

# all that glitters...

Sheridan Kennedy's recent work directly plays on the conception of jewellery as adornment, as something that draws the gaze and ropes you in for a closer look, says **Isabella Reich**



YOU CAN IMAGINE SHERIDAN KENNEDY—A CONTEMPORARY JEWELLERY DESIGNER BASED IN SYDNEY—COMBING THROUGH THE TREASURE TROVES OF HER MOTHER'S WARDROBE AND JEWELLERY BOXES WHEN SHE WAS A LITTLE GIRL, costuming herself in chains and pearls and parading about in high heel pumps. Her jewellery combines the same lush decadence of play and costume that the childhood dress-up evokes. Her pieces almost become a costume drama that only truly unfolds in the wearing, without which Kennedy says the pieces appear almost flaccid to her. It is a turn of phrase that is put into context by her belief that "jewellery needs animation to be understood, it comes to life in the immediacy of experience. When you wear something it changes you, it allows you the lenience to costume yourself in another personality". She likes to stage 'happenings' to put her belief of dedicated wearing into action, where she gets friends to wear the pieces she has made, as in *Taste* held in the gourmet food hall in the renovated stately former GPO building in Sydney in 2000. At this event, her friends moved through the crowds spearing morsels of food with various now eponymous pronged utensils that fit snugly on the tip of the finger and fed them to passers-by.

Her most recent collection of work (for they are collections, as those of treasured shells, or rare insects) is *Specious*, which directly plays on the conception of jewellery as adornment, as something that draws the gaze and ropes you in to look. Shown at Object galleries in early 2002, *Specious* toys with the seduction of the viewer-wearer with its definition as superficial yet captivating, something that is at once tawdry and fancy in its attempt to attract attention. The pieces in this show were displayed as a museological exhibit of specimens, permutations of jewellery and insect/botanical life, divined and classified by Kennedy. *Arachnid Flower Brooch* was pinned quivering on the

All photos: J Kukli.



Opposite page: Sheridan Kennedy, *Bonsai coral ring* from *Specious*, 2001. Sterling silver, coral, stones.

Left: Sheridan Kennedy, Akura (+ Autore South Sea Pearl). Elastomas, coral, Autore South Sea Pearls. Collaboration with Akira Isogawa for Mercedes Australian Fashion Week 2002, sponsored by Autore South Sea Pearls.

Below: Sheridan Kennedy, *Retractable Spike Ring* from *Fondue Finger Series* (1999). Sterling silver and steel spring.

wall like a newly discovered insect with emu feathers billowing out of a beaded centre, magnified by a Fresnel lens to pick out its features.

These pieces reinforce studied looking and deliberate display. Kennedy has cemented the relationship jewellery has to costuming for her through various collaborations with fashion designers such as Michelle Jank in 2001, and Akira Isogawa for Mercedes Australian Fashion Week 2002. Both collaborations were sponsored by Autore South Sea Pearls—and the latter one produced delicate nets of pearls knotted onto elastic silicone with Japanese knot motifs.

At the moment her studio is a corner of a large and drafty warehouse space in Chippendale, a space she shares with an organic stylist and an interior stylist. This set-up with other commercial designers has helped put her into a financial frame of mind she laughs, reminding her to marry the business with the jewellery design. Kennedy supports herself with her jewellery practice, and has done over the two years since she set up her business, which in today's commercial environment is no mean feat. However her jewellery isn't necessarily at all straight-laced and sensible, instead showing itself off as a polished interplay of concept and object. Just as Kennedy believes in dedicated wearing, she also believes in dedicated making. She is taking the *Specious* show to Brisbane City Art Gallery in May 2003 where it will be reworked, which she comments is an unusually mature step for her rather than rushing on to the next project. "I always need to be making, my fingers get itchy" she says, and so she continues to seduce us with her finely-honed jewellery like the big bad wolf in grandmother's clothes imploring us to come just that little bit closer.

**Isabella Reich** is a writer with a background in art history and criticism based in Sydney.

**endnotes**

Sheridan Kennedy's web-site is at: [www.sheridankennedy.com](http://www.sheridankennedy.com)

