



Bittersweet Adornment: Tasting and Memories

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I was raised in a small, mid-western city, in the historical district. Growing up surrounded by Victorian houses filled with antiques, I had a childhood that was submerged in imagery of the past. Oil lamps, old metal toy trucks and airplanes, Victorian sofas, front porch swings, and old porcelain pedestal sinks were second nature to me. I grew up with close family ties to the historical society, so I knew how important these pieces were, but I had yet to fully appreciate my “home” and these objects until I had some distance from it all. With this distance, my yearning started with reminiscing and the want to retrieve the memories that felt so far away. I began to look at photographs, which led to more visits home. Oddly enough, my longing developed into my own personal history with objects, and I became fixated on the antiques that filled my childhood. My desire for memories that are intertwined with these everyday objects is just as strong as my associations with “home” in the same objects. Therefore, my attraction to them is as natural as anyone’s is to their favorite childhood toy. A cathedral radio, a piano, a 1950’s style refrigerator, an antique fan, and an old German cuckoo clock are the things that spark my memory and allow others a glimpse into more than just my past.

Memories are the pieces that make us who we are and the parts that, when shared, bond us together. I like to think that there are two interactions we have with memories: keeping and carrying. The locket I have designed evoke “keeping” through their aesthetics, and when worn the wearer experiences “carrying” the memory or makes associations. Similarly, “keeping” and “carrying” are two purposes of jewelry lockets, and, as a jewelry designer and creator, I find this parallel meaningful. For my senior Integrative Project, I decided to create a line of jewelry lockets related to my memories of home. Some of my strongest memories of

home are set in the kitchen and these memories are often evoked by smells. For example, the smell of mint tea transports me to my childhood kitchen, where a kettle was singing and a roast was just put in the oven. The relationship between food, smell, and memory inspired the design of my jewelry lockets, which assist the wearer in beverage-making and are linked through design, technique, and concept. With the focus on beverages, I am allowing other senses, such as taste and smell, to assist the narrative imagery of the lockets' design in evoking memories in myself and others. The designs are everyday objects of an otherwise overlooked nature but in this context, they inspire other's associations with the objects, and the viewer begins to reminisce. Along with exploring the interaction of wearable pieces, narrative imagery, and one's interaction with beverage-assisting, I investigated in this writing the further purpose, place, and function of these objects.

My work falls under the category of "Art Jewelry," which is defined by Quirk Gallery as: "...a creative philosophy and process which is grounded in the history of adornment and celebration. It culminates in expressive and engaging pieces of wearable art. Each piece is produced to the highest level of artistry and workmanship" (Quirk Gallery). The creation of Art Jewelry pieces, while somewhat rooted in utilitarian design, begins more with an "artist's approach" that allows for other inspirations, such as memory to play a role in the process. There are a couple of Art Jewelry designers and adornment makers that have similar roots to their conceptual approach.

Felieke van der Leest is an Art Jewelry designer and maker. Felieke's portfolio is described with these words: "Jewelry, object or light fixture, the scale or function is not the aspect that inspires Van der Leest: the telling of unusual stories is always her main motivation"

(Felicie van der Leest). I find a parallel in her main objective to evoke a narrative through images, and her incredibly sharp wit with her humor makes Felicie's objects/jewelry (fig. 1) incredibly fun to look at and wear. I also share the approach of creating sculptural objects as well as jewelry, which is a rare quality to find even in the Art Jewelry world. Her work "Camouflaged Deer with Target Trousers," is a perfect example of her use of multiple materials, which is often encouraged in the Art Jewelry movement. Also, she juxtaposes an expected view of the deer hiding in nature, with a mounted head as a necklace: a playful approach of breaking down an object in parts and expectations that often assists me in my own designs.



2003 Camouflage Deer with Target Trousers
Object/necklace 12x12x6cm
Plastic, textile, gold, coral, shellpearls

Fig.1

Berkeley Brown is another jewelry designer and maker who is a participant in contemporary fine metals. While my work is more object based and food/cooking inspired, her work is visually cooking-centered and utensil-driven. She explains her work in this way: "Using the aesthetics of cooking utensils, abstracting their function and form, I explore our relationship to food in daily life. We relate to food through the utensils we use to make and eat it and these objects' beauty of design and function inform my work" (Berkeley Brown). She works in a very clever fashion abstracting form and function to create recognizable, almost iconic kitchen imagery. Some of her work breaks down as sculptural work (non-functional), while others function as tea infusers for actual cooking. I appreciate her clean aesthetics and design. Her

work (fig. 2 and fig. 3) helps bring context to my own work in contemporary fine metals within the Art Jewelry world. Both Berkeley and I are as concerned with the object we are beginning with in terms of design and function, and how we can adjust it to address our own adornment visions. Again, I lead with a narrative aspect in my own work, yet still find Berkeley's love of cooking and utensils inspiring.



Fig. 2

Berkeley Brown Portfolio



Fig. 3

I began designing my integrative jewelry pieces by recognizing my inspiration from memory and my interest in small sculptural objects with a narrative edge. I also knew I wanted to incorporate food, cooking, and eating because most of my sweetest memories are in relation to cooking and eating. After looking at common objects in the kitchen, such as cookie cutters, measuring cups, and utensils, I decided I needed a more defined approach to “eating” or “food.” I decided upon beverages due to the flexibility in design and previous test projects I had done in relation to tea, coffee, and spices. After I noted my attractions to narratives and food, and finally decided on beverages, I realized that these objects were themselves going to be little “makers,” better defined as “beverage-assisting jewelry.” With the function aspect of these lockets decided, I had to jump back to focus on the narrative aspect of these pieces.

I initially wrote down four beverages that could be made “instantly” or somehow enhanced and could be transportable within a container worn on the body. These beverages were: tea, hot chocolate, fruit punch, and cider. I then started sketching out imagery associated with these drinks until I had pages filled with objects. The imagery (fig. 4) I was coming up with, and the associations between function and narrative made it clear that there was an overwhelming sense of “home” from which I was drawing.

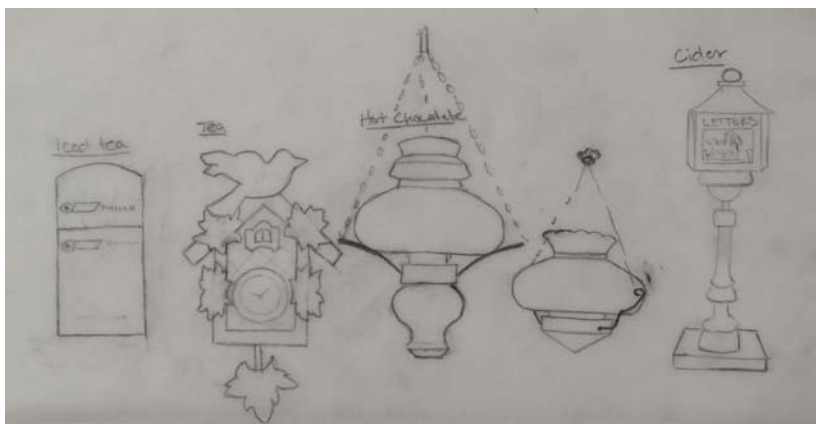


Fig. 4 (Five initial designs)

After having a clear vision of function and narration inspiring my design, I had to direct my attention to the specifics of the design material, and all the technicalities associated with it. I decided I would create the pieces out of sterling silver, because of my experience with silversmithing in sterling, and silver’s aesthetics, functionality, and history. Copper, nickel silver, and brass are not food safe, nor are they appropriate for skin contact over periods of time, so those metals were out. My designs are achieved by hand fabrication methods such as riveting, chasing, repoussé, and box forming.

Additionally to my familiarity with sterling silver, there are several historical implications that are attached to this material. Silver, as a material, has long been associated with status and function. According to Philippa Glanville, a historian and authority on silver collection:

[Silver] was never solely a rich man's pleasure. Silver has a universal appeal and a powerful hold on the imagination...Until recently, it had little competition for the principle social rites of eating and in particular drinking and is still without rival for worship and ceremony. (7)

Silver has not only had a history of being accessible to many classes of people through different forms, but its beauty has us captivated. Silver has even made its way into ceremony, and the practice of eating and drinking. This material is not only used routinely because of beauty or ritual, but also because of its purity, best explained by Glanville: "The purity of silver is both proverbial and actual. It is sterile, or rather anti-bacterial, a property appreciated if not understood scientifically by apothecaries, surgeons and nurses since the Middle Ages..." (8). So, silver is not only aesthetically pleasing and nostalgic in its own "rich" history, but it has anti-bacterial qualities. Both of these attributes supported my decision in using sterling silver for my beverage-assisting jewelry.

Another aspect of my project is sculptural and functional objects, which I've long found interesting, especially in the realm of jewelry-related objects. For example, a signet is a seal or piece that makes an impression that either gives authority or takes the place of a signature. Many of these signet pieces are rings, or, as in the following example (fig. 6) cylinder-seals from Mesopotamia:

...on them incised inscription would give the name, family name and profession of the owner, and by rolling in damp clay, goods could be sealed and identified. These cylinder-seals were hollowed out and worn on a cord or chain around the neck...these cylinder-seals have been found with gold mounts, which... transform

an essentially functional object into a highly decorative and attractive piece of jewelry. (Tait 229)

Thus, functionality, personal history and jewelry are rolled into one. This is but one example of functional historical jewelry from which I derive inspiration, and in which I ground my work.



Fig.5

Cylinder seal and seal stamp, 2800 BC

Spice boxes are another example of functional objects that convey personal sentiment, but with more of a sculptural sense. A “spice box” is explained by Allison Kyle Leopold, the author of *Antique Judaica*, as an object that is, “Traditionally crafted to resemble towers (in deference to the preciousness of their contents), these containers also appear as small boxes, organic forms, and occasionally as figurative sculptures.” Leopold continues to break-down the tradition as, “Sniffing the aromatic contents (cloves, bay leaves, or fragrant flowers) is part of the weekly Havdalah ceremony that marks the end of the Sabbath, at sundown” (Leopold 51). These small, functional, meaningful, and even, at times, narrative sculptural pieces (fig. 6) are another source of motivation in my own work.

“Since antiquity, the ceremony known as Havdalah has marked the conclusion of Jewish Sabbaths and holy days. As early as the first centuries of this era, the smelling of aromatic spices was part of this ritual” (Berger, The Jewish Museum). This tradition is similar, and inspiring to my work. The containers I have created (fig. 7) visually, materialistically, and technically echo the tradition of spice boxes. The ephemeral, intrinsic moment when smelling the contents of the lockets I have created, like that of hot chocolate, mimics that of the Havdalah ceremony.



Fig. 6

Spice Container
Frankfurt am Main (?) (Germany), c. 1550,
repairs and additions 1650/51
Silver: traced, pierced, cast, and parcel-gilt
The Jewish Museum, New York



Fig. 7

Cuckoo Clock Tea Infuser Necklace
Bittersweet Adornment: Tasting & Memory Series
Tea Time: The teapot started singing
Sterling Silver

My jewelry pieces are not only meant to be functional but reminiscent as well. While imagery provokes memory, as do taste and even touch, smell is the strongest sense connected to memory. Like spice boxes, my pieces employ a scent-captivating purpose in order to spark memory. The scents that are experienced through my work are powdered chocolate, sugar, tea, and nutmeg. In time, the housing and containment of spices and powdered drinks within the

pieces, the viewing of the whole piece, the smelling of the beverage aroma while it is being made, and the first sip of each drink will become ritualistic in practice for my own memory, and possibly others

When I was growing up, both of my grandmothers had a clock in their kitchens, and the time kept on those clocks seemed to be the only time that mattered to me. However, one of the clocks had something special about it: it chirped like a bird, as it was a cuckoo clock. I would run to the kitchen (often during Friday night visits), just a few minutes before it would start singing, and watch the pinecones ever so slightly balance themselves as the pendulum would be swinging, all in anticipation for the cuckoo bird to pop out of her little door when the hour would strike. The clocks were not the only similarity that my grandmothers shared, for they were avid tea drinkers: one preferred spearmint, and the other black tea. It is only fitting for my imagination to trick me into smelling the aroma of tea whenever I hear a cuckoo clock hit the hour. So in memory of my late grandma, and in the honor of my other grandma, I created a cuckoo clock tea infuser pendant. This necklace (fig. 7) is displayed with the complete set of lockets (fig. 8) within a dark wooden framed shadow box in a simplified shape of a house. The other lockets are a cathedral radio that holds extra nutmeg for eggnog, a piano container for a packet of hot chocolate, a 1950's style refrigerator sweet tea infuser, and an antique fan sugar container to add an extra splash of sweet to lemonade. There is also a book (fig. 9) modeled in its materials after my favorite childhood storybook that sits on a matching wooden shelf below this display. This book has sketches with directions of how to use the beverage-assisting lockets, along with a poem for each piece linked to a specific memory to the inspired object.



Fig. 8

Jewelry display with Artist Book
 Bittersweet Adornment:
 Tasting & Memory Series

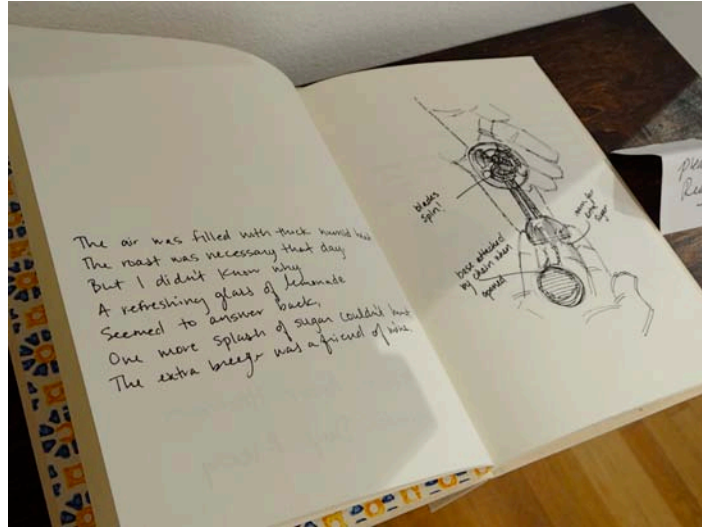


Fig. 9

Bittersweet Adornment: Tasting & Memory Series Artist Book
 (diagram, description, & poetry)

Senses drive my work, and the strongest one is the sense of home. The purpose of my integrative project *Bittersweet Adornment: Tasting and Memories* is sharing a story, personal, yet relatable. My line of beverage-assisting pendant lockets are inspired through my reminiscing, and are driven by a literal and metaphorical hunger. These pieces find home in the Art Jewelry world where one can be an artist sharing a part of his/her voice, as well as a designer allowing the material and object a physical form of dignity. The sculptural, functional jewelry I have designed and built took not only introspection, but also investigation into historical implications, and the present day context. *Bittersweet Adornment: Tasting & Memories* is a nostalgic exploration of my sense of home. These lockets are inspired by my need to contain what I hold dear. Within these containers, I am capturing moments entangled in taste, smell, and play. These everyday objects are icons within my memory and muses for my designs.

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