

Jewellery is a State of Encounter

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Introduction

In my work I like to involve people into a story, that they become part of the work. I understand the jewellery piece not as the finished piece, but as a vessel of relations. It is essential for the work that the wearer becomes part of it. Without his or her involvement the work is not complete. The wearer tells the story of the work, and adds value to it. The more wearers, the stronger both the story and the value of the work become. Especially in the field of jewellery I think this plays an important role, because its aim is to produce something that is wearable.

With the involvement of people everything takes place in the field of interaction. Therefore my interests and questions in this thesis come forth out of my own practice. I will explore the field of interaction, and where this positions us in contemporary jewellery, the importance of a concept, and how this is able to enrich us in our work, and create value. I will discuss ways of working to either enhance interaction or create value. And I will demonstrate you how the involvement and participation of an audience takes us outside the museum or gallery.

The issues I work with in my own practice are related to the questions I pose in this thesis. My interests lie in how value is added to conceptual work by using interaction as a foundation. These works function on different levels of value, think of emotional value, conceptual value, material value, relational value, historical value etc. The issue of added value and how to translate this into work is always evident.

In 2011 I did a project at the academy involving the distribution of 350 wooden laser cut buttons. The buttons varied in shape, based on different medals. With the text "Become Part of Rietveld's Army" I attracted people to make part. Anyone could choose the button they wanted; the only thing I asked in return was a photograph of them wearing the medal. In the end I had a photo series of all the participants wearing the medals, which I presented together on a wall as if they were an army. With this army I linked the individuals, the bond between them will last forever. The medals question the relevance of an army, the structural distinctions in an army, and the meaning of the associated medals.

Out of this project another work arose entitled, "The Ultimate Medal". This is a medal made out of gold leaf, where if one tries it to wear it, it will break in to a thousand pieces.

Interaction

I understand interaction as a tool to create awareness among the wearers. It is a process in which every participant becomes a *part* of the *whole*. The wearer is part of a group of people, and those people together create the work. I like to enhance these interactions between people, to link participating individuals with the work I make. It is therefore important to make the wearer want to be a part of the work, by creating connective possibilities and by making propositions. The concept of the work plays an important role in how a work evolves into an interesting, interactive piece of jewellery that brings people together.

How important is a concept? How important can an object or concept be for a piece of jewellery? Would the concept itself be enough for an artwork, without changing anything about the object, or would the value that is already in the object be enough?

Mr Claw

Ted Noten's piece *Mr Claw* (2004) poses these questions.¹ The work consists of a fairground machine, where you can insert your money and steer a claw around to try and catch a kilogram of pure gold. In this case the object plays an enormous role. The gold is an object of extreme material value, beauty which provokes greed. The emotions that can be provoked by the bar of gold, have a huge impact on the participant. Nothing is done to the shape of the gold; it is the material value that is already enough.

What interests me is that nothing is changed in the form of the kilo of gold. Only with adding the idea of play and win, the work becomes more valuable. The work triggers people to want the bar of gold. It proposes to you, that for only one euro, you can have one kilo of gold. It works with the idea of value and greed, and at the same time asks the participation of the viewer. This active participation is

¹ Ted Noten, *CH₂=C(CH₃)C(=O)OCH₃ enclosures and other TNs*, (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2006), p. 214.



Mr Claw, installation, Ted Noten 2004

embedded in the work. You can attribute this to the installation of a machine we all from our youth. One. That triggers the childhood feeling of wanting to win something, in the case of Noten's work, something very valuable. This direct way of working attracts me very much. That by adding an idea, the whole becomes much more valuable. For me this is an example of the different possibilities in the field of jewellery.

Value

What does this have to do with jewellery? Traditionally jewellery is valuable, most of it made out of precious materials. Often jewels gain more meaning over time, by collecting emotional value and being passed from generation to generation. This is something that lacks in this work. There is no such emotional value in the kilogram of gold, at least it is not intend in Noten's view. I am convinced that in a recycled bar of gold all the emotional value of the melted pieces of jewellery live on because, all the pieces are still here only in a different form. Nevertheless the aspect of true material value is important in Noten's work. This is what it connects with *value*.

The exchange between the object and the participant is not in proportion. 1 euro against 13.000, today around 40.000 this is what creates this *value*. Not speaking of the fact that you waste your money because nothing comes out. This is not important for the idea of the work, it is the fact that you can *try*, this is important. It insists upon use rather than contemplation. As we can see, this work connects differently to the aspect of value. Maybe in a more raw way, somehow a true way? Because what is more pure than a bar of gold?

The Content of Interactive Art.

Educator, artist, and theoretician Roy Ascott is somebody who has build a theoretical framework for approaching interactive artworks.² The following chapter will explain his ideas.

Modern art is concerned with initiating events and with the forming of concepts of existence. The vision of art shifted from the field of objects to the field of behaviour and its

² Roy Ascott, *Behaviourist Art and the Cybernetic Vision* In: *From Wagner to Virtual Reality*, ed. By Randall Packer and Ken Jordan (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), p. 104-120.

function became less descriptive and more purposive. The artist, the artefact and the spectator are all involved in a more behavioural context. We find an insistence on polemic, formal ambiguity and instability, uncertainty and room for change in the images and forms of modern art. With the goal of drawing the spectator into active participation in the act of creation; to engage him, via the object, to give him the opportunity to become involved in creative behaviour on all levels of experience, physical, emotional and conceptual.

We may say that the boundaries between making art, the artefact itself, and the experience of the work are no longer clearly defined. The participational form of art has as its basic principle *feedback*, and it is this loop, that makes the artist, artwork and observer an integral whole. For art to switch its role from the private, exclusive arena of a rarefied elite to the public, open field. The artist has to create more flexible structures offering a greater variety of readings than were formerly needed in art. This is a situation in which the artwork exists in a state of transition, and in which the effort to establish a final resolution must

come from the observer. The artist is primarily motivated to initiate a dialogue, to set feelings and ideas in motion, to enrich the artistic experience with feedback from the spectator's response. The active involvement of the spectator can be thought of as removing uncertainty about a set of possibilities. Deep involvement and interplay produces information. The *set* of the artwork has variety only in so far as the observer participates. The artist is doing little more than exploring his new relationship to the spectator.

The Goal

According to Ascott the goal of an artist that works in the field of relational arts is to draw the spectator into active participation, to create an opportunity to become involved. While the artist sets the general context of the artwork, the evolution of the work is unpredictable and totally dependent on the involvement of the spectator. You could say that the artist is not working towards a predetermined art piece. The art piece is the outcome of his behaviour, rather than the reason for it. There is no point in a *final* piece. The artist's message is that the extension of creative

behaviour into everyday experience is possible. He will continue, to provide a *matrix* for ideas and feelings from which the participants in his work may construct for themselves new experiences and unfamiliar patterns of behaviour.³

I think in the field of jewellery we can use this framework to enrich our work. Because, a piece of jewellery is so personal we should indeed initiate a dialogue to involve the spectator, to set feelings and ideas in motion, to create a bond between the piece of jewellery and the spectator. This means it is important to establish an opportunity to become involved. What interests me is a piece of jewellery, which would be the outcome of this framework. A piece, that creates space for these experiences.

Relational Aesthetics

I wonder if there is a difference between interaction and interactivity? Interactivity in my opinion is always bound to a certain place and time. Because, it is always *something*, an object, that is interactive. Where interaction is never

³ Ascott, *Behaviourist Art and the Cybernetic Vision*, p. 100.

bound to a certain place or time. Interaction is something that can always take place, no matter where or when. Where interaction affects the participants in a situation, interactivity is a dialog with a set of possible responses. We could say that a piece of jewellery is interactive, and that the wearer creates the interaction.

Nicolas Bourriaud's understanding of *relational art* is; "an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space"⁴. In other words, it is no longer possible to regard the contemporary work as a space to be walked through. It is presented as a period of time to be lived through, like an opening to an unlimited discussion.

In the field of jewellery you are invited into another kind of interaction. Claire Bishop discussing Bourriaud writes, "relational art is entirely beholden to the contingencies of

⁴ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods (Dijon: les presses du réel, 2002), p. 14.

its environment and audience”.⁵In jewellery we create interaction through an object. We have a different hand in creating these relations, and are less dependent on the environment. More importantly, through these objects we create something not only in the present, but something that lives on. Bourriaud says that “today’s artists seek only to find provisional solutions in the here and now; instead of looking forward to a future utopia, this art sets up *microtopias* in the present.”⁶ In the field of jewellery we set up long lasting relations between the maker and the objects and between the objects and the participants, without the boundaries of time. We have the interactivity of the object that creates timelessness. We create not only in the present but also in the future.

In the field of jewellery we are less dependent on the surrounding, we are more dependent on the wearer. A piece of jewellery can create relations here and now, but as well in 25 years from now. The most important thing we

⁵ As quoted by Claire Bishop in, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics* In: *OCTOBER 110*, (October Magazine, Ltd. And Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2004), p. 54.

⁶ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 13.

need is a wearer. The interaction of the wearer that can always take place, together with the interactivity of the piece, which is bound to a certain place and time, create these long lasting relations. A piece of jewellery can create interaction throughout its whole existence.

Part of Something

Interaction can take place on a small scale between two people connected through a piece of jewellery, but it can grow out to actual communities, all having something in common. These communities still exist after an exhibition. We leave the site and go home, but actually we also take something home, a piece of jewellery. Everything we experienced during the exhibition, all the encounters we had, is all embedded in the piece of jewellery. Every time we make contact with the piece, we are aware of its history and meaning. I think this is a strong quality compared with other fields of art. We could say we have an advantage with the piece of jewellery. You are not only part of something, but you also have a part of something. Whereas, in the field of fine arts interaction is more bound to a certain event, in the field of jewellery this is quite different as we can see.

Where in fine arts this event takes place. In the field of jewellery this is an event without ending.

If we look back at the project I did with the medals, in the Rietveld Academy, we see the advantage of the object in creating a community. And how this project could even grow bigger as a result of the object. We also see the bond that still exists when the participants leave the site, and that the environment where the project took place is in the end unimportant.

Creation of Value

In 1968, the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers gathered with a few friends to analyse the relations between art and society. After quite a bit of discussion they were to meet in Broodthaers studio. By that time there had been a lot of talk about them, so they expected quite some people. Because there was nothing to sit on, Broodthaers lent transport crates from a company. When the crates arrived he arranged them as one would arrange artwork, and said to himself, “But actually, this right here is the museum. This has something to do with the concept of the museum.”⁷ Broodthaers wrote the word “Museum” on his window and the words “Department of Eagles” on the garden wall. The image of an eagle acted as the emblem of the museum. The museum, titled *Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles* was born. The museum was born not out of a concept, but by way of circumstance. The concept came

⁷ Marcel Broodthaers, *A Conversation with Freddy de Vree* (1969) in: *Institutional Critique*, ed. By Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2009), p. 83.

later. The museum was a fictive one, because it had no permanent location or collection. It manifested itself, appearing at different locations between 1968 and 1972. Broodthaers made installations especially for this museum, mostly reproductions of artwork in the form of postcards, and inscriptions that indicated to the visitor that they were in a museum. Within the function of director Broodthaers created a *Financial Section* in his department, with the goal to sell the museum itself, stating that this was necessary “on the account of bankruptcy”. Within this *Financial Section*, Broodthaers created an unlimited series of gold bars stamped with the museum’s symbol, an eagle, a symbol associated with power and victory. The bars were sold at twice the market value of gold, to raise money for the museum.

In this work, by Broodthaers we see an object that is slightly modified. By adding a stamp the object becomes twice as valuable. He uses the authority of the museum to increase value. Broodthaers was one of the first artists to question the role and the structure of the institution; we could say he made a statement with this work, because in

essence this is what happens with artworks in museums or galleries. If a museum or gallery accepts a work of art, the value of the work increases enormously.



Marcel Broodthaers, One of the gold bars, 1970-71

If we agree on the fact that the bar of gold is an artwork, why didn't Broodthaers sell one? This is quite strange, seeing that a work of art is rated in the same way as the bar of gold. The only difference between the two is that we immediately have an idea of the value of the gold, in terms of the day price, and that an artwork with a different body is harder to grasp in means of value. But this doesn't take away that the bar of gold is an artwork, and that an artwork is more valuable than its material value. So by stating something is a work of art, the object becomes more valuable. In case of this work, we can see how Broodthaers uses the power of a museum to increase value, and in the same time criticises the museum politics.

I wonder where the borders are between these different values in the work? Because the gold on it own has a value, the concept is valuable, and by stating it has twice the value has value. And this last part is something he gives critique on, while the conceptual value is actually made up in the same way. Do we as artists also have the power to increase value? We could see it as a critique of the museum, of the status of the artist and of the art object, and the relations of

both to capitalist society.

This is quite a different approach on value than Noten's work. The difference lies in the participational part of the work. In Noten's work the active part is important; this is what makes the work. In Broodthaers work, what is important is that the material value is increased with an idea. It is not so much about wanting to have the gold, but more about the fact that Broodthaers can create more value. Showing what other institutions are doing all the time. In Noten's work you can try to get the gold for 1 euro, where in Broodthaers work you have to pay twice the material value before you can take it home. What they have in common is that in the exchange the object and its price are not in balance with each other. In both cases there is no balance between what the *participant* or *buyer* has to pay compared to the object they can retrieve. With totally different means, at the end the two works look quite alike.

Audience

While Broodthaers gives critique to the role of a museum or gallery, Noten strives to reach a wider public than these

institutions can offer him. I believe that only certain people visit museums and galleries. If this is the only place where our work is shown, we exclude a lot of people who will never know what is happening in contemporary art. Noten wonders if these institutions can offer him a wide enough public. Noten's thoughts on the audience:

"Do you think its odd I want to be overwhelmed by the urgency of jewelry? Isn't the case nowadays that this urgency must be derived from appealing to a different kind and in particular much wider public than that of museums and galleries?"⁸

I believe that with work that lies in the field of interaction and participation we can enhance this situation. This is a tool to create a bigger audience. If we make the wearer part of the work, the work becomes open. We immediately invite a lot more people to the work. Simply because it attracts people, don't you want to be part of it? I believe people would rather participate with a work than stand

⁸ Internet Blog, Article on Ted Noten, *Ted Noten, and expanding definitions of jewellery* <http://helenjewellery.wordpress.com> (accessed 2 November 2011).

statically near it. Despite the fact that in the beginning people need a small push to participate, once it gets going, there is no stopping it. And because of this active participation the work becomes important to the participant, they create a bond with the work and the maker. I think this is a stronger bond we create here, than the bond between a wearer and a predestined object. This personal connection creates value in the work; this is something a predestined object will never accomplish.

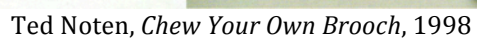
What I share with Noten is that I believe it is important to investigate the role of a maker according to the wearer, owner, and the interaction between them. With this we can create a larger public that appreciates contemporary jewellery. And that we can't just do this in a museum or art gallery, we should search for this in the outside world, where everybody is, and not only visitors of museums and galleries. If we want to share our fantastic world of jewellery with everyone, we should open up by broadening our view through interaction.

The Role of the Maker

Noten made a work called *Chew Your Own Brooch* (1998) where he investigates the role of the maker.⁹ The piece was an attempt to present the role of the designer to the public. He simply provided the audience with a piece of chewing gum, in a package with instructions how to proceed. The participant would chew the gum into any shape they liked, and then send it to Noten's studio where he would cast a replica in silver, mount it onto a pin on it and have it gold plated. At the end the piece was send back to the chewer by post.

It is clear here, that Noten functions as a manufacturer. He does not have anything to do with the design process. He is only offering the participant a material, one that could take any shape possible. I appreciate the fact that the interaction is visible, it relates to each other in all ways. The relationship between the jewel and the wearer, the manufacturer and the wearer, and also between the manufacturer and the jewel become very clear. Both creator and manufacturer take part in the process. This is a

⁹ Noten, *CH₂=C(CH₃)C(=O)OCH₃ enclosures and other TNs*, p. 30-39.



clear way of creating an open ended project. It is a project that anyone can enjoy, and one where anyone can become an artist and design their own brooch. It is an ordinary piece of chewing gum that anyone can transform into their own piece of jewellery.

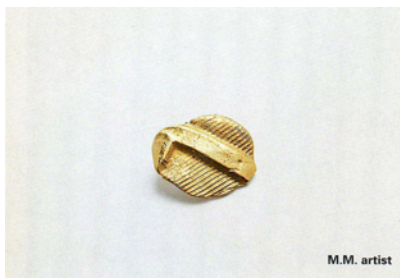
In 1999 Noten held a chewing workshop for children in the museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. The amount of people Noten reached with this project in a direct way is quite large. In one day there were 600 children participating; so not only did he reach the young visitors, but also 600 pieces were made, all with their own identity. With this intervention Noten accomplishes to use the museum visitors in an unusual way. As a visitor of a museum you go there to watch and experience the works shown. In this case you have the opportunity to create something yourself, although it is initiated by someone else.

I think this project could have taken place anywhere. The location of Boijmans Van Beuningen only provided the amount of people. What I would like to see is what happens if this project is done in a totally different context. The fact that Noten reached 600 children in one day is of course a

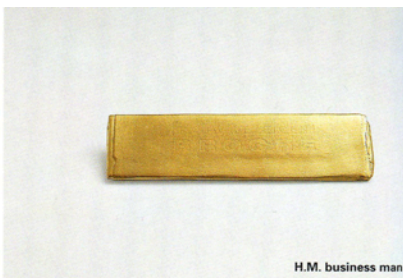
nice approach to the conventional museum visit. What I wonder is if the museum is the right place for a project like this. If we work in the field of interaction, shouldn't we search for a wider and different public than the museum or gallery can offer us. Isn't this the whole idea behind interaction? To search for it instead of using places that already have a great number of visitors? Is this an impossible search? Or is it something we can achieve within the field of jewellery?

This work treats the visitors in a different way than usual. It provokes the idea of interacting with a different kind of public, in this case children. And interacting with participants precisely through the act of making. But would it not be wonderful to make this project available and known to people who have nothing to do with art. To, make a temporary artist out of every day people that never go to a museum, besides children? It seems to me this would be a lot more exciting, to reach these people and to let them know what is going on in contemporary jewellery.

If we take a look at some pieces that were made, we get a better view on the interaction between the object and the



M.M. artist



H.M. business man



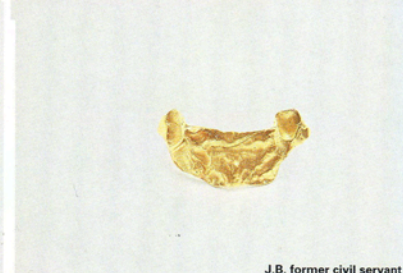
anonymous



M.V. gallery owner



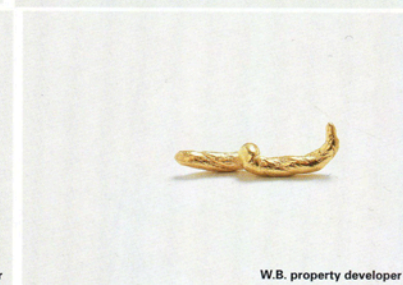
B.C. & L.D. café owner



J.B. former civil servant



anonymous, curator



W.B. property developer

Ted Noten, Chew Your Own Brooch, 1998

participant. And an overview on what people designed during events that took place. For example the *business man* who didn't even unpack the chewing gum, but sent the whole thing back with the idea that the brooch would contain the most amount of silver. Or the *café owner* who makes it look like he scraped the piece of chewing gum from the floor of his café and sent it back. We can see the artist in everybody, and also well the falseness of the belief that making art is easy. This whole project is not so much about the object, but more about the relations that arise between the artist and the participants. The object is only a vessel of communication. I think we can place this project in Ascott's framework for approaching interactive artworks. This work is about the outcome rather than the art itself.

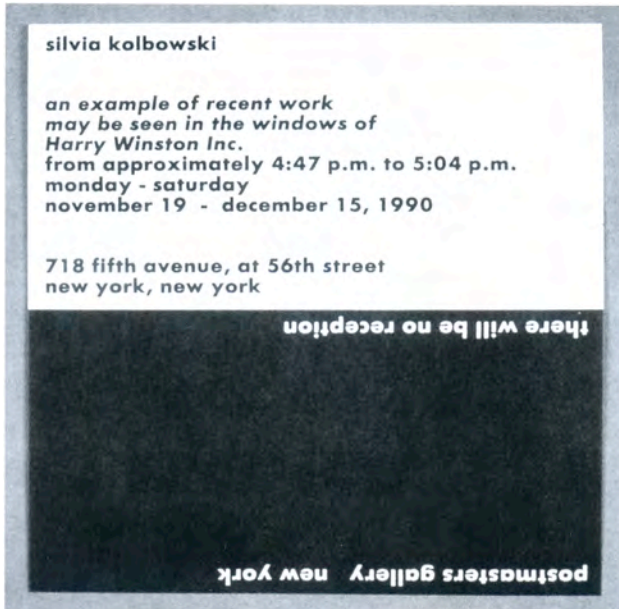
Appropriation

How can a work of art exist far removed from a gallery or museum? The gradual move outside the gallery and museum context started in the late 60s, and early 70s when a number of artists developed a critical analysis of the gallery structure. It began with the rejection of traditions, and the exploration of new sites. These established

opportunities, raised new possibilities of using various strategies of intervention to interact with cultural situations. At the same time, artists found a way of working with the exhibition system that they could incorporate into the process of their work. This way of working emerged from a process of analysing the circumstances of these different types of spaces, and incorporating this analysis into the structure of the work.

With this new developed cultural context these works where often seen as *nonmaterial*, because they functioned outside the traditional context of the marketplace, and often had a variety of public locations. The artists that created these public works, all have in common their ability to use the exhibition system to create works that extend far beyond the traditional frame of the institution.

The following work of Silvia Kolbowski is a work that utilized the window displays of the Harry Winston jewellery store in Manhattan. Kolbowski decided to swap the actual jewellery with photographs of the original pieces at sporadic, short time intervals during a four-week



An example of recent work, installation view , Silvia Kolbowski, 1990.

period.¹⁰ Monday through Friday, employees of jewellery store Harry Winston in Manhattan would remove the diamond jewellery from the display windows, and replace it with the photographs. Kolbowski put an advertisement in *Artforum* and sent invitations announcing her *Example Of Recent Work*. Viewers were sent to Harry Winston every late afternoon to experience the change of displays. Kolbowski's motivation was to create a public work of art that would explore the borders between private and public through the appropriation of an already accessible site.¹¹ Because of the appropriation Kolbowski sought written consent from the company, because her advertisement might run against the law in terms of misappropriation of name. The company agreed on the condition that she makes a change in the invitation, that would avoid the suggestion her work included the design of the jewellery itself.

¹⁰ Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2003), p. 200-203.

¹¹ Appropriation refers to the use of borrowed elements in the creation of a new work.

What actually happened on the sidewalk is that the people who came by invitation got mixed up with other people walking by. Kolbowski did not only reach the people who have something to do with art. Suddenly there was an unpredicted blend of people on the sidewalk; this work became accessible for everybody.

The change of displays took place only at certain times, and therefore it is hard to grasp it as art. The time span of the work being set in motion is too short to really take advantage of the work being public. In this short moment approximately 4:47 pm to 5:04 pm, there is a limit to the people who can really experience the alteration. Furthermore, there was little or no sign that this was an art project, so people wouldn't identify the work as *art*. Here in lies the difficulty of situations like these. Where museums or galleries can offer this *artification*, outside these institutions we are on our own.

With the term *artification* I would like to refer to the situations and processes wherein something that is not regarded as art in the traditional sense of the word is changed into something art-like. In the field of jewellery we

can create something art-like, think about Noten's work *Chew Your Own Brooch* how this is about the outcome rather than the art object itself.

The gallery puts the work in a different surrounding, and states it is a work of art. With this gesture of the gallery it is easier to except it as a work of art. If we want to work *outside* these institutions, we have to create a way of identifying our work as an art. How to achieve this is not yet clear for me, but I believe that with further investigation in the field of interaction we can reach this identification. That by these means of interaction we can reach people that otherwise just walk by. Every passer-by takes a story home, an experience to share.

Change of Terms

We could say that there is some kind of shift in how the artworks mentioned function in comparison to their ancestors. Where in the past you could buy a concrete object, how can one buy an experience? And how do you put a price tag on something that you experience? It is not that the object is not important anymore, but it became more some kind of vessel of relations to the other. Is it that

we should change our view on how we perceive art? Should we change the terms? Like instead of looking at a picture try to feel a picture? Isn't it a logical step that if we change an object with an idea we should also change the way of looking at it? Maybe this is also the reason why these artworks are harder to define as a work of art. Because we are not only dealing with an object, but also with an experience that takes place. We could say that it is not possible to buy the artwork as a *whole*; you can only be part of it. And if you buy a documentation of the artwork, you buy the relation to a relationship.

Conclusion: The Beginning

Throughout this text we get an idea of the possibilities in the field of contemporary jewellery concerning interaction and added value. On the one hand, there is a difficulty in defining these accessible works as art. On the other hand, that compared to other fields of art our position in art is pretty strong. That we move in a very special and precious area in art, where interaction plays a crucial role in the creation of meaning.

In my work I want to keep on working in the field of interaction. I want to create connective possibilities and make suggestions. I will keep on adding ideas to create value. I want to initiate events to create purpose. I want to create work in which the final resolution comes from the observer. I want to initiate dialogues. I want to create jewellery that interacts. I want to keep on investigating the role of the maker according to the wearer. I will try to find a way of working to identify my work as art, if it moves *outside*.

More and more I see the importance and possibilities the field of interaction gives us, and have the urge to handle jewellery in this way. Is this not the most essential part of something that is so close to you? To create a story where everybody could come along with, and where form doesn't play the biggest role anymore? But where an object carries emotional value, when it intervenes, it becomes part of you. I think the open-ended jewellery piece is winning. It blends art and life. In the specific field of jewellery the blend of art and life has a huge potential. This is one of the few fields where the involved object is personal and public at the

same time. Especially an interactive piece of jewellery can use this blend of art and life to create stories and become valuable to everybody.

In the end the question if something is made very well gets exchanged by the question if it is made up in a convincing way. Not what we see of an artwork but what we can make out of it, this is what counts. The field of jewellery has a very interesting position in the field of arts; there are a lot of options. Jewellery can: create meaning over time, embed emotions, connect people, be valuable, tell stories, be worn, be interactive, be important, be conceptual, be questioning, be involving, experience, be timeless, become part of you. Jewellery is focused on the here and now as well as the past and the future. But also I believe the everyday is a very fertile terrain, which offers us a lot of possibilities.

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