"Think Twice: New Latin American Jewelry," is the largest comprehensive overview of contemporary Latin American jewelry to come to the U.S. and Bellevue Arts Museum is the only Northwest venue to showcase this extraordinary collection.

The exhibition features over 130 works by over 90 artists from 25 countries and offers a glimpse into the history of jewelry making in Latin America with an emphasis on the past 10 years.



Ring by Claudia Cucchi of Brazil. Photo by Karl van Velzen Among the many artists whose work is on display include Mirla Fernandes, Dionea Rocha Watt and Claudia Cucchi from Brazil; Valentina Rosenthal and Walka Studio from Chile; Elisa Gulminelli, Francisca Kweitel and Silvina Romero from Argentina; Jorge Manilla, Martacarmela Soto and Eduardo Graue from Mexico; and Miguel Luciano from Puerto Rico. The work of this new generation of artists is varied in scope and explores the relationship Latin Americans have always had to jewelry, while observing it outside its conventional frame.

The exhibit focuses on three themes: addressing the region's past through work completed in the last half of the previous century, investigating the fusion of ethnic influences in the area, and delving into the continent's ever-changing socio-political issues.

Artists such as Enrique Ledezma (Mexico) and Caio Mourau (Brazil) exemplify the work created between the 1940s and 1990s, which helped to shape the path of contemporary jewelry in Latin America and served as inspiration to later generations of jewelry artists.

The oldest piece on display is "Croissant" (1940), a silver necklace with a large rosewood pendant by William Spratling, a North American architect who is credited with reviving the ancient silver craft in the Mexican mining town of Taxco.

Written by Deborah Stone

His work inspired generations of Mexican jewelers to create jewelry in non-European forms with a well-defined national identity. In contrast are the more contemporary pieces such as "Collar para el Coleccionista" (2009) by Costa Rican artist Julieta Odio.

This fascinating necklace, made of silver, glass vials and plastic, was created to hold small mementos and "evolves" as the wearer fills the tiny bottles with objects and changes their contents over time.

For this exhibit, the artist has filled one of the vials with a tiny colored bean. Other artists explore the use of non-traditional indigenous materials in their work.

In "Roots" (2010), Mexican born artist Martacarmela Sotelo employs discs of nopal, a cactus fiber, to create an eye-catching neckpiece. The discs represent the 32 different states of Mexico, linked together by its people.

In "Guacamayas" (2010), Colombian artist Linda Sanchez weaves para grass into her neckpiece with stunning results.

Sanchez works in collaboration with the U'wa, one of the most remote pre-Columbian tribes in Latin American, to preserve their ancient techniques. Interesting found objects are also incorporated into various pieces of jewelry.

In "Olvides de la Revolución" (2008), artist Alcides Fortes of Cape Verde and Mexico integrates porcelain and copper portrait medallions into his silver necklace.

The medallions were discarded tombstone memorials for a family assassinated during the Mexican Revolution. A number of the pieces have religious significance, such as "Altar Itinerante," (2007), a mobile shrine by Maria Paula Amezcua that has a protective shield of winged hearts – the symbol of San Miguel Arcangel.

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Mexicans are said to have much faith in the field commander of the "Army of God," which serves as the official face of the Catholic Church.

Carefully concealed on the back of the piece, however, are a variety of images and symbols referencing the hidden pagan beliefs advocated by these people. Politics also play a role in the work of many of the artists in this exhibit.

Carlos Martiel's "Fuego" (2008) and "Fuego Peludo" (2008) are two body ornaments that allude to Cuba's violent history. The former simulates a gun and the latter is an actual spent gun shell recovered from the Bahia de Cochinos area with human hair as a replacement for the gunpowder.

Colombian artist Nuria Carulla's necklace "Sentados" (1978) contains a silver straight chair, representing the chairs that political prisoners in Colombia were tied to – often for hundreds of days – while in captivity. Several artists bring the notion of memory into their pieces.

Dionea Rocha Watt, for example, takes ordinary objects and materials and gives them a new focus. In "Protection" (2008), she references memorial jewelry and love tokens of past ages which often contained a lock of hair. Here, however, the locket is contained in a nest of hair.

Romina Fuentes deals with the notion of home and the shapes of her textile and iron-made necklaces are reminiscent of hearts as organs, representing the "portable" hearth of a home. Incorporated in the pieces are objects that have personal meaning to her (a T-shirt belonging to her brother, a bit of a cushion from her mother's house, ink that is used to keep in touch with people who are far away) and which convey her sense of home.

The work on display in "Think Twice" aptly illustrates the variance in scope within Latin American jewelry today. It is an engaging exhibit that draws attention to the unique ways in which visual artists and jewelry makers in Latin America view and relate to this diverse region of the world through their work.

"Think Twice: New Latin American Jewelry" runs through October 16 at Bellevue Arts Museum.

## BAM showcases extraordinary collection of contemporary Latin American jewelry

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For information: (425) 519-0770 or www.bellevuearts.org.