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# Unique By Design: Contemporary Jewelry In The Donna Schneier Collection



## Synopsis

Studio jewelry dissolves the modern distinction between decorative and fine arts. The 60 pieces in this lively volume, collected by Donna Schneier and donated to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, were created primarily from the early 1960s to the present day and show a fluid engagement with various traditions in jewelry-making; from old masterworks to contemporary pieces; as well as various 20th-century art movements such as Conceptual art, Arte Povera, and Surrealism. *Unique by Design* draws attention to these dazzling small works of art, most of which have never before been published. Although these pieces incorporate a variety of materials, ranging from the precious to the ordinary, they share some common traits that reflect the collector's tastes: wit, elegance, fantasy, imagination, social observation, and technical virtuosity. Above all, these works were made to be worn and to create a dynamic engagement with a body.

## Book Information

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History

## Customer Reviews

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (05/13/14 - 08/31/14) (The Metropolitan Museum of Art 2014-08-31)

A notable collection of 20th-century studio jewelry in various media and styles is the subject of this dazzling catalogue, which reframes these works within the context of contemporary art.

This looks great. I ordered it for a gift so will not be reading it myself.

Very avant garde kind of jewellery, I bought for a jeweler friend and she loved it.

Wasn't exactly what I expected

First, I must state that my work is discussed in this small but important publication, and that I am represented by four pieces in the exhibition for which this was published. Obviously, I am biased, but all who know me know that my reputation is as being hyper-critical and I feel free to say exactly what I think. This publication has very much to recommend it, but does not really represent the entire Schneier Collection/ Gift. Suzanne Ramljack's essay SEDUCTIVE TACTICS : Contemporary Jewelry in the Donna Schneier Collection is as succinct and a clear analysis of this field as any I have ever read. Most such writing quickly bores me because of murkiness, too much description of technique, and too little understanding that art jewelry CAN and SHOULD be about ideas as well as the technical realization of the object. The author thankfully practically ignores technical matters and the C word---craft---- and instead honors the jewelry objects in such a way that leaves no doubt that we who are the makers combine our individual assumed technical skills with concepts and references that clearly leave commercial jewelry and mere adornment "in the dust." While most women----and this is jewelry that is usually meant for that gender-----use jewelry as accessory to their wardrobe, the work illustrated and discussed here really requires just the opposite.....any piece of clothing chosen as a support / background for works like these must be subservient to that work. Just as a powerful contemporary painting could not be fully appreciated, and indeed disrespected, if hung on patterned wallpaper-----the exception being Warhol's cows-----these jewel/objects deserve the same respect and best appreciation on simple, elegant clothing. We are not talking about endless chains of Coco Chanel costume jewelry nor branded designer initials and logos here! This work is beyond fashion, style, and accessory. The potent ideas that precipitate the making of these objects are about intellect and contemporary issues, first and foremost, and not mere design. Materials can range from traditional precious metals and techniques to unorthodox and surprising inclusion of hair, egg-shell, broken mirror, and glass, myriad types of plastics, rubber, and even coal and pencils. Ms.Ramljak offers clear analysis of why different materials are used for different purposes. These are works that will be worn by women so secure with their own social and economic situation that they want to challenge the observer, and not necessarily "impress" a viewer as to the piece's commercial cost or the initials of a fashion designer. They are not for the meek or

insecure wearer. The author eloquently deals with these socio-economic challenges, as well as aesthetic intents. My only real complaint is that several pieces that are importantly discussed by Ms Ramljak, are not illustrated. This is obviously a mistake on the part of the Museum when assembling the design of the publication. The photographs, while not reproducing images of everything in the exhibition, let alone the entire collection, are absolutely first-rate, and allow the reader to study the rich visual elements easily and thoroughly. At the end of the catalogue is a list of the artists represented, but again, not a complete listing of the collection, not any attempt whatsoever with biographical information. These are fairly minor quibblings on my part, and I am extremely proud to be part of this critically precise analysis of a collection representing the donor's personal eye and taste for this moment in the realm of Jewelry as Art. It would have been incredibly brave of the Met to have presented this exhibition and publication concurrent with the recently closed, overblown display of "Jewels by JAR" with its extravagant use of precious stones and the availability of couture level technical skills of the myriad craftsmen who actually make the work of this Brand / Designer, which more often than not are fairly trite representations of flowers, butterflies, and even a bagel. Ideas clearly did not inform this work, nor its sumptuous catalogue completely void of serious criticism and discussion. The JAR book, however, would have made a great Christmas catalogue like those of Neiman Marcus or Tiffany, and certainly supplies a wealth of image-availability for all the stuff the Met markets. UNIQUE BY DESIGN, by contrast, clearly positions jewelry made by jewelry artists just where it should be within a great encyclopedic art museum.

This book has been produced in conjunction with an exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art also called Unique by Design. This is a fantastic show of jewelry created by artists from around the world. The text in this book written by Suzanne Ramljak is a clear and concise introduction to this type of jewelry which is smart, beautiful, and well crafted. Anyone who loves jewelry will find it fascinating.

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