

Lena Christina Grabher

MFA Thesis in Metal

Prof: Kerianne Quick, Myra Mimplitsch-Gray, Matthew Friday

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Diplopia

Visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is one of them. It is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it sees and moves itself, it holds things in a circle around itself.

— Maurice Merleau-Ponty

In my work, I manipulate aspects of physical appearance. Using the language of jewelry, I explore optics and illusion. Jewelry as a traditional means of adornment is a part of our appearance, and therefore a medium to explore this idea more closely. I use jewelry to create a symbiotic relationship between the body and its environment, using light projection or mirroring to manipulate the boundary between the two. I am focusing on the presence of the body and the interaction of the wearable object with the body and its surroundings.

Diplopia means “double vision,” and refers to the symptom of seeing two images instead of one. The term *diplopia* is derived from two Greek words: *diploous*, meaning double, and *ops*, meaning eye. It is the simultaneous perception of two images of a single object that may be displaced horizontally, vertically or diagonally. *Polyopia* refers to the perception of more than two images, and is often a monocular phenomenon caused by refractive aberrations resulting in multiple images of one object. In such cases, the dominant image of the object is accompanied by secondary images that may be less intense, distorted, or fleeting (Williamson 63). Used here, the term refers to the effects of play back, projection, and distortion, that are threaded through this body of work.

What we place on our body becomes a part of the image of our projected self and therefore acts as an indicator of our identity. Jewelry and the skin are similar in their abilities to simultaneously embellish, reveal, and conceal. They are both layers that shape our appearance literally and figuratively. While the kind of jewelry we choose to wear may describe our mood or our personal preferences for certain forms or

colors, it can also project the internal, outward. It can commemorate our past, divulge our private relationships, and expose our affiliations. Jewelry has the ability to effect the way we appear to others, which means it is a method to modify and influence our own appearance. Similarly, a rash can disclose an internal condition, a scar can be a reminder of an event, and wrinkles reflect our age. The skin may be treated artificially, ranging from surgical alterations to tattooing and so forth, revealing our priorities, desires, and anxieties. These layers are constantly being negotiated between the external and internal as a means by which we recognize ourselves both internally and externally, in unison on a physical as well as on a psychological level. Jewelry serves as an interface between our private selves and the public space.

How do I want to portray my identity? In my work, I play with the wearer and viewer's perception by manipulating the body and its surroundings through the medium of jewelry. Using mirrors, magnification and projections, I affect the image of the body. From my initial focus on the skin and the idea of emphasizing it through magnification, I started to investigate optical lenses. Optical lenses are used for various purposes. Conceptually I am interested in their ability to improve our vision and to capture and lead light, light being the base for visual perception. We use lenses to compensate impaired sight and to focus on details that without their magnifying effect would be impossible for us to see. My piece *Diplopia 6* focuses on the magnification of the skin. Based on the body's symmetry, it includes two large glass lenses, one is placed on the back and one on the chest of the wearer. The lenses are embedded in tulle and transparent silicone that visually simulates an enlarged cell-structure. When worn, it magnify's the wearers skin. The cell like appearance of the tulle creates a comparison between the artificial simulation of cell structures and the reality of skin cells, suggesting that the viewer reconsider what skin looks like. The magnification

illuminates the details of our skin, while simultaneously, manipulates and exaggerates the visual nature by giving the illusion of a dome like volume of skin.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a french phenomenologist, argues in his book *The Phenomenology of Perception* that perception is the background of experience that guides every conscious action. He sees the world as a field for perception. Human consciousness assigns meaning to the world, and therefore we cannot separate ourselves from our perceptions of the world (Scott). My work is inspired by the ideas of Merleau-Ponty as he describes how what we see and what we perceive are interwoven and cannot be disentangled from each other. Space and the body are inseparable. Merleau-Ponty asserts that experience may be reflective or unreflective (Scott). Unreflective experience may be known by subsequent reflection. Reflection may be aware of itself as an experience, and may also be a way to understand and to structure experience. This explores the idea of spatiality, or the body in relation to and including its existing environmental surroundings. *Diplopia I* projects images of the environment onto the skin as if the body is “caught in the fabric of the world” (Merleau-Ponty 124). In this case, the body “holds things in a circle around itself” (124). As Sarah Pink asserts, “Human beings are continuously and actively involved in the processes through which not only culture, but also the total environments in which they live are constituted, experienced and change continually over time” (Skinner 236). In my piece *Diplopia I* I explore this idea using optical lenses to collect and project the wearer's environment directly onto the skin. Using a cell-like, bodily structure to keep them at their focal length, the lenses collect visual information from the wearer's surroundings. The material, a 3-D printed elastic, adapts to the shape of the body. Functioning similar to the human eye, the lens captures the light reflecting off of objects in the environment, and projects those images onto the body. It suggests the arthropod eyes, also referred to as the “fly

eye,” allow better performance by enabling a much wider field of vision. The images move with the wearer and their surroundings, emphasizing the effect of a changing environment. From wearer to wearer, the “canvas” for the images changes. The images change constantly as well, while the wearer is moving through space, in addition to the activities and light qualities of the environment. The artist Krzysztof Wodiczko uses the means of projection to create an awareness as he is projecting images onto the facades of buildings, which helps to recognize them physically. In his essay called “Public Projections” from 1983, he is comparing buildings to the human body. He is concerned with our absent relationship, which means that we are moving around buildings without realizing they are there. As he explains, the visualization of the “myth” - the projections force us to look at it (Harrison, Charles, and Paul Wood 1065-8). This is comparable to our body and the way the light projected through some of my pieces leads the viewer to look at it in a different way.

Where we are born, how we are raised, in which time period or climate, what took place in our surroundings – all human experiences and circumstances shape who we are and how we think, which in turn shapes our appearance. Our skin is a document, an index of passing time. It grows, changes, and renews itself. Freckles and wrinkles form, influenced by time and circumstances. These marks serve as an illegible document of our past and shape our perception of our self. The skin is the border, the external layer which confronts our surroundings constantly. This surface is affected by the sun, the air, our lifestyle and everything around us. *Diplopia 4* suggests the permanent marking of the skin. It consists of a symmetrical steel wire structure that holds two optical lenses on each side at focal distance to the shoulder. Sun rays are collected through the lens and narrowed to a single beam, whose intensity is determined by the focal length. The directed sun rays are strong enough to burn anything within the lenses focal distance. As the direction of the sun changes,

the light point tracks across the surface of the shoulder. If worn directly on the skin, the result would appear as burn marks referencing moles—the mole is a pattern, a kind of ornamentation that is influenced by both the internal and the external, and changes and increases over time. Harnessing the “natural” impacts of our environment through the marking of the skin can be viewed as mutative or transient fashion of the skin. Similarly to our skin acting as a mirror of our surroundings, the fast pace of our modern times is reflected in the fashion industry. During periods in which ideas about the self seem to be unstable or shifting, trends, style, fashion and culture tell us if our pale skin is beautiful or the mole upon our lips makes us more attractive. The idea of beauty is culturally constructed and our appearance affects both the way we look at other people and other peoples’ opinion of us, which in turn influences how we view ourselves (Evans 5).

How do we deal with identity today? The abundance of options to shape identity can be difficult to navigate. From the city we choose to live in, the educational path and the career we choose, everything becomes a symbol that stands for who we are. It becomes an indicator for who we are and self-realization is the central element in our lives. It may be an act of the creating an image of our self, probably a partially elusive self. Similar to how many millennials design a social media profile like Facebook, the modern objective focuses on forming an identity by creating circumstances that reflect the way one wants to be viewed by others. The “mirror stage” is, according to Lacan, a stage of psychological development in which a child recognizes himself or herself in the mirror and becomes conscious of selfhood. Lacan's “mirror stage” theory results in the idea that our mirror image completes our identity. For Lacan, when we look in the mirror, we “assume an image”. According to Lacan, all self-images occur after we have learned language and started interacting with others, and so all self-images are constructs of the other. Therefore, we manipulate our self image visually in

order to adapt and construct an identity according to what we have learned and see from others. This visual manipulation can be achieved through physical adornment like jewelry or tattoos. It can also be achieved through media manipulation like blog outlets or social media profiles. All of these constructs help shape our identity. Lacan's concept is based on his discovery that children between the sixth and eighteenth month of life, recognize their reflection of themselves in the mirror for the first time. This is the first time that the child sees itself in its entirety instead of seeing itself fragmented, from a perspective where one never sees its own face but only its extremities. Before that a person can't imagine themselves as a whole. Therefore the reflection is necessary to deal with the self-conscious "I". Nevertheless, because "I" is formed in a mirror, it is a fantasy, an unreal image that only seems real. The image that we recognize as our self is outside of the space of ourself; it is in the mirror. Therefore the mirror stage also causes a division of the self (Harrison, Charles, and Paul Wood 620 - 624). As Dr. Allen Thiher, Professor of French Literature at the University of Wisconsin, explains, "The result is that, as we strive for the completion of our self-image, we have partially constructed it with a fantasy and thus it will always remain a fantasy" (Thiher 94). In regard to this idea, I see the mirror as a transient self-portrait, that depicts a fantastic reality. *Diplopia 5* is a goggle-like construction of aluminum, silicone and mirrors. It explores the Lacanian idea of the mirror stage; that our mirror image completes our identity. *Diplopia 5* reflects the wearer's vision in several mirrors, constructing a complete view of the wearer's face - including parts of the face that would not normally be visible from a frontal perspective. Mirrors can reflect reality but can also distort one's vision of the reality, in this case, imposing a hyper reality which is physically impossible without the device. *Diplopia 5* acts as a fragmented, yet more complete, portable portrait. This device includes another physical phenomenon as it refers to perceptual adaptation and change in

vision for the wearer. Glasses are a device that usually serve to compensate the distortion caused by a disorder of our sight. Their usual purpose is to improve or correct vision. However, perceptual adaptation does not infer improvement. For example, if an individual's visual field is altered, the brain compensates the difference allowing the individual to function normally. As Scientist George M. Stratton explained at the *Third International Congress for Psychology* in Munich in 1896, explored in the 1980's, this neurological function in a series of experiments on visual adaptation. Stratton proved that after four days of wearing vision-reversing glasses non-stop, the brain would reprocess a subject's vision and adapt to make the world appear "normal" again (Stratton 611-617). The lower part of the *Diplopa 5* serves as reversing glasses. If the wearer directs the gaze to the mirror placed underneath the eyes, the piece will make everything appear upside-down.

Humans have adapted to the culture of wearing and carrying accessories such as caps, earrings, chains, bracelets, bags and electronic devices. Especially the latter have become vital to the "super-modern" human being, who is always on the move, always connected, and living with an over abundance of space and individualization, according to anthropologist Marc Augé (Skinner 205). In the article "The Problem With Wearable Technology," Blade Runner designer Syd Mead describes some of his futuristic designs as being dystopian as he deals with technology's impact on human society and identity. Dystopia, which literally means "not-good-place" appears in many sub-genres of fiction and is often used to draw attention to real-world issues regarding society, environment, psychology, science, and/or technology, which if unaddressed could potentially lead to such a dystopia-like condition. Typical dystopian claims are that we are all puppets of technology, that technology distorts our world by trying to improve it. For example, as technology attempts to connect us through communication devices, and social media, we experience isolation. One device Syd Mead

created, the uni-pod, is a personal device for transportation to enclose the wearer in a carapace with a pair of mercury gyros on the back. Visually it reminds viewers of a futuristic shield or an insect carapace. Commenting on the dystopian nature of the device, Syd Mead comically defends against accusations that the uni-pod is too isolating with the argument that the shield would keep bird shit away (Mead). I am interested in this humorous approach of acknowledging advantages and disadvantages. Developments and inventions often come with positive as well as negative side effects and cause transitions and adaptation. *Diplopia 7* suggests isolation by distorting the view of the audience and the wearer. It is a tube-like shape with a visor form that acts as a wide angle lens. When worn, the wearer has difficulties seeing because of the distortion created by the wide angle. The distortion creates an uncomfortable feeling which can be cause the wearer to become off balanced. At the same time, it makes the wearer's head appear comically small to the viewer.

Diplopia 3 also draws on the ideas of Lacan, adding fragments of instability and transience. The basic idea of this piece is to create a cloaking device by leading the light around the wearers body. Made from a fleshy silicon, the body of the neckpiece mimics the skin, acting as a camouflage, even though its large shape clearly reveals that it is not of the body. The mirrors placed inside the structure are positioned to reflect what is behind the neck, creating the illusion of a hole. Here, the surroundings of the wearer become one with the body, creates the illusion of the separation from the body. In doing so, *Diplopia 3* investigates disruption, disintegration, and integration.

The distortion of the body's silhouette, including the blurring of the border between the body and its surroundings was one of the first inquiries in this body of work. In *Diplopia 2* Fresnel lens foil with two different effects are utilized. One lens is wide angle, causing everything to appear smaller than it is in reality, while the other lens magnifies. Creating a

structure of fragmented sheet lenses, the body is surrounded in a shell like casing. This causes a visual interruption of the body's silhouette. It plays on the boundaries of the body and the environment. *Diplopia 2* creates a faceted effect on the contour of the figure, challenging the viewer's perception of the wearer.

Lucy McRae is "a science fiction artist, director and self proclaimed body architect probing the frontiers of the body, health and human adaptability. Dousing technology in femininity she responds to complex future scenarios inventing visually iconic experiences that connect science with the imagination" (McRae). Lucy's fascination with and manipulation of the human body is an inspired approach to creating body adornment. Thematically, her practice is diverse, with the playful and provocative silhouettes she creates, they sometimes serve as gleeful speculations on how the human body might adapt to changing environments and technology, or as meditations on personal identity (McRae). She is trying to blur the parameters of the body, for example in one of her collaborations with Bart Hess, she explores ways to alter the silhouette in ways that disguises where the skin ends and where the environment begins. McRae and Hess use a foam-like substance to create this effect. While comparable in concept, but different in execution, *Diplopia 2* makes use of optical effects, directly playing on the illusion of the skin. The foam suggests a hidden body, rather than the blurred line of the connected environment and body. Her dynamic textile creation for the music video of pop singer Robyn, is much more intriguing. It seems to transform the "inside" to the outside, using common plastic tubing. Giving the impression of veins, it fuses the idea of our body, consisting largely of water, and our environment.

"Some forms of traditional Jewelry are able to fuse with the wearers body, such as a wedding ring - these objects tend to disappear; they become flesh" (Skinner 67). In the book, "Contemporary Jewelry in Perspective", Skinner argues that the space of the body is not so

much a physical destination as it is a reference point and a vehicle. In his eyes, the body functions simultaneously as a platform or a vacancy poised for adornment, a space and an environment in which pieces of contemporary jewelry deliberately do not blend into the wearers body. The position of jewelry in relationship to the body is often, but not always, subordinate. What relationships can jewelry create, between the body, adornment, and one's surroundings? The body, argues Skinner, is the most challenging site to present an artwork, because there is little ability to control the conditions of presentation and reception (67). In the presentation for my thesis show, I was confronted with this in a way that was unexpected to me. The pieces, worn by models at the opening of the show, forced me to think directly about each individual wearer. Instead of relinquishing responsibility by sending the work directly out into the world, I had to deal with factors like clothing and positioning. Who do I want to wear my piece? How do I want my pieces to be perceived? I want to use the body not as a vacancy for adornment, but to acknowledge the body as part of the conceived jewelry, and to create a synergy using the body as an important element of the piece. The space of the body and its variability and particularity "complicates perception, but activates objects in a transformative way. "(67) Therefore my goal is to create jewelry that not only stands alone as an object but obtains its function when worn as it points out the relationship it creates between the body and the environment.

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Images

Title: Diplopia 1

Year: 2015

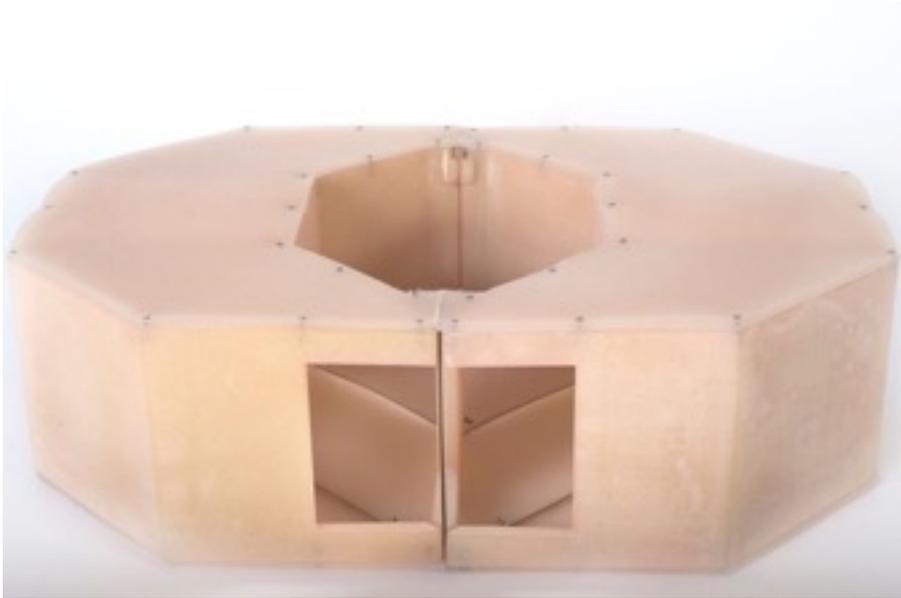
Materials: Elasto - plastic, glass, monofilament



Title: Diplopia 2
Year: 2015
Materials: PVC fresnel lens sheet, silver, copper, steel



Title: Diplopia 3
Year: 2015
Materials: Elasto-plastic, magnets, silicone, polyester, acrylic mirror, steel



Title: Diplopia 4
Year: 2015
Materials: Steel, glass



Title: Diplopia 5
Year: 2015
Materials: Aluminum, silver, silicone, tulle, mirror styrene



Title: Diplopia 6
Year: 2015
Materials: Silicone, tulle, glass, polyester zipper,



Title: Diplopia 7
Year: 2015
Materials: Aluminum, silver, polyvinyl fresnel lens



Installation shots:







LENA CHRISTINA GRABHER

Artist /Jeweler

grabherl1@hawkmail.newpaltz.edu

EDUCATION

- 2013 - 2015 State University of New York in New Paltz, USA, **Masters of Fine Arts** in Metal
- 2011 - 2013 ALCHIMIA, Contemporary Jewelry School in Florence, Italy
with professor Ruudt Peters and Peter Bauhuis; Completed with the **BFA**
in June 2013
- 2009 - 2010 Jewelry Academy in Vienna, Austria; Completed with the **final apprenticeship examination**

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

- 1/2014 - 5/2014 Internship to college teaching (processes and experimental techniques), Teacher's Assistant at SUNY New Paltz, USA
- 9/2010 - 6/2011 teaching assistant at the Jewelry Academy in Vienna
- 4/2010 - 7/2010 Internship at the Jewelry workshop of Claudia Steiner and Katie Gruber
- 8/2009 Internship at Haberl& Ilg Jewelry workshop

EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 **Adorned Spaces** - SUNY NEW PLATZ at SNAG Boston, USA
- 2015 **Alchimia - An Anthology** at SNAG Boston, USA
- 2015 **Diplopia - MFA Thesis** exhibition at the Samuel Dorsky Museum in New Platz, NY, USA
- 2015 **Emergence: New Questions in Craft and Object Making** curated by Arthur Hash; at the Winthrop University Galleries; SC, USA
- 2/2015 **Inproper Articles** - Group exhibition at Greenpoint Gallery in Brooklyn NY, USA

- 2014 Permanent collection at **SCHMUCKSSTELLE** Gallery in Vienna, Austria
- 2014 **Lange Nacht des Schmucks**, at *Karja*, Vienna, Austria
- 2014 **Author**, Bucharest, Romania, Group exhibition with Alchimia Contemporary Jewelry School curated by Izabella Petrut
- 2014 **Staring in Hindsight**, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Germany
- 2013 **MARZEE Annual International Graduation Show 2013**, Nijmegen, Netherlands
- 2013 **Sieraad**, Alchimia stand, Amsterdam, Nederland
- 2013 **Pattern**, Group exhibition at Eleni Marneri Gallery, Athens, Greece
- 2013 **JOYA**, Barcelona, Spain
- 2013 **Humans we are** - graduation show, Alchimia, Florence, Italy
- 2012 **Beginning, middle, endless**; a transatlantic exhibition between Massachusetts college of art and design and Alchimia, Boston, USA and Florence, Italy, curated by Heather White
- 2012 **JOYA**, Alchimia stand, Barcelona, Spain
- 2012 **Hazardous experiments**, collective exhibition by Alchimia, Valencia, Spain, curated by Doris Maninger, Pater Bauhuis and Alchimia Special Hazard Operation Team -jewelry
- 2012 **End of the year** group exhibition at Alchimia, Florence, Italy

GRANTS, AWARDS, PUBLICATIONS AND HONORS

- 2015 100 Drawings : Adorned Spaces - SUNY New Paltz @ SNAG Boston 2015 (Book)
- 2014 graduate student representative at the SUNY/CUNY Symposium of graduate research; Albany, NY
- 2014 RCPA funding (Research and creative project award)
- 2013 MARZEE international graduate show selections; Nijmegen, NL

WORKSHOPS

- 2012 workshop with C Zellweger, Florence, Italy
- 2012 Enameling, with Nikolaus Kirchner, Florence, Italy
- 2012 Chasing and Repousse, with Fabrizio Acquafresca, Florence, Italy
- 2012 Red workshop with Ruudt Peters, Alchimia, Florence, Italy
- 2011 Casting, with Peter Bauhuis, Munich, Germany
- 2011 Brooching Workshop with Sungho Cho, Florence, Italy
- 2011 Dreamworkshop with Ruudt Peters, Alchimia, Florence, Italy
- 2010 Direct impression techniques workshop at the forum of goldsmithing in Vienna, Austria

BIO

Lena Grabher (Lustenau, 1988) is a contemporary Jewelry designer and maker. She started her education in Vienna and completed her apprenticeship examination as a Jeweler at the *Wiener Goldschmiede Akademie* in 2010. She served as a teaching assistant at the same school for one year before she moved to Florence, Italy. There she studied at *Alchimia (contemporary Jewelry school in Florence)* with Ruudt Peters and Peter Bauhuis to receive her BFA in 2013. Her graduation work was selected for the annual graduation show at MARZEE Gallery in Holland. Since then she has exhibited her work in Munich, Vienna, Bucharest, Amsterdam, Athens, Valencia, Florence, New York or Boston and has participated in several art fairs such as JOYA or SIERAAD.

Lena has developed an experimental way of working, driven by a concept that plays a fundamental role along with her design and material explorations. Her recent work *Diplopia* she

manipulates aspects of physical appearance. Using the language of jewelry, she explores optics and illusion. She investigates in jewelry to create a symbiotic relationship between the body and its environment, using light projection or mirroring to manipulate the boundary between the two. Her goal is to create jewelry that not only stands alone as an object but obtains its function when worn. Currently she completed her MFA studies in Metals at the State University of New York at New Paltz.