R|A|M

Quiet Elegance: The Jewelry of Eleanor Moty
August 17, 2022 – January 28, 2023

Whether referencing the landscape or architecture—or both—metalsmith Eleanor Moty creates distinctive jewelry that poetically encompasses both wearer and viewer. Moty first gained recognition in the 1960s and 1970s for using cutting-edge fabrication techniques—such as electroplating and photo-etching—in adornment. She shifted her focus toward including stones in her work, and the large-scale brooches she has been creating over the last couple of decades exemplify her dialogue with the "linear imagery" of quartz stones.

In essence, Moty's elaborate and time-consuming process begins with finding the right stone—which a stonecutter has modified—and building from there. The artist engages with the tone, shape, and features of her chosen stone. Preferring brooches to other forms of jewelry, she remarks on their relatively self-contained nature: "Brooches needn't be worn to be complete…Not having to fit the piece to the body…I can concentrate on the sculptural aspects."

Moty has been applauded for her many contributions to the field, including a 28-year teaching career at the University of Wisconsin-Madison—in a department she helped develop into one of the most well-regarded in the country.

With 12 pieces currently in the collection, including an early photo-etched hand mirror and brooches containing large quartzes, RAM ranks Moty as an archive artist. Featuring over 35 works, including several from RAM's holdings, alongside recently finished pieces borrowed from the artist, this exhibition owes its name to a recently-published monograph on the artist. It follows a similar arc to the book in representing Moty's working career to date—over 50 years of making.

In addition to examples of her jewelry, the exhibition includes a video where Moty describes her process in-depth as well as sketches borrowed from the artist.

RAM's Executive Director and Curator of Collections Bruce W. Pepich wrote about Moty's work for his essay, included in the book with the same title, *Quiet Elegance: The Jewelry of Eleanor Moty*. An excerpt from that essay follows:

An American original, Moty grew up in the countryside on the western edge of the Chicago suburbs. In the 1950s and the 1960s, the city's sprawl dropped off at the farmland from which numerous suburbs were slowly emerging. However, the pace of this development meant one could still live a rural life relatively close to the city's center. Growing up as the child of immigrants provided her with a slightly different background from the suburbanites she met in high school. Life on a working farm instilled a strong sense of personal responsibility in Moty and also made her comfortable with the variety of tools needed and the kinds of problem-solving called for in a small agricultural enterprise. Her parents lived the twentieth-century version of the life of nineteenth-century settlers

R|A|M

who came to the Midwest and became farmers. Moty became a pioneer in her own right, helping lead the way in creating handmade jewelry that is recognized as a legitimate contemporary art form.

With the scale of her work, Moty asks people to pay attention to nature's beautiful details, as if she were pointing to a small flower pushing out of the soil or having us notice a hummingbird. She prefers to draw the viewer into her works quietly as the eye follows the light and the visual elements of each stone and the metal that surrounds it. These subtle statements are not political, narrative, edgy, or transient. What they are is a quietly presented record of the artist's observations of nature and a stunningly beautiful body of work which is the result of the solid intellect behind their creation. Moty's conversation between gem and metal creates objects of contemplation worth our consideration. In their quiet way, these pieces are astonishing to behold, for both stone and metal are so much better off for being a part of her designs than in their original state—a result of the delicate balance of nature and Moty's considerable abilities and vision.

Quiet Elegance: The Jewelry of Eleanor Moty, published by Arnoldsche Art Publishers, is available through the RAM Museum Store.

To learn more about Moty, please visit the Art Jewelry Forum's website where she conducted an interview with Bonnie Levine in 2016 about her artwork. The following, which addresses the creation of Moty's early work, is an excerpt from this interview:

https://artjewelryforum.org/interviews/eleanor-motyaethe-jewelry-art-collection/

Bonnie Levine: *The early part of your career was defined by your pioneering work in electroplating and photo-etching applied to jewelry and accessories, for which you were widely recognized and regarded. Tell us about this period in your career.*

Eleanor Moty: *I became aware of these processes as an undergraduate in the jewelry program at the University of Illinois, Champaign. An engineering student introduced me to the photo-etching process that was commonly used to create printed circuits and precise metal parts. At the same time, my jewelry professor, Robert Von Neumann, asked me to assist him in setting up a rudimentary copper electroforming facility in the studio. Working on these two diverse processes simultaneously was an efficient way to carry out experiments and led to interesting results. Using images from family photos or antique glass plates, I etched the photo into silver, copper, or copper alloys. These images served as the focal point, with heavily textured electroformed or electroplated copper surrounding and enhancing the etched image. At times, instead of photo-etching the image, I photo-electroplated it onto the metal, thus creating a subtle, textural abstraction of the original photo. I also experimented with patinas by selectively painting the chemical solutions on the photo-etched plates to color them in a way similar to how old photographs were hand-tinted.*

R|A|M

Glossary:

Biwa Pearls are irregularly shaped pearls. Typically their appearance is long, stick-like, and bumpy. Today, fewer and fewer Biwa Pearls are produced, but they are still popular and sought after.

Typically, jasper consists of 80% quartz and 20% other materials. **Brecciated Jasper** is a type of jasper that has been broken internally and then solidified with chalcedony—which is a crystalline structure of silica.

Chasing and repoussé are often used together and can easily be confused with one another. **Repoussé** is mostly used as a relief process that is three-dimensional. This creates texture that does not significantly alter a piece of metal. It pushes and pulls the material, but the thickness of the work remains. **Chasing** is more often engraved or incised into the material, a two-dimensional or linear technique. Often this method is used to define the markings that repoussé creates. Moty has used these techniques in her work—see her *Portrait Hand Mirror* as an example.

Electroforming is a process of electroplating a heavy layer of metal, one atom at a time, onto a matrix, building up form and surface dimension. Oxidizing the electroformed surface creates the illusion of even more texture.

Micarta is a laminated paper or fabric impregnated with resin, originally developed by Dr. Leo Baekeland, the inventor of Bakelite. It can be sawed, sanded, filed, and polished, and maintains its dense color saturation throughout.

Phantom Quartz is a type of quartz that includes visible layers of overlapping crystal growth. The inner crystals are able to be seen due to the variation in composition or mineral inclusion that allow the viewer to see the boundary between growths.

Photo-etching is created by coating a high-polished metal with photo-sensitive resist, which is then heat cured. The image is prepared as a high-contrast transparency—that is, black/transparent with no gray tones—and exposed onto the metal via contact printing with a high-intensity light source. After the image is "developed" in a solvent, it remains on the metal.

Rutilated Quartz is a type of quartz that includes needle-like inclusions of titanium oxide called rutile. Rutile, which can be found in igneous or metamorphic rock, can show up as lines in transparent quartz, often in a golden color, but they can also appear silver, copper red, or deep black.