



The New Latin American Jewellery©

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Valeria Vallarta Siemelink

To attempt to define Latin American jewellery would be as difficult as to attempt to elaborate a clean-cut definition of Latin America as a whole entity. The notion of *Latin America* is already a challenge to comprehension: an extensive territory that covers over 20 million square kilometres. With a variety of ecosystems that range from deserts to rain forests; a population over 500 thousand million people, composite of ancestries, ethnic groups and races; hundreds of indigenous languages and dialects spoken from the Río Bravo to the Patagonia; great variations in political and economic systems and an overwhelmingly diverse cultural production make Latin America one of the most diverse regions in the world.

However, there are some elements in common that, despite the deep impact of recent globalization, still bind us and help defining a Latin American identity. Defining identity is never a one-way street, but there is a common ethos between Latin American nations that can be understood as a hybrid and heterogeneous cultural construction, characterized by problems specific to postcolonial societies. The Latin-American identity is a plural and dynamic one, opened to progress, to modernity, and to the contribution of the universal culture.

Latin America by Simone Rothier



In the words of the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz:

“Identity is multi-faceted: both things as small as a grain of sugar or as large as a hurricane have equal influence in the formation of an identity.”

An exuberant, varied and colourful natural environment; a rich and advanced pre-Columbian civilization; similar historical processes of colonization, resistance and independence movements; the European immigration of the 19th and 20th centuries are all factors that have marked us and that unite the Latin American experience.

Although the way in which Amerindian, African and European people collided in different forms to produce unique mixtures in each country – a process known as *Mestizaje* –, Latin Americans still have a great sense of joint *continentship*. Tight family structures with the woman as the centre of the home (and the man as the centre of everything else); everlasting conflicts caused by social disparity; the silent infection of corruption and clientelism; a syncretic religiousness that permeates all aspects of life; a humorous society that reflects the abundance and intensity of the surrounding nature and that holds deep values about personal contact and celebration are some components that Latin Americans recognize, cope with, share and appreciate.

The concept of *mestizaje* expresses the tensions, contradictions, and ambiguities of its birth in the New World. More important, it is a concept that continues to have spiritual and aesthetic dimensions. Notions, values, history, memory, traits, and customs have been transmitted to us. From that, an enriched and completely different product has evolved and continues to do so. Latin Americans, always indulging on the senses, have forged a common language that conveys its contemporary identity through language, food, art, and jewellery.

Latin America has a millenary metallurgic and goldsmith tradition. When the Spaniards arrived in the New World in the 16th century, they found a variety of developed technical skills in fine metalwork that included the use of metals like gold, silver, copper, tin and lead. The pre-Columbian civilizations mastered techniques as early as 1000 BC, when lost-wax casting originated in northern Peru and then spread northwards. Miniature, hollow lost-wax castings of the Mixteca



Nose ornament in gold
Tayrona culture, Colombia, Ca. 600 DC
Photographer: Lina Hernández



Double crocodile pendant in gold and amethyst
Panama, Ca. 800 DC
Photographer: Joseph W. Wright

goldsmiths in Mexico have never been surpassed in delicacy, realism, and precision; and some solid-cast frogs from Panama are so tiny and fine that they must be viewed through a magnifying glass to be appreciated. A technological and artistic triumph of the pre-Hispanic goldsmiths in Ecuador was the making of complex beads of microscopic fineness by sintering dust and small grains of alluvial platinum. Peruvian smiths had taken the first step toward cloisonné, the *cloisons* being filled with cinnabar instead of enamel.

The process of *transculturation* influenced all aspects of life in Latin America. And jewellery was no exception. Some of the ancient techniques were lost. Some were modified by the incorporation of the new European tools and materials. Hispanic-Arab techniques, like the filigree, soon became so enrooted that they were developed into unique and distinctive styles, like the intricate filigree earrings and necklaces from Oaxaca, México and Mompo in Colombia. The African slaves that arrived to America through Cartagena de Indias brought along their cast, smiting and beading techniques, a rich design aesthetic and their own perspective about the symbolic and ritualistic function of jewellery. A particular style flourished in the coastal region of Colombia and then extended to other areas in the Caribbean: Panama, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Venezuela and also Brazil quickly incorporated the African legacy into their own jewellery production. Jewellery in Latin America started to develop a new and distinctive language.

Objects of adornment have been a significant part of Latin American history. From the strong ritual, mystic and symbolic function of jewellery in the pre-Columbian era to the shiny opulence that distinguishes the members of the Mexican drug cartels nowadays, Latin Americans have always had a profound and intricate relation to jewellery. A new generation of jewellery makers from Latin America is interested in exploring that relationship and, at the same time, in observing jewellery outside its conventional frame.





Although the path that this generation of jewellery makers has taken to question the traditional values of jewellery and to challenge its orthodox forms has not been so different than the one followed by their mainstream western colleagues, the movement that started in the US and Europe in the 1940s did not have a direct influence in Latin America. Even despite the fact that one of the first promoters of the American movement was the Cuban-Jamaican jewellery Art Smith. But it was around that time that the North American architect Guillermo Spratling revived an ancient craft in the Mexican mining town of Taxco and trained a whole new generation of talented silversmiths. His work prompted Mexican artisans to resuscitate some of the pre-Columbian techniques and to create jewellery in non-European forms but with a well defined national identity. The resulting pieces were proudly displayed and promoted by artists like Frida Kahlo, Remedios Varo and Lupe Marín and Spratling's influence soon reached other Latin American countries. A few years later visual artists like Rogelio Polesello in Argentina, Antonio Roda in Colombia, Wilfredo Lam in Cuba or Juan Soriano in México, started to experiment with jewellery as a meaningful and rewarding media. Collaboration between artists and jewellery makers and convergence between disciplines that included jewellery making became common. Brazil produced a group of daring jewellery makers between 1960s and 1970s. The sculptural designs of Caio Mourao, Reny Golcman and Clementina Duarte expanded the boundaries of traditional jewellery. Even when these almost isolated events did not constitute a connected movement, they shaped a different approach to jewellery that the new makers in Latin America are now pushing further.

In more recent times and, thanks to the trend towards globalisation, a growing connectedness has developed between jewellery makers within Latin America and with fellow jewellery makers



from other regions. They have now access to more information: to exchange ideas, to learn, understand and appreciate each other's work and to explore international markets. This has given them a clear insight of the way art jewellery is perceived nowadays around the world and the possibilities for their work reach a broader audience.

Latin American jewellery nowadays is able to generate both national and transnational communication and it is tremendously varied in its scope: figurative or abstract, conceptual or symbolic, traditional or experimental but it all has been made by committed jewellery-makers, heirs to a millenary tradition and part of a culture in which jewellery is a common language. To present what can be only considered a brief sketch of the wide panorama that composes the new jewellery of Latin America, this essay aims to identify a few of the elements that are often present in the work of some of our makers.

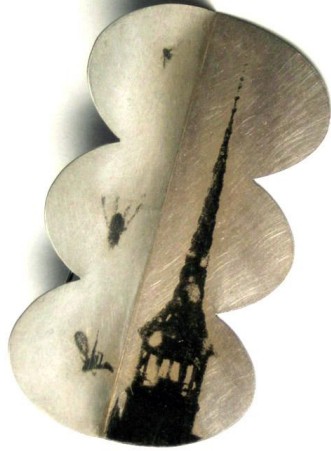
Tradition and modernity. The tension between tradition and modernity occupies a central position in the history of the modern Latin America. Artists and designers often strive to find ways to reach a balance between what they are and where they come from; between the richness of the past and the abundance of the contemporary world. In recent years, Latin America has seen a tendency to revive craft traditions which the arena of contemporary jewellery has not escaped. The use of noble metals and traditional jewellery-making techniques, for a while rejected by jewellery makers, and the common misconception that jewellery in Latin America is only about chunky, crafty silver, has made some of our jewellers approach this matter with a cautious, critical and creative eye. Some jewellery makers focus on the study and the revival of pre-Columbian and colonial jewellery techniques, the exploration of traditional craft techniques or the use of the iconic Latin American silver to create body ornaments that inventively play off conventional expectations. As expressed by the Argentinean writer José Luis Borges "*...That between the traditional and the new, or between order and adventure, there is no real opposition, and that what we call tradition today is a knitwork of centuries of adventure in Latin America.*"



Brooch from series Nubes / Nuria Carulla
Reticulated silver

Like the work of Nuria Carulla, whose uninhibited body ornaments have been the cornerstone of contemporary jewellery in Colombia. 30 years ago, Carulla bravely challenged the conservative Colombian taste that favoured the traditional European style jewellery, unearthing the techniques and symbolism of the pre-Columbian ornaments and reinterpreting them in her own way.

She has turned her childhood memories into cryptic twists of metal that are meant to call attention of a specific part of the body and to invite wearers and viewers to question the traditional aesthetics and function of jewellery. Her inexhaustible body of work has inspired a whole generation of Colombian jewellery makers.



Brooch / Alejandra Solar
Silver, photo transfer

Although Alejandra Solar is fond of experimenting with all kind of materials that fall into her hands, she often resorts to silver as a canvas that illustrates stories inspired in the syncretic Mexican culture. Solar marks, bends and folds thin silver sheets to recreate small *retablos*, or altarpieces, which evoke images of life, death and religion in a rather fantastic and ludic way. Solar fragments her photo-etched images and plays with them until she finds a visual connexion. Her pieces are the result of careful consideration and executed with extreme precision, artistry and a caustic sense of humour.

Venezuelan Samantha Fung is a storyteller who uses jewellery as a media to recount the tales and anecdotes that she finds in everyday life. Silver is always her primary substrate, which she can playfully combine with other materials, like origamied paper, or magnifying glasses or simply display her indisputable skill to manipulate the metal. Casted, laminated, knitted, weaved, folded; Fung's prolific work is delicate, daring and festive.



Bracelet / Samantha Fung
Knitted silver



Brooches / Andrés Fonseca
Casted silver

Andrés Fonseca has documented, with ornaments, the long journey between his natal Colombia and his country of residence, Mexico. Fonseca's work – ancient, earthy, weighty – challenges conventional aesthetics to create a language of its own. Resorting to the

essential shapes found in the natural world, Fonseca draws inspiration from his personal history, the family left behind, the chaotic city that has adopted him and the indigenous past that links his two countries. His pieces could be the product of an archaeological expedition: the lovingly preserved castings of footprints left by generations of pre-Hispanic goldsmiths.



Two bracelets / Cecilia Richard
Silver

The work of Argentinean Cecilia Richard inquires into the relationships that can be established between subject and object: their limits, interests, and implications. Her work doesn't always need to be attached to a body, but it can be separated from it and seek a connection where subject and object create situations of evident autonomy or marked interaction. Touching, manipulating, rolling, taking, sharing, playing, abandoning, resuming; masterfully constructed pieces always sustained by an action. A hand-object

that spreads out into two bracelets; a cube that retracts and unfolds in fragments, becoming dynamic and unstable; arms that extend and retract by the action of gravity. In state of rest, the pieces are autonomous and provocative. In active state, they become dynamic and unstable. Static, they are. Active, they happen.

Colombian Alina López' work derives from an exhaustive observation of nature. Her sculptural pieces are highly tactile and silver, her media of choice, is often textured, coloured, drilled or enamelled. López' vocabulary of shapes is straight, simple and barely reminiscent of natural structures. Her series *Fluyendo* –Flowing– is composed by rings and bracelets made in enameled silver that remind the fluid movements of the human body.



Flowing Bracelet / Alina López
Silver, enamel, rubber bands



Love Bird II/ Isel Mendoza
Silver

The work of Isel Mendoza doesn't need to be worn to validate its existence. Her pieces are massive, exaggerated and often painful to wear; but they are also greatly mastered and very symbolic. Mendoza draws inspiration from the history, rituals and customs of the pre-Columbian Mexico to propose a body of work that can be displayed like a small sculpture which recalls our origins or worn as aching reminders of the harshness of modern life in Mexican cities. *Hummingbirds* is a series of rings conceived as spells to cure love sickness, attract and retain love or fulfil an impossible one.

Mendoza enjoys playing with the possibilities of the silver, generating unexpected patterns, deceiving with weight and dimensions and varying its tones and luster.

The jewellery of Colombian Andrea Muñoz evokes an element of ambiguity. The ancient and the contemporary, the fragile and the resilient, her pieces seem to sit on a precipice between senses, in a kind of visual, tactile and almost musical synesthesia. Immersed in a deeply personal process, Muñoz manipulates and ages the silver through ancient techniques and uses delicate, almost ethereal stones to find a balance between opposite forces. The inspiration drawn from her fascination with nature, evolution and cycles gives birth to pieces with subtle movement and rich contrast.



Ring Andrea Muñoz
Aged silver, ojo de agua

A search for identity. Jewellery makers in Latin America strive to develop an individual language that allows them to express who they are and the culture they come from. Identities cannot be defined once and for all in fixed or essentialist terms, as if frozen in time and space. Identities are fluid because they are constantly enacted and re-enacted, performed and performed anew, within individual situations, and within changing socioeconomic and political contexts. Gender, family, art, religion, economy, celebrations, violence, traditions, and all the little details that make every day life, unite our collective and individual identity. For its makers, jewellery becomes a tool to reflect upon themselves and the elements that configure the world they live in.

History, memory and migration are themes that always interest jewellery makers in Latin America. Cita Dominguez was born in Asunción, Paraguay. Her family migrated from Spain to Portugal to the Cape Verde Islands and finally, arrived in Paraguay in the

1800's. The work of Dominguez is a map that shows the history of the family and their long journey. Over the years, she has collected mementos that all branches of the family have accumulated through centuries. Interested in the most intimate objects – letters, handkerchiefs, underwear, photographs, baby clothes, hair – Dominguez transforms them into fragile and ethereal ornaments that show the passage of time: stains, rust, dust, tears, blood. Using old local textile techniques, like the fine Aho Poi embroidery of the Guaraníes or the intricate and fragile Nanduti lace, Dominguez pieces weave the past and present history of a large Panamanian family.



Brooches from the series *So Well Hidden* / Cita Dominguez
Blood stained silk handkerchief, cochineal, cotton, human hair, silver



Blosson Ring / Chequita Nahar
Silver

Chequita Nahar's work revolves around interculturalism and the preservation of identity in a highly globalised world. She was born in Surinam – one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the Americas – and grew up in the Netherlands. This provides her with a unique view of how people migrate and how their traditions and customs are mixed, perpetuated, recovered, diluted or lost in the process. Although the theme is constant, the formal treatment of her work varies greatly. She creates complex but pure forms by either computed aided technologies like rapid prototyping and stereolithography or by skilfully mastering a variety of craft and smiting techniques. Her pieces are always meticulously detailed and highly tactile;

Traditional Aho Poi weaver

Photo: Alex Dominguez

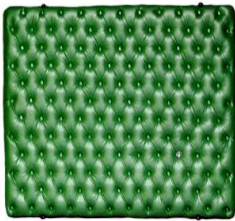


the product of a careful cultural analysis that involves observation, recording, analysing and interpreting. Her work reminds us of a *mamio*, a Surinamese patchwork quilt often used as an unofficial symbol of Suriname's variety of population groups and cultures. It reflects a sense of pride, interest and belief in intercultural cohabitation and a vibrant sense of aesthetics.

Haitian artist Norman Aboudou explores, through his vast production, the impact of colonialism on the present and the way how modern-day poverty is connected with a unshakable historical process. In a five year project that delivered 200 jewellery pieces (brooches, necklaces, rings and hair pieces), Aboudou addressed the tensions created by the illegal immigration of almost one million Haitians to the Dominican Republic and the problems that arise between two countries that share the same island but are culturally different. The artist collected a wide variety of items (textiles, toys, jewellery, cooking utensils, religious paraphernalia, photographs, etc) that have 'migrated' along with their owners from one country to the other and transformed them into ornaments that incorporate some elements of the host culture. Focusing greatly in the religious and ritualistic practised of both countries, Aboudou's pieces often resemble amulets, like the Haitian voodoo dolls or the Dominican scapulars.



Super Silent Podn Hairpiece / Norman Aboudou
Cotton, kitchen glove, cooper



Lost, never found Brooch / R. Paz Mesa
Gold, diamond, vinyl, polyester

Some jewellery makers withdraw inspiration from the popular culture of Latin America which, despite being highly influenced by global mass culture, is also a key producer and exporter of popular culture to the world. Ramiro Paz Mesa is a Mexican artist and jewellery maker examines the development of the Chicano culture in the United States. US-born Americans of Mexican ancestry use the term

Chicano as a positive self-identifying social construction which often implies being '*neither from here, nor from there*'. Paz Mesa's incisive eye recognizes the playful and painful way in which Chicanos oscillate between two cultures and explores the



Toque Chicano / Osaka, Japan
Photo by Ramiro Paz Mesa

broad and complex arena of the Chicano popular culture. His jewellery (always brooches) is a mix of the genuine with the superimposed and the distorted. He takes religious, popular and commercial iconographic imagery both from Mexico and the US and,



Never-ending Crop Brooch / R. Paz Mesa
Gold, jelly beans, ink, polyester resin

using materials associated with the American hyper-consumerism like car seat covers, candy, perfume bottles, transforms them into critical, humorous and highly aesthetical and wearable ornaments that show the indelible mark made by Chicanos on American culture.



Pure Platanium Necklace / Miguel Luciano
Platinum-pleated plantain, platinum chain

Puerto Rican Miguel Luciano examines the effect of American consumerism in the Puerto Rican culture. He transforms common objects traditionally associated with Puerto Rico into fetishized commodity objects in order to evoke the process in which ordinary objects become cultural icons. Often choosing jewellery as a media, in his of his work, Luciano helps us question how we assign value to things – why are yams worth more than freedom and burgers more

than life? *Platanium* is a series of necklaces and pendants where a plantain is equated with precious object: it is covered in platinum. But, at the same time, the fruit is actually rotting under a pristine and seductive shell. The plantain's shape invokes the phallus as well, as Luciano plays on this double entendre to invoke Puerto Rican masculinity. The jewellery was photographed in various contexts: worn by a gang member or displayed in the window of *King of Platinum*, a store in Harlem, where it is presented as an emblematic token of respect. An object imbued with value in the context of today's hyper-materialism.

Other jewellery makers are preoccupied with recording the diverse aspects of daily life. Such as the Argentinean Elida Kremelman who explores, through her work, the territory of female domesticity. Her series *Persianas* – Shutters – alludes to the secrets that woman keep behind closed doors, or shut windows. The study of the facades of the buildings in the city of Buenos Aires leads to the execution of formal pieces where repetition and monochromy are a cover for the

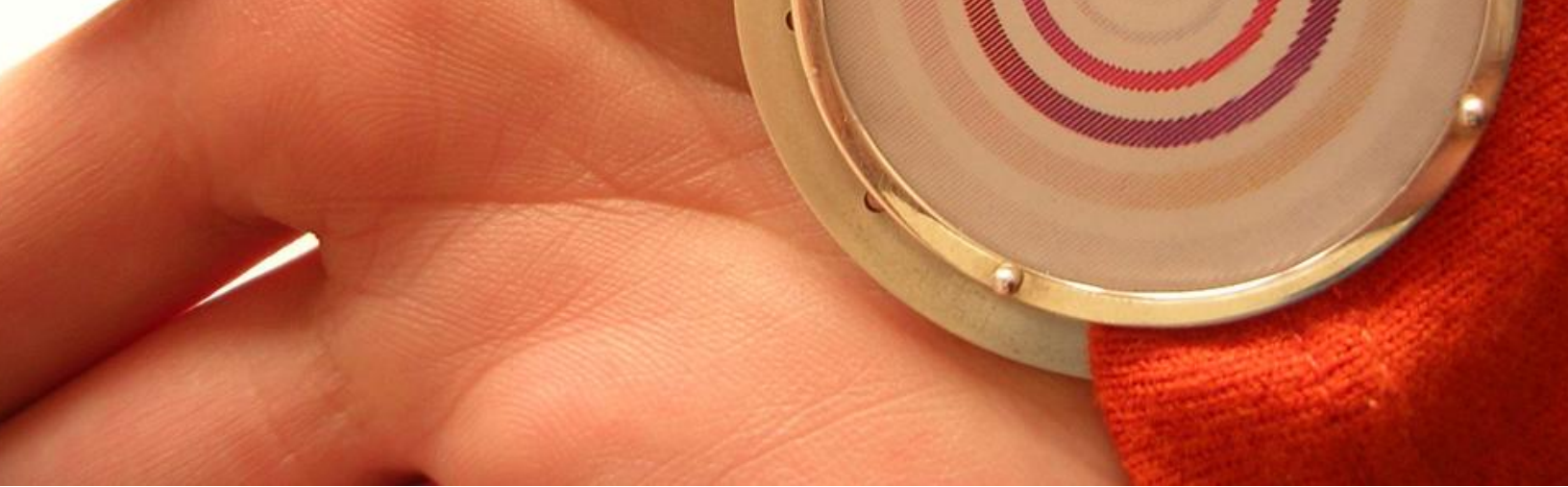


Shutters Brooches / Elida Kremelman
Silver, aged

untold stories of many Argentinean women: violence, 'machismo', the struggle for professional recognition, the little secrets that only woman share, the frustration of the never sending home chores. Zina Rudman whose reflections about time deliver a body of work that dwells on the small and precious details of



Brew from 3 to 5 minutes neckpiece/ Zina Rudman
Silver, recovered fresh water pearls, silk



Optic Clip / Claudia Correa - Silver, acetate, paper, ink



MultiPins / Claudia Correa
Silver, enamel

life. Her series *Reposar 3 a 5 Minutos* - Brew from 3 to 5 Minutes – explores this idea through a series of wearable containers that connote the sense of time: in the use of old fashioned materials, like pearls and in the way how her pieces focus on little rituals like the morning mass, the midday nap or the afternoon tea. On the other hand, the Chilean industrial designer Claudia Correa resorts to jewellery making to interpret the diversity and vitality of modern Chile. Her work, although finely manufactured by hand, makes reference to the industrial production and consumption of goods, the fast pace of life in

major cities and the vibrancy of the cultural diversity that now populate those cities. Her *Multipin* series, is an impressively extensive collection of silver and enamel pins, each so perfectly executed that appear to have been industrially produced. Still, each one of those hundreds of pins is highly individual; different in shape, size and colour and a reference to the uniqueness, effervesce and humour of the people who walk up and down the city of Santiago every day.

Unstable and unfair economic systems in Latin America, have lead to situations of constant poverty and extreme contrast. Some jewellery makers like Argentinean Elisa Gulminelli, with her series *Inflación* – Inflation – humorously uses bills of stratospherically high denomination which lost their value after the massive 2001 Argentinean crisis to question the value of things. The Argentinean crisis resulted in a series of public demonstrations where people went out to the streets banging pots, pans and other utensils in protest for the freezing of all private savings.



Inflación Brooch / Elisa Gulminelli
Bills, coin, silver



Cocoon Necklace/ Gabriela Horvat
Silver, fibre, dye

Gabriela Horvat has taken inspiration on these collective acts to create *Cacerolazos*, a series of brooches, rings and neckpieces that reflect, in their smooth and concave surfaces or their protective cocoons, both the despair and the union of

the Argentineans to face adversity. While María Solorzano plays with the deeply rooted Mexican custom to play the lottery. A series of delicate brooches that use the flimsy paper where lottery bills are printed, show the unshakable faith of Mexicans on the phrase: 'Este es el bueno' – 'This is the good one'.



Este es el Bueno Brooch / María Solorzano
Silver, fishing line, lottery bills, obsidiane

Religion is an essential and antagonizing part of life in Latin America and a common source of interest and inspiration for artists and jewellery makers. Mexican Maria Paula Amezcua, humorously combines popular elements, religious and non-religious images and symbols to recreate the eclectic and



Itinerant Altar Necklace / María Paula Amezcua
Brazz, silver, gold, glass, cotton, found objects

surprising altars that Mexicans devote to all kinds of saints and example of the syncretic way in which Mexican people experience faith. Also Mexican Lorena Lazard, a second generations of Jewish immigrants, combines traditional images and figurative elements





Is Something There? Brooch
Lorena Lazard
Silver, gold

from the Mexican culture in a contemporary form to establish a common ground between the two religions she has grown up with. Her work is an internal search from a religious and a secular sphere. Through her jewellery Lazard questions existence and reflects on the equilibrium of the opposites (life and death, presence and absence, good and evil, faith and disbelief) and on the need that humans have to believe in something.

Jorge Manilla's necklace *Eternas Penitencias* – Eternal Penitence – seems from afar a delicate tapestry of silver encasted lace. Then one realizes that each tiny silver frame contains an equally tiny slice of very porous bone, human bone in fact. It represents the physical devotion of the faithful and refers to the relics and exvotos offered by the Mexicans to their patron saint, the *Virgen de Guadalupe*. The necklace, as the rest of Manilla's vast production, is



Eternas Penitencias Necklace / Jorge Manilla
Silver, human bone

both utterly beautiful and profoundly upsetting. Attraction, repulsion, uneasiness: his work confronts him with his religious upbringing and us with a powerful and intimate perception of the syncretic religion of the modern Mexico. Allusions to religious images and iconography that show the often tortuous and painful relations that Mexicans have with their faith. Wood, bones, textile, branded leather and silver are amalgamated and transformed into almost recognizable shapes: a probable anatomical part, a series of tiny bundles that could be small babies, an unknown religious utensil. Manilla's work is as enigmatic as it is skilful.

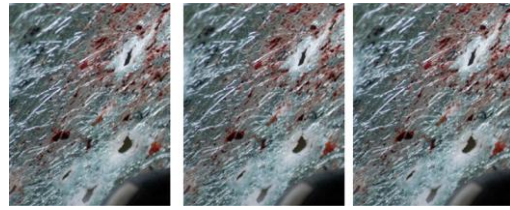


Ring/ Nicolás Estrada
Silver

For other jewellery makers, a troubled history of dictatorships, civil war and political repression as well as the increasing violent actions of the organized crime in countries like Guatemala, Argentina, Mexico or Colombia have become a constant theme. Colombian Nicolás Estrada's challenging line of work revolves around the unlimited capability of our society to excuse its faults. Themes like terrorism, crime religion and violence merge in a horrifying, implausible and at the same time derisory way in Estrada's pieces: an endless chain of

miniature shot-guns, a toy soldier whose neck wraps hilariously around a finger, a suffering Christ bolted in a cross of rifles. His pieces clearly convey the dose of

bravery, callousness and humour that sometimes is necessary to deal with a world in turmoil. The theme of mortality and violence often preoccupies visual artists like Teresa Margolles, who has found in jewellery an additional media to develop her work. Margolles studied art but then became a certified forensic doctor in order to better understand one of her preoccupations: the socio-cultural implications of death and corpses. Themes like violence, death, burial, poverty, exploitation and criminality in the large and crowded metropolis of Mexico are at the heart of her often shocking consideration of the relics of life. Her most recent work, *Ajuste de Cuentas* – Grudge – consists of 21 pieces of jewellery: rings, bracelets, pendants, impeccably executed in 18 karats gold fashioned according to the heavy and ostentatious jewellery of the Mexican drug lords. The pieces are decorated with what seems to be diamonds. Only after a closer look, one realizes that they are shattered pieces of glass; thick, threatening morsels of windshield glass that has been extracted from the body of a person killed in their car during a grudge match. The jewellery pieces were developed in cooperation with a jeweller that actually works for the Mexican *Narcos* (drug traffickers). An other example is the work of Rolando Chacalté, a Guatemalan journalist of Mayan origins who was forced to seek refugee in France during Guatemala's armed conflict. Having studied liberal arts in Grenoble, Chacalté returned to his country, to record part of the civil war that ended in 1996. His plastic production frequently includes ornaments, as he trained as a goldsmith in



Ajuste de Cuentas Necklace/ Teresa Margolles
Gold, glass



the workshop of a renowned jeweller from El Quiché. His politically charged work deals with the complex social and racial problematic from Guatemala's past and present. Inspired in a traditional custom in which woman have their children's milk teeth set in golden pendants or earrings, the maker has used teeth, bone fragments and skin prints of the indigenous man and woman murdered and abused by the earrings using the teeth of Quiche people killed during a raid at the Spanish embassy in 1980 is worn by members of the family of the murdered people as a reminder of the impunity of a crime, which is still being denied by the Guatemalan government. The work of Chalcalté narrates a side of Latin America that is still a reality for many of its inhabitants.

There are also those makers who are interested in exploring, through jewellery, the notion of self, or individual identity. Brazilian maker Claudia Cucchi's produces highly narrative ornaments able to conjure particular moments of her life. A multidisciplinary background that includes liberal arts, graphic design, photography and jewellery, allows her to manipulate a variety of materials and processes to achieve very personal pieces that depict the natural or urban scenery of her country, details of her every day life or intimate thoughts and emotions. Cucchi establishes a rewarding dialogue between images and metals, where photographic details are transferred to the surface of her pieces, to form colourful landscapes that offer the viewer a subtle and interpretative reading of the artist's life.



Brooch / Claudia Cucchi
Silver, photograph



Colar Vermelho / Thelma Aviani
Polymer clay, Urushi

"Sometimes I believe it is about the duality within me", comments Thelma Aviani; "sometimes I think it is about those relationships where it's necessary conciliation. But most of the times, I simply work to feel good". The work of the Brazilian artist is extremely personal, both in content and in form. She long for those materials she hasn't encountered yet, to express the emotions she hasn't recognized yet and to find out is there will be conciliation.

But most of the times, I simply work to feel good". The work of the Brazilian artist is extremely personal, both in content and in form. She long for those materials she hasn't encountered yet, to express the emotions she hasn't recognized yet and to find out is there will be a possible connection between both. Set to explore contradictions and contrasts: happiness



Coracao / Thelma Aviani
Polymer clay

and sadness, hope and despair, hard and soft, colourful and colourless, her work is an association of extremes. Aviani explains the origin of her sculptural ornaments: "Forms appear from the movements of my hands on the materials." Sometimes the material is a ball of soft yarn to be knitted; sometimes is a piece of wood to be polished or a ball of polymer clay to be moulded. "Intervention is optimized by the use of tools and machinery that feels like extensions of my own body," the maker continues; "Although forms and beings come up from somewhere in my head, I am always surprised by their existence. As the pieces take up materiality and sit around me, I start feeling comfortable, as if the world was more recognizable and familiar." The result is a always beautiful, soothing and intriguing piece that invites both the wearer and the viewer to discover its meaning or simply to enjoy the fact that it is there.

Freedom to experiment. As Latin America has such fertile soil, rich with enticing local materials, many jewellery makers have surrendered to experiment with materials foreign to jewellery and a range of processes that, uninhibitedly, helps them to convey their contemporary perspective to jewellery-making



Herranca Necklace / Mirla Fernandes
Latex, porcelain

Mirla Fernandes, a converted visual artist, has chosen jewellery as a media to discuss the value of things. What determines value? What is luxury? How do different cultures understand and interpret value? To answer these questions she engages in a process that allows her to create luxury goods

on her own terms. A background in biochemistry enables her to develop techniques that push the possibilities of the materials to the limits. Fernandes works with a minimum of tools; moulding and painting each piece by hand to get the maximum from the most pure way of production. She produces highly wearable ornaments, but does not pursue the virtuous techniques of traditional jewellery. Instead, she uses a much more gestural approach, allowing a subtly fierce expression to take over each piece. The paint-like qualities of latex, her material of choice, allows her to work

between two disciplines: painting and jewellery. When working with silver, Fernandes doesn't cast, smith or bend; instead she applies direct fire to the silver, as a brush in a melted metal painting. *Herranca* – Inheritance – is a series of latex and silver pieces that take inspiration on the blue and white arabesques of the Brazilian tiles that in the XVII and XVIII centuries covered the facades and interiors of homes and public buildings and that deal with the inheritance of cultural and traditional values. The lace-



Necklace and pendant from *Herranca* series / Mirla Fernandes
Silver, latex, porcelain

like flexible pieces – in shades that go from blue to black and contain surprising little fragments of porcelain – can be worn in a multitude of ways. Fernandes finishes her pieces but that doesn't end their possibilities.

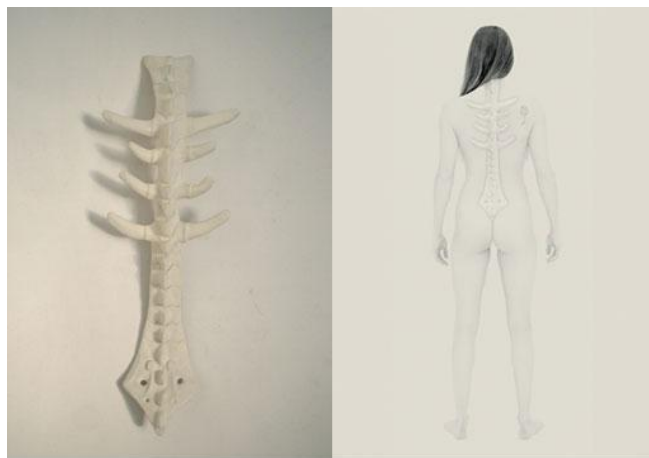


Brooch from *Hybrid Reality* series / Keisha Castel
Crab shells, plastic, coral beads, Silicon, silver

Inspired by nature, Jamaican artist Keisha Castel, often interested in producing ornaments, she creates compelling assemblages of new and beautiful hybrid forms from found objects such as fish bones, crab shells, feathers, insects, leaves. Castel has created *Hybrid Realities*, a series of brooches that, boxed like natural history specimens, give life to dead and decaying organic matter while expressing the impermanence of life and its natural cycle from birth to death. The artist hybrid and very personal realities play with the notions of identity and self definition. The concept of hybridity has particular resonance in the changing and mixed

cultural environment of her country, where it extends to race, geographical origin, language and the ongoing process of cultural convergence and transformation.

Marina Molinelli's background as an industrial designer is reflected by the structural frame that her dramatic pieces exhibit. Her understanding of skin and ornaments as a combined medium of communication between our inner world and our environment has taken her to work on *Osea*, a series of to ornaments developed in partnership with the artist Cecilia Saubidet, also from Argentina.



bones

ósea

photos

Both are daughters of surgeons and have always been fascinated with the aesthetics and the mechanics of the skeletal system. The idea to 'make the invisible visible' drove her to create a collection of wearable bones. The collaboration with Saubidet took them to elaborate artistic studies and reinterpretations of the bones of women



Necklace from the series Osea / Marina Molinelli
Silver, polyester resin

with unusual skeletal features and to experiment with the merging of silver to execute a prolific batch of rings, neckpieces and brooches. The result is a set of anatomically impossible structures that resemble inverted x-rays; the projection of bones on skin. The subjects of their study received the final pieces: woman wearing their own bones.

Valentina Rosenthal is not shy with materials: silver easily cohabitates with wood, resin, porcelain, textiles. She likes to explore the possibilities of the materials that she simply finds attractive and her work develops intuitively around them.

Rosenthal is enchanted with the biodiversity of her native Chile and strives to combine materials that show the geography of her country. Her latest work



Pendants from Algae series / Valentina Rosenthal
Silver, algae, textile, porcelain, gold

investigates the limits of fragile and perishable materials like algae. Diverse processes like pressing, ironing, dehydrating, transform the algae: some lose their vegetable character, some acquire an even more maritime aspect, and all of them offer a rich assortment of green and ethereal elements that are combined with silver, textile, glass and porcelain to generate hybrid creatures: half industrial, half organic and all bearing an impression of the Chilean coast.

Colombian Helena Biermann Angel is a visual artist whose work sometimes ends up being an ornament. Interested in the complex dialogues that often unfold between art and viewer, jewellery offers her a quiet and intimate arena to explore the matter. A set of two bold necklaces titled *Leben/Tod* – Life/Death – shows the artist's preoccupation with natural cycles like birth, death and the changing seasons. Each necklace is made of strings of transparent gelatine capsules. The capsules of the *Tod* necklace contain 1500



Tod neckpiece / Helena Biermann Angel
Gelatine capsules, insects, cotton

dead insects, while the capsules in *Leben* contain 500 different types of seeds. Biermann choice of unorthodox materials often delivers a body of work that is clean and subtle in form, but rich and antagonistic in meaning.



Holly Desert! Ring / Fiorenza Cordero
Silk, cotton, metallic thread, silver

Mexican Fiorenza Cordero likes to have fun with her work. Her training as a goldsmith was harsh and severe and the metal skeletons that often sustain her work are impeccably executed. Then she buries those skeletons with layers of stitched, crocheted, knotted and weaved fibers that draw her attention and that become an excuse to fabricate fantastic interpretations of the Mexico's natural and man-made landscapes. An array of

satellite dishes crowding the roofs on Mexican homes; a cactus that flourishes only once in its lifetime; a flowery sugar skull that decorates the windows of Mexican bakeries for the festivities of the Day of the Dead; all are transformed into festive wearable objects under Cordero's skillful hands.

Francisca Kwetiel's work is an unusual mixture of fatalism and hope. Her often politically charged work communicates the despair she shares with her fellow Argentineans about the convulsed cycles that often shake their country, and becomes a portable statement against oblivion. Wearable or not, permanent or ephemeral her free choice of materials always communicates the contradictions of her own frame of mind. Sometimes she reacts against her own work and scatters it



Deseos Neckpiece / Francisca Kwetiel
Silver, tin, waxed cotton

with hints of the hope and fantasy that she stubbornly retains. Her neckpiece *Deseos* – Wishes – is a large chain of candle wick clips that was worn over and over, each time by a different person. Every wearer could make a wish and then a wick was added to a clip. The necklace soon filled with wishes and wicks, transforming itself during the process. When the necklace was completed, the wicks were lit and left to burn so, like a with birthday cake, all the wishes would come true.



Ornament / Silvina Romero
Cotton, silk

The work of Argentinean Silvina Romero is entirely made of textile waist and floats ambiguously between ornament and apparel. Discarded clothes are manipulated and reformed until the original materials and functions are reversed, exchanged and turned into something completely new: an entity that seems to inhabit the body, instead of dressing or adorning it. The supple and organic shapes have an almost aquatic character and reflect the maker's deep interest in the natural diversity and the coexistence of species. Through her work, Romero delves into the way how clothes, ornaments and the body converge and relate to each other. The wearer must decide how to wear the piece and is always reminded of its presence: it must be held, carried, fastened, rearranged. And he can

also choose to simply let the piece rest aside, to become part of the landscape.

Colombian Maria Constanza Ochoa is moved by the power of ornaments to communicate thoughts, feelings and ideas in a sensuous and pleasant way. With great care, she chooses the materials that convey her serene notion of aesthetics and that stimulate the senses, be it physical or metaphorical. The themes, materials and constructive arrangements in Ochoa's pieces vary greatly and depend on the momentums in her life.

Formally, her work tends to the abstraction, a scarce use of resources, and a quiet color palette. A neckpiece made of finely sliced sticks of cinnamon embodies a rhythmic



Faith Necklace / María Constanza Ochoa
Cinnamon, latex, gold

interpretation of the act of spiritual meditation – the repetition of a mantra, passing beads on a praying string – and its effects on the body. A pendant made of white and black latex balloons filled with flour is a subtly humorous and tactile allegory of a grazing cow. A fragile and delicate cluster of silver and iron sticks make a necklace that translates the stillness of the winter and quiet await for the spring. What Ochoa sees, feels and thinks is narrated through beautiful and clean pieces that seem to invite the wearer to engage in a quiet and intimate dialogue.



Brooch from *What is Not* series / Carolina Hornauer
Silver, resin, cashew lacquer, egg shell, quartz

Carolina Hornauer is a Chilean architect interested in telling stories. Her invented stories emerge from the encounter of an idea, a memory or an anecdote with an ideal material, whatever it might be. She grabs the materials that catch her interest in her habitual roaming

of flea markets, strolls on the beach or at the homes of family and friends. Then she engages in a process that involves the skills of an architect to visualize, plan and sketch and the skills of a seasoned jeweler to transform the media into an ornament. Formally, Hornauer jewellery contains the sense of movement, energy, and tension characteristic in the baroque which show in her series of brooches titled *Ilusión* – Illusion. The clever use of materials, the strong contrasts of light and shadow, the detailed patterns and the delicate finishing touches, all aim to trick the viewer; to make him believe in something that is not there. There is no gold, porcelain, precious stones or careful enamels in those brooches; just wood, paint, crushed eggshells, glass and resins gathered to tell stories about past times, long trips and forgotten treasures.



Brooch from *What is Not* series / Carolina Hornauer
Silver, wood, cashew lacquer, jade

A great sense of inventiveness. Artists, designers and jewellery makers in Latin America often find limitations in many areas: lack of government or academic programs that support research, experimentation and exchange in the field of contemporary jewellery, prohibitive prices of materials and access to technology, lack of spaces to show, promote and

commercialize their work. As often done in Latin America, jewellery makers have to be extremely ingenious and creative in order to optimize resources and to keep a constant production. There are also every time more jewellery makers in Latin-America that show a concern for environmental and social issues. Their work incorporates local and renewable materials, the rescue of lost and indigenous techniques and the participation of small craft communities. Thus, the work of Latin-American jewellery makers often shows that integrating ecology, recycling principles and local manufacturing techniques into their jewellery serves as a source of reflection, expression, innovation and differentiation.



Homemade razor / Cuban popular creation

Photograph by Ernesto Oroza



Chocker from *End of the Day* series / Jaime Alonso
Discarded tires, silver, lacquer, glass

Jaime Alonso grew up in Santiago de Cuba. A medical doctor who later studied liberal arts in Mexico City, his country of residency, he found in jewellery the perfect media to record the privations that the Cuban people live with and the way, despite this, they still enjoy every moment. In Cuba, objects are reinvented every day in ways that transcend basic recycling. Alonso creates exquisitely simple, yet powerful, ornamental and functional objects, giving a new esthetical sense to discarded and mundane objects. *End of the Day* is a series of bold and festive necklaces made of copper and

cotton nets that seems to have caught hundreds of tiny erasers, suspiciously chewed pencils or a bunch of those delicately folded papers used to cheat during exams. Alonso's metal work is executed with the precision of a surgeon but they contain a fairly adequate dose of the humour and hope that characterizes the Cuban people.



Brooch / Valeria Hasse
Discarded objects, cooper

Valeria Hasse and Marcela Muñiz decided to produce meaningful ornaments as a reaction against the despair brought by the Argentinean economic crisis. When the economy collapsed many people lost their jobs. In the following months many of them sorted through the day's trash in search of recyclable material that could be reused or exchanged for money. In the meanwhile, artists and designers had difficult access to tools and materials. Working only with material available in the

surroundings became the starting point of the makers' creative process, using discarded things to comment on the culture they come from. They begin with a reflection on the life of objects, focusing on objects dumped and abandoned in an urban context and also on garments and ornaments inherited from the family. The objects are the bisected, dismembered, cleaned, restored, combined and transformed into unbelievably crafted pieces which value and meaning has shifted. For Hasse and Muñiz Recycling evokes the triumph of creativity over circumstance.

Mexican Laura de Alba has a purely visual and aesthetical relation with her work. Her pieces seek to cause surprise and pleasure. Repetition, proportion, symmetry are often in contrast with the imperfections of the old and discarded materials that claim her attention. A variety of smiting and textile techniques, show her background as a professional weaver and her skills in fine metal work. De Alba recovers all those materials that inspire her: leftovers of furniture, buttons, toys, medals are carefully organized on substrates of weaved, knitted or knotted textile and become bold, vivid ornaments that re-examine notions of value and shift our perception of the worthless.



Necklace / Laura de Alba
Metal pulls, silver, cotton



Latin America as a source of inspiration. Finally, there are also those jewellery makers that are not native to Latin America, but that they have lived or currently live there and their work has been inexorably influenced by the experience. Coming from countries like Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark or South Africa, these artists have been interested to understand the past and present of Latin America, to nurture relations with its people and to learn about its craft and jewellery tradition. Always retaining their own history and identity, the encounter has provided new elements to incorporate to their own visual language and resulted in fresh, emotional and evocative pieces that communicate, among many other things, the value of cultural exchange.

Beate Eismann has been seduced by Mexico's abundance and by the strength and flexibility of the Spanish language. One of the most powerful functions of a language is that of repository for the culture and worldview of its speakers. Inspired by the Mexican literature and popular songs, Eismann has, contradictorily, created *silent* interpretations of the



Brooches / Beate Eismann
Silver, enamelled cooper, felt, gold leaf

rich and colourful language of contemporary Mexico. Combining the skills acquired during her training as a CNC technician and her deep knowledge of the jewellery making art, the maker has developed a hybrid approach to jewellery making that shows the successful merge of industrial production and crafting techniques. Through an extensive series of brooches, rings and neckpieces made in an array of materials like felt, cooper, silver, enamel, handmade paper and wood, Eismann displays a clear understanding of the Spanish language and a skilful manipulation of the imagery and symbolism often found in the Mexican literature.



Neckpiece / Alexander Bourtteia
Aged silver, Madnhao seed

Alexander Bourtteia had been working for 20 years as a watchmaker in France when he decided to immigrate to Belize and trade his art for jewellery making. Interested in the role of the African diaspora in the contouring of Belize's biological and cultural landscapes, Bourtteia has applied his precision skills and artistic sensibility to create minimal but meticulously constructed pieces

that narrate the various episodes of the African history in the country. His series always have a beginning and an end, where each piece is part of a single story that involves either the colonial landscapes of Bahia, populated with beautiful Garifuna wet nurses, hideous masters, virtuous heroines, men of honour, and rebellious slaves, or the urban tragedies of the harsh habitat of Port Loyola, the poorest and most dangerous neighbourhood in Belize City. The austere but meticulously constructed gold and silver pieces are purposely tainted with a deliberate attempt at expressing contrasting surface textures of ordinary materials, such as old wood, seeds and stones or the leftovers of a soccer ball, a flattened soda can scraped off the street or the heel of an old shoe. Bourtteia's highly conceptual work is equally elegant and provocative.



Necklace / Alcides Fortes
Silver, cooper, recovered enameled photographs

Alcides Fortes is a Dutch jewellery maker of Cape Verdian origin who lives and works in Mexico and was formally trained as a gold and silversmith. His work stresses the importance of an impeccable makeshift and the ability to communicate powerfully on an aesthetic level. Skilfully engineered micro connections, masterfully hidden locks and delicate settings often frame disturbing topics: racial intolerance, environmental pollution, violence, poverty, social inequity; all matters that Fortes finds compelling to explore. His intense and ambiguous

relation to Mexico is translated to a body of work that displays his admiration for a rich, vibrant and welcoming culture as well as his rejection to the corruption, social disparity, veiled racism and increasing violence that suffuse all aspects of life in this country. Fortes has a prolific production of ornaments that are both beautiful and arresting.



Two Sides of the Same Coin Brooch / Alcides Fortes
Coal, silver, diamond, white gold



Virtues Brooch / Carolina Vallejo
Pleated gold

Carolina Vallejo has experienced multiculturalism in several ways. The daughter of German and Danish parents, she was born and raised in Greece and has lived in Mexico, Spain and Denmark. Married for several years to a Mexican goldsmith, her relation to Mexico has been intense in many levels. Regarding jewellery as a tool to



restructure identity, Vallejo explores the mythology and philosophy of the ancient and relates them to her own personal experiences and enthrallment with existential questions. The pre-Hispanic legacy of Mexico, the exuberant nature and the work of artists like Remedios Varo, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera are elements that continue to inspire Vallejo's highly symbolic work. Her pieces have been quietly imbued with the intensity and the buoyancy of the country she is enchanted with.

Jewellery has adorned the body since the dawn of man. The ornaments recovered and preserved through the centuries have helped us to learn about the development of the rich and diverse cultures that created and bore them. And nowadays, jewellery has indisputably become a mean of artistic expression able to transmit the ideas, sentiments and perspectives of its makers and their own contemporary culture and to reach all the places where people ramble.

In an era of globalization, cultural reciprocity is fundamental. Learning about others does not only help us to understand, appreciate and enrich from what we considered as foreign, but also to learn about ourselves. Jewellery is a universal language where cultures can meet, communicate and create associations directly connected to specific cultural and personal settings and backgrounds.

Very few contemporary jewellery makers have had significant exposure beyond their own countries. And in an eminently westernized arena of contemporary jewellery their work tends to be poorly comprehended. But as art historian and curator Tumelo Mosaka explain in his essay *Infinite Island*:

"The artwork is a mobile entity; it moves physically between places, and temporarily through history. Its meanings change depending on its social context, location and audience. There is always room for comprehension, even in the most foreign environment."

The new Latin American jewellery must be understood for what it is, instead for what it isn't. Far from being an imported

concept from western countries, jewellery as art in Latin America develops at its own pace and it's slowly been moulded according to the individual and cultural identity of its makers. It is the sensible and varied product of a unique historical process and of an incredibly diverse and modern society that must be seen free of prejudice and of the stereotypes that typify the Latin American culture.



Ya Déjenme en Paz Graphic for T-Shirt
Juan Jolowsky, Argentina

The new Latin American jewellery intersects between the conventionally distinct categories of craft, visual art, and design. It fuses seemingly diverse references, concepts and materials, resulting in an impressive array of ornaments full of



Between Us Brooch / Carolina Hornauer
Piece selected at the Dutch contest NTJ 2008

meaning and vitality. The new Latin American jewellery is original, both individually and culturally. It is generous, as it's always eager to share the view of its makers and to portrait the world that surrounds them. It is, above all, courageous, as it is not afraid to be experimental, to bravely defy all conventional expectations and to proliferate in an extremely challenging environment.

Latin Americas is simultaneously constructing its cultural identity and modernizing, while hands and eyes, hearts and minds of the Latin American jewellery makers, continue to create small marvels, witnesses of their times and bearers of the spirit of the ancient.

Youth demonstration at Cabuya, Costa Rica

Photographer: Alcides Fortes



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