

Bling

**things**

Bling things  
Curated by Kitty Lees

This catalogue looks at how jewellery is one of those things that can be everything and nothing. It's very personal; first, through its proximity to the body. Also through its purpose, which can change and develop over time. It can be a declaration, performance, a mask, a celebration. It's worn in protest, in mourning, in hope, in flirtation. Sometimes expensive, sometimes not, but somehow always precious.

This small collection looks at jewellery through an art-focused gaze.

The works gathered here are written pieces, interviews, profiles, and visual studies, each of them handling jewellery as something charged.

Through conversations with designers, collectors and researchers, the magazine questions:

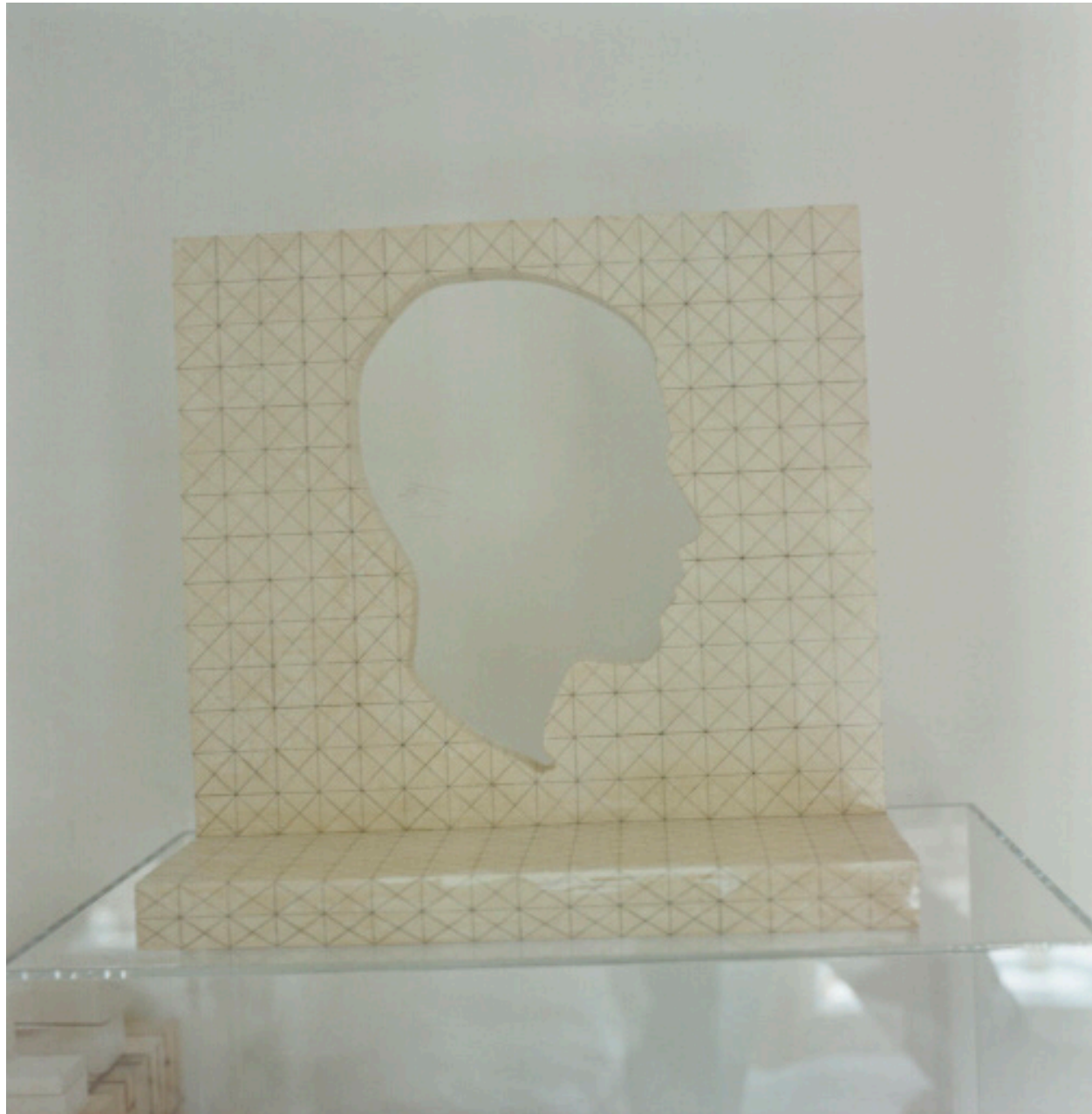
What makes something precious?

What are we trying to say when we put something on?

Bling thing looks at advertising the same way it looks at jewellery.

Thoughtfully staging and photographing products in a way that feels in keeping with the practice of the artist.

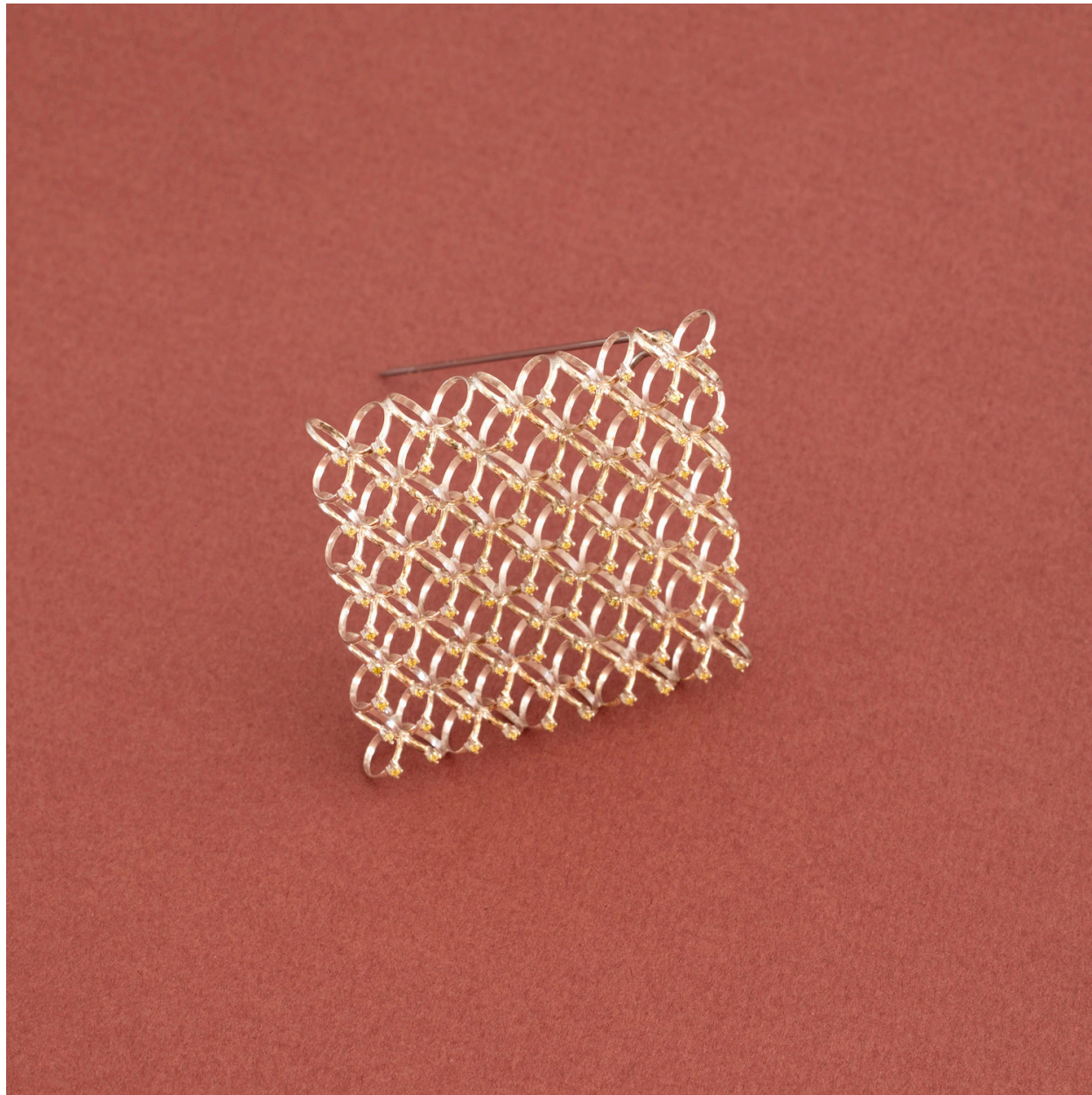
And so promoting new pieces whilst not taking away from what's most important: the art!



1 Blue Bird ring, Solange Agazury-Partridge  
18-karat gold and enamel



# Ami



2 LITTLES Brooch  
Sterling silver, yellow cubic zirconia

3 FRIEZE Earrings  
Sterling silver



# Masamitsu



# A piece of



4 EAR-RING Earring  
18k yellow gold, freshwater pearl

## **A conversation with Ami Masamitsu, a jewellery designer who is reframing what we choose to treasure.**

On meeting Ami for the first time, I had a mouthful of salmon onigiri.

I'd walked along the Skirakawa River in Sakyo-ku to try 'Kyoto's best' rice ball and had plumped for salted salmon and pickled plum. Each was individually wrapped in an origami style fold and carried its own message. "Have a nice day" was embossed on the salmon, "good luck," on the pickled plum.

Ami ordered after me: tuna mayo onigiri and a cup of miso soup.

When she tapped her card to pay, I noticed that her fingers glinted with gold and silver rings.

Ao Onigiri was her local, she explained. Just a ten-minute walk from her apartment, which she'd recently moved into with her boyfriend and young daughter.

We struck up a conversation, and she told me she'd studied jewellery at Central Saint Martins, graduating in 2017. "Come see me!" she beamed, jotting an address in neat handwriting on the back of my onigiri wrapper.

# gold



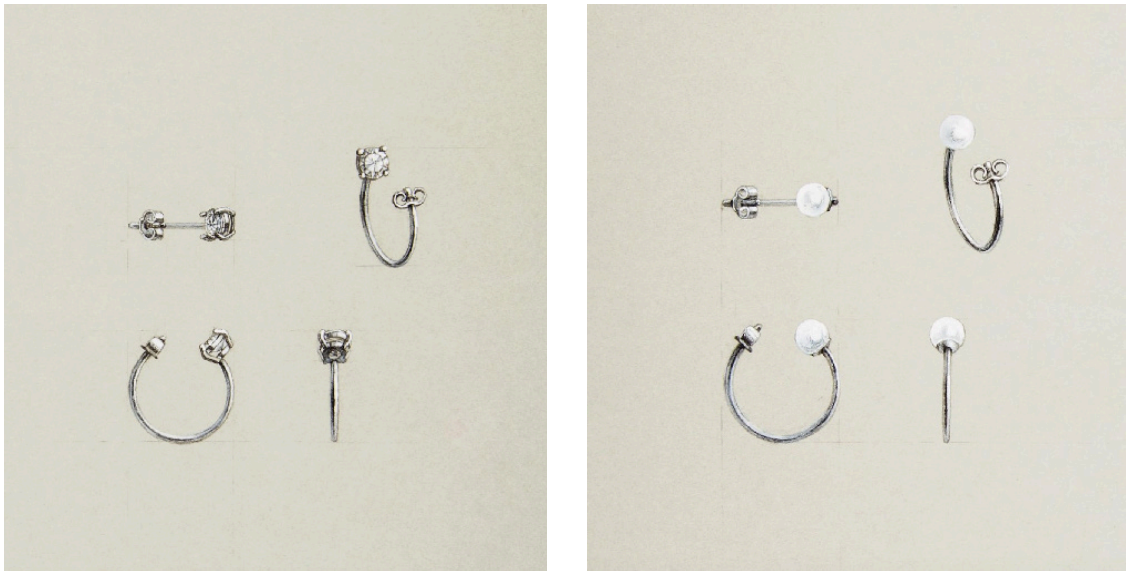
The next day, I met Ami at her studio.

It was small, and full of odds and ends of good design. White walls, lots and lots of books on art and design: Naum Gabo, Isamu Goguchi, Barbara Hepworth. Open on a coffee table was a paper about Glass Works by Laura de Santillana, lit by the soft white light of a vintage lamp with a 1960s, Star-Wars-esque shape. “This year’s Christmas gift to myself,” Ami laughed, explaining it was a Lindner art piece designed by Wilhelm Wagenfeld.

Her workroom was even more bijou and had lots of shelves with tiny draws filled with tiny things – delicate chains, wire cutters, pieces of twisted metal. Ami opened a painted wagara box to show me more tiny things – shells and stones – or “micro treasures” she’d found on a beach in Kyoto. These are the kinds of materials she seems to lean towards – modest objects that she’s collected and treasured.

Today, Ami primarily works in gold. But that hasn’t always been the case. “I started by making jewellery with materials I liked – drilling holes and combining them with metal chains or string”, she explained. During her time at Tokyo University of the Arts, she sold handmade plastic earrings and necklaces to fund her studies. “I liked the immediacy. You could make a hole in something, add a chain, and suddenly it was wearable.”

This simple act – of making the ordinary wearable – remains central to her practice. Ami’s work takes the unassuming and, with precision and grace, transforms it into something quietly extraordinary. Safety pins, earring backs, fasteners: all are reimagined as objects of elegance.



5, 6 Paint-up for EAR-RING



7 FRIEZE Bracelet  
Sterling silver





8 SEQUINS SQAURE, pair of earrings  
Sterling silver

A silver bracelet clings to her wrist as she gestures, stretched from the form of a safety pin into an elegant abstraction. Its sterling silver finish and clean cut reject the disposability of its origin while retaining the functionality of its shape.

Her rings are studded with stones – blue chalcedony, orange moonstone, dark onyx – cut in forms that are precise but unprecious: leaning triangles, skewed squares, irregular octagons. Each stone teeters above a thin white-gold band.

In the middle of the room stood a wooden topped workbench with cherry red metal legs. On its surface, an undone necklace made from chains looped together in flower bud-like clusters.

Frieze is the name of this piece, and of the small series it later became part of. A frieze, in classical terms, is a decorative design element located within the entablature of a building – here, in Ami’s hands, it is reconceived as something to drape around the body, rather than the wall.

This idea of recontextualising everyday forms continues throughout her practice. Things that could easily be discarded – a pin, a scrap, a shell – are reconsidered. Her work is less about reinventing materials than about reframing how we see them. “My ideal piece of jewellery is one where both functionality and artistic expression coexist in balance,” she told me.

Her work celebrates easily overlooked items such as safety pins or earring backs, taking their simplicity and making things that are beautiful and intricate. “My ideal piece of jewellery is one where both functionality and artistic expression coexist in balance.”

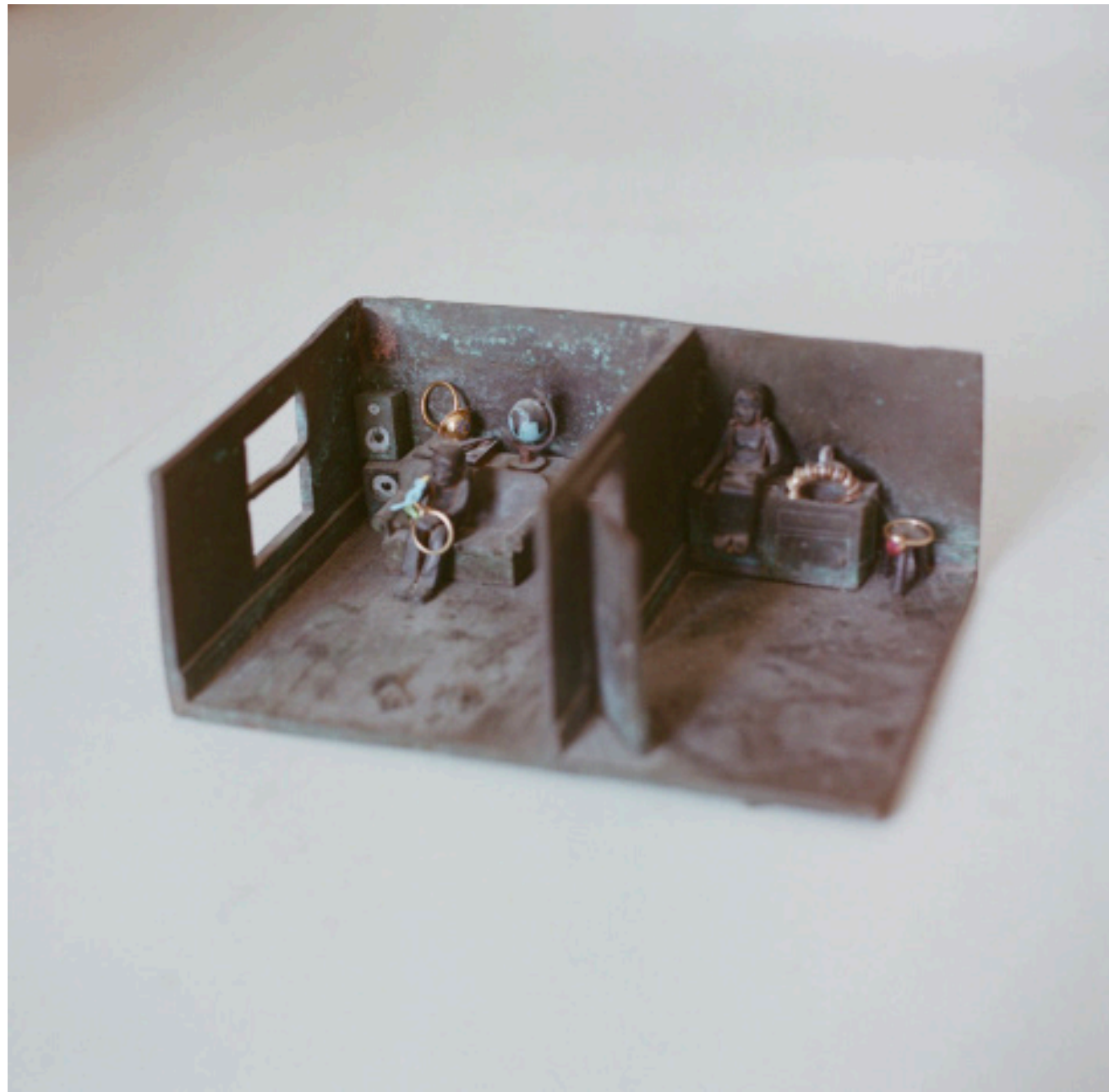
When I ask which materials she likes to work with, the designer replies instantly: “Gold is my favourite.”

“It’s gleam, eternal value and high malleability have always attracted humans from ancient times to the present, producing countless fascinating stories”, she gushes.

This affection is evident in her ‘Embroideries’ series: a collection of very thin gold rings that echo the gestures of hand-sewing. Just 0.4mm thick, each flat band is adorned with letters and patterns that have been composed like paintings and glued one by one with meticulous handwork. ‘Mind the gap’, exclaims one, ‘still sleeping’, yawns another. My favourite: the face of a cat, finished with oxidized 18 carat yellow gold paws and whiskers. The finer details of these pieces – paws, whiskers and other ‘embroidered’ elements, are made from the finer gold, soldered on top of thin oxidised gold bands.

“Jewellery is most compelling when it brings out the full potential of its materials”, said the designer, pointing to pieces of gold in various cuts and tones. The oxidized metal is cheaper and more durable, but “gold is the material that provokes the desire to wear”, she affirmed. It feels as though each ‘embroidery’ is an exploration of the weight of gold – its presence, its absence and the shifting boundaries of what luxury might mean today. By looking at how jewellery can be made thinner, lighter, and use less gold, Ami proposes a new way of using the material in a world where its price is constantly rising.

The thinness and angular nature of certain pieces echoes the nature of kintsugi – the Japanese art of repair, which uses gold to bind broken ceramics. Perhaps less in a literal sense, but more in her approach to value: that something small, fragile, or even broken, can still hold worth. That it might, in fact, be the imperfection – or the overlooked detail – that makes it beautiful.



**9, 10** Blue Bird ring, Solange Agazury-Partridge  
18-karat gold and enamel

Gold 'Botanist' ring, Christopher Thompson-Royds  
18-karat gold

Gold 'Strength' ring, Motley  
18-karat gold vermeil

Gold ring with pink cut glass, Vintage





# JB

# Blunk

## Big and small sculptures

James Blain Blunk was one of the 20th century's greatest sculptors. He's celebrated for his organic sculptural works in clay and wood – a lover of raw forms.

Blunk was drafted into the Korean War in 1949. Hopefully, perhaps, the artist saw it as an opportunity to visit Japan and meet the revered studio potter Shoji Hamada. There, a chance encounter with the artist Isamu Noguchi led to apprenticeships with the distinguished ceramicists Kitaoji Rosanjin and Kaneshige Toyo.

These years spent absorbing Japanese stoneware tradition would teach him to welcome cracks and imperfections and colour variations in a piece, an approach he'd eventually bring to wood. It was here too that Blunk learnt about Shinto, the ancient Japanese religion that worships nature; which too deeply influenced his work and way of life.

When Blunk returned to California, he built his own house entirely by hand; a humble, redwood cabin nestled in the sleepy green forest of Inverness Ridge. The Blunk House held countless ceramics, tables, chairs and sculptures he made during his lifetime. It was not only a home, but what his friend Rick Yoshimoto called “One Big Sculpture.”

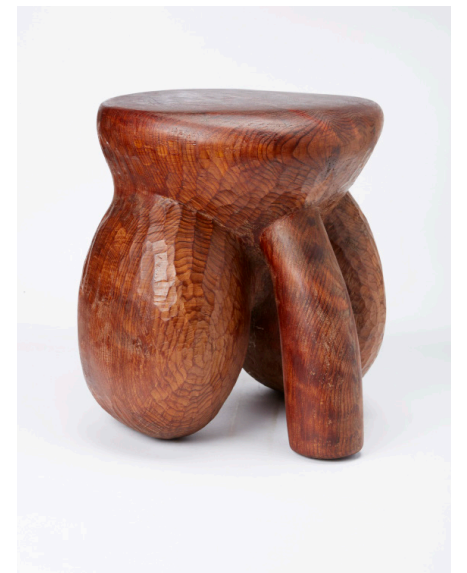


**11** Untitled, 1991  
Wood and stone





**12** Untitled 1972  
Stone



**13, 14, 15** Three Forms, 1975  
Redwood

Blunk moved fluidly among mediums – making ceramics and paintings and wooden seats that blur the line between sculptural and functional.

Much of the delight of JB Blunk's work is that it was made to be interacted with, sat on, drunk from, lived in, and - in the case of his jewellery - worn.

His rings, bracelets, bolo ties and belt buckles, were a natural extension of his practice: sculpture scaled to the wrist, the finger, the throat.

Though Blunk's earrings, pendants, and bracelets are smaller in scale than his sculptural work, the pieces reflect the same earthy warmth and contrast between function and abstraction.

There's an intimacy to Blunk's jewellery, which was rarely made for exhibition. These were gifts: each Christmas he would give his wife, Christine Nielson, a new piece, introduced by a poem he had written on brightly painted pieces of paper, folded into shapes and tucked into the tree. One bracelet – a circular brass band fitted with two beads, one carved from a deer antler, the other from ivory – Nielson wore every day for the next 40 years. That same design has since been reinterpreted by their daughter as the Sun Moon Bracelet, part of a set of limited reproductions issued in collaboration with Los Angeles jewellery designer J. Hannah.



16 Blunk Book





**17, 18, 19** Continuum, Valentine's Day 1975  
Sterling silver



These designs, reimagined in recycled gold and silver, are testament to the tactility of Blunk's originals. Like his large wood sculptures, the jewellery invites contact. Continuum, carved from a single piece of ivory in 1975, is both continuous and marked by a distinct beginning and end, like the vast outdoor redwood sculpture, its namesake, which Blunk finished the same year.

Presence, with its broad face and architectural form, recalls Blunk's 1977 sculpture Entry Arch (Presence). Another ring, Muse, given to Nielson in 1974 and later worn as her wedding band, is carved with subtle irregularities, an embrace of imperfection that animates the piece. Also rethought is the ring Blunk made for daughter Mariah in 1988 when she was 11 years old, with Crown cutting a symmetric shape, a refined foil for Blunk's usual rawness.

The appeal of Blunk's jewellery lies not only in its form but in its materials, often taking cues from salvaged natural materials. He worked with ivory brought back from Taiwan by his mother-in-law, with antique beads from Mexico, abalone shells from the California coast, deer antler, brass, silver, and salvaged walnut.

As Isamu Noguchi so beautifully wrote, JB Blunk's work reflects "open sky and spaces, and the far reaches of time from where comes the burlled stumps of those great trees. JB does them honour in carving them as he does, finding true art in the working, allowing their ponderous bulk, waking them from their long sleep to become part of our own life and times, sharing with us the afterglow of a land that was once here."



19 Blunk Book



**20** Crown, 1988  
Sterling silver with 18-karat gold beads



**23** Crown, 1988  
18-karat gold





24, 25 Spring bracelet, 2004  
Tortoiseshell



# A piece of Peggy



26 Peggy with a mobile sculpture by Alexander Calder at the Tate  
(Photo by Norman Potter/Express/Getty Images)

“I  
am not an  
art collector. I am a  
museum.”

Oh, to be Peggy Guggenheim. A devotee to Surrealism and a crusader for the beau monde, she amassed one of the world's most notable collections of modern-day art. The self-proclaimed “art addict,” had an artistic mission – to buy a picture a day – a mission that the art world seemed to accept with a kind of boggled delight.

Gug-  
genheim was  
an exhibitionist.

Sexually, it is claimed she had close to one thousand liaisons, controversially including most artists that she supported. At the age of fifty-one, she took up naked sunbathing on the roof of her palazzo – directly across the water from the windows of police headquarters – and developed an attitude to sampling the local men which her friend Mary McCarthy compared to her attitude toward the local olives and crusty bread.

Gug-  
genheim was  
haunted by a  
lonely and suppres-  
sive childhood and suf-  
fered great insecurities,  
often using her wealth and  
wardrobe as a shield. An extrav-  
agant flapper, she was famously  
photographed by Man Ray in an ori-  
ental Poiret dress, worn with a hair-  
band given to her by Stravinsky's  
girlfriend. Other favourites included  
an Elsa Schaparelli cellophane  
zipper, a black and gold Ken  
Scott dress and a collection  
of tricorne hats and eth-  
nic jewellery.

A  
botched  
nose job at 21 left her with  
what would be referred  
to as the “Guggenheim  
potato”.

### Earrings for Peggy Guggenheim, 1938

Alexander Calder

Alexander Calder is most known for his beautifully suspended mobiles- but also made thousands of pieces of jewellery, each unique and produced by his own hand.

From the 1930s, Calder's wife and friends became walking mobiles when wearing the artist's necklaces and bracelets, primitive executions in bent, curled, and twisted silver and brass. Calder's creations: be it object or jewellery, come to life when they are lifted and hung in position.

Each piece he made was designed to move, to be worn or to perform. As a result, the wearer of Calder's jewellery becomes a part of the jewel and plays an integral role in the spectacle. Peggy epitomised 'spectacle' and was a great supporter of Calder's art and jewellery.

'Earrings for Peggy Guggenheim' demonstrate the eccentricities of Calder's hand, expressing his tactile qualities. One earring is long and sinuous, like a single spindly spider's leg, the other is shorter and more angular, composed of intersecting shapes—flat brass discs and bent wire—that create a sense of rhythmic imbalance, as if frozen mid-spin.

The pair hang freely, moving almost in the manner of helicopter seeds falling from a tree—their movement subtly echoing his mobiles.



27 Peggy Guggenheim in Venice. GETTY Images





**29** Peggy Guggenheim at the 1948 Venice Biennale.  
GETTY Images

### **Flower Earrings, 1948**

Peggy's flower earring! Worn to the 1948 Venice Biennale, an event which marked her return to Europe after World War II and the public debut of her newly formed collection.

Guggenheim was newly single – following her divorce from Max Ernst in 1946, and so this singular earring, clipped onto her left ear and resembling such a fantastical bloom in full flourish, marked also her return to society as a single woman.

Photos from the event show the earring blooming outwards in gilt metal, petals fanning dramatically from her face. Each one curls slightly as if in caught in the wind. The earring feels deliberately exaggerated, sitting on the side of Guggenheim's head, interrupting the symmetry of her face and the formal balance of her otherwise (uncharacteristically) minimal ensemble.

In her memoir, *Out of This Century*, Guggenheim refers to the asymmetry as a way of unsettling the viewer.

The piece has often been attributed to Yves Tanguy, and although unconfirmed, it certainly evokes the dreamlike distortion found in his paintings. Like much of Guggenheim's collection, the earring sits somewhere between the real and the imaginary.

Worn at a moment designed to showcase her newly established art collection, the flower blurs the line between collector and collected, showing Guggenheim's commitment to living as art.

Earrings for Peggy Guggenheim, 1938

Yves Tanguy



The Earrings for Peggy Guggenheim were a gift, a surrealist love letter, from French artist Yves Tanguy. Best known for his dreamlike, biomorphic landscapes, Tanguy was a key figure in the Surrealist movement alongside Salvador Dalí and Max Ernst (Guggenheim’s husband at the time). His paintings depicted endless, desolate plains strewn with fluid, alien-like forms, often occupying psychological as much as physical space. Given to Peggy in 1938, these earrings, Tanguy’s smallest paintings, reflect his surreal visual language on a miniature scale. They are delicate yet strange: mismatched, abstract shapes composed of silver, gold, pearls and oil on shell. Each bears an organic, almost marine-like quality. One resembles a curling mollusc or a tendril; the other, a coiled, twisting pod. Peggy was later to wear one of these, together with an earring by Alexander Calder, on the opening night of her New York museum-gallery, Art of This Century, on October 20, 1942, to signal her impartiality towards abstraction and Surrealism.



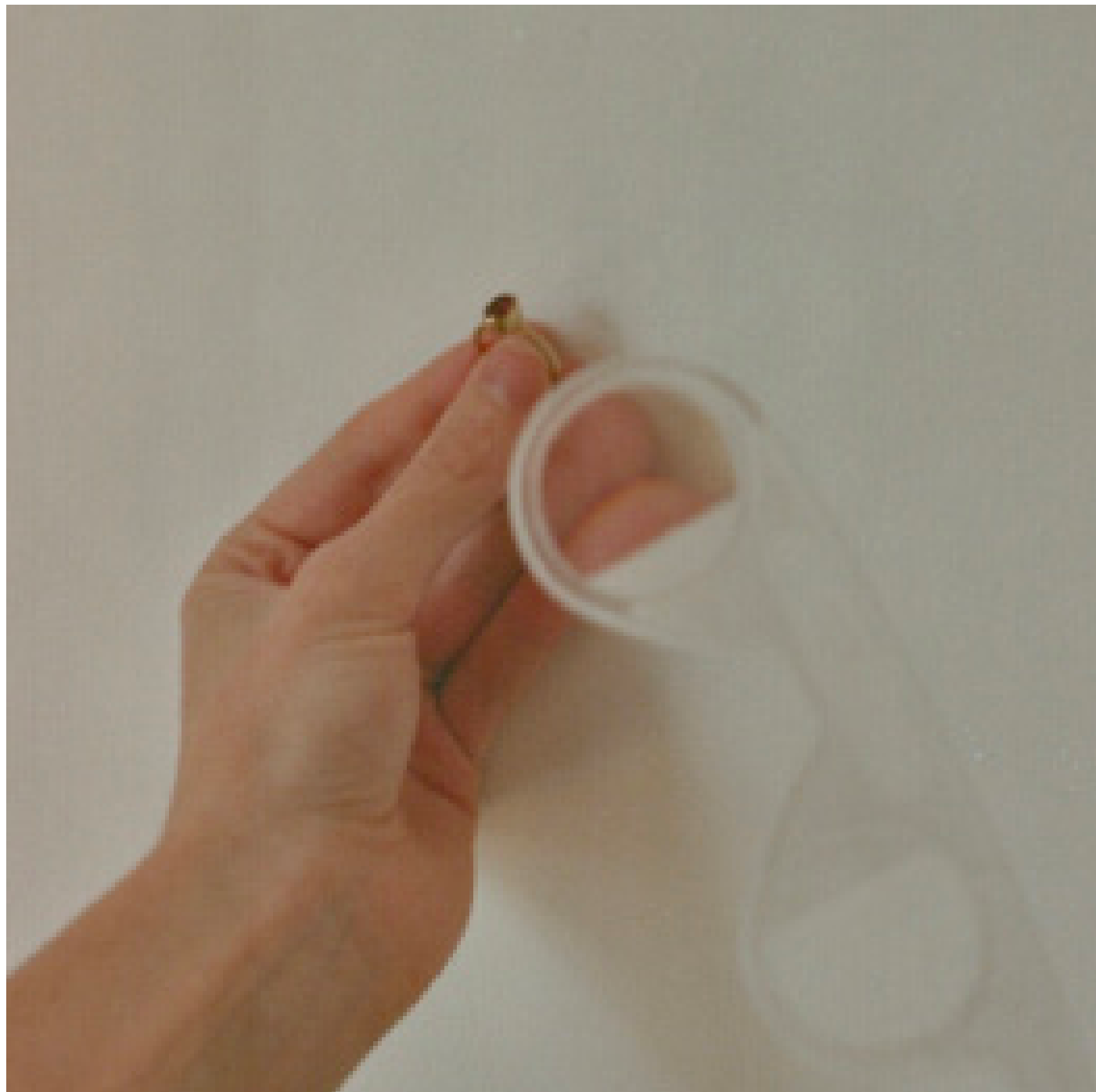
28 Peggy Guggenheim with her dogs. GETTY Images

Bat Glasses, 1948

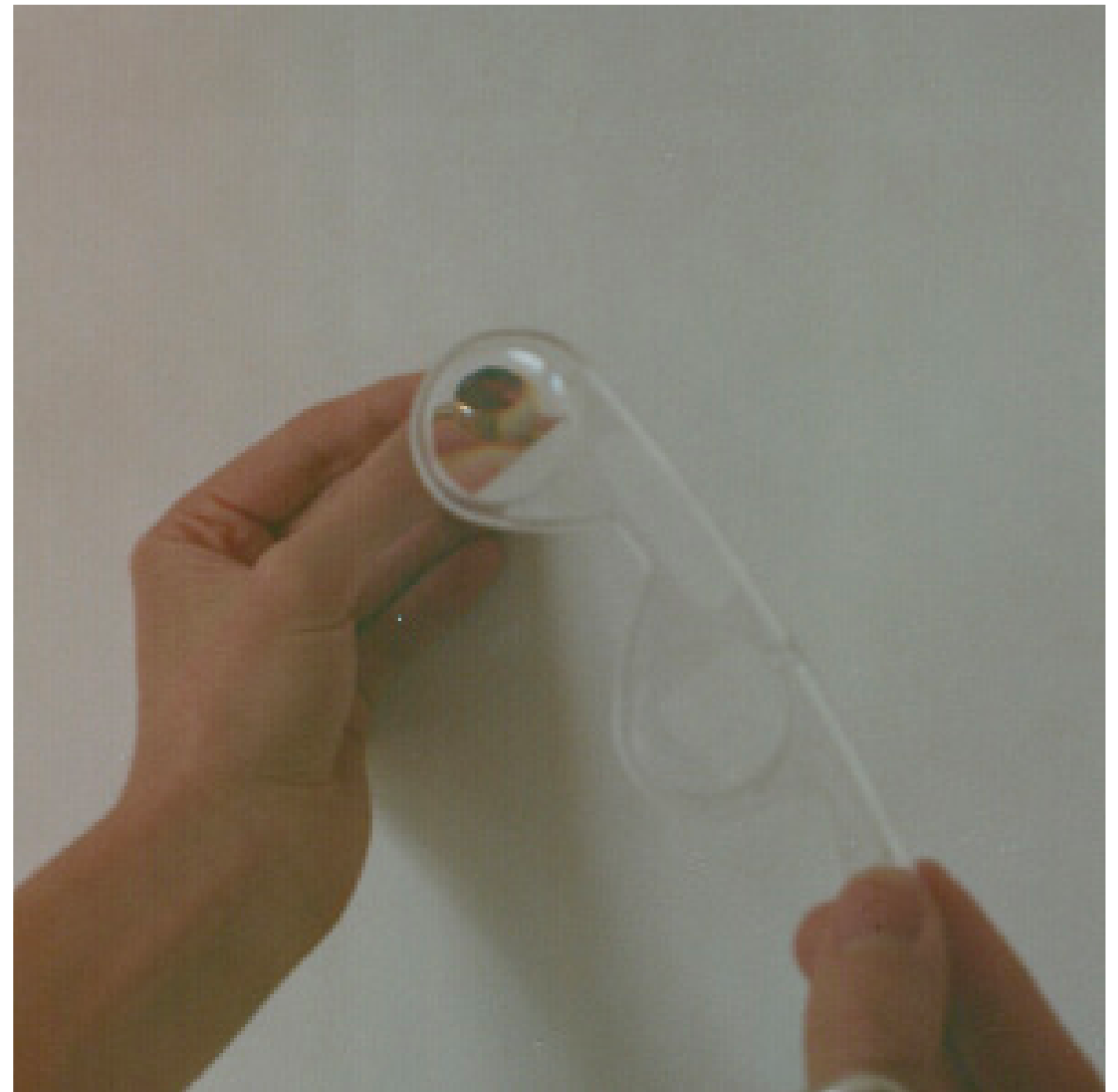
Edward Melcarth

Guggenheim was calmer and quieter in her last years in Venice; she liked to say that floating in a gondola was the nicest thing in her life since she gave up sex. Nicer still, seen through the bottle-green-tinted lenses of her bonkers ‘bat’ glasses. Peggy commissioned the frames to be made by her friend, the artist Edward Melcarth, in 1948. Melcarth was primarily a painter; a romantic, who dared to live as an openly homosexual man and did not hide his support for communism. He painted hungrily - like he was inhaling the world - it’s grime, its grandeur, its boys with cigarettes dangling. His paintings represented what he called “‘Social Romanticism’”. The artist’s bespoke design became a staple in Guggenheim’s wardrobe during her later years, metamorphosing into butterfly frames, too, growing precious wings of gold and silver. Peggy flaunted the frames to gallery openings, as she traversed the Venice canals with her beloved dogs (Guggenheim was the last private owner of a Venice gondola) and making for Venice’s most eccentric version of street (canal?) style.





30, 31 Gold ring with pink cut glass, Vintage



# Lin

# Cheung

**32, 33** Bottom of a Plastic Bag, 2016  
Necklace, carved rock crystal, 18ct gold

**34** Paper and an elastic band, 2016  
Brooch, carved Recon stone, gold, elastic band

**35** Kitchen Paper, 2016  
Brooch, carved Recon stone, gold

**36** Corner of a Plastic Bag, 2016  
Brooch, carved rock crystal, gold



**32, 33**





Kitchen Paper, Plastic Bag, Paper and an Elastic Band, are not items on a list of corner shop essentials. These are the names of brooches by the British-Chinese jewellery designer Lin Cheung.

The objects, made from carved Recon stone, gold and carved rock crystal, are the opposite of throw-away, intended, as per the name of the collection, to Keep.

Keep is a wry look at how Lin stores and protects her own jewellery.

“Unceremoniously tucked in corners of plastic grip seal bags, wrapped like a slice of cake in kitchen paper, scrunched up in a tissue, folded in a handkerchief or secured with paper and an elastic band are just some of the ways the jewellery I own and wear is stashed and stowed”, explains the designer.

She pulls a handful of plastic grip seal bags from her pockets; each containing miscellaneous pieces of metal and stone – cuts of lapis lazuli, rose quartz and yellow carved Corian. Nearly ten years on from first exhibiting Keep, Lin’s pragmatic approach to owning material possessions has not changed.



34



35



36

Lin is an intriguing jewellery designer, whose output oscillates between installation pieces, work that contains political and social commentary, as well as high profile commissions, including the medals for the 2012 Paralympic Games in London. She picked up an Arts Foundation Award in 2001 and a Jerwood Contemporary Makers Award in 2008. In 2017 she was shortlisted for the Woman's Hour Craft Prize, while in 2018 she won the prestigious Francoise van den Bosch Award. She is also a teacher on the jewellery course at Central Saint Martins. As one critic said: 'Lin's work is a commentary on the human condition, a conveyer of the maker's thoughts and feelings, a constant exploration into the meanings of jewellery.'



**37** Pearl Necklace 2016  
Carved freshwater pearls, vintage case, gold

**38** Pearl Necklace - Graduated 2017  
Carved freshwater pearls, reconditioned vintage case, gold



The designer recalls her earliest sign of creativity as “a constant source of annoyance to my parents”, joking that she spent her childhood making and breaking things. The third daughter of Chinese parents from Hong Kong, Lin was born in the UK and grew up in Wiltshire, where her father ran a Chinese take-away. The family lived above the busy kitchen, and Lin would help her parents box up orders on the weekend. She describes her father's practicality in contrast to her mother's “philosophical, immediate and more domestic outlook on the world.” Together, her parents taught her to work with both thought and feeling, a “sense of practicality and exploring life through contemplating on it.”



# Delayed



39 Delayed Reactions - Nonplus 2018  
Brooch, carved Lapis Lazuli, gold

40 Delayed Reactions -Slightly Sad 2018  
Brooch, carved Lapis Lazuli, gold



# Reactions

Lin's project Delayed Reactions takes this idea of contemplation and asserts it politically. The series of brooches, shaped like spring-pin buttons with little emoji-like faces. The series of carved stone objects reflect the mixed emotions Lin felt about the world around her.

*Confused, Speechless, Fallen, Nonplus, Slightly Sad* and *Frowning Face* were her response to the events following the EU Referendum and the continued debate over Britain's future in relation to Europe. But instead of being made from pressed metal or plastic, as traditional spring-pin buttons are, they're impeccably carved out of semiprecious stones and dotted with gold stars.

Pin-badges are traditionally of the moment – a humble communication device traditionally associated with political campaigns. Lin's choice to work with stone, a material that is the opposite of throwaway, she explains: "Was a good test to see what remained in my thoughts... what surfaced after the dust had settled."



41 Delayed Reactions - Confused, Speechless, Fallen 2017  
Brooches, carved Lapis Lazuli, gold



'Delayed' is a reference to the laboriousness of making in stone and the metaphoric meaning we associate with stone and stone carving," Lin said in a previous interview with Art Forum. "Grinding, honing, whittling can also mean wearing away, ruminating, brooding, perfecting, reducing – the slow, physical acts of making sense of my thoughts, buying time before committing to resolutions like delayed gratification, deliberately having to wait."

'Transparent', another piece in the Delayed Reactions series, is obvious but a little bit more complex. You can interpret it in different ways – the need for transparency or truthfulness. It's a pin badge that perhaps has no power and no message – or it's the act of activism with an ulterior motive, so seeing through something transparent in that sense.

The wearing of jewellery – nice challenge to build this into the piece. To make the object wearable. Gives the piece of jewellery another life when it's worn by someone. My pieces are personal, singular – but I welcome other people wearing them.

