

**"GOLDEN CLOGS,
DUTCH MOUNTAINS"**

VELVET DA VINCI, SAN FRANCISCO
MARCH 21 - APRIL 30

ORNAMENTUM GALLERY
HUDSON, NEW YORK
JULY 6 - AUGUST 6, 2007

MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF ART
BOSTON
OCTOBER 15 - DECEMBER 1, 2007

GALLERY LOUPE
MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY
JANUARY 13 - FEBRUARY 10, 2008

by JENNIFER CROSS GANS



The Dutch don't wear clogs any more, except at tourist traps, the Netherlands are still flat, and nearly half the artists in this show of contemporary Dutch jewelry aren't Dutch—so what's going on here? Curator Andrea Wagner's goals were to shake up any stereotypes people might have about the country's art, and to showcase changes among the generation of jewelry artists following such luminaries as Gijs Bakker, Emmy van Leersun, and Ruudt Peters. The show also questions whether there is any overriding Dutch style, particularly since most of the exhibitors were schooled, at least in part, at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy and the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam.

All the artists on view have had a world-class classical training in the metal arts, but there isn't much visible in the way of precious metals and stones. Instead, the unusual materials become precious in their own right, whether they are antiques, recycled, natural wood, textiles, leather and fur, or plastics and epoxies. Several artists have done extensive research, particularly into man-made materials. Metal, when it occurs, is more commonly used as an accent.

In addition to a new view of preciousness, the show has its own definition of beauty, based on strong content. A number of artists expressed nostalgia for the past, specifically Dutch history. Iris Nieuwenburg created a brooch called *Dutch Glory*, featuring an antique photo of a woman in traditional costume. Francis Willemstijn, whose work is often based on traces of the disappearing past, fabricated *The Battle*, one of the few silver pieces in the show, saluting the country's triumphs as a seafaring nation.

Many of the works employed antique or recycled materials to deliver universal messages about love, life, and death. Constanze Schreiber combined silver and recycled iron horseshoe nails to create "Memento Mori" pendants, shaped like sinister and lumbering flies intent on their last meal. She showed a fur neckpiece with lead weights as a counterpoint, a reminder of the price the animal paid to create an object of beauty. Schreiber also fabricated *Mourning II*, a bracelet of silver skulls in memory of the dreadful legacy of the Pol Pot regime.

On a lighter note, a number of artists found whimsy and inspiration in household objects. One of the most striking was *Neckpiece/Plate: My Home is My Castle* by Gésine Hackenberg, who flawlessly cut small circles in an antique collectors' plate, mounting each disk in silver to create a necklace, then displayed the perforated plate for admirers to speculate on the process. She also enlisted kitchen towels to make a necklace, and as surfaces to render a *Hand Object*, *Spoon Votive*, and a *Spoon Necklace*.

Themes related to the environment, the body, and space exploration were also addressed in several works. The most appealing were two brooches by Ineke Heerkens, *Flourish Green* and *Stretching Bud* in silver and textile. An early piece by Iris Eichenberg titled *Hearts* featured an odd but lovingly clustered group of red wool ornaments, all bearing a passing resemblance to anatomical reality. Even stranger were out-of-this-world brooches by Jantje Fleischhut from her series "We Are All Space Travelers," and two

brooches by Katja Prins from her series "Machines Are Us" and "Anatorium."

The show certainly succeeded in its goal of provoking and challenging viewers, as well as eliminating any lingering perceptions of the Dutch as being staid or humorless. It also reveals that Dutch artists are leaders among other Europeans and American artists in their investigations of fabric, plastic, found objects, and other unexpected materials.

Jennifer Cross Gans is a writer and studio jeweler in San Francisco.

clockwise from top left

Iris Nieuwenburg
Dutch Glory (brooch), 2004
silver, synthetic resin, antique postcard, Victorian picture paper

Constanze Schreiber
Memento Mori IV (pendants), 2006
silver, used horseshoe nails
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 x 3/4"

Ineke Heerkens
Flourish Green (brooch), 2005
silver, textile, silkscreen ink
5 x 6 x 2 1/2"

Photos: Corrette Schoenaerts

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