

# **Jacomijn van der Donk**

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translation Miranda Mion

Your work,

When I see your work, the first thing that comes to mind is that it is mostly concerned with display, a presentation of things visible. Your work demands a lot of room and always seems to get it, no matter if it's being worn or is lying on your desk. It is the sensual and visual aspect of your work that causes this first impression. Every time you show your work there is a clear outline of an idea. Every exhibition is a new project and also a new piece. In Waregem you presented your rings as gifts by placing them in the palms of hands, which seem to reach out from the wall. Presenting jewellery as gifts, is treating the matter properly... we agree those things are not a human necessity. They may even be superfluous nonsense and yet we cannot live without them! A hand reaching out to me. Does it want something from me as well? It does show me that jewellery is about wearing, holding, taking away; about the sense of touch, about support and shelter.

Hands are important in our trade, but so is the neck. That personal and vulnerable body part that stands upright while the rest of the body just hangs there. And importantly, the area around the neck frames the face so that its décor carries extra impact. The symmetry and sculptural quality of the neck make it a most powerful place for hanging and laying down art.

I always wonder why so many artists focus their attention on one kind of jewellery. You concentrate on the neck, the arm and the finger. I wonder if you will ever make a nice brooch. You once told me that it is absolutely out of question: a brooch would interfere with your desire to actually feel and experience the object. You seem to think that a brooch is a fast and shallow way to communicate, and yet you are very interested in the ostentatiousness of jewellery. Besides, you make every new pendant bigger and bigger, so they look like brooches anyway.

Rather than standing coldly alone your jewellery works better with skin on which it rests. The pieces are flexible and adjust to every movement of the body. Your dark filigree jewellery makes an amazing effect when worn on a fair skin. Like dark shadows on brightly lit wall, they show a quality of contrast – a negative and positive side, which one do I see?

You make jewellery a part of wardrobe. The body becomes the ornament and underlying your work is the focus on people who are actually going to wear it. Your focus on the body brings about a rare experience. Is it you who accentuates the body? The wearer not only wants to have your jewellery but also your kind of magic. He wants a part of your charm and beauty.

Or are you manipulating us and playing a trick? A lot of your work reminds me of a gesture of hands that are encircling the neck. It is a gesture going from a clenching to a soothing and even to an encouraging one. I named it the "reversible gesture", because it is also an action of communication. There is this bracelet that looks like a crown, which is impossible to put on without the help of another pair of hands. I know this human interaction is exactly what you want. For me, this interactivity is in conflict with the distinct and stylish aspect of your work. How can you combine passion and bluff, features inspired from the streets of Amsterdam, with posh and fashionable qualities? I am probably the only one bothered with this friction.

There are more opposites in your work. Your obsessive interest in nature is another contrast to your inspiration derived from the streets. You must have been taught from an early age to search for these natural objects. This passion for collecting objects; have you ever considered that you have to get rid of all the things you accumulate? I always thought of abundance as the tragedy of collecting. I compare the collector's search with watching the sunrise. I refuse to believe that I already know what tomorrow's sunrise will look like, and that I therefore don't have to watch it. The image of a rising sun is just as cliché as the size of a pebble stone. The pebble stone is a detail, and it's the details combined that form the universe. I think, ultimately every building revolves around its detail.

I saw the box for "the little hanger" for the first time in September of this year. Very bold, indeed, to present jewellery on a wooden hanger. The necklace is placed on a hanger in a box that looks like a huge aquarium. The box is the size of a human being. Again, you are playing with the concept of jewellery. In this presentation there is a contradiction between fantasy and real life. It's like looking at yourself in a shop window and at the clothes on display, imagining that you're wearing the clothes you can ask yourself: what will I look like when I wear this, will it suit me? But always when you want something you can't get, these questions should not be revealed. Where this imaginative fitting is going on, the box actually looks like a fitting room as well. There it is again: the contrast between everyday reality and an incredible dream world.

When I approach a new piece in your collection, and thereby approach the wearer, an image within the object becomes clear to me. Oval shaped pieces are loosely connected to each other – forming an erotic picture. It is the wearer who can decide whether this picture is displayed or not, but sometimes a slight stir will give a chance for a quick peek. The shape of the object is that of a buttoned up collarette. The object exists on many levels. Top-centre there is a stone made of glass, which magnifies the skin between the two collarbones, making it look like a jewel. This little piece of skin is special even before you made this object around it.

The funny thing is that one has to put on the collarette around one's neck. All those levels cause this piece to be full of information. Luckily, the visible side stays clear.

During our many enthralling conversations you've always said that you imagine yourself to be an actor in a play with both object and humans wearing nothing, except your jewellery. You say that this nakedness is the perfect basis for your art, because only then does your art touch all the senses. And only in this situation is your work both protective and revealing.

I imagine that the process of a new piece starts with questions like: How does it work? Who is going to wear it? Where is it going? You go about your work like a playwright or a choreographer who does not so much focus on the detail but concentrates on the entire picture. The shape and form of the exhibition is on your mind from the very start. This has got to have something to do with the fact that your work has to present people, the most important part of your jewellery. Others must have noticed this as well: never does your work rest on a body, neither in a presentation or a photograph. You must find this sort of presentation too obvious to make your intention clear. I think it would make your art look too general. After all it is the tactile sensation of your work that is important and a picture of that is too easy.

There is one piece of jewellery that I would like to call "the Ray", do you mind if I name it as such? I find it very classical, but not just that. It also connects different cultural norms. The European beauty norm is different than that in Japan. There, what is considered the arousing part of a woman's body is her back, and not her breasts,

like here in Europe. It is good to see that you manage to sink these differences. The tail of "the Ray" starts where western jewellery stops: it falls all the way down the back. Again, there are the filigree and lace aspect in it, which contrast the skin. The garnets are as red as pigeon blood: colour red so dark that it almost looks like black.

Why did you start using those materials? I think because you've discovered the beauty and intimacy in small objects and you don't want them to look like any ordinary jewellery. Silver is a very precious but also a very shiny metal, it reflects more light than any material we know. It does not have a colour, so its appearance depends on its environment. You make it black and, thus you cause its existence to be noticed.

Every time I look at your work it makes a reserved impression; wouldn't call it cool because that would oppose everything I said so far, but I feel a distance. I get the same feeling when I look at your jewellery pictured in a photograph. The pieces often look like heavenly bodies, the way they float in the air. Heavenly bodies are cold, but every step closer to your work reveals a warmth and sensuality. Finally, when I am holding the piece I immediately forget that first impression. I think this is an amazing quality.

It isn't the shape of the work that looks a little hard and cold. The shape never looks aggressive because it is rounded off. Perhaps your work can be compared to the temperature of water: it rises once the liquid is stirred. It probably is your intention that we hesitate before we plunge in. The reserved impression is there to serve as an obstacle, to prevent your audience from coming closer too fast. Only when they are close they feel the warm attraction and may experience your jewellery with all their senses.

I like to compare it with the face make-up. The paint is there to appeal, but also to protect and create a distance. I don't intend to look for a meaning in your work, but I do find it obvious that your work has a certain amount of subtlety in that it doesn't attract attention too quickly.

I wasn't at all surprised when you told me that you were absolutely overwhelmed by Lalique's exhibition in Paris, because I experienced the same sort of distance in his work as I do in yours. Besides, your work has a lot of Art Nouveau and Art Deco features.

It is perhaps dangerous to put it like this, but mind and hand are the two most important elements in our trade. The creation of small objects means that you have to make a lot of big decisions in a short time. Your skilled hands can handle that. If mind and hands are both trained, there will be a lot of opportunities for intuition. In your case, you can control your intuition well enough, so it doesn't work in your disadvantage.

Finally, other typical features of your work are its frankness and its universality. It is obvious that your work is ready to take over the world. I am glad that you don't pay any attention to the rules and codes that are known to our profession and taught in the art-schools. You float freely through the universe and the form of your art is independent from others. While other people shout louder, your choice of shapes is quicker and clearer than others.