Jewelry by artist. Art to be worn.

Sophia Vari's wearable sculptures

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By Piera Anna Franini

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Sophia Vari, Greek painter and sculptor. She has atelier in New York, Monte Carlo, Colombia, Italy and Greece

She grew up just outside Athens and nurtured on classical harmonies and equilibriums. Then, allured by the inquietude of Paris, she went to live and teach there for several years. A keen traveler, she visited many countries around the world, to discover places and delve into the past Egyptian and pre-Columbian civilizations, such as the Maya and Olmec.

The distinctive style of this woman, whose beauty bewitched Fernando Botero - her husband since 1978 - derives essentially from her great sensuality, dynamism and geometric sense, that are imbued with human qualities. Her jewelry pieces range from rings to minaudières, real jewel cases,

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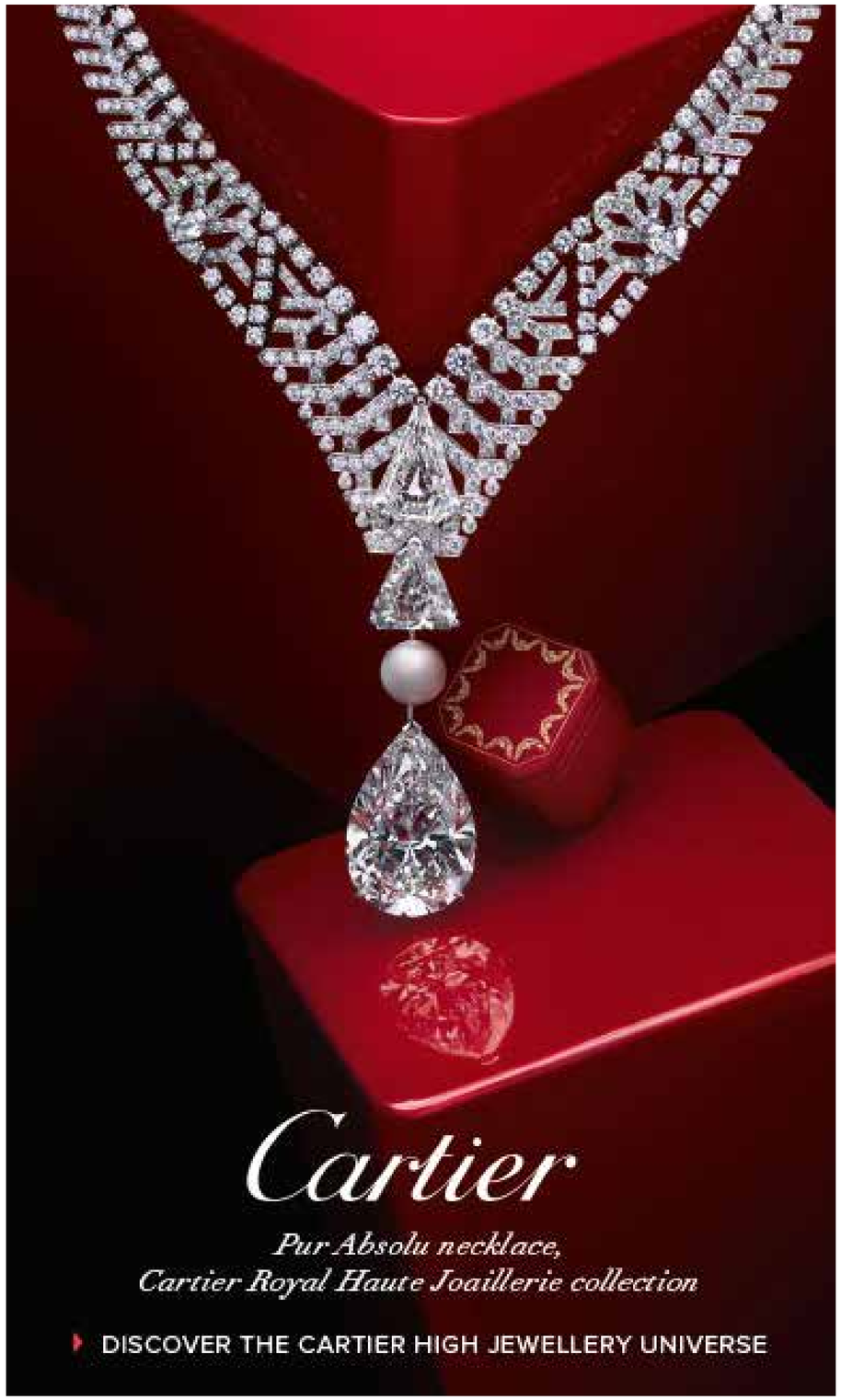

that you will not be able to find in jeweler's shops, but only in art galleries, such as those of Louisa Guinness (London) and Contini (Venice and London). In November, she will take part in a solo exhibition at Pierre Dumonteil in Shanghai, dedicated to sculptures and paintings, but with a special section dedicated to jewelry.

Sophia Vari's art works are unique and created according to the same criteria used in making sculptures: each prototype gives life to no more than six creations and she rarely uses precious stones. In her studio in Pietrasanta, the Italian village of marble and bronze, she shows us a ring with a green stone mounted on it, that looks exactly like an emerald, but which is actually a crystal that she found in a river-bed in Colombia. "As you can see, I have chosen pearls for this jewelry piece, but only to create a sense of luminosity. My goal is not the preciousness of the gems. I tend to follow a different criteria from that of a jeweler", she explains. She adores ebony and Brazilian Pao Amarello wood, which is cherished for its yellowish color.

Fleur de Vin - 1998 - Polychrome bronze (cm 57x45x39)

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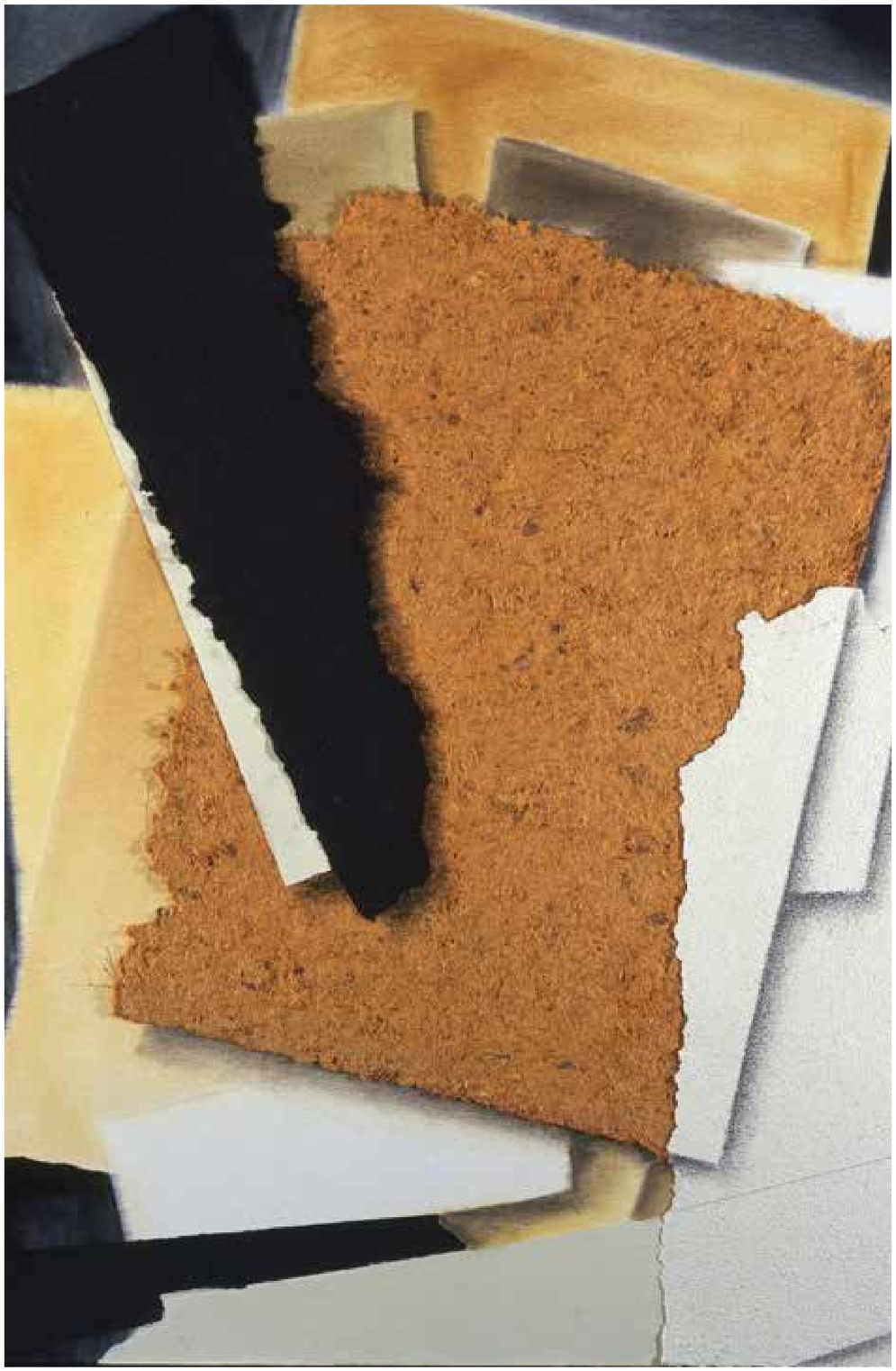
Curiously, the ring has been called Medea: just like the role that the famous singer Maria Callas embodied so remarkably. And it was actually Maria Callas, her compatriot, that influenced her destiny when she was just a seventeen year old girl: *"she said: 'go on..., my dear, don't be afraid. Live your art to the full'. It was thus thanks to her prompting that I persisted and got rid of all my uncertainties"*.

How does Vari create her jewels? *"Well, I don't actually plan ahead or ponder: 'now I am going to create a jewel'. It is while I am rough-hewing a sculpture with plasticine models that I may happen to envisage a ring, a necklace or a brooch and start creating it.*



Racine de blè - 2005 - mixed media on canvas

It all began more than twenty years ago when I entered my studio one day and saw dozens of plasticine models. I thought it would be nice to make a piece of jewelry just for me and, as it was such a success, I decided to create other pieces of jewelry to satisfy the number of requests". They estimate that she has made at least 300 models.

Sophia Vari creates the essence, the soul, of her jewelry pieces, then her daughter, Ileana Bouboulis, takes over and sends them to a number of Parisian artisans to complete the rest of the work. How much do these micro-sculptures cost? *"Well, I have never personally sold any of my sculptures, or jewelry. My gallery managers usually take care of that aspect. I have to say, though, that they do not come in cheap"*, she admits. Who is the typical buyer? *"Maybe an art collector to give it as a present to a loved one. However, the preciousness does not come from the materials, but rather from the name of the artist or the idea and it implies a different approach towards jewelry"*. Vari particularly loves necklaces. *"It is a real challenge for me and it is very much like creating a sculpture, made to be worn. No doubt, the*

fact that I am a woman has its advantages. Firstly because I can try it on me - and the fact that I have greater sensitivity compared to a male artist - enables me to highlight the female trait to a greater degree".

Many of Vari's jewelry pieces derive their name from mythology and Greek figures: Sophocle, Heracles, Cassandra, Athena, Pelias, Aphrodite and Ulysses. But we must also consider that Sophia Vari is Greek. How do you feel about the economic downfall of your country, where you sojourn two months a year? *"Greece has made huge mistakes and it is only fair that it should pay a price, but we shouldn't have reached such levels of despair, because the country does not deserve it. I am appalled by the situation, because we don't know exactly how long it is going to take to pull through the crisis. Nevertheless, I trust Greece and its people because they are proud and this is not the first time they have had to face a downfall. We are Mediterranean people and tend to exaggerate, but years of hardship lie ahead".*