

## The Art of Sculptural Jewels



**With their geometric forms, fluid curves and abstract shapes, these pieces transform the body into a gallery.**

During the pandemic, there was an explosion of cute, sparkly, rainbow-colored jewelry that aimed to lift spirits in dark times. However, jazzy, bright jewels are not to everyone's taste. There are those who prefer purer, modern, sculpted forms — thoughtful shapes that are tactile and beguiling in their fluidity or volume.

Those shapes vary, from the organic to the geometric; they may have a simplicity of line, or they may spiral into complex structures that give thought to the positive and negative space. These designs have a timeless quality, notes Nada Ghazal.

“Our pieces are quite versatile and ageless,” says the Lebanese jeweler, whose customers range from young millennials to more mature, discerning shoppers who snap up her seductively tactile, voluminous rings and cuffs. “What they share is a need to be individualistic. The jewelry is the centerpiece of their outfit, and they search for something authentic, something that has soul.”

## A wide audience

London-based American designer [Jacqueline Rabun](#) has made a name for herself with fluid, conceptual pieces that she says reflect the human experience. “Clients who are drawn to my work typically have an appreciation for pure minimalist design; [they include] artists, architects and designers,” she says. Nevertheless, her long collaboration with Danish brand Georg Jensen means her work reaches a wider audience.

Turkish jeweler Senem Genço?lu, founder and designer of [Kloto](#), has had a similar experience. “Kloto is a niche brand, and a majority of collectors are people that love design and art, but I’m discovering that our audience is becoming more varied, as the collections have some range in price, gender fluidity and material,” she relates. “Silver, gold and mixed [metals] may not be mainstream, but [they do] appeal to a larger audience than I predicted.”

## Design language

The Istanbul-based Genço?lu draws on the Bauhaus era and 1960s Modernism, subscribing to the principle that “good design is long-lasting.” Her sculptural design language is rooted in her industrial and furniture design background, so jewels range from the geometric to fluid curves that remind one of a Zaha Hadid building — although she cites Japanese architect Tadao Ando and sculptor Isamu Noguchi as inspiration.

There is an innate elegance to the work of these designers. Catherine Sarr’s signature aesthetic for her [Almasika](#) brand is founded on abstract lines and undulating curves, while Brazilian jeweler Antonio Bernardo’s ideas tend to be delicate, wavy linear forms, especially his swirling rings.

[Tabayer](#), a new brand that debuted this year in Las Vegas, feels similarly cool and modern even as it invokes the past. Its penchant for tapering gold shapes with diamond tips takes inspiration from an ancient amulet of coiled reeds, distilling that image into jewels that loop around fingers and wrists. While others might add gemstones, engravings, or other embellishments, founder Nigora Tokhtabayeva prefers simplicity. “Creating something truly special simply by forging metal into elemental, purely beautiful shapes is a real challenge,” she says.

[Ute Decker](#), who has exhibited at the Design Miami show, spent 20 years in political

economics and journalism while exploring the creative arts in evening classes. She debuted her first wearable artworks in 2009. “I treasure the surprise element when someone realizes [after putting] a piece on that it is actually wearable,” says the German-born, London-based jeweler. Her gold and silver structures suggest waves and spirals that “have a calmness to them and a dynamism. It is the tension with the empty space and the line that frames that empty space.”

## Behind the scenes

Decker considers the creative process “both a creative and intellectual exploration.” She spends hours in the studio with garden wire or brass strips, trying out shapes and deciding which parts of the body they would suit best. She then makes brass maquettes to see how they sit and balance on the body.

The process for [Vram Minassian](#)’s spine-like Chrona Totem earrings and trumpet-shaped Sine and Echo collections runs the gamut from traditional metalsmithing and lost-wax casting to high-tech equipment. “The magic of the work is not in a singular technique; it’s the emotion you get when you experience it,” explains the Los Angeles-based jeweler, who was in his 50s when he finally started telling his story with sculptural pieces.

Ghazal’s ideas start as sketches, which she 3D-prints or works in wax before turning them over to the Beirut craftsmen who make her jewelry.

Genço?lu, meanwhile, uses traditional cutting and soldering to work on her sculptural shapes for Kloto, then employs technology. She has craftsmen in Istanbul’s Grand Bazaar produce the designs and do her stone-setting. “The stone-setting requires very intricate work, and the whole process is done by hand under a microscope,” explains Genço?lu. “The stones are set with a special technique so they are very close to each other to create a uniform look.”

## To gem, or not to gem?

Using diamonds and colored stones as accents can highlight a shape or take a jewel from day to evening. For example, Rabun’s Beautiful collection features a statement ring that sandwiches a sliver of diamond-edged white gold between white and yellow

gold halves for an evening look; the sliver is removable for daytime.

Diamonds also give Tabayer's and [Antonio Bernardo](#)'s pieces a touch of sparkle, and marquise cuts add an unusual shape to Almasika's jewelry silhouettes. Ghazal uses diamonds in shades of grey to white, or scatters her brushed-gold creations with tiny stones in the bright, summery colors of her native Beirut.

For Minassian, a passion for form comes first. "I then use gemstone treatments only when it serves the form," he says.

Genço?lu feels similarly: "I use diamonds for highlighting, because I want the form to be the center of attention. However, with some of the pieces, the diamonds bring the form alive and accentuate the curves — leading the eye, in a way."

The sculptural jewel "can be the most intimate of art forms because you wear it on your body," observes Decker. "Not only is it an adornment, it's also a beautiful sculpture."

*Image: Almasika*