

JEWELLERY AS SCULPTURE



My Place in the City

The marks in silversmith MIKE RIPOLL's jewellery are part memory, part imagination and part serendipity

It is a theme I frequently return to – the tiny living spaces we carve out for ourselves set against the city that goes on forever

In an issue of the magazine that focuses on art and our relationship with the built environment, the jewellery of Mike Ripoll encapsulates in miniature form the diverse emotions we feel for the places where we work and which give us shelter.

Mike Ripoll is a Spaniard, raised in the Philippines where he studied at the 400-year-old University of Santo Tomas. For the last 30 years he has worked as a designer—of publications, displays, websites, furniture, posters and packaging. Throughout his working life, he has always pursued his love of sculpture. A request from a girlfriend sparked his interest in jewellery and so he went on to study with master silversmith Val Aked and other wellknown jewellers, among them Linda Darty, Carolyn Delzoppo and Thomas Mann. Jewellery for Ripoll is sculpture in miniature.

'I'm intrigued by the magic of turning a flat, lifeless sheet of silver into a three dimensional object—and by symbols, marks, graffiti—anonymous scratches on decaying walls. I am not fond of shiny perfectly polished silver. Or of bling.'

Many of the marks in Ripoll's jewellery are part memory, part imagination, part serendipity. They come from everywhere; they look familiar and as though they've been around for a

long time, made by people one has never met yet somehow one knows them well.

Ripoll likes jewellery that becomes one with the wearer, worn all the time, that ages and tarnishes and gradually reflects the wearer's history until eventually it is passed on.

'The silver I use is usually beaten, burned, scratched, twisted, tortured and generally mistreated. The scrappier the better. I usually let the work process show—the hammer blows, the irregularities of the old anvil, the strokes of the file and the imperfections of the working surface.

'Then I blacken the recesses—much like in the scratched, used cities that I love—all those people making their way within and between the spaces left to them by edifices. I like their graffiti, faded signs, scratches and patterns on decaying walls—tiny living things making their mark on a concrete behemoth.

'It is a theme I frequently return to—the tiny living spaces we carve out for ourselves set against the city that goes on forever—the interaction between people, animals and plants with the huge often brutal economic machinery that lurks behind a modern city, no matter how pretty. There is a



Metropolis 1



Metropolis 2

..some symbols I've made up and some I can't be sure of—they're just in my head, almost by serendipity—fragments or half remembered memories

complexity—a swirling, intricate mass of flesh and machine that I experience and struggle to capture.

'I'm beginning to add colour to my pieces and I'm experimenting with glass-on-metal. And lately I have been letting chance play a role in how I make jewellery—not planning everything anywhere as meticulously as I used to do. I make the background for the city and in the cauldron loosely position the shapes, cogs, gears, symbols and figures I find at the bottom of the silver waste tray. I flux everything, put solder all around and fire the hell out of it. Some pieces vanish completely, some end up twisted and tortured looking, most are moved around by the flame and some simply fall off, leaving a gap, I don't fill the gaps—I figure that whatever falls off didn't belong there anyway. Much like in our cities.

'I'm striving towards what I would call a more honest, personal jewellery that hopefully will mean something to the wearer.'

Nowadays Mike Ripoll lives in Leura and participates in exhibitions as well as accepting commissions.



Sometimes The Tree Wins