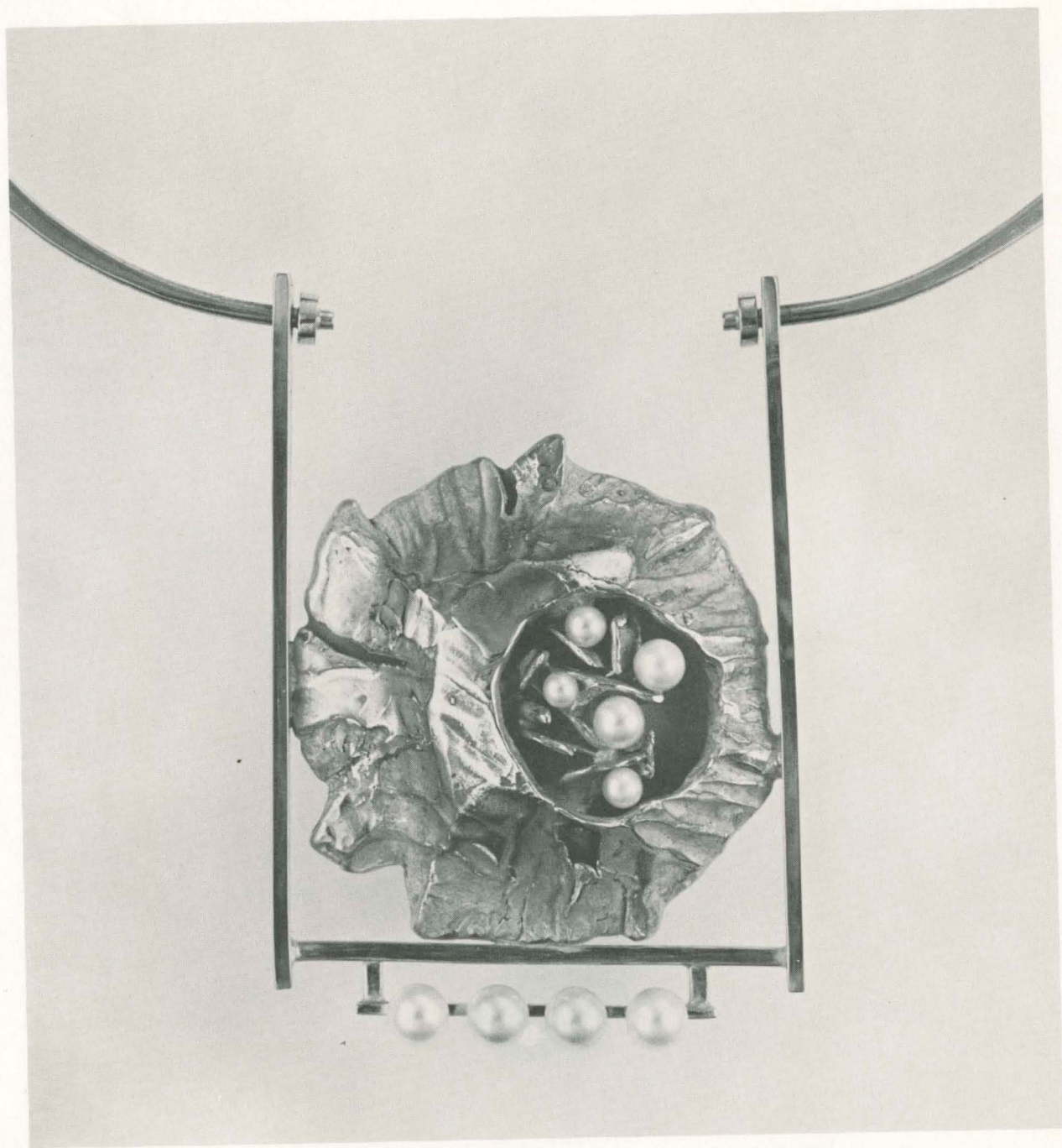
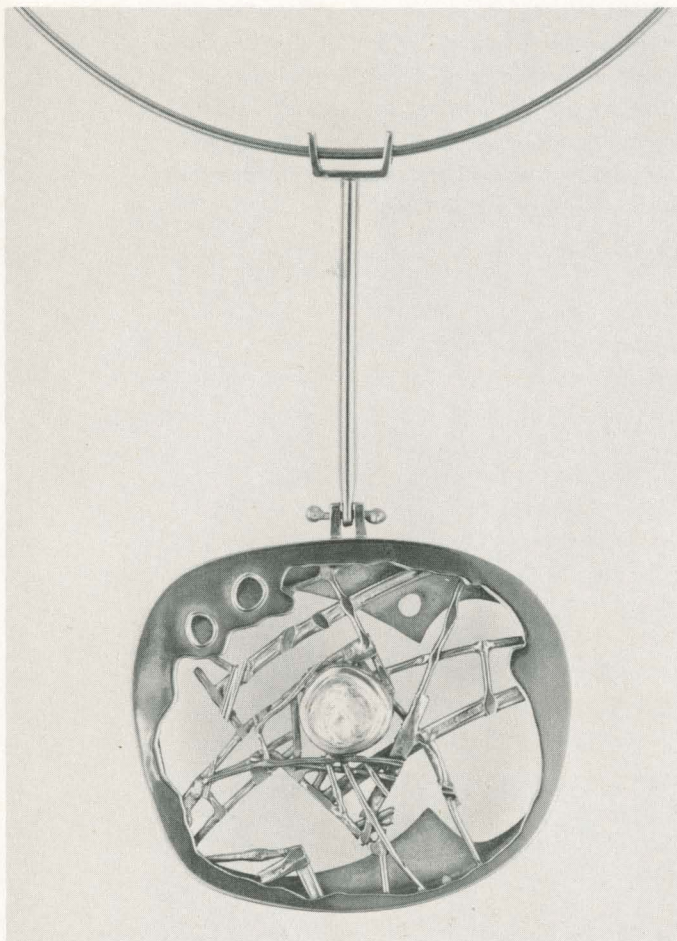


OLAF SKOOGFORS : JEWELRY





The small but exquisite selection of Olaf Skoogfors' recent jewelry, shown in the Little Gallery, has a very direct visual and sensual appeal. This is jewelry in a traditional format — pins, pendants and rings that it would be easy to wear and a pleasure to own. There are no extravagant flights of fancy here — no necklaces made from flashbulbs, no improbably anthropomorphic bracelets of papier mache, nothing that makes reference to anything other than what it is: finely wrought gold or silver with semi-precious gems incorporated into many of the designs. One might easily enjoy this show and dismiss it just as easily for its apparent disingenuity. Accustomed as we are to be shocked, thrilled, titillated and beaten over the head with self-proclaiming cleverness on the part of craftsmen eager to join the mainstream of ART, we can look at the sort of thing that Olaf Skoogfors presents and say, that's very nice — but so what? The fact is that Skoogfors' work demands far more than casual consideration from the viewer.

For those who allow themselves to study and savor these pieces, there is a remarkable surprise in store. Skoogfors is that rarest of all craftsmen, the technical virtuoso whose technique has reached such simple perfection that it actually disappears from view. So much of contemporary jewelry relies on technique alone to make an impact that it is difficult, even strange, to look at a jewelry show where the subject matter is ideas — and their conceptual execution. In the end one is not conscious of *how* Skoogfors puts his pieces together, but only of the delightful synthesis of form and design that results. Skoogfors admits to treating jewelry somewhat like collage — that most calculated and intellectual of artistic pursuits. None of his pieces is conceived in advance as a whole. Rather, he will make a series of castings, or a collection of stones, and then seek to create an environment for them. Thus his pins, pendants and rings are actually very precise, consciously determined arrangements.

The pendants, involving a highly complex organization of disparate parts, present Skoogfors at

his most masterful and reveal a playful streak that is not manifest in his other work. They are like glamorous mechanical contraptions — shy beginnings of Klee-like toys. Tremendous tension is generated between the absolutely round neckbands, rectilinear pendant frames and the abstract, impasto surfaces of the cast pieces they enclose. Stones too are hung and framed, in settings that never look “set” but act as one more part of the collage. Joints and catches, like the stone settings, serve to articulate the forms, implying visually their real quality of movement — dangling or opening and closing. One is at first only conscious of the joints and catches as wonderful little knobs and boxes, echoing the other knobs and boxes that are the larger design elements. It is only after a while that it dawns upon the viewer that each catch, each joint, each stone setting is as remarkably inventive and technically brilliant as the entire piece itself.

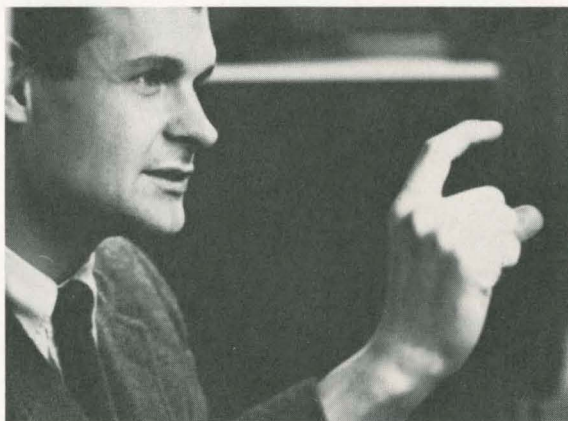
This is Skoogfors’ triumph over his medium; while it is obvious that his work involves a steady flow of technical experimentation, technique is always subordinate to superbly achieved expressive goals. For instance, in some of the earlier pins one can see thin, shaved and folded forms that have been painstakingly constructed to give an effect that is more easily obtained by wax casting in later pieces. This choice of the economic means to an expressive end is typical of the very best art. It represents ten years at the jeweler’s workbench, and as many years of refining and maturing both technique and vision.

The pins, naturally more limited in dramatic compositional opportunities than the pendants, deal with the same juxtapositions of cast and forged elements, gems and open spaces in complex, three-dimensional spatial tension. Like the pins and pendants, Skoogfors’ rings are as remarkable for their inventiveness as for their steadfast similarity. Each stands alone, and lives off the finger as a strongly executed sculptural form. Most are simply gold bands supporting a stone, but each stone has its own lovely treatment. A tiny pearl is set in its own tiny

cup, an emerald-cut stone is raised on a sort of second ring band of its own, so that the bottom facets are boldly exposed in mid-air. Nothing — neither stone setting nor band forms, is taken for granted. All this has its effect upon the serious viewer, who must ultimately realize that the art of Olaf Skoogfors cannot be taken for granted either.

Harriet Goodwin Cohen

Besides maintaining a workshop, creating production and special order jewelry, Olaf Skoogfors is presently teaching jewelry and metal working as Assistant Professor at the Philadelphia College of Art in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Born in Bredsjo, Sweden, Mr. Skoogfors received his education at both the Philadelphia Museum School of Art and the School for American Craftsmen in Rochester. Since the completion of his formal education, he has been involved in an impressive number of exhibitions. He is often in demand as a lecturer, a juror and as a participant in panels and conferences. He is particularly well informed on craftsmanship today.



January 19 to March 24, 1968

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