

Cultural Diversity, Hybrid Identities



*Contemporary Jewellery
Art in South Africa*

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Becoming a contemporary jewellery artist in the highly diverse society of South Africa is a promising task and a true challenge.

A group of eleven graduating students of the Jewellery Design and Manufacture Department of the University of Johannesburg undertook profound research on individual themes. On the background of personal experiences and often hybrid identities, the young artists prepared the ground for individual artistic solutions to express their concerns through jewellery.

Jewellery is body-related and has emotional significance. It may have a purely ornamental function or a monetary value, but contemporary conceptual jewellery is seen as an artistic statement, be it personal or an expression of critical political issues. You may remember Madeleine Albright (former Minister of Foreign Affairs, USA), who never started diplomatic negotiations without wearing a specific brooch with a narrative content, expressing her mood or an underlying message to her counterparts.

The works selected and presented in this exhibition all contain the elements just described and have a distinct artistic expression and quality. The stylistic means and materials used are as varied as the themes they deal with. Socio-political and environmental concerns, such as load shedding, state capture, waste pollution and the extinction of animal species, are as important as questions of fair politics, LGBTQI+ issues, stress release, medical awareness campaigns and contemporary interpretations of ethnic and religious traditions.

The visitor will be surprised with unexpected pleasures of creativity and artistic expression. This exhibition is based on the co-operation of a mentoring programme between the University of Johannesburg, the "Business Scouts for Development" by GIZ (German Agency for International Co-operation), Natura Co-Lab, and NIROX.

– Martina Dempf, Curator



Stress is something that I have always struggled with. In my jewellery, I aim to record the emotions that I feel when working with wood. I tend to unintentionally fidget, which is something that happens naturally. It helps to calm my nerves and stay focused.

My handmade rings emphasise the tactility of wood, which provides a novel way to overcome stress. As opposed to pens, fidget cubes or spinners, wood does not make noise, nor does it have an age restriction. It is also wearable. As a jewellery designer, I have also incorporated metals such as brass within my woodwork that allows my jewellery pieces to stand out.

Yuty Chuang

Sensory Collection

2022

Two rings (brass and wood,
carved and mounted).



My work explores the relationship between two different ideas related to the future and nature, namely Afrofuturism and extinction. The purpose of the project is to create awareness and save a species.

In terms of importance and survival, the Lemur species is extinct. Using Afrofuturism, I highlight the importance of this species, while educating people about futuristic black people. Because of its abstract nature, my jewellery makes viewers question the origins of its design. As they dig deep, they will come to realise the source of my inspiration, which I hope will remain imbedded in their minds.

Yanda Gubevu

Future Deer
2022

Ring (silver, mounted and soldered)



Electricity is essential to both the jewellery industry and educational institutions, since it allows for the mass-manufacturing of products. In South Africa, load-shedding has had a big impact on both. This inspired me to come up with fresh ways to create jewellery without the aid of electricity-dependent instruments.

For me, creating and producing jewellery encourages the development of new skills like cold-joining and wire-working. Inspired by historical African artworks, each piece of jewellery I create features an exquisitely original African notion that draws the wearer in with its comfort. My design approach follows its tenets and uses modern tones and shapes.

Libron Mahlaola

Loadshedding Solution

2022

Pendant (Silver, copper, silicon,
filigree-work mounted)



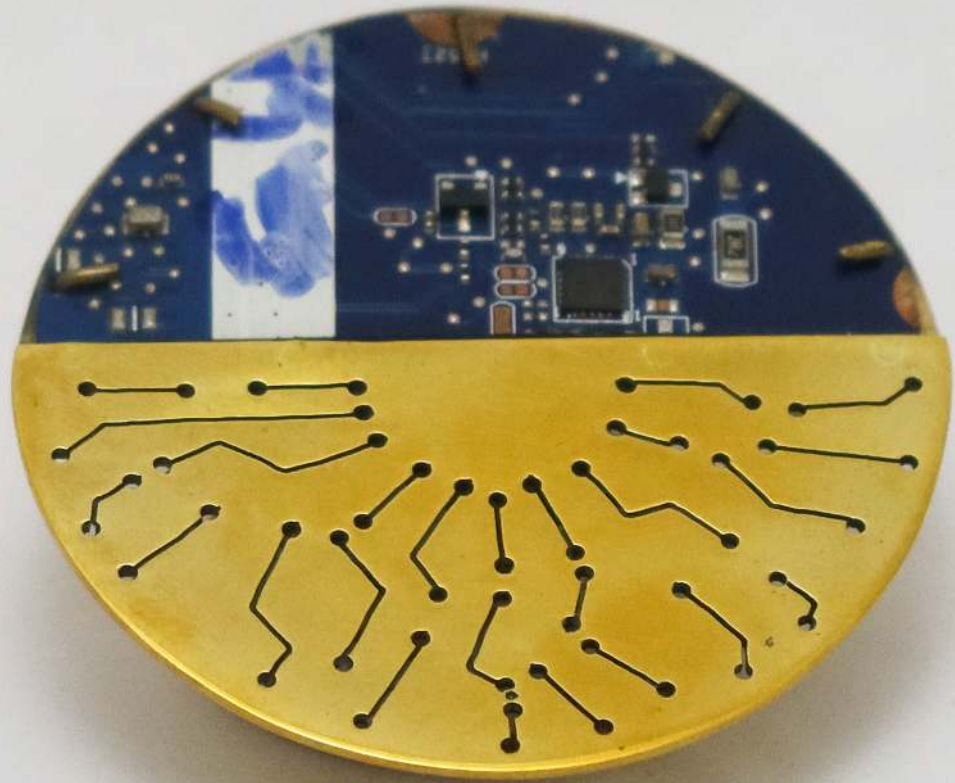
My collection comprises wearable contemporary jewellery pieces that speak to the problem of racial discrimination in the workplace, in business, and in universities. It strives to provide a solution that will benefit those working in the arts. I chose this topic because, as someone who has faced persecution and hardship, I want my art to spread love and unite people. Using materials like brass, copper, and the oxidisation of copper produces different colours that reflect humans of all races.

Conrad Kekana

World in our Hands

2022

Pendant (Copper, brass, oxidized,
green cabochon stone,
mounted and soldered)



Within sustainability, there are many avenues a jeweller can venture. For my work, I look at alternatives to metal and gemstones. In today's consumer culture, electronics are discarded and forgotten. The aim of my jewellery is to reuse and give new life to old, used electronics, using the circuit boards from laptops and televisions as a focal point.

Asaad Khan

Circuit Jewellery

2022

Brooch (Brass and circuit boards,
steel, cut, soldered and mounted)



My pieces speak about body politics, specifically hair politics. Made from hair and brass, they shed light on the present disparities between different textured hair and how these differences are used to create feelings of superiority and inferiority, which should not be the case. Eurocentric features should not be the benchmark for beauty standards.

However, in recent times, there has been a shift within the perception of beauty, with organisations like the Natural Hair Movement advocating, promoting, and celebrating individuals with natural hair. I hope these pieces help people understand the importance of representation in hair, and that all hair should be celebrated for its inherent beauty. By combining hair and brass, I emphasise how natural hair is as precious as gold. I hope these pieces help audiences recognise the importance of representation.

Lerato Maisela

Hairy Tale
2022

Pendant (Brass, zirconia gemstones,
human natural hair, silicon)



My jewellery serves as activism for people within the LGBTQI+ community. It describes discrimination towards the LGBTQI+ community, helping people to understand the struggles that this community go through. I made a range comprising stylised elements which represent a lotus flower. I would like the audience to understand the importance of being inclusive of all genders and sexes.

Nikita Mischa Bhula

Lotus Rebirth

2022

Ring (Aluminium, sculpted,
engraved and mounted)



I convey statements of political structuralism through the cracks and fragments of my work in mixed-media, incorporating the flaws in the materials used, as well as coin motifs, as a focal point.

This work is titled *Statement Jewellery-State Capture*. It projects the social and economic disparities within South Africa. The use of mixed-media communicates that we are widely known as a rainbow nation of mixed cultures and races. The work tests the boundaries of aesthetic and non-aesthetic jewellery designs, not only challenging the norm of dispensing of cracked and fragmented jewellery pieces, but also of wearable versus non-wearable jewellery.

I would like to communicate the message of socio-economic decline in countries undergoing state capture. This will enable my views to be shared with the audience as they experience the transition and transformation of the work for its aesthetic and non-aesthetic values.

Karabo Gabanakosi

Fragile Line
2022

Ring (glass, hand-made
glass flow)



In 2010, my mother was diagnosed with Sarcoidosis, 'an inflammatory, multi systemic disease of unknown cause with a wide range of clinical manifestations.' The formation of small growths can affect any organ in the body, in particular the lungs. There is no known cause or cure, however, several treatments have been explored. My goal was to create a series of functional adornments that serve as a visual representation for people battling with Sarcoidosis. The globally accepted symbol for this disease is a snowflake. After experimenting, I chose to create a large brooch with six smaller, interchangeable attachments. The base resembles a sash or banner. It developed subconsciously, while thinking about how much my mother means to me. Other materials include cardstock and paper in various shades of purple. The steel base uses magnets to adorn to clothing. I also wanted to create a smaller brooch as an awareness-raising pin, using the decoupage method to glue the purple-coloured codes on. I riveted the word 'Sarcoidosis' on the top part of the snowflake and a smaller, aluminium snowflake at the bottom.

Liza Findt

Sarcoidosis 2022

Body object (aluminium plate, pierced and cut, coloured paper and cardstock, steel plate, vinyl fabric with magnetic fasteners)



A wise man once told me that one has to be careful of who or what one takes for granted. He asked me, 'what is smarter between a bird and a human?' I answered, 'a human.' The wise man explained that he believes humans can learn a lot from animals, stating that a bird builds a home first before making babies, while humans often make babies before building a home. Since then, my perspective has changed. I am more conscious about the natural materials found in our surroundings and how humans and other species interact.

I look at animal totems, inspired by Bapedi cultural traditions, to produce contemporary jewellery that celebrates and preserves Bapedi and African cultural heritage. Bapedi people in South Africa use animal totems to express their identity. They associate their clans with certain animals. For my designs, I emulated a lion and a cow. As humans, we communicate in different languages. This jewellery gives Bapedi people an alternative way to express their identity.

Mmeshi Nkadimeng

Ba Tau

2022

Ring

(wood and brass,
carved and mounted)



This project explores how indigenous materials can be incorporated into a highly globalised jewellery industry, both in South Africa and abroad, without losing its true meaning and purpose. That is the study on its own and it has been going on for years.

Mbuso Zondi

*Indigenous Materials in
Contemporary Designs*
2022

Cow bones, shell, beads (rock) and
cow horn made through retri-
culation, frogging, and stringing.

Martina Dempf

In September 2022, world-renowned jewellery designer Martina Dempf began working with this group of students from the Jewellery Design and Manufacture Department of the University of Johannesburg. Her collaboration with the Department, particularly Farieda Nazier, served as a source of guidance and inspiration for the students. As such, this exhibition also includes a selection of Dempf's jewellery, which provides visitors with some context to the students' experimentation with different materials and the aesthetic sensibilities employed in their work.

Artist statement:

Nature has always inspired scientists, artists, and philosophers. The earliest evidence of artistic expression comes from man's natural environment and is – of course – made of natural materials.

In my works, I try to approach the subject of material culture from today's perspective. Jewellery, as a body-related and emotional object, has a special expressiveness for me.

I am a jewellery artist and ethnologist. In my creations, I often reflect and interpret concepts and narratives of cultures that I have personally experienced during ethnological research and jewellery art workshops in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, in a personal and contemporary way.

Through this intensive contact with cultures that still live much closer and more respectful to natural conditions than the modern city dweller, nature also becomes the center of design and artistic expression

for me, often in combination with contemporary narrative elements.

The materials I use are carefully selected. I pay a lot of attention to the sustainability and environmental friendliness of my materials. Metals are melted down and reused or otherwise recycled. Wood and other materials are used exclusively according to species protection criteria.

This results in authentic works with an unmistakable aura. Each object has its own story and emotional level. It is intended to arouse the curiosity and imagination of the viewer to fathom the respective story, to take the objects in hand and use them as body ornaments.



Motion 1

2020

Brooch (silver and hazelnut wood)

14 x 7 x 5 cm

Photo: Martin Beckett

Twister 1

2018

Necklace (silver and hazelnut wood)

36 x 20 x 5 cm

Photo: Harald Müller-Dempf





Origin 3

2018

Necklace with pendant (silver and ebony wood)

Chain: 45 cm; pendant: 9 x 6 x 3 cm.

Photo: Uwe Steckhan



Aleppo

2016

Becklace (silver and ancient teak wood)

9 x 6 x 6 cm

Photo: Agata Szymanska-Medina



Meditation 1

2009

Necklace with pendant (silver and amboina wood)

Chain: 50 cm; pendant: 14 x 14 x 4 cm.

Photo: Sebastian Ahlers

Acknowledgments

On behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development the "Mentoring programme" is implemented by the Business Scouts for Development Programme through master jeweller and jewellery designer Martina Dempf together with the Jewellery Department at the University of Johannesburg.

In particular we would like to thank Farieda Nazier and Andrea Joubert (University of Johannesburg, FADA) for overseeing this project, as well as Manthe Ribane from making her space, NATURA co-lab available and for working closely with Martina and the students during the curatorial phase of the project. Similarly, to Benji Liebmann, Sven Christian, LeRoy Croft, Tammy du Toit, and the rest of the NIROX team for hosting us. Similarly, to Teresa Theis, GIZ (Business Scouts for Development), Christiane Stock (GIZ Welt-wal-z student, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Art, XS Jewellery), and the students, who have dedicated their best capacities and skills to create art jewellery.

