the History of Art* written for this exhibition and available at our exhibitions webpage, www.villaterracemuseum.org/exhibitions.html.

Ethan W. Lasser is Curator of the Chipstone Foundation, a Milwaukee-based educational foundation with a mandate to advance scholarship and innovative curatorial practice in the field of American Decorative Arts history. Lasser earned his PhD in the History of Art at Yale University in 2008. He has curated numerous exhibitions of contemporary craft and was awarded a Fellowship in the Research Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum last spring.

GÈSINE HACKENBERG

A basic theme in my work is appropriating ordinary and utilitarian objects for jewelry, which reveals the relationship between an object's inherent emotional value and its use as bodily decoration. The pieces are based on craft techniques and employ various materials that tell their own stories about preciousness and adornment, like ceramic tableware, fine metals, Japanese Urushi lacquer and glassware. The materials refer to the validity of traditional themes and cultural heritage, and merge concepts like jewelry, ornament and everyday objects.

By reusing and recycling materials, objects are transformed and given a new and unexpected life. I consciously isolate the various layers of meanings and associations that are intrinsic in the shape, patterns and material of an object in order to absorb and reflect these values in my jewelry yielding a strong emotional impact.

The *Ceramic Jewellery* series plays with deconstruction and reconstruction by drilling pieces out of earthenware, a material that is widespread throughout the Netherlands. Each piece in the series is a unique creation drawn from a whole universe of shapes found in plates, dishes, and pudding moulds. These disc-shaped 'beads' are firmly threaded to almost object-like necklaces, or pieced on rings, earrings, and brooches. The fragile, leftover material with a lace-like pattern goes along with the piece of jewelry.

Bio

Gèsine Hackenberg was born in Germany in 1972 and currently lives and works in Amsterdam. She was trained as a goldsmith in Germany and studied jewelry design at the Fachhochschule für Gestaltung Pforzheim. In 2001 she received her degree from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. She is currently Visiting Professor at the MAD-faculty in Hasselt, Belgium and since 2008 teaches technical metalsmithing classes at the VakschoolEdelsmeden in Amsterdam. She is a three-time recipient of the Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture Grant as well as other awards including the 2010 scholarship for modern silver from the Stokroos Foundation that was combined with an exhibition at the Netherlands Zilvermuseum Schoonhoven (NL). Her work is published in numerous international publications and is in the permanent collection of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Mima Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art and the Museum of Arts and Design, New York.



Gèsine Hackenberg, *Kitchen Necklace with Red Ornament*

RORY HOOPER

Smashed is an extensive body of work and an ongoing project of reinventing traditional objects that stemmed from my inheritance of my Grandmother's jewelry. These specific pieces held a sentimental place in my heart and I wanted to celebrate this by transforming them and reconstructing their beauty in order for my memories to begin a new life of their own. From this impulsive process I created new decorative elements and an intimate collection of abstract forms. A large part of my work now advances me to use cast-off or abandoned pieces of jewelry and crush them with a single blow of a hammer to form flattened silhouettes almost frozen in time. My aim is to reinvent new ideals out of old clichés by recycling mass-produced objects into contemporary unique pieces to own and wear.

Bio

Rory Hooper was born in Jerusalem in 1975. He received his BFA from Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in 2002. After graduation, he taught for three years in their department of Jewelry and Accessories. He earned his post-graduate MC RCA degree in Goldsmith, Silversmith, Metalwork and Jewelry from the Royal College of Art in London in 2008.

He currently teaches metalworking techniques and jewelry design at Shenkar College in Tel Aviv and Tel Chai College in the north of Israel. He specializes in producing one-off art works of jewelry and objects for exhibitions, clients and collections such as The Silver Triennial in Hanau, Schumck in Munich, COLLECT in London, The Tel Aviv Jewelry Biennales, SOFA New York, SOFA Chicago and in galleries such as Marsden Woo London, Flow Gallery London and Gallery Loupe New Jersey.

He currently lives and works in Tel Aviv running a studio of metalwork and jewelry and a contemporary jewelry gallery, Gallery Complete, with his wife, Leonie Philpot, who is also a jewelry designer and maker.



Rory Hooper, *Memory Necklace*

ANYA KIVARKIS

These pieces evolve from a recent body of work titled, *Vanishing Point*. In this series, I look at images of jewelry worn by celebrities in the ever-changing, Internet archive of paparazzi photographs of the Academy Awards. From these images, I fabricate replicas of the represented objects, and consider what I have the capacity to understand as a spectator through the conditions of the media format in which I am viewing. In appropriating and recreating this jewelry, it is reproduced with its visual obstructions left intact. I replicate what is visible to me in the image of the jewelry mediated through the screen, building the obstruction of the wearer's body, the cropping of the frame, blurriness, accumulations of glare, and perspectival views into the object. I am interested in recreating these worn objects through sequential views that capture the gesture of a body advancing in space. The work captures the movement of these objects, implying the presence of the celebrities, but leaving their bodies absent. I am conscious of how I perceive, to what I have visual access, and I acknowledge the discrepancies between what I understand about the material reality of the represented objects, and their reproductions.

In my work, I am interested in making representations of representations of luxury through time. The work creates layers of distance from the 'real', from the original, and from notions of the authentic. Mediated by the image and the screen, they are recreations of the past and present that retain and exemplify the ambiguity of their origins. Ultimately, they are an incomplete archive generated out of the inaccessibility of the 'original', partial views, and blurry reproductions.

BIO

Anya Kivarkis is currently Assistant Professor and Area Head of Jewelry and Metalsmithing at the University of Oregon in Eugene. She received a BFA in Jewelry & Metalsmithing from the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, and an MFA from the State University of New York at New Paltz in 2004. In 2007, she was the recipient of the Sienna Gallery Emerging Artist Award, and presented the solo exhibition titled, *Blind Spot*. Recent exhibitions include the solo exhibition, *Vanishing Point* with Galerie Rob Koudijs in the Netherlands, *L'education Sentimentale* at the Solidor Art Space in Cagnes sur Mer, France, *Metalsmith magazine's Exhibition in Print: Neo-Palatial: Objects of Virtue and Vice*, and *COLLECT* at Saatchi Gallery in London, where she was represented by Galerie Rob Koudijs. Upcoming exhibitions include a solo collaborative exhibition with Mike Bray at Sienna Gallery in Lenox, Massachusetts and the International Exhibition of Contemporary Jewelry at CENTRE Materia in Quebec, Canada. She was a recipient of the 2008 Oregon Arts Commission Individual Artists Fellowship, and the 2007 Rotasa Foundation grant to support the publication of *The Thinking Body*, an exhibition co-curated with Kate Wagle. Her work is included in collections such as the Tacoma Art Museum, the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, The Rotasa Foundation, and the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art. She is represented by Sienna Gallery in Lenox, Massachusetts and Galerie Rob Koudijs in the Netherlands.



Anya Kivarkis, *Red Carpet*

AMELIA TOELKE

The home that I grew up in remains an ever-evolving tableau. From wall treatments and faux finishes to the triptych of church windows, neoclassical columns, and the spread of objects old, new, bought, made, a deep love and appreciation for ornamentation, decoration, and objects is at the heart of my work and worldview. This has informed a practice that is captivated by the complexity of human-object relationships and explores the ways that objects and the decorative function symbolically and iconically.

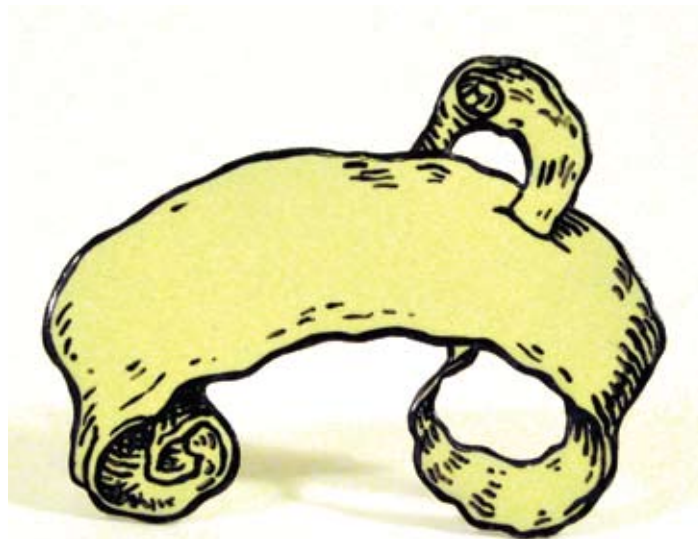
My diverse practice finds continuity through a minimal color palette and pared down visual elements. A fusion of material, process, and content offers a perspective that engages the vocabulary of the jeweler/metalsmith to speak to a human history steeped in the ritual of adornment, decoration, and beauty.

The space between the two-dimensional and three-dimensional plays a key role in my work. I am interested in the fluid transference of images to objects and objects to images and the way that the line between the real and the representative is often indistinct and obscure.

The work in this exhibition employs jewelry as both subject and content: jewelry is a platform for the altered function of image when placed on the body, jewelry is a signifier for importance, deed, and memory, and jewelry is flattened and enlarged to reference signage and indicate authority.

BIO

Throughout her childhood in upstate New York, Amelia had a passion for making. She cultivated that passion in the metals department at the State University of New York at New Paltz. For three years after graduating, she helped organize and run a shared studio and community gallery space in Kinston, NY. Amelia received her MFA in metals in August 2011 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She currently lives and works in Madison, Wisconsin.



Amelia Toelke, *Banner Pin #8*

JONATHAN WAHL

The Jet Drawing Series

In my current body of work, a series of large charcoal drawings of Victorian jet mourning jewelry, I am interested in scale and perception. I am intrigued with how the viewer relates to or perceives these historical objects of jewelry when rendered larger than life, out of scale, and how this shift from three dimensions to two parallels a rift between jewelry and fine art.

The jet jewelry that were the models for my drawings were made during the mid to late 19th century carved by hand from jet, a fossilized material similar to coal but more durable. They were worn during a woman's period of mourning after the death of a loved one when wearing conventional precious jewelry would have been deemed inappropriate.

Today these objects seem Gothic, yet contemporary and almost timeless due to their reflective surfaces and monochromatism. Yet today, we could barely imagine reenacting their specific and prescribed sociological role in Victorian society. Both the objects' timeless beauty and our alienation from their original roles make them perfectly ambiguous when viewed in the scale in which I have rendered them. I am more interested in them for these qualities than any nostalgic longing for gothic mourning.

Rendered as large drawings they become abstracted, transcending their history and meaning and become ominous objects of unknown origin. They invite the viewer to speculate and draw them in. Being trained as both a jeweler and sculptor I am very aware of how people view both fields differently, drawn to them for very different reasons, as well as how the larger art world classifies them. In this current work, I hope to invite the viewer to speculate on the myriad of reasons they might be drawn to the qualities inherent in both jewelry and fine art and perhaps explore what this shift means. How would they perceive these drawings differently if framed behind their couch or worn as a brooch?

BIO

Jonathan Wahl's artwork ranges from sculpture to the decorative arts. His work has been featured or reviewed in publications as diverse as the *New York Times*, *Art in America*, *The New Yorker*, *Oprah Magazine*, *W Jewelry*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Metalsmith magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar* and the *Advocate* among others.

Wahl has been awarded the Louis Comfort Tiffany Emerging Artist Fellowship from the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, two New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships—one for Craft and one for Drawing—and the Pennsylvania Society of Goldsmiths Award for "Outstanding Achievement." He was also featured in the PBS series, *Craft In America*, which aired in 2009. His work is part of the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Houston Museum of Fine Arts and the Museum of Arts and Design in NYC. He was named one of the Top-10 jewelers to watch by *W Jewelry* in 2006. Wahl is an accomplished artist who, from 1994 to 1995, served as artist-in-residence at Hochschule Der Kunst in Berlin, Germany. His work is exhibited both nationally and internationally.



Jonathan Wahl, *Facet*



VILLA TERRACE DECORATIVE ARTS MUSEUM

2220 N. Terrace Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53202

Museum Hours: Wednesday through Sunday 1 to 5 p.m.

Museum Admission: \$5 Adults • \$3 Seniors, Veterans & Students

FREE Members, Active Military & Children

Information: (414) 271-3656 • www.villaterracemuseum.org