

THE ART OF ADORNMENT

*When artists turn their hands to objects, magic can happen.
Harriet Quick meets
Elisabetta Cipriani,
the London gallerist who
fuses her passion for
jewellery to create
wearable art*



This page, Above: Ai Weiwei. *Rebar in Gold*, 24-carat gold bracelet, 60 cm long. Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio.
Below: Rebecca Horn. *Medusa*, 2011. A 22-carat and 18-carat gold, ammonites fossil necklace
Facing page: Elisabetta Cipriani.





Jannis Kounellis, Untitled, 1972. Cipriani collaborated with Kounellis to re-create his 1972 gold lips sculpture as rings. Below: Jannis Kounellis lips, 2012.



Above: Installation view of Ai Weiwei, *Rebar in Gold* at Elisabetta Cipriani. Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio and Elisabetta Cipriani, Photography by Riccardo Abate
Below: Tatsuo Miyajima, *Time Rings*, 2009.



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n a time-honored ritual, Elisabetta Cipriani experienced her jewelry epiphany while watching her mother get dressed as a young girl. “My mother, she had beautiful pieces and I always remember her pulling them from the safe each time she was dressing for an evening out. I would look at these pieces front and back, totally mesmerised. It was the 1980s so the jewelry was big and often in sets—necklace, bracelet, earrings,” says Cipriani who was born and raised in Rome. Little did she know that one day she would be working with some of the greatest living artists in the world to create one of a kind and limited-edition ‘art jewelry.’

Currently on display in an installation room connected to her husband’s art gallery (Niccolo Sprovieri) in Heddon Street, London, is a series she created with Ai Wei Wei entitled *Rebar In Gold*. The project is rooted in the artist’s investigation into the devastating 2008 earthquakes in Sichuan Province, China. On visiting the site, Wei Wei found piles of contorted steel rebar, left behind from the demolished buildings. He purchased the material to create memorial works. Those monumental sculptures were recently on show at The Royal Academy’s monograph exhibition and filled entire rooms. For Cipriani’s jewellery collection, Wei Wei recreated the rebar in gold strips in three lengths that can be twisted and contorted into bracelets and chokers. These wearable mementos are striking, moving and distinct from the normal language of adornment yet connect to a fine tradition of art jewelry with Picasso, Man Ray and Jeff Koons among the pioneers.

The Rebar, is the latest in a series of art jewelry that Cipriani has developed and collaborated on since starting her enterprise in 2009. She has worked with artists including Castellani, Jannis Kounellis and Rebecca Horn on distinctive work that over time has amassed a serious group of collectors. “Seven years ago, this world was unknown but now there is a lot of interest and shows,” says Cipriani who exhibits the works on art platforms including Art Basel and Frieze. The process can be long an arduous. “I choose the artists, write to them and sometimes even have to wait for three years before there is even a ‘maybe.’ The only thing I ask is that the piece is wearable.”

Giving the artist *carte blanche* has achieved impressive results. Portuguese artist, Pedro Cabrita Reis, worked with raw iron to create visceral cuffs that are grey black on the outside and lined in gold. “Vitality of life comes of its contradictions, antagonisms, its permanent tension, a steam of clashes,” writes Reis. Giorgio Vigna’s pendants and bracelets feature hand blown Murano glass that are mesmerizing in colour—like starrng into the cosmos. Taking a different tack, Iranian artist Avish Khebrehzadeh turned his hand to design sunglasses that are emblazoned with gold plated butterfly and botanical motifs while Greek artist, Jannis Kounellis recreated his famous 1972 lips sculpture (that has its roots in Greek funeral masks) into a series of 12 rings. Every series is unique and the materials are diverse. British artist Rebecca Horn worked with ancient stones, shells, and ammonites tapping into the energy of the spiral form.





Cipriani developed her passion for art early on. As a child of antique dealers, she grew up surrounded by fine objects and artifacts including 18th century English furniture and Chinese porcelain. She went onto study history of art. Her first proper role was as a curator at Rome's contemporary museum of art (MACRO) where she staged eleven shows including Tony Oursler and the late, Tom Wesselman. She visited studios, learned how to talk and build rapport with artists—a skill that is invaluable in creating jewellery. On moving to London, she worked with Louisa Guinness, the wife of art dealer, Ben Brown, who is a pioneer in the art jewellery field. "Because I had a passion for it, I found I could sell these pieces quite easily," she says.

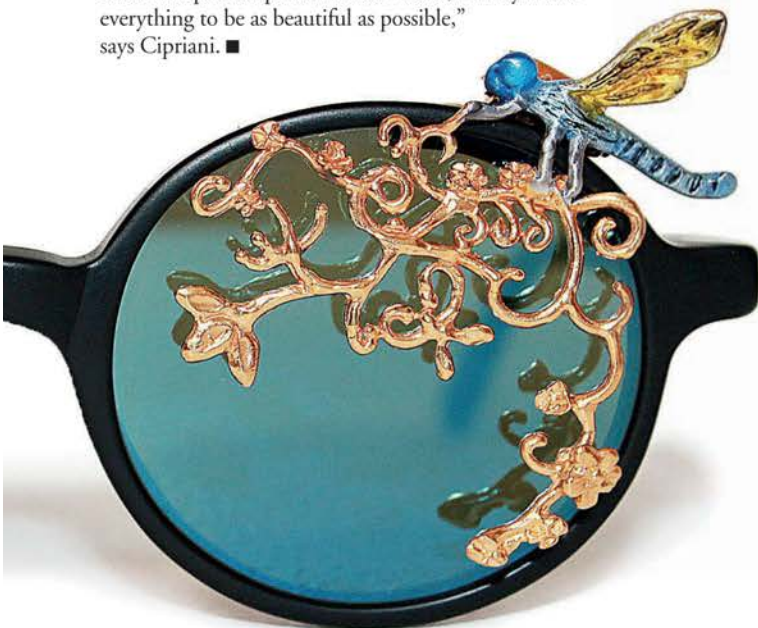
Her first solo project was with Tatsuo Miyajima who created a series of rings each with LED display that counts from 1-9 back again on a flashing micro 'signet' like surface. "These rings are about eternal life. 0 which represents death in Buddhism is never reached," says Cipriani of the inherent poetry of the work. Museums as well as private collectors bought these works. Her clientele are sophisticated, cultured women. "They are not interested in the latest cool bag or shoe. They might have traditional jewellery from Cartier and Van Cleef in their collections but want to wear something more special, limited, something with a story behind it," says Cipriani. Pieces range from an affordable £500 to a 'sky high' mark of £60,000.

"The real challenge is creating pieces that are made for wearing and move with the body," says Cipriani who works with skilled artisans and goldsmiths to create the prototypes. Next in the series is collaboration with sculptor, Marisa Merz, the only woman to be associated with the Arte Povera movement. The art movement is close to Cipriani's heart and her love of noble materials. "With all the time, effort and passion put into these works, I always want everything to be as beautiful as possible," says Cipriani. ■



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Left: Avish Khebrehzadeh. Maskara with Dragonfly glasses.
Above: Vigna blue and yellow necklaces.