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07 July 2013

Rebecca Hannon: Jolie

Jewelers'Werk Galerie, Washington, DC, USA

Rebecca Hannon's work, at Jewelers'Werk Galerie in Washington, DC this month, is a fascinating study of the relationship of gender roles to jewelry as well as a study in scale and materiality. Her residency on a French Polynesian island allowed for some really innovative jewelry.

Susan Cummins: Can you tell the story of how you discovered that you wanted to be a jeweler?

Rebecca Hannon: I grew up in Virginia, and my high school art teacher took me to the [Interlochen Center for the Arts](#) in Michigan to be his metalsmithing assistant one summer. He had a few art jewelry catalogues with him, and they were unlike anything I had ever seen. (Imagine, pre-Internet!) I carefully re-drew Hermann Jünger and other jewelers' work in my journal, as I was sure I would never see such amazing things again. I made jewelry for everyone that summer and loved this connection, person to person, through an object. I went on to major in jewelry and metals at [Rhode Island School of Design](#).

Are you teaching now?

Rebecca Hannon: I teach full time at the top Canadian art school [Nova Scotia College of Art & Design](#), nestled in Halifax, Nova Scotia. This working port town is bursting with creative energy. I teach color, design, and 3-D courses and really love working with students who are starting their artistic journey. Their curiosity and openness fuels me. In summers, I teach workshops in New York City and beyond to keep this part of my practice active.

Recently you participated in a residency on a French Polynesian island. Please describe that experience and what influences it has had on your current work.

Rebecca Hannon: I learned about the artist residency on the island of Hiva Oa through my



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mentor Robin Quigley. I spent three months on the remote island where both Paul Gauguin and Jacques Brel died. When residents learned a new artist had arrived, they would approach my outdoor atelier and ask, "Where are the paintings?" This is what someone with the title of "artist" would make. Jewelry and adornment is very present in everyday life there but never given the definition of art or really craft. Just life. Women would get up in the wee hours to collect fresh flowers for a headpiece or neckpiece, and then hand assemble it to wear to work at the post office, for example. I met a woman in her 70s, who like many others, created a small packet daily with flowers, banana, sandalwood dust, all wrapped in a leaf and secured in her bun. The purpose of this lovely packet was to emit a sensual smell. Some of the best tattooing in the world comes from the Marquesas, another very direct form of personal adornment. These bold forms of self-expression really intrigued me.



At this residency you became very interested in gender roles as related to jewelry. How does the jewelry in your show *Jolie* raise questions about these roles?

Rebecca Hannon: In Hiva Oa, I was interested in the traditional roles both women and man had and how this was expressed through ornamentation. These roles are shifting,

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especially with the overlay of European culture present. The Marqueses people are currently involved in an intense re-examination of their history. I did a switch of traditional gendered adornment and made ornaments for men with flowers and pieces for women utilizing the tattoo symbols of the warrior. I worked very big and free using simple materials.

Over the past two years, I have been studying the objects and photos and writing to understand how this investigation might shape understanding of gender expectation in ornamentation. There has been much writing about the loss of distinct style linked to a place, but I am curious about why with all of our global contact, our ideas of what can be considered jewelry haven't changed that much. The work in *Jolie* explores nontraditional adornment. It is big, bold, white, and mostly made for men.



You put a great emphasis on research in your working procedures. Why?

Rebecca Hannon: Funny you should ask this. I remember the days when we “made work,” and I’m sort of skeptical about how we have changed this terminology to “researching.” I am told this shift occurred when artists had to compete with scientists for grants.

I am a sucker for new materials and processes, and this always requires a long research and development phase. I usually have an idea I am exploring through different facets, writing and making, trying to answer my questions.

You were recently at the 2013 SNAG conference in Toronto. Can you describe a memorable moment or two?

Rebecca Hannon: My favorite thing is talking with the young jewelers. At both *Schmuck* and SNAG, I love to see the exhibitions they create. At SNAG, [Opine](#) and [Making it Real](#) (both at OCAD University Student Gallery) stood out, [Heidi](#)

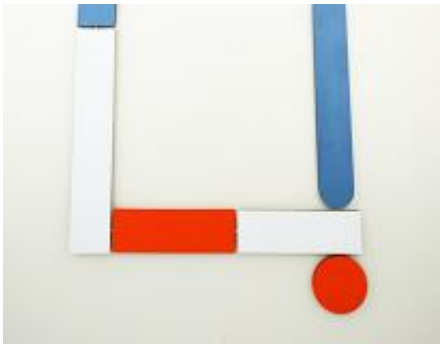
[Lowe's](#) pop-up shop was fabulous, and a collaborative workshop and outreach collective called [Studio Huddle](#) showed a lot of spunk!

Are you reading something that you would like to recommend?

Rebecca Hannon: Living in a working port town, I am obsessed with [dazzle camouflage](#) and plotting my next body of work. I am reading two books, [Shipshape](#) and [False Colors](#) by Roy Behrens, a leading authority with an amazing [blog](#) to boot.

Thank you.





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