



a standard cut donna brennan

ROBERT BAINES DISCUSSES DONNA BRENNAN'S REMARKABLE GOLD, ENAMEL AND CRYSTAL JEWELLERY

Prior to Donna Brennan leaving Australia she had followed a philosophy of no pre-condition of material in her jewellery practice. Her work could be best summarised by her *Surgical Bracelet* series. The fundamental condition of this series was to pursue new meanings for jewellery, and specifically its relationship to the human condition. The *Surgical Bracelet* series of 'Scotch Tape', (in either red or green) came about as a consequence of placing the wearer in a stereotypical environment.

Brennan's arrival in Germany and her becoming established in Düsseldorf was followed by new confrontations, in particular, Brennan became conscious of the 'standardising' of jewellery. While mass-produced componentry for the assembling of so called 'individual' jewellery may have provided a multiplicity of options within an industrial manufacturing premise, Brennan observed that it left the meaning of jewellery somewhat barren. As a result of this Brennan began to reconsider the traditional language of jewellery; that is materials and their meanings. The visual vocabulary of gemstones, their settings and the 'vehicle' of gold came under a new scrutiny.

Within the process of making, the rawness of natural quartz crystal, powder enamel, and molten gold is transmuted into artifice. Within the transubstantiation that takes place the realm of the natural transcends into cultural artifice, as the raw (crystal) is intervened by the cooked (enamel). The interplay by the two disparate materials brings harmony with tension—the binary opposites of nature/culture. This is a confrontation of material and condition. The firing of the enamel over the crystal breaks the general rule regarding quartz, where no heat is allowed. The

physical confrontation of heat on the siliceous materials used by Brennan becomes a reading of the resistance to assimilation into a cultural domain.

The making process becomes part of the text. The glassiness of quartz meets the glassiness of enamel and there is a casualty in the transaction. A failure that attests to the struggle, but a consequence of the survival, is a harmony of enamel that envelops the crystal forms beneath. A certain lusciousness appears, and the new fused surface points the observer to the new condition of artifice.

Brennan's series calls into question the cliché of setting a stone. Resting against the transmuted quartz, the stone is devoid of function—deprived of its orthodoxy. Brennan robs these structures of their function and gives them a new purpose of adornment. Further insult to orthodoxy is registered when she melts balls on the ends of the wires.

A Standard Cut challenges pre-ordained notions of fashion and manufacturing, the coronet becomes subversive—a mere inclusion in the new 'stone'. Reclaiming legitimacy of ornament these delicate rings liberate the signage for both maker and observer.

A Standard Cut toured as follows:
Craft Victoria, Melbourne, 20 September–19 October, 1996.
Craftspace, Sydney, 13 December, 1996–5 January, 1997.

Robert Baines is a practising goldsmith exhibiting nationally and internationally, and lectures in the Dept. of Fine Arts at RMIT. He is a researcher of ancient jewellery with published works in international journals, and writes occasionally on contemporary theories of craft practice. He is presently the editor of the *Jeweller and Metalsmiths* Group of Australia's magazine *Lemel*. Baines is a 1979 Churchill Fellow, a 1993 Australia Council Fellow, and received the 1996 Senior Fulbright Award.



Donna Brennan
clockwise from top left

Ring, 1996. 18 crt gold,
enamel, crystal (vanadinite).
Photo: Mathius Baumann.

Ring, 1994. 14 crt gold, crystal.
Photo: Mathius Baumann.

Ring, 1996. 14 crt gold,
enamel, crystal. Photo: Mathius
Baumann.

Untitled Ring, 1993. 14 crt
gold, enamel, crystal. 41 x
23mm. Artist's own collection.

Untitled Ring, 1993. 14 crt
gold, sterling silver, enamel,
crystal. 40 x 28mm. Artist's own
collection.