

DISCOURSE OF THE POSTMODERN JEWELLERY: IDENTITY AND EXISTENCE OF CONTEMPORARY ASPECTS

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of the article is to present the contemporary jewellery creative process of Europe's progressive artists and designers who express postmodern aesthetical philosophy. Said philosophical concept emerged after the industrial revolution, a period that saw society as framed by rules and theories. Denying traditional beliefs and not believing in the ultimate truth or universality, the postmodern aesthetics is the total opposite of a life defined by theories and rules. The essence of this philosophy is a result of respect for cultural uniqueness. Postmodern aesthetics does not decide what is best or appropriate. However, it logically criticises the prosperity of the modern Western world, asking whether it really does lead to happiness, freedom and discipline. Change in the mindset has an impact on the study of jewellery design in Thailand, a country that still views jewellery as an indicator of status, rank and body adornment. In this regard, knowledge from studying the postmodern aesthetic philosophy in contemporary jewellery design can benefit artists, designers and students ambiguous. It is interesting to consider a creative approach, a relation to the ultimate truth of life, social phenomena, globalisation, aesthetic experience and conceptual development as elements that contribute to the production of new styles of jewellery. This study aims to create meanings and values of design as means to uplift the intellect and mind, that follow the trend in the 21st century. This is because, since the prehistoric period, humans have forged a deep relationship with jewellery as an object that connects the body, mind and environment.

Keywords: Postmodern; contemporary; jewellery; identity; existence; body

1. INTRODUCTION

The difference between 'postmodern' and 'contemporary' is widely debated. They have many similarities but differ in details. The differences are critical for creating uniqueness in a design. Firstly, postmodern and contemporary are similar; they both refer to the present though there may be some hidden meanings from past phenomena that may be attributable to the fact that the postmodern philosophy period began in the late 1970s. The philosophical movement combines different social and cultural theories and demonstrates shifts in viewpoints across different disciplines, such as sociology, architecture, literature, fine arts, fashion, technology and communications. The second similarity is that both are intellectually uplifting. The postmodern philosophy is known to 'question' the power shift and dehumanisation that occurred after the

World War II and its attack on consumer capitalism (Mambrol, 2016). The philosophy goes as far as juxtaposing high and low art together for satirical purposes. The aim of postmodern art and design is to remind its viewers that everything is relative and kind of make-believe—an ambiguity that allows various interpretations. It is an intellectual stimulation for people to understand meanings or an individual being generalised by a culture. While contemporary aesthetics also aims to stimulate thinking, it focuses on challenging concepts, forward thinking, reflections on art history, evaluation of values and expression of an individual. This is because it expresses opinions about society and culture. Its presentation is attractive, which makes its message an easy alternative to other art theories. The goal of contemporary art is to stimulate the viewers to question what defines art. The philosophy is loosely referred to as a form of art, whether in the past or presently, which reflects the nature of creativity. It does not try to criticise humanity or society because people are not able to fully understand the situation of the post-industrial or late capitalism society (Stejskal, 2014).

Understanding the goals of the postmodern and contemporary aesthetic philosophy is therefore important to alter the definition of 'jewellery' and its meaning to the people of today. The 21st century world allows art and design to develop unique ways to express individuality and believe them as having potential to express social reality and individual value. It can also be said that the interactions between space and time created by postmodern and contemporary art are reflective of the respect given to academic and existential complexity. The reason is that the goal of the contemporary art is not fixed on the idea that art is an aesthetic product but rather, that aesthetic is a necessary condition but is nonetheless sufficient by itself to create art. Similarly, conceptual art is not an alien to craftsmanship as seen from the contemporary jewellery. Samples from the 2000s, specifically, samples of postmodern jewellery selected for this article, are essential to exploring the concept of beauty that is in harmony with the past, or the beginning of contemporary jewellery, which clearly demonstrates creative philosophy (Fox, 2021). Some of the working parameters that are evident include political identity, body, globalisation and migration, technology, contemporary society and culture, time and memory and criticism of institutions and politics. In addition, different schools of thoughts, such as Post-structuralist, Feminist, Marxist and, most importantly, Postmodernism, are utilised in the development of contemporary art theory. Therefore, it provides more support that postmodern jewellery artists have been experimenting on a kind of jewellery that exists independently but still relates to its environment. When not worn, this kind of jewellery is often designed to stimulate thoughts. The design acts as a frame or environment for the jewellery itself, lifting its status to that of a work of art (Den Besten and Brouwer, 2012). The status is created so that the next generations can appreciate a broader world of jewellery. The postmodern jewellery also leaves behind symbols of wealth, glamour, endurance and privilege. Postmodern jewellery artists explore materials, forms, values, colours, movements, as well as traditional meanings that are actually changing. The aim is to demonstrate that jewellery is capable of reforming creatively and combining knowledge of other disciplines, especially science, art theory, aesthetics philosophy, etc. (Rehab, 2020). The reform gives rise to more complex aspects of the contemporary jewellery, rendering its mixes and integration (Broadhead, 2012).

The argument goes that studying the history and importance of the postmodern and contemporary jewellery allows us to identify to understand the catalyst to creative revolution. It is important to understand the change in art forms that took place following the Second World War until the 1960s. From about 1960, art has constantly been changing, though without a clear turning point. Definition of contemporary art is still unclear and changing in the 2010s. Most of the definitions given to the concept of art are obscure but nonetheless generally covers work of art produced for some 20 years until around 1970. Examples of the definitions of contemporary art during this period refer to the concept as 'the art of late 20th century/early 21st century', 'the art of late 20th century/early 21st century which is a result and denial of modern art', 'the work of living artists' or 'the work of art produced between the 1960s, 1970s until now'. Sometimes the definition of contemporary art limits covered art works to only those produced from the year 2000 onwards. Worth noting is that a topic avoided by galleries and critiques is whether to consider a piece of work contemporary when its artist's career had already ended but with the work still wielding an influence to an art movement.

Furthermore, this review article profoundly aims for the academics of the postmodernism era to determine the value of contemporary aspects in the expressive conceptualisation of jewellery art based on the demonstration of alignment with art theory and not only on physical beauty. While it is true that the methods of Thai jewellery-making appears to be influenced largely by the country's traditions, which are dependent on skilful craftsmanship, what remains just as important is the need 'to promote the discourse content.' This is because the success result in the feeling as form or shape in this conceptual context will likely make people gain acknowledge, feel enjoyment and is a tool to integrate between abstract emotions in hand skill, which depends on the applicable element of art that would have already been pre-determined. What is more, art elements can persuade the person who experiences them to feel alive after appreciation of the art work.

2. METHOD OF JEWELLERY DELEGATES A SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP TO A BODY

From ancient times, the use of jewellery cannot be considered successful without relating it to a body. This is because the body is the first place that the jewellery touches and is the first sensual gate—to the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, body and mind. Body is what moves the internal context of the jewellery and what brings it out. Movement made while wearing a piece of jewellery might change the whole meaning of it, even before it is perceived, interpreted and able to completely express its essence. There exist delicate customs in using body and spaces between the body and the jewellery from the prehistoric period until the present. It is said that humans are able to appreciate the internal context of jewellery when contemplating the results of their interactions with it at the right time and right place. If the thought about the beauty of placing jewellery upon the body is not perceivable, then humans cannot feel the rite of interaction through even one of the senses. This is because every element of the jewellery is created to comply with its internal context, with focus on making people to notice, perceive, communicate and interpret what can be felt or seen by observing its meaning through the senses and preparing for the ornament of the souls.

The postmodern jewellery sparks conversations about the relationship between an object and a body. To the contemporary society, there are two statuses of jewellery and body. What will be explained here, however, does not include how an object, such as a piece of jewellery or clothing item, even if meticulously designed, only exists independently to have value when worn. This is because people are already familiar with it. On the other hand, the status in an explanation in this article can be considered interesting for having been continuously presented in contemporary society. For the first status, which is determined by the designers or artists, an object or jewellery coexists with the body. The concept sheds light to the blurred line between an independent object that relates to the body and an accessory. For the second status, the designers or artists aim for their spectators to not take an object by its appearance and name. This can be a piece of jewellery that looks expensive or needs to be worn on a body. The viewers have to reinterpret the meaning, signs and symbols, such as the jewellery's artistic elements, materials, status, concepts, lifestyles, social, political, psychological phenomena and behaviours of people in the postmodern era (Cohn, 2009).

Regardless of its semiotics, both states of the postmodern objects or jewellery need to still relate to the body. They contain spiritual and traditional meanings, whether symbolic or otherwise, memento, or a means to communicate a message. Different presentations expand their aesthetic values and make their existence more intriguing. As a result, it is more difficult to give a definition to their forms and names. The word 'jewellery' does not quite capture the fascinating dynamic between the body and jewellery. In addition, contemporary objects or jewellery do not necessarily involve gemstones or do not only exist/worn on a particular part of the body anymore. People try to call them in different names, such as body ornaments, body decorative objects, jewellery art. These names do not demonstrate the identity of the objects and neither communicate the coexistence between the objects and body in a traditional sense. This perhaps, inspires the elaboration of examples of postmodern jewellery and how they question and expand knowledge of relationships and coexistence between jewellery and body. For example, Kim Buck intends to create work that reminisces traditional jewellery despite his contemporary gold art being entirely different from traditions. Nonetheless, he learns that the reasons why people create, buy, wear and own a piece of jewellery, whether traditional or contemporary, are the same and intangible (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Kim Buck. String of Pearls with Gold Lock. 2003. 18-Karat Gold and Silver (Klimt02, 2006a)

3. 'DIVIDED' OR 'UNITED': DEFINING STATUS AND IDENTITY OF AN OBJECT

When an object moves with a body, humans as participants have an opportunity to explore their identities. It is the beginning of surprising and inviting stories. This is because wearing an object close to the body creates a situation, a state, or a space for exploration from the personal to the social and cultural levels. An effect of the object is personal to people. It shows a personal history, a relationship with other objects or creates two-way communication between a person and her or his self-image. It also raises a question over one's identity, existence and status.

The first group of artists that will be mentioned in this article aims to create the experience of wearing or placing an object on a body. This is to demonstrate the relationship between the object and the body, that is, unity. This is explained by how placing the object on the body stimulates complex senses to the wearer and viewer. The body is prepared to communicate an essence of the object, which varies from one person to another and from one space to another. Nevertheless, the essence of each piece of object shall reflect possibilities to eventually unite or become one with the body. Examples can be seen from Mona Hatoum's 'Hair Necklace' in 1995 (Figure 2) and Nanna Melland's 'Decadence' in 2003 (Figure 3). Both works use a part of the artists' body to explore something which was once part of the body but is now decaying. Both parts are separated from the body. Fascination over junk discarded by the body came unexpectedly. Nail and hair require continuous maintenance but once cut and 'alienated' from the body, they become something disgusting even though they are still a part of us, though not physically. Turning an alienated part of the body into an object raises questions about immortality and a changing parameter of the body. Hatoum's work is made of beads. Sizes of the beads are carefully selected and carefully stringed, enhancing the jewellery's elegant and exquisite quality. However, the perception of quality is quickly taken over by the disgusting feeling of someone else's hair touching one's body (Sobieralski, 2003). It immediately creates juxtaposition. As for Nanna, she spends a year collecting clipped nail and recording the time taken for it to grow. She then casts it in gold—a material which does not decay over time—revealing something worthless that can have some value (The French Jewellery Post, 2017). This can be considered similar to how our ancestors make talismans from animals' claws and teeth.



Figure 2: Mona Hatoum. Hair Necklace (President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2013)



Figure 3: Nanna Melland. Decadence (Melland, 2003)

The next work, a photograph of lace collar, 'Lace Collar' by Mille Cullivan (Figure 4), was taken in 2004. The photo shows white dust laced on shoulders, revealing what is left of a sensation. It creates an illusion that makes its spectators hold their breath out of fear that they might damage the photo if they breathe too hard. It also sends a message of how our body gets rid of dead cells every second. Though unwillingly, the body or part of the body disintegrates into the air all the time. This is similar to the 2004 'Dust Interaction' (Figure 5) by Linsey Bell who records the disintegration process to show its beauty and delicateness. Light against black background captures scurf being dusted off a body. Scurf does not last as Mary Douglas (1966) wrote in a book called *Purity and Danger* that shows the dirtiness reflected in the relationship between the organised and disorganised, the existence and non-existence, the form and formless and life and death.



Figure 4: Millie Cullivan. *Lace Collar* (Koulidou, 2006) Linsey Bell. *Dust Interaction* (Koulidou, 2006)



Figure 5: Linsey Bell. *Dust Interaction* (Koulidou, 2006)

4. 'ALONE': THE SECOND STATUS

As a next step, consider a thinking process of postmodern jewellery in which each piece of jewellery depends on its environment and careful installation. Because of the trend to showcase the jewellery art in a contemporary way, jewellery artists and designers need to find new approaches and opportunities to exhibit their works, such as videos, installations, interactions and others. Such exhibits show the relationship in the second status by looking at the object without a frame such that it has to be worn on a specific place on a body. It has to be viewed based on the social context, lens of psychology and in collaboration with the viewers. The emphasis on the contextual relationships becomes the environment of the work. Arguably, jewellery does not lose its identity because of this second status and on the contrary, it integrates other artistic disciplines without directly mentioning them. They are used to guide the essence of the work. Traditional paradigm is presented through concepts, installations, videos, or designed interactions in order to create new visual perception. This leads to new understandings and interpretations (Skinner, 2011). Some of the works that appear 'reserved' thus require a more elaborated form to frame the interpretation. Creative designers may play with different hidden layers of meanings. The only idea that is unacceptable is the notion that meanings of postmodern jewellery cannot be changed. As a result, one of the contemporary ways to wear jewellery is to produce new conditions to create new experience, beliefs and reality. It is possible that the traditional world of form will be changed. It is similar to philosophical thinking that aims to encourage the viewers to assess the values of materials and consider jewellery more than just an object for decoration or for enhancing the status of its wearer (Teresa Carne, 1987). 'Cupfragment' by Sabrila Felgenträger, 2002 (Figure 6), dissolves traditional structures of household items to create new values. What appears to be a broken piece of glass is turned into a

ring. Another work, which is an example of a familiar object being reinterpreted, is 'Mercedes' by Ted Noten, 2001 (Figure 7). We all know of the worth of a Mercedes Benz automobile. Dismantling the car gives it new values. The brooch made by Noten is simple, wearable and carefully made. Both works demonstrate how postmodern jewellery is used to stimulate thoughts and is transformed into a focus of intellectual as well as intelligent activity (Teresa Carne, 1987). It shows the quality of materials in order to deepen the interpretations and destroy traditional ranking of values and perceptions of the materials.

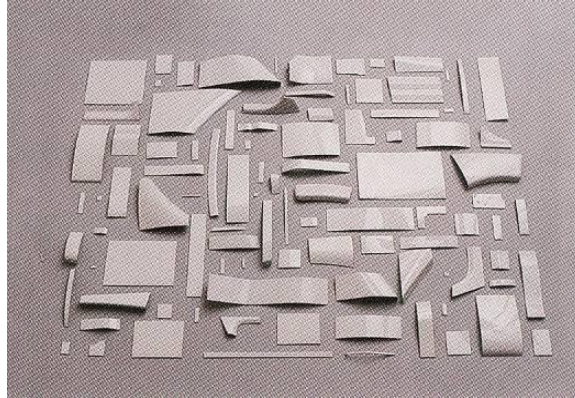


Figure 6: Sabriela Felgenträger. Cupfragment (Poljanac, 2021)



Figure 7: Ted Noten. Mercedes (Noten, 2001)

Manuel Vilhena's works clearly demonstrate the discovery of 'self-intellect-self' (Travers, 1992). Each piece comes together perfectly. It may not be an exaggeration to say that these pieces unintentionally 'invent' themselves (Figure 8a). The separateness of each piece creates an unclear identity of the artist and does not contain specific meanings or codes (Figure 8b). The work of Vilhena is created solely for visual purpose and existence. When worn, it is open to judgement its wearer only.



(a)



(b)

Figure 8: (a) Manuel Vilhena. Jewellery, Jupiter Ring, 2012 (Vilhena, 2021); (b) Manuel Vilhena. Jewellery, Brooch, 2019 (Vilhena, 2021)

The status of the unconventional jewellery is determined to be different from the traditional way of wearing jewellery. The wearer and the spectators cannot stay still because the jewellery's presentation invites intellectual interactions. This can be seen from the complex construction of the work: it tells of unlimited stories and importance of the variety of components (Figure 9). It reduces the importance of a single identity of one piece of jewellery, or the sole ownership of its wearer. Different identities of different objects can reveal, elaborate, or reflect life experience, the environment, social and political situations and modern life's changes. The message is far more complex to be effectively conveyed through traditional approach. The wider meanings create new and diverse aesthetic experiences and realisations. Creating unconventional status is a tool used by contemporary artists and designers to relate ways of living while integrating science and art. The most important components to design the unconventional status are space, position and time. When the viewer experience each piece of work, which is presented differently, it is as if they are more able to learn and be intellectually stimulated, even in a more condensed period of time, than in real life. The identity of the postmodern jewellery is, therefore, a mechanism that creates movements while blending time, space, jewellery, objects, the viewer and the artists or designers into one. An example is the project 'Chew Your Own Brooch' by Ted Noten (Figure 10), which was exhibited at Boojimans Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam where more than 800 guests chewed their own brooches. In another example, the project 'For the Farmer and the Market Gardener' (Figure 11) created by Hilde De Decker, presented traditional jewellery using a new approach.



Figure 9: Arther Has. Silhouette Brooches, Installation Jewellery (Oppenheim, 2007)



Figure 10: Ted Noten. Chew Your Own Brooch (Noten, 1998)

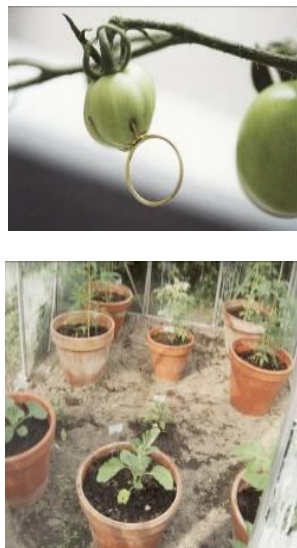


Figure 11: Hilde De Decker. For the Farmer and the Market Gardener (De Decker, 1999)



5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A sociologist, Nathalie Heinich, differentiates modern and postmodern art by explaining that they are two distinctive styles with some overlaps on their history. Heinich finds that while 'modern art' tries to defy conventional patterns, 'postmodern art' tries to defy the idea behind the work. Heinich pinpoints Fountain by Marcel Duchamp, created in the 1910s and inspired by the post World War II, as the middle and the height of modern art and the beginning of postmodern art (Camfield 1989; Heinich, 1998).

From the emerging history of postmodern jewellery, we can see a search for an identity of work using aesthetics philosophy through forms or approaches able to demonstrate the point that exchanging of ideas is as important as life. With its exciting appearance, contemporary jewellery invites the spectators to relate to the true identity of an object. It also enables the artists and spectators to share aesthetic experience in a humble way. What jewellery is able to do is to celebrate and pay respect to the body, which becomes one with the object or is placed at centre of a piece of jewellery. The postmodern jewellery reverses its identity away from the traditional approach stating that a wearer needs to put it on the body by themselves.

6. THE DYNAMIC FORCES OF DESTRUCTION AND CREATION

The postmodern jewellery can be seen as a link between knowledge and culture in the age of globalisation through the use of creative and interdisciplinary approaches. It is able to portray the contemporary aspect ideas without devaluing traditional meanings. Overall, it is the fusion of the dynamic forces of destruction and creation that the new jewellery makes explicit. Of the jewellery shown, the first is a neckpiece of 'David Watkins' (Figure 12), made up of neoprene over wood and steel. The second is the 'Hiroshima mon amour' (Figure 13) that combines several casually cut circles of thin metal tied together with a broken part of a ceramic plate to show a tranquil Japanese scene (Broadhead, 2012). This fusion aspect of postmodern jewellery should increase public interest in the jewellery industry. It is also able to communicate concepts of jewellery and its intriguing appearances through compositions, futuristic and unconventional concepts, extreme presentations and use of interesting materials, as seen in the set of two adhesive rings designed by 'Benjamin Lignel' (Figure 14). The contemporary aspect of jewellery can stimulate us to appreciate its existence and allow its creator and the spectators to experience aesthetic beauty. The viewers may or may not be able to touch the work itself but may rearrange its composition according to their interpretations. While jewellery has its limitations, particularly being small, light and wearable, the limitations should be viewed as challenges, which is superior to the view that jewellery should be something static and worn on the body only for visual effects. The great discourse over how to identify art is over. In its wake, creative design is allowed the freedom to use and integrate an open spectrum of materials (Jensen, 2003).

7. QUESTIONING VALUES AND BLURRING BOUNDARIES

Because life is organised by our behaviours and ability to understand. The life which is built around value systems and indefinite views of the globalised world becomes an important art and design structure. It is an integration of knowledge and experience through various objects that serve as highly 'praised' or 'controversial' narratives or writings. The contemporary aspect of jewellery is created to explore and serve as a middle person in order to communicate the harmonious and conflicting nature of identity and existence. Nevertheless, the most relatable identity is still the most powerful one, regardless of the age and time people are in. For the creators of jewellery as a contemporary experience, identity and existence are intertwined and reflect miracle of bodies, great ideas, complex emotions and preferences of its time. Eventually, jewellery provides its viewers the advantage of visual experience, leading to a world of meanings right from the beginning. If the spectator will choose to contemplate or reinterpret the meanings, postmodern art philosophy can serve as guide to new discoveries, especially the ones relating to this contemporary world. People try to break the mould by breaking free from the 'separateness' or 'collectiveness' in order to create new meanings to life. The extension of meanings is possible partly because of the power of technological tools. In short, the contemporary jewellery can organise complex concepts and change the traditional knowledge or experience of a simple object because of technology. This new experience comes from the changing meanings of images and stories, which may be totally different from their original forms. This is seen in an example of contemporary pieces, the work called Deviant Ring by Lin Cheung (Figure 15). The artwork reveals the mixing and matching

of pictures and usage. Pieces show a traditional bezel being used on a bracelet and a necklace. Because the bezel does not hold any gem, it can be seen as posing a question about traditional status and role.

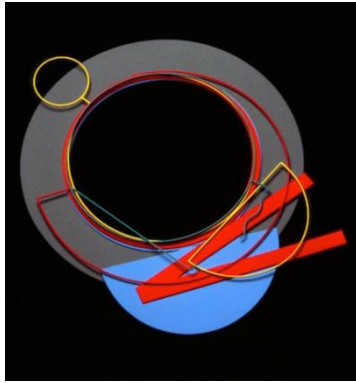


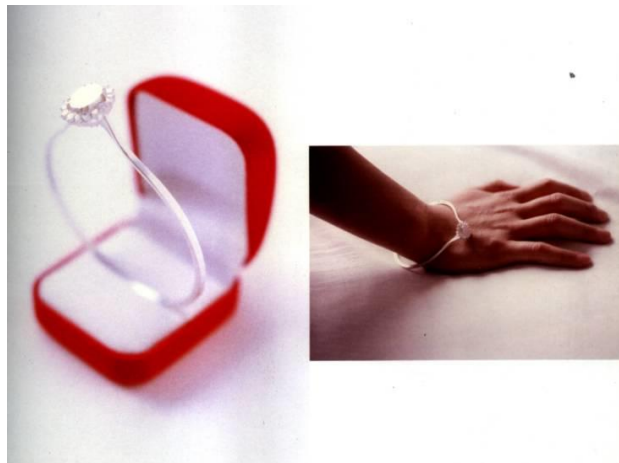
Figure 12: David Watkins.
4-Part Combination Neckpiece
(Watkins, 2000)



Figure 13: Bernhard Schobinger.
Hiroshima Mon Smour (Victoria
and Albert Museum, 1987)



Figure 14: Benjamin Lignel.
Happy Family NHS (Lignel,
2002)



(a)



(b)

Figure 15: (a) Lin Cheung. Deviant Ring. 18ct Gold and Zirconias, Bracelet (Radulescu, 2018); (b) Lin Cheung. Deviant Ring. 18ct Gold and Zirconias, Necklace (Radulescu, 2018)

8. CONCLUSION

The nature of art and design freely reflects the world. Restricting one piece of work for just a particular use is like limiting art to be for art's sake only. If this situation is changing, the turning point of the belief that occurred recently will allow us to see the revolutionary function of art and design again. The change occurred after the rise of postmodern aesthetics in the late 20th century. The reaction that arose from the discourse of changing the world of creation into ordinariness was the transfer of artistic duties through a relationship with the viewers. The artist is no longer a genius that reveals the pure truth. The role of the artist is to be a medium in bringing people from different places to gather in an amazing way as well as perform the duties of design works in the postmodern world. The need to change the functions and usages are caused by the desire to benefit from one thing in order to solve frustrations over desires to be successful and to be able to respond appropriately to human utilitarian needs, such as in how to design works to be suitable for daily life. Worth noting is the existence of a psychological study of drug users to determine the value of the cost and the production value to be balanced with the sales value setting.

Regarding the pioneering approach to the design of contemporary jewellery in the Western world since the 1970s, there is the argument in the international jewellery industry as to which kind of material beautiful jewellery should be made of. The scope and definition of jewellery or the question whether the

jewellery is an art or not is not as important as the bias towards materials and techniques for the production of most jewellery works. The boundary line among jewellery-making, sculpture, performing arts or fashion has been widened. Artists and designers who do not wish to be limited by the original traditional style will determine this line by not wanting to define the types of works but mainly focus on creativity. Throughout the past era, the most beautiful jewellery possibly refers to the intellectual power that fascinates and inspires human. This is the main feature of art or the best design of every field no matter which form of art is presented.

During the time marked by the changing tastes of many societies in the postmodern era, the greater consumption of jewellery works of citizens in economically advanced and influential countries can be seen. From the study of the development of aesthetics of traditional jewellery to modern jewellery styles, it can be said that it is design that mostly takes into account the principles of design or decoration for beauty: it consist of images and the properties to be created by reducing the existing details while maintaining its overall condition and getting the most from it. The important features can be presented, such as having a sequence of things, value, or usefulness. It can also be improved in colour and shape to become the art work that is able to maintain its value as jewellery piece. The works of jewellery works are created with aesthetics in mind in accordance with the preferences of most societies to create conventionally pleasing conditions, such as being fairly rough, fair, or delicate. Production techniques for simple jewellery shapes are developed to enhance external surface finishing in order to create fineness and to add value.

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