

Kiko Gianocca: Pareidolia

Kiko Gianocca's fourth solo exhibition at Gallery Funaki is titled *Pareidolia*, which refers to the human trait of perceiving in an object or sound a pattern or meaning that doesn't actually exist. This is most frequently encountered in our tendency to detect faces in things such as natural rock or vegetation formations, and marks and stains on various surfaces. The relevance of pareidolia to Gianocca's jewellery is in the various ways that human perception and intervention are able to transform things into something familiar and personal to us.

Gianocca has played with this human predisposition previously, in his *who am I* series of rings, where he drills two holes in the flat front of a ring, which then immediately suggest eyes and a face, notwithstanding the variety of shapes the rings come in. This exhibition includes a new series of rings called *the elephant on Mars*, making direct reference to a famous pareidolia effect. One of the characteristics of pareidolia is that it is almost impossible to unsee the face that one has imagined. Gianocca's strategy has us imprint these rings as familiar faces and, in doing so, cement their belonging to us.

A look at Gianocca's career shows few superficial similarities between each of his bodies of work. He has used materials as diverse as silver, porcelain, resin, polyurethane, felt and wood veneer. The common factor is not the material or the form, but his interest in discovering transformable characteristics inherent in materials or objects, and in creating jewellery that involves the wearer directly in activating this transformation.

For his *Onward Backward* earrings in the exhibition, Gianocca has found an alloy called nitinol that is flexible enough to be easily bent and transformed by its wearer from its basic hairpin shape. The special characteristic of this alloy is that it maintains the memory of its original shape – when immersed in hot water, it instantly snaps back to that original shape. The wearer is also incorporated as a creative participant in the *I tangled up the wool to annoy my mother* necklaces, in which Gianocca's placement of a shorter thin string inside a longer nylon cord wrinkles and bunches the cord/necklace and allows it to be manipulated into different configurations. Both these works demonstrate the particular elegance that is achieved when an apparently simple object carries within it layers of complexity. As Gianocca says: 'A piece of jewellery can be small as a tiny ring but with the right idea can enclose the biggest aura.'

These ideas of transformation and participation call to mind the early work of two brilliant German sculptors, Reiner Ruthenbeck and Franz Erhard Walther, and illustrate the contrast between sculpture and jewellery. Ruthenbeck's sculptures in the 60's and 70's similarly utilised a range of materials, including paper, fabric, felt, metal, ash and slag. To highlight the essential properties of these mundane materials, Ruthenbeck re-ordered or condensed them into new forms, or created works in which the assumed incompatibility of different materials was confounded.

Of course, the difference is that Gianocca, as a jeweller making objects to be worn, is able to utilise the dimension of human involvement intrinsic to jewellery. And while Walther's sculptural works required the involvement of people and relationships to activate and complete them, the wearing of a work of jewellery on the body opens up a deeper personal reservoir of behaviour, emotion and memory for the artist to tap into. That so many of Gianocca's pieces are predicated on human involvement has led Benjamin Lignel to describe them evocatively as 'objects in waiting'.

Also included in the exhibition are new pieces in the *Veneer* series that won Gianocca the inaugural Mari Funaki Award for Contemporary Jewellery in 2014. In these complex neckpieces, Gianocca reworks wooden veneers, guided by the grain of the wood inherent in the material, into shaped plates, twinned like Rorschach ink tests and inviting us in the same way to identify them as something familiar.

Pareidolia again! The carapace-like neckpieces are a veneer over the body beneath them, but also evoke the shadowy shapes of internal organs seen in x-rays. Through a process of transformation, which incorporates an explicit invitation for wearers to invest his pieces with their own meaning, Gianocca continues to produce profound works of jewellery that are able to carry elements of both our external and internal identities within a single piece.

Peter Jones,
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