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The Smallest Beautiful *Thing*



The Work of
Caroline Gore

By Marjorie Simon



“Only things speak to me.”

—Rainer Maria Rilke¹



Previous spread, left:
Caroline Gore
clustered cones, 2017
Made for *Dual/Duel* exhibition at
Reinstein|Ross Gallery, NYC
18k gold, oxidized sterling silver
 $\frac{3}{8}$ x $\frac{3}{8}$ x $\frac{3}{8}$ in., including post
Photo: Thom Carroll

Previous spread, right:
Caroline Gore
wings, 2023
18k gold
 $\frac{3}{8}$ x $\frac{3}{8}$ x $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
Photo by the artist

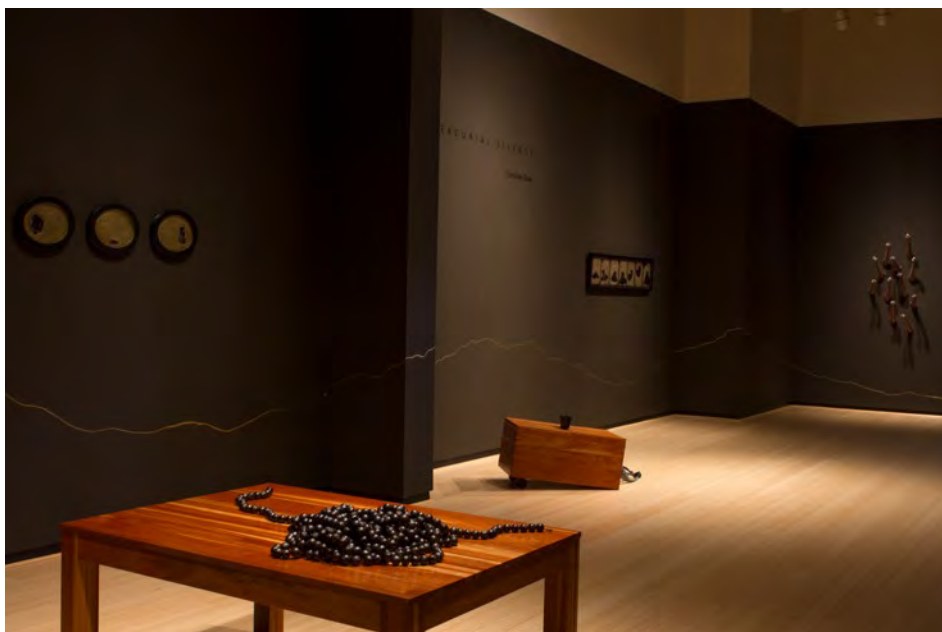
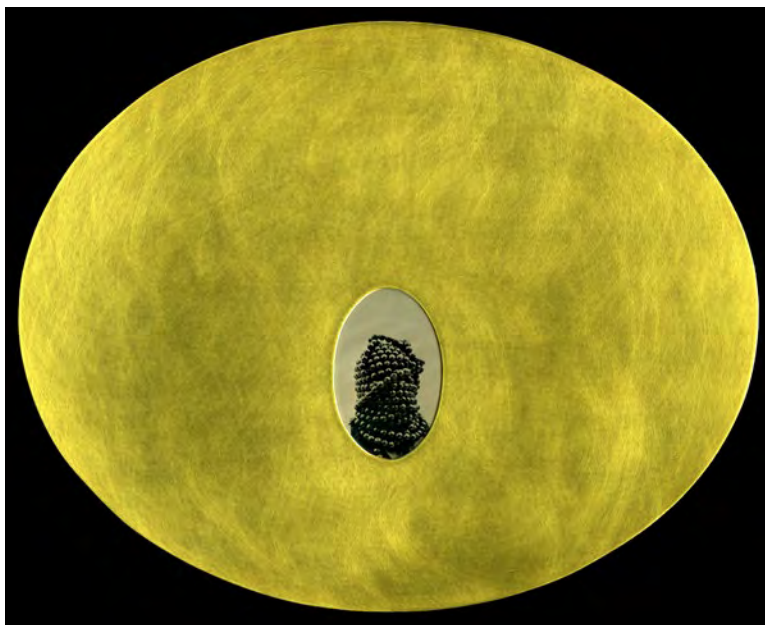
IN BOTH GREEK AND ROMAN MYTHOLOGY, the goddess Niobe, married to King Amthion of Thebes, boasted that she was superior to Leto, mother of divine twins Apollo and Artemis, because she had produced fourteen children—seven sons and seven daughters—rather than just two. To avenge the insult of Niobe’s sinful hubris, Apollo killed the seven sons, and Artemis killed the daughters. Overwhelmed with this loss, Amthion killed himself. Niobe was left alone, her tears of grief flowing for eternity. She was turned into stone from which poured a river of tears, becoming an icon of bereavement.

Niobe occupies the center stage in Caroline Gore’s *...mercurial silence...*, a multilayered installation created during her sabbatical year (2012–2013) from Western Michigan University, where she taught jewelry and metalsmithing.

Grounding herself in Niobe’s story, Gore asked herself and her audience how to treat inherited possessions thoughtfully and respectfully. The entire installation is her response. She recontextualized possessions left by her grandparents’ deaths into sculpture and photographs. They are individually stunning, and collectively mournful. *Collide* is an allusive work containing objects and photographs. A gargantuan necklace of jet and black spinel rests on a table Gore had constructed from a cherry glass-fronted dining cabinet. Jutting out from nearby walls, table legs are a cluster of appendages, as if a centipede had become entombed there. In the photograph

Revenir, a pair of hands grasps multiple strings of beads held by an unseen source, refusing to relinquish the vanished love object. Another wall holds a solid brass plaque, hand-rubbed to glowing gold, that frames a haunting tintype of the artist’s head wrapped in the enormous necklace, silenced in mourning. A trio of such images highlighting parts of the artist’s body echoes the feeling of being trapped and mute with grief.

Along the gallery walls Gore had drawn a low, meandering gold line, as if she might have been strolling along trailing a slim paintbrush or piece of golden chalk. The line gave movement to the static shapes on the wall, as it evoked variously a border, a horizon, a path, a means of way finding, or a kind of *kintsugi*, the Japanese art of “golden repair.” The slightly raised line resembled a golden scar—not so much a flaw but a badge, indicating what can be mended.



Above:
Caroline Gore
...mercurial silence... collide
 (performed), 2012–2013
 Brass, quarter plate tintype
 10 x 12 in.
 Photo by the artist

Left:
Caroline Gore
...mercurial silence..., 2012–2013
 Reclaimed wood (cherry) from inherited furniture, jet, black spinel, hematite, silk, 18k gold, oxidized sterling silver, brass, tintype, ambrotype
 Installation at Western Michigan University’s Kerr Gallery
 Photo by the artist

Opposite:
Caroline Gore
...mercurial silence... revenir
 (performed), 2012–2013
 Tintype
 Whole plate: 5 x 7 in.
 Photo by the artist and Mary Whalen

Caroline Gore applying gold leaf during installation of *Summer Installation* at Gallery Loupe, Montclair, NJ, 2023.

Photo: Patti Bleicher

In creating *...mercurial silence...* Gore focused on the core of loss, the void left after death or trauma. She portrayed Niobe's missing daughters by creating seven life-sized black silk dresses, even giving them whipstitched hems like old crinoline gowns. She photographed the floating garments as ambrotypes and hung them in a row, where they seem animate and haunted without their wearers.

Although Gore refers to the difficult process of metabolizing personal loss, she doesn't confide a personal narrative. Observers may experience their own grief indirectly, subliminally, where it can be privately managed. Sink into the wailing Niobe or commemorate a lost sibling, lover, or pet. Permission is given to hold that space of mourning, and to hold the connection to others. The cloak of grief that blankets *...mercurial silence...* will eventually shrink, and in time Gore will leave this narrative behind. Some pieces, like the photos in brass frames, will not be exhibited again.



... the intrinsic satisfaction of making, of *thingness* ...

As Gore has related more than once, her introduction to jewelry is a classic tale of metal love at first sight. She entered Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in 1994 intending to be a painter. By the end of the year, she knew she had met her destiny in materiality and process: the intrinsic satisfaction of making, of *thingness*.² She had always loved making. In high school she made all her own clothes; she learned pattern-making from her mother, and loved manipulating the pattern components. At VCU she was “just surfing around,” she says. She took some material craft courses—fiber, ceramics, jewelry, and metalsmithing. Jewelry professor C. James Meyer showed her the work of the late Norwegian master Tone Vigeland (1938–2024), whose jewelry is characterized by myriad moving metal parts. “I remember turning to him and saying, this is *possible?*”³ Gore credits Meyer with her superb technical skills, but he says of her that she was audacious and hungry to learn; she sat up close in demos and asked questions.

While still an undergraduate, Gore began to participate in exhibitions, and work in the jewelry industry repairing jewelry and learning the supremely useful skill of pearl stringing, which

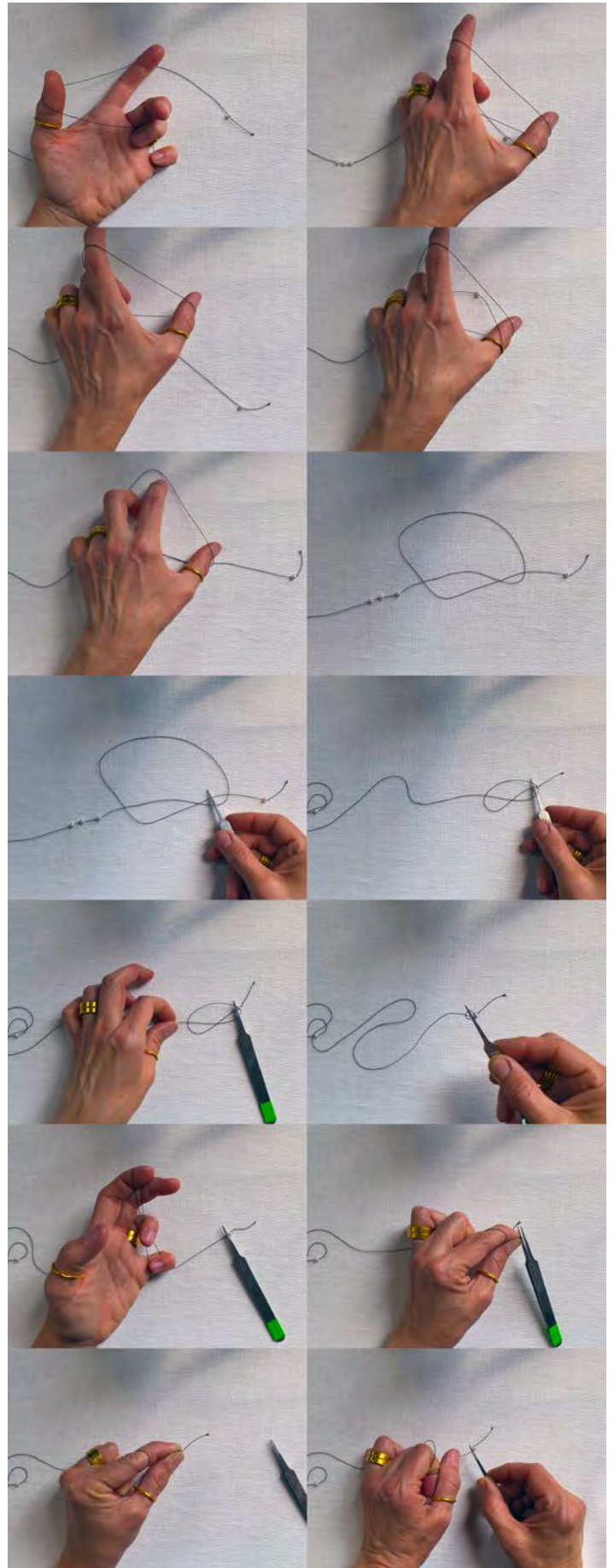
Caroline Gore's bead-knotting instructional images, prepared for *The Limitless Possibility of the Bead*, an upcoming workshop at Brooklyn Metal Works, NY, and previously online at Pocosin Art School of Fine Craft, NC, 2023.

Photo by the artist

would serve her well outside academia. On Meyer's recommendation Gore entered East Carolina University's MFA program, where she thrived with the support of Professor of Metals Bob Ebendorf, and navigating graduate school gave her confidence. It also gave her the opportunity to take on a big sculptural project, and the ability to lose herself in intentional, repetitive tasks in which everything matters. This approach remains a hallmark of Gore's work to this day, regardless of scale.

After graduate school, Gore spent several years teaching metalsmithing and photography at Interlochen Center for the Arts in Michigan. Using antiquarian processes and large-format film cameras satisfied her itch for both tools and praxis. As seen in *...mercurial silence...*, these processes became central to her unfolding practice.

In 2004, Gore began teaching jewelry and metalsmithing at Western Michigan University (WMU). During this time she continued her education and practice with residencies in the States and abroad, most notably at Fiskars, Finland; and Florence, Italy. Each immersive environment offered opportunities for Gore to expand her multifaceted work combining photography, site-specific installation, and, of course, jewelry. Gore refers to the process of finding a site and creating a photographic opportunity there as an *intervention*. During this period she began to think of all jewelry as site-specific installation—a viewpoint that, a decade later, is still reflected even in her smallest jewelry work. The material explorations in multiple creative languages that she began at VCU really achieved fluency with these travels and residencies. Gore produced major works for installations and nurtured ideas for the future that began to put her on the map.



One hundred granite stones found on-site were gathered and carried back to studio — one side of each stone was coated with 24k gold. The stones were then placed back in the original environment.

Caroline Gore

*Puutarhatie/Trädgårdsvägen,
Fiskars, Finland, 2007*
Selected environment, 24k gold
Printed image: 11 x 14 in.
Photo by the artist

Caroline Gore

*on Via della Bella Donne,
Florence, Italy, 2006*
Selected environment, 24k gold
Printed image: 8 x 10 in.
Collection of the Museum of
Fine Arts Houston
Photo by the artist



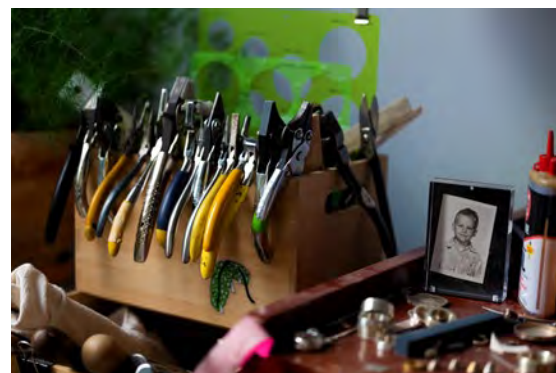
Caroline Gore
the stolen necklace, 2022
18k gold
21½ in. (length)
Photo by the artist

For example, while in Florence in 2006, Gore began selecting visual sites for interventions by highlighting with gold ordinary surfaces such as paving stones and rocks from the forest floor. She would photograph the intervention in situ and return to the studio, where she would create a piece of jewelry about it as a souvenir of the activity. By isolating aspects of a physical environment and capturing them in a photograph, Gore created the impression of a narrative. The photographs would then be exhibited with the jewelry, or published in books and publications, such as *Metalsmith's* juried "Exhibition in Print."⁴

Gore's fertile decade at WMU ended in 2014, when she relocated to Philadelphia to fill the vacancy at the historic Crafts program at the University of the Arts (UArts) left by retiring professor, the late Sharon Church (1948–2022).⁵ A giant in the field, Church had left a void that might have been hard to fill. But when senior faculty member Rod McCormick met Gore during the search process, their instant rapport told him he need look no further. Gore's diversified skill set was a strong addition to UArts, and she and McCormick continued the example of intellectual and technical rigor set by Church.

At the same time, Gore maintained an active professional profile, with solo jewelry shows such as the former Gallery at Reinstein|Ross in New York City and Gallery Loupe in Montclair, New Jersey. Then, in 2021, UArts closed the Crafts department despite its long history in the field, and hands-on jewelry and fine metals ceased to exist there. Finding herself without employment after seven years of committed teaching, performing demos, making samples, and creating programming, Gore embraced the return to her bench.

Gore remains well situated in Philadelphia, with a spacious studio in a restored warehouse that is a hive of creative activity. In addition to her now full-time jewelry practice, she continues to flex her teaching muscles at nearby NextFab, a member-based makerspace within walking distance. At NextFab she is a mentor and maker. She develops curriculum and teaches jewelry occasionally, thrilling others



Caroline Gore's bench in her Philadelphia studio, 2024. The tabletop is covered with pliers, tools, and a photo of Gore's father as a grinning boy.

Photo by the artist





Caroline Gore

flip dash earring series, 2018
 Made for 2018 *Earrings Galore* with
 Heidi Lowe Gallery
 18k gold, oxidized sterling silver
 2½ x ½ x ¾ in. (including post)
 Photo: Thom Carroll

Gore's story is not only
 about loss—it is also
 about *resilience and*
re-engagement,
 about rising up
 and showing up

with the magic of fire and pouring molten metal in lost-wax casting. She continues her life-long learning at the Tuscarora Lapidary Society about thirty miles from Philadelphia, where she joyfully cuts double cabochons and seeks mentorship with some equipment repairs of her own.⁶

At present, Gore's "social jewelry" practice is her primary activity. Creating salable work engages the same refinement she has always shown in her craft and her aesthetic. Even the smallest ornamental adornment is animated by the touch of her hand. As a materialist she has no hierarchy. As McCormick observed, "She treats 18k gold and jet with the same respect."⁷

In the summer of 2023, a selection of objects and photography from *...mercurial silence...*, coupled with recent jewelry, comprised one-half of the *Summer Installation* at Gallery Loupe. Outsized black-beaded necklaces and gold-framed, mounted photographs first seen in *...mercurial silence...* hung on the gallery wall, which was again painted black and marked with wandering gold.

Jewelry and objects by both artists referenced some shared elements of mourning, as well as deeply personal losses and trauma. As expected, Gore's earlier mixed-media work was haunting and dark. And though her contemporary jewelry—spread atop display cases in an open sunny spot—was intimate and bright, it was nonetheless characterized by the same sensitivity and grace as her earlier work.

The contrast in scale and tone between Gore's two bodies of work demonstrated her skills and range while also drawing a temporal thread between them. The poignant objects and jewelry are related because Gore's story is not only about



loss—it is also about resilience and re-engagement, about rising up and showing up. From her big ideas to her intimate jewelry, Gore’s work has a quality that Glenn Adamson had in mind when referencing Susan Stewart’s book *On Longing*: “A kind of ache’ that arises when we care about something deeply.”⁸ We know it by the *sigh* when we are in the presence of something transcendent, something that moves us; or the feeling we get when we desire something intensely and we *must have it*. The desire to possess is familiar to jewelers, who want to make things that others desire.

Throughout the spare beauty of her work of the past dozen years, Gore’s uncanny ability to know what to leave out—like the Japanese concept of *ma*, a necessary void—lifts each object into an ethereal realm.⁹ What is not there, in the spaces between the beads and pearls, creates a sense of order.

Paramount in Gore’s current work is her absolute fidelity to the body. Perhaps the most intriguing example might be the deceptively simple *Wing* earrings. Resembling a couple of artificial fingernails when laid on the table, these slivers of gold or silver take flight on the body. When worn, they are so perfectly situated on the ear as to make it seem one’s earlobes have been dipped in gold. Burnished edges illuminate the wearer’s face, uplifting one’s spirit with the confidence to face any event. Like a souvenir, this jewelry “speaks ... through a

Above:
collide in process for
Dual/Duel exhibition at
Reinstein|Ross Gallery, NYC.

Photo by the artist

Caroline Gore
collide (necklace), 2017
 Altered jet beads, silk
 Continuous strand 30 in.
 Photo: Thom Carroll





language of longing”¹⁰; they are objects that make you sigh. Another such piece is the *flutter* necklace, in which a starkly simple, subtly graduated, oxidized handmade silver chain supports a pair of pyramidal faceted rock crystals in sturdy gold bezels. Gore bought the vintage crystal gems, cut them in half herself, and altered the facets.

Despite its diminutive size, Gore’s jewelry contains and projects the emotional valence of her maximal sculptural work. To hold *vortex rêverie*, a slender chain of linked crystal charms as clear as tears—magnifying and fracturing the skin beneath as it encircles the collarbone—is to appreciate the power of the miniature. It achieves maximal impact when worn, where the individual gems attract the eye of the beholder. Even a pair of tiny, coiled gold rose earrings seems to possess greatly compressed energy. Gallerist Patti Bleicher described this new work as “spare, holding back. The materials are sensuous, and their weight feels fantastic.”¹¹

Gore’s shift in scale from the installations in the early 2000s to the present is not a retreat but a recalibration. Her concepts start at the widest point and converge to the smallest, as she says: “Starting from the mile and working toward the millimeter.” The magnitude and materiality of Gore’s early work has been distilled in the later work into smaller beads, slender strings, and ethereal necklaces with glimpses of gold and subtle variations in diameter or form. By her own admission, she has a “deep affection for luxurious materials” such as silk and gold. There is always gold. That circlet of gemstones with the simplest of handmade gold clasps is ornamental, yes, but not really supplemental. Because if you owned this work it would be primary, the only thing you would ever need to wear.

For now, personal narrative is subsumed beneath Gore’s flawless fabrication, classic design, and her authenticity of materials. She says, simply, that she is looking for “the smallest beautiful thing.”

From top:

Caroline Gore

rose, 2022

18k gold

$\frac{1}{4}$ x $\frac{1}{4}$ x $\frac{5}{8}$ in.

Photo by the artist

Caroline Gore

wings, 2023

18k gold

$\frac{3}{8}$ x $\frac{3}{8}$ x $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

Photo by the artist

Caroline Gore

flutter, 2017

18k gold, oxidized sterling silver, manipulated antique quartz

18½ in. (length)

Photo: Thom Carroll





Gore's jewelry
contains and
projects the
*emotional
valence*
of her maximal
sculptural work



Caroline Gore
vortex rêverie, 2024
18k gold, quartz
18 x $\frac{3}{8}$ x $\frac{3}{8}$ in.
Photo by the artist

1 Rainer Maria Rilke, letter to Lou Andreas Salome, August 8, 1903, *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, 1892–1910*, trans. Jane Bannard Green and M.D. Herter (New York: Norton, 1945), 122. 2 Bill Brown, ed., *Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). 3 This and all unattributed quotes are taken from personal communication with the artist, 2023–2024. 4 "Exhibition in Print: Equilibrium—Body as Site," special issue, *Metalsmith* 28, no. 4 (2008), <https://snagmetalsmith.org/product/metalsmith-magazine-exhibition-in-print-2008-vol-28-no-4>; "Exhibition in Print: Saturated—Color and Metal," special issue, *Metalsmith* 29, no. 4 (2009), <https://snagmetalsmith.org/product/metalsmith-magazine-exhibition-in-print-2009-vol-29-no-4>; "Exhibition in Print: Shifting Sites," special issue, *Metalsmith* 36, no. 4 (2016), <https://snagmetalsmith.org/issues/metalsmith-exhibition-in-print-vol-36-no-4-2016>. 5 For our tribute, see *Metalsmith* 43, no. 1 (2023): 72–73. 6 Tuscarora Lapidary Society, <http://www.lapidary.org>. 7 Rod McCormick, personal communication with the author, February 18, 2024. 8 Glenn Adamson, *Fewer, Better Things: The Hidden Wisdom of Objects* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 123. 9 Kiyoshi Matsumoto, "MA: The Japanese Concept of Space and Time," *Medium*, April 23, 2020, <https://medium.com/@kiyoshimatsumoto>. 10 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, and the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 135. 11 Patti Bleicher, personal communication with the author, August 7, 2023.



METALSMITH

VOLUME 44 / 2024
NUMBER 2 / SUMMER

Metalsmith is published by the Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG), a national nonprofit committed to advancing jewelry + metalsmithing by inspiring creativity, encouraging education, and fostering community.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Adriane Dalton, adalton@snagmetalsmith.org

COPY EDITOR Kirsten Janene-Nelson

ASSISTANT EDITOR Olivia Shih

GRAPHIC DESIGN Heather White, Pixel37 Design

SNAG EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Brienne Rosner

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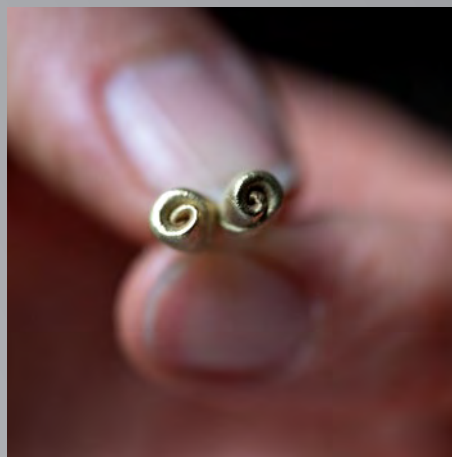


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ALLAN HOUSER
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When one thinks of a monument one tends to conjure certain physical and material qualities: a large, sculptural form, usually publicly situated, often made from impenetrable, long-lasting materials—crossover traits recognizable within jewelry and adornment. But monumentality is about more than mere material: an imposing marble obelisk; a sleek, black granite wall etched with names; or a more-than-human-scale bronze of some horse-mounted military figure. These real-life references are symbolic of people, places, events, and ideas, but interpretations of their meanings and what they memorialize lack fixity—despite their erectors’ intentions.

Overt monumentality is easily clocked in a new series we launch with this issue: tracing creative lineages within Indigenous metalsmithing and jewelry practice, starting with influential bronze sculptor Allan Houser. Also in these pages you’ll find Preston Jackson’s figurative metal sculptures, which are often accompanied by folkloric narratives that aid in monumentalizing his subjects. A feature-length interview with Jackson offers readers a fuller picture of his career as a storyteller, and this issue’s **Voice & Vision** captures his character-driven writing practice. Intermingling among these are subtler nods to monumentality and memorialization: jeweler Caroline Gore has a knack for giving even the “smallest beautiful thing” a larger-than-life impact, and Susie Heuberger’s bold necklaces are symbolic homages and offerings. The notions of site and scale are at play in **Findings** as well, wherein Liz Steiner explores evolving models for artist residencies and support opportunities.

Lack of fixity also applies to questions of material meanings. Rebecca Enderby builds upon and extends the material ethics conversation we began in the previous issue by unpacking the realm of lab-grown diamonds. And **LOOK** showcases a variety of jewelry and metals artists using a metamorphic paper-composite known as Thurmanite™.

Much like the multiple, layered interpretations possible when we ask what a monument stands for, the content herein contains many angles for contemplation. Your feedback on what this issue conjures for you is always welcome: editor@snagmetalsmith.org.

—Adriane Dalton, Editor

The mission of *Metalsmith* is to explore, analyze, promote, and document the field of jewelry and metalsmithing.

The editorial content of *Metalsmith* emphasizes contemporary activities, makers, and ideas and incorporates supportive content, relevant critical issues, and the exchange of viewpoints.



Daniel Brena is the director of Centro de las Artes de San Agustín (CaSa) in Oaxaca, Mexico, an art center established by the artist Francisco Toledo. CaSa offers free art education integrating heritage techniques with contemporary art practices. Brena also designs silver filigree jewelry. [@noku.mx](#)



RoseMary Diaz (Santa Clara Pueblo) is a freelance writer based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She studied literature and its respective arts at the Institute of American Indian Arts, Naropa University, and the University of California, Santa Cruz. [firstamericanartmagazine.com/rosemary-diaz](#)



Rebecca Enderby is a jeweler and writer based in the UK. Her interests lie in exploring ideas around value, nature, our relationship to the nonhuman world, and what the jewelry we make or wear says about us. She holds a PhD in Geography from King's College London with a research focus of political ecology and the social construction of nature. [@rebeccaenderby](#)



April Higashi has been a contemporary studio jeweler, curator, and gallery owner in the San Francisco Bay Area for over twenty-five years. She founded Shibumi Gallery in 2005 to be a dynamic space where she could create and exhibit her work, as well as highlight the inspiring work of fellow jewelry artists. [shibumigallery.com](#)



Preston Jackson is an artist and educator based in Illinois. He is Professor Emeritus of Sculpture at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago and was named a 1998 Laureate of the Lincoln Academy of Illinois, the highest honor given to individuals in the state. Much of Jackson's work deals with the subjects of our history that he wants us to learn. Despite the hardships of the people he depicts, the pieces do not reflect bitterness or hostility, but rather an admiration for the resolution and resiliency of each individual.



Mengjie Mo, originally from Yunnan, China, now resides and works in Detroit, Michigan. She completed her MFA at Cranbrook Academy of Art in 2023 and was honored with the 2022 Maxwell-Hanrahan Foundation Materials Award and AJF 2024 Top 10 Young Artist Award. Previously, she was a jewelry and industrial designer and a design adviser in China. Mo currently is a visiting artist at Cranbrook Academy of Art. [@mlikeadour](#)



Marjorie Simon is a writer, maker, educator, enamelist, and occasional curator based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She is a longtime contributor to *MetalSmith*.



Liz Steiner is a maker and educator located in Greenville, North Carolina. She can be found in the digital space on Instagram [@lrsteiner7](#) and in person at the Makerspace of Greenville. She is not a robot.



Grace Stewart is the Director of Equity & Inclusion at the American Alliance of Museums, and is responsible for leading the Alliance's diversity, equity, accessibility, inclusion, and antiracism initiatives. She is also an Adjunct Instructor at Heinz College | Carnegie Mellon University. Stewart was the Director of Collections & Exhibitions at the Metal Museum from 2014 to 2019 and currently serves on the Museum's board of directors.



Jessica Todd is a curator, writer, artist, and arts administrator living in Tampa, Florida. She is passionate about building the creative infrastructures that support artists and communities, and addressing issues of equity, access, and inclusion. She seeks to amplify the voices of marginalized and emerging artists who create work that is innovative, impactful, and interdisciplinary. [jesstoddstudio.com](#)