

Precious Ways Of Letting Go

by Silvia Bombardini

There was a time when lives were frailer and souls were stronger, when a respectable widow would honor her husband's memory by wearing only black for a year, nine months and a day. It was a time when Queen Victoria was holding the longest reign of any female monarch in history, when fine memorial jewelry reached the peak of popularity.

Gisèle Ganne's oversized, yet minutely detailed works of art are driven by the same devoted and slightly eerie sensibility—an anachronistic wish “to celebrate death and decay for the power that it holds over life.” Whereas in the last century we concealed and disguised our sorrows and tragedies, Ganne allows us to put them on show once again, in all its gold-plated grief. She believes in powerful, emotional jewelry, imbued with memories and feelings that are brave enough to mark every moment of life: not just anniversaries, holidays and achievements, but sad, difficult events that make us stronger and wiser.

Ganne sees death as a necessary conclusion—an absorbing, romantic, extraordinarily painful event that instead of being forgotten, should be fully grasped and even glamorized “to the level of haute couture catwalks.” She feels the same way about divorce. “Today, 42 percent of marriages end in divorce in Britain, and 38 percent in France,” says Ganne. “My divorce jewelry refers to old and contemporary wedding customs to illustrate this sort of mourning”.

Who better than celebrities then, to teach us about glamor, red carpets and breakups?

Renowned personalities such as Florence Welch, Lady Gaga, Ke\$ha, Yasmin and Eve have all been seen wearing Gisèle Ganne's collections. While the jewelry designer would prefer her pieces to be worn in context, she is content to see them reinterpreted by her celebrity customers: “I aim to create a sort of pop voodoo, or decadent curse,” she says. “And by wearing this jewelry, we can mourn the death of the celebrity icons we love as they pass on in the coming years.”

Inquisitive but always respectful, Ganne's research wanders from the severe, resolute appeal of the Victorian era to the raw, ancient and exotic rituals of death, marriage, urban legends, historical events, even witchcraft and voodoo.

Her materials of choice include leather and sequins, silver and human hair, magpies and raven skulls for her celebrated divorce knuckledusters, and more recently, gemstones and foxtails to add a touch of color. The pieces tell stories of loss and endurance, helping survivors face their fears in an almost cathartic way. Ganne's two latest collections—*Hunting Man* and *The New Amazony*—delve deeper into this state of empowerment and the subsequent feral hunt for a new partner. They evoke the dangerous and seductive allure of hunting trophies, shameless in their imposing scale like an intimidating display of victories.

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