Brooch - Athene Noctua

Object: Brooch

Place of origin: London (made)

Date: 1983 (made)

Artist/Maker: Coates, Kevin, born 1950 (designed and made by)

Materials and Techniques: Gold, platinum, blued titanium and silver

Credit Line: Commissioned by the V&A

Museum number: M.19-1983

Gallery location: Jewellery, Rooms 91, The William and Judith Bollinger Gallery, case 37, shelf B, box 4

Public access description

With the exception of the portrait miniature, the use of the human form in jewellery is seldom purely representational. In the 1970s aspects such as humour, eroticism and symbolism were also present.

For goldsmith and musician Kevin Coates, ‘the figurative element almost always exists within a larger abstract context’. Suffused with allegory, myth and mystery, Coates’s intellectually complex work draws on an extraordinary range of materials and surface colourings.

Coates engages the viewer in a dialogue. In a book on his work published in 2008, he states: ‘If jewellery has become jewel, then jewel must become poem. I realize that this is a personal philosophy, but it is at the very heart of what I seek in my work; I understand, too, that it requires the conspiracy of others to approach what I do in terms of connotation and not denotation, in other words to “read” it in terms of poetry not prose.’

A recent publication on Kevin Coates includes a catalogue raisonné by Françoise Carli (Kevin Coates. A Hidden Alchemy. Goldsmithing: Jewels and Table-Pieces, Stuttgart 2008). This brooch is described as follows:

“The goddess Athena (patroness of the arts which include that of the goldsmith) is portrayed as a mask-image, with hollow eyes, behind which an optical trick of self-reflecting gold is wrought. Her attenuated neck joins a base engraved with her Greek name. The metal for this portrait could be said to be her own - platinum from the Palladian group - Palladian from Pallas Athena. The horizontal supporting the head is a slab of sand-blasted titanium, carved in persepective, and bound by eight ribs, or slats, of yellow gold. From the ends of this structure, seemingly balanced on four white-gold rods (two of which form the pins of the brooch) is a convex, oblate disc of sleep blue titanium, engraved with constellations of the stars. This floating globe of night is the element from which Athena's sacred bird, the Little Owl, or Athene Noctua, spreads its damask wings to do the bidding of its mistress.”

Descriptive line

Brooch 'Athene Noctua' by Kevin Coates. Blued titanium, gold, silver and platinum. London 1983

Physical description

A disc of blued titanium etched with gold stars represents the night sky. In front of this is a mask-like face of platinum with a gold recess behind, surmounted by an owl with outstretched wings. The figure’s long neck rises from an angular base ribbed with gold and inscribed Athena in Greek characters at the centre. Paired bars with spherical ends connect the base and the disc at either side.

Dimensions

Height: 6 cm, Width: 5.7 cm

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Object history note

Commissioned by the V&A. A design for the brooch is held in the V&A Print Room (pressmark M.8.A). 'Time Regained' Exhibition RF.2010/722

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O153031/athene-noctua-brooch-coates-kevin/