

45:13 "Margaret De Patta": Typescripts

Text for Catalog of the Margaret DePatta Memorial Exhibition
San Francisco Museum of Art, 1969

Folder 1 of 2

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86/97c

5-7-62

Margaret De Patta - Mrs. Eugene Bielawski

Husband is designer, taught at School of Design in Chicago in 41
Met him there, and married here. He was there in early years.
Now hopes to do some work in design, upgrading bldgs, here.

They went to Japan in 1961.

She is originally from San Diego - went there to the Academy of Fine Arts
for 1½ years; came to SF, studied at the Calif. School of Fine Arts - 3 yrs,
had scholarships to Arts Students League in NY and went there for one year
of study.

Studied painting and sculpture; had training in traditional arts.

One summer, while waiting in SF to go to Arts Students League in NY, had
just married and wanted a wedding ring. Went to the Art Coppel Shop run by
Mr. Hairinian and got a ring made. But not the design quality she wanted, so
asked him to teach her.

Did go to New York, but when she came back she began working in jewelry - 1929

At that time, there was no modern jewelry - concepts were old and traditional.
She saw the possibility for modern design in jewelry. Began trying
this and that. Had good enough ~~training~~ fundamental background ~~too~~.

Begin
ring
work

Loves architecture - would want to be arch. more than anything else.
Can see that in use of large planes - ~~flexxofnsp~~ use of space and light.

She knew that metal came in 3 basic forms, sheet, wire and grain (heated)
also the dome, and she began by composing pieces using these basic
forms.

As she worked with structure, she felt the need for a new concept in stone.
She went to Sperisen in SF, and found that he was willing to experiment
with her. Now she was free to design new cuts of gem stones to go with
her new structures.

First She ~~has~~ saw a completely new use for gem stones - which until then
were used in jewelry in a most conventional manner, merely for brilliance
and to reflect light. She discovered an entirely new area of exploration
by treating stones as transparencies - using their transparency to
create entirely new concepts in jewelry. She analyzed the various
optical principles and the reflections of light and related them to her
new concept of jewelry.

To her, the space concept is most important.

Cont'd painting for some time in SF - but rapidly developing jewelry.
She began in 1929 and by 1935, she was a professional.

Painting really does not influence her work as much as sculpture, for jewelry
is necessarily limited in the use of color.

In 1941 - went to Chicago - was already well-established as a jeweler.
But the Bahaus philosophy was very important to her. She worked
there with Moholy Nage who used to tell her -
/"Catch your stones in the air ... make them float in space
don't enclose them."

Function of jewelry: To me jewelry is not ~~decorative~~ done for decorative
purposes primarily, altho it eventually serves that purpose. I wouldn't
want to spend time making small decorative pieces. The concepts I'm
working with are very important. I have to feel them out and work them
out. *I don't work from the decorative aspect at all - but completely from a structural & spatial pt. of view*

She is always experimenting and solving new problems. -

Has experimented in movement - for example - made pieces with moving
parts. - Has made a pin with two movable sections, each side faced
with a diff. colored stone @ Another large pin with a moving part
that can be worn in 3 diff positions to reveal two stones, or one
or the other alternately; has made rings that rattled, vibrated,
had a sliding and a textured piece.

Has a pair of earrings ~~within~~ which she designed mainly for the
locks. - has a small silver rod that slips into place locking
the earring in place.

Likes to experiment with pins with moving parts that will turn a
small pin into a larger one...

Has made jewelry for children that completely disrupted the classroom.

Texture and tactile values are important as well as visual.

"LINES AND PLANES IN SPACE ARE THE ELEMENTS THAT BEST PROJECT THE QUALITY
WE WANT TO GET ACROSS. TO ME THE SPACE CONCEPT IS MOST IMPORTANT.
The planes are like the walls in architecture.

(~he seems to think in terms of planes - facets, that reflect light..
She has an orderly mind - that likes to work out intricate complex
movement - an earring designed around the lock; a clasp - simple but
perfect.)

Jewelry does have its limitations: She knows them well. Above all they
must be durable. (~he is most practical) - light enuff to wear, suitable
in size, no sharp projections, comfortable. - a pin has to be flat
against a background - earrings function spatially

Use of pebbles - her "sweater jewelry" - these have universal appeal and
can be sold as inexpensive items. She has a great collection of stones,
and they are chosen carefully for size, shape and texture, and then
worked out carefully into a design - so that the design evolves from
the stone. "Instead of enclosing the stones in a metal form, I slot
the stones with a diamond stone and the metal is fitted in and baked
to the stone with ~~epoxy~~ epoxy, this leaves no visible holding form,
but is completely durable. I feel diff. about pebbles than about other
stones. They shouldn't be enclosed, but should be free as they are in
nature. The metal is as simple as possible -."

*Has done extensive testing of epoxy - the print is more durable than the stone -
Durable crafted - This is imp't to her -*

Pebbles

"I have vast quantities of stones which I sort by color and size and then compose the various pieces. I don't class these as important pieces."

Use of transparent stones: In using them, I found that certain curvature in the cabachon form develops a blind spot where you can make a good durable backing for the piece that doesn't show in front.

colored stones are expensive: so use mostly crystal, smoky quartz, topaz, and a great deal of rutilated crystal that has inclusions of various color. R.C. hadn't been used very much until the dev. of modern jewelry. It can be cut to reflect, distort or multiply the inclusions - depending on angle and placement of the facet. De Patta buys big chunks of this from Brazil. (Likes smoky topaz best)

In working out a complicated design for these stones - she makes a model from lucite which is easy to work with - can be sawed, ground, polished or textured. She drills hole for the rutiles and from the model Sperisen cuts the stone. (long ago used to use wood, for shape, but it had no transparency).

As she works with a piece, observes what light is doing to transparency - uses movement in a controlled way.
She does make a few notes before designing - but the actual designing takes place in her head; she visualizes the piece in her mind.

On wrought metal pieces - she designs directly on the material (Uses cast only for her production pieces).

"I have a strong preference for wrought metal. It is so much stronger than a cast piece. A cast piece is granular and will crack if bent. A wrought piece becomes stronger, tighter, more compact as it is worked and so I like it much better.

Work mostly in gold - because for all the work, it is a stronger metal. For white pieces - uses white gold, which is really strong. A piece made of white gold is really a fine piece - springy, hard, and keeps its surface. For other - uses yellow gold.

In 1946 (still in SF - went to Napa in 1951) - went into production work.

Mainly because of conviction that the artist has a responsibility to relate to present society and its methods. Became unhappy over the fact that as her craftsmanship ~~won't~~ improved, her prices kept going up, and soon no one could afford her pieces.

She would like very much to design for industry. Thinks it is good for the artist to influence production design and vice versa - healthy interchange is good for both. She wouldn't feel at all limited or restricted by demands of production - in fact has experienced in it.

Believes there is great validity in designing for production.

She observes the rutiles in a piece - logical working out of a structural problem. She doesn't do anything arbitrarily - but every part of a piece has a reason for being designed that way. - Every stone cut on certain facets to bring about a certain element.

till about 1957 (*about 12 yrs*)

-4-

In 1946 *A* decided to take her designs and have them reproduced.

Had 4 different craftsmen work on the mold, the wax, the cast, and finishing. She found it diff. to get her designs ~~made~~ reproduced well and gradually began to undertake all these processes herself. Had outlets all over country - with repeat patterns, was able to sell for under \$50. -

Soon developed into such a large business, they were in competition with Hickok; shops eager to buy; but got to point where there was so much to do, she couldn't do what she really wanted to. There was bookkeeping, photos, advt., pkging, all details connected with production. Temperamentally not suited to it - and husb. wanted to get back into design.

Would love to design for production - if somebody asked her.

10 years ago.

At one time, did design for ~~one~~ ~~production~~ ~~maker~~ of costume jewelry.

Did 25 rearranging designs. Have big catalogue of parts which were punched out by machine, these were bought by weight, she assembled them in the most simple forms possible - to sell for 1 and 2#\$. She enjoyed picking out the parts.

But the buyers wouldn't touch them. They were too different from what was on stock. Buyers look over what has sold well in the past and go a little further, but not too far. All merchandising is the same.

The little modern novelty shops were best outlet in early days - just starting. "We came up with that group" and had work in many shops all over the country. (The production pieces???)

Now does custom and experimental work only. Special orders come from all over the country. Have been working for so long, her name is known and orders come from all over.

In custom jewelry she sends out a questionnaire with 8 questions, such as what metals, stones, what purpose (for ex - for every day wear or special occasion - in a ring makes quite a diff, as she stresses strength and durability for daily wear); whether person likes open spatial work, masses, or delicate.

Has made many wedding and engagement rings - trad'l and non-trad'l.

She can't meet special design requirements, but finds it easy to meet any physical requirements.

She always makes a piece as the person wants it (whether she thinks it suits them or not) because she feels a person expresses his ideas, his tastes, his thoughts by the kind of jewelry she picks to wear. *she never imposes her own taste on that person.*

Her work is one of a kind - once a person orders a piece, they own that design; She doesn't repeat without permission.

About 3 yrs ago - devoted a whole year to developing several designs in ceramics.
Had a commission from Heath to try to dev. some designs.

Did salt shaker (felt need of a good one), container for fat drippings,

Feels there is need for a new type of design for dinnerware, not dependent on the potters wheel. A completely symmetrical plate is traditional, but maybe there is something better. She has designed many pieces that serve their purpose better, but are not traditional. Ex. She doesn't like having to turn the pitcher around to hand it to someone. "Why not several spouts or several handles_"

Had 2 L. design of 1/2 cup coffee -

There are so many exciting and wonderful ideas that could come. ~~xx~~ They can be functional, and if an artist designs them, they can also be beautiful.

Trouble with design of above, they didn't fit in with general Heath line. She really has to develop a whole line } and sell as a group.

Also designed flatware: Had grant for Int'l Silverware competition. Certain artists given \$500 grant to leave work and devote time to developing a good design. Winners chosen for production. She was eliminated in the 2nd judging. "The trouble was that I didn't realize we ~~xxxx~~ already have a modern tradition. We're stylized - with extreme simplification of forms. That can be just as tight ~~xx~~ a tradition as any other. I started out with a form that would be good in the hand - a form functional and satisfying to hold."

She is already working on having stainless steel castings made of designs for flatware. She has already completed models on the knife. Will give pieces to friends and get their judgement. Wants them to try.

She says stainless steel has a waxy feel, so needs texture.

(Her mind is very logical, clear - a piece must function - above all - and she can approach the development of a new design completely fresh - can discard all traditional concepts.)

NOW: she is concentrating on handwrought jewelry. She also has a very strong desire to work in sculpture. To work with space without having the requirements that jewelry presents of having to be worn.

OUTLETS: Nanny's - SF, Zahho's - LA, Am. House - NY, now stock some of her lower priced pieces. *Still make band ring - 18 designs - reproduced - \$12 - \$30.*

Special orders come to her thru individuals or from museum shows. No shop represents her best pieces. People order after seeing her work in exhibits or on other people.

Av. custom piece \$100 - 150.

EXHIBITS: About a tenth of her work goes into exhibits. "I usually have things in about 5 diff. places at a time. She has won so many prizes and her work has been shown or mentioned in so many books, she hasn't kept a list.

She has a permanent collection of her work since 1929 - which has been shown in many museums. It shows how her work has developed from early days of Turkish and Armenian influence; ^{Myan}egyptian influence; - early works show lots of beating, wrought work. 1st pin- use of figure, influe of painting.

earrings - with special lock to hold to ear.

In early 30's - cup form to hold moonstone - now basic and commonly seen

Early hollow bracelet - to hold 2 bills en route to NY, with baby bracelet chain

Small textured designs floating on black onyx

1940 - beginning to get modern concepts - ARCH. one of main influences

Pin with moving forms that can be worn 3 diff ways to expose both red and green stone or just one of each.

Some pins with screen and wrot silver

Stone - facets cut to give extreme depth, one facet left unpolished.

Pin - with modular structure. moving pieces. Mobile stones can change color accents coral and green onyx on 1 piece; agate and amber on another.

Ring, pearl under golden topaz. Multiple image seen from arrangements off facets on top.

"I think it is important to exhibit. It is important for artists and craftsmen to communicate with each other. A person can't work in a ~~xx~~ vacuum."

Showed crystal pendant with diamonds in show sponsored by the Victoria and Albert Museum and Worshipful Society of Goldsmiths - Jewelry from 1900 to present. International exhibit. Brit. museum bought the piece.

Also showed in Brussels exhibit - piece was stolen.

Various pieces:

Pendant: crystal, with amethyst, emerald and two blues - seem to be floating in the crystal. She achieved this by cutting two identical pieces of crystal, Colored ~~forms~~.c. stones cemented to flat side of one, top piece was concave, two crystals put together - and stones seem to be floating inside.

This piece was then hung on a piece of metal wire, so that it swings without being flat against the ~~xxxxxx~~ body. It is not a static piece. The whole is a spatial organization.

Pendants give me more freedom. More scope in weight and space.

Pines limiting in that they have to be flat against the fabric.

Earrings: don't stock, because she considers this one of the most personal pieces. size and shape completely determined by the face, way hair is worn, shape of ear, etc.

Ring: She makes it with an organic shank - that fits the ~~hand~~ grooves of the hand.
One is larger than the other - this way the ring fits straight. constructed on
wider organic principle of finger construction.
She likes the accent on one side rather than the other.

Ring- onyx, emphasizes transparency of crystal and rutilles.

SIMPLICITY OF FORM: Many of her pieces look deceptively simple, altho they are extremely complicated and intricate work. Ex. pendant of white gold, with diamonds embedded by baked epoxy. Diamonds must fit perfectly; crystal is drop-shaped, with complex ~~xxxxxxx~~ contour of the metal that holds it.

Clasp on a pendant - looks extremely simple and graceful - worked out meticulously.

DEAREST FRIENDS:

IN THIS INTERIM—FOLLOWING THE UNTIMELY EVENT OF MARGARET'S DEATH—
MY GRATITUDE FOR THE MANY EXPRESSIONS OF SORROW AND SYMPATHY IS HARD TO EXPRESS.
NEEDLESS TO SAY—I AM GROPING TO ESTABLISH SOME SEMBLANCE OF THE WONDERFUL REALITY
WHICH COMPRISED OUR RICH AND PRODUCTIVE LIFE. MAYBE IN THE DAYS AND YEARS AHEAD—
TIME WILL PROVIDE THE TRANQUILITY OF MIND AND PURPOSE SO ESSENTIAL TO CONTINUE THE
QUEST FOR GOODNESS—RICHNESS—AND STRIVINGS FOR PERFECTION WHICH SO EXEMPLIFIED
MARGARET TO ME — TO US ALL. SO BE IT.

Bene

Yoshiko Uchida,

Dear Friend:

The Metal Arts Guild appointed a special committee, the MARGARET DE PATTA MEMORIAL FUND COMMITTEE, to sponsor an exhibit of a select group of original jewelry pieces created by Margaret during the past thirty years.

The exhibit will be held at the San Francisco Museum of Art from July 24 through August 23.

You can assist in this endeavor, and it is earnestly hoped you will participate, by lending for display the below described piece of jewelry you have, for this occasion.

Precautions will be taken to safeguard all jewelry submitted, and adequate insurance will be provided. All pieces will be promptly returned following the exhibit.

Because of the set date and shortness of time, it is urgent all pieces be received not later than July 18th. Please carefully package and mail "registered and insured" collect to the MARGARET DE PATTA MEMORIAL FUND COMMITTEE, 525 Montclair Ave., Oakland, Calif. 94606; Attn: Eugene Bielawski.

Your cooperative assistance in this undertaking will be deeply appreciated.

Sincerely,

Eugene Bielawski

* Pendant with crystal

blanks may be obtained from Western Craft Exhibit, 158 Thomas,
Seattle, Wash.

Entry cards are due May 1; entries May 1 thru May 28; exhibit
June 7-Sept 7, 1964; entry fee \$3.00; 3 sections: crafts for 1) in-
terior or garden, 2) architecture, and 3) apparel. There will be
three awards of \$200.00, three of \$100.00, three of \$50.00 and one
purchase for the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York City.

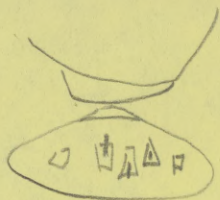
o o

Our member John N. Miller will soon be married, we hear.
Flash! Philip Eden also will be married soon - in fact, May 3 to
Ilse Salomon.

: :

New Members: We welcome Frances and Lloyd Clark of 1501 - 19th Ave.,
OV 1-6064, San Francisco. They are members of the S.F. Gem &
Mineral Society. Both work in jewelry and Lloyd does faceting and
general lapidary besides.

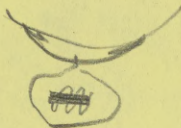
① Pendant



- wh. gold.
emerald, amethyst,
spinel - chrysocolla
enclosed in crystal.

X ②

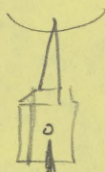
"



- w. gold - crystal enclosing
emerald, amethyst,
spinel

③

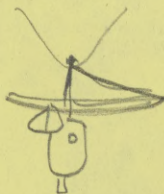
"



- yellow gold.
topaz inlaid & diamond on
surface
ebony behind stone

④

"



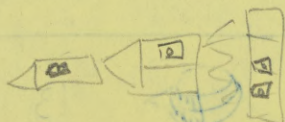
- silver -
trachstone (black)
granite & pearl

⑤



- wire constructed yellow gold
Pin - with ebony - coral accent

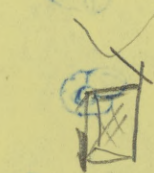
X ⑥



- Pin - wh gold structure
black onyx inlaid
w coral, jade, jasper

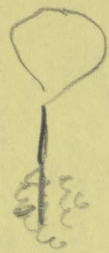
⑦

Pendant



- y. gold, rutilated crystal
ebony

X (8)



y. gold. structure
w ebony

(9)



silver + gold pin
w s. steel screen

(10)

pendant



gold w rhinestones crystal


(11)




seawater pin

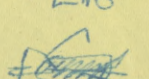
silver, pearl touchstone
+ beach pebbles.

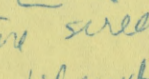
1. pendant - structural
(2) on back

2. " 


3. " 


4. pin - #4 back


5. pin 

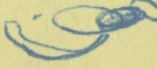
6. " 


7. ring - with wire screen
rhinestones crystal

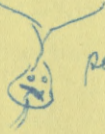
8. ring - 

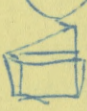
9. ring (2) 


10. ring (2) 

11. pin - 

12. pin 
(see Young photo)

13.  pendant
all rhinestones

14.  pendant

15.  #4 back
pendant

16.  pendant

July 13, 1964

Dear Merry:

Enclosed is the biography for the exhibit.

Please let me know if you find any omissions or corrections needed.

About the statements:

I - statement on large gray sheet which you have. The following paragraph was included at the end on one of the drafts and sounded fairly good to me. Should it be added? "It seems to me that a creative artist has a social responsibility to produce not the single highly priced handmade article for extremely limited consumption, but to produce the best possible in design, workmanship and materials to give pleasure to the largest number of people possible."

II - typed sheet enclosed

III - " " "

IV - If needed - I thought we could use the three marked paragraphs on the enclosed "Godd Design" piece. Since there is a duplicate copy, I thought it would be all right to mark and mail this piece to you.

I'm sending a carbon of the biography and Statements II and III to Gene.

Best to your family.

As ever,

Yoshiko

July 13, 1964

To: Gene

From: Yoshiko

Enclosed is a copy of the biography for the exhibit. Will you insert the proper number on page 2, and let me know if there are any inaccuracies or omissions?

I'm also enclosing copies of 2 statements which I thought might be good. Merry has the original of Statement I, and a fourth possibility is an excerpt from "Good Design" which I also sent on to Merry.

I gave my pendant to Merry when she visited me the other day, so I trust it will be in your hands soon.

I am looking forward most eagerly to this exhibit which will be a fine tribute to Margaret.

as she was able to
abstract beauty 2
world around her
in her art, she also
accepted / social
resp'y / artist /
bring order - beauty
into societal rel'ns -

He 1-4746

you copy

MARGARET DE PATTA

1903 - 1964

More than any other craftsman of the west, Margaret DePatta brought to the field of contemporary jewelry design a special distinction, vigor and new dimensions.

A native of Tacoma, Washington, she was trained primarily in the field of fine arts as a painter and sculptor, studying at the San Diego Academy of Fine Arts and the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. Twice winner of a national scholarship at the New York Art Students League, she developed an interest in jewelry shortly before undertaking her studies in New York.

Although her interest was at first divided between jewelry and painting, she soon saw the possibilities inherent in jewelry as a modern structural medium for creative work. As early as 1929 she rebelled against conventional interpretations of jewelry and brought fresh impulse to the craft through her inventive experimentation and creative spirit. She felt strongly the need to bring the concepts of the modern art world to the craft and by 1935, she devoted full time to jewelry, exploring the problems of structure, function, space concepts, transparency and movement in its design. She revolutionized the concept of stone cutting through visual optical exploration and was one of the first to use synthetic adhesives in attaching stones, thus freeing them from enclosure to "float in space."

From 1940-1941, she studied with Moholy-Nagy at the School of Design in Chicago (now Institute of Design), a contact which she considered the most important educational experience

of her life.

Margaret DePatta believed that the artist has a responsibility to relate to present society and its methods and found validity in designing for production, not only in the field of jewelry, but in ceramics and flatware as well. In 1947, she and her husband, Eugene Bielawski, began production of jewelry by the lost wax process and continued this enterprise for 12 years.

She taught Contemporary Design at the California Labor School, the California College of Arts and Crafts and the University of Oregon Extension Division. She also helped organize the Metal Arts Guild of San Francisco and the Designer Craftsmen of California.

Her work has been shown in innumerable exhibits of the country's leading art museums, as well as in many international exhibits, and has won countless prizes over the years. Many fine shops throughout the country have carried her work, always in much demand for its elegance, simplicity and dramatic impact.

For the past year or two, she had given up custom work to devote her energies to experimentation, particularly in the field of sculpture, which was always of special interest to her.

Margaret DePatta leaves a fine legacy, not only in her distinguished work, but in her constant search for excellence and the fresh, bold, imaginative outlook which promise to remain a vigorous force in the area of contemporary jewelry design.

Y. U.

Rec'd Astor -
from Cite

3-17-69

OK
checked
8/18/75

sent 7/29/75
to H. Gray

MARGARET DE PATTA

By

Yoshiko Uchida

MARGARET LE PATTA

Born: March 18, 1903, Tacoma, Washington

Died: March 19, 1964, Oakland, California

1921-1923 Attended Academy of Fine Arts, San Diego, California

1923-1926 Attended California School of Fine Arts,
San Francisco, California

1926 Attended Arts Students League, New York, N. Y.

* * *

1929 Began to study metal^{work} with Harinian, San Francisco

1930 Early work influenced by ancient jewelry. First
work in metal involved wire forms, scrolls, twists.
Development of handcraft concept - simple and bold.

1932 Studied enameling and engraving, San Francisco

1934-1935 Began to work fulltime as professional jeweler.

1932-1940 Emphasis on structural organization of three
basic metal forms - wire, sheet, grain or dome

Development of new structural concepts. Continued
influence of modern architecture and sculpture.

Began experimentation in new structural and
visual ways of setting stones.

Departure from traditional shapes in stone cuts

First conscious use of transparent stone as
a transparency (1939)

1940-1941 Studied at School of Design, Chicago, with
Moholy Nagy and others

1940-1950 Exploration of visual effects of transparencies,
reflections, distortions, magnification, etc.

Lapidary projects cut by F. Sperisen, San Francisco
(from 1941)

Incorporation of texture in metal and stone as
an element in design.

1960
(approx.)

Development of open wire three-dimensional
linear space structures.

Development of free form and free relationship of parts.

Incorporation of movement as an element in design.

Use of new materials, such as stainless steel, plastics, epoxies, etc.

1946-1958 Production work with Eugene Bielawski

1951
(approx.) Designed for production of costume jewelry

1960
(approx.)

Note: The development and use of various concepts in Margaret De Patta's work naturally cannot be confined to specific dates. The above are listed simply to indicate the general chronological direction of her work as a designer draftsman.

Perhaps more than any other craftsman of her day, Margaret De Patta was an artist of her times. She was a unique craftsman and human being who felt the inner rhythm of her time in history long before her peers. Sensing the full vigor and surge of 20th century development, she possessed the genius and skill to relate it to jewelry design with fresh and vital expression.

Accustomed as we now are to modern concepts in jewelry, it is easy to forget the enclosed tradition-bound forms that prevailed in jewelry design for so many years. The pronged or bezeled stone, dull symmetry, unimaginative structures and representational forms were for long years the usual and accepted designs. (To such an arid field) Margaret De Patta brought her own special creative effort, discovering the tremendous possibilities inherent in adapting the technical and scientific developments of the times to her craft, thereby evolving some of the most distinctive contemporary statements in handwrought jewelry. It was as though she had suddenly torn down a wall that had kept craftsmen from seeing the world beyond their fingertips, revealing unexplored dimensions

of design, technique and material.

"Contemporary jewelry must characterize our times with its emphasis on space and structure, strong light, open forms, cantilever, floating structures and movements," she stated, reflecting that a basic component of good design is the projection of the positive concepts characteristic of its age. It was imperative, in her view, that an integrated relationship should exist between an artist's design concepts and the world and culture in which ^{the artist} ~~he~~ lives.

A free and revolutionary spirit, Margaret De Patta was quick to shed binding or meaningless traditions. She never stopped learning, searching or growing. And that growth infused not only her artistic effort but her total development as a human being. Constantly analyzing her work in relation to various elements of design, she sought new ways to create ^a relevant statement. Never satisfied to stand still, she was always ready to move on, for the finished piece was not important to her. A friend has said of her, "There was an almost religious involvement in creativity and the exploration of material and the function of an object."

Although her early training was in the traditional areas of painting and sculpture, her interest turned to jewelry when she came to San Francisco ^{in 1929} ~~in 1929~~, and ^{during} ~~in~~ her search for a wedding band, could find none with the design qualities she sought, ^{and} (She) realized then the vast possi-

bilities for developing good contemporary design in jewelry and began to study metal craft with the Armenian craftsman, Hairinian.

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Her early designs, much influenced by ancient Colombian, Turkish, Egyptian, Etruscan and Mayan jewelry, evolved largely from the basic forms of metal (sheet, wire and grain), and retained some influence of her training as a painter as well.

Although she continued to paint, she studied engraving and enameling, and gradually began to devote greater time to metal work. By 1935 she had created a small workshop in her home and had become a professional jeweler. The following year, her work was placed commercially at Amberg-Hirth in San Francisco, then a well-established retail outlet for quality handcraft.

With characteristic intensity of purpose and effort, she plunged into the exploration of jewelry as a structural form rather than as mere ornamentation, seeking to utilize new structural principles in the working of metal and the holding of stones. For her, the structure of the work itself was a basic element in her design. Discarding rigid views formerly associated with jewelry, she viewed her work not as decorative objects, but rather as wearable miniature sculptures and mobiles. The artistic value of jewelry, she felt, should not be any less than that of sculpture.

Her constant search for satisfactory solutions to various problems of structure led her to many imaginative innovations. She devised new ways to hold stones, for

instance, freeing them from the tradition^d obvious enclosing forms. Searching for ways to diversify joints and fastenings, she created original catches and fastenings related to wearability and body structure. She designed special locks for earrings, using a small rod that slipped into place to hold the earring to the ear. She made pendants that would hang free from the body so they would not be static. [~~Interpreting an idea suggested by Afton Giacomini~~ *delete*] She made interlocking rings and ring shanks designed on the organic principle of finger construction.

She was intrigued with finding solutions to such problems as how to achieve volume without excessive weight, how to explore textures of metal and stone, how to use new material, or how to use old material in new ways, and how to vitalize a piece by movement.

Although she experimented freely, she never lost sight of the function of jewelry, nor of its limitations as to size, weight, durability and relationship to body structure. Such limitations were not a hindrance to her, but rather, provided a stimulating challenge toward working out a logical solution in a design always related to function.

Margaret De Patta was a meticulous, disciplined craftsman who worked constantly at perfecting her techniques and her work. She was protective of her working

time and tried not to let anything encroach on the period she set aside for it. She had an orderly mind and knew exactly what she was doing and why. There were no random or accidental designs; each part of every piece performed a specific function. Every cut of a stone, every element of metal represented the logical working out of a structural or spatial problem. There was nothing in any of her pieces that did not make a vital, relevant contribution toward the total design. Her work appeared dramatically simple and elegant, although it ^{was} ~~actually~~ represented the result of painstakingly intricate and complex processes.

"An aesthetically satisfying structure," she said, "calls to mind an artistic mate in chess where each piece bears upon the solution with its full power, without duplication and without extraneous or non-active pieces. This points a clear answer to the question of decoration in art."

She was a craftsman who never violated the integrity of her material, realizing that every substance has characteristic elements of beauty which must be handled directly and utilized to best advantage. The result, she knew, would be beautiful if it grew directly from the observed beauty of the material.

She was among the first craftsmen to employ new materials of her day, finding use for stainless steel,

jeweler's bronze, stainless steel screening, plastics and epoxies which enabled her to attain new freedom in both design and structure.

"We should not hesitate to use new material," she said, "or to use hitherto unacceptable materials, if they fit within our requirements of good design."

A truly good design, she felt, was the result of the interaction of the tool, the material and the designer, deriving from technical excellence capable of producing an aesthetic totality.

Sensing a need for further direction in the development of her work, Margaret De Patta interrupted her work in 1941 to attend the School of Design, (now the Institute of Design), in Chicago to study with Moholy Nagy whom she had met the previous year at a Mills College Summer Session. Seeing the creative use of various material in her home, he told her then that she was already putting into practice ^{many of} the theories taught at the Bauhaus.

In Chicago she met and married Eugene Bielawski who taught design at the School, and thus ^{was formed} began a creative team which ^{which} ~~was to~~ contribute much to many and varied artistic communities.

Margaret De Patta spoke of her studies in Chicago and the influence of its Bauhaus philosophy as the most important educational experience of her life. And it was from this period that she intensified her focus on

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the tremendous potential of non-objective visual and spatial concepts in jewelry design.

The dominant element in her total design now became the projection of the three-dimensional space concept and each element of a piece was utilized not only for its own importance and for its effect on the whole, but for its relevancy to the satisfactory solution of a space problem.

She was particularly influenced by and attracted to architecture, and might indeed have become an architect had she not turned her talents to jewelry. The structural and spatial viewpoint which dominated her jewelry reflected these leanings, and the movement of lines and planes in space were the elements that best projected the quality she sought in her work. The open steel structures, the cantilevers, the floating structures of contemporary architecture were all aspects which found strong application to her work.

To further articulate and intensify the space concept, she experimented with the conscious use of movement in her work. She designed pins, for example, with moving parts that could be worn in three different positions to either cover or reveal two stones and alter the color accents.

Other moving parts such as a pivot clasp or hinge might produce positive and negative volume relationships

the wearer. The unique qualities of her stunning jewelry were apparent even in the pieces she designed for children, some of which could completely disrupt a classroom. S

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or permit the reversal of a piece from light to dark. Some pins achieved ^{their} (development of) maximum potential by expanding or changing shape, and there were rings with moving parts that could spin, vibrate or rattle, thereby giving tactile ^{as well as} and manipulative pleasure to the wearer. The unique qualities of her jewelry were such that some of the pieces she designed for children could completely disrupt a classroom and her stunning pieces for adults too, were invariably conversation pieces.

include? One of Margaret De Patta's major contributions to her craft was the totally new concept she evolved for utilizing the visual properties of gem stones. For hundreds of years the transparent stone had been cut simply to produce brilliance and sparkle, until it had reached the point of maximum angles of refraction. The use of a stone as a "transparency" captivated this creative craftsman, and employing this approach, she opened completely new avenues of design.

"The fascination of looking into or through an object or material is boundless," she stated. "Add the excitement of optical effects such as magnification, reduction, multiplication, distortion and image reflection, and the function of the gem stone in jewelry becomes one to stimulate the ingenuity and imagination of the designer."

reveal an underlying structure such as the shank of a ring. At other times, the transparent stone revealed a bit of silver or gold pin-pointed beneath or was employed to permit the color of a dress to become a positive part of the piece so that different materials could vary the visual stimulus.

"Catch your stones in the air," Moholy Nagy had said to her in Chicago. "Make them float in space. Don't enclose them." And this, indeed, was what she managed to do.

She did not want her stones to be enclosed by bezels, prongs or other metal holding forms, and devised ingenious methods whereby they appeared to be unfettered and free. She discovered that certain curvatures in the cabachon form produced a blind spot where a durable backing for a piece could be attached without being visible in front. There are pieces in which one stone seemingly floats within another, their complementary use adding dramatic dimensions to both stones. A pearl, for instance, will be mounted in the concave cut beneath a topaz or crystal so that it seems to float inside. A translucent ring of light is created around the pearl by the concavity and, in addition, the facets of the enclosing stone magnify or multiply the pearl depending on the angle of observation. In a single piece she would make use

of light and shadow, transparency, translucency, magnification and multiplication, in a virtuoso development of the total visual spatial concept. Such pieces she called "opticuts".

In other pieces she would incorporate small colored stones by cementing them onto the flat side of a piece of crystal and enclosing them in the concavity of another identically shaped crystal, so stone appeared to float within stone.

She approached her work with such fresh insight that she could combine such an unlikely group as beach pebbles, silver and pearls into an award-winning pendant.

When she worked with beach pebbles to make her informal "sweater jewelry", she was careful to keep them looking free as they are in nature. She ^{would} fit a metal backing into slots made in the stone and attached it with epoxy for durability. There was no visible holding form and any surrounding metal work was always kept simple.

In working out a complex cut for her stones, she made models from lucite which could be sawed, polished or textured, and drilled holes in it to correspond with rutiles in her crystal. She then took her models to Francis J. Sperisen, a San Francisco lapidary, who understood and shared her belief in the potential of modern jewelry and ^{who,} since about 1941, worked closely with

her in developing new experimental cuts for gem stones.

Of Margaret De Patta's designs as a whole, one could say that they were the result of a fusion of effort involving her total being. Each design concept was the result of years of experience and observation, of experimentation in the manipulation of material and of dozens of sketches which clarified her concepts as she worked, finally producing the best statement she could evolve for the idea in mind.

She worked primarily in white or yellow gold because of its durability, and she preferred wrought to cast work because of the strength of metal which becomes compacted as it is worked.

By 1946 she discovered that the demand for her work was far exceeding the supply, thus forcing her prices upward until her work was becoming available only to those who could afford luxury prices.

"For quite some time," she wrote, "I had become aware of the contradictions between my social viewpoints and my method of work."

Being the conscientious individual she was, it pained her to negate the Bauhaus philosophy of social integration that had influenced her so greatly in Chicago, and she and her husband began to devote much thought to production methods for the craftsman.

"It seems to me that a creative artist has a social responsibility to produce not the single highly priced handmade article for extremely limited consumption," she stated, "but to produce the best possible in design, workmanship and materials to give pleasure to the largest number of people possible."

She ^{was} concerned ^{about profit motivated production} (herself with the attitude of production geared only for profit, ^{about promotion that creates} of a market dominated by false values (created by promotion, ^{about} packaging and advertising, and the consequent low level of consumer taste. She was concerned ^{for} about the problem of the craftsman's attitude toward production and his need to resolve the conflict between his creative self and his desire for wide distribution of a good design.

She felt that the artist must recognize his role as an economic producing unit in a society oriented to mass production; that he must create for a market and work to maintain the highest possible standards in such a market. She wanted to explore the possibility of artists working together as a group to achieve cooperative production.

She was determined to bridge the existing gap between the craftsman and production, not only because she felt it necessary to relate to society and its needs, but because she believed in the potential of modern production methods for producing fine articles in

volume and at lower cost,

(In addition ^{to} ~~to producing in quantity and selling at~~
~~prices lower than those possible by handcraft methods~~, she
was determined to compete ~~on the market~~ with quality
costume jewelry without sacrificing her own standards of
design or workmanship.

With the help of her husband, she became involved
in the beginning phases of production which she called,
"heartbreaking pioneer work" and described ^{it} as follows:
"The artist craftsman now becomes ... a composite of
production manager, experimental engineer, purchasing
agent, distributor, bookkeeper and advertising manager,
handling all work right on down to the final packaging
and mailing. It is only after an ample buying public
is assured that the small plant becomes the large plant
and that the artist emerges, shorn of his traditional
impracticality and achieves the role of designer, experi-
menter, coordinator of design and fabricating processes."

During the production process, Margaret De Patta
made some forty to fifty original master models in silver,
from which rubber molds were ~~then~~ made. Wax was ^{then} poured
into the rubber molds for casting by the lost wax method.
For about a year one additional craftsman was employed
to assist in the casting and finishing while Eugene
Bielski worked on the complex details of the produc-
tion process, solving various problems as they arose.

The Bielawskis created repeat designs which sold for under \$50. and developed outlets throughout the country. They eventually developed a successful business and were in competition with well-established costume jewelry and accessory firms. This was a major pioneering effort which few craftsmen have managed to accomplish in the field of contemporary jewelry.

After twelve years of production work, however, they found that the details necessary to running their business were so time-consuming that neither of them had time for the designing and experimentation toward which they were more inclined. They decided, therefore, to discontinue production work, but they had shown themselves as well as other craftsmen that it could be done.

At the time she first began production work, Margaret De Patta wrote: "I am proud of the fact that the popularly priced piece is indistinguishable from the one of a kind piece. It delights me to display a group of these things and see the baffled frustration on the faces of the 'handcraft for handcrafts sakers' as they realize their inability to distinguish one group from the other."

She was confident that her production pieces were comparable in material and workmanship to handcrafted pieces, the only difference being in the quantity produced

of a given design. She did not share many artists' prejudice against the machine. She had no sentimental or emotional attachment to handcraft per se. Nor did the word "commercialism" frighten her. She felt it was not a sin for an artist to earn a decent livelihood from his craft or to produce for a large group rather than for a favored few. She refused only to release too many pieces of a single design in a given area for fear that the design becoming too familiar, would lose its stimulation and interest.

She felt there was validity in designing for production and was pleased to see the trend in art schools toward training students in functional and technological, as well as aesthetic matters. She believed that students should be encouraged to experiment with all possible materials and to realize the necessity for "making fresh and unbiased solutions to problems of functional design." The future, she felt, was wide open to their findings.

"A creative individual," she stated, "well-grounded in the fundamentals of color, composition, form relationships, and working with hand and machine techniques, is bound to produce articles of valid aesthetic value to fulfill the use needs of the people."

She realized that the designer-craftsman's methods must gradually change from that of complete personal control of all processes to that of working as designer

only, and in 1951 undertook a project of designing for a producer of costume jewelry. Working from a collection of various machine-punched parts, she assembled twenty-five earring designs of simple form and structure. These were sold for as little as one and two dollars. She enjoyed assembling the parts and creating new designs, but soon learned that store buyers would not touch them. Most buyers were accustomed to ordering on the basis of past performance and sales, and tended to form their opinions of consumer taste from past records. Thus, they perpetuated the traditional accepted designs and excluded the new and fresh.

Unfortunately, she found this to be true in other fields as well. She was one of several artists given a grant in an international silverware competition to develop new designs for flatware, the winner's work to be scheduled for eventual production. Feeling that designs in table flatware were extremely inadequate, she wanted to create a fresh form that would be both functional and satisfying to the user. She devoted considerable time to working out a good design, but her work was eliminated in the second judging. "The trouble was," she said good-naturedly, "I didn't realize that we already had a modern tradition that can be just as tight a tradition as any other. We're stylized with extreme simplification of form."

The fact was that once again she was many years ahead of general public taste and her designs, therefore, could not be selected for mass production. In areas such as jewelry and household objects, consumers were still bound with emotional and intellectual associations to past forms.

Her forward look encompassed other crafts as well, and she spoke out to challenge potters. "A pot is a container," she stated, "...but why must these forms be containers simply because the wheel makes a hollow shape. Make the next step forward and free yourselves of the pot - explore the world of shape, form, volume, negative-positive volume and space - then with this new found knowledge, as sculptors, come back and make us pots as never before existed." She had foreseen the future development of pottery even more clearly than many potters themselves.

For a time her creative energies were channelled to designing in ceramics, and with the aid of a commission from Heath Ceramists, she worked a year in this craft. She sought fresh designs for dinnerware which were not dependent on the potter's wheel. "A completely symmetrical plate is traditional," she stated, "but maybe there is something better."

Always she was concerned with improving function as well as with creating something beautiful, seeking

to design an object that would serve its own purpose to maximum advantage.

"I don't like having to turn a pitcher around to pass it to someone," she explained. "Why not make a pitcher with more than one spout and handle?" And why not?

In her own home, the Bielawski dining table bore definite marks of her ingenuity. The tabletop was made entirely of terrazo, and contained round plate-sized indentations at each place, thus eliminating the need for plates. Food was placed directly into the hollows which were later wiped and thoroughly washed. Dessert was served in handturned wood bowls that fit into the indentations.

In 1951 the Bielawskis moved to Napa. There on a six-acre tree studded knoll overlooking the surrounding hills, they renovated an old farmhouse and hoped to establish nearby a school of design based on the Bauhaus principle. This hope did not materialize, however, and they concentrated their efforts instead on production work. A few years later they moved to Oakland where, in partnership with friends, they bought an old house which they renovated together to suit their contemporary taste.

Wherever located, their homes were always filled with work representing man's artistic efforts from all

over the world. And when possible, their homes have opened to patios of rocks and trees or a yard with fruit trees and vegetables, bespeaking Margaret De Patta's closeness to nature.

Her home was always open to her friends and she took great pleasure in entertaining them with her culinary skills, which were considerable. As in her metal work, she applied her superior craftsmanship to cooking, and ~~with great proficiency~~ she delighted in whipping up such dishes as cheese blintzes for her friends.

"She loved to have people in her home," one friend has said of her. "She was a warm person, a wonderful hostess and always made others feel good about themselves."

She was a small and rather quiet person, yet her dynamic personality seemed to influence any who came in contact with her.

She had a lively sense of humor, and once asked a potter friend to make cups cut in half lengthwise with which to startle and amuse friends who asked for "just half a cup of coffee." She was also capable of laughing at herself, and when it became necessary for her to wear a hearing aid, she arrived at a costume party sporting a large horn for her ear.

She was not only interested in people, she was interested in everything about her, always eager to gather new information or to learn new skills. She liked to folk

dance, was a good ice skater, did all her own photography, and bartered her jewelry for lessons on the recorder. She was a perfectionist and excelled in everything she tried.

Her sensitivity to other people was apparent in the care with which she made her custom pieces. Special orders came to her from all parts of the country as people viewed her work on exhibit. She never began work on such a piece, however, until her customer had filled out a detailed questionnaire. She not only asked about preferences in metal, stone and general spatial qualities, but determined the purpose of the jewelry so the piece could be designed for maximum suitability and function for that particular individual. If the piece was for every day wear rather than for special occasions, she stressed strength and durability. Rings were adapted to the size and shape of the wearer's finger, and earrings, which she considered a highly individualized and personal piece of jewelry, were determined by the face, hair style and shape of the ear.

d She tried always to make commissioned pieces ^{conform} as close as possible to the concepts requested by the customer for she felt that the kind of jewelry a person selected to wear was an expression of her ideas and tastes. ^{by the kind of jewelry she selected to wear.}

Her custom pieces were all one of a kind and were

never repeated without the permission of the owner, ^{because} ~~for~~ she felt that a design belonged exclusively to the individual who ordered it.

In addition to her special orders, Margaret De Patta placed her work through^{out} the country in a number of small retail shops featuring handcrafted articles. Her jewelry also found its way to such shops as Black, Starr and Gorham in New York City, where her bold dramatic designs ^{might have} ~~undoubtedly~~ startled the conservative clientele. Whether they purchased them or not, however, she was delighted that they had been exposed to her work.

Usually about one-tenth of her jewelry was always out on exhibit, often in as many as five different locations. She had several one-man retrospective shows of her permanent collection dating back to 1929 and her work has been exhibited in the major museums of the United States, winning innumerable prizes and awards throughout the country.

She had, in fact, participated in so many exhibits and her work had been mentioned in so many books as exemplifying the best pioneering efforts in contemporary jewelry, that she herself had lost count. Her work had been featured in many international periodicals as well.

She did recall with special pleasure, however, the British Museum purchase of her crystal pendant with diamonds shown at an invitational international exhibit

in England, and her participation along with a ^{select} ~~few~~ group of ~~American~~ craftsmen in the invitational American exhibit at the Brussels Worlds Fair in 1958.

She believed that it was important for an artist to exhibit, and for artists and craftsmen to communicate with each other. ~~Further~~, ^{also} she felt that artists should work together to educate and communicate with the buying public.

In 1948 she was instrumental in organizing the Metal Arts Guild of San Francisco, an organization that enabled craftsmen to pool their resources and exchange information about outlets, material and equipment sources as well as methods of work. She was also one of the founders of the Designer-Craftsmen group of San Francisco which brought together the leading craftsmen of the Bay Area.

It was her feeling that art should be integrated into other areas of human effort and understanding, and should ~~be~~ related to contemporary society and its problems, adding when it could, to existing knowledge. ~~Affirm-~~ ^{she believed} ing that an individual must maintain his own identity and importance, ^{she also} ~~still she~~ believed that ^{on her} ~~it was his~~ ^{individuals has an} obligation to participate in creating a richer more democratic society, which in turn would enrich ^{their} ~~his~~ own life. ^{was}

She taught contemporary design at the California Labor School, the College of Arts and Crafts, the Patri

School, and the University of Oregon in conjunction with the Portland schools. She participated actively in the artistic life of every community in which she lived, and spoke to lay groups as well as to craftsmen. She was an active member of the American Craftsman's Council and was a participant in their panel on Metals at its second national conference in Asilomar in 1958.

For some time preceding her death, she and her husband were working on a book on design directions, outlining historical influences on the artist, the development of jewelry design, and the need for a general evaluation in all creative fields.

Margaret De Patta was a rare individual - a whole human being in this world of specialized interests and compartmentalized skills. She was a sensitive and brilliant artist who was completely aware of her times and her responsibilities to it. And she was capable of relating this awareness to her craft with distinction and vigor.

Her legacy lies not only in her distinguished work, but in her constant search for excellence and a fresh, imaginative outlook, which was a major force in the development of contemporary jewelry design. Her enormous contribution in this area can scarcely be over-emphasized. But equally important, it was to her great credit that she was universally loved and admired as a vital, warm and lovable human being.

A permanent collection of her work has been

donated to the Oakland Art Museum by her husband, Eugene Bielawski, and will eventually travel throughout the United States.

A Margaret De Patta Memorial Committee composed of six craftsmen in the San Francisco area was founded in 1964 upon her death to establish a fitting and lasting memorial to her. This book was written under its auspices to document her outstanding contribution to design in contemporary American jewelry.

CITY OF OAKLAND



THE OAKLAND MUSEUM • ONE THOUSAND OAK STREET • OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 94607

January 5, 1976

Ms. Yoshiko Uchida
1685 Solano Avenue
Berkeley, CA. 94707

Dear Yoshiko:

I enclose a copy of your text on Margaret De Patta as we plan to use it in the catalog. As I mentioned earlier, we made only minor revisions because it read so easily. We deleted the closing section where you wrote about the collection, the committee and the museum's plans. This information appears in the foreword and introduction and I have given a rather lengthy summary of the collection and our association with the committee and the Metal Arts Guild.

The first chronology that was included with your text relied upon Eugene Bielawski to complete. We have replaced it with a biographical brief and a selected list of periodical references.

If you have any comments on the revisions, or feel strongly about the editing, I would appreciate hearing from you by January 12th. It may be that certain words or phrases alone will express your meaning and minor changes can be made no later than that date if you feel they are necessary.

I will call you toward the end of this week to set up a time to pick up the pendant you are lending to the exhibition. I hope you have had excellent holidays and that the New Year will be a happy and productive one for you.

Sincerely,

John E. Peetz
Director

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Hazel".

Hazel Bray
Associate Curator, Art

MARGARET DE PATTÀ

by Yoshiko Uchida

"An aesthetically satisfying structure calls to mind an artistic mate in chess where each piece bears upon the solution with its full power, without duplication and without extraneous or non-active pieces. This points a clear answer to the question of decoration in art."

Margaret De Patta *

Perhaps more than any other craftsman of her day, Margaret De Patta was an artist of her times. She was a unique craftsman and human being who felt the inner rhythm of contemporary history long before her peers. Sensing the full vigor and surge of 20th century development, she possessed the genius and skill to relate it to jewelry design with fresh and vital expression.

Accustomed as we now are to modern concepts in jewelry, it is easy to forget the enclosing and tradition-bound forms that had prevailed in jewelry design for so many years. The pronged or beveled stone, dull symmetry, unimaginative structures, and representational forms were the usual and accepted designs. Margaret De Patta brought her own special creative effort to this arid field by discovering the tremendous possibilities inherent in adapting the technical and scientific developments

* The quotations used in this article are drawn from a combination of sources within the artist's correspondence, lecture notes and other writings.

of her times to her craft, thereby evolving some of the most distinctive contemporary statements in handwrought jewelry. It was as though she had torn down a wall that had kept craftsmen from seeing the world beyond their fingertips, revealing unexplored dimensions of design, technique, and material.

"Contemporary jewelry must characterize our times with its emphasis on space and structure, strong light, open forms, cantilever, floating structures and movements," she stated, reflecting that a basic component of good design is the projection of the positive concepts characteristic of its age. It was imperative, in her view, that an integrated relationship should exist between an artist's design concepts and the world and culture in which the artist lives.

A free and revolutionary spirit, Margaret De Patta was quick to shed binding or meaningless traditions. She never stopped learning, searching or growing. And that growth infused not only her artistic effort but her total development as a human being. Constantly analyzing her work in relation to various elements of design, she sought new ways to create relevant statements. Never satisfied to stand still, she was always ready to move on. A friend has said of her that she had an almost religious involvement in creativity, in the exploration of material, and in the function of an object.

Although her early training was in the traditional areas of painting and sculpture, her interest turned to jewelry when she came to San Francisco. ^{During} In 1929, ^{she changed the meaning of jewelry. She came to SF in 1929, as a student.} In her search for a wedding band, she could find none with the design qualities she sought and soon realized the vast possibilities for developing good contemporary jewelry design. She then began to study metal craft with the Armenian craftsman, Armin Hairenian.

Her early designs, much influenced by ancient Colombian, Turkish, Egyptian, Etruscan, and Mayan jewelry, evolved largely from the basic forms of metal (sheet, wire

and grain) and retained some influence of her training as a painter as well.

Although she continued to paint, she studied engraving and enameling and gradually began to devote greater time to metal work. By 1935 she had created a small workshop in her home and had become a professional jeweler. The following year, her work was placed commercially at Amberg-Hirth in San Francisco, then a well-established retail outlet for quality handcraft.

With characteristic intensity of purpose and effort, she plunged into the exploration of jewelry as structural form rather than as mere ornamentation, seeking to utilize new structural principles in the working of metal and the holding of stones. For her, the structure of the work itself was a basic element in her design. Discarding rigid views formerly associated with jewelry, she viewed her work not as decorative objects alone but as wearable miniature sculptures and mobiles. The artistic value of jewelry, she felt, should not be any less than that of sculpture.

Her constant search for satisfactory solutions to various problems of structure led her to many imaginative innovations: she devised new ways to hold stones, for instance, freeing them from the traditional, obvious, enclosing forms; searching for ways to diversify joints and fastenings, she created original catches and fastenings related to wearability and body structure; she designed special locks for earrings, using a small rod that slipped into place to hold the earring to the ear; she made pendants that would hang free from the body so they would not be static; interpreting an idea suggested by Afton Giacomini, she made interlocking rings and ring shanks designed on the organic principle of finger construction.

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through movement.

Although she experimented freely, she never lost sight of the function of jewelry, nor of its limitations as to size, weight, durability, and relationship to body structure. Such limitations were not a hindrance to her, but rather, provided a stimulating challenge toward working out a logical design solution always related to function.

Margaret De Patta was a meticulous, disciplined craftsman who worked constantly at perfecting her techniques and her work. She was protective of her working time and tried not to let anything encroach on the period she set aside for it. She had an orderly mind and knew exactly what she was doing and why. There were no random or accidental designs; each part of every piece performed a specific function. Every cut of a stone, every element of metal represented the logical working out of a structural or spatial problem. There was nothing in any of her pieces that did not make a vital, relevant contribution toward the total design. Her work appeared dramatically simple and elegant, although it was the result of painstakingly intricate and complex processes.

She was a craftsman who never violated the integrity of her material, realizing that every substance has characteristic elements of beauty which must be handled directly and utilized to best advantage. The result, she knew, would be beautiful if it grew directly from the observed beauty of the material.

She was among the first craftsmen to employ new materials of her day, finding use for stainless steel, jeweler's bronze, stainless steel screening, plastics and epoxies which enabled her to attain new freedom in both design and structure.

"We should not hesitate to use new material," she said, "or to use hitherto unacceptable materials, if they fit within our requirements of good design."

A truly good design, she felt, was the result of the interaction of the tool, the material, and the designer, deriving from technical excellence capable of producing an aesthetic totality.

Sensing a need for further direction in the development of her work, Margaret De Patta interrupted her work in 1941 to attend the School of Design in Chicago, (now the Institute of Design) to study with Moholy-Nagy whom she had met the previous year at a Mills College Summer Session. Seeing the creative use of various material in her home, he told her then that she was already putting into practice many of the theories taught at the Bauhaus.

In Chicago she met and married Eugene Bielawski who taught design at the School, and thus was formed a creative team which greatly contributed to many and varied artistic communities. X

Margaret De Patta spoke of her studies in Chicago and the influence of its Bauhaus philosophy as the most important educational experience of her life. It was from this period that she intensified her focus on the tremendous potential of non-objective visual and spatial concepts in jewelry design.

The dominant element in her approach to total design now became the projection of three-dimensional space where each element was utilized not only for its own importance, and for its effect on the whole, but for its relevancy to the satisfactory solution of a spatial problem. X

She was particularly influenced by and attracted to architecture, and might indeed have become an architect had she not turned her ^{talents}~~talents~~ to jewelry. The structural and spatial viewpoint which dominated her jewelry reflected these leanings, and the movement of lines and ^{planes}~~plains~~ in space were the elements that best projected the quality she sought in her work. The open steel structures, the cantilevers, the floating structures of contemporary architecture were all aspects which found strong application to her work.

To further articulate and intensify her space concept, she experimented with the conscious use of movement in her work. She designed pins, for example, with moving parts that could be worn in three different positions to either cover or reveal two stones and alter the color accents.

Other moving parts such as pivot clasp or hinge might produce positive and negative volume relationships or permit the reversal of a piece from light to dark. Some pins achieved their maximum potential by expanding or changing shape, and there were rings with moving parts that could spin, vibrate or rattle, thereby giving tactile as well as manipulative pleasure to the wearer. The unique qualities of her jewelry were apparent even in pieces she designed for children - some of which would completely disrupt a classroom. Her stunning pieces for adults, too, were invariably conversation pieces.

One of Margaret De Patta's major contributions was her totally new utilization of the visual properties of gem stones. For hundreds of years the transparent stone had been cut simply to produce brilliance and sparkle, until it had reached the point of maximum angles of refraction. The use of a stone as a "transparency" captivated ^{her} Margaret, and employing this approach, she opened completely new avenues of design.

She also explored the dimensions of illusion, transmission, area of invisibility, perspective and space enhancement in the use of transparent stones. Sometimes she combined optical effects with texture, as in a pin ^{with} ~~in~~ which a crystal mounted over stainless steel wire screen (to provide texture), ^{which} magnified and distorted the screen to produce visual excitement.

Resisting the use of an object for show or status, Margaret De Patta avoided ^{the ostentatious use of} ~~using~~ precious stones ~~in any~~ ~~ostentatious~~ way, employing diamonds, for example, not for their opulence, but rather for compositional enhancement or as an accent of brilliance in combination with other stones.

She made extensive use of such unpretentious stones as crystal, smoky quartz and topaz which lent themselves well to her original cuts and bold designs. She felt that the wise utilization of the native qualities of stone was a great source of power and richness. She gave new life to rutilated crystal which until then had been little used in modern jewelry, but which she used frequently and purchased in large amounts from Brazil. She ~~discovered a~~ ^{provided a} fascinating and controllable design component ~~in its~~ varicolored hairlike inclusions which could be reflected, distorted or multiplied according to the angle and placement of a facet.

She sometimes produced an interdependence of stone and mounting by using the transparency of a stone to

p. 7

"The fascination of looking into or through an object or material is boundless," she stated. "Add the excitement of optical effects such as magnification, reduction, multiplication, distortion and image reflection, and the function of the gem stone in jewelry becomes one to stimulate the ingenuity and imagination of the designer."

With the use of transparent stones she explored the dimensions of illusion, transmission, area of invisibility, perspective and space enhancement. Sometimes she combined optical effects with texture, as in a pin with a crystal mounted over stainless steel wire screen (to provide texture) which magnified and distorted the screen to produce visual excitement.

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She sometimes produced an interdependence of stone and mounting by using a transparent stone to reveal an underlying structure, such as the shank of a ring.

At other times, the stone revealed a bit of silver or gold pin-pointed beneath or was employed to permit the color of a dress to become a positive part of the piece so that different ^{fabrics} ~~clothing~~ could vary the visual ^ustimulus.

"Catch your stones in the air," Moholy-Nagy had said to her in Chicago. "Make them float in space. Don't enclose them." And this, indeed, was what she managed to do.

She did not want her stones to be enclosed by bezels, prongs or other metal holding forms, and devised ingenious methods whereby they appeared to be unfettered and free. She discovered that certain curvatures in the cabachon form produced a blind spot where ^o durable backing for a piece could be attached without being visible in front. There are pieces in which one stone seemingly floats within another, their complementary use adding dramatic dimensions to both stones. A pearl, for instance, will be mounted in a concave cut beneath a topaz or crystal so that it seems to float inside. A translucent ring of light is created around the pearl by the concavity and, in addition, the facets of the enclosing stone magnify or multiply the pearl depending on the angle of observation. In a single piece she would make use of light and shadow, transparency, translucency, magnification and multiplication, in a virtuoso development of a total visual and spatial concept. Such pieces she called "opticuts."

In other pieces she would incorporate small colored stones by cementing them onto the flat side of a piece of crystal and enclosing them in the concavity of another identically shaped crystal, so stone appeared to float within stone.

She approached her work with such fresh insight that she could combine such an unlikely group as beach pebbles, silver and pearls into an award-winning pendant.

When she worked with beach pebbles to make her informal "sweater jewelry,"

she was careful to keep them looking as free as they are in nature. She would fit a metal backing into slots cut in the stone and attached with epoxy for durability. Again, there was no visible holding form and any surrounding metal work was always kept to a simple minimum.

In working out complex stone cuts, she made models from lucite which could be sawed, polished or textured, and drilled to correspond with rutiles in her crystal. She then took her models to Francis J. Sperisen, Sr., a San Francisco lapidary, who understood and shared her belief in the potential of modern jewelry and who, since about 1941, worked closely with her in developing new experimental cuts for gem stones.

Of Margaret De Patta's designs as a whole, one could say that they were the result of a fusion of effort involving her total being. Each design concept was the result of years of experience and observation, of experimentation in the manipulation of material, and of dozens of sketches which clarified her concepts as she worked, finally producing the best visual statement of her evolving ideas.

She worked primarily in white or yellow gold because of its durability, and she preferred the strength and compactness of wrought to cast work.

By 1946 the demand for her work was far exceeding the supply, thus forcing her prices upward until her work was available only to those who could afford luxury prices. This created conflicts for her; "For quite some time," she wrote, "I had become aware of the contradictions between my social viewpoints and my method of work."

Being the conscientious individual she was, it pained her to negate the Bauhaus philosophy of social integration and she and her husband began to devote much thought to production methods for the craftsman.

"It seems to me that a creative artist has a social responsibility to produce not the single highly priced handmade article for extremely limited consumption," she stated, "but to produce the best possible in design, workmanship and materials to give pleasure to the largest number of people possible."

She was concerned about profit-motivated production, about promotion that created a market dominated by false values, about packaging and advertising, and the consequent low level of consumer taste. She was concerned about the problem of the craftsman's attitude toward production and his need to resolve the conflict between his creative self and his desire for wide distribution of a good design.

She felt that the artist must recognize his role as an economic producing unit in a society oriented to mass production; that he must create for a market and work to maintain the highest possible standards in such a market. She wanted to explore the possibility of artists working together as a group to achieve cooperative production.

She was determined to bridge the existing gap between the craftsman and production, not only because she felt it necessary to relate to society and its needs, but because she believed in the potential of modern production methods for producing fine articles in volume and at lower cost. ←

In addition, she was determined to compete with quality costume jewelry without sacrificing her own standards of design or workmanship.

With the help of her husband, she became involved in the beginning phases of production which she called, "heartbreaking pioneer work" and described it as follows: "The artist craftsman now becomes... a composite of production manager, experimental engineer, purchasing agent, distributor, bookkeeper and advertising manager, handling

all work right on down to the final packaging and mailing. It is only after an ample buying public is assured, that the small plant becomes the large plant and that the artist emerges, shorn of his traditional impracticality and achieves the role of designer, experimenter, coordinator of design and fabricating processes."

During the production process, Margaret De Patta made some forty to fifty original master models in silver from which rubber molds were made. Wax was then poured into the rubber molds for casting by the lost wax method. For about a year, one additional craftsman was employed to assist in the casting and finishing while Eugene Bielawski worked on the complex details of the production process, solving various problems as they arose.

The Bielawskis created repeat designs which sold for under fifty dollars and developed outlets throughout the country. They eventually developed a successful business and were in competition with well-established costume jewelry and accessory firms; a major pioneering effort few craftsmen have managed to accomplish in the field of contemporary jewelry.

After twelve years of production work, however, they found that the details necessary to running their business were so time-consuming that neither of them had time for the designing and experimentation toward which they were more inclined. They decided, therefore, to discontinue production work, but they had shown themselves as well as other craftsmen that it could be done.

At the time she first began production work, Margaret De Patta wrote: "I am proud of the fact that the popularly priced piece is indistinguishable from the one-of-a-kind piece. It delights me to display a group of these things and see the baffled frustration on the faces of the 'handcraft for handcraft sakers' as they

realize their inability to distinguish one group from the other."

She was confident that her production pieces were comparable in material and workmanship to handcrafted pieces, the only difference being in the quantity produced of a given design. She did not share many artists' prejudice against the machine. She had no sentimental or emotional attachment to handcraft per se. Nor did the word "commercialism" frighten her. She felt it was not a sin for an artist to earn a decent livelihood from his craft or to produce for a larger group rather than for a favored few. She refused only to release too many pieces of a single design in a given area for fear that the design ^{would become} ~~becoming~~ too familiar and thereby lose its ability to stimulate and interest.

She felt there was validity in designing for production and was pleased to see the trend in art schools toward training students in functional and technological, as well as aesthetic matters.

She believed that students should be encouraged to experiment with all possible materials and to realize the necessity for "making fresh and unbiased solutions to problems of functional design." The future, she felt, was wide open to their findings.

"A creative individual," she stated, "well-grounded in the fundamentals of color, composition, form relationships, and working with hand and machine techniques, is bound to produce articles of valid aesthetic value to fulfill the use needs of the people."

She realized
Realizing that the designer-craftsman's method must gradually change from that of complete personal control of all processes to that of working as designer only, *and* in 1951 she undertook a project of designing for a producer of costume jewelry. Working from a collection of various machine-punched parts, she assembled twenty-five earring

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designs of simple form and structure which sold for as little as one and two dollars. She enjoyed assembling the parts and creating new designs, but soon learned that store buyers would not touch them. Most buyers, accustomed to ordering on the basis of past performance and sales, tended to form their opinions of consumer taste from past records and thus, perpetuated traditionally accepted designs which excluded the new and fresh.

Unfortunately, ^{not De Patta} she found this to be true in other fields as well. She was one of several artists given a grant in an international silverware competition to develop new designs for flatware, the winner's work to be scheduled for eventual production. Feeling that designs in table flatware were extremely inadequate, ~~Margaret~~ ^{she} wanted to create fresh forms that would be both functional and satisfying to the user. She devoted considerable time to working out a good design, but her work was eliminated in the second judging. "The trouble was," she said good-naturedly, "I didn't realize that we already had a modern tradition that can be just as tight a tradition as any other. We're stylized with extreme simplification of form."

The fact was that once again she was many years ahead of general public taste and her designs, therefore, were not selected for mass production. In areas such as jewelry and household objects, consumers were still bound with emotional and intellectual associations to past forms.

Her forward look encompassed other crafts as well, and she spoke out to challenge potters. "A pot is a container," she stated, "...but why must these forms be containers simply because the wheel makes a hollow shape. Make the next step forward and free yourselves of the pot - explore the world of shape, form, volume, negative-positive volume and space - then with this new found knowledge, as sculptors, come

back and make us pots as never before existed." She had foreseen the future development of pottery even more clearly than many potters themselves.

For a time her creative energies were channelled to designing in ceramics, and with the aid of a commission from Heath Ceramists, she worked a year in this craft. She sought fresh designs for dinnerware which were not dependent on the potter's wheel. "A completely symmetrical plate is traditional," she stated, "but maybe there is something better."

Always she was concerned with improving function as well as with creating something beautiful and sought to design objects which would serve their own purposes to maximum advantage.

"I don't like having to turn a pitcher around to pass it to someone," she explained. "Why not make a pitcher with more than one spout and handle?" And why not?

In her own home, the Bielawski dining table bore definite marks of her ingenuity: the tabletop was made entirely of terrazo, and contained round plate-sized indentations at each place, thus eliminating the need for plates. (Food was placed directly into the hollows which were later wiped and thoroughly washed. Dessert was served in handturned wood bowls that fit into the indentations.)

In 1951 the Bielawskis moved to Napa. There on a six-acre, tree studded knoll overlooking the surrounding hills, they renovated an old farmhouse and hoped to establish, nearby, a school of design based on the Bauhaus principle. This hope did not materialize, however, and they concentrated their efforts instead on production work. A few years later they moved to Oakland where, in partnership with friends,

they bought an old house which they renovated to suit their contemporary taste.

Wherever located, their homes were always filled with work representing man's artistic efforts from all over the world. When possible, their homes have opened to patios of rocks and trees or yards with fruit trees and vegetables, further evidencing Margaret De Patta's closeness to nature. X

Her home was always open to her friends and she took great pleasure in entertaining them with her considerable culinary skills. As in her metal work, she applied her superior craftsmanship to cooking, and delighted in offering delicious dinners to her friends.

She loved to have people in her home, one friend has said of her. She was a warm person, a wonderful hostess and always made others feel good about themselves. X

~~Although~~ ^{she was} a small and rather quiet person, ^{yet} her dynamic personality seemed to influence any who came in contact with her. X

She had a lively sense of humor, and once asked a potter friend to make cups cut in half lengthwise with which to startle and amuse friends who asked for "just half a cup of coffee." She was also capable of laughing at herself, and when it became necessary for her to wear a hearing aid, she arrived at a costume party sporting a large horn for her ear.

She was not only interested in people, she was interested in everything around her and was always eager to gather new information or to learn new skills. She liked to folk dance, was a good ice skater, did all her own photography, and bartered her jewelry for lessons on the recorder. She was a perfectionist who excelled in everything she tried.

Her sensitivity to other people was apparent in the care with which she made her custom pieces. Special orders came to her from all parts of the country as people viewed her work on exhibit. She never

began work on such a piece, however, until her customer had filled out a detailed questionnaire. She not only asked about preferences in metal, stone and general spatial qualities, but determined the purpose of the jewelry so the piece could be designed for maximum suitability and function for that particular individual. If the piece was for every day wear rather than for special occasions, she stressed strength and durability. Rings were adapted to the size and shape of the wearer's finger, and earrings, which she considered a highly individualized and personal piece of jewelry, were determined by the face, hair style and shape of the ear.

X She tried always to make commissioned pieces conform as closely as possible to the wishes of the customer^s for she felt that the kind of jewelry a ^{people} person selected to wear was an expression of ^{and her} their ideas and tastes.

Her custom pieces were all one of a kind and were never repeated without the permission of the owner as she felt that a design belonged exclusively to the individual who ordered it.

In addition to her special orders, Margaret De Patta placed her work throughout the country in a number of small retail shops featuring handcrafted articles. Her jewelry also found its way to such shops as Black, Starr and Gorham in New York City, where her bold dramatic designs might have startled the conservative clientele. Whether they purchased them or not, however, she was delighted that they had been exposed to her work.

Usually about one-tenth of her jewelry was on exhibit, often in as many as five different locations. She had several one-man retrospective shows of her permanent collection dating back to 1929 and her work has been exhibited in the major museums of the United States, winning innumerable prizes and awards throughout the country.

She had, in fact, participated in so many exhibits and her work had been mentioned in so many books as exemplifying the best pioneering efforts in contemporary jewelry, that she herself had

lost count. Her work had been featured in many international periodicals as well.

She did recall with special pleasure, however, the British Museum purchase of her crystal pendant with diamonds shown at an international invitational exhibit in England, and her participation along with a select group of craftsmen in the invitational American exhibit at the Brussels World's Fair in 1958.

She believed that it was important for an artist to exhibit, and for artists and craftsmen to communicate with each other. She also felt that artists should work together to educate and communicate with the buying public.

In 1948 she was instrumental in organizing the Metal Arts Guild of San Francisco, an organization that enabled craftsmen to pool their resources and exchange information about outlets, material and equipment sources as well as methods of work. She was also one of the founders of the Designer-Craftsmen of California which brought together the leading craftsmen of the Bay Area.

It was her feeling that art should be integrated into other areas of human effort and understanding and should relate to contemporary society and its problems, adding when it could, to existing knowledge. She believed that an individual must maintain his or her own identity and importance. She also believed that individuals had an obligation to participate in creating a richer more democratic society, which in turn would enrich their own lives.

She taught contemporary design at the California Labor School, the ^{California} College of Arts and Crafts, the Patri School, and the University of Oregon in conjunction with the Portland schools. She participated actively in the artistic life of every community in which she lived, and spoke to lay groups as well as to craftsmen. She was an active member of the American Craftsman's Council and was a participant in their panel on Metals at its ~~second~~ national conference in Asilomar in 1957.

For some time preceding her death, she and her husband were working on a book on design directions, outlining historical influences on the artist, the development of jewelry design, and the need for a general evaluation in all creative fields.

Margaret De Patta was a rare individual - a whole human being in this world of specialized interests and compartmentalized skills. She was a sensitive and brilliant artist who was completely aware of her times and her responsibilities to it. And she was capable of relating this awareness to her craft with distinction and vigor.

Her legacy lies not only in her distinguished work, but in her constant search for excellence and a fresh, imaginative outlook, which caused her to be a major force in the development of contemporary jewelry design. Her enormous contribution in this area can scarcely be over-emphasized. But equally important, it was to her great credit that she was universally loved and admired as a vital, warm and lovable human being.