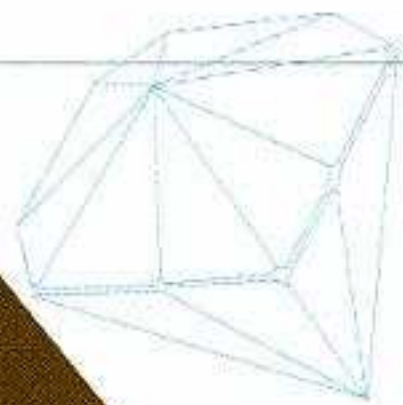
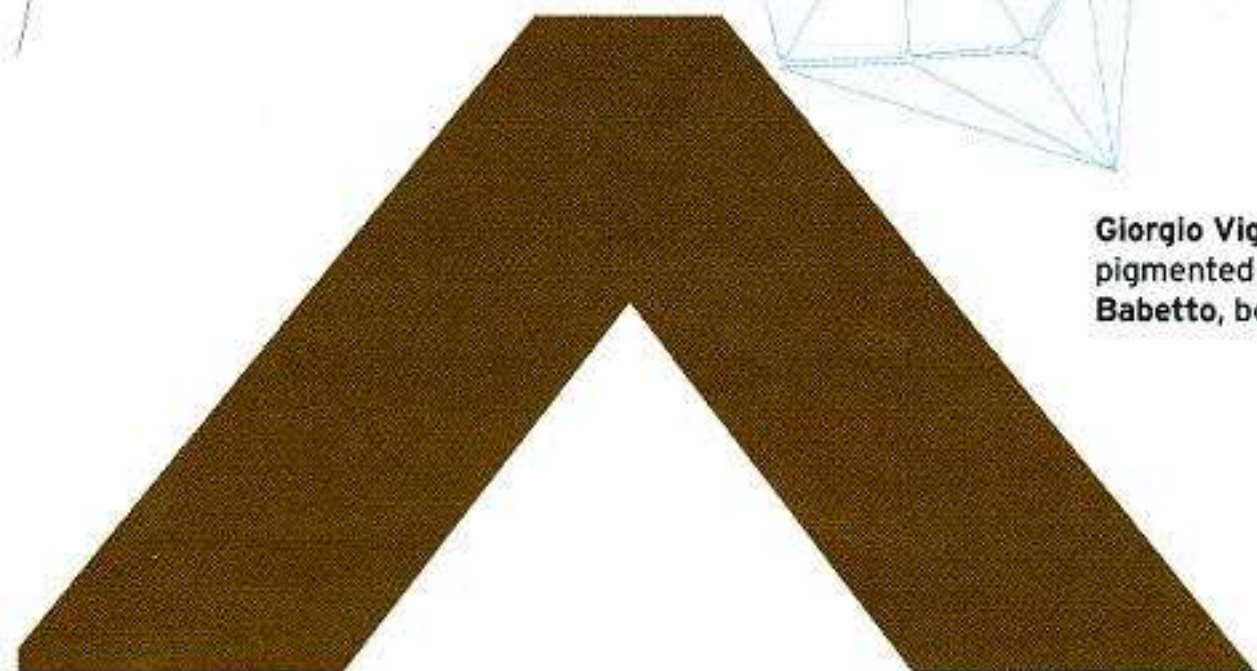


By Miles Socha

Portrait by Roberto Frankenberg



Giorgio Vigna's silver "Flint" ring and a pigmented 18k white gold ring by Giampaolo Babetto, both for Naïla de Monbrison



naïla de monbrison material swirl

It's not that you won't find gold, silver and even diamonds among the jewelry displayed at Naïla de Monbrison's compact gallery on Paris' Left Bank. But it's the unexpected—a ring carved from a river stone or a necklace composed of brittle fish scales—that really inflames her passion.

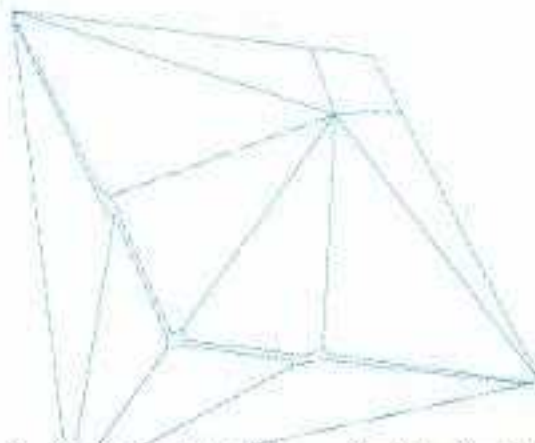
"Look at this!" she cries, proudly holding aloft in her palm a cuff made of a glossy black material designed by Dominique Biard. Her dark eyes widen in wonder. "It's carbon fiber—what they use for airplanes. When I saw it used for jewelry, I thought it was very exciting, but no one has bought it yet."

No matter. A pioneer selling unusual and sometimes experimental designs for 15 years, de Monbrison knows it's the rare woman who can see as much beauty and value in jewelry constructed from metal springs or seashells as in that made of platinum or sapphires. "What's important about this jewelry is the creativity, not the material," she explains. "It could be paper; it could be bronze. But it's not costume jewelry. It's something else."

De Monbrison currently represents 17 jewelry artists from across Europe. Some, like the Italian minimalist goldsmith Giampaolo Babetto, have works in major museum collections. Others, like France's Taher Chemirik—who does delicate, sculptural pieces in metal mixed with natural materials such as wood and coral—are less well known.

While their styles vary wildly, all of the designers in de Monbrison's stable share two critical characteristics. "First, they don't copy anyone," she says. "The artist puts himself into the work without any commercial purpose."

And the second? "There is no fashion," she declares. "It shouldn't have anything to do with fashion." ♦



JEWELRY MADE FROM METAL SPRINGS? "WHAT'S IMPORTANT ABOUT JEWELRY IS THE CREATIVITY, NOT THE MATERIAL."