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Watches & Jewellery

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Signature work: portrait of the artist as jewellery designer

Famous names in the art world are following in Picasso's footsteps with creations that fetch high prices at auction, writes *Claire Adler*

This autumn, the Louisa Guinness Gallery opened in Mayfair, central London, dedicated to jewellery by artists. Anish Kapoor, Antony Gormley, Sam Taylor-Wood and Conrad Shawcross are among the artist/designers on display.

Louisa Guinness, the gallery's owner, works with artists to commission designs realised in small editions and handcrafted in Hatton Garden - London's jewellery quarter - or at the artists' studios. The majority of her customers are art lovers, many of whom, she says, are unaware that jewellery created by artists from Picasso to Lichtenstein to Koons is available.

The rarity of pieces made by famous artists make them highly desirable, according to auctioneers Christie's and Bonhams, although it is a niche part of the jewellery market.

"Jewellery by famous artists has not been produced in vast quantities, so there is a finite supply and I don't see it posing a threat to the historic jewellery houses," says Jean Ghika, director of the jewellery department in Europe at Bonhams.

Ms Guinness agrees: "Artists' jewellery doesn't compete with the historic fine jewellery houses or the antique jewellery market. Our market has much greater crossover with the art market, and buyers tend to be interested in the jewellery in the context of the artist's work."

Rings and cufflinks by Anish Kapoor are priced at between \$6,786 and \$35,000; Picasso pieces cost approximately \$41,000 and pieces by Alexander Calder, largely acknowledged to be the forefather of artist jewellery, are priced at about \$120,000.

Sometimes high prices achieved for artists' jewellery at auction bear little reflection on the value of the material used to make



Art form: Jeff Koons' Rabbit pendant necklace; Picasso's Visage Geometrique aux Traits pendant (below)

it. In 2011, a brass necklace made by Calder in 1939, with recurring spiral shapes alluding to eternity, went on sale at Christie's in New York. It soared past its estimate of \$300,000, going on to fetch \$602,500. Calder created about 1,800 pieces of jewellery, giving many away as presents.

Guinness says the 2011 price for Calder's jewellery could be surpassed at a Sotheby's New York Contemporary Art Day auction on November 14, when a collection of 18 Calder pieces will go on sale, with the low estimate at \$1.9m. The top

lot is a necklace likely to fetch between \$400,000 and \$600,000.

"Jewellery by famous artists is extremely sought after at auction," says Ms Ghika. "It is viewed by collectors in this field as both a piece of art and a wearable jewel."

Prices do vary, however. In 2011, Bonhams sold a diamond-set necklace by Dali, inspired by his *Madonna de*

Port Lligat paintings, for £6,000. Yet in 2005, Christie's had sold a suite of peridot, diamond and gold jewellery by Dali for \$192,000.

Elisabetta Cipriani, another Mayfair-based gallerist, suggests that the price achieved by art at auction can affect perceptions of the value of that artist's jewellery. She works with artists and sculptors who design jewellery, including Enrico Castellani. Last month, Mr Castellani's 1972 painting *Superficie Gialla, Ricomposizione*, sold at Sotheby's for £459,000 - more than double the

upper estimate. At Ms Cipriani's gallery, jewellery by Mr Castellani includes a limited edition bracelet and necklace priced at £17,000 and £15,000 respectively.

"Don't you think the jewellery is worth buying considering the importance of the artist and the price of his paintings?" she says.

Artists and designers making jewellery is nothing new. In the 16th century, Hans Holbein the Younger

was a prolific jewellery designer, as his work in the British Museum proves. Now, other creative professionals are also turning their hands to jewellery.

When Radha Mehta, an Emmy-nominated set decorator based in Los Angeles, found herself between film and TV projects in 2005 she decided to take up designing jewellery and has now established her own brand, Jagga Jewellery.

Terence Woodgate, a designer of furniture and lighting, has set up Eiger, a company inviting designers of furniture, interiors and textiles to work outside their usual mediums and create jewellery, initially on sale at Heal's in London.

Sir Kenneth Grange, who has designed trains, bus shelters, the first parking meter and Wilkinson Sword razors, has added cufflinks to his repertoire. Another Eiger jewellery designer, Tomoko Azumi, has furniture on show at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

But some purists question whether non-jewellers can turn their hand to jewellery with all the finesse required for the task.

"Jewellery is an art form which stands alone from other genres," says Sam Loxton of Lucas Rarities. "More demanding than sculpture, it requires a sense of proportion which is almost always the undoing of artists such as Dali and Kandinsky being able to produce great jewellery."

"Conversely, the work of great jewellery designers like 20th century Parisian Suzanne Belperron transform from great jewels into amazing ones once they are worn."

Mr Loxton also cites Paul Irbe, who died in 1935, as an outstanding, multi-talented designer. He created jewellery, furniture, Hollywood film sets and costumes, and helped Coco Chanel with designs for her first jewellery show in 1932.

