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Habitat: See the Unusual, Distinctive Jewelry Favored by Judith Bernstein, Katherine Bernhardt, and Other Artists

by Katherine McMahon



Judith Bernstein modeling her light-up skeleton necklace (<https://www.artnews.com/t/judith-bernstein/>)

Jewelry has been a feature of the human enterprise for almost as long as there have been bodies to adorn. From self-made accessories fashioned with cheap plastic tchotchkes to fine works forged from precious elements of the earth, ARTnews surveyed treasures belonging to well-accessorized New Yorkers with an artistic eye.



Katherine Bernhardt(<https://www.artnews.com/t/katherine-bernhardt/>)

Katherine Bernhardt

The drippy shape and retro sensibility of resin letters commemorating the fashion giant Prada puts painter Katherine Bernhardt in mind of the song “Groove Is in the Heart” by the 1990s dance-pop group Deee-Lite. The piece was a gift from Carl Freedman Gallery and the printmaking operation Counter Editions, both of which represent her in London. And how often does she sport her necklace of choice? “I wear it all the time!” Bernhardt said.



Lia Gangitano (<https://www.artnews.com/t/lia-gangitano/>)

Lia Gangitano

The founder and director of the not-for-profit exhibition and performance space Participant Inc likes to wear one-of-a-kind rings made by her friend Jelena Behrend, a jeweler based on New York’s Lower East Side. The first piece Behrend created for Lia Gangitano was based on a prized pair of her grandmother’s earrings—and it has kept a special kind of watch over her ever since. “I think jewelry holds energy and power,” she said. “I feel that these pieces are protecting me.”



Judith Bernstein (<https://www.artnews.com/t/judith-bernstein/>)

Judith Bernstein

Judith Bernstein made her heady necklace from Halloween decorations acquired at a Duane Reade drugstore. “The skulls light up red, blue, and green, and they play spooky funhouse sounds,” she said of her resourceful find. “Almost anything can be made into jewelry.” The painter of spectacularly lewd and sprawling canvases said she has collected many pieces of statement jewelry during her 76 years, but she’s discerning about when to trot them out. “Because of my big hair and dramatic glasses, I only wear them on occasion.”



M. Lamar (<https://www.artnews.com/t/m-lamar/>)

M. Lamar

The musically inclined performance artist M. Lamar takes inspiration for ornamentation from the documentary film *Screamin' Jay Hawkins: I Put a Spell on Me*. “He has ten rings on every one of his fingers,” Lamar said of the late rock legend whose digits dialed into the “demonic side of the blues.” Of his liking for rings as well as studded gloves and inverted crosses, Lamar said they help him achieve a kind of “negrogothic” James Bond villain vibe. “It is my daily armor for the battle that daily life on this planet has become.”



Kambui Olujimi (<https://www.artnews.com/t/kambui-olujimi/>)

Kambui Olujimi

“I’m interested in jewelry because of how it’s used to signify and encrypt beauty, elegance, and worth,” said Kambui Olujimi, who buys mass-produced costume jewelry in bulk to work with at his studio in Newark, New Jersey. More subdued, however, are a favorite pair of cufflinks that his wife gave him as a gift. Showing off his initials with letters from old typewriter keys, the links make for a connection, Olujimi said. Wearing jewelry “is a way to carry a person with you. A lot of times I carry pieces with me in a bag, pocket, or under my shirt, quietly against my skin.”



Saskia Friedrich (<https://www.artnews.com/t/saskia-friedrich/>)

Saskia Friedrich

The painter and sculptor Saskia Friedrich started experimenting with felt during a residency last spring at the Watermill Center, the self-described “laboratory of inspiration” founded by avant-garde luminary Robert Wilson on Long Island, New York. Felt exudes a sense of “anti-jewel-ness” that makes it intriguing to enlist for earrings, necklaces, and tiaras, Friedrich said. Plus one special feature: “I like the way felt absorbs light.”