Brooch - Seraph

Object: Brooch
Place of origin: London (made)
Date: 1989 (made)
Artist/Maker: Coates, Kevin, born 1950 (designed and made by)
Materials and Techniques: Titanium, patinated silver, gold and opal
Credit Line: Anonymous gift
Museum number: M.16-1996

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 2008, he stated: ‘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, which includes a catalogue raisonné by Françoise Carli, describes this brooch as follows: ‘a triangular frame, with truncated corners forming three triangles of similar outline, is carved from titanium and coloured an electrifying green. Emerging from this celestial door, the form of an angel is appearing. Carved from opal, the head and neck glow with a myriad of tones echoing the green escutcheon of titanium. The purity of Sacred Love is perfectly captured in the sad radiance of features: his downward averted, glance could not be met with our own. Around the golden hair, and billowed by the movement, beautiful wings of patinated red are seen. Beneath them draperies cross the chest of the angel, fastened at their crossing by a jewel of identical form to that in which it appears as a detail.’ (Kevin Coates. A Hidden Alchemy. Goldsmithing: Jewels and Table-Pieces, Stuttgart 2008)

Kevin Coates himself describes it as: ‘This being is from the red-winged order of Seraphim – highest in the ninefold hierarchies of Angels. Associated with light and purity, the Seraph is sent to inspire mankind with the gift of Divine Love.’

Descriptive line

Physical description
Brooch depicting an angel within a triangular frame of turquoise-coloured titanium. His face and body are of carved opal, his robes of silver, his wings of patinated silver and his hair of gold.

Dimensions
Height: 6.6 cm, Width: 5.2 cm, Depth: 2.1 cm

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URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O153036/seraph-brooch-coates-kevin/