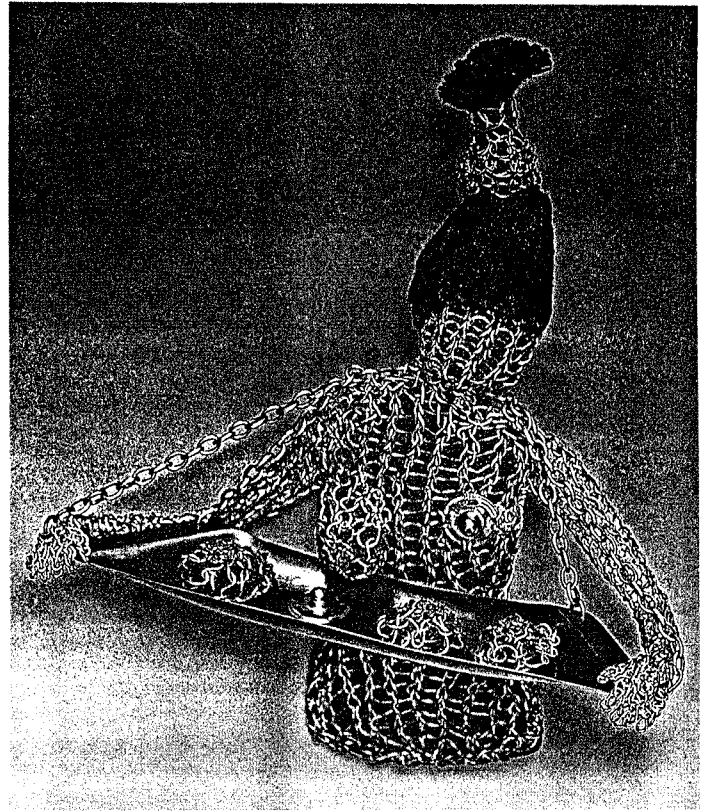


*Stacking Reality* (brooch), 1996  
sterling, fine silver, magnet, wire,  
nickel silver, cotton thread,  
polyurethane mono filament  
5 1/4 x 4 1/2 x 2"



## Barbara Stutman: *Impaired Visions*

Galerie Noel Guyomarc'h Bijoux d'Art  
Montreal, Quebec  
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text by R. Bella Rabinovitz

*Impaired Visions*, the title of Barbara Stutman's jewellery exhibition initially prepares us for a didactic event. Fortunately, after a mere glance and an acerbic chuckle, the title also reveals its aptness as a harbinger of comedic pratfalls. For Stutman, the satirist, is unabashedly at play sending up fashion advertisements that attempt to dictate femininity. Solemnly and somewhat rhetorically, a body-wash ad affixed to the gallery wall proclaims: "What do women want? We want to be delicious." And Stutman responds with six subversive works. For example, *Is Hot Stuff Delicious?*, 1997, begs the question with a pair of exposed spool-knit silver legs and a naked bum that emerge awkwardly from a red crocheted tutu. On closer inspection the tutu turns out to be a ring, inspired by the net sponge that is featured in the ad. An artificial flower, it conjures up the vaginal imagery used in early feminist works and is in this ad seductively co-opted to serve commerce. Judy Chicago's central and once so controversial core imagery witnessed in *The Dinner Party* of 1974, must be accompanied by the naked truncated lower body of a woman to regain its power to affront and engage us in examining woman's work, as well as the imaging of women. In fact, the somersaulting legs are a detachable brooch. Set free from the nest/ring it can be worn with the legs dangling down or folded over to retain the disquieting air of sexual gymnastics. Hidden in their interiors are black peppercorns, a touch of added heat reminiscent of the heated debate that accompanied another contentious ad.

The Dior Svelte campaign also employed the lower half of a fragmented female body coyly topped by a huge bow. In one of the eight works that respond directly to this ad, *How To Package A Fantasy*, 1996, precious materials are once more spool knitted, knitted, and crocheted to give us a headless naked woman. Inspired by

Chanel's Coco perfume ad a large gold bow replaces the head and a red thread dangles from her ankle. Leashed and muzzled, this delicate brooch is a broad spoof on the psychological requirements needed to be a sexy woman in our post-feminist era. Wearing this piece of jewellery would amount to broadcasting "I know what you are thinking" to any male still caught up in the fantasy of a passive woman. A beautifully crafted conversation inhibitor.

Another brooch, *Stacking Reality* offers us the only woman to keep her head. Depicted from the waist up, she is an exotic, though featureless, creature. Her black hair bounded by a red thread, she proffers a tray to the viewer. The forbidden fruit are two sets of breasts. One pert and the other sagging, they can be detached from the tray and snapped onto her awaiting chest one at a time. The viewer is the surgeon, whose emotional gamut runs from the playful deconstructing of perfect *Barbie* to the harsh reality of mastectomies.

In the twenty-five works that refuse to stay neatly in the jewellery category, Stutman explores the construction of female identity. Bound, gagged, and reduced to sexual candy containers, the women in Stutman's pieces seem totally compliant. And it is this very lack of subtlety that helps us to transcend the solemn hype and to *repair* vision.

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