



Representation of the Female Body as a Substance of Contemporary Ornamentation in Metal Jewelry A Surrealism Perspective



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Keywords:

Surrealism, Metal Jewelry Design, Female Body Representation, Castration, Fetishism.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of surrealism in metal jewelry design as it pertains to the representation of the female body. The research focuses on the works of three contemporary metal jewelry artists from Etsy, examining how their creations utilize surrealism to express experiences of castration and fetishism, as theorized by Freud. It investigates the interplay between functionality and unconventional forms, highlighting how surrealism allows for a critique of traditional gender norms and a subversion of established visual conventions. By employing literature studies and visual analysis, the research demonstrates how these surrealist elements in metal jewelry serve as a medium for expressing complex narratives about femininity, identity, and bodily autonomy. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how surrealism can be a powerful tool in challenging and reinterpreting conventional representations of the female body in contemporary art.

Kata Kunci:

Surealisme, Desain Perhiasan Logam, Representasi Tubuh Perempuan, Kastrasi, Fetisisme.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peran surealisme dalam desain perhiasan logam terkait dengan representasi tubuh perempuan. Penelitian ini berfokus pada karya tiga seniman perhiasan logam kontemporer dari Etsy, mengkaji bagaimana kreasi mereka menggunakan surealisme untuk mengekspresikan pengalaman kastrasi dan fetisisme, seperti yang diteorikan oleh Freud. Penelitian ini menyelidiki interaksi antara fungsionalitas dan bentuk-bentuk yang tidak lazim, menyoroti bagaimana surealisme memungkinkan kritik terhadap norma-norma

gender tradisional dan subversi terhadap konvensi visual yang mapan. Dengan menggunakan studi literatur dan analisis visual, penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana elemen-elemen surealis dalam perhiasan logam berfungsi sebagai media untuk mengekspresikan narasi kompleks tentang feminitas, identitas, dan otonomi tubuh. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang bagaimana surealisme dapat menjadi alat yang kuat dalam menantang dan menafsirkan ulang representasi konvensional tubuh perempuan dalam seni kontemporer.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of civilization, the female body has long been an object represented in cultural artifacts, including works of art. The discoveries by Josef Szombathy, Hugo Obermaier, and Josef Bayer in 1908 in Willendorf, a village in Austria, revealed a Venus statue artifact, standing 11 centimeters tall, which is estimated to date back 30,000 years (Cunningham & Reich, 2002). Later, during ancient Egypt, the female body was often depicted in proportions that reflected harmony and balance, symbolizing both fertility and purity. Female figures such as the Goddess Isis and Queen Nefertiti were immortalized in statues, wall paintings, and other artifacts, showcasing their exalted and respected status in society (Bianchi, 2006; Conrad, 2024). These evidence at least demonstrates how the image of the female body has been commemorated since prehistoric times.

During the Renaissance in Europe, art began to undergo significant changes with the resurgence of interest in the human body, including the female body. One of the most famous examples of Renaissance art is Sandro Botticelli's painting *The Birth of Venus*, which represents the goddess Venus in an idealized bodily form (Mack, 2005). Renaissance works paved the way for further exploration and interpretation of the female body in art in subsequent periods. The theme of the female body was so central that Edmund Burke, an 18th-century thinker, wrote in his book *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) that he associated the concept of beauty as an 'extrapolation of the female body' (Doran, 2015).

In the mid-20th century, the art movement evolved towards surrealism, initiated in part by André Breton. The term 'surrealism' was first introduced by the Polish writer and playwright Guillaume Apollinaire. The emergence of surrealism was largely triggered by World War I. However, before discussing surrealism further, it is important to first understand the Dadaism movement, which emerged as a direct reaction to World War I. Dadaism argued that the war was the result of excessive rational thinking and bourgeois values. As a form of protest, Dadaism presented what was called 'anti-art' (Hopkins, 2004).

André Breton was one of the Dadaist activists with a background in medical and psychiatric education, particularly in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic methods. In October 1924, Breton, along with artists such as Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, and Yves Tanguy, founded the Surrealism movement, which was considered more radical than Dadaism. Breton's version of Surrealism had a rival in Yvan Goll's version, both claiming to be the successors of Apollinaire's ideas. Interestingly, both groups published Surrealist manifestos around the same time. However, the strong influence of Breton made his version more widely recognized (Hopkins, 2004).



In the Surrealist manifesto, Breton defined Surrealism as a pure automatism of the soul used to express, whether in verbal form, writing, or otherwise, the true function of the mind, unrestrained by logic, aesthetics, or morality. Surrealism was heavily influenced by Sigmund Freud's study of the unconscious mind. For Breton, Surrealism had to include dream analysis, free association, and efforts to liberate the imagination. Another important concept was juxtaposition, which involves comparing two very different things within the same frame to create something 'illogical' (Breton, 1972).

Although Surrealism appears to depict 'unreal' things, this movement holds a specific political stance. Surrealism seeks to revolutionize human experience on personal, cultural, social, and political levels. Its goal is to liberate people from false rationality and from restrictive rules and structures. Breton claimed that Surrealism is the path to social revolution, beginning with the liberation of imprisoned minds (Breton, 1972).

In his manifesto, Breton explained that objects in Surrealism are 'unreal,' closer to dreams, free association, and can be produced through the technique of juxtaposition. However, this concept does not necessarily resolve the issue of objects in Surrealism. Doesn't this mean that Surrealism could depict 'anything,' since dreams and free association are highly personal to everyone? To answer this question, Breton proposed the idea that objects in Surrealism are those that serve no other function than to be enjoyed. This means that even if a Surrealist painting depicts an object like a urinal, the object is not meant to function as such but rather as an element considered part of a game or merely an artistic expression (Malt, 2004).

Theodor Adorno, a thinker of the Frankfurt School, argued that Surrealism employs the concept of fetishism in his work. In this context, fetishism includes the fetishism of the human body and the fetishism of commodities, which can be viewed as a critique of the 'supremacy of the world of objects' (Malt, 2004). Before explaining further about fetishism in Surrealism, it is important to first understand what fetishism is.

In general, fetishism refers to the belief that certain objects possess supernatural powers. In a narrower sense, fetishism means the assumption that man-made objects have power beyond their inherent function. Sigmund Freud, in his essay titled *Fetishism* (1927), linked fetishism to the unconscious and sexual instincts. Freud argued that fetishism arises from childhood trauma, where a boy realizes that his mother does not have a penis, causing fear and anxiety about the possibility of 'castration' happening to himself. Freud concluded that fetishism is a form of both rejection and acceptance of the castration trauma (Freud, 1927).

For example, if someone experiences fetishism towards women's shoes, the object is viewed as a symbol of acceptance of female genitalia as well as a fear of threat to one's own penis. The person may be more aroused by the shoes than by the woman herself. In this context, inanimate objects are often considered more appealing than living beings (Freud, 1927).

Fetishism can also involve specific parts of a person's body, not just inanimate objects. In this case, the attraction is not towards the individual as a person but rather towards their body parts as objects or 'inanimate things.' For example, someone with fetishism might be highly aroused by breasts, feet, or armpits. As Freud argued, individuals with fetishism experience an unconscious conflict because they desire sexual interaction but are also fearful of 'castration trauma.' Jacques Lacan added that fetishism is a form of one's inability to form deep social relationships. Fetishism allows individuals to feel they have power over others, even though this is demonstrated through the symbolization of objects (Gemerchak, 2004).

By linking fetishism with Surrealist objects, we can see that Surrealism illustrates fetishism in several ways. First, Surrealism represents desire through the depiction of objects, particularly objects that portray incomplete human forms, as a form of castration or emasculation experience. Second, objects in Surrealism often include elements such as hair or fur, which are associated with the experience of castration and the imagery of pubic hair (Malt, 2004).

This research seeks to unravel elements of Surrealism which are to be applied as the substance of ornamentation in metal jewelry associated with the image of the female body. Within the framework of Surrealism, the image of the female body in metal jewelry design can become a rich and complex visual expression that challenges conventional views and pushes the boundaries of imagination and aesthetics.

METHODS

This research will employ the methods of literature review and visual analysis to unravel elements of Surrealism and apply them in metal jewelry design related to the image of the female body. According to Pillai & Kaushal (2020), a literature review is a research method that involves examining and analyzing written works, theories, and previous findings relevant to the research topic. The purpose of the literature review is to understand the context and development of existing research, identify knowledge gaps, and build a theoretical foundation for new research. This process assists researchers in formulating research questions, selecting appropriate methodologies, and assessing the contribution of their research to the broader field of study.



The literature review will include an in-depth study of Surrealism theory, art history, and relevant jewelry design principles. Through exploring various sources, this research will examine how Surrealism has influenced art and design, and how elements such as distortion, juxtaposition, and symbolism can be translated into the context of jewelry.

Meanwhile, visual analysis will focus on the application of Surrealist elements in metal jewelry design. According to Ledin & Machin (2018), visual analysis is an approach used to understand how meaning is communicated through visual elements such as images, colors, and shapes. This method involves a deep examination of how various visual elements interact to form messages and express ideas. Visual analysis aims to reveal the structure, function, and effects of visual elements within a specific context, as well as how they influence audience perception and interpretation. By analyzing Surrealist artworks and jewelry design prototypes, this research will evaluate how the image of the female body can be expressed through Surrealist techniques, such as the use of unconventional forms and the combination of contrasting elements.



RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Determining which objects belong to Surrealism is a rather complex debate. We can begin by including a number of works from Surrealist artists to be analyzed in the following table:

No.	Artist's Name	Example of artwork visualization	Description of the artwork	Visual sources of the artwork
1	Meret Oppenheim		The artwork <i>Object</i> (Oppenheim & Bern, 2021) is also known as 'Le Déjeuner en fourrure' (Breakfast in Fur). Object is a sculpture in the shape of a tea set, consisting of a teapot, cup, and saucer, all covered in gazelle fur. (https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80997).	https://www.moma.org/artists/4416
2	Salvador Dali		<i>The Persistence of Memory</i> is an oil painting on canvas (Dali, 2021). The painting measures approximately 24 cm x 33 cm and is currently housed at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. This painting is famous for its depiction of clocks that appear to be melting or dissolving. (https://www.wikiart.org/en/salvador-dali/the-persistence-of-memory-1931).	https://www.wikia.org/en/salvador-dali/the-persistence-of-memory-1931

3 Max Ernst



The Elephant Celebes is a painting by Max Ernst created in 1921. This painting features a large object resembling an elephant, but with unconventional shapes and elements. The elephant in this painting has a metallic structure with a funnel-shaped head and a body that appears like a machine or heavy equipment. The background of the painting shows architectural and industrial elements, creating a contrast between the main object and its surroundings. Ernst used collage and frottage techniques to produce distinctive textures and visual effects in this work (Ledin & Machin, 2018).

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ernst-celebes-t01988>

4 Frida Kahlo



The Wounded Deer (1946) was created using oil on canvas. This painting, measuring approximately 76 x 61 cm, uses very fine details to depict the wounds on the deer's body and facial expression. This technique creates a clear contrast

<https://www.fridakahlo.org/the-wounded-deer.jsp>



between lighter and darker areas, and provides texture that adds visual dimension to the artwork. (<https://www.fridakahlo.org/the-wounded-deer.jsp>).

Object by Meret Oppenheim is a representative example of surrealist art using unconventional materials. According to Klingsöhr-Leroy (2004), in this work, Oppenheim covered a cup, saucer, and spoon with animal fur, creating an unusual combination between everyday objects and materials rarely used for such purposes. The use of fur on dining objects produces a surprising effect that is inconsistent with their usual function, challenging conventional perceptions of these items. This technique utilizes a drastic change in material usage to create a visual experience that evokes discomfort and dreams (Klingsöhr-Leroy, 2004).

Meanwhile, according to Bradbury (1999), *The Persistence of Memory* by Salvador Dalí exhibits surrealist characteristics through visual representation that blurs the line between reality and dreams. This painting features melting clocks, transforming the usually solid object of time into something fluid and deformed. Dalí uses a surreal landscape with unusual elements such as melting clocks and an empty landscape to depict the uncertainty and relativity of time. The technique used creates a distinctive dream-like effect and highlights the subjective nature of human experience.

The Elephant Celebes by Max Ernst exhibits characteristics of surrealism using unusual forms and collage techniques. In this painting, Ernst depicts a large object resembling an elephant but with unusual mechanical elements, blending industrial structures with animal forms. The applied collage technique adds unique texture and detail, creating an evocative and unconventional visual. The background of the painting, which shows industrial and architectural elements, underscores the surreal impression, adding a dreamlike and distorted dimension to the work (Stam, 2001).

The Wounded Deer by Frida Kahlo, referring to Drucker (1991), depicts characteristics of surrealism through body transformation and unusual symbolism. This painting features Frida as a wounded deer, with her body pierced by arrows, creating a symbolic image of physical and emotional suffering. The use of a deer to represent the human body and elements like arrows adds a surreal effect by creating a distortion of reality and a dreamlike impression. The dark and blurry background enhances the surreal atmosphere and reveals complex internal conditions.

In table form, the characteristics of surrealism in these four works can be outlined as follows:

Work of Art	Artist	Characteristics of Surrealism	Reference
<i>Object</i> (1936)	Meret Oppenheim	The use of unconventional materials (feathers on	(Klingsöhr-Leroy, 2004)

		<p>eating objects).</p> <p>The combination of everyday objects with unusual materials.</p> <p>A challenge to conventional perception.</p>	
<i>The Persistence of Memory</i> (1931)	Salvador Dalí	<p>Visual representation that blurs the line between reality and dreams.</p> <p>The use of melting clocks to depict the relativity of time.</p> <p>Surreal landscapes and unusual elements.</p>	Bradbury (1999)
<i>The Elephant Celebes</i> (1921)	Max Ernst	<p>The use of unconventional forms (mechanical elephants).</p> <p>Collage techniques that add texture and unique details.</p> <p>Industrial backgrounds that enhance the surreal impression.</p>	(Stam, 2001)
<i>The Wounded Deer</i> (1946)	Frida Kahlo	<p>Transformation of the body and unusual symbolism (a wounded deer's body with a human face).</p> <p>The use of symbols like arrows to create a distortion of reality.</p> <p>Dark and blurry backgrounds.</p>	(Drucker, 1991)

In relation to this research, which seeks to formulate ornaments to be applied in metal jewelry, I will use the following visual jewelry examples:





Jewelry Visual
<https://www.etsy.com/>

The works from this Etsy company are intentionally left undescribed so that we can focus solely on their visual aspects. What has been overlooked in the surrealist analysis of the previous four works is their connection to the experience of castration as Freud mentioned in relation to fetishism. The experience of castration is represented by depicting body parts incompletely with a sense of being cut off (Malt, 2004). This impression can be seen in Etsy works number 1 and 2, which portray female bodies with breasts and vaginas, but not in their complete form as the bodies lack other limbs such as faces and hands. Such visual representation could also fall into the 'unconventional' category as outlined in the previous analyses.

In Etsy work number 3, there is a visual impression that resembles both hands and feathers, which is one of the requirements in surrealist art—displaying visuals in a feather-like form, as seen in Oppenheim's work. Upon closer inspection, at the upper end of the metal jewelry, there are shapes resembling cut-off body parts, which contrast with the sharp forms attached to them. This creates an impression of juxtaposition while also emphasizing the theme of castration, which is a part of fetishism in Freud's view.

With the visual depiction in the Etsy metal jewelry, there is indeed a surreal impression that blurs the line between dreams and reality, featuring a strong image of the female body but presented incompletely, thus giving an 'unconventional' impression compared to what we perceive in everyday life. In metal jewelry, the background aspect is not as easy to depict as in the works of Dali or Ernst. This is mainly due to the functional aspect of metal jewelry, which ultimately must serve as an accessory attached to the body. Nevertheless, this Etsy metal jewelry still has characteristics of surrealist ornamentation because it contains features related to visual forms that evoke castration, resemble feathers (hair-like), and merge the boundaries between functionality and 'unconventional' forms as often shown in surrealist works. Thus, Etsy metal jewelry functions not only as an accessory but also as an artistic expression that reflects psychoanalytic experience through surrealist visualization.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion above, the following points can be concluded in relation to the image of the female body in metal jewelry ornaments from a surrealist perspective:

1. The image of the female body in metal jewelry ornaments which contain surrealist elements can be observed through cut-off body parts, which create a sense of castration as described by Freud regarding fetishism.
2. The image of the female body in metal ornaments with surrealist elements can be seen in forms resembling feathers (hair-like), as displayed in some of Oppenheim's works.
3. The image of the female body in metal ornaments with surrealist elements can be found in the juxtaposition between the functional aspect of the metal ornament as an accessory and its role as an artistic expression depicting psychoanalytic experience.



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