

VANITY FAIR

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On Jewellery

*The WORLD is
in her POCKET*

Lily

McINERNEY

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Speaking VOLUMES

For more than 30 years, Jacqueline Rabun's use of form as a means of telling stories has changed the narrative around contemporary jewellery, as *Mazzi Odu* discovers

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“I SEE MY story as the story of an artist, working in the medium of jewellery,” says Jacqueline Rabun, whose forthcoming retrospective at Carpenters Workshop Gallery in London (September 14 to November 18) finds her at an emotionally complex juncture. Spanning her 33-year career, the show will have more than 250 pieces on display, including drawings and photography from Rabun's personal archive.

The exhibition promises to be an inspirational one, offering an insight into one of contemporary jewellery's living greats, whose minimalistic, sculptural pieces have garnered both commercial success and critical acclaim. “The retrospective brings up a lot of feelings. But for me the timing is right to really share my work, my journey, and to just be ‘naked to the world,’” says Rabun, referencing the

classic Teena Marie track that she used as an internal working title while realising the project.

Rabun's design process has always centred on distilling emotional experiences. “My work is inspired by the human experience,” says Rabun, “which includes the cycle of life from birth, and the journey we go on to discover ourselves and ultimately evolve.” The names of her collections

PHOTOGRAPH BY SEAN WATKINS; STYLING: GIANINE COUJ; HAIR MAKE UP: PASCALE FODAL; DRAWING: COURTESY OF JACQUELINE RABUN; JEWELLERY: COURTESY OF JACQUELINE RABUN

offer signposts of her intent: Offspring was a paean to the unbreakable bond between a mother and child; Mercy, designed for Georg Jensen, has become a modern-day talisman for many who wear the pieces; Raw Elegance, her breakout collection from 1990, looked boldly to the future. More recently, in 2022, Rabun cleverly reimagined the jewellery perennial, the chain, with the Reflect collection, which illustrated how 1990s androgyny is analogous with 21st-century notions of gender fluidity.

"MY FIRST COLLECTION, Raw Elegance, was not only about discovering the world of contemporary jewellery, but also materials and a new culture when I moved to the UK," says Rabun. "Raw Elegance was my blank canvas moment because it allowed me to discover my artistry. It was the foundation for everything that followed."

For many jewellery collectors, Rabun is best known for her 23-year collaboration with the Danish house Georg Jensen. Via the world-renowned silversmiths, her pieces (also available in gold) have reached a wide clientele, with many collecting her work.

female designers Vivianna Torun Bülow-Hübe and Nanna Ditzel and expands notions of who are the custodians of good design.

Rabun's design language creates a relationship with the wearer. Its appeal is instinctive. "I think organic,

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minimalistic forms tend to complement the human form," says Rabun. "There is a lot of harmony there, so that the jewellery becomes part of the wearer rather than the jewellery wearing you." Unique connections have made the Carpenters Workshop Gallery at Ladbroke Hall a natural home for

it before the pandemic. I was in a state of flux and I could feel a change coming in my life: the decision to move back to my native California [she returned to live in Los Angeles in 2020] after many years in Europe. So the Metanoia, that was what I was going through." Of the gemstone choice, Rabun says,

"Rutilated quartz crystal is great as it's an illuminator for the soul—it cleanses and energises." Platasa echoes the sentiment: "I recently had the privilege to wear Rabun's Metanoia Torque Gold necklace and I felt a sense of strength from within. Its seemingly effortless design struck me, and I felt it was charged with a powerful energy."

Now she has become a grande dame of the jewellery world, Rabun is looked up to by new talent. "I know there is a generation of young artists and jewellery designers that look to someone like me for inspiration—and it is my turn to provide that," she says. She mentors young jewellery makers, and new jewellery series and design projects are in development, with collaborations afoot.

Having lived in London for 31 years, Rabun is excited that the retrospective



"I believe the success is down to the fact that we have married beautiful design with authentic stories," says Rabun. What might have initially felt like an audacious move for Georg Jensen—working with an African-American and recent European émigrée to invigorate its jewellery offering—has actually proved both profitable and pioneering. Rabun's oeuvre now sits side by side with the legendary Scandinavian

Rabun's work. Tamara Platasa, head of jewellery at the gallery, says: "Jacqueline Rabun's jewellery collections do not comprise mere design objects but rather wearable works of art that each continue stories as told by the artist." Rabun designed the Metanoia series for Carpenters, and remembers knowing from the outset that it would mark a transition both for her practice and her as a person. "I started designing

will take place in the city where she built her career. "I am delighted this exhibition is going to be in London because there is a part of me that will always be a Londoner. I have more than one hometown and it is definitely one of them." Home, belonging, the spaces where we find ourselves moving to, the different stages of life—Jacqueline Rabun, it seems, has a piece of jewellery to express them all. ■