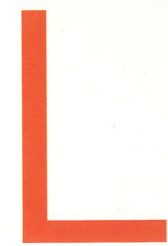


ON BARBARA HEATH



01

The jeweller mediates the intimate exchange between the jewellery object and its wearer. Brit Andresen speaks about Barbara Heath's special insight.

For more than 30 years, Barbara Heath has explored the communicative power of contemporary jewels and the relationship between herself, the maker and the wearer.

Her paper at the 'Alchemy 93' conference posed the question: What is a jewel? She responded by stating:

It's not architecture for the body. It's not wearable art. It's not sculpture. It is about combining matter (material) and the spirit (the maker) and placing that on, around and even in the vulnerable, temporary housing that we call our body.

Heath's definition of the jewel offers a wide conceptual space for her creative leaps. Encoded with stories, secret messages and symbolism, her jewellery, both on and off the body, continues to engage and inspire those who either wear or encounter it.

Following the death of a family member, I looked to Heath to create rings to capture memory and to bind my family together. Her process started with her active listening, then gentle questions, a few exchanges, ideas and sketches. It was from these seemingly slight clues that the Barbara Heath spirit was transformed into matter to produce 'a family of rings'.

For us, she made seven rings – one wide ring for my hand and two sets of three rings for my daughters. The rings celebrate water in its various forms – tears, sprays, waves and droplets. The design as a whole is held in a tension of contrasts: fire on water, solid and void, straight and curved, wide and narrow, form and counter-form. Three of the rings bear a common motif to bind the family, two identical rings connect the siblings, and two rings, set with different 'water blue' stones, signify the individuality of each sister.

'Jeweller to the lost', Heath's epithet since 1990 and the title of a solo exhibition currently showing at Queensland Art Gallery, points to a role she sees for herself: assisting others by making jewellery that resonates with meaning. This rare and significant exhibition is drawn from private and public collections, and features 70 carefully selected works from the mid-1980s to the present day.

Many private collectors attended the *Jeweller to the Lost* exhibition opening. Their bodies held the memory of the jewellery on display – its weight, shape, outline, colour, material, texture and transparency. Since pulling off their rings or unclipping their bracelets for this exhibition, the collective fingers and hands have become lighter in weight, suntans show up white bands of skin, some digits are more wasted than others and then there is the constant, absent-minded fingering for the absent thing. Barbara Heath's work acknowledges the silent power of objects and the capacity of the body to register and hold their memory. ■■■

Brit Andresen is Professor of Architecture at the University of Queensland.

All works by Barbara Heath. Images courtesy Queensland Art Gallery

01 *The necklace of Princess Fiorimondi*, 1997, sterling silver, brass/gold plated, lead and quartz crystal, faux pearls, hematite, rubber, anodised aluminium, stainless steel

02 *Love Tokens*, 1987-91, freshwater pearls, sterling silver, 19 carat yellow gold, stainless steel, ebony, tortoiseshell, boar tusk, steel, shakudo, hair, pearl shell, lapis lazuli, bronze, anodised aluminium, white coral, patinated brass, nickel silver, copper, perspex

03 *Mashrabiya-inspired lattice brooches*, 1993-94, 18 carat yellow gold, sterling silver

04 *Mashrabiya-inspired lattice brooches*, 1993-94, 18 carat yellow gold, sterling silver

05 *Bracelet (detail)*, 1988, sterling silver, bronze, hematite

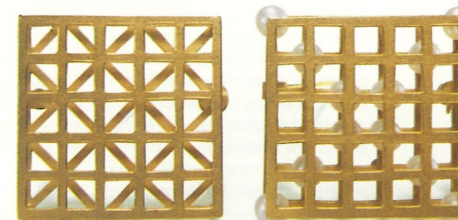
06 *Whie enamel fusion brooch and sphere*, 2004, 18 carat yellow gold, enamel



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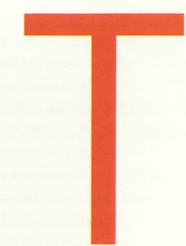
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