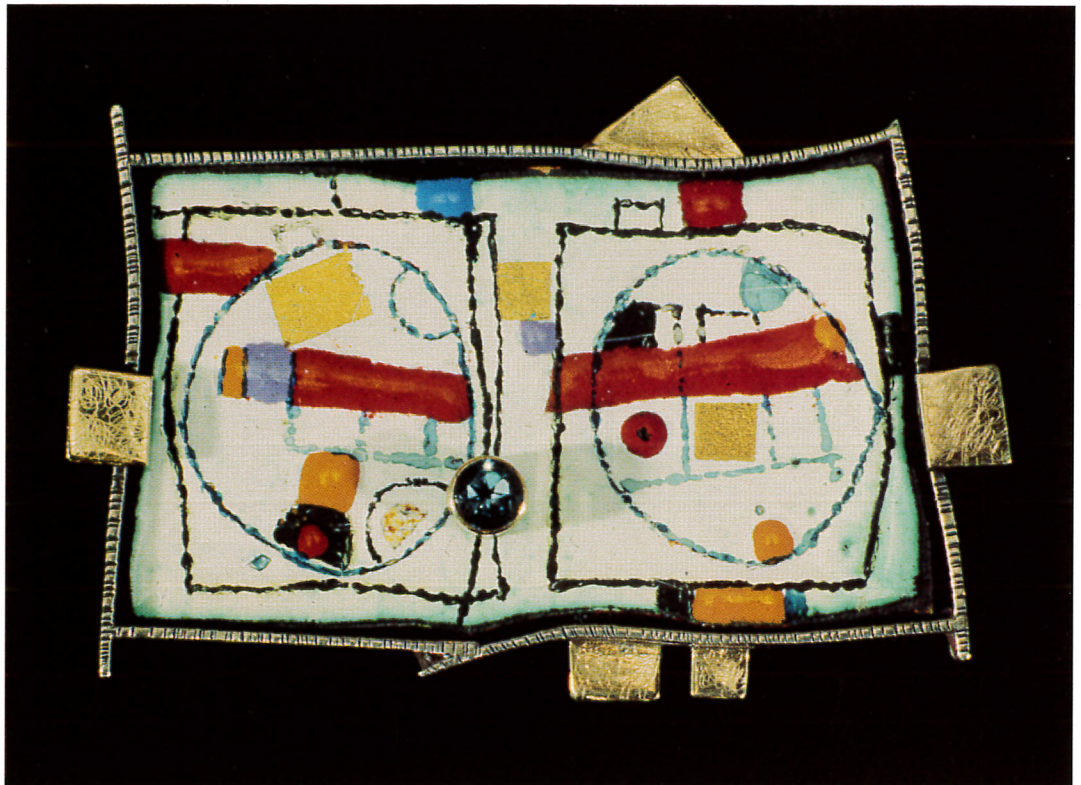


EARL PARDON: JOY IN THE MAKING

JEWELRY FROM THE COLLECTION
OF MARTHA CONNELL



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THE ARKANSAS ARTS CENTER
DECORATIVE ARTS MUSEUM



ARKANSAS
ARTS CENTER

EARL PARDON: JOY IN THE MAKING*

STUDIO ART JEWELRY AND THE MODERNIST MOVEMENT:

A number of currents converged during the first half of this century to help bring about the studio art jewelry movement. The modernist movement was defined by a new rational for painting, sculpture and architecture. The major styles: cubism, surrealism and futurism rejected the immediate past and opened up new possibilities for experimentation. The Bauhaus not only influenced architecture, but also contributed to the notion that art and science went hand-in-hand and that the fine and applied arts no longer needed to be thought of in hierarchical terms; it was possible to consider the fine arts and the applied arts on equal terms. In partial reaction to modernism, artists explored historic and non-Western traditions such as those found in Pre-Columbian and African art. New aesthetic considerations were brought about by new materials, new techniques and new ways of thinking. For example, in jewelry, design and problem solving became more important than setting a precious gemstone. In fact, substitutes were as eagerly sought after as were new techniques, such as fabrication and collage. By the 1950s, art jewelry was whimsical and eclectic. Artists appropriated and adapted to the prevailing aesthetics. Their work took on the characteristic of miniature "wearable" art. Meanwhile, other things were also happening. After WW II, jewelry was introduced into the university curriculum through the fine arts department, new organizations and new magazines were started, and slowly the field began to expand with teachers, artists and patrons. The jewelry of the period, as pointed out by Peter Dormer in *Jewelry of Our Time*, "is characterized by the desire of each artist to present to the world his or her own singular view." This was the climate Earl Pardon stepped into and became a part of.

EARL PARDON

Earl Pardon returned to his hometown of Memphis after serving in the infantry in Germany for two years. Like many other GIs after WW II he took advantage of the GI Bill and attended the Memphis Academy of Art where he majored in painting. As part of the core curriculum, along with painting and sculpture, he was required to take a crafts course. There he made his first jewelry and was smitten by the expressive potential of the medium. "It was an immediate love affair," said Pardon. For him, jewelrymaking was a bridge between his interest in painting and sculpture. In 1948 and 1950 Pardon was awarded a scholarship to the 2nd and 4th National Silversmith Conference sponsored by Handy and Harman Company, refiners of precious metals. The firm had been commissioned in 1947 by the U.S. Army to conduct a series of workshops in metalsmithing for the purpose of preparing teachers to teach returning GIs. Pardon attended the conferences - two six week sessions organized by Margaret Carver and conducted by European metalsmiths. Pardon's teachers were: Erik Fleming, silversmith to the Court of Sweden, and Reginald Hill, a metalsmith from the Central School of Art in London, England. These workshops, held at the School for American Craftsmen, Rochester Institute of Technology in New York, gave him a jump-start in the field and helped to establish him as a pioneer in the art jewelry movement. Up through the Great Depression jewelry was mainly designed and produced by European jewelers and man-



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ufactured commercially. Here was a break in tradition, which began with people outside of jewelrymaking. Pardon approached the medium as an artist, a painter and a sculptor. He worked in isolation in his studio and had little or no communication with the community, organizations, exhibitions, or publications to help sustain him. Essentially he was self taught - he learned and he improvised as he went along.

Pardon graduated with a BFA in painting in 1951 and, that same year, took a position teaching painting, sculpture and jewelrymaking at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. In 1954-1955 Pardon took a leave of absence from Skidmore to work as an Assistant Designer for Towle Silversmiths in Newburyport, Massachusetts. There he designed flatware and hollowware, worked in enamel, and undertook the design of two presentation pieces: one for Queen Elizabeth II and the other for Sir Winston Churchill. Pardon returned to Skidmore in 1956 and added enameling to his teaching repertoire. He completed his MFA at Syracuse University in 1959 and remained at Skidmore until his retirement in 1989. During his long tenure he balanced his career of teaching and being a studio artist with exhibiting annually, participating on committees, and curating and jurying exhibitions; he also served as Chairman of the Art Department from 1968 to 1977.

Pardon's style advanced with the changing aesthetics of the time from an interest in primitivism (African and Oceanic art) in the early 1950s to a multi-discipline modernist view of painting, jewelrymaking and sculpture in the 1960s to a highly individualistic style in the 1980s.

In the 1950s Pardon explored the figure and abstraction through elemental shapes and forms. He was interested in primitivism, not so much with the object but with the spirit - the emotive power within the object. In those early days his mentor was the sculptor Harry Bertoia and his contemporaries



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* We extend our thanks to Martha Connell, Earl Pardon's estate, and Tod Pardon for making this exhibition possible. We would also like to acknowledge Sharon Church whose article, "Color Construction and Change: The Inventive Jewelry of Earl Pardon," which appeared in *Metalsmith* was invaluable to the text below.

were jewelers such as: Bob Winston, Merry Renk, John Paul Miller, Betty Cooke and Ed Levin. Sharon Church, a former student of Pardon's, describes a "jazz-like rhythm" and complexity to his work. Says Church, "It was jewelrymaking that provided him with an enduring format most sympathetic to his mode of inquiry and it was jewelry that earned him his early critical attention." After his experience at Towle Silversmiths, Pardon introduced enameling into his work, but its initial use was restrained. Pardon is described as the leading jeweler of the 1950s whose craftsmanship was generally more refined when compared to other studio art jewelers working at the same time.



EARL PARDON, No. 1

In the 1960s Pardon's work alternated between painting, sculpture and jewelry; he worked in whatever material, technique, or scale that interested him. Jewelry, which was more immediate than either painting or sculpture, seemed to be the conduit through which ideas flowed. Sharon Church cites, "Enameling would provide a venue for unifying his activities as

"The aesthetic value of a small drawing or statement in jewelry can be a degree of importance equal to a large painting or sculpture."

— Earl Pardon

painter and jeweler . . . structure on the bench would emerge in sculpture." An example can be seen in the large commission Pardon was to do for the Prudential Insurance Company of America Corporate Headquarters in Newark, New Jersey. To make the 10' x 17' sculptural screen, Pardon employed a form of modular construction - a method of deploying smaller elements, fairly simple metal shapes in varying colors, in spatially rhythmic units to build up a composite whole. This type of

modular construction, an interest in color, repetition, and spatial rhythm were to become characteristic of Pardon's style; figurative elements disappeared and sculpture appeared to be more integrated into his work. Pardon cites Cézanne, Picasso and certain Zen painters as his mentors - perhaps Cézanne for color and overlapping planes; Picasso for a changing mode of exploration and discovery, and the Zen painters for his spatial philosophy. Wrote Pardon in 1980, "My search has always been, and will remain, exploratory in nature, an unending quest for a multitude of new aspects of the visual phenomena. . . . The cause or reason for the existence of the piece in which I am involved now will have its inception in the work that preceded it."

By the 1970s Pardon was a mature artist. He was Chairman of the Art Department, teaching painting, sculpture, enameling and jewelry, and producing in his studio. By the end of the decade his works were described by Church as "cooler," more visually complex and, while open to wide array of possibilities, his technique tended to move toward enameling and fabrication. His techniques appeared to be on the surface and were relatively straight forward - the rivets and hinges were exposed and the sides turned up to frame each composition. The balled wire and the drilled hole (ball and socket joint perfected with the advent of the micro-torch) formed the basis of his work. The arrangement over the surface appeared casually spontaneous and yet balanced. Examples of his work ranged from birdnests of gold wire to miniature canvases of dots and lines.

For the last decade of his life, Pardon focused on jewelry-making. His energies, writes Church, were directed toward "graphic organization and color theory - activities normally reserved for painting." Speed became increasingly important - to the point of finishing one work a day. For the 1986 Aaron Faber Gallery show in New York, he made 200 pieces of

jewelry in a period of nine months. This caused him to work in series. "Thus," says Church, "he works in a continuum that acts to feed his compulsion." "Pardon never repeats himself," writes Ettalgale Lauré, "as he moves the idea and stretches it, refines it, defines it, embellishes it." In addition to necklaces, brooches, earrings, pendants and bracelets, Pardon added the fibula brooch (an early form of safety pin used to fasten the toga together) to his repertoire. On a trip to Italy in 1981, he was "overwhelmed with the richness and variety of design and materials" of Etruscan and early Roman fibulae. The 1980s also brought colored gemstones to his work; not to enhance value, but for the qualities the color could bring to the whole assemblage. "I treat jewelry like I would a painting," says Pardon, "they are color statements more than anything else." The work of this decade is syncopated with rhythm, brilliant color, and a rich palette of enamels and natural materials - exotic woods, ivory and shell.

Pardon delighted in the element of surprise, which related to his Zen philosophy, and often incorporated unexpected change in his jewelry. It formed a unique and intimate link between the patron and the artist. Beads revolving on their



EARL PARDON, No. 12

chains, hidden stones, "drawings" on the back of a pendants, reversible parts, and a black pearl on the underside of a ring are a number of examples. Says Pardon, "I have a tendency to make pieces that are organic in feeling. When I tire of that, I go after more graphic, sharper edged effects. They balance each other out." For this reason it is nearly impossible to determine what period a piece may belong to. While the works may be identified with numbers, they were not applied systematically and only help to confuse proper dating.

One of the characteristics of the studio art jewelry movement is that the artist has been able to work in his studio; outside of the factory system. For many, especially after WW II, this was achieved through the stability of a teaching position. Pardon fits that profile perfectly with his long and happy association with Skidmore. He was one of those artists who thrived on teaching while at the same time produced an enormous body of work. His curiosity, his incessant desire to invent, experiment and share discoveries with his students, nourished him and gave them the feeling that everything was possible. Not only was Pardon an important founding figure in the 1950s, but he was able to exert an enormous influence in the art jewelry medium for the next three decades. His reputation as an innovator and his distinctive personal style are long to be remembered.

ADB



EARL PARDON, No. 55

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

EARL PARDON

NECKPIECES

- * 1. **Pendant**, ca. 1950 sterling
2. **Necklace #433**, ca. 1950 sterling, amethyst
3. **Necklace #434**, ca. 1950 sterling, ebony
4. **Necklace #435**, ca. 1950 sterling, amethyst
- * 5. **Pendant #440**, ca. 1970 14K, ivory, emerald
6. **Pendant #451**, ca. 1970 sterling, white jade, colored beads
- * 7. **Reversible Necklace #501**, ca. 1970 sterling, 14K, cloisonné ebony, amethyst
8. **Pendant**, ca. 1970 oxidized sterling, 14K, black pearls
9. **Necklace #903**, ca. 1987 sterling, 14K, enamel abalone, gemstones, hematite bead chain
10. **Reversible Necklace #984**, ca. 1970 sterling, 14K, black pearl
11. **Pendant #1259**, 1989 sterling, 14K, enamel, abalone, gemstones, bead chain
- * 12. **Segmented Necklace #1872**, ca. 1990 sterling, 14K, painted enamel on pure silver, shell, gemstones: peridot, rhodolite, citrine, blue topaz, amethyst, ruby

EARRINGS

13. **#1284**, 1989 sterling, 14K, enamel, shell, rhodolite
14. **#1604**, ca. 1989 sterling, 14K, enamel, gemstones (rhodolite or ruby)

RINGS

15. **Box Ring**, ca. 1950 sterling, ebony, ivory, coral
16. **Box Ring**, ca. 1950 sterling, ebony, ivory, blue agate
17. **Reversible Box Ring**, ca. 1950 sterling, 14K, ebony, ivory
18. **Cocktail Ring #151**, ca. 1960 sterling, pearls
19. **Cocktail Ring EP-F**, ca. 1960 sterling, ebony, pearl
20. **Cocktail Ring**, ca. 1960 sterling, amethyst, pearls, wire
21. **Cocktail Ring #152**, ca. 1960 sterling, gemstone (ruby or rhodolite)
22. **Ring #577**, ca. 1972-1975 14K, cast figures

23. **Ring**, ca. 1972-1975 14K, gold granulation
24. **Ring**, ca. 1960 sterling, 14K, amethyst
25. **Ring #700**, ca. 1972-1975 oxidized sterling, 14K, black opal
26. **Ring #1092**, ca. 1988 purple enamel, sterling, 14K, blue topaz
27. **Ring #1151**, 1988 sterling, ebony, abalone, gemstone (ruby or rhodolite)
28. **Ring #1107**, ca. 1990 sterling, ebony, abalone, gemstone (ruby or rhodolite)
29. **Ring #1385**, ca. 1990 sterling, ebony, abalone, gemstone (ruby or rhodolite)

BROOCHES

30. **Fibula EP-13**, ca. 1985 grey enamel with red dots, sterling, ebony, black pearl
31. **Fibula #462**, ca. 1981 sterling, 14K, ebony, ivory, onyx, coral, amethyst
32. **Fibula #471**, ca. 1970 sterling, blue lace agate
33. **Fibula**, ca. 1980 oxidized sterling, 14K gold granules, ebony, black pearl, carnelian, amethyst
34. **Brooch #538**, ca. 1986 sterling, 14K, enamel, shell, gemstone (ruby or rhodolite)
- * 35. **Brooch #585**, ca. 1986 sterling, 14K, ebony, ivory, shell, enamel, peridot
36. **Brooch #624**, ca. 1985-1987 oxidized sterling, 14K, enamel, shell, ruby
37. **Brooch**, ca. 1986 sterling, 14K, gemstone (ruby or rhodolite)
38. **Brooch #845**, ca. 1987 sterling, 14K, enamel, shell, gemstone
39. **Brooch #863**, ca. 1980 ebony, walnut, sterling, 14K, black pearl
40. **Brooch #864**, ca. 1980 ivory, sterling, 14K, enamel, shell, rhodolite
41. **Brooch #865**, ca. 1987 sterling, 14K, enamel, shell, ruby, aquamarine
42. **Brooch #875**, ca. 1980 ebony, ivory, sterling, 14K, ruby
43. **Brooch #981**, ca. 1981 sterling
44. **Fibula #982**, ca. 1988 sterling, 14K, rhodolite
45. **Brooch #1208**, 1988 sterling, 14K, shell, enamel, ebony, ivory, rhodolite
46. **Brooch #1215**, 1988 sterling, 14K, shell, enamel, gemstones
47. **Brooch #1237**, 1988 sterling, 14K, enamel, shell, gemstones

48. **Brooch #1364**, 1988 sterling, 14K, enamel, shell, rhodolite, blue topaz
- * 49. **Brooch #1525**, ca. 1990 painted enamel, sterling, 14K, 24K, blue topaz
50. **Brooch #1581**, ca. 1989 painted enamel, sterling, 14K, 24K, rhodolite, amethyst, blue topaz
51. **Brooch #1886**, ca. 1980 oxidized sterling, 14K, enamel, shell, rhodolite
52. **Brooch #2098**, 1990 painted enamel, sterling, 14K, 22K, shell, rhodolite, blue topaz, citrine
53. **Brooch #1113**, ca. 1988 sterling, 14K, enamel, blue topaz

BRACELETS

54. **Segmented Bracelet #1315**, ca. 1989 sterling, 14K, enamel, shell, gemstones: ruby, blue topaz, rhodolite, amethyst, ruby, spinel
- * 55. **Segmented Bracelet #1379**, 1989 sterling, 14K, enamel, shell, gemstones: ruby, citrine, blue topaz, amethyst

* illustrated

TOD PARDON

BRACELETS

56. **Terra Plura #3690**, 1990 sterling, 14K, 24K, enamel, pure silver, ebony, purpleheart, red glass, hematite, black pearls. The Porter Price Collection
57. **Untitled #8492**, 1992 sterling, 14K, copper, ebony, pigmented glass, abalone, shell, paduk, bone, tagua nut, horn
58. **Untitled #14093**, 1993 sterling, 14K, ebony, paduk, bone, turquoise, coral, pigmented glass

NECKLACES

59. **Pendant #13393**, 1993 sterling, 14K, ebony, bone, paduk, pigmented glass, turquoise, blue topaz, chromium diopside, rhodolite

BROOCHES

60. **Untitled #1689**, 1989 sterling, 14K, mahogany, pigmented glass. The Connell Collection
61. **Wisdom's Red Head #5090**, 1990 sterling, 14K, paduk, pearls, malachite, hematite, pigmented glass. The Porter Price Collection
62. **Inside Out #4991**, 1991 sterling, 14K, enamel, coral, ruby, rhodolite, citrine. The Connell Collection

63. **Jackie with Red Balloon #8192, 1992** sterling, 14K, copper, ebony, paduk, purpleheart, pigmented glass, peridot, tsavorite, reconstituted coral. Collection of Jackie Pardon
64. **Ruby's Shell #192, 1992** sterling, 14K, enamel, blue topaz, rhodolite, citrine
65. **Polimon #1192, 1992** sterling, 14K, 22K, copper, enamel, peridot
66. **Golden Voice #7892, 1992** sterling, 14K, ebony, pigmented glass, tsavorite, carnelian
67. **Cotillion Standout #1193, 1993** sterling, 14K, 22K, ebony, simulated ivory, pigment, horn, bone, citrine, rhodolite
68. **Tami Jumbo #12493, 1993** sterling, 14K, 22K, copper, ebony, bone, pigmented glass, chromium diopside
69. **Beak #5594, 1994** sterling, 14K, 22K, copper, mixed inlay, blue topaz, cryspacola
70. **Goose Bumpa #5694, 1994** sterling, 14K, mokume-gane, mixed inlay, hematite, yawha nut
71. **Wishing Zelda #2596, 1996** sterling, 14K, copper, pigment, glass
72. **Who #01997, 1997** sterling, 14K, wood, bone, simulated ivory, pigment, glass



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