Constellations Brings Universe of Wearable Art to the Chrysler

By Jeff Maisey



For as far back in history as is known humans have been fascinated with jewelry.
From precious gems such as skillfully cut diamonds, rubies, and emeralds to strung pearl necklaces, shark teeth and sea shells to flowery Hawaiian leis, human and animal bones to various metals, paper, and colorful plastic beads, jewelry has adorned nearly all parts of the body.

Over time jewelry has served both ceremonial and ornamental.
It communicated economic status, cultural tradition, and a sense of creative, fashionable expression.

Jewelry is also symbolic in religious realms for identity and protection against perceived evil spirits. Catholic priests and faithful flocks hang a cross around their necks; voodoo practitioners, African and Native American shaman don elaborate headdresses, necklaces, and piercings in sacred rituals to heal and restore spiritual and physical balance; followers of Islam may wear silver rings or feature verses from the Quran; Jews display the Star of David; believers in Buddhism and Hinduism incorporate beads, lotus flowers, and the Om symbol.

From the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus Valley, China and the Andes to Classical Greek, Roman, and the contemporary world jewelry has played a valuable role in all aspects of life.

From the Crown of Thorns and Britain's Crown Jewels to ultra luxury brands Cartier, Harry Winston, and Graff; from the fingers, necks, and ankles of the rich and famous to hip hop bling, fantastical wizard wear adorn at thematic Harry Potter parties, and the pierced nipples, spiked choke collars, and nose rings cladding motorcycle gangs, punk rock and death metal musicians and fans; from the kaleidoscopic colors of costume jewelry worn at Mardi Gras in New Orleans and the Venice and Brazil Carnival to delectable ring pops from the candy store; from Paris Fashion Week, Las Vegas' COUTURE Show, and Hollywood red carpet events; from bartering street vendor markets and cheap shopping mall vendors selling charms to high-end retailer Tiffany & Co.; from the wedding finger of Taylor Swift to yours, the wearing of jewelry is a characteristic of all cultures — a common element bonding us all together.

This deep connection to the human spirit is likely to make ""Constellations: Contemporary Jewelry from the Dallas Museum of Art" at the Chrysler Museum of Art a popular, must-see exhibition.

Mark Castro, Director of Curatorial Affairs at the Chrysler Museum of Art, recently gave me a sneak tour as the exhibition items were being placed on the walls and glass cases of the special gallery space.

"More than a survey of contemporary jewelry, "Constellations" celebrates artists' ability to expand the boundaries of wearable art through innovation and creativity," said Castro. "The exhibition invites audiences to embrace the full range of the medium's potential—to engage serious issues while also fostering playfulness and delight."

Before he began his position at the Chrysler just over three years ago, Castro came from the Dallas Museum of Art and had firsthand knowledge of its immense collection of jewelry. Castro said it was a no-brainer to showcase this selection of its collection as its first travel destination given the Chrysler had not exhibited jewelry in some time.

"I thought this one was quite unique and would bring something unexpected and different as it pushes you to rethink your ideas about jewelry," Castro said.

Featuring more than 230 artists from 41 countries, the exhibition reveals how jewelry expresses more than the wearer's status and taste: it communicates vital ideas about aesthetics, functionality, the current moment, and our wondrous world.

"Constellations" is presented in four thematic sections: Zones of the Body, Archetypes, Signals and Play.

In the Zones of the Body section, Castro said the exhibition aims to demonstrate how arts push the boundaries when it comes to jewelry worn on the body. One artwork is of four pieces of toast appearing in shades from burnt to lightly "cooked." These are actually broaches that could be worn on a dress or dinner jacket lapel, though each would be a noticeable statement piece at five-inches square.

Works such as Gerd Rothmann's Spitznase (Pointed Nose) headpiece is bold as it clamps around the cranium and fits over the wearer's face giving her/him a apparent golden, pointed snout.
As visitors walk into the main gallery entrance they immediately come face to face with one of the most spellbinding jewelry pieces of the show. Positioned on a black mannequin, the Aeriform collar by Dutch fashion designer Iris van Herpen is a phantasmagoric necklace of some 60 zinc-coated steel orbs that appear to hover around the torso, shoulders, and head. Another highlight of the exhibition is Robert Baines'"Red Car" bracelet (pictured above). The wrist piece hails from Baines' The Intervention of Red series and incorporates electroplated sterling silver, paint, and the collected object (miniature toy car).

Numerous works in "Constellations" make use of simple materials but showcase the complex artistic capabilities of the craftsmanship in design. Many of the pieces are meant to be thought provoking as well.

"Wearing something kind of small that could make you change the way you see the world," as Castro shared, "is a really great message to carry throughout the show."

As part of the creative programming designed to enhance the exhibition, "Ignite: Bling" is scheduled Friday, July 31 (7-10 PM) in Huber Court as an eccentric party featuring DJs, a men's fashion show, open runway and paparazzi experience, and a jewelry market.

"Constellations: Contemporary Jewelry from the Dallas Museum of Art," which is presented by This exhibition is presented by G Marie Luxurie in Virginia Beach, is a wonderful mental accessory to your knowledge and appreciation of everyday wearable art.