

Wearable Fine Art Sculpture

A Hannah Goldrich retrospective

For five decades counted among contemporary metalsmiths who demonstrate that jewelry can be approached as a fine art, Hannah Goldrich creates unique pieces, which stand alone as small-scale sculpture. Her aesthetic vision is not subject to the whims of fashion and time, however deeply it may belong to this period and culture. Goldrich's 50-Year Jewelry Retrospective is exhibited at the Jacobs Gallery through May 29.

Jewelry is not merely a fine art. It is functional, and function imposes formal constraints. Wearable art must be pleasing to both the eye and to touch, not just to the skin but to the three-dimensional, moving body, in a most intimate relationship. Goldrich does not forget this.

Jewelry is also a craft, which means that quality of workmanship and materials are paramount, whereas in non-functional art other considerations may override. In her attention to detail, Goldrich thinks like a master craftsman as well as a fine artist. Even the hidden parts of her work — her clasps — deserve display.

Goldrich grew up in an aesthetically appointed home in New York City with supportive parents who loved and understood art. Early on, she became acquainted with the work of modernist metalsmiths Paul Lobel, Sam Kramer and Ed Wiener, who broke away from mainstream jewelry design and laid the ground for subsequent generations of fine-artist jewelers.

Goldrich never studied jewelry formally. Her university degrees were in sociology (Antioch) and education (Harvard). To learn the metalsmith's craft, she became jeweler Charles Hopkins's apprentice in Chapel Hill, N.C., in 1956. She designed pieces for him, and he in turn showed her the techniques to create them. After moving to Eugene in 1963, Goldrich took courses from UO professor Max Nixon, who became her mentor. Although she taught 15 years at Maude Kerns Art Center, to this day she still enjoys taking workshops.

Goldrich's aesthetics and grasp of design were in place from the start, as were the hallmarks of her style. Sterling silver, 14-carat yellow gold, gemstones and pearls have always been her materials of choice. She generally uses construction techniques instead of casting. She cuts out small, individual component parts from metal sheet and wire. She textures and shapes them, soldering them together "like a jigsaw puzzle," a patient, work-intensive process.

Goldrich favors a strong, fluid line and elegant simplicity, whether the piece is minimalist such as "Sawtooth Serenity" pin, a 1958 choker with a bold, wing-like horizontal pendant bearing an off-center pearl, or created from component parts, such as "Proud Headpiece" or the solar "Fritz Goro's Opal." Her forms are usually organic, inspired by female curves, leaves, buds

or teardrops. And central to her design is an exquisite sense of asymmetrical balance. Asymmetry provides visual complexity, which, combined with flowing lines, gives a sense of freedom and the unexpected.

Goldrich learned the techniques of inlay and texturing with a rolling mill in 1978 at a workshop in Haystack, Maine, and a variety of subtle textures became another characteristic of her work. "Haystack Moon" (1978) is a rounded rectangular pin whose abstract landscape we may interpret as a lightly textured silver ocean reflecting the light of a pearl-moon and lapping at an ebony shore.

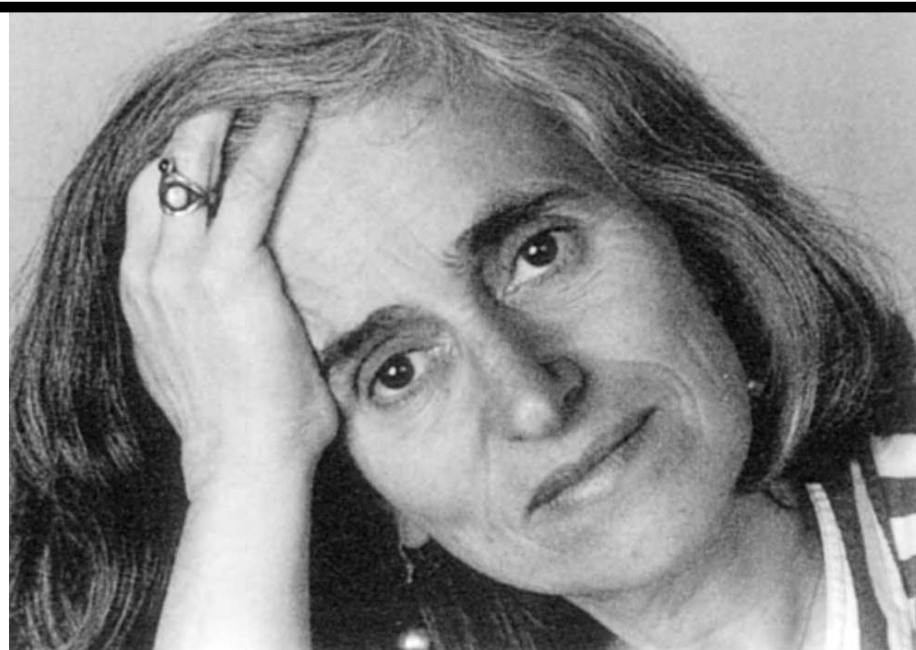
Goldrich considers 1990 to have been the beginning of her properly narrative work, when the death of friends prompted her to tell stories and express emotions through her art. But from the start, she created figurative pieces, which inevitably hint at a story, as well as non-representative, formalist jewelry. Early neckpieces, "Intimate Leaves" (1976) and "Winged Foliage" (1977), reach an apex in terms of formal design, based in both cases on a leaf motif. I think of them as royal pieces. Not the stilted, fussy, glittery kind associated with institutional royalty, but royal in a simpler, freer, more personal and primary way, for a queen such as Hatshepsut of Sheba or for a pagan goddess.

"From the Boreal Depths" (2002) follows in the same vein. Its biomorphic shape evokes both an opening bud and a female form. Goldrich often replicates in the metal section of a piece the characteristics of a stone used in that same piece. Here the silver's texture at left mirrors that of a fossilized coral at right, while the color of both is echoed in a dark gray pearl at the bottom. The form of that pearl is in turn repeated in the silver beads at the top.

"Hannah's Pendant," with its poised balance and light texture, shows a more geometric design, although angles are still softened, and asymmetry still plays a central role.

Her figurative pieces include landscapes. Whether pins or pendants, these are genuine bas-relief sculptures, albeit miniature ones. "Urban Views" (1958) is the earliest in the show, with individually enameled, colorful skyscrapers against a deep blue night sky and foreground elements in relief. A majority are exquisitely stylized renditions of the Northwest, which bring to the fore her sense of composition, her subtle use of contrasting textures, and an ability to maximize the effects of individual stones.

"It's Just the Tip" was inspired by Alaskan glaciers whose color and brilliance is captured by a chrysocolla drusy placed off-center among richly textured mountains. "Oregon Wonder" distills Western Oregon in three tightly integrated parts: a stylized silver-and-gold moun-



Hannah Goldrich (above)
Loss (lower right)
Casa Panchita (lower left)

tain landscape, a Morrison Ranch jasper with hill-depicting striation, and a luxuriant green indicolite.

Goldrich visits Mexico every year. To Oaxaca we owe several delightful pieces. "From the Museum Window in Oaxaca #1" and "#2" represent views from the Santa Domingo museum. The first, framed in the shape of a shrine, is a delicately textured bas-relief of houses, trees and mountains. The second is a one-point-perspective, vertical tableau of a building-lined street under a tall sky. "Casa Panchita," unframed, has the power and magic of a miniature world.

The female figure is a recurrent motif in Goldrich's figurative and narrative work. Gentle, affectionate humor characterizes her few animal figures ("Hansel," "Hoot") but is also often present in her portrayal of woman ("Senora," "Hampelfrau"). A sense of liberated energy imbues "Go, Girl!," a bellydancer, torso bared and a pearl in her navel. "She's Dancing Through Her Sixties" was inspired by Carolyn Heilbrun's book.

Goldrich's ongoing story of woman includes themes not often found in art, let alone jewelry. "Menopausal Moods," a reversible pendant, shows what a woman experiences during menopause. With understanding and humor, one side expresses the torment of hot flashes irradiating from a fire-opal womb and the storming emotions that accompany hormonal changes. On the other side, inner peace is regained, and the womb, a cool green tsavorite, is settled.

"The Wonder of Birth" tells of an earlier stage of womanhood with a wonderful mix of symbolic stylization and realism. The pregnant belly is a locket that contains a cast-silver infant with a hand-wrought chain for an umbilical cord. "Secrets" (the woman's chest is another locket), "Woman Embracing Her Stories," "Elusive Totem" and "Turquoise Mother," all differently convey the mystery at the core of womanhood.

Some pieces tell stories in an oblique, symbolic way, while others bring cultural symbols to bear on personal stories, as does "Hamsa for Ursie," a "healing hand" with amethyst created to make her sister feel better. "The Crying World of 2001," which the title describes, was done after 9/11. Making "Never Again" and "Forgive, but Don't Forget" was a way to deal with her emotions after a visit to Heilbronn, the German town Goldrich's family fled from in 1937. Similarly, "Peace in the Middle East 1992" followed a trip to Israel. Powerful in its economy, the pin beautifully combines stylized religious architectural elements and symbols from the three religions that hold Jerusalem sacred. **EW**



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