




STING OF PASSION

An exhibition of art jewellery created in response to Manchester Art Gallery's
Pre-Raphaelite collection, curated by Jo Bloxham.

MANCHESTER ART GALLERY 11 JULY - 25 OCTOBER 2009



Dedicated
to my boys
Tom, Charlie
and Harry

INTRODUCTION

The title of this exhibition, *The Sting of Passion*, is taken from a line in a poem, which the Greek poet, Sappho wrote as a hymn to Aphrodite. A depiction of Sappho is included in this publication.

I have always felt a natural empathy with the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. In them I can see a potent and enigmatic quality that - despite the superficial appearance of warmth, serenity and beauty - hide profane and often sinister meanings. Many Pre-Raphaelite and Late Victorian paintings were made in response to a poem or a piece of historical literature, often belonging to medieval mythology. Likewise, the jewellery made for each painting in *The Sting*, is a contemporary interpretation of something from the past.

The twelve paintings selected for *The Sting* have a common theme. They are not just aesthetically pleasing and beautifully painted; they all depict women in various guises. Be it the woman portrayed as the Temptress, Seductress, Femme Fatale or purely as an icon of beauty, there can be no doubt - these women are dangerous. They appear to have a hypnotic power over man, which serves to highlight and expose his vulnerability.

Human weakness is at the heart of these tales. Love can be a fatal drug. These women are not to be messed with!

The twelve jewellers were chosen because of the thoughtful sensitivity and feelings so clearly expressed and shown in their work. The resulting pieces comprise a varied and diverse body of work, which in some cases may be described as 'belonging on the fringes of jewellery'. It nevertheless shows that each jewellery artist has had - nothing short of - an ephemeral but deeply felt, spiritual fling with their painting.

I am proud to show the work of these jewellers in my hometown of Manchester, and I hope those who visit it will enjoy *The Sting of Passion*. I also hope it will encourage people to look at jewellery in a new way, as well as appreciate the paintings on a deeper level.

Jo Bloxham, Curator

THE STING OF PASSION

O so beautiful, and yet... maybe not...

Looking at the idealised representation of women in Pre-Raphaelite paintings confronts us with an ambiguity that might not have been intended at the time, but our 'modern' eyes see with suspicion. Victorian representation is usually explicit on the level of appearance, but reticent to the point of suppression on a range of issues - mainly sex, of course, but also other unacceptable issues, like madness, sanitary arrangements, the horrific conditions of the poor, the physicality of the body and, by implication, its socio-political recognition in a wider cultural context.

We are looking at women betwixt ideas of identity, which in its most extreme oscillates between the stereotypical clichés of the virgin and the whore, leaving not much space for domestic triviality and self-motivated, applied activity. For a person living today it is very difficult to empathise with the experience of normal living conditions of women in the Victorian age. Those who were born into the 'better' classes did not have much to do other than to be pleasing (there did exist exceptions of course) to the men who, one way or the other, owned them. Those who were born into the 'lower' classes often had to fight for their survival, and being excluded from meaningful training and education, often it was sex that was left to be sold as a commodity. However, and maybe because of this, Pre-Raphaelite representation offered an unprecedented viewpoint of the woman destroyed by love, betrayed by love, seduced by love, victimised by love... Inspired by medieval romance and classical Greek mythology the Victorian idea of feminine weakness took on another more ambivalent quality in Pre-Raphaelite depiction, while denying representation of the fulfilment of true romantic love.

On first viewing the paintings we are impressed by represented ideas of hyper-sensuality, while at the same time the figure, suspended in the space of the paintings, appears arrested in a state of loneliness, which in some paintings verges on despair, madness and pain. Some of the paintings allude to an awareness of social injustice and depict women left alone to bear the consequences of social or sexual transgression. The presence of the male is implied and makes us question the validity of a gendered sense of justice. I do think, however, that the embedded narratives of the paintings offer a much more ambivalent reading of the conundrum of gender relationships, fetishisation of the female body and social acceptance of the cultured body. The ambivalence we can perceive seems to come from an almost uncanny dynamic of hidden narratives that offer symbolic meaning, which reverses first readings and offer alternative explanations to the contrived poses in which the women are depicted. When our eyes wander through the picture planes, looking behind bushes, opening closed doors, wondering at the construction of impossible garments and indeed impossible bodies, we find elements that are not consistent with the paintings' general appearance, elements that hint at danger, assertiveness and complicity. After all, hardly any heroine in Greek classical mythology, which informed so much of these paintings, had been victim only - most of them had been 'bad girls', bending the rules, power-playing using their bodies as currency or weapons and that often with murderous intentions. But mythology, other than history, is characterised by suppression and is 'true' only in varying degrees of metaphorical investment.

In a world of uncertain meaning, contemporary or Victorian, we find distinctions between reality and story blurred; we are left to fill in with our own interpretations the emerging gaps in our understanding. We might choose systems of ideas and theories like psychoanalyses, various methodologies of historical dissemination or other thought systems to help us along. Mainly though, it is our imagination that takes over, fictionalising what we are seeing and ultimately it is ourselves that we are looking at, our fantasies, projections and invested emotions. Such activity and dialogue is not only instructive about a particular kind of representation of the past, it also makes us enquire about our own present age, in which taboos and colluding silences continue to exist - only now we are stuck in the middle of it, and our own hang-ups are much more difficult to detect than those of the past. We delight in the exoticism of the past - fascinatingly similar and yet intriguingly different from our own period - while we remain safely remote, even though our safety is just as imaginary.

What makes the paintings stand out against Victorian conformity is, however, that they counteracted the representational conventions of their time - and that in my view relates them to contemporary artistic preoccupations. At the time when most of the paintings selected for Sting Of Passion were being painted they were viewed as progressive, even revolutionary. Writers and painters associated with the Pre-Raphaelites or belonging to the society known as 'Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood' (now, here is a term that raises questions...) were committed to advancing a style and attitude of Italian painting before Raphael. The artists aimed to express a genuine 'new' idea and professed a commitment to what was considered heartfelt and serious in previous art, to the

exclusion of what was considered conventional, ironic or learned repetition. Not so much different to today then, one might say, only that what was established as artistic ideal in Pre-Raphaelite art seems often conventional and stereotypical, if beautiful, to us now. Ideas of innovation, romantic investment in the metaphysical ideal of art, complicated dynamics of nostalgia and utopia, and the ideal of the beautiful body remain controversial and merit creative engagement.

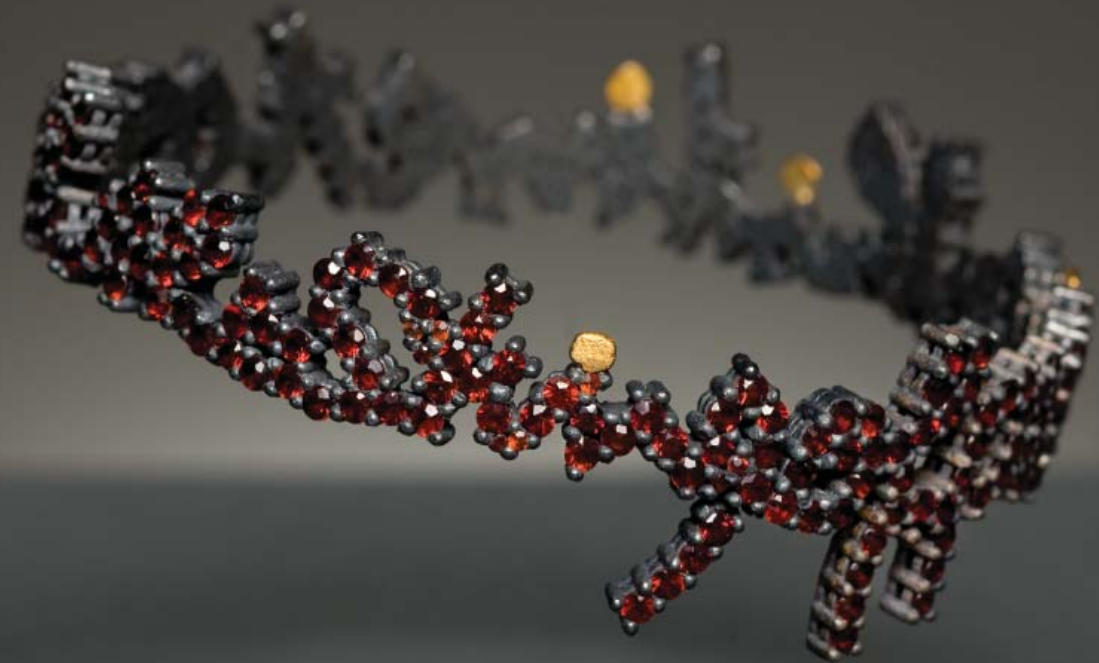
Nowhere is this more so than in contemporary jewellery art, where so much creative work is motivated by the ambivalent and questioning attitudes of artists whose practices resonate with re-inventing and interpreting notions of the beautiful, the body and the romantic, while remaining critical about the repressive aspect of the ideal. Making new work in response to Pre-Raphaelite paintings for the exhibition The Sting of Passion meant the opportunity for each artist to engage with the paintings on the level of discovery and innovation. It called for a creative process that distinguishes itself from other design processes by inviting interpretative and emotional investments, idiosyncratic readings and other embedded narratives to motivate the new creative work. In turn, the new work invites us, the viewer, to share another way of seeing, subjective and often highly personal, and by doing so engage with the paintings in a new way too.

© Jivan Astfalck



Iridescent-throned Aphrodite, deathless
ahhh my heart, my heart
beating blood-red fleshiness
in the shrine of woolly passion
but before if ever you've heard my pleadings
when at night love comes creeping in
through those folded blinds and crumbled sheets
nagging at the edge of consciousness
then return, as once when you left your father's
golden house
once there was a girl who had parents
but really not a home
wing-whirring sparrows
skimming down the paths of the sky's bright ether
the earth she lived on was lacking full of loss
she took her roots into her hands
swiftly--then you stood with a sudden brilliance
and planted she into another space
and trading places she was looking for that home
deathless face alight with your smile
setting one word after another
toetrippeditraptrap
what would ease the pain of my frantic mind
word after word
a little way along
here, to soothe the sting of your passion this time
where I can follow
hopefully
thinking something new

Sappho and Jivan



Sting of Passion.
Bangle.
Fine gold,
sterling silver
and garnets.

Sappho 1877 by Charles-August Mengin

Sappho was a Greek poet who lived around 600BC. She wrote about love, yearning and reflection, often dedicating her poems to the female pupils who studied with her on the island of Lesbos. Mengin has chosen to paint a story that says she threw herself into the sea because of unrequited love for a young man, but many art historians believe that this unrequited love was in fact for another woman.

JIVAN ASTFALCK
UK



The Last Watch of Hero 1887

by Frederic Leighton

Although Hero and Leander lived in rival cities separated by a stretch of sea, the star-crossed lovers conspired to meet every night. Braving the current, Leander swam across the water guided by a lamp that Hero lit in her tower. Tragedy struck after a summer of love when winter winds blew out the lamp.

Without this guide, Leander floundered and drowned. Leighton shows Hero as she begins to fear the worst. His device of the additional predella panel shows Leander dead and hints at how the story ends.

Hero will throw herself onto these same rocks and the lovers will be joined in death.



Chamber Candlestick, Candle Snuffer and a pair of Candle Snuffers. *Gold plated metal.*

CRISTINA FILIPE
PORTUGAL

We are alone with all that we love.

Novalis

Hero holds a candle. The light that supposedly symbolises the passion that united her with Leander and that, due to its absence, separated them.

A 'line of dribble' that can break at any moment holds life and death. It is this moment of tension and vulnerability that the image tries to represent. Nothing is up to us, nothing depends on us, though this does not mean that we are not responsible for our acts.

The flame blows out. The wind was too strong. Leander no longer sees the way and drowns in the waters of Hellespont, which separate Sestos from Abydos. Hero cannot endure the enormous pain of loss... and throws herself into the sea for her eternal tryst with Leander.

The candlestick, the candle snuffer and the pair of candle snuffers. The house of Hero. Domestic objects, par excellence, associated with the ritual of candle lighting, presented here as golden icons, symbols of the story of the love between Hero and Leander.

Yet Hero did not use them, nor did she depend on them to save her Love.

Love does not depend on objects, nor can any object save us.

Nevertheless, the memory of an object holds meanings and connotations that guarantee us its true significance.

The jewel is the light. The objects and the images remind us of the importance of its presence, and of its absence, in the story of this Love.

Cristina Filipe





The silver boxes in this necklace have the same proportions as the original painting. The transformation has completed in my necklace and the young woman has even disappeared from the painting. She is hiding in the stems of the reed. But what kind of reed is this? This reed has erotic bulges. And is it blood and / or saliva that's on it?

"The Latin name for reed, Phragmites, comes from the Greek word phragma, which means fence or barrier. It refers to the impenetrable masses of common reed that often form continuous belts in roadside ditches and along upper borders of salt marshes."

For how long will the girl stay in hiding? Will the reed ever be turned into a love nest?

P. Hoogeboom



Phragmites
saliva L.
Porcelain,
silver and metal.

Syrinx 1892 by Arthur Hacker

Syrinx was the daughter of a Greek river god. In order to escape rape by the god Pan she was turned into a reed. The moment of her transformation is shown here. Experiencing the girl's terror can be uncomfortable: she is desperately trying to hide but her body is exposed for the viewer's pleasure.

PETER HOOGEBOOM NETHERLANDS



Ophelia 1852 by Arthur Hughes

Ophelia is based on a speech in Shakespeare's play Hamlet. Ophelia is driven to madness by Hamlet's murder of her father and rejection of her love. We see her moments before she drowns. Queen Gertrude's speech in the play, describing Ophelia's death, is inscribed on the frame.



It is possible that Shakespeare based the character of Ophelia on real events that happened at the time, a young girl fell into the river Avon and drowned. In fact what seems to have really happened is that she lost her balance, but all manner of stories were spread about the event, mainly that she had committed suicide over a lost love.

Whilst looking for more information about Ophelia, I found the case of a French student, also called Ophelie, who went missing in Budapest. The girl was eventually found drowned in the river Danube, her personal belongings placed at the entrance of a bridge. A parallel story with the original Ophelia emerges, the fatal event returning to make a formal appearance. It is as if with this name her destiny was fixed, Ophelia cannot be saved, she is condemned from the beginning.

This piece is a gift from Hamlet to Ophelia – perhaps for Valentine's Day – that predicts her destiny. We can imagine that she fell into the river by accident but we cannot dismiss the possibility of suicide. I have made a piece of jewellery which is crude and basic, but in sympathy with the style. The concept of the necklace is based on the heavy walls of a prison, closed in order to incarcerate her, heavy in order to sink her: the glass shards becoming symbols of violence and aggression. Many women across the world occasionally receive presents like these.

Neckpiece. Concrete and glass.

KEPA KARMONA
SPAIN



Sibylla Delphica 1886
by Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones

The Sybil of Delphi was the priestess at one of the most important Ancient Greek temples, Burne-Jones shows her in front of the sacred flame and holding the Laurel leaves her puzzle-like prophecies were written on.

The painting began as a church window design. Though pagan, Sybils are depicted in Christian churches as they foretold the coming of Christ. The Sybill of Delphi had said 'The Prophet born of the Virgin shall be crowned with thorns'.

She stands facing the viewer, with her head turned to the left, looking at laurel leaves which she holds in her right hand, a stem of the same plant in her left hand. A tripod altar burns behind her, on the left, incense smoke rising high.



Because Sibylla Delphica, is not adorned, I considered other paintings that would be simultaneously hung in the exhibition space. I focused on Rossetti's Astarte Syriaca, because in contrast, she is so excessively adorned with jewels. I became interested in a fictional envy that could exist between the figures in these paintings, and appropriated a fragment of Astarte Syriaca's jewels and made a mediated copy for Sibylla Delphica.

I am interested in making representations of historical luxury goods. Because of my physical distance from both of these paintings, I considered how I was viewing these images through an Internet archive, a surrogate and unstable source of this history. I examined the conditions of what I could visually understand from their Internet representations. Within this examination, I was conscious of how I perceive, to what I have visual access, and I acknowledge the discrepancies between what I understand about the material reality of the represented objects, and their reproductions. I replicated what was visible to me in the image of the jewelry mediated through the screen, building the obstruction of the wearer's body, the cropping of the frame, blurriness, accumulations of glare, and perspectival views into the object.

Mediated by the image and the screen, the work is a recreation of traces of history that retains and exemplifies the ambiguity of its origins. Ultimately, this work is generated out of the inaccessibility of the 'original', incomplete views, and blurry reproductions.

ANYA KIVARKIS
USA

'Envy', brooch. Sterling and fine silver.



The Bower Meadow 1872

by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Rossetti painted the background of this work in 1850. It was originally intended for a large-scale version of Dante meeting Beatrice in Paradise. He took up the canvas twenty years later by which time his style had become more lyrical. His earlier watercolour may still have been in his mind with its two medieval 'angels' playing psalteries in a paradise garden. Painted after what he called his 'time of love' with Jane Morris it evokes an undefined feeling of poetic melancholy.



'Replay (comb)' and 'Replay (hairpin)' 2009. Baked clay, distilled water, glycerin, ink, glitter and vintage glass.

BENJAMIN LIGNEL
FRANCE

His pleasure dome - portrait of the artist as a voyeur

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, as ever surfing the wave of his anguished libido, likes to bake cakes he'll never eat: viz. his Bower Meadow (1872) showing a luscious crew of in-bred Pompadours, either frolicking in the middle-ground of a Marian hortus conclusus ¹, or seated in the foreground, gingerly tickling the strings of antiquated guitars for the pleasure of their absent master. This is courtly love gone wrong: while Dante Alighieri's one-sided and largely contact-free passion for Beatrice championed resistance to temptation as a measure of man's virtue, Rossetti's panopticon of sleepy courtesans casts the artist as a compulsive voyeur, pulling the strings in a masturbatory dreamland peopled by sanctified whores on house arrest: all dressed up and no one to blow.

His puppets are the real desperate housewives: typecast for maximum excitement, these dancing beauties live the test-tube lives of neutered she-monsters in a tree-lined water-tank. Camille Paglia, who wrote extensively about the male sexual construct calls this a sado-masochistic structure. The product of a Western "agonized ambivalence of body and mind" ², it is manifest in pre-raphaelite paintings, where "the eye elects a narcissistic personality as galvanizing object and formalizes the relationship in art". His idolatry of "self-replicating females" is never more decadent than in a museum context. Here, his centerfold girls can fulfil their destiny as art objects, and dance their bored abstinence away, like some pre-parental-planning Britney Spears ³ tripping on laudanum, in front of a solitary male museum-goer, guilt-soaked and sex-starved: the painter.

* * *

I won't pretend I warm up to Rossetti's tortured portrayal of women. I do find, however, the notion of objectified love (the transfer of one's passion onto an image or object) very pertinent in the context of jewellery. I focused on the vertical glass-ceiling Rossetti erects between the objects of his fear / adoration and himself - the fetishistic arrangement of fearsome females behind glass - and chose to depict the forever protracted denouement of his emasculated longings with - a comb, a hairpin and a ring stolen from his girls' dressers, and suspended in the pink serum of his repressed passion. Shake it, baby, shake it.

Benjamin Lignel

¹ The hortus conclusus, or enclosed garden, is used in Marian iconography, from the XIVth century onwards, to symbolise the virginity of Mary. Rossetti would have seen Italian Renaissance variations on the theme, notably Fra Angelico's Annunciation, or Bellini's Madonna of the Meadow.

² This and the following quote: Camille Paglia. *Sexual Personae*, Vintage books, New York, 1991, pp.121 and 156. The author develops in these pages her general theory on the sado-masochistic structure of the Western sexual personae. See also her excellent analysis of pre-raphaelite art, pp. 490-498.

³ Spears' planetary success can be partly attributed to her deft and controversial self-branding as virginal tart. In 2000, having just released her second album, the evocatively titled 'Oops!...I did it again', she also became a public advocate of abstinence until marriage.



Comb, hairpin and ring. Photography by Enrico Bartolucci, Paris.



Hylas and the Nymphs 1896

by John William Waterhouse

Hylas was one of the Argonauts who sailed with Jason in search of the Golden Fleece. When the adventurers harboured at an island Hylas' task was to search for fresh water for the crew. He found a gladed spring and was filling his pitcher when he was encircled by water nymphs. Hypnotically, they drew him into the watery depths and although his friends searched for him, Hylas was never seen again. In Waterhouse's hands, a myth explaining the drowning of a youth amongst sinuous lily leaves and stems, becomes an evocation of sensual female flesh, an immersion into the deadly allure of the femme fatale.



Large brooch; 'Only out of conscience' - Hylas. *Shibu-ichi silver, bone and wood.* Nymphs brooches. *Silver and bone.*

Eros and Thanatos, seduction and death, are the two themes that inspired me for the realization of this project. Hylas, son of King Theiodamas of the Dryopians, was seduced by a group of seven sea nymphs, with beautiful white skins and captivating eyes. But what is hidden behind these tempting eyes? I have tried to represent this deadly temptation in a symbolic way by creating a series of 7 brooches. By using porous, white, fragile bone, I have emphasized the deathly allure of the nymphs. The brooches are oval shaped, referring to intimate female forms. The sinuous lily leaves and stems into which Hylas disappeared, are translated into silver twigs. The dark shaded brooch symbolizes Hylas, dragged into the water by these sensual femme fatales. The bodies of the nymphs, vibrant and alive contrast the darker figure of Hylas, perhaps suggesting his impending death.

JORGE MANILLA
BELGIUM

Astarte Syriaca 1877

by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Mystery: lo! betwixt the sun and moon
Astarte of the Syrians: Venus Queen
Ere Aphrodite was. In silver sheen
Her twofold girdle clasps the infinite boon
Of bliss whereof the heaven and earth commune:
And from her neck's inclining flower-stem lean
Love-freighted lips and absolute eyes that wean
The pulse of hearts to the spheres' dominant tune.

Torch-bearing, her sweet ministers compel
All thrones of light beyond the sky and sea
The witnesses of Beauty's face to be:
That face, of Love's all-penetrative spell
Amulet, talisman, and oracle, -
Betwixt the sun and moon a mystery.

Rossetti



Chain. 750 Gold.

Astarte, goddess of fertility and sexuality, she masters the art of war. A bit dangerous and perhaps even malign, but nevertheless she is also a benefactress. Rossetti's painting of Astarte is a beautiful romantic portrayal of the goddess dressed in a green robe, fastened with two girdles. I like the painting, but I do find it far removed from Astarte's ambiguous nature. This inspired me to make a new girdle for her. A girdle that would not only be erotic, but also a bit disturbing. I made a thin chain that would easily follow the female curves. This is not only a piece of jewellery, but also an erotic line around the waist when being worn. The ring in front is meant to pierce her clitoral hood. With this girdle, I imagine Astarte posing naked, powerfully erotic and attractive, in charge of her own sexuality, but also present with a disturbing, perhaps even dangerous nature.

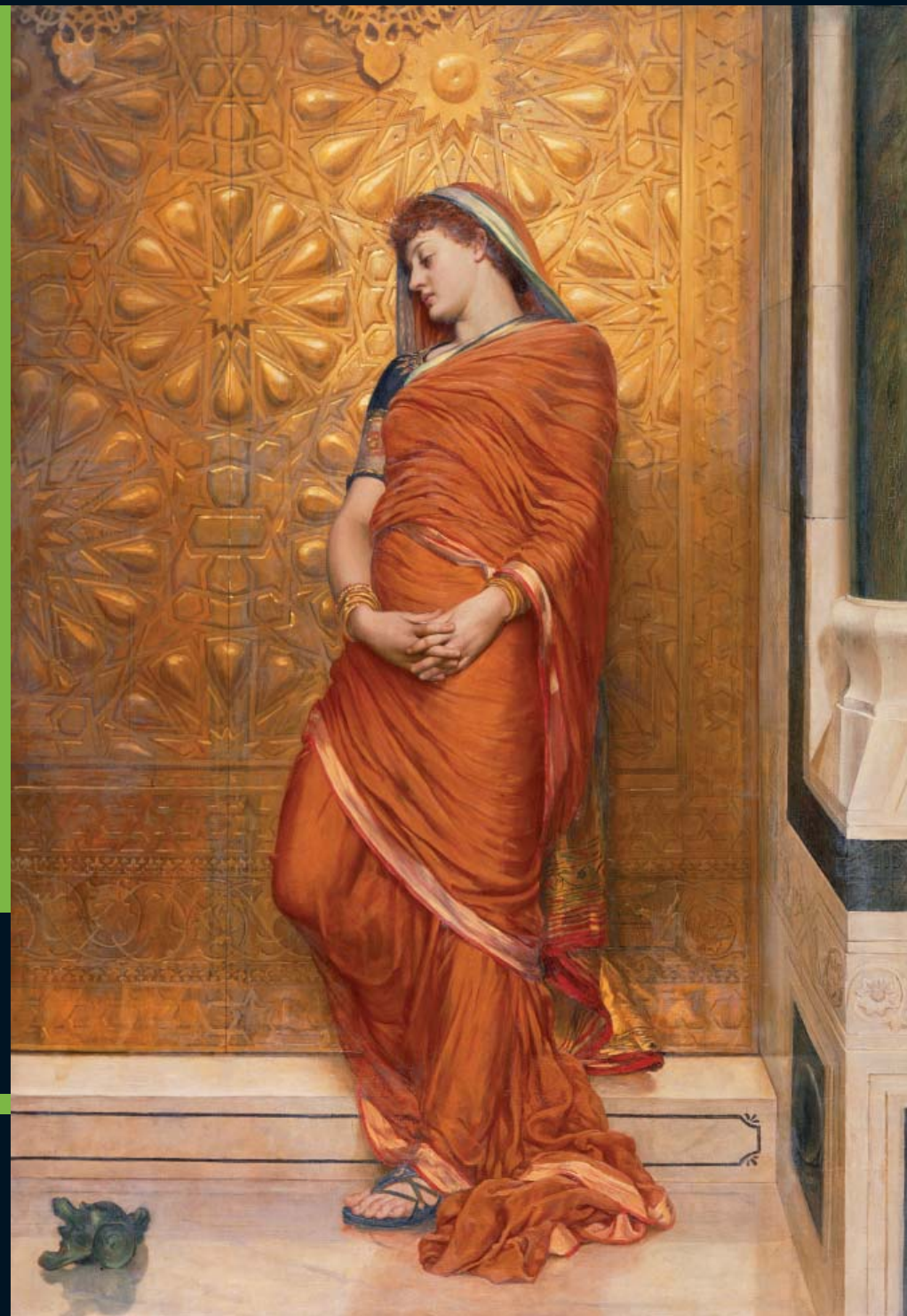
NANNA MELLAND
NORWAY

At the Golden Gate

about 1882

by Valentine Cameron Prinsep

Victorian viewers looked for the story in paintings. They recognised that the discarded lamp in this painting was part of a biblical tale: The Wise and Foolish Virgins. The painting shows a Foolish Virgin, who wasted all the oil in her lamp which made her miss a most magnificent wedding feast, because she couldn't find her way in the dark. She is shown late, remorseful and locked out of the party.



I have given this Foolish Virgin two things to alleviate her plight. The first is a keyhole so that she may at least catch a glimpse of the wedding celebrations and maybe even attract someone's attention to be let in. The other is a correcting prism to peer through. Since she casts an angular glance at the door, the lens can be rotated so that the image on the other side can be moved to suit her.

The richly decorated but forbidding golden gates represent a divide yet create a growing curiosity over what might be on the other side. The disappointment visible in the woman only adds to this frustration, so I hope that the instruments that she now owns will help unlock this and other restricted territories.

Prism 20.^A Acrylic, silver, stainless steel, gold leaf and brass.



SARAH O'HANA
UK



Joli Coeur 1867
by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Joli Coeur, meaning pretty heart, refers to both the pendant and the beating heart of the girl in this painting although the notion of true love seems suspect here.

There is the decadence of a Venetian courtesan in the rich red and gold colouring of the cloth and in sensuous touches like the fur-lined sleeves.

The immodest way the girl is unbuttoning to reveal underclothes and flesh means this is an image of seduction, not romance.



Pendant.
Vintage glass, copper, gold and coral beads.

Brooch.
Fine silver, glass, porcelain, coral, lacquered wood and photo.

Sensuality, sexuality and erotic signals are subliminal messages hidden in the details of Rossetti's Joli Coeur. It was an exciting, and pleasurable challenge to integrate these signals into my pieces for the Sting.

MARIANNE SCHLIWINSKI
GERMANY



Vivien 1863

by Frederick Sandys

In the legends of King Arthur Vivien was an evil enchantress. She entrapped the magician Merlin by misusing the spells he entrusted to her. We know reviewers admired this painting for the haughty beauty of the woman alone. But the symbols warn the viewer of her evil nature: the rose of passion, the apple of the Fall, the poisonous daphne, the opium poppy of obliteration. Here, Sandys has been influenced by Rossetti's half-length portrayals of beautiful women which place full focus on the sensuality of female face, shoulder and breast.



Vivien

The Lady of the Lake
Everything faces Everything
The Woods and the Waters
Man and Woman
Good and Evil
Faith and Will
Everything is One

Brooch.
Silver, emerald
beads, sapphire
beads and
mother-of-pearl.

BETTINA SPECKNER
GERMANY



Eve Tempted 1877
by John Roddam Spencer Stanhope

In Christian belief, Eve is tempted by Satan to pick and taste fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, the one thing that God has expressly forbidden. Eve in turn persuades Adam to try the fruit and so God expels them both from the Garden of Eden.

For her part in man's downfall, Eve can perhaps be seen as the first femme fatale. The artist depicts Satan as a serpent with a fantastically sinuous body and a horrible humanised head.

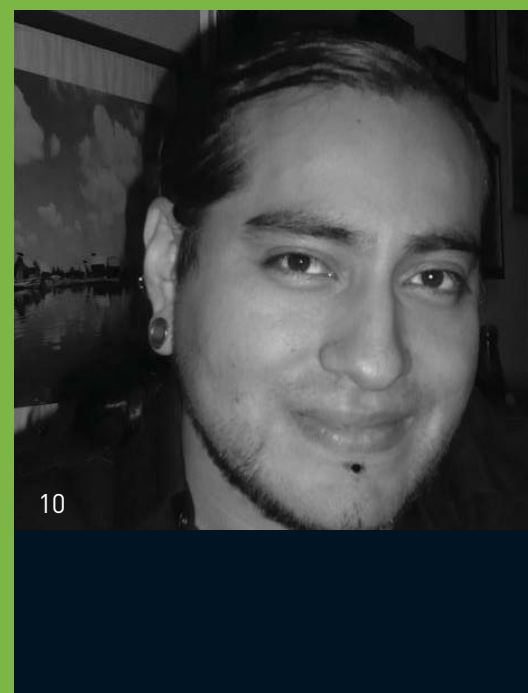
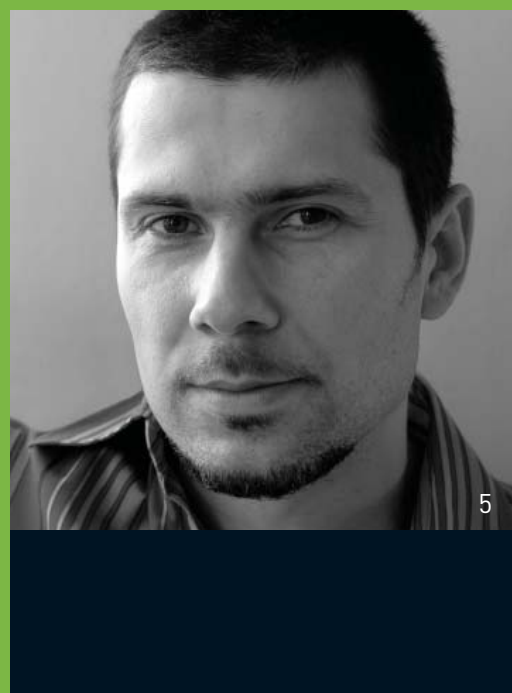
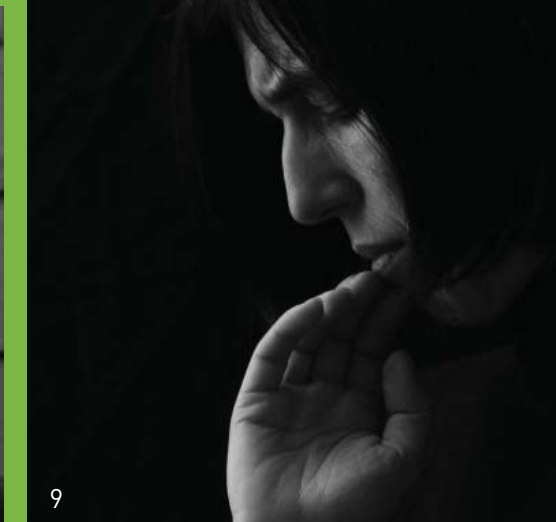
For Stanhope, Eden is a medieval Italian walled garden but he details the millefiori of grass and flower with truth to nature typical of an English Pre-Raphaelite.



The study of my painting was a really nice beginning to the thinking about religion, now and before. I am interested in this theme, although I'm not religious man. I didn't want my piece to be so serious in form, but to talk about an issue based on the story from the painting, Eve Tempted. All temptation has its consequences.

Brooch;
"Consequences".
Silver and resin.

AREK WOLSKI
POLAND



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