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The Chrysler Museum's new exhibition dazzles the mind — and wrist and neck

WHRO | By Betsy DiJulio
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Courtesy Via The Chrysler Museum Of Art
"Red Car" bracelet, 2014, by Robert Baines. He uses Etruscan goldsmithing techniques for the piece but inserts a car instead of a jewel, a hint at modern consumerism.

The major exhibition from the Dallas Museum of Art features 385 wearable pieces of art crafted during the last century.

The Chrysler Museum of Art's recently opened jewelry exhibition "is not diamonds and tiaras," said Mark Castro. Castro, the Chrysler's director of curatorial affairs and the in-house curator for the show, said the museum is committed to "exhibitions that really push the boundaries of what people think of as art."

And "Constellations," from the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA), pushes the boundaries of what people think of as jewelry: a dazzlingly elaborate bracelet made of electroplated sterling silver and paint with a red toy car perched on top; rings crafted from plastic bottles or Polyethylene terephthalate (PET); brooches made of what looks like burnt toast; a necklace assembled from razor sharp scissors whose blades are coated in toxic cinnabar.

Jewelry “can deal with all the same major issues that other art deals with,” Castro said, be it politics, sustainability or identity. “I mean, all of these major ideas and themes that are part of our contemporary culture are in jewelry.”

Hence, the title is a reference, not so much to glittering objects, but to “relationships and meanings created through the connections between them,” said curator Sarah Schleuning in the exhibition brochure. These associations are not fixed, but opportunities for visitors to remap configurations for themselves.

For Schleuning, Castro’s former colleague and senior curator of decorative arts and design at the Dallas museum, “Constellations” has been in development for six years.



Photo Via The Chrysler Museum Of Art
“Goldfinger” bracelet, 1969, by Bruno Martinazzi. It is included in the Chrysler Museum of Art's recently opened show, “Constellations: Contemporary Jewelry from the Dallas Museum of Art.”

After opening at DMA in 2025, the show traveled to Chrysler this month. It showcases 385 pieces crafted by more than 230 contemporary artists from 41 countries. The exhibition is organized around four pillars: Zones of the Body; Archetypes; Signals (identity); and Play. The latter, Castro said, “gets a bad rap in art and in life.”

Though some of the pieces of sculptural jewelry are more pragmatic than others, all of them are intended to be worn. For Schleuning, a pivotal moment is when visitors ask, “Are these actually wearable?” That is when, she states in the brochure, they have begun to question the relationship between function, consumption and powerful artistic expression.

For example, “Aeriform Collar” by Iris van Herpen opens the show. Made of zinc-coated steel wire, the hovering volumetric spheres worn by a mannequin appear

simultaneously feathery and molecular. Castro described the piece as “constantly reacting to your breathing,” echoing the kinesthetic pieces that close the show. The gallery palette of deep Prussian blue, white and crisp gray unifies each space as it unfolds into the next while setting off every piece to advantage. The color story takes its cue from the title and from the first iteration at DMA, but is uniquely configured for the Chrysler. Exhibition designer Cassie Rangel and preparator Eliot Hicks traveled to Texas, where they engaged deeply with the Dallas team. Rangel made the concept her own by designing 60 cases with mounts, customized for each piece.



Photo Via The Chrysler Museum Of Art
“Pillar Rings”, 1977, by Wendy Ramshaw. It is included in the "Constellations: Contemporary Jewelry from the Dallas Museum of Art” at the Chrysler Museum of Art.

She conceived of the clean and modern casework with an eye towards how it can be reused. In addition, the 456-page, illustrated exhibition catalog uses cyanotypes of necklaces as section dividers. Rangel’s exhibition design reproduced the cyanotypes on large scrims as room dividers and wayfinders with an open feel. In addition to detailed labels and section panels, visitors will encounter preparatory drawings by some of the artists, video and interactive components.

Jewelry “engages with monumental ideas, but at a different scale,” Schleuning stated, but “it’s never just about aesthetics, ideas or function alone, but about how all those elements come together to tell stories about both artistic intention and everyday life.”

For her and Castro, this work is meant to inspire curiosity and openness. And the hope is that visitors leave with more questions than when they arrive.

The show runs through Jan. 3, 2027. Chrysler Museum of Art, 1 Memorial Place, Norfolk; visit chrysler.org for more information.

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