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The Figure and Environmental Forms in Jewelry

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63

THE FIGURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL
FORMS IN JEWELRY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Sophie Sheppard
July, 1969

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---|------|
| I. THE PROBLEM | 1 |
| Introduction | 1 |
| The Problem | 1 |
| Statement of the problem | 1 |
| Importance of the study | 2 |
| Limitations of the study | 2 |
| II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE | 3 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| The Works of Rico Lebrun and Ernest Trova | 3 |
| III. DEVELOPMENT AND ANALYSIS OF THE SERIES | 8 |
| Introduction | 8 |
| The Figure and Environmental Forms in Jewelry | 8 |
| IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS | 35 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 37 |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| FIGURE | PAGE |
|-------------|------|
| 1. | 10 |
| 2. | 11 |
| 3. | 13 |
| 4. | 13 |
| 5. | 14 |
| 6. | 14 |
| 7. | 15 |
| 8. | 16 |
| 9. | 18 |
| 10. | 19 |
| 11. | 20 |
| 12. | 21 |
| 13. | 21 |
| 14. | 24 |
| 15. | 25 |
| 16. | 26 |
| 17. | 28 |
| 18. | 29 |
| 19. | 29 |
| 20. | 30 |
| 21. | 30 |
| 22. | 31 |

| FIGURE | PAGE |
|-------------|------|
| 23. | 33 |
| 24. | 33 |

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

For some time the candidate has had an interest in the application of sculptural figurative and environmental form to work in jewelry. In exploring this interest a series of silver objects was started utilizing the human figure and related forms to serve as an environment for these figurative elements. The figure itself evolved in two directions. The first involved the use of accidental, raw, unfinished form as inspired by the sculpture of Rico Lebrun, and the second was the use of an extremely finished, mechanical handling of the figure as suggested by the works of Ernest Trova. The environmental elements stemmed from Trova's figures and their placement within geometric environments, and, in several instances, from similar elements of Lebrun's work.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study to produce a series of silver jewelry, conceived of as small sculpture, exploring the use of the figure and related environmental forms. These were developed through the study and application of the following means: 1) utilizing the figure in jewelry based on interpretations of work by Ernest Trova and Rico Lebrun; 2) studying reflections as a decorative element on polished silver surfaces; 3) creating variations in jewelry design involving the geometric forms, such as the circle,

and the rectangle, as a point of departure; 4) controlling the accidental in constructing forms by the over-heating and fusion of the metal used.

Importance of the study. Studying the work of other artists has been stressed frequently as an important means of inspiration in the work of the candidate. It was the intention of this study to develop a series of jewelry forms in the above context and to respond to the motivation and resulting changes that occur in creating original work through the impetus and inspiration of another (other) artist(s) work. The study presented reviews of the literature on the works and philosophies of Ernest Trova and Rico Lebrun. It further discussed the relationships between the human figure as conceived by the two artists, and an environment of geometric shapes. Work produced by the candidate was presented as interpretive of the issues discussed on Lebrun and Trova.

Limitations of the study. This thesis was composed of eighteen piece of jewelry. The materials used were silver, gold, copper, fur, and enamel. The methods used were the customary methods of the silversmith: fabrication, casting, fusion and enameling.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

When other artists provide inspiration to the work of the student, the purely plastic properties of their work must be clearly visualized and analyzed. Further, it is helpful to include a supporting discussion of the personal intellectual concepts and philosophies of these artists regarding their work.

This chapter covers such aspects of the works of Ernest Trova and Rico Lebrun as are relevant to the work of this candidate.

I. THE WORKS OF RICO LEBRUN AND
ERNEST TROVA

Discussing the visual aspects of the works of the two artists exposes plastic qualities which, at first, seem to have little in common. When this contrast in visual material is advanced to a discussion of the motivational philosophies of the two artists, however, many similarities are found in their work.

Trova's pieces are "identical, anonymous dummy figures" (6:17) with the highly polished appearance of being machine-made, mass-produced articles. His surface finish is flawless, shiny, cold and sterile. The figure is always found in the same static pose: about to fall, hence its name Falling Man. "He is a science fiction puppet in surgical steel" (3:18). The figure is armless, sexless, sway-backed, and has a pronounced protruding abdomen described as "the

false pregnancy of an elderly eunuch" (3:18) by Jan Van Der Marck.

Conversely, Lebrun's figures are extremely organic conceptions of man's image. They are raw, agonized figures, often appearing wounded and tortured, bursting with the powerful movement of their particular pain. There is no feeling of sterility or perfection of finish in his work; for instance, in his painting, Hostages, we find "grotesque graces with their craggy faces, broad hips and horribly dimpled knees" (11:36). Described rather critically, as "degenerate, lumpish shapes with half-formed arms and legs like boiled potatoes with mouths and hair" (2:17) his figures can be sharply contrasted to Trova's precisely made, highly polished forms.

With the visual properties of Lebrun's raw, rough masses of sculptural form, there is transmitted the impression of his physical and emotional presence, or the presence of his hands as he formed the piece. "The secret of the strength . . . is . . . due to the artist's all out abandonment to his emotional impulses" (10:46). On Trova's Falling Man and its often chrome plated surface perfection there is no feeling of this physical permeation of the hand of the artist. Instead there is a very definite feeling of the presence of the intellectual, conceptual artist. One feels that Trova's pieces are the material manifestation of a mental concept, while in Lebrun's work one visualizes the mental process as it has been transferred through the hands into the action of production. In Trova's work one is concerned with the visual concept and the finished product, not with the intermediary steps except for a possible technical interest. In

Lebrun's however, one is forced to regard the physical actions of the sculptor as well as his conceptual idea and final product because the traces of his path of action are so apparent.

As with the differences in the human form as conceived by the two artists, there are definite dissimilarities in concepts of their work. Trova, in particular is extremely interested in the role played by environment in relation to Falling Man. Until recently, Falling Man has changed little except for his position within his various environments. Falling Man's environment is composed of highly refined and polished shapes which, like the figure itself, seem to be precision-manufactured objects of the computer age. The figures either stand or fall within their environment, or the machine-like parts form an entity including the figure, reducing the stature of the figure to a component within a total mechanical system. "A new surrealist dimension appears in the static landscape where nameless directorial objects constitute a sort of outerspace environment for the figures with imaginary scientific instruments attached to their torsos"(7:12).

When employed by Lebrun, environmental elements become part of the compositional structure related to the figure in a more traditional sense. When he uses environmental forms at all, they appear to be extensions of the organic material and movement of which the figurative element is composed. As in his painting Beggars Balustrade, ". . . fragments of remembered images of a meat stall, a balustrade, a human figure, merge into passages without specific recall . . . the legs of the beggar fuse into an interwoven image" (9:14).

The affinity between the two artists occurs in their apparently negative concept of the image of man.

About Falling Man, Jan Van Der Marck states that:

This facelessness deprives him of individuality, the truncation of the upper body thwarts his powers to act and to articulate and the suppression of sexual characteristics make it impossible for him to communicate on the biological level.

.
 Relevant to the artist's intentions and significant in its philosophical implications is the fact that Trova applies the generic title Falling Man regardless of the actual position of the manikin's body, whether standing, falling or prostrate. The epithet "falling," consequently, denotes a condition of being -- the fallen state of man -- rather than a physical action in process. Whether walking or standing, the figure is equally consistent with Trova's concept of Falling Man The fatalistic slant of Trova's Falling Man is further enhanced by his determined gait, by his defiance of gravity and by a distinct suggestion of remote-control movement, relieving him of the burdens as well as the risks of free choice (12:64-66).

Out of context with the figure, the machine parts become at once absurd and threatening and Falling Man is reduced to a replaceable part within the totality of the machine. "In the face of certain doom man's alternate choices are dignity and hysteria" (12:66).

Lebrun's figures react to their circumstances with violent and dramatic agony. The environment in Lebrun's work is often implied by the convulsions of his figures rather than depicted in a material form. The implied environment reduces his figures to a state of bound doom. "It is only by reaffirming through tragedy the emotional meaning of man's destiny that Lebrun can express the dignity as well as the futility of man" (I:60). Where Trova's Falling Man is reduced

by their distress to something less than a romantic paragon.

Neither artist thinks of his particular imagery as negative however.

About his work, Lebrun says:

I am not in love with decay. But I am in love with an object that has experienced some kind of existence. Our desire for simplicity, for triumphant solutions, for accomplishment, for the clearcut and the wholly "original" stems from our puritanism. We have a fear of mud and blood. But if we are to be anything, if we artists are to survive this period at all -- we will survive as spokesmen, never again as entertainers (11:35).

Similarly, Trova presents man as viewed within a world structured by systems and computers over which he has little, or no, control. Yet his figures sit with dignity within the situation that they find themselves. Van Der Marck further states:

Trova insists that despite the ordeals he inflicts on his subject, the Falling Man should be read in a positive way. He claims to project man as master of his own fate, cool and composed in triumph as well as defeat, untouched by irrational panic, as cognizant of his coming and going on this planet as he is of time and eternity and facing the fact that even total annihilation requires man's free choice and intervention. . . . In singling out the universal and generic in man and in freeing him from particularized associations, Trova has succeeded in elevating Falling Man to the level of a symbol; he has created Man of Tomorrow (12:67).

CHAPTER III

DEVELOPMENT AND ANALYSIS OF THE SERIES

The following chapter involved a personal interpretation of the utilization of environmental form as related to the figure in a total sculptural unity, as inspired by Lebrun and Trova, and as correlative to the work of the candidate.

It should be noted here that the review of literature pertaining to Rico Lebrun discussed only his paintings, prints and drawings. However, the candidate regards such discussion applicable to Lebrun's three dimensional work as well, and, therefore, to the work of this candidate.

I. THE FIGURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL
FORMS IN JEWELRY

The visual contrasts afforded by the works of Lebrun and Trova was most strongly felt in the first nine pieces of jewelry in the series. To juxtapose elements of the works of each artist in a series of silver jewelry items constituted the substructure of the thesis. The intention in selecting such highly contrasting visual material as the inspirational sources was to record the changes that occurred when dissimilar form was combined within a visual totality. The resultant metastasis is further altered by the interpolation of the candidate's personal interaction to the series as it was produced.

Lebrun's freedom in manipulating the figure on a large scale was one of the primary sources of inspiration to the candidate, though as the series progressed, this interest was minimized to some extent. The collocation of the rough figure with the geometric environmental shapes found in Trova's work, afforded the desired combination of contrasting material in the first half of the series.

The issue in Figure 1 was to maintain the impression of the looseness, strength and directness of method seen in Lebrun's work, yet reduce it to a scale suitable to jewelry. The difficulty encountered was that much sculptural form could be sacrificed in the effort to retain this feeling on such a small scale. Thus, instead of casting the figure, which would be the procedure normally used, the figure was constructed directly by the fusion of small scraps of silver with an extremely hot flame. This method eliminates the 'tightness' usually found in small scale work and facilitated accidental and expressive form, in keeping with the qualities of Lebrun's figures.

Here, the precise geometric shapes found in Trova's work were provided by the circle, or inverted dome, used as an environmental backdrop to the figure. While the geometric influence was present at this stage, the rough finish of the total image caused the piece to be applicable more to the work of Lebrun than to that of Trova.

This pattern was closely adhered to in the next piece (Fig. 2), with variations in the figure which became more refined as greater control with the torch was achieved, and with the addition of a secondary dome.



Figure 1. Silver and Gold. 1 1/4" high.



Figure 2. Silver. 1" high.

An interest in manipulating the original environmental shape was seen in the following pendant (Fig. 3). In this case, the dome was split, then reconstructed to form the crescent shape (Fig. 4). In this, and successive pieces, the candidate explored the architectural possibilities inherent in the dome-shape by its division and subsequent reassemblage of the parts. A highly polished surface formed the support for the figure here, thus a greater degree of contrast between the figure and environment was incipient in the work.

Figure 5 progressed with this interest in the contrast of finish and the manipulation of the circle (Fig. 6). Negative space was introduced here with the rectangular hole cut in the top plate of the supporting environmental shape. As the pieces, when worn, are seen only from the front, it was felt by the candidate that the use of negative space emphasized the three dimensional properties which could otherwise be ignored by the viewer.

At this point in the series, a greater degree of correlation between the figure and its environment was felt to be necessary. The format of the environment was modified to relate more logically and traditionally to the figures; in this case, it became a landscape. The negative space within the circular framework was emphasized to give the impression of deep space to the rainbow (Fig. 7) and the mountains (Fig. 8). Further, the gold beading used for purely decorative properties in the previous pieces was eliminated.

However, the interaction between figure and environment in Trova's work does not rely on a traditional play between figure and



Figure 3. Silver and Gold. 1 1/2" high.



Figure 4. Back view of Fig. 3.



Figure 5. Silver and Gold. 1 3/4" high.



Figure 6. Back view of Fig. 5.



Figure 7. Silver and Enamel. 2 1/4" high.



Figure 8. Silver and Enamel. 2 1/4" high.

environment. Figure 9 involved a partial reversion to the original contrast between the organic figure and the geometric environment. Instead of attempting to reconcile the opposed elements by the homogeneity of finish seen in the first pieces of the series, it was decided to emphasize the dissimilarity between the two elements. The circle remained as a framework for the piece, yet it was treated more minimally than in previous work. The figures remained the rough, organic form, consistent to Lebrun's work, and were placed on the highly polished circular environment which was left unbroken by decoration except for small enamel dots flush with the surface. Here, the concept of reflection became an integral part of the piece. The rigid and static qualities of such hard geometric form begin to flow with the movement of reflection over the surface of the circle.

Concordant to these concepts were Figures 10 and 11. Figure 11 introduced a variation on the use of reflective surface; part of environmental shape was constructed in copper. As the surfaces of both copper and silver here highly polished, the color change between the two metals became ambiguous and subordinate to the reflective qualities of the total surface.

To interpret figure and environment as segregated parts within a given piece became dissatisfactory to the candidate, however. The environmental elements in Figure 12 suggested the figure to a position of incidental importance. The balance established between figure and environment in the previous pieces was upset as the form of the inner dome, with its nipple-like protuberance, suggested the



Figure 9. Silver and Enamel. 2 1/4" high.



Figure 10. Silver and Enamel. 2 1/2" high.



Figure 11. Silver, Copper and Enamel. 2" high.

Figure 12. Silver and Enamel.
3" high.



Figure 13. Back view of
fig. 12.



presence of figurative form within itself. Much greater attention was given to the environment than to the figure as the detail even on the back (Fig. 13) would suggest. This imbalance indicated that the figurative form within the environmental structure should be stressed.

Here, there was a reversal of roles played by the respective influences of Trova and Lebrun. In the first ten pieces of the series, the figure was visualized in terms of Lebrun's rough organic form, and as separate from the environment inspired by Trova's use of geometric shapes.

Influential to the architectural structure of the next half of the series were the following two visual concepts taken from Lebrun's work. As illustrated in the discussion of his painting, Beggar's Balustrade, in the previous chapter, he employs a fragmentation of imagery, fragments of the figure interwoven with fragments of the environment. Second, in his painting Villon's "Death Ballad" (4:30) a compositional device is used consisting of two reclining figures in separate elongated box shapes, gave impetus to the subsequent work of the candidate.

In accord with the above concepts, cast doll parts were set into a rectangular framework. The fragmented anatomical parts became less identifiable and thus, took on more importance as integral parts of the piece. The doll forms had the same 'dummy' quality as does Falling Man, and like wise were highly polished. As the distance between figure and environment were lessened, the candidate

realized, that as the pieces were jewelry, the environment was extended to include the person wearing the piece. The reflective surfaces extended that environment even further to include the color, light, and movement surrounding the wearer.

The first of these pieces (Fig. 14) included the above elements and retained the idea of contrasting rough and shiny forms. The breasts and knee were cast from wax positives which gave a surface on which a high polish was possible. The rough hand was made by casting directly from the rubber doll part which, having a high content of silica, did not burn out completely in the casting process.

The contrasting surface form in Figure 15 was provided by the juxtaposition of the highly polished silver breasts and supporting framework of the piece, and the rough gold nugget. A new material used for contrast was introduced in the series with the fur piece in the center section. Until this time, the candidate had used only contrasting surface textures in metals. The use of fur places greater emphasis on the contrast of texture by absorbing more light than does a metal surface, and accentuating the total tactile qualities of the piece.

By allowing the figurative element, the stomach section in Figure 16, to become the major structural unit in the piece, an even closer affinity between the figure and environment was achieved. A departure from the purely rectangular structure of the preceding two pieces resulted and this change in structure was evident in further



Figure 14. Silver. 4" x 1 1/2".



Figure 15. Silver, Gold and Fur. 3 1/2" x 1 1/2".



Figure 16. Silver. 2 1/4" x 2 1/2".

work in the series. Contrast in form did not occur in opposed textural qualities here, as all parts had a mechanically conceived polish. Contrast was provided in the curvilinear stomach, and related amorphic forms protruding from the rigid, mechanical structure of the box forms.

The break from the solid rectangular format to the fragmentation of the total piece in Figure 16, led to the development of the next two pieces (Fig. 17 and Fig. 18). In Trova's most recent work called Hinged Man, his manikin figure is cut up and reassembled in hinged sections. Similarly, the foot in Figure 17 was cut and reassembled to give a dissected image. Figure and environment played equal parts in Figure 18. The vertical form of the leg opposed the circle and square (Fig. 19), thus organic form is contrasted to geometric form, yet there is no longer a true figure versus environment relationship inherent in the piece. The grinning faces had a definite relationship to the role of the wearer as environmental to the piece.

Figure 20 and 21 involved the only major use of color in the series and here it was confined to the pink fur which was the primary environmental element of the piece and the main source of emphasis on the tactile qualities of the bracelet.

The contrast between mechanical and organic form was reduced greatly in Figure 22 by the rigid construction of the parts, with the exception of the rough surface on the protruding fingers. The reflective surface qualities of the piece were exploited by the wide



Figure 17. Silver and Fur. 3 1/4" x 2 1/2".



Figure 18. Silver and Fur.
2 3/4" x 1 3/4".

Figure 19. Back view of
Fig. 18.





Figure 20. Silver, Copper and Fur Bracelet. 1 1/2" wide.



Figure 21. Side view of Fig. 20.



Figure 22. Silver. 1 1/2" x 2 1/4".

expanse of polished silver forms.

The last piece in the series (Fig. 23) constituted a partial return to the original source material, yet the use of this material was quite different in concept. The figurative element was reduced to a mass of rough fingers protruding from a slit in the top of the rectangular environmental structure. The original contrast between Lebrun's rawness of finish and Trova's perfection of finish was seen here, yet the intention of the contrast was not to separate, but to combine the elements affording this contrast. The reflective surface in the box accomplished this, in part, as it mirrored the finger shapes, thus the rough shape was seen on the shiny surface itself. The rough fingers sticking out from the slit suggested further organic material within the box shape, yet they grew from within a mechanically conceived environment. An ambiguity in spatial relationships was caused by the self reflective qualities of the piece and the resulting multiple images that occurred. This ambiguity was furthered by the small size of the box relative to the imaginary figures that would be attached to the fingers (Fig. 24).

The philosophical content of the works of Ernest Trova and Rico Lebrun affected the work of the candidate only minimally in comparison to the visual properties offered by the two artists' work. The idea of man in bondage to his surroundings occurred in the series only because of the fact that the figures, and figurative elements were confined by structural boundaries. There was inherent in the last piece, however, a psychological impact in the content that gave



Figure 23. Silver.
4" x 1 1/4"

Figure 24. Side
view of Fig. 23.



an impression of imprisonment and anguish not unlike that found in the works of the two artists.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to make a series of jewelry, conceived as small sculpture, using the human figure in relation to environmental form. The review of literature pertinent to the study consisted of a presentation of the visual and philosophical content in the work of Rico Lebrun and Ernest Trova, and an analysis of the work of the candidate as influenced by these artists.

The work consisting of eighteen pieces of silver jewelry, could be subdivided into two basic groups. The first ten pendants explored the use of figurative form as inspired by Lebrun, and environmental form derivating from Trova's work. The tenth piece was considered a pivotal point in the study. The second group of eight pieces was a partial reversal of this format, with most of the figurative elements stemming from Trova's Falling Man, and the relationship between figure and environment inspired, in part, by Lebrun's Beggar's Balustrade and fragmented composition.

In the second half of the series, the personal contribution by the candidate becomes the most prominent element in the work. This occurred as the original ideas of relating figure to environment, studying reflection as a decorative element integral to the piece, creating variations in jewelry design involving geometric forms, and controlling the accidental in constructing forms by fusion, were interpreted, expanded and evolved.

The philosophies discussed in Chapter II furthered the candidate's comprehension of the work of the two artists, yet it is the visual material with which she was most concerned. There was no attempt made to retain this philosophical content in the candidate's work, as the visual material indicated the structure of the thesis. In the last half of the series, most of the pieces had a humorous quality, which was indicative of the personal interpretive work by the candidate. The last piece had some of this humor, yet contained also some of the content of Lebrun and Trova when discussed philosophically.

Exploration and development of ideas and forms indicated by the last piece are suggested as further work by the candidate, but these ideas do not pertain to the thesis under study, and thus, will be treated as an independent series.

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