

The Body Adorned

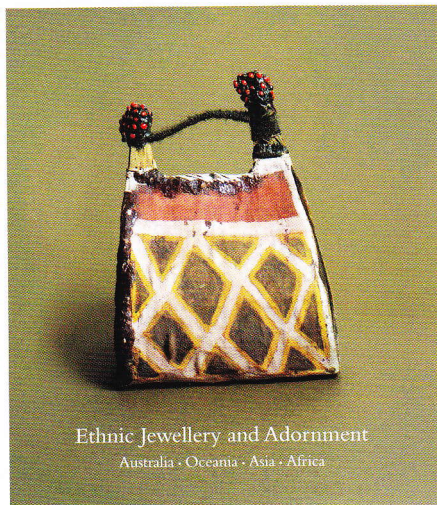
Jewelry and bodily adornment are intrinsically sculptural. The diversity, meaning, and singularity of such objects from around the world speak to many differing social, cultural, and spiritual traditions.

By Christine Nicholls

Truus Daalder's magnum opus *Ethnic Jewellery and Adornment*¹ is a handsome and scholarly book. In this comprehensive survey Daalder successfully marshals an impressive body of knowledge about the world's ethnic jewelry and adornment traditions. Daalder's approach to her subject matter is comprehensive: she focuses on the objects themselves, canvasses the social histories and cultural milieux in which they are located, and, where relevant, examines their political contexts. Based on years of meticulous research, and ranging over many differing objects, social practices, and traditions, this beautiful and ambitious book represents a substantial achievement on the author's part.

Husband Joost Daalder's skilful and sensitive editing and son Jeremy's high quality photographs—of more than 500 items from the family's personal collection of ethnic adornments—also play important parts in the book's success. Daalder Jr. brings to his photographs the connoisseur's feeling for the formal presence of these extraordinary items. These excellent photographs also contribute to readers' understanding that these objects are significant items, the value of which transcends any simple or 'mere' ethnographic appeal. Jeremy Daalder's superb photography encourages readers to appreciate these treasures as not only having ethnographic significance but as having some purchase within a 'fine art' paradigm. This enables readers to evaluate each work's aesthetic qualities in terms of contemporary artistic criteria. An additional 200 high quality photographs of Australian Aboriginal and Pacific Island pieces from the South Australian Museum's collection accompanies and complements Jeremy Daalder's photographs.

While the author's passion for her subject informs this book and lies at its heart, Daalder also investigates related questions. Included among these are questions concerning who wears specific items of jewelry and why, as well as how bodily adornment and decoration function



as status markers in diverse cultural groups, and/or can be indicative of the wearer's place in local social hierarchies.

In her *Introduction*, Daalder also canvasses the subject of the affective

potency that particular groups of people attribute to the wearing of certain ornaments and objects. Carefully distinguishing 'universal' magical thinking about the power of jewelry and bodily adornments—it seems that all cultural groups tend towards such thinking—from the highly specific beliefs of certain cultural groups, Daalder writes, "Perhaps the most frequently recurring themes are the fear of malevolent spirits and misfortune, and the wish for fertility and good luck. Possibly the Chinese have the most systematically organized set of symbols to express wishes for a long life, happiness, marital harmony, the birth of sons and many more of their greatest desires. Fear of omni-present evil spirits and danger is expressed in objects from New Guinea and Borneo, but it is also present in the blue beads on Central Asian ornaments, used to deflect the 'evil eye' (which is blue), as well as in amulets worn in the Middle East, India and Tibet. The expression may take a different shape, but the emotions behind the pieces are universal..." (p 9). This human capacity and indeed, predilection, for imbuing specific inanimate objects, ornaments or bodily adornments with a capacity for generating good or ill is, it would seem, a characteristic of homo sapiens. At no point does Daalder make the mistake of distinguishing between what were, up until recently, widely regarded as a 'primitive' and 'civilized' belief systems.

The comprehensive coverage provided by this book is reflected in its detailed sections, dealing with Aboriginal Australia; New Guinea; Melanesia and Polynesia; Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines; Southeast Asia, China, and Mongolia; The Himalayas (Tibet; Ladakh; Nepal; Bhutan); India; Central Asia (The Turkomen; Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan; The Caucasus); Turkey and Greece; as well as with The Middle East and Africa. The items under discussion include headwear, necklaces, earrings, armbands, belts, carvings, personal items and charms used for purposes relating to sorcery, as well as other three-dimensional



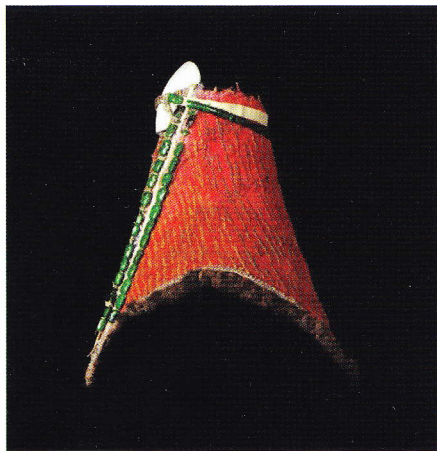
Warrior's helmet (te barantauti), Kiribati, Gilbert Islands (Micronesia); 19th century, skin of the porcupine fish, H: 34 cm, W: 25 cm. SAM A6522; 'Old Collection' (before 1911).

objects used to adorn the human body, to confer power upon the wearer, or to ward off harm.

Owing to the encyclopedic nature of this book, what follows in this article cannot extend much beyond a mere sampling of its riches. *Ethnic Jewellery and Adornment* starts with a discussion about Australian Aboriginal bodily adornments and objects, ranging from items incorporating marsupial teeth; aprons and pubic covers; shell ornaments; woven fibers used in ornamentation, baskets, armlets, and necklets, and numerous others. The book's front cover shows a very fine hair-string, ochre painted, beeswax and seeds (*Abrus Precatorious*, also known as Crab's Eye and Black Eyed Susan) armlet known as a *tjunguti* from the Tiwi Islands, north of Australia, one of a matching pair worn on each arm by young female and male initiates during their initiation ceremonies.



Young man's hair ornament (*nuok*); the hair is pulled through the cylinder and sticks out at the back, PNG, East Sepik Province, Vokeo Island; first half of 20th century, cane, dogs' teeth, resin, pigments, H: 20 cm, Diam. (at bottom): 12.5 cm.



'Judge's wig', ceremonial headdress (*peng koem*), PNG, Western Highlands Province, Wahgi Valley: Melpa people, 20th century, human hair on rattan frame, resin, ochre, orchid fibre, green beetles, white balershell, H: 47.5 cm, W & D: 35 cm. South Australian Museum, Adelaide, acquired in the 1960s.



Admiralty Islands' 'war charms', PNG Admiralty Islands, Pak Island (?), 19th – 20th century, carved and painted wood, serrated frigate bird feathers, parinarium nut paste, string, H: 48 cm, W: 14 cm each. Collected by an Adelaidean military policeman in 1915.

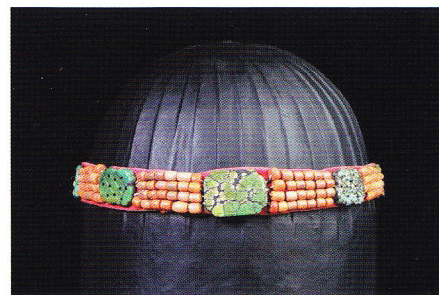
The following section, where the focus is upon New Guinea and Papua, showcases the remarkable range of bodily adornments of these diverse peoples. The war-like nature of these Papuan-New Guinean societies is demonstrated by many objects, including two 'war charms' from the Admiralty Islands in PNG, comprising carved and painted wood, serrated frigate bird feathers, parinarium nut paste and string. While little detail has been brought to the carving of these objects' bodies and legs, their carved heads and faces have been afforded considerable attention. That bellicosity can be channeled into the production of such charismatic objects is a matter of no small interest.

Moreover, the face decorations, armlets, aprons, and particularly the ubiquitous ceremonial headdresses and head- and face-related accoutrements worn by men are visually stunning. They also reveal a good deal about the nature of these societies. For example, a bright red and green 'Judge's wig', a ceremonial headdress fashioned from human hair placed on a rattan frame, with resin, ochre, orchid fiber, green beetles, and white shells as decoration, speaks eloquently to a society in which men routinely wore, and in many cases, continue to wear, fancy wigs as a means of beautifying themselves in order to attract the opposite sex.

The fascination of New Guinean men with headwear of diverse kinds is also evinced by a hair ornament called a *nuok* worn by young men on Vokeo

Island on the north coast of PNG in the East Sepik Province. This rather astonishing cylindrical hair ornament has been made from plaited cane and resin and is decorated with dogs' teeth and natural pigments. The wearing of this adornment produced an effect not unlike a variation on the contemporary 'Mohawk'. As Daalder explains, the long hair at the back of the young man's head was pulled through the ornament, while the "[h]air at the front of the head was shaved off, and the cylinder containing the hair stuck out backwards at an angle." (p 70)

Still on the subject of male headwear, Truus Daalder provides a formidable example from Kiribati in Micronesia, a warrior's helmet made from the lethal spines of the porcupine fish (also known as the blowfish). Part of an I-Kiribati warrior's traditional armory, which included a full suit of thick coconut fiber and a viciously effective *rere* (short swords which were lined on each side of the blade with sharks'



Headband of a married woman of the Khorchin Mongolians, China, Inner Mongolia: Khorchin people; early 20th century (turquoise panels older), red cotton cloth, coral beads, turquoise panels, H: 3 cm, W (spread out): 62 cm.



Hat decorated with elaborate beadwork patterns, Indonesia, Kalimantan: Dayak people; second half of 20th century, beads, black cloth over rigid interior, claws, Chinese coin, H: 5.5 cm, Diam: 17 cm.



Large necklace for girls of marriageable age worn at New Year's festivities, Myanmar (Burma), Kachin State and Thailand: Lisu people; early- to mid-20th century, silver, H: 22.5 cm, W: 34.5 cm.



Very old and traditional carving of a mother and child; the mother wears a great variety of ornaments, as is customary among Indian women.



Pair of exceptionally tall and heavy armbands, Gujarat; first half of 20th century, silver (the pair weighs 1400 g), H: 17.5 cm, Diam: 8.6 cm.

teeth), this deadly bonnet, under which a sennit cap was worn, gives the impression "fighting was a very serious business on the Gilbert Islands", as Daalder understatedly comments. "*The helmet*", she continues, "originally formed part of a thick plaited coir suit of armor which was worn as protection against the spears and daggers fitted with sharks' teeth slotted into grooves which were used as weapons of attack." (pp 132-133)

Male and also female headwear figured strongly in the dress of the Indigenous Dayak people of Kalimantan (Borneo) in Indonesia. Dayaks' cloth hats decorated with elaborate beadwork patterns and hybrid decorative elements (in some cases, for example, bones carved to look like the teeth of wild animals or even sets of claws) are accessories of real visual force and beauty. Renowned for their beadwork, the Dayak also created marvelous shamans' chaplets often incorporating beads, as well as beaded belts, necklaces, and baby-carriers.

In the section devoted to Southeast Asian jewelry and adornment, the objects and practices of a wide range of minority groups are canvassed. The thoroughness of Daalder's coverage is to be applauded. Included among the groups surveyed here are the Mien (Yau), the Hmong (Meo), various Karen sub-groups including the Pdaung, and also the Akha and the Lisu. The magnificent silver jewelry created by the latter group is particularly striking. The heavy silver necklaces designed for Lisu girls of marriageable age to wear during New Year's festivities in Kachin State in Northern Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand provide an excellent example of this group's traditional practices. Worn in conjunction with an underbodice, itself wonderfully decorated with small buttons (*inter alia*), these are silver necklaces fit for goddesses. Placed

on top of the heavier silver necklace was another considerably lighter 'over-necklace' that was in fact fastened to the earlobes by a hook hung around the neck (p 210).

Moving north to Inner Mongolia, the women's fabulous headwear cannot fail to impress. To provide but one example from the many possible, the headband worn by a married woman of the Khorchin Mongolians, in Inner Mongolia, China, in the early 20th century, comprising red cotton cloth, coral beads, and turquoise panels that have been sewn onto the padded band, is captivating in its drawing power. At one level, this object is quite minimalist. The simplicity of the black headpiece, designed to be worn under the headband, sits in wonderful contrast with the jeweled diadem that encircles it. The interlaced 'eternal knot' or 'endless knot' of Tibetan (and Mongolian) Buddhism is clearly evident on at least one of the turquoise plaques. The color contrasts also contribute to this headdress being a truly inspired and engaging example of wearable body art with universal appeal.

Moving across to the subcontinent of India, identifiable works from another of the world's great cultures radiate their unique expressive force. One very old, traditional and somewhat crude wooden carving of a woman whose child clings onto her body reveals that the woman is wearing a great deal of jewelry and many other bodily adornments. Of this significant work, which is part of the Daalder family's extensive personal collection, the author has this to say: "In this otherwise simple representation the mother wears a necklace with pendant, large earrings, bracelets on both the upper and lower arms, and anklets. The only suggestion that she wears clothes is a draped cloth between her legs, but the carving shows her jewelry in considerable detail. Indian images and sculptures of gods and goddesses usually present the deities as very

lavishly adorned, and they provide a kind of history of jewelry in India. Photographs of Indian women also often show them as literally covered in jewelry from head to toe, for toe rings and foot decoration were commonly worn." (p 309). With these words Truus Daalder sets the scene for unveiling a rich and varied tradition of jewelry and bodily ornamentation, often forged from gold, silver, and other beautiful and precious materials. Works of Hindu and Muslim provenance (and more) are shown in this section.

The section on India is particularly strong; in it Daalder provides an excellent account of the diversity of adornment practices across a wide range of distinctive, largely rural cultures. From the northern hill state of Nagaland where people incorporate ivory, boars' tusks, and cowry shells into their bodily adornments to the Gujarat state where the Gujarati love to cover themselves more or less head to toe with chunky silver jewelry, the fact that bodily adornments are important markers of regional identity and indicators of minority groups' social unity becomes clear. People's bodies are in fact social productions, active producers of value, rather than merely passively expressing significance. Nowhere is this more evident than in the vestimentary codes that people adopt, in which jewelry and adornment do not play the purely secondary role that 'commonsense thinking' might have us believe. It is also apparent that all over the world people are prepared to some degree or other to 'suffer for beauty' when it comes to bodily adornment. As Daalder notes, *à propos* of the gorgeous, though very long and weighty silver Gujarat armbands, they "would have been a pleasing addition to any dowry, since together they weigh 1400 grams." This statement she qualifies, in deadpan fashion, with the following coda: "To wear them may have been less pleasant" (p 311).

Traveling east to the nearby independent state of Nepal, where the majority of citizens are of the Hindu faith, there is a significant Buddhist minority. It does, however, need to be pointed out here that there is a degree of overlap in terms of the two groups' respective symbols and deities.

One outstanding, very early work in the latter tradition comes from the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal. This spectacular work is a repoussé ornament on a chain, an offering to an image of the Lord Buddha. This rare and remarkable treasure, comprising silver, gilt bronze, and copper, is referred to as the 'Heart Flower' in text incised on the back. The aforesaid inscription offers a detailed reading of the work and its significance in terms of Buddhism. On the front there are representations of the five Tagatha (Wisdom) Buddhas and four Taras (consorts). Its raised center is dramatic and alluring. This work, which is an artifact of the Newar people, dates back to 1667. The fact that this splendid ornament has been created specifically as an offering to a deity draws the readers' attention to yet another time-honored *raison d'être* for the creation and wearing of jewelry and bodily decorations: that of pleasing or pacifying deities, which is, of course, closely interconnected with notions of seeking protection from the gods and keeping harm at bay.

After crossing Central Asia and examining its jewelry and adornment practices, including those of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan, Daalder moves beyond the Caucasus to visit the traditions of the Greeks and the Turks. Notable among these are the gorgeously colored glass bead and silver works of the Kazakh and Uzbek peoples, and the bejeweled Turkish and Greek belts created for special occasions, including weddings.

In terms of Middle Eastern traditions, Daalder looks at some very fine works from Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Oman, and Yemen before considering indigenous works created by North Africans and Egyptians.

Parenthetically, color plays a decisive symbolic role in specific socio-cultural frameworks, and throughout the book Daalder demonstrates an awareness of the differing symbolic values attributed to particular colors used in body decorations. In parts of the Arab world, for example, the color red is associated with marriage, and Daalder offers a marvelous example of a Palestinian Bedouin bridal veil that comprises red cloth, red cotton strips, small, brightly colored glass beads, and several rows of small coins that she says were intended to signify affluence (p374). In addition, larger coins are included among the



Repoussée silver and gilt bronze ornament on a chain, offered to an image of the Lord Buddha and referred to as the 'Heart Flower' in text on the back of the ornament; the front has representations of the five Tagatha (Wisdom) Buddhas and four Taras (consorts) and has a raised centre (side view), Nepal, Kathmandu Valley, Newar people; piece dated AD 1667 on back, silver, gilt bronze, copper back with inscription, ornament without chain: 17.5 x 17.5 cm, H: (central dome) 6 cm.

item's decorative elements, including two from the time of the reign of the Italian King and Emperor Victor Emmanuel III (1900–1946) who deposed the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie (1892–1975) (Ibid, p374).

The jewelry of the Berber people is especially wondrous to behold. Daalder also spends some time on the practices of the Moroccans whose 'assemblage' jewelry, including necklaces, decorations that are threaded through the hair and amulets comprising diverse elements, for instance, silver, glass beads, coral, shells, and precious or semi-precious stones such as amethyst, are wonderfully original hybrids. The latter works seem to foreshadow or prefigure a great deal of contemporary jewelry and other craftwork in which natural materials and precious metals are brought together in assemblages that derive their



Bedouin bridal veil, Palestine, Gaza; mid-20th century, red cloth, silver coins, gilt coins, glass beads, silver balls, chains and plaques, red wool, H (total): approx. 60 cm.



Man's beadwork chestpiece of glass beads sewn onto leather, Nigeria: Yoruba people; early to mid-20th century, leather, glass beads, H (without straps): 17.5 cm, W: 35 cm.

appeal from what could be described as a science of contrasts.

In the final section of the book, titled *Africa beyond the Mahgreb* Daalder discusses the distinctive (often silver) jewelry of the matrilineal Tuareg people, the gold jewelry worn by rich and powerful Furani people, who are mostly resident in Nigeria, and the pubic covers (caches-sexes) of the Kirdi people who, like the Tuareg, deploy geometric designs in their works.

The Yoruba people of Nigeria in West Africa are represented by their signature beadwork, in this instance a man's chestpiece incorporating hundreds of colorful glass beads that have been painstakingly stitched onto a leather base. In this section I was a little disappointed not to find an image of a Yoruba King's beaded crown, but this is only a tiny gripe with respect to the major achievement that this book entails.

There is a great deal more in this book meriting critical attention and further elaboration, but it is hoped that this account will whet the appetites of those who wish to learn more about the world's jewelry and other bodily ornamentation traditions. In conclusion, the author and researcher Truus Daalder, ably supported by her editor husband and photographer son, deserves the greatest kudos for successfully carrying through this labor of love and of sheer hard work. Daalder's *Ethnic Jewellery and Adornment* is a beautifully designed reference work with exquisite photographs of jewelry and adornments from across the globe, and fascinating descriptions of their meaning and import. *Ethnic Jewellery and Adornment* has a place in the hands of every serious researcher, collector, or enthusiast, and equally, in every scholarly library.

Finally, one can only hope that the next step for Truus Daalder and her family team will be to mount a major exhibition of the works drawn from their substantial collection. Now that *would* be a wondrous sight to behold. Δ

Ethnic Jewellery and Adornment, Australia • Oceania • Asia • Africa by Truus Daalder, ed. Joost Daalder, photographs by Jeremy Daalder, publ. Ethnic Art Press, Adelaide, and Macmillan Art Publishing, Melbourne, 2009, 420 pp, ISBN 978 1 921394 28 7. For further information about *Ethnic Jewellery and Adornment* please visit <http://www.ethnicartpress.com.au/>

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