Adornment, Armor and Amulets: The Astonishing Jewelry of Nancy Worden

Jewelry connects to life's memories, seductions, vanities, sorrows and celebrations. Body ornament as one of the oldest arts in the world, has been found in sites that date back thousands of years Nancy Worden's jewelry builds on these ancient traditions and transforms them by means of modern techniques and materials She reclaims mundane detritus from everyday life and makes it beautiful. Although her point of departure is often personal experience, Worden expands the content of jewelry with references to politics, history, and mythology that resonate with the realities of modern life.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1954, Worden was raised in an academic family that valued literature, art and politics. When she was still a child, her family moved to the Central Washington communities of Yakima and then Ellensburg. In spite of the pervading conservatism, they followed the Civil Rights movement and actively protested the war in Vietnam. Women in her family were encouraged to speak up, pursue a college degree and lead an active professional life. These family traditions provide the bedrock for her career as an outspoken narrative artist.

REFERENCE POINTS

Nancy Worden has a deep respect for earlier jewelry traditions as well as other cultural traditions, but as she adopts formal elements from other periods and cultures, she transforms them according to her contemporary perspectives. Her first self conscious historical reference was the result of a student assignment to investigate Native American jewelry design. Initiation Necklace (1977) was her response, a contemporary translation of the traditional squash blossom necklace, which includes a crescent shape and central pendant. Throughout her career, Worden has repeatedly returned to this format, but she has always altered it with contemporary ideas and materials.

Another historical format adapted to new ideas is what Worden calls the Victorian "drippy" necklace. Which Way? (1989) alludes to this format with its multiple elegant swoops that drape over the chest. The humble found materials—plumber's chain, typewriter letters (N, S, E, W- hence the title), and the compass at the center—amusingly update the Victorian format.

In Lifting Weights (2006), Worden transforms the format from Victorian to Modernist. Instead of the Victorian elegance of looping chains, the effect is mechanical. Hanging from pulleys are lead weights that move when they are pulled. Stamped texts on the lead weights literally balance the needs of others with those of the wearer. In the front are the words "I want," "I need," "I should," "I mustn't." In the back the weights read "they want" and "they need". In contrast to Which Way?, where the directions are literally spelled out, Lifting Weights offers conflicting messages. In contrast to Victorian women's clearly established social norms modern women lack clear codes for dealing with multiple pressures.

The elegant art nouveau jewelry of René Lalique (1865 – 1945) provides another reference point for Worden's jewelry. Lalique used a variety of materials and techniques

combined with precious stones and metals to suggest nature and eroticism. Worden pays homage to Lalique with her brooch A Funny Feeling (1994), but she combines the art nouveau elegance of a sinuous cast silver vine and a dangling pearl with a highly personal choice of cloves and tacks set in an ordinary eye glass lens. This contradiction of the beautiful and the uncomfortable is one trademark of Nancy Worden's jewelry.
Worden's ability to combine odd materials into harmonious forms is based in a perspective that she acquired in her earliest years. Worden first jewelry teacher was Kay Crimp, who was teaching in her high school in Ellensburg, Washington. Crimp was a student of Ramona Solberg (1921-2005), an internationally renowned jeweler based in the Northwest, who lived and taught in Ellensburg for many years. Solberg was known for her beads and assemblage necklaces that incorporated materials and objects she found on her many trips abroad. These pendants and necklaces were the first real studio jewelry Worden ever saw. Worden pays formal homage to Solberg in The Good Omen (2004). The beads, evoking a modernist arch, are filled with rusted steel that create contrasting textures and tones; chunks of aggregate from the destroyed King Dome sports stadium in Seattle also found their way into some of the beads. While the formal shapes salute Solberg, the metaphor of the necklace is characteristic Worden. The Good Omen captures her exuberance when she surprised a flock of bright blue butterflies that she came upon at a time when she was depressed. Asymmetrically scattered over the modernist segments are silver ears that honor the psychologist who helped her overcome depression.
Nancy Worden's jewelry has deep roots in her study from 1972 to 1978 with Ken Cory (1943-1994) at Central Washington University. Cory's jewelry was often technically experimental, but extremely refined. His small scale pins suggest subtle archetypal forms with scrupulously crafted precious metals. He carefully planned his work through dozens of preliminary sketches. Simultaneously with his personal work, Cory collaborated with graphic artist and painter, Leslie Le Pere, as the Pencil Brothers. Together, they celebrated popular culture by creating small scale- works that suggest both a deep love of the natural world and an irreverent humor that resulted in quasi surrealist fantasy images. Cory loved practical jokes and explicit male sexual overtones. In contrast, Worden's humor is laced with feminine imagery and references to the dark side of life.
Don Tompkins(1933-1982) is another Northwest artist who provided a point of departure for Nancy Worden. In the late 1960s Tompkins worked with Ramona Solberg at Central Washington State College. His large Pop- influenced pendants and brooches with direct references to contemporary celebrities are sometimes echoed in Worden's work. Silence is Golden(1998) is Worden's conscious salute to Don Tompkins. The main pendant of the necklace is a vintage black and white rotary phone dial, with a cast metal mouth in the center. The cast mouth echoes a Tompkins motif as does the cut out gold bubble stamped with "silence is golden." The necklace itself has tongue shaped red stones and coiled telephone cord from old fashioned phones. Silence is Golden is also about telephone solicitors and the incessant noise of the media
In 1970 the exhibition and book, Objects USA defined the American Craft Movement. It is still the definitive source on the subject. It included such now well known artists as ceramist Peter Voulkos, glassblowers Harvey Littleton and Dale Chihuly, fiber artist Leonora Tawney, and jewelers Ramona Solberg, and Ken Cory As these artists admired the recognizable imagery in contemporary artists like Robert Rauschenberg Roy

Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol, as well as the slick reductive forms of the minimalists, they expanded the possibilities of traditional craft materials ,
When Worden was a student, modernist jeweler Olag Skoogfors (1930 – 1975) was widely admired for his technical and formal innovations As a metal smith, he excelled in soldered lines that created framing devices and "wrinkled" surfaces based on careful control of heated metal surfaces (called reticulation). He added precious stones to his sculptural metal pins for texture and color. Worden is still playfully experimenting with his trademark hanging pearl or gem stone .
Worden's graduate training with Gary Noffke at the University of Georgia expanded her technical proficiency. Approaching form and process like a potter, he explores the same forms over and over, like variations of a musical theme. In contrast to the systematic approach of Cory, Noffke encouraged Worden to work rapidly and intuitively with precious materials.
Following graduate school, Worden worked for five years in the male dominated world of jewelry manufacturing, an intense and demanding experience that exponentially increased her technical proficiency. Worden was mentored by skilled tradesmen who could make almost any kind of jewelry imaginable. At the same time she herself was hardened and tempered in the realities of the working world for a woman.

MATERIALS and TECHNIQUES,
Precious metals and stones have always been basic materials for jewelry. In Worden's jewelry, these elegant materials are combined with scrap metal, concrete, plastic, and glass found in the street. But Worden goes a step further. She also works with a dizzying array of found materials selected for their textures, shapes, tactile qualities, and, most importantly, their associations.
Found materials are sometimes selected from what she calls her "accumulations," collections of discarded objects like bottle tops, clothespins, eyeglass lenses, credit cards, scraps of metal, tire weights, cigarette butts, wishbones, fortunes from cookies, souvenir pennies, champagne corks, and electric typewriter balls. She also collects old phone parts, rifle shells, coiled steel wire and electrical insulators, oven thermometers, clocks, and watches. Barbie Doll arms and the scaled-down organs from the anatomical model known as the "Visible Woman" serve as the sources for models that become electroformed body parts.
Narratives and metaphors drive Worden's choice of materials and techniques. She chooses whatever material will best convey her specific idea for a particular piece of jewelry. For example, in Balancing Right and Left (2000), a straightforward symmetrical necklace, hard electroformed beads based on miniature brains alternate with watercolor brushes made from the soft hair of a mongoose spread out like flowers. The materials as well as the balance of the composition convey a metaphor for an exactly alternating rhythm of the left and right brain, the intellectual and the intuitive.
Beans in Your Ears (1996), constructed from eyeglass lenses used as settings for dried beans, is a delightful variant on the squash blossom format. Worden chooses eye glass lenses for both their formal qualities invoking an age-old jewelry tradition, the glass lens protects an "artifact." In Beans in Your Ears, the lens-covered artifacts alternate with cast bronze and silver ears inset with a single blue lapis bead. The pendant has a larger bean-filled lens, blue plastic ear plugs and pointed ears made of dinosaur bone. Enumerating

all the materials underscores a primary Worden characteristic, a willingness to use anything that gets her point across. Taken together, the materials construct a narrative based on Worden's experience as PTA president- she often presided over meetings where everybody was talking and nobody listening.

Another example of materials that drive a narrative is Dead or Alive (1997). It uses resin bear claws and found scraps of fur punctuated by glass fish eyes from a taxidermist, . The composition echoes traditional Native American grizzly bear claw necklaces. Worden intends the necklace to be empowering, but in a contemporary substitution, her fur comes from thrift shops, rather than as a result of prowess in hunting (other than hunting in thrift shops). The necklace also includes bullet casings, beads made from dimes. A camera lens at the center adds another metaphor. The necklace is about the human need to both kill and take a souvenir from a wild creature.

Worden's choice of technique is as intentional and wide-ranging as her use of materials. She combines casting, fabricating, assemblage, electroforming, and other techniques in a single work. Perhaps the most unusual technique in this list is electroforming, in which metal is added to a form by use of an electric current.

Worden first used electroforming in The Importance of Good Manners (1995), three tiaras made for the City of Seattle. The technique enabled her to enlarge her forms without increasing their weight. Charity Tiara refers to philanthropy. Hospitality Tiara is about food. Politically Correct Tiara blatantly breaks rules with politically charged materials like elephant ivory, ebony and fur. In contrast to the heavy spirit of the tiaras, Gilding the Past (2001), also electroformed, is cheerful and light, with alternating gilded peace symbols and happy faces in a double strand of coral, turquoise, and coin beads. The two strands are connected by gilded electroformed bones.

Electroforming can also create distance from the original found object. Initiation Necklace (1977) and Exosquelette #1 (2003) both include hair curlers, but in the first they are easily recognized, and in the second they are electroformed into a subtle repeated pattern that takes on a second meaning as vertebrae-like bones. Combined with carefully set eyes both front and back, the hair curlers become a protective device.

Two early works display Worden's ability to combine a variety of techniques and crazy materials. A baroque-looking wisdom tooth and cast gold crown in Venetian Vacation (1986) combine with smashed "Add-a-Beads," ear- like shells, and pearls dangled on spiraled gold. The effect is simultaneously lush and annoying, similar to the aesthetic of the over elaborate containers for religious reliquaries. Eyelet Lace (1984) combines slick greenish plastic and quartz with cast lace. It has a protective charm made from tourmaline at its center. The old plastic frames introduce odd colors, and strange shapes that suggest eerie mysterious powers. That strangeness is reinforced by the lace dipped in silver that hangs from the bottom.

RITES OF PASSAGE

One of jewelry's traditional functions has been to commemorate a rite of passage. Worden's jewelry connects to her own passages as a young girl, a woman, a mother, a friend, a daughter, a granddaughter, and a wife in the United States of the late 20th century.

Initiation Necklace honors her maternal grandmother who insisted that Worden dress as a proper young lady, including permed hair, when she reached adolescence. This oddly

elegant necklace incorporates two types of pink hair rollers to form the characteristic squash blossom shape. Made in 1977 when women's liberation rejected traditional feminine actions, colors, and forms, the necklace makes a defiantly feminine statement with its pink hair curlers.

Even more playfully referring to a rite of passage is Resolution to Lose (1992), an eyeglass format brooch full of popped popcorn with a cancellation sign etched across the glass. The popcorn was shamelessly borrowed from the Pencil Brothers's Pop Quiz, (1973) because Worden liked its formal color relationships. In contrast with the Pencil Brothers's lighthearted pun on firecrackers and academic tests, Worden refers to weight loss—here the baby fat that she gained while she was pregnant.

Planning for our children to receive an inheritance is another rite of passage. Conflicts over inheritance can be an intense process that brings out the worst in families. Worden has addressed that in several works, particularly Hidden Agenda 1994, an odd, ugly brooch with shark's teeth floating in sand in its circular center. In the leaves that frame it, a gun lurks. It suggests a dark, paranoid mood.

The Family Fortune (1994) addresses the more specific situation that artists frequently have little to leave in traditional wealth. The necklace is built from eye glass lenses used as settings for Chinese fortune cookie fortunes, alternating with gold wish bones. The work invokes the idea of superstition and false hopes. For Worden, it also represented another rite of passage- as she made it, she came to realize that what artists leave their children are intangibles like a love of art, rather than a monetary inheritance.

Mourning jewelry commemorates death and loss, the most profound rite of passage. During Queen Victoria's reign, after the death of Prince Albert, it became common for women to wear jewelry that commemorated lost ones, either with a lock of hair, or chains and brooches fashioned from black materials like jet, bog oak and vulcanite. Worden collects some of this "hair jewelry" and has even created brooches that incorporate hair, one of the parts of the body that never rots. But she has also expanded mourning jewelry beyond lockets and medals.

Commemorative and mourning jewelry assumed profound significance for Worden when Ken Cory died unexpectedly of undiagnosed diabetes. Out of My System (1994) refers directly to the cause of his death. The heart shape is completed by plastic tubing on one side, referring to medical supplies. Inside are a cast kidney charm and a kidney bean. Red coral evokes an aorta, and the baroque pearl suggests a mystery organ. The brooch seems to be ripped open, with the inside of the heart exposed. It takes commemoration and mourning to a level of intensity that is socially unacceptable. This small brooch declares itself as an interruption in the silence that veils illness, organs, and the physical body in a state of malfunction.

The same can be said of Buying Time (2000), which commemorates Nancy Worden's mother who died of ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. The artist's grandmother, mother, and sister have all died of ALS. In this poignant work of commemorative jewelry, the necklace itself is made of two strands of plastic tubing from a ventilator. The central pendent has small metal lungs with a tracheotomy tube inserted. Glass egg timers filled with red sand suggest that ventilators just buy the patient a little time. The mostly horizontal position of the timers means that as the wearer moves, the sand may or may not move; life may or may not run out.

RELATIONSHIPS

Much of Worden's jewelry is about experiences between people. Because she is a woman, the experiences are frequently feminist as we see in The Middle Aged Mom Series of the early 1990 which directly expressed both her defiance of traditional limitations for women and her assertion of new possibilities.

This series was a turning point for Worden. She was suddenly struck by the fact that she was limiting her jewelry to its traditional function of ostentatious display and decoration. The event that led to that realization was designing "Pounding Hearts, Singing Feet," an exhibition of Eastern European dance costumes, for the Northwest Folk life Festival in 1991. As she listened to stories about the histories of the costumes from the women who owned them, Worden had an urge to reconnect her artwork with her own stories.

She returned to her "idea" training with Ken Cory by carefully choosing unusual materials that had personal resonance. The desire to redirect her art was affirmed by a grant from Artist Trust that enabled her to make the Middle-Aged Mom series that includes Runnin' Yo Mama Ragged (1992), Overprotective Impulse (1993), Bathroom Bowl Blues (1992), I Feel Pretty (1993), Nights in Shining Armor (1994), and Mixed Messages (1993).The titles alone tell us that Worden is commenting on the craziness of parenting, conflicting views of child-raising, and the contradictions of what we expect and what we get.

Runnin' Yo Mama Ragged is built around a purple watch face surrounded by castings of small shoes from dolls. The shoes can be spun around the clock face, a humorous outlet for the harried mother racing from one event to another. Yet, this mother keeps hold of her dignity; the brooch has inset amethysts and the shoes are cast in silver. Whatever is coming down on this family is going to be coming down in style.

In Overprotective Impulse, a reproduction of a folk painting of a stiffly seated, overdressed young girl surrounded by pieces of fruit is placed behind an eyeglass lens. A chain crosses in front, hanging from a heart at one end and a padlock at the other. Even more protection comes from a gun, an all seeing eye, and spiky stones. The brooch dates to when Worden's own daughter was growing up, but the theme would be familiar to any mother.

The last three works in this series are more obviously feminist. Nights in Shining Armor has a bright pink condom and a penis-shaped pearl next to a small cast "knight" and a "lifesaver." This outrageous work says forget getting saved by men from our follies; be prepared to take care of yourself. Bathroom Bowl Blues has a little brush curving over the top and a sponge behind the lens, a hilarious reference to the humblest of household chores.

I Feel Pretty with its fake fingernails, an eyelash set on vintage lace, and a little cast ballerina commemorates a prom organized for her Worden's 40th birthday. But the brooch is also beautifully designed, asymmetrically weighted, ironic, funny, and serious all at the same time. With ultra- feminine materials, it revels in femaleness as much as feminism.

In contrast to the low relief brooches, necklaces like Repairing the Nest (1999), Conjugal Bushwacking (2000), and Grafting (2000) are more sculptural, but they are equally layered with contradictions. While they appear elegant, the branch-like forms address conflicts between people. Repairing the Nest suggests a circular nest with electroformed branches based on cottonwood sticks. Made when the artist and her husband were remodeling their home, a time when many couples break up, it suggests the idea of

reconstructing a relationship. Conjugal Bushwacking has a dominant pendant that interlaces silver and copper branches with tangled arms. The pendent suggests that energetically clearing underbrush is a metaphor for clearing the air. The rest of the necklace is composed of chunky lava beads, actively engages the wearer in the discomfort of the situation. The silver branches of Grafting wind around the neck like tentacles; they sprout solid gold cast ears, hearts and arms, representing the capacity of the human brain to branch out in new directions.

Electric Fence (2007) is made of coiled wire and tubes from old fashioned electrical wiring. At the center is a cow's vertebrae bone, a literal and metaphorical backbone. Based on Worden's childhood memories of rural electric fences, it suggests fear of intimacy since electric fences give a shock.

POLITICAL THEMES

While personal politics are evident in most of Worden's work, a personal experience can become a metaphor for a larger comment on society. The Seven Deadly Sins 1994 was stimulated by a disagreement with a neighbor, but Worden translated it into a darkly humorous expose of the elevation of vice in popular culture. The necklace has eyeglass lens units that each refer to a sin: envy–green eyeballs, sloth–broken jewelry blades, gluttony–Hershey's Kisses wrappers, lust–brass screws, wrath–broken glass, avarice–credit cards, and greed–fake rubies. In between each lens a small cast-silver devil's head creates the alternate bead rhythm. On the back of each lens, mounted in a "flaming" setting, is a photograph of a celebrity with his or her assigned sin: envy–Bo Derrick, sloth –Zsa Zsa Gabor, gluttony–Elvis Presley, lust–Woody Allen, wrath–Lorena Bobbitt, avarice–Leona Helmsley. Linking people elevated as icons in our society to biblical vices can also be read as a metaphor for the general dysfunction of our social and political world.

The same devil heads show up again in Hologram Hell 1998, a work Worden designed by asking herself, what would a modern slave bracelet look like? Her answer was, not surprisingly, a bracelet based on credit cards. Each silver link of the bracelet has a partial credit card, a bezel set onyx stone, and a devil's head cast in gold. Hologram Theater (1998) uses the same materials, but with gold comedy and silver tragedy masks molded from toy charms. In The Seven Deadly Sins and the Hologram bracelets, Worden incorporates a different kind of found object—that of commercial and popular culture—by using credit cards and portraits of celebrities.

Armed and Dangerous (1998) addresses the power of religion over people's lives. Using a squash blossom format, the pendant is an oversized cross stuffed with money. The necklace is made of rifle shells that hold black onyx bullets and green stones the color of money. The work is a reference to a Christian fundamentalist group that directly affected Worden's family. But not withstanding its simplicity, the imagery of Armed and Dangerous still suggests a loaded threat

Aside from fear in general, fear of poverty and its corollary, the greedy pursuit of money, obsess both individuals and American society as a whole. Broken Trust (1992) and Diamonds and Lust (1998) address that pursuit. Broken Trust puts real cut up money behind glass lenses, half of which are broken on purpose, alluding to the erosion of trust in the federal government.

Diamonds and Lust refers to the greed of sports team owners that take money away from the basic needs of ordinary citizens. The main motifs of the necklace

emphasize the supremacy of money in our national pastime. The pendant, in the shape of a baseball diamond, is stuffed with money; an elegant pearl hangs from a small gold baseball bat. On either side of the pendant are four gold-plated arms holding coins. On the back, pierced letters read "PLAY BALL." The overall effect is both elegant and humorous.

As Worden observed people's vindictive behavior after 9/11, she made Vicious Circus (2002). Referring to the calls for revenge, the beads are cast-silver mouths with gold-plated serpents' tongues snapping out. The snake mouths alternate with multicolored star beads and a clasp in the shape of a clown face. This "vicious" circus of serpents and clowns evokes the cacophony of uninformed and hateful conversations that erupted after the attack on the World Trade Center. Also from the post 9/11 period, but saluting the opposite spirit, is Circle Dance (2001), a necklace of cast arms that hold on to each other and encircle the neck, suggesting collaboration and community.

Terminology (1996) comments on misunderstandings that can result from careless speech in a public sphere. Old fashioned IBM Selectric typewriter balls alternate with flat, silver pill-like shapes. The work is reversible; the wearer can choose to expose politically correct terms or rude epithets according to their mood and company. For example, on one pill, it says "fat" on one side and "pleasantly plump" on the reverse. Other beads refer to sex, gender, race, swearing and politics. As Worden explains, "Terminology came out of years of attending community meetings in the most diverse legislative district in the state and observing misunderstandings arise from unfortunate word usage."

The necklace format is dramatically expanded to an armor-like neckpiece with Literal Defense (2007). Although this work mainly lies on the shoulders, rather than the chest, it evokes the steel breastplates of medieval soldiers. Painstakingly stamped on the entire surface are quotes from various authors who champion art education. Upended typewriter balls with fish eyes are both a jagged threat and a protective device. Worden dedicated Literal Defense to the armies of art teachers that do daily battle with those who consider art education superfluous.

FEMINISM

As already suggested, feminism informs much of Worden's jewelry and sometimes it is the main subject. Her jewelry is primarily designed for and worn by women. Historically, in the United States, men have purchased expensive jewelry for women as a sign of love or appreciation. But as women have gained wealth and independence, they have become buyers of jewelry for themselves. If a woman chooses to wear a Nancy Worden necklace, she makes a statement about her self, her confidence, and often her politics.

The Middle Aged Mom series is one starting point for thinking about this aspect of Worden's work. From a later era in her life, at the advent of her fifties, she observed many women her age abandoning earlier ambitions, a condition she refers to as "spiritual osteoporosis." Lifting Weights and Grafting were intended to empower women to achieve their goals.

The delightful Frozen Dreams (2004) suggests liberation in its playful absurdity. At its center are facing high heels, nickel plated to make them appear cold and frozen. Eyeglass lenses cascade over the shoulders front and back in a great pileup that jangles on the

body. The work's bold presence encourages anyone wearing it to break up the ice freezing over their hopes and dreams and get on with their lives.

The Leash (2003), made of oversized clumps of mink and real pearls, salutes the present and future for women. This necklace references the trophy wife, ridicules it, and declares that women have moved on, all at the same time. The exaggerated puffs of mink, the pearls, and the long extension down the back are all parodies. The pearl and gold extension can be a whip, or, according to the whim of the wearer, removed entirely.

Transfer of Power (2005) revisits the format of the bear claw necklace, substituting nail extensions for bear claws and hair extensions for animal fur. The main motif that anchors the necklace is loomed seed beads from Native American souvenir belts. They encircle the neck and continue with a long tail on the back. The components of female beautification, like nails and hair, are bound together with a kitschy decorative technique. In spite of the heavy title, the work is a lighthearted celebration of feminine ornamentation.

The two Exosquelettes are both assertively feminine and feminist. The electroformed hair curlers in Exosquelette #1 (2003) form an exterior backbone to empower strengthen the spirit; yet, as the wearer walks, it playfully sways back and forth like a long ponytail or braid. In Exosquelette #2 (2003), clothespins create a wide collar in the front and morph into a set of ribs in the back, symbolically offering strength and support but also alluding to the torturous whalebone corsets of the past. The materials are carefully chosen: clothespins and curlers have traditionally female associations, while glass taxidermy eyes protectively ward off evil.

Also endowing strength to the female wearer is Fortitude (2006). More armor than ornament, this work is constructed of flat sheets of brown mica that hold scrap metal and random coins. A surprise on the flip side honors Worden's paternal grandmother by embedding pages of her diary in segments of the necklace made of plastic and mica . The clasp made from a broken oven thermometer, also salutes traditional female activities

Stories of forceful women fill Middle Eastern mythology. Inanna's Laugh (2005), Ereshkigal's Hook (2004), and Brigandine for Ishtar (2005) all refer to one of those ancient stories. One myth, told in many other cultures as well, describes a descent into the underworld, a near-death experience, and a return to the surface after compromising with the forces of darkness. Worden refers to the story of Inanna (or Ishtar), the goddess of fertility, sex, and war, and Ereshkigal, her older sister, the goddess of the underworld, death, and darkness. What particularly intrigued Worden was the role of jewelry in this story. First it empowers Inanna as she dresses to visit her sister in the underworld. Then, as Inanna descends into the underworld, she is required to remove the jewelry and her power disappears.

Ereshkigal's Hook refers grimly to what happened to Inanna at the bottom of the underworld. When she insisted, naked and disempowered as she was, on sitting on her sister's throne in the underworld, she was condemned to become a piece of rotting meat hung on a hook. This dark necklace is reptilian. Evil eyes look out from copper settings to form beads that hold electroformed chicken bones. Down the back are reptile skin covered cork "beads" with tacks pushed into them.

Inanna's Laugh has the opposite spirit, suggesting the blooming world when Inanna returns to the earth after her rescue. Celebratory and joyous, it is formed from gilded glass vials placed in copper electroformed settings. When it is worn, each vial holds a

large red rose. Between the vials are oversized ball-like beads, making the vials seem like penis shapes. It is celebrating the power of women to make the world bloom, as well as the power of men to join in that positive endeavor.
On the same theme of mythic female power, Brigandine for Ishtar moves completely beyond the necklace to become a shield that covers the front and back. (A brigandine is a metal undershirt worn during medieval wars when soldiers were primarily on foot.) This work was inspired by the reports that the soldiers in the Iraq War were picking up scraps in the street to strengthen their Humvees. The brigandine is for Ishtar because she is the goddess of war and young women are fighting in Iraq. Worden's stunning work includes American copper pennies and nickels (both of which are worth more in metal than their face value today) as well as Japanese coins attached to a scrap-metal and mesh base that forms a haphazard layer of protection. Attached to the mesh base are also glass fish eyes electroformed into copper that watch out for the wearer. Weighted by tire weights that Worden picks up in the street, this formidable work is her most emphatic expansion into wearable art.

CONCLUSION

From the earliest jewelry made in Ellensburg, Washington in the turbulent 1970s to the present mature work forged in the midst of early twenty-first century crises, Nancy Worden's work is a timeline of her life and the world in which she lives. Worden has been shaped by both the East Coast and the West Coast, by small town academic life and by rural farms. As a middle class white woman, she responds to personal challenges, honors history and myth, and takes on contemporary issues. The dramatic changes in her jewelry in format, scale, materials and content follow the changes in her life and our society over the last thirty-five years. But above all, her jewelry reflects the time honored purpose of body ornament that reaches back for centuries, to honor the individuals who wear it.

Worden's art is physical. We feel the weight on our bodies. Some materials are cold and smooth, others warm and rough. We fulfill its function by wearing it, but putting it on is never a casual act. The necklaces inhabit space and they insist on good posture. The brooches require a proud, open chest. They are part of our body, rather than simply an ornament that we wear.
Wearing jewelry is predominantly a woman's act of declaring her identity: Worden's jewelry collaborates with the wearer in telling the world who she is, as she demands energy, pride, self confidence, and even courage. If you don't have those strengths before you put on a piece of Nancy Worden's jewelry, you will when you are wearing it and hopefully, after you take it off.