

Master's thesis

Grief and Passing in Jewelry Art The Art of Preservation and Letting Go

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Introduction

In our fast-paced modern world, we live one day after another, often forgetting the date or whether it's Wednesday or Thursday, while barely noticing how quickly time flies by. We take it for granted that there will always be a tomorrow. With advancements in medical science, improved hygiene, and hospitals, we encounter death and the immediate consequences of passing less frequently than previous generations. Although the news and social media constantly report deaths, accidents, and other tragedies, they often depersonalize the stories' characters, making the concept of death seem distant. The communal experience and processing of death have faded from our society, making the thought of passing uncomfortable, and discussing it usually unsettling. (Bifulco and Pecchinenda 201, 3)

In this paper, I will examine the expression and processing of grief and passing through jewelry, from classic mourning jewelry to contemporary ephemeral pieces. How did mourning jewelry, which comes to mind when we hear the term, originate? What were the actual purposes of mourning jewelry? How has the fate of these refined objects evolved over the centuries? How have artistic and societal attitudes toward the concept of passing changed? I aim to answer these questions, focusing specifically on Western societies, particularly England, due to the scope of this paper not being sufficient to explore various cultural differences. (For example, considering Mexican or Far Eastern philosophies and life perspectives).

What is Mourning Jewelry?

Before delving into the historical overview, it is essential to precisely define the concept of classic mourning jewelry. According to (Newman 1981), mourning jewelry consists of "various pieces of jewelry worn during the mourning period in memory of a deceased person."

In the following sections, I will explore what this interpretation means within the realm of jewelry art and how it has evolved up to the present day.

Origins and Regional Definition of Mourning Jewelry

Jewelry is one of the oldest forms of self-expression, used by humans for communication since the earliest times. Initially, it primarily functioned as a status symbol, but as it evolved, it took on various roles, including remembrance and commemoration. The first ancient pieces of jewelry were discovered in graves, and some of them—similar to later mourning jewelry developed after the 1700s—contained remains from the deceased, such as teeth, bones, or hair. This suggests that they were created for commemorative purposes, serving as predecessors to mourning jewelry. (Astteria 2021) Specifically crafted mourning jewelry, however, did not become common until after the 1500s, predominantly in England. During this period, more general symbols closely associated with death, such as skulls or skeletons, were used as decorations, often accompanied by the deceased's name and date of death. (Newman 1981, 308) Over time, these symbols became more widespread during the late Georgian period (1710-1837) and reached their zenith in Victorian England during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). This peak followed the death of her beloved husband, Prince Albert, in December 1861. (Tsoumas 2022) Following the queen's death, societal trends were influenced significantly by celebrities such as Oscar Wilde, leading to mourning itself becoming fashionable. (Palka 2014) (Cronberg 2013)

Mourning Rituals and Customs

To understand how the defining jewelry of the era was created, it is essential to review the mourning rituals, customs, and etiquette that developed in England. In the 18th, and especially the 19th century, specific etiquette became integral to the mourning process. Community rules and rituals emerged, which were initially just customary to follow. However, following Prince Albert's death, it became almost mandatory to adhere to the mourning practices established by Queen Victoria.

A distinction must be made between the poorer, middle-class, and aristocratic layers of society. While the wealthy segments of society could afford to seclude themselves in their mansions for weeks or even months following the etiquette, the poor working classes still had to provide for their families. They could not afford special foods, ceremonies, and meticulously crafted garments. However, one thing was common across social differences: everyone had access to dark, black clothing, with only the quality of the materials differing. (Tsoumas 2022, 122) Since ancient Egyptian culture, black had been the color of death, so black clothing indicated to outsiders that the individual was in mourning. (Palka 2014) (Pastoureau 2008) Simultaneously with Queen Victoria's coronation, the era was characterized by scientific discoveries, inventions, and innovations, which naturally influenced communal morals and ethics as people's thinking evolved. Differences emerged between genders and their roles, leading to distinct rules for men and women. Since death usually occurred at home, within the four walls—just like birth—it was more often women who were present, resulting in more and stricter restrictions for women than men. (Palka 2014) For men, the primary requirement was to wear dark, preferably black, suits, gloves, hats, and ties, sometimes adorned with a black ribbon. In contrast, women had to meet much more complex and detailed expectations.

According to English descriptions, the mourning period was divided into three major phases. These phases gradually became more permissive and relaxed over time, but there were

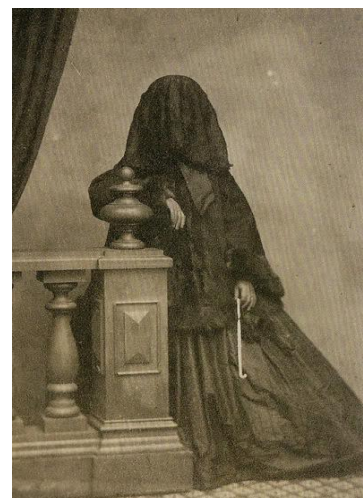


Image 1: Women's mourning attire in the first stage of mourning, around 1860.



Image 2: Women's mourning attire in the second stage of mourning, mid-19th century.

instances where a widow could be expected to mourn for the rest of her life. (Tsoumas 2022, 128)

During the first phase, women had to completely withdraw from the outside world, avoiding all social customs and connections. They could not accept invitations from anyone, and it was not advisable to attend even close family events for a year and a day from the time of death. (Palka 2014) The attire during this phase had strict guidelines. Simple, black crêpe fabric dresses characterized this status, and only a few carefully selected, modest pieces of jewelry were allowed. Additionally, it was mandatory to wear a black veil that covered the face.

In the intermediate phase, the strict expectations slightly relaxed. While simple dresses that avoided splendor and decorations were still permitted, a greater variety of black materials could be used. More mourning jewelry could be worn, and the black veil moved from covering the face to being draped behind the head.

The third and final phase, which could last from three to six months, allowed for more ornate and comfortable clothing. The dominance of black gave way to shades of gray and purple. (Tsoumas 2022, 128)

Although these numerous restrictions may seem severe and harsh towards the mourners, they were beneficial for those grieving. These precisely defined customs helped in processing grief and dealing with the loss. After losing an important person, one might feel lonely and lost, as if left alone against the whole world. Today, society expects us to quickly move past our losses and return to the routine of daily life. Urbanization and the



Image 3: Women's mourning attire in the third stage of mourning, second half of the 19th century.

erosion of traditions have made us forget that customs were established for a reason. By experiencing death not alone but almost as a community, our predecessors elevated an individual loss to a philosophical level, making it easier to accept that passing is a natural part of life. (Dr. Pilling 2012, 8-10)

How did mourning jewelry originate?

The earliest examples that can rightfully be called "mourning jewelry" are pieces imbued with emotional significance, belonging to the deceased and transforming into mourning jewelry when they were passed on to friends or relatives (as gifts or bequests) and worn in memory of the deceased. These early forms of mourning jewelry might not have been "specifically made for this purpose," but they still served an important commemorative function. (Middlemass 2018, 33)

The roots of mourning jewelry can be traced back to the Middle Ages, a time when death was a nearly everyday occurrence. During this period, the concept of "memento mori," which originates from Christian faith and teachings, became widespread. Given that the average lifespan was considerably shorter compared to today, this Latin phrase (reminding people of the inevitable end of life) provided true meaning to daily life. (Carter 2018) Consequently, people wanted to keep this reminder close, and jewelry became the ideal form for this purpose. Thus, "memento mori" jewelry emerged, generally reminding wearers of mortality using classic symbols such as skulls, skeletons, or coffins. (Newman 1981, 308)

It became a custom for relatives to wear the rings of the deceased as a form of remembrance, leading to rings being the most commonly crafted "memento mori" jewelry initially. Over time, pendants and brooches also appeared. (Newman 1981, 308) Following this, there arose a demand to make these unique pieces more personal rather than just general reminders of death. With the incorporation of new symbols, inscriptions, images, and materials, these pieces evolved into personal jewelry and became a distinct type known as mourning jewelry.



Image 4: Gold ring decorated with enamel skulls, bones, and rubies, with "CC" and "AL" monograms inside, around 1550-75.



Image 5: "Torre Abbey Jewel," a gold pendant with a white enameled skeleton on a black background, 16th century.

The development of mourning jewelry reflected a significant cultural shift. As the "memento mori" concept transitioned from a general reminder to a personal keepsake, mourning jewelry became a way to honor and remember loved ones in a more individualized manner. This transformation underscores the human desire to maintain a tangible connection to those who have passed, blending artistry with personal memory.

Their History and Development

In the 17th century, the previously mentioned "memento mori" jewelry began to transform. Alongside general symbols, personal motifs started to appear on the jewelry. These included the deceased's name, monogram, and significant dates such as the date of passing or other important events. This shift marked the beginning of a more personalized approach to mourning jewelry.

By the 18th century, the role of material culture in the individual processing of death became increasingly important. Objects associated with loved ones helped many people alleviate the sense of loss and navigate the grieving process. The association of objects with people mitigates the absence of loved ones for most individuals, aiding the mourning process and helping them come to terms with loss. (Middlemass 2018, 64) Wearing unique mourning jewelry allowed individuals to express their personal loss and "keep" a piece of the departed, maintaining a connection that made daily life and personal remembrance easier. (Middlemass 2018, 65)



Image 6: Gold shoe buckle with an enameled skull, hair, and inscriptions from the late 17th century.

Rings were produced in the largest quantities during this period. However, as the demand for uniqueness grew, other types of jewelry, such as pendants and bracelets, began to appear. The emergence of individual mourning jewelry types reflects the increasing desire for

personalized expressions of grief and remembrance. This evolution from general symbols to personal tokens highlights the significance of mourning jewelry in providing comfort and a tangible connection to lost loved ones.

The attached images clearly illustrate the medieval mourning jewelry symbols previously discussed, such as skulls, urns, and iconic depictions of mourning—often featuring a widow at the grave with a weeping willow hanging overhead. However, the use of simple black enamel started to give way to intricate scenes depicted with enamel. Some pieces showcase astonishing detail, and while they might appear to be made of glass enamel, closer inspection reveals that finely ground hair was used instead of traditional glass powder. This technique led to the inclusion of hair and pearls in the materials used for bracelets created at the turn of the century.

Hair played a significant role in mourning jewelry. It was a personal and durable material, suitable for commemorative objects used daily. Hair was typically placed under glass or quartz, either as a simple design or as a lock of hair encased within a frame of gold and enamel. The inclusion of hair in mourning jewelry allowed for a deeply personal connection to the deceased, making it a poignant and meaningful element in these keepsakes.

Although it was important for the bourgeois class to display their wealth not only through magnificent estates and ornate clothing but also through jewelry, the increasingly wealth-reflecting French fashion had only a negligible influence on the form of mourning jewelry developed in England. Under French influence, valuable gemstones such as diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and emeralds, as well as pearls, ivory, and rare crystals adorned the jewelry, which in England were combined with various shades of gold, silver, and enamel. (Tsoumas 2022, 123) However, since mourning jewelry was heirlooms passed down through generations or accessories with strong symbolism and meaning, the spreading opulent French style, and even the changes occurring in politics and society, were not able to alter the character of mourning jewelry developed in England until the death of Prince Albert during Queen Victoria's reign. (Tsoumas 2022, 124)



Image 7



Image 11



Image 8



Image 9



Image 10

Image 7: Gold ring covered with black enamel and featuring a skeleton, from the first half of the 18th century. Image 8: Enameled gold ring with a portrait of Charles I, from the 17th century. Image 9: Bracelet from around 1790-1810 made with gold, enamel, hair, and pearls. Image 10: Pendant depicting a mourning widow, 1782. 11. Image: Gold ring with enamel and hair, late 18th century.

The Golden Age of Mourning Jewelry

In the first half of the 19th century, there were no significant changes in mourning jewelry. However, in the latter half of the century, great emphasis was placed on this type of jewelry, especially starting from 1861 following the death of Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert. The queen entered a period of deep mourning, which she continued until the end of her life. (Versteeg és van den Hoven 2017, 6) In the royal court, everyone had to mourn similarly to the queen, leading to the adoption of these mourning customs by everyday people as well. (Mendonca de Carvalho, and colleagues 2013, 134) As mentioned earlier, Queen Victoria implemented strict regulations regarding mourning etiquette and attire, including mourning jewelry. The mourning jewelry produced during this period is what typically comes to mind when we hear the term, as this was their golden age in England from 1861 to 1901. (Middlemass 2018, 1)

Due to the strict rules of the mourning period, the widespread use of



Image 13: Brooch with enamel, pearls, and hair on a gold base, around 1860.

black in fashion and jewelry became common. Black almost entirely displaced other colors in the design of mourning jewelry, as it was closely associated with death and mourning, especially in European cultures. (Tsoumas 2022, 129) In addition to black, other colors appeared only in combination with natural materials that had specific symbolic meanings. Similar to previous periods, this era also saw the frequent use of gemstones, primarily diamonds of various cuts, black onyx, pearls (symbolizing tears), various exotic animal horns, black enamel, human



Image 12: Queen Victoria's pendant in memory of her daughter Alice, featuring onyx, agate, and diamonds on a gold base, containing a lock of the princess's hair, around 1878.

hair, and the recently popularized jet, also known as black amber. These materials were combined with gold and silver to create rings, pendants, and bracelets. Brooches and earrings also became increasingly popular. (Tsoumas 2022)

During this era, I observed two prominent groups based on the sources and the collected jewelry. One group highlights the use of hair, while the other centers around jet. Both became significant due to Queen Victoria's influence. The latter became a mandatory element of mourning jewelry etiquette in the royal court until 1887, primarily due to the queen's exclusive use of jet-made jewelry. (Mendonca de Carvalho, and colleagues. 2013, 134)



Image 14: Jet brooch from the 19th century.

Jet is essentially the fossilized remains of driftwood, a rare material that is both hard and lightweight, making it easy to carve, cut, and polish. (Victoria & Albert Museum 2006) Its main source is Whitby in Yorkshire, England, which produced jet jewelry in such high quantity and quality that by 1872, it employed 1,400 men, women, and children in 200 workshops. (Mendonca de Carvalho, and colleagues 2013) However, these meticulously crafted pieces from rare materials were accessible only to the wealthier classes. Consequently, cheaper yet similar substitutes were found in a short period, such as black glass known as jet glass, vulcanite, gutta-percha, ebonized wood, and bog oak. (Victoria & Albert Museum 2006)



Image 15: Ebony wood brooch depicting a hand and flowers, from 1875.



Image 16



Image 17



Image 18



Image 19

Image 16: Jet bracelet with a female cameo and flower motifs, 1870. Image 17: Jet cross pendant carved with rose motifs, 1870. Image 18: Jet carved chain and pendant, around 1870. Image 19: Jet earrings carved with a female portrait cameo and filigree motifs, 1870.

The other prominent group consisted of hair jewelry, or mourning jewelry containing the deceased's hair, which was highly sought after between 1830 and 1880. This trend was significantly influenced by Queen Victoria, who constantly carried an amulet with a lock of Prince Albert's hair following his death. (Tsoumas 2022, 130) Moreover, "Before the era of photography, hair was one of the few physical remnants that survived the decay of the body, preserving the memory of the deceased". (Meier 2020)

Compared to earlier periods, it became much more common to transform the hair of the deceased into some form of jewelry, rather than merely preserving it under a glass or quartz plate. Initially, the goal was to preserve a lock of hair in keepsakes, locket, or mounts. (Harmeyer 2013) However, by the second half of the 19th century, hair became an integral part of the jewelry itself, used in place of chains for necklaces or bracelets, and incorporated into clasps. Jewelers used weaving and braiding techniques to craft this delicate material, which, despite its fragile appearance, proved to be quite durable. These hair jewelry pieces have retained their beauty even after centuries.

Additionally, the lightness of hair allowed for the creation of large, impressive pieces that did not pull on or damage clothing when worn as brooches. Thus, hair became the primary material in jewelry, often combined with precious metals, especially gold, portraits, gemstones, and even jet to highlight its beauty. Outside of England, the use of hair in jewelry became almost a fashion trend in the United States. Renowned jewelry houses like Tiffany & Co. incorporated this unique material into their collections alongside traditional precious materials. (Meier 2020) (Ellsworth 2017)

The scale of hair jewelry production grew so large that by the mid-19th century, an entire industry had developed in England, importing 50 tons of hair annually. (Peters 2005)



Image 20: Gold portrait pendant with a lock of hair and diamonds, 1871-72.



Image 21: Tiffany & Co. bracelet from 1854, featuring gold, diamonds, hair, and silver.



Image 22



Image 23



Image 24

Image 22: Brooch woven from hair, with a metal medallion in the center and a leaf decoration hanging from it. Image 23: Watch chain made from hair, supplemented with metal, dating from 1850-80. Image 24: Hair brooch from Jennifer Berman's collection.

Since both jet and hair proved to be expensive materials, neither could be afforded by the poorer or working classes. Consequently, neither material could become widely popular in its original form over the long term. Although Queen Victoria remained devoted to deep black jet jewelry throughout her life, by the end of the 19th century, only a few continued to wear it. (Mendonca de Carvalho, and colleagues 2013) Hair jewelry was replaced by small portraits made possible by advancements in photography, which relatives could keep in lockets. (R. R. Harmeyer 2013, 49) Similar to jet, hair jewelry also lost its popularity. However, hair remained an important material in jewelry art and object design. This led to the art of hair creations. During this period, intricate hair wreaths, floral compositions, picture frames, and other detailed works were made. These pieces, while decorative, retained their personal nature (Burgess, 2018).



Image 25: "Primitive Methodist Society Dome" made from glass, wood, hair, and wire in 1864.

The fate of mourning jewelry after the turn of the century

After Queen Victoria's death, mourning jewelry production declined in the 20th century, exacerbated by the disruptions of the World Wars, which also affected jewelry design. Post-World War I, strict mourning rules relaxed, likely due to the overwhelming number of mourners, leading to more practical considerations. (Lee 2021) Although commemorative objects regained significance during World War II, they largely faded into obscurity afterward, paralleling changes in fashion and jewelry styles. (Wichrowski 2021)

Pearls, symbolizing tears, persisted in mourning jewelry, but their connection to grief lessened. Instead, their natural appearance and simple color made them acceptable for mourning attire. Thus, pearls replaced older customs and became mourning jewelry in the 20th century. Their elegant appearance and restraint allowed them to fit into modern fashion as mourning jewelry, as seen in Vogue magazines of the 1920s and 1930s. (Lee 2021)

Funerary Jewelry as Fashion Jewelry

In the 1960s, the introduction of plastics and the pursuit of cheaper materials brought about significant changes in the world of jewelry, changes that arguably continue to influence it today. (Saeid 2021) Alongside traditionally accepted jewelry, a contemporary jewelry category emerged that blends elements of applied arts with classical fine arts, as described on Kultúra.hu. (Kultúra.hu 2020) As time passes and boundaries blur, categorizing jewelry becomes increasingly challenging. Classical fashion jewelry typically consists of precious metals and gemstones crafted using goldsmithing techniques. The primary focus of fashion jewelry lies in its aesthetic appearance, with the final product being meticulously crafted to enhance its visual appeal. (Saeid 2021)

In the decades following the 1930s, funerary jewelry has once again become intriguing, albeit in a much more subdued manner compared to previous centuries. Following the invention and popularization of cremation, people had to decide what to do with their loved ones' ashes. They had the option to bury them, place them in a cemetery, keep them at home, or

scatter them in a meaningful location. However, some preferred to keep their loved ones close to them, which led to the emergence of funerary jewelry designed to hold ashes by the latter half of the 20th century. (Kirkland 2023) (I couldn't find visual sources of these pieces, possibly due to their personal nature, as they are unlikely to appear in auctions, sales, or collections.)

Human ashes can be utilized in various ways for creating jewelry. One option is to place them within a sealed compartment or underneath a central gemstone in the jewelry, making the ashes visible through the gemstone. Another method involves physically or chemically transforming the ashes. Some pieces of jewelry mix the ashes with resin, tinting the mixture with pigments, which is then polished after solidification to resemble a genuine gemstone. With advancements in technology, synthetic stones can now be created, and it has become possible to transform the ashes of the deceased into diamonds. This process takes approximately one to one and a half years, resulting in a synthetic diamond from the remains of loved ones. (Calvão és Bell 2021) Such diamonds are often fashioned into rings like traditional gems, but they could be utilized in any other type of jewelry as well.



Image 26: Fine and Flux Jewelry, silver ring with ashes, rubies, and diamonds. 2023.



Image 27: Fine and Flux Jewelry, silver ring with ashes mixed into resin and diamonds. 2023.



Image 28: Raw synthetic diamond made from ashes.



Image 29: Cremation ashes incorporated into a polished

We also find solutions that would still be classified as classic fashion jewelry, but already show the need to convey deeper messages characteristic of contemporary jewelry. Examples include the glass jewelry made by The Seventh Sea; they continue to use the ashes of the deceased, but an added meaning is associated with the finished pieces. The focus is on the gas released from the ashes under heat, representing the last breath, the energy released from the deceased's body. (Sea 2023)



Image 30: The Seventh Sea glass bead pendant with cremation ashes, silver, and pearls.



Image 31: The Seventh Sea glass containing ashes and released air bubbles.

We see another unique use of ashes in the mourning jewelry by Jessica Cast & Found Jewellery, which often encases the ashes of loved ones in cast poppy pods or acorns, stating that “these are the natural containers in our environment” (the jewelry packaging is also unique, with boxes lined with moss), thus returning the deceased and their life stories back to nature. (Cast 2023)

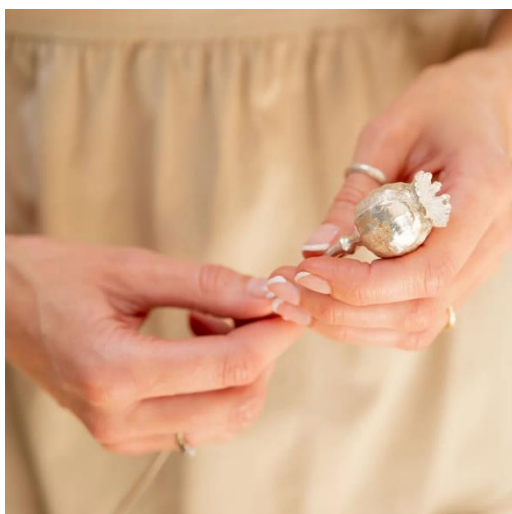


Image 32: Jessica Cast & Found Jewelry, poppy seed pod cast in silver with cremation ashes.



Image 33: Jessica Cast & Found Jewelry, silver necklace featuring a small poppy seed pod cast with cremation ashes.

Mourning jewelry as contemporary jewelry

In the realm of contemporary jewelry, there exist pieces that can be considered mourning jewelry, albeit not necessarily dedicated to commemorating a specific individual. Similar to medieval "memento mori" jewelry, these pieces serve more to represent the concept of loss and mourning in a broader sense, and they often explore the fluidity of the concept of time. It is a natural reaction for artists to incorporate their personal experiences of loss and emotions into their creations, resulting in unique jewelry pieces.



Image 34: Toni Mayner, "Orphan," made from camera parts and wood.

During the spring of 2023, I had the opportunity to visit the Munich Jewelry Fair, where I encountered Toni Mayner's poignant series of jewelry created in memory of his late father. Following his father's death, Mayner disassembled his father's camera and reimagined it into jewelry pieces, intertwining the memory of his father with his artistic expression. While I cannot cover all contemporary artists inspired by medieval jewelry in this work, I strive to select artists whose work showcases the diversity of contemporary jewelry.

The concept of "memento mori" almost comes to life anew when we get to know the jewelry of Constanze Schreiber. Schreiber "uses symbols and archetypes from the past that are still relevant today (skull, pearl), but imbues them with contemporary metaphors". The artist focuses on the complexity of life, which is further complicated by grief. Her goal is for her jewelry to provide opportunities for conversations about death, a topic that is uncomfortable for most people. Constanze Schreiber's pendants and objects demonstrate that memories can create value even while mourning". (Vanderauwera 2014)



Image 35: Constanze Schreiber, "Abschiedsfest" (Farewell Party), bracelet,



Image 36: Constanze Schreiber, "Black Flower," silver, steel brooch, 2009.

Another prominent jewelry designer who draws inspiration from the past is Anya Kivarkis. Starting from Victorian jewelry, she shapes her design world using baroque jewelry designs and Victorian jewelry photographs as foundational elements. (Radulescu 2017) In contrast to the 19th-century black jet jewelry typical of that era, Kivarkis' pieces are dominated by white tones, which truly highlight the sophisticated, almost baroque ornateness of carved and polished motifs. (Simon 2009)



Image 37: Anya Kivarkis, "Movement Image," silver brooch, 2016.



Image 38: Anya Kivarkis, "Marcus Gunther Sketch, c. 1711," silver, white gold, automotive paint brooch, 2007.

Melanie Bilenker, similar to Kivarkis, draws inspiration from Victorian jewelry for her creations. Starting from the technique of Victorian hair jewelry, Bilenker creates delicate pieces that depict everyday situations. She uses hair strands adhered to paper as the basis for her drawings stating, "I try to preserve and display the passage of time, so it can be looked back upon. I strive for the scene depicted in the image to feel as lived-in as we experience it. Hair symbolizes a person, intimacy, a fleeting moment, something left behind." (Bilenker 2019)



Image 39: Melanie Bilenker, hair, resin, gold, ebony, pigment brooch, 2008.



Image 40: Melanie Bilenker, "Dogwood," hair, paper, gold, silver, mineral pendant, 2017.

Shift in Perspective

It is essential to highlight that the showcased jewelry and designers, both in the past and in contemporary spheres, aimed and continue to aim to prevent or slow down the passage of time. We all know how difficult it is to accept that everything in life is ephemeral, and nothing can be preserved forever. The transient nature of life is an integral part of nature, and although it is not always easy, we can still find beauty in it. In my opinion, ephemeral art strives to capture and emphasize this beauty. Ephemeral art, akin to contemporary jewelry, is a relatively newly emerged and difficult-to-define phenomenon. Numerous definitions exist, such as "ephemeral essentially defines the nature of human existence, prompting us to contemplate our existence and realize that nothing is permanent." (Nuruddin 2016, 6) Many descriptions agree on the fleeting nature of time and art. However, what makes ephemeral art different, given that everything in life is transient? In Nuruddin's report, there is a definition stating that "Ephemeral is the branch of art where the work disappears over time; and the passing is an important detail in communication with the audience." (Nuruddin 2016, 8)

As mentioned earlier, contemporary jewelry design can be considered a relatively new artistic discipline. Therefore, it's not surprising that consciously or subconsciously, there is an increasing number of jewelry creations influenced by ephemeral art, where time plays a

significant role. Artists intentionally create jewelry that is ephemeral or has a limited lifespan. They experiment with unconventional materials not typically associated with jewelry, using transient substances and exploring forms and designs that change or disappear over time. These creators explore various themes, including the beauty of transience or the dynamic relationship between the jewelry and its environment, wearer, and the passage of time. As a result, designers often challenge traditional perceptions and expectations associated with jewelry, crafting pieces that reflect the fleeting nature of life. This new approach allows for the innovative use of materials such as biodegradable and fragile substances like paper, bioplastics, or natural found materials. The resulting jewelry pieces can transform, degrade, or break, offering a unique experience both to the creators and the wearers. While the material value of these objects is often a fraction of that of conventional jewelry made from precious metals, their true quality derives from the intrinsic values and narratives assigned to them. These pieces embody a deeper meaning, reflecting the ethos and stories behind their creation.

Stephie Morawetz's sensitive artwork is a great example to understand ephemeral jewelry. The artist "created a prayer necklace consisting of 242 beads, each symbolizing a day when she cared for her grandmother. For Morawetz, life and the subsequent period of mourning correspond to the metaphor of the bead string. It's an endless cycle where repetitive or meditative beads signify the mnemonic rituals of grief and solace. Each bead in the necklace is made from ash, symbolizing not only mourning but also purification and new beginnings. The ritual of mourning gradually begins and becomes certain. The ash beads are hand-crushed until only dust remains." (Nuruddin 2016, 8) Therefore, relatively simple materials like ash and thread have been imbued with significant meanings, thus conveying the artist's story.



Image 41: Stephie Morawetz, "242 pearls for 242 days," ashes, thread, the artist's grandmother's blanket cover, 2023.

The chain crumbled as a performance becomes an integral part of its existence by turning to dust, making the act of destruction a vital element of the object. Meanwhile, Daniela Sharaya's works boldly question the nature of jewelry. Her pieces address important themes such as the value of materials, the concept of jewelry, and our inner feelings, doubts, and fears. Sharaya's creations pull us out of conventional thinking. Most often, we see performance-like compositions recorded on video, displayed on the human body. As Sharaya writes: "One of the most interesting questions that arise when we think about jewelry is the question of the value (and cost) of materials. Throughout history, it has been customary to make jewelry from precious materials, metals, and stones. Today, we have the opportunity to discuss this issue through jewelry, questioning why we consider a particular material expensive or valuable". (Sharaya 2021) She believes, "making jewelry today offers an opportunity to provide new methods for defining the value of materials through a deeper understanding of the ideas and meanings represented by the material". (Sharaya 2021) A great example of this is when the artist makes us reflect on the importance of material value and the passage of time, and its acceptance with her necklace made of live roses.



Image 42: Daniela Sharaya, necklace made from withered roses, 2021.

"A mutual relationship develops between the jewelry and the material, defining each other's value". (Sharaya 2021)

"The Curiosity collection is an ephemeral jewelry collection, immortalized in prints but short-lived like a performance. Lodie Kardouss' jewelry pieces have a physical lifespan that matches their exhibitions because the natural materials used require each piece to be recreated for every new showing. 'The artist performs a gesture choreography, allowing her to reproduce all 11 pieces of the collection as they were originally born in her studio. The making-of performance is documented in a short video serving as a choreographic archive, reenacting the artist's gesture at the heart of creation. The performance's lifespan is also captured in a series of photographs. Each photograph is of the very first piece created, thus serving as physical memories of their existence.' (Kardouss 2019) Therefore, the creation itself evolves into an independent work of art, and the physical object becomes the end product of the choreography."

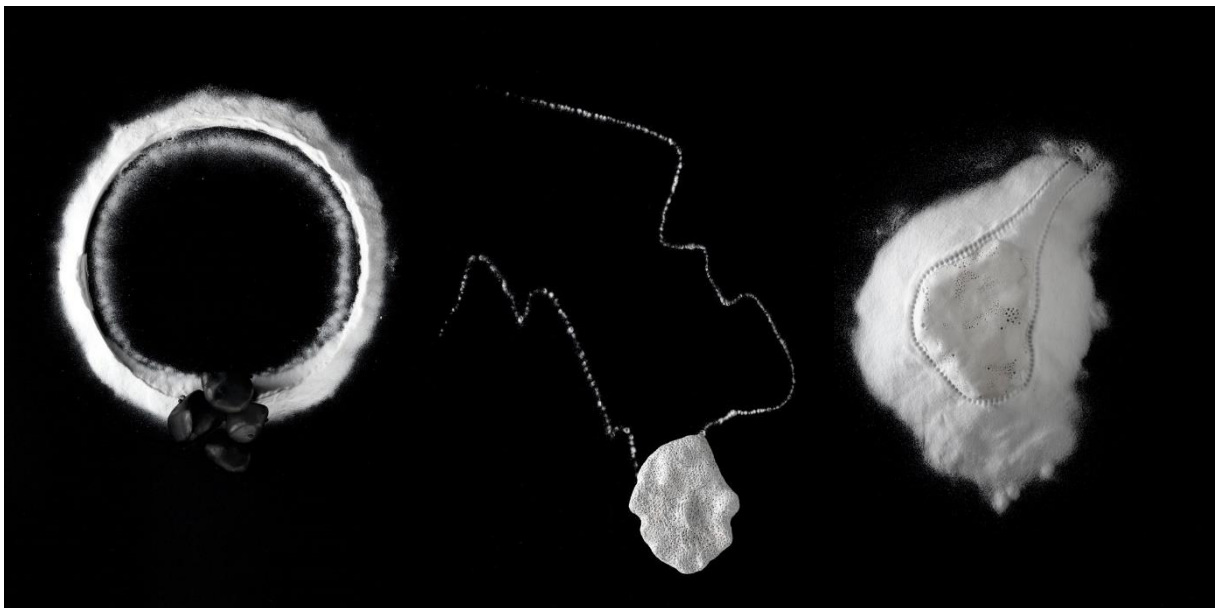


Image 43: Lodie Kardouss, "Curiosity," imprint of baking soda, stones, chains, 2017.

Summary

We can see that over the centuries, not only has the aesthetics of jewelry changed, but also the philosophical views surrounding death embedded in them. The rigid systems that provided security have loosened and transformed into a much more permissive and free environment. However, this freedom comes at a price. The importance of community has gradually been replaced by individuality, which makes coping with loss more challenging. At the same time, the preservative tendencies characteristic of the past have persisted, but a perspective that provokes this way of thinking has come to the forefront. Ephemeral art attempts to bring the concept of passing closer to people, and in certain respects, almost takes on the role of past communities. Jewelry serves as a medium for both trends, as, like death and passing, jewelry is physically and emotionally close to us.

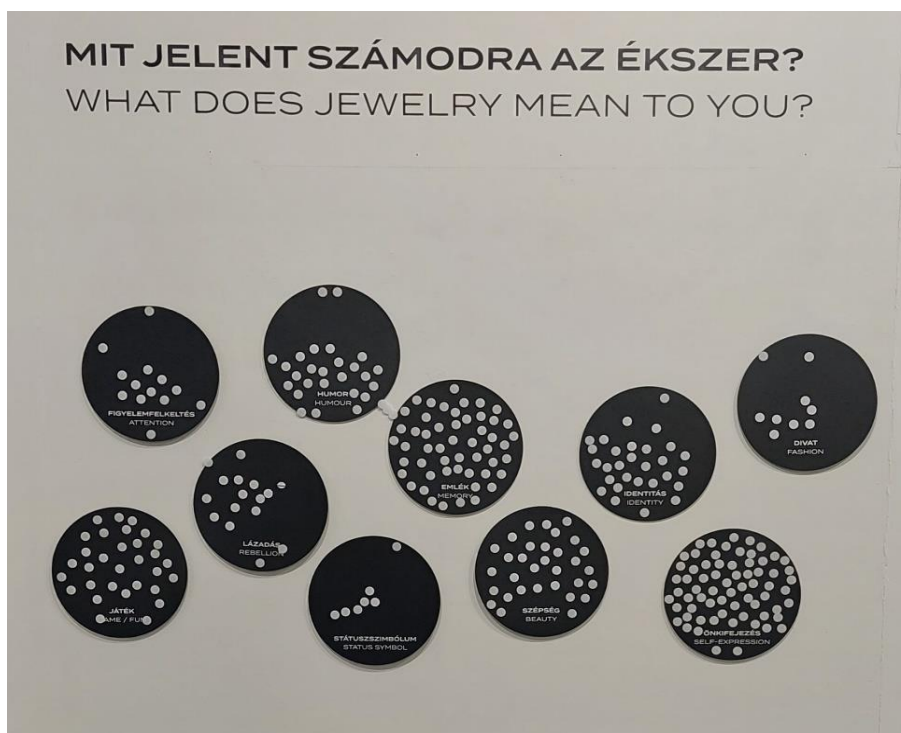


Image 44: Budapest Jewelry Week, "What does jewelry mean to you?" 2023.

This is well symbolized by the interactive installation seen at the central exhibition of this year's (2023) Budapest Jewelry Week. Using labeled clusters and white discs placed on the wall, viewers could indicate what jewelry means to them. One such cluster included memory alongside self-expression, identity, or play. Returning on the final days of the exhibition, I saw that while self-expression received the most votes, memory took second place.

Based on what I've read and seen, I don't feel that one approach is better or worse than the other; both preserving the past and letting go of it have their own beauties. It's solely up to us to notice them.

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Képjegyzék

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<http://www.katetattersall.com/mourning-dress-victorian>

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<https://www.grayanddavis.com/blog/2015/10/16/memento-mori-vs-mourning-jewelry>

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