

# Good Enough to Eat: Explorations in Food Jewelry

BY CAROLYN TILLIE

Barbara Uderzo  
*Bijoux-Chocolat - Boules: Ring, 2007*  
(designed 2004)  
dark chocolate, pure gold leaf  
Photo: Augusto Collini





Rachel Shimpock  
*Butter vs. Moldy Neckpiece*, 2015  
electroformed bread, copper, brass,  
gold, enamel, wax, citrines  
Photo: Rizzhel Javier

Barbara Uderzo  
 Glucogioiello: Necklace,  
 2007 (designed 2004)  
 marshmallows, closure  
 with wooden balls  
 Photo: Augusto Collini



Barbara Uderzo  
 Bijoux-Chocolat - Boules:  
 Necklace, 2007  
 (designed 2004)  
 dark chocolate, pure gold  
 leaf, faceted smoky  
 quartz closure  
 Photo: Augusto Collini



*Jewellery must go out  
 into the street to eat  
 and be eaten.*

— Ted Noten, as recalled by Gert Staal<sup>1</sup>

SETTING: NEW YORK CITY, 1961. With the sun rising in the background, a yellow cab pulls to a stop on a deserted Fifth Avenue. Out steps Holly Golightly, with a perfectly coiffed beehive, wearing oversized and — considering the hour — entirely unnecessary sunglasses. Her black satin Givenchy gown has a low-cut, rounded back, into which nestles a layered pearl necklace by French jewelry designer Roger Scemama. Clad in elbow-length black satin gloves, she reaches into a white paper bag for her croissant and black coffee. Enigmatic, she strolls in front of Tiffany's to the strains of "Moon River," consuming her breakfast while

hungrily gazing at window after window of jewelry displays. This iconic opening scene from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, featuring the dazzling Audrey Hepburn, presents the perfect critical symmetry of analyzing food as jewelry — and jewelry as food.

How we eat and how we adorn ourselves share many of the same emotions, perceptions, sensations, and language. Art has the capacity to *nourish* the soul; those who appreciate beautiful jewelry have *great taste*. Food involves rituals of preparation, appearance, and ingestion that directly correlate to personal ornamentation. Both are intimate, usually imagined by one person (chef/jeweler), often manifested by many (kitchen staff/atelier); jewelry is worn and beheld, and a meal often eaten in community. Each traffics in themes of memory, waste, and identity, and both are "consumed."

Adorning oneself with food has a long history. The first jewelry might even be considered food-based. Before man learned to smelt metal, his Paleolithic

and Neanderthal ancestors created symbolic ornaments from mollusk shells, carved bones, and perforated animal teeth, the detritus of hunting and gathering sustenance. The medieval era saw spice-filled beak masks to ward against the plague, while Fluellen wears a hat bedecked with a raw leek in William Shakespeare's *Henry V*. In recent years artists have embraced food ornamentation, from the eroticization of food in Salvador Dalí's *Retrospective Bust of a Woman* (1933), which sports bread and corn jewels, to avant-garde performance pieces like Robert Kushner's *Costumes Constructed and Eaten* (1972), in which audience members joined models in the communal consumption of food-based garments. Long before Lady Gaga shocked the world in 2010 by wearing a dress of raw beef, Canadian artist Jana Sterbak fashioned *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (1987) from flank steak.

There is also a rich tradition of contemporary jewelers using food as a

theme. For example, Richard Mawdsley's *Feast Bracelet* (1974) is an opulent miniature homage to seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painting in sterling silver. The delightfully quirky *Ringtisserie: Weber* (1999) by Andy Cooperman is a kinetic ring depicting a roast chicken above a fiery spit. David Bielander works in a culinary oeuvre, including his 2007 *Scampi* bracelet in hollow-form copper; silver and leather *Bananas* (2010–12); bentwood *Sausages* (2007); and hollow-form silver *Garlic* (2009). But, like the Flemish still-life paintings that inspired Mawdsley and Bielander, these are all trompe l'oeil representations of food and not adornments crafted of food itself. Jewelry made with *actual* food has the potential to utilize themes of memory, identity, and consumption to subvert mainstream expectations of both adornment and dining.

The Italian artist Barbara Uderzo has been incorporating food into her jewelry since 1992.<sup>2</sup> She experimented early on

with barley sugar and almond paste, then by 2003 transitioned to working in chocolate, developing *glucogioielli* — literally translated as “sugar jewels” — as deliberately ephemeral ornamentation with strong symbolism linked to the taste sensation of sweetness. For *Bijoux-Chocolate – Boules* (2004) she not only designed spherical molds for a chocolate necklace but also had to research the complexities of melting and tempering chocolate to obtain a glossy and engaging finish. Experimentation with gilding allowed her to apply the thinnest leaves possible to the curved surfaces of each “bead.” Themes of transformation permeate Uderzo's wearable food, as the chocolate boules will inevitably melt against the warmth of the wearer's body. Treating a meringue with the same dignity with which she manipulates gold, Uderzo intends for her jewels to be “precarious,” to disintegrate or be consumed.

Uderzo also conducts multisensory jewelry workshops in museums and

galleries. Courses such as “Food Makes You Beautiful” and “Food Face” enable participants to create necklaces of blueberries or bracelets of marshmallows. These events speak to the playful relationship many of us have with food from an early age: “Who has never held up a pair of cherries as if they were a pair of earrings? Food is a material that is easy to handle, can be soft and easier to work with than hard metal, and provides a more personal aspect to design with, freeing the participant to experiment.”<sup>3</sup>

Ted Noten's Amsterdam atelier, ATN, subverts the idea of luxury goods through the production of a variety of crystal-clear, nonfunctioning acrylic handbags. The most beguiling are those with organic contents, such as *Meat Bag* and *Survival Bag 1* (both 1997), the former showcasing a pork chop and the latter an entire mackerel. Noten has continued to engage with this alternative method of food preservation; for example, in a 2017 work from the “Drawer's Delight” series. Playing

#### Ted Noten

*Drawer's Delight 4*, 2017  
meat, cast in acrylic,  
engraving, wood handle  
9.5 × 5.1 × 1.2 in.  
Private collection,  
Montreal Quebec, Canada /  
Vermont, USA  
Courtesy Ornamentum,  
Hudson, NY  
Photo: Ted Noten



#### Ted Noten

*Chew your own brooch*, 1998  
chewing gum, silver or gold plated  
Photo: Ted Noten

on the “excitement of finding something cherished hidden away and forgotten in the back of a drawer,” that found object is a spoon made from meat.

Perhaps Noten’s best-known foray into food is his now-classic *Chew Your Own Brooch* kit. In 1998, inspired by the flattened spit-out gum that builds up on city streets, Noten began to consider chewing gum as an act of creation; the kits he developed included a single piece of Wrigley’s gum to be chewed by the purchaser, packaging to preserve the chewed gum, and instructions for shipping it back to Noten’s studio. The gum shapes were cast in silver, plated in gold, mounted with a pin back, and shipped back to the chewer as a wearable ornament. Some gum chewers seemed to suffer creation anxiety, so Noten held workshops to encourage and assist in the process, as well as special events geared towards children. At the Boijmans Van Beunigen Museum in Rotterdam, a jury reviewed the six hundred results from

young people, and the three finalists had their creations cast by Noten: first place in gold, second place in silver, and third in bronze. Noten established an interactive dialogue by including the eaters in his process: the gum-chewer became the artist, and Noten the maker-craftsman.<sup>4</sup> This process has been repeated in Tokyo, Milan, and Amsterdam over the past twenty years, with close to three hundred brooches cast since the project’s start. Noten says, “I could have used other material, like a piece of string that people could bend into a shape. Chewing gum eating, however, is such a universal act that I thought, ‘Everybody can do that!’”<sup>5</sup>

Rachel Shimpock’s sobriquet, Kitchensmith, perfectly marries her vocation as a jeweler with culinary themes. Married at twenty-five and working in advertising, she felt a need to reclaim the artmaking of her youth. After getting divorced and living in her car, all for the chance to study jewelry in Southern California, she longed for nothing more

than the comfort of her mother’s grilled cheese sandwiches. This desire manifested itself in her first bracelet, made from toast: “Parents often bronze baby shoes to anchor memories of youth, so why not create an amulet of bread?”<sup>6</sup> Shimpock demonstrated that she could imbue something tangible and wearable with the sense of contentment a grilled cheese suggests. Her food wearables are rough-hewn and raw, as she nibbles out the center of each bread slice she transforms; wearers consume her work, but so does the artist.

Shimpock wrestles issues of conservation and longevity as a result of the limited shelf life of her chosen materials. Electroforming and enameling have become Shimpock’s preferred techniques of preservation. Food must be sealed before any electroforming can occur, lest the bath become contaminated, a process that took months of experimentation. Shimpock had to determine the correct order of



Rachel Shimpock  
*Jam Toast Bangle*, 2008  
electroformed bread,  
copper, 18 karat gold,  
enamel  
6 × 6 × .5 in.  
Photo: Rizzhel Javier



Rachel Shimpock  
*French Fry Bangles*, 2018  
electroformed Ore Ida Extra  
Crispy French Fries, copper,  
brass, 18 karat gold plated  
bangle, enamel, wax  
Photo:  
Rizzhel Javier



Rachel Shimpock  
*Bagel with Schmear*, 2017  
copper, bagel, enamel, wax  
6 × 6 × .5 in.  
Collection of the Enamel  
Arts Foundation  
Photo: Rizzhel Javier



Rachael Colley  
*Doggy Dodger*  
 (*Chewed a Roast*), 2010  
 CNC milled British roast  
 beef, gold-plated silver,  
 stainless steel  
 Approx. 105 × 105 × 35 mm  
 Photo: Rachael Colley

Parents often  
**bronze baby shoes**  
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sealants to perfectly seal the food and still allow for the bread slices to retain a sense of crumb and crust. A food's level of moisture determines how it is sealed: some are sprayed with shellac, some with polyurethane. Others, like bagels, are sealed with resin, which can take upwards of a week of preparation and forty or more coats. Besides bread and sliced bagels, onion rings, potato chips, popcorn, French fries, and chicken wings are part of her toolkit. After the electroforming, enamels are used, but sparingly, as too many layers can obscure the clarity or fill holes,

excluding much-desired texture.

U.K.-based Rachael Colley seeks to recapture memories of comfort and home through food-based jewelry permeated with themes of British heritage, the monarchy, and cultural identity. While attending the Royal College of Art in London, she began to notice the local elite walking purebred dogs. Colley pondered the division of classes, and the types of gourmet dog biscuits that these pedigreed animals might eat. This led to her “Doggy Dodger” (2010) series, which incorporates the Tudor rose motif into clean, architectural creations, and hearkens to her ancestral heritage. Colley’s culinary vocabulary features quintessentially British foods, including the traditional biscuits that are eaten as part of a tea service. Second only to fish and chips in the British gastronomic tradition, the Sunday roast with its Yorkshire pudding, gravy, roast vegetables, and pudding (dessert), is symbolic of family, country, and ritual all served up weekly on a single

plate, and it makes its way into works like *Doggy Dodger (Chewed a Roast)* (2010).

Colley suffers from a rare autoimmune disorder, and has an introspective and contentious relationship with food. Her disease causes severe drying of the throat and difficulty swallowing. She places her food jewelry on models who are often seen ravenously devouring their adornment. As “decorative wearable artefacts,” her “M(eat) et al” series is the result of Colley’s developing a proprietary process of denaturing and preserving meat and fruit, which renders it cracked and dry, communicating the parched, tightened, and restrictive nature of a body in the midst of chronic illness. The surface textures reflect her own fragile health; meat, for example, is prepared entirely with natural processes but is ultimately unstable and needs to have a leather support to be worn. She explains, “The degradable materials’ limited lifespan highlights the fleeting and complex nature of human existence and the passing of



Opposite:  
**Rachael Colley**  
*Vanitas II*, 2017  
 apple peel, balsa wood,  
 stainless steel  
 66 x 44 x 39 mm  
 Photo: Rachael Colley

**Margaret Dorfman**  
*Crimson Hues*, 2018  
 beet, purple cabbage,  
 red onion, watermelon,  
 watermelon radish,  
 silver leaf  
 20 cm diameter disks,  
 56 cm long  
 Photo: Chris Wahlberg

time, suggesting the ultimate end that conventional jewelry circumvents through its endurance.”<sup>7</sup>

Margaret Dorfman is best known for her vibrantly colored fruit and vegetable jewelry. Two decades ago, when cutting up a zucchini for a stir-fry dinner, she held a slice up to the light and was captivated by its internal beauty. She wanted to capture and preserve its intricate botanical structure. Now, with more than forty-five different fruits and vegetables in her repertoire, Dorfman has developed a methodical process that turns the produce into luminous, jewel-like parchment. Starting with inch-and-a-half-inch slices sandwiched between rags and recycled paper, the fruit or vegetable is slowly flattened in a custom 250-ton hydraulic press over a period of eight to ten days. The laborious process requires almost constant vigilance, as the extracted water and juice must be changed three times a day or the material can overheat, grow mold, and destroy the vibrant colors. The subsequent

parchment is first pressed onto copper sheet, pressed again with gold or sterling, and then dipped in a water-resistant soy-based polymer. As she believes that it would be hypocritical to use anything toxic when celebrating the natural world, Dorfman is insistent that all her glues, sizing, and gilding be water-based.<sup>8</sup>

These artists are part of a larger movement to transform food into extraordinary ornamentation through unconventional processes and materials. Scientific developments in food preparation — whether molecular gastronomy from the world of the high-end restaurant, or from various industries, where companies are producing “leather” and “cloth” from mushrooms and pineapple with an eye towards sustainability — provide new potential avenues for exploration.<sup>9</sup> As long as food serves as a potent carrier for the full range of human emotions and experiences, it will be a vital option for contemporary jewelers.

*Carolyn Tillie, a metalsmith and author, is looking forward to the release of her second book Feast for the Eyes: Food Art from Apples to Zucchini (Reaktion Books) in early 2019.*

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<sup>1</sup> “Celebration of the street: Manifesto for the new jewellery,” written by Gert Staal as a part of the book *Ted Noten: CH<sub>2</sub>=C(CH<sub>3</sub>)C(=O)OCH<sub>3</sub> enclosures and other TNs*, [Lacey Books, Ltd., Cirencester, U.K., 2005].  
<sup>2</sup> This took place on the occasion of a ring-themed exhibition at the Proforma Gallery in Bassano del Grappa in Venice titled *Fedi, Anelli, e Pegni d’Amore* (Faith, Rings, and Pawns of Love). / <sup>3</sup> Written communication with artist, March 2018. / <sup>4</sup> Written communication with artist, March 2018. / <sup>5</sup> Written communication with artist, March 2018. / <sup>6</sup> Interview with artist, February 2018. / <sup>7</sup> Colley, Rachael, y“M(eat) et al: art jewelry as a means to explore body boundary?” Paper presented at Culture, Costume and Dress, Birmingham City University, May 2017. Available at [http://shura.shu.ac.uk/17543/1/M%28eat%29%20et%20al%20-%20art%20jewellery%20as%20a%20means%20to%20explore%20body%20boundary\\_paper.pdf](http://shura.shu.ac.uk/17543/1/M%28eat%29%20et%20al%20-%20art%20jewellery%20as%20a%20means%20to%20explore%20body%20boundary_paper.pdf). / <sup>8</sup> Interview with artist, March 2018. / <sup>9</sup> For more information on mushroom leather, see <http://www.mycoworks.com>. For more information on *piñatex*, or pineapple textiles, see <https://www.ananas-anam.com>.