

JEWELRY FROM THE EDGE. EVERYTHING GOTHIC. MARJORIE SIMON
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OPENING IMAGES: DRACULA + EIP COVER

Some of you may know that I like to set deep background for investigating ideas. Please follow along as I set the scene for a way of looking at the jewelry in the exhibition. I will talk about some definitions of Gothic, some art forms that include Gothic themes, including architecture, painting, film, music, and the decorative arts; and then look at some work: work that is in the exhibition that you can look at, and some work that is not but that may be a good example of some of these principles or some things to look for out in the world, as you raise your Gothic consciousness.

Contemporary gothic jewelry involves much more than skull rings and black crosses. It draws on the imagery of medieval body armor, ecclesiastical design, the Victorian cult of mourning, taxidermy, body parts (especially blood, bone, and skin), and the femme fatale, as well as ideas about decadence, memory, and fear, especially fear of Death. Gothic motifs have proved to be durable, resurfacing periodically over centuries. I'm going to use some examples from the 2012 Metalsmith Exhibition in Print to explore aspects of contemporary gothic jewelry and its relation to historic Gothic idiom.

Some elements of GOTHIC are: transgressive, oppositional, confrontational, anti-establishment, a fondness for gloomy castles, degeneration, decay. Gothic style suggests angles, lace cut-work, wild and desolate landscapes, ruined monasteries, castles with dungeons, secret doors, winding stairways, phantoms, demons, atmosphere of brooding gloom, full of details designed to create horror, disgust, or terror, such as vampires and the undead. And of course, an unlimited variation on skulls.

One interesting aspect that came out of the music scene, and more about this later, Goth aesthetic is androgynous with jewelry, costume, with make-up being used by men and women alike.

So just keep some of these elements in mind as we go Goth through the ages.

WHO WERE THE GOTHS?

One of a number of Germanic tribes that conquered Rome—under Alaric I, sacked Rome in 410, and incidentally defeated Attila the Hun in 451. A series of Gothic invasions in the 3rd century spread around the eastern Mediterranean. Goths were considered Barbarians by those who valued Roman and Greek achievements in art, architecture and literature. Italians blamed the Goths for the fall of the Roman Empire.

Recent scholarship shows that what is meant by Gothic is largely a result of competing mythologies, since the original Goths—Visigoths (western) and Ostrogoths (eastern) weren't really members of the same tribe after all and they all disappeared after a few centuries. Contemporary Gothic seems to have become a very large tent, incorporating not only European gothic, with castles, vampires, ghosts, endless corridors and dungeons, but American Gothic, with Puritanism turned on its head with the embrace of notions of sin, hell, and darkness, Southern Gothic, and Japanese Gothic-Lolita. The Goth community sees itself as inclusive—metal, punk, industrial, cyber, straight, gay, masculine, feminine, a mixture of DIY, Couture and specifically Goth designers.

SO, Gothic refers to anything ANTI-CLASSICAL, anti-rational, anything referring to the DARK AGES, or MIDDLE AGES, 13th-15th centuries, pre-modern. Incorporating what historian Barbara Tuchman refers to as the calamitous 14th century, the era of the Black Death. Began as a northern European style contrasted with the classicism of southern Europe, Italy and France. [Here is the] Classic Gothic cathedral of Chartres, completed in 1228. And here, the rear of Notre Dame.

The iconic Gothic innovation was the flying buttress, the external weight bearing structure that meant you could build higher buildings. E. H. Gombrich, in the History of Art has this to say about classic Gothic architecture. “Standing inside a Gothic cathedral we are made to understand the complex interplay of thrust and pull that holds the lofty vault in its place. There are no blank walls or massive pillars anywhere. The whole interior seems to be woven out of thin shafts and ribs” [1] “The walls of these buildings were formed of stained glass that shone like rubies and emeralds...the pillars, ribs and tracery were glistening with gold. Everything that was heavy, earthly, or humdrum was eliminated.” [2]

The leading idea of Gothic cathedrals is a building of stone and glass—stained glass. The pointed arch is more versatile than the rounded arch and the “flying buttress” resulted in taller buildings. It is the marriage of design and engineering. Windows shone like gemstones. Can we say a mimetic impulse from jewelry led to advances in engineering and architecture?

This necklace by Chicago artist Kathleen Kamal directly references some key elements of Gothic architecture, notably the vaulted arch and the stained glass window.

Inside the Gothic vault, as shown in this cathedral in Basel, Switzerland, you have a complex series of intersecting angles. Likewise, this ceiling from southern England.

This structure is used in “Blue Morning Glory Brooch” by Diane Falkenhagen, as well as the vaulted window in this brooch also by Diane. In “Gothic Revival Brooch (The Sublime and the Beautiful)” she pairs obvious Gothic arches and vaults with inspiration from a 19th c. Gothic revival painting by Caspar David Friedrich, “Cloister Cemetery in the Snow.”

In addition to the direct reference of Gothic architecture, the theme of DEATH is probably the most notable and durable Gothic association. Returning for a moment to the late Renaissance and influence of Gothic themes, here is one of my favorite objects, the Mechanical Screaming Biting Skull Clock with Animated Snakes for Eyeballs, designed and built by Nicolaus Schmidt der Junger of Augsburg, Germany. Created in 1610, the clock’s jaws open and snap shut every 3 minutes and a snake shoots out of the eye socket. Although the later reign of Victoria became synonymous with mourning, the 17th and 18th c. were also death obsessed, combined with an emerging love of mechanical toys and automata. For example, this gold and diamond memento mori pocket watch from 1810.

Contemporaneous with the screaming biting skull is the darkly sublime painting of early 17th c Italian painter Caravaggio, here showing St. Jerome, who translated the bible into Latin, contemplating death.

But lest we think that gothic meant only black, Gothic fashion has appropriated the “white, neo-classical nightgown of the woman in John Henry (Johan Heinrich) Fuseli’s 1781 painting, The Nightmare, which includes elements of romanticism with classicism in his reclining figure with its supernatural presences and mood of terror.” [3] There are several versions of this painting,

in different formats, but the image of the vulnerable, sleeping woman became a staple in Hollywood's vampire tales.

In the early 19th c the field of Gothic literature was given a huge boost by writings of Edgar Allan Poe. In his description of the house in the Fall of the House of Usher, amidst the adjectives and nouns communicating gloom, decay, and darkness, Poe mentions the "Gothic archway of the hall" and the windows which were "long, narrow, and pointed...admitting only "feeble gleams of encrimsoned light." [4]

During the 19th c several developments converged to create the fertile soil of Gothic resurgence. Even before the 1897 publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the invention of photography made popularization of death imagery possible. These Diableries, handpainted scenes for viewing in stereopticon viewers, are whimsical, shivery scenes you could linger over. And the new discoveries in science also appeared in illustration.

I see the 19th c as the crucible for Gothic revival in the arts. The salient elements of Gothic—the architecture, darkness, the permeable boundaries of life and death, the power of the unseen—all are related. In 1895 Roentgen invents the X-ray, Freud writes *Studies in Hysteria*, *The Interpretation of Dreams*; *Sherlock Holmes* is published. *Dracula* is published.

1896 Marconi applies for patent on wireless telegraph.

The Brownie camera invented by Kodak and first theater showing of motion pictures takes place in Paris., thus ushering in Hollywood's introduction to Gothic. As Stephen Jay Gould observed, "visual imagery is central to our lives...much of our judgment in social matters, particularly our emotional feelings, depends on images." [5] The power of the visual is immense, so it seems no accident that the invention of photography and all its descendants would play an enormous role in the dissemination of Gothic culture. The potential numbers of people affected surpassed Gutenberg's invention. The rise of the motion picture was well suited to things that are invisible, technology that can alter your perception of reality, Freud's discovery of the unconscious, Darwin's theory of evolution. The "natural, rational order of things" is upended.

The wars of the 20th century, depicted in this painting by Salvador Dali, and the rise of Surrealism, in which Dali adds jewelry design to his other art forms, including his collaboration with Luis Bunuel in the deeply Gothic film, *Un Chien Andalú*. And the confluence of all these developments followed dark illustration and tales of horror at fin de siècle, which were in turn midwived by the reign of QUEEN VICTORIA.

When Queen Victoria's husband Albert died at the age of 42, she remained in deep mourning for the next 40 years, wearing only black and wearing black jewelry. Her reign, known as the Victorian era, covered nearly the whole of the 19th c. and has become synonymous with extremes of feeling and a virtual cult of death and darkness.

Jet jewelry has become a kind of shorthand for Victorian mourning jewelry. Interestingly, *Dracula's* ship enters Whitby Harbor, North Yorkshire, east coast of England source of the famous Whitby Jet. Jet is a naturally occurring gemstone made from compressed wood formed over millions of years and known for at least 10,000 years. It was used in Victorian and mourning jewelry because it was plentiful, carvable, and black.

Victorian motifs have been appropriated wholesale by Goth subculture. Jeweler and sculptor Jonathan Wahl has taken that reference one step further with his large format (40"x50")

charcoal drawings of Victorian jet jewelry. Playing with scale and perception he challenges perceptions of jewelry as “merely” supplemental, simply because it is worn on clothing. And in this same vein, this black resin brooch by Lin Stanionis. Also in the 19th c. and the industrial revolution was the appearance of iron jewelry from Berlin. These bracelets are in the collection of the Newark Museum, but the Schmuckmuseum in Pforzheim has some nice examples too. This wonderful brooch by HELEN BRITTON is created in the same mode. As is this black bracelet from Francis Willemstejn, made of human hair.

HAIR JEWELRY, like this Victorian brooch, is also v. popular now, partly because of the revival of Victoriana and the deliciously uncomfortable “eww” factor of the hair, cut from the dead. Hair is great where it is supposed to be, not so welcome when out of place or of unidentified origin, such as in food. FRANCIS WILLEMSTIJN. Also created this elaborate hair neckpiece.

As Valerie Steele pointed out in the EiP, the use of parts of animals is another Gothic characteristic,. This gown by couture designer ALEXANDER MCQUEEN from his 2006 collection, uses black duck feathers. One of the defining features of McQueen’s collections is their historicism. While McQueen’s historical references are far-reaching, he was particularly inspired by the nineteenth century, especially the Victorian Gothic. McQueen says “There’s something . . . kind of Edgar Allan Poe, kind of deep and kind of melancholic about my collections,” with an emphasis on death, destruction, decay, ruins that you can see in his collaboration with jeweler Shaun Leane, and uber-designer Daphne Guinness. [6]

JULIA DE VILLE, Australian jeweler, created this Bird Shoulder Piece. For her, using animals implies death is a continuum, not a discrete event, and here are some of her non-jewelry pieces.

The artistic partnership of Afke Golsteijn and Floris Bakker, who collectively are better known as Idiots, use animal material sculpted into natural positions and combined with luxe materials such as embroidery and pearls. Here, Corpse Bride Vulture with Victim. 2006. Their Bird necklace that appeared in Metalsmith, and a close-up. This Parakeet necklace even though it’s pink and white, is still DARK. Idiots collaborating with MARTA MATTSON [Mouse Machine]

KELLY MCCALLUM combines fine goldsmithing skills, a keen interest in Victorian taxidermy and her extensive training in art and science. Taxidermy seeks to preserve life by celebrating death: it is a strange half-live, a suspension, an illusion.

[Marta Mattson] Insects on the other hand feed on death, breaking down. “My goal with the piece was to turn something that I found disgusting into something beautiful and intriguing. Mattson—Brown Beetle Brooch, contrasted with Georg Dobler’s Stag Beetle, here paired with a giant citrine. Dobler has also cast dung beetles but he always references jewelry, making creepy insects beautiful, and treating them as seriously as gold, iron, and semi-precious gems.

SIMON COSTIN designer. In 2009 internationally renowned designer Simon Costin created a touring Museum of British Folklore. In April 2010 the Museum took up semi-permanent residence at Port Eliot in North Cornwall. Claws for Alarm Simon Costin (British, b. 1963), and this classic “Memento Mori” Necklace, 1986. Black synthetic tulle with jet-bead and rock-crystal embroidery, two bird claws, carved black wood beads, and three rabbit skulls with hematite eyes.

KEITH LEWIS “Of Rarity Untold (Scene from an imaginary libretto by Ronald Firbank.) This brooch refers to a moment in a novel by the early 20th c gay British writer Ronald Firbank in

which “a moth becomes trapped in a candelabra. The drapery frames the piece and creates an operatic sense of theatre and movement” while the moth is caught between risk and desire. On the back Lewis honors Firkbank’s memory and mortality with the skeletal hand. “Lacrimae rerum sunt” [“lacrimae”] also covers a lot of historical ground. Starting from a lengthy quote from the Aeneid, Lewis refashions Vergil’s line from “there are tears shed for things even here...” (meaning the mural found in a temple at Carthage, depicting Aeneas’ friends who have died in war) to “here are the tears of things” presented as an old-fashioned school lesson written on a chalk slate, meaning, perhaps a memorial to those who died of AIDS, an ongoing theme in Lewis’ work. The elaborately staged tableau leaps ahead millennia to Dutch genre painting [lacrimae reverse] and the pansy “evokes gay stereotypes..., remembrance and meditation.”

“The memento mori object, variously translated as “remember you must die” or “remember you are mortal” appeared somewhere around the 16th century and has never really disappeared. The classic memento mori piece referred not to a specific person, so it is NOT commemorative, but to a general warning about the transitoriness of life. A theme used by many jewelers and objectmakers, and seen here in examples by Simon Costin, Julia DeVille, Jonathan Wahl)

These two titled Memento Mori are by young German jeweler CONSTANZE SCHREIBER. Though she doesn’t specify I can’t help thinking of the dark history of Germany in seeing these black skulls piled up.

JENNIFER TRASK. Trask uses parts of animals, glancingly referencing their bodies, and at the same time appropriating them for her own designs. The gargantuan necklace Germinate contains mule deer antlers, cow and ox bones, nutria teeth, pigeon skull, recycled diamonds, among other materials. The combination of created and repurposed elements does little to hid its animal origins yet in some way proclaims its human dominance by reconfiguring the components. By making use of animal parts, found or repurposed, Trask also participates in looking at death as a continuum. The animals, their spirits, and certainly their bodies, live on as human art and adornment. They also inadvertently recall Paleolithic peoples who created jewelry from fish bones and bird’s beaks.

This necklace by SHAUN LEANE, covering the shoulders, is shown in a collaboration with a gown by Alexander McQueen. He’s using the same body parts—antlers—as Trask but with a very different intent.

Here, jewelry designer JOJI KOJIMA, creator of the EIP cover image, “Raspberry Face Piece,” has an international design company. Lady Gaga wore one of his pieces for an album cover. His work, making abundant use of black and red, is definitely meant to confront, whereas American jeweler and enamellist Shana Kroiz uses the same colors in a more conventional way.

Heart imagery, often considered trite, is used effectively on the left by Lin Stanionis, and paired on the right with LORENA LAZARD, who has chronicled the passing of both her parents in her work. Prongs filed like talons hold a gleaming coral heart while an angel’s wings unscrew it out of the body. Lazard’s chain mail “Mexico City Survival Vest” mourns and protects her in her home of Mexico City, using the heart symbol found in much Mexican art and artifacts. Lin Stanionis has been referencing the body for about 25 years. In the 1980s she made raised vessels on legs, which embodied vices, dreams, madness, passions, invented customs,

debauchery.” (Sarah Bodine). Stanionis casts bodies of plants and animals, as in her Victorian brooch, here a rattlesnake head, in urethane resin.

Jeweler Shaun Leane created this Chain Mail Glove for designer Daphne Guinness-- CONTRA MUNDUM from 18K WHITE GOLD, DIAMONDS. In our corner of the world Shaun Leane is credited with making the glove, whereas in Daphne Guinness’s corner of the world she is the designer and Shaun Leane is the fabricator. Here Daphne Guinness creates her own Gothic environment. Remember the white nightgown?

The Gothic continues to fascinate on many levels: besides jewelry, there are Gothic home furnishings, personal accessories, T-shirts, clothing, themed weddings, food. It’s a durable if now smaller subculture. There’s even a Goth weekend in Whitby with Goths roaming the streets of the seaside town. Goth culture lives on in adornment, lifestyle, film, and fashion. And of course

POPULAR MUSIC: In my research I was interested to discover that Goth music is gloomy and moody, NOT heavy metal. Though the Goth movement gained traction in UK with the Cure, it was American Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground that spoke to the disaffected teens to begin with. As a contemporary movement Punk and later Goth coming out of the 70s was the anti-hippie peace and love, flowers, color and light. Here, Siouxsie and the Banshees, puts it all together and leaves us SPELLBOUND.

ENDNOTES:

1. E.H. Gombrich. *The Story of Art*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1972, p. 140.
2. Gombrich, *ibid.* p. 141.
3. Steele, Valerie and Jennifer Park. *Gothic. Dark Glamour*. Yale University Press and the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, 2008. P. 11.
4. <http://www.online-literature.com/poe/31>.
5. Gould, Stephen Jay. “Ladders and Cones: Constraining Evolution by Canonical Icons.” In *Hidden Histories of Science*, Ed. by Robert Silvers, New York Review of Books, USA, 1995, pp. 37-67.
6. <http://blog.museum.org/alexandermcqueen/about/>