

GIJS BAKKER

Dutch, born 1942

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The period dating from 1985 to 1990 was a prolific one for Gijs Bakker, resulting in numerous series of brooches and necklaces that took his ideas in new directions. In 1985, Bakker began to use easily available, recognizable images of popular figures for his *Sportsfigure* series. Completed between 1985 and 1989 and consisting of forty one-of-a-kind brooches, this series features newspaper images of athletes in track and field, soccer, hockey, cycling, tennis, diving, and golf. Bakker was drawn to these specific images because they capture the balletlike way the athletes moved.¹ *Moses* depicts an image of the legendary Olympic medalist Edwin Moses leaping over a gold hurdle, which adds depth to the composition while providing a foil for the fluid movement of the imagery. Bakker's ingenious use of gold in these brooches—to represent a particular moment or necessary equipment—acknowledges the important role the material plays in the history of jewelry.

More often, Bakker utilized precious stones, rather than gold, for his *Sportsfigures*.² By incorporating stones into the composition, he gave them meaning; they represent the confrontation between the expensive and the cheap. Indeed, the explicit contrast between the refined precious stones and the vulgarity of the daily newspaper was meaningful to the artist.³

Bakker developed the concept for the *Sportsfigures* before the *Bouquet Brooches*, yet, as often was the case, he produced these two series at the same time. The *Bouquet Brooches* celebrate the inherent qualities of gemstones in a different manner. As Ida van Zijl rightly stated, for this series, “the ‘real’ beauty of the stone is mounted in the ‘false’ splendor of a bouquet of flowers in a picture postcard.”⁴

As with many of Bakker's series, individual pieces are often one-of-a-kind. He explores a particular idea until he feels that it has run its course. This usually happens within a well-defined timeframe, but with the *Bouquet Brooches*, Bakker returned to his idea years later. In 1988 and 1989, Bakker made five *Bouquet Brooches*, each with a different image and various stones, ranging from yellow sapphires to pink tourmaline, to citrine. In addition to the Drutt Collection's example, other works from this series can be found in the collections of the Centraal Museum Utrecht, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, the Stedelijk Museum 's-Hertogenbosch, and a private collection. In 1999, Bakker executed a final *Bouquet Brooch*, this time with multiple stones of different types and an image from an eighteenth-century Dutch painting by Jan van Os.⁵

When Helen W. Drutt English commissioned Bakker to create *Waterman* in 1990, she brought him a diamond ring of her mother's to transform into a new piece of jewelry. The resulting work follows the path of the *Sportsfigure* and *Bouquet Brooches* in the handling of the gemstones and imagery. This brooch conveys the same sense of confrontation as the others—the playful tension that comes from having precious gems combined with a piece of plastic.⁶

To construct *Waterman*, Bakker made use of a postcard of a Bruce Weber image that he had discovered in San Diego years ago.⁷ The diamonds from Drutt's ring were placed so that they would appear as water droplets, cascading down the figure's back. The movement and elegance inherent in the image was therefore heightened by the placement of the gemstones. Bakker eventually created two additional brooches using this image; one is in the collection of the Stedelijk Museum 's-Hertogenbosch, the other in a private collection. Bakker also used diamonds to represent water in two later brooches, *Competitor at the Start* (1991) and *Anthony Nesty* (1991).

¹ Gijs Bakker, e-mail message to the author, November 3, 2002. ² See the Drutt Collection *Sportsfigure* brooches *Zoetemelk* (checklist no. 17), *Gullit + Richardson* (checklist no. 22), *Sonor* (checklist no. 27), and *Ray Floyd* (checklist no. 38). ³ Gijs Bakker, interview with Helen W. Drutt English, Amsterdam, January 30, 2005. ⁴ Ida van Zijl, *Gijs Bakker and Jewelry* (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2005), 42. ⁵ “Oeuvre Catalogue,” in Van Zijl, *Gijs Bakker and Jewelry*, 257. ⁶ Bakker, interview with Helen W. Drutt English, January 30, 2005. ⁷ *Ibid.*

WATERMAN BROOCH, 1990, PVC, photograph, diamonds, 6 × 2 5/8 × 1/4 inches (15.2 × 6.7 × 0.6 cm), promised gift of Helen Williams Drutt English, TR:2753-2002 [see checklist no. 39].



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Soon after initiating the *Sportsfigure* series, Gijs Bakker visited the library of London's Royal College of Art, where he found inspiration in a book on Michelangelo Buonarroti's Sistine Chapel.¹ From 1987 to 1988, he turned images from the vaulted ceiling into necklaces by balancing figures, such as *Jonas* and *Jongeling*, on a thin circle of gilded brass (see checklist nos. 24–25).²

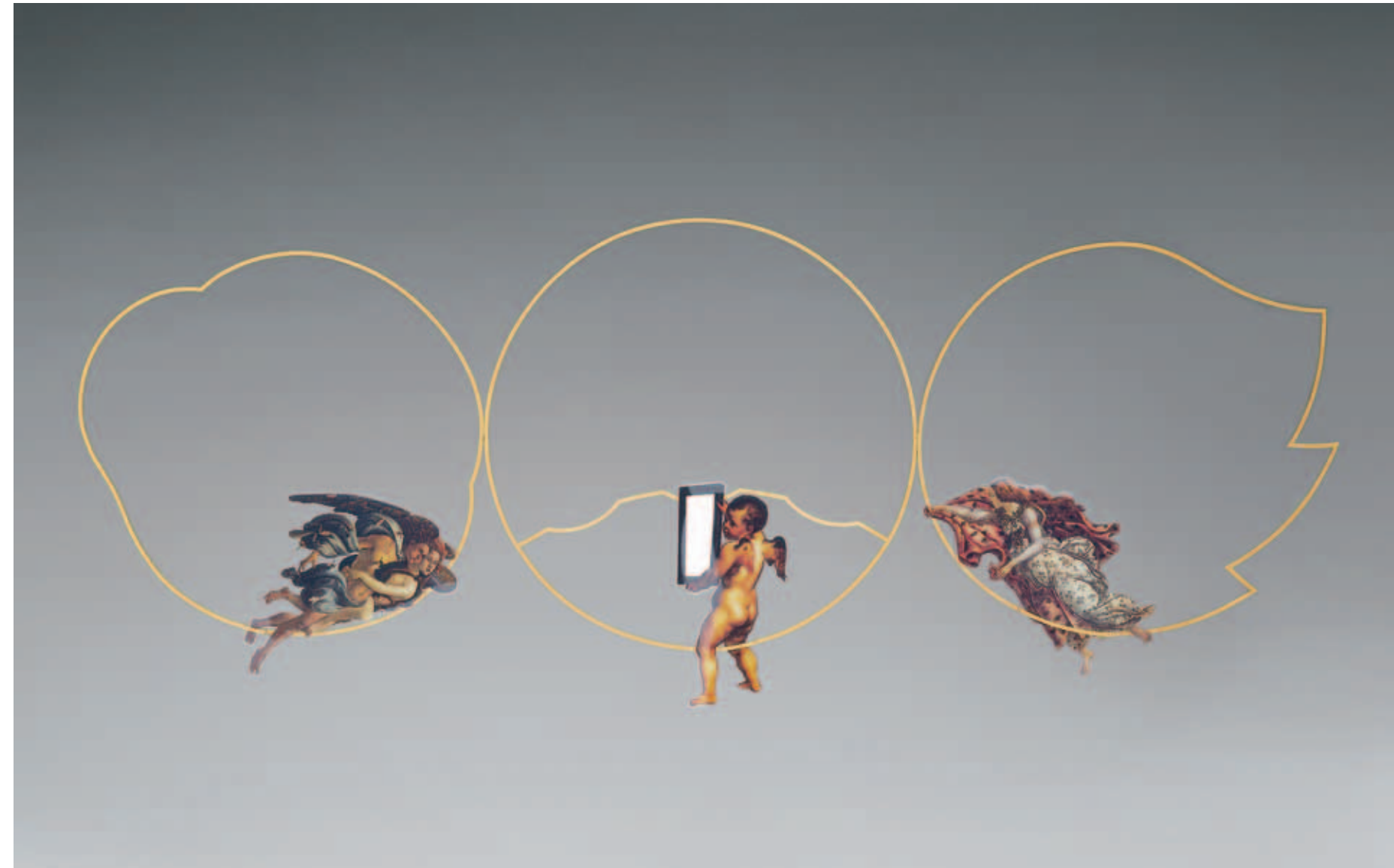
A few years later, Bakker returned to Old Master paintings as a source for the triptych *The Botticelli Project*, a one-off work consisting of three necklaces. This time, his inspiration came from a trip to Southern California that included stays in San Diego and Los Angeles. In Venice Beach, just outside of Los Angeles, Bakker took a photograph of one of the city's renowned outdoor murals featuring Botticelli's Venus.³ The mural, *Venice Beach Reconstituted*, by the artist Rip Cronk, depicts an amalgamation of imagery, including figures from the *Birth of Venus* transposed onto a scene from modern-day Venice Beach.⁴

In 1990, Bakker received an invitation to participate in an exhibition titled *Schräg* in Bonn, Germany. The show's title, which translates as "controversial," offered Bakker the opportunity to create a new work that challenged perceptions of beauty. The resulting piece, *The Botticelli Project*, evolved from his earlier experiences with the Michelangelo figures. Here, Botticelli's figures appear to float on thin bands of gilded brass. Two of the figures are positioned to reflect the forward movement of their flight.

In addition to using the images from Botticelli (by way of the mural) for the two flanking necklaces, Bakker chose an image of a *putto* holding a mirror from Peter Paul Rubens's *The Toilet of Venus* (1606–11) for the central necklace.⁵ The painting, a copy of a work by Titian called *Venus with a Mirror* (c. 1555), shows Venus staring into a mirror, an attribute associated with truth and vanity. Bakker used this image for the centerpiece of *The Botticelli Project* because, "the mirror is reflecting the beauty with the idea if you look to the necklace and when you wear it the spectator can see himself being the beauty and the woman who is wearing it [as] the beauty. They can make ... a conversation together."⁶

Bakker's capacity for constructing new paradigms that highlight jewelry's role as a signifier of beauty and wealth is extraordinary. His pieces embody a dialogue that offers layers of meaning. The Drutt Collection is fortunate to contain works from the majority of Bakker's series dating from the 1960s to today. Through these examples, his consistent ability to surprise and challenge the viewer and his larger contributions to the advancement of the field are readily apparent.

¹ Ida van Zijl, *Gijs Bakker and Jewelry* (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2005), 42. ² In addition to these two works, the MFAH's decorative arts collection also contains Bakker's *Adam* necklace. ³ Gijs Bakker, interview with Helen W. Drutt English, January 28, 2005. ⁴ The mural was completed in 1989 and is located on the Venice Beach Hotel, 25 Windward Avenue at Speedway. I am grateful to Leslie Scattone, assistant curator at the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, for her help in locating this mural. ⁵ Again, I am grateful to Leslie Scattone for locating this reference. ⁶ Bakker, interview with Helen W. Drutt English, January 29, 2005.



THE BOTTICELLI PROJECT NECKPIECE, 1990, PVC, print, gilded brass, 18k gold, and Plexiglas, .1: 11 3/4 x 12 1/16 x 5/16 inches (29.8 x 30.6 x 0.7 cm), .2: 13 1/2 x 11 15/16 x 3/8 inches (34.3 x 30.3 x 1 cm), .3: 11 1/8 x 12 5/8 x 3/16 inches (28.3 x 32.1 x 0.8 cm), gift of Helen Williams Drutt English, 2002.3607.1–.3 (see checklist no. 30).