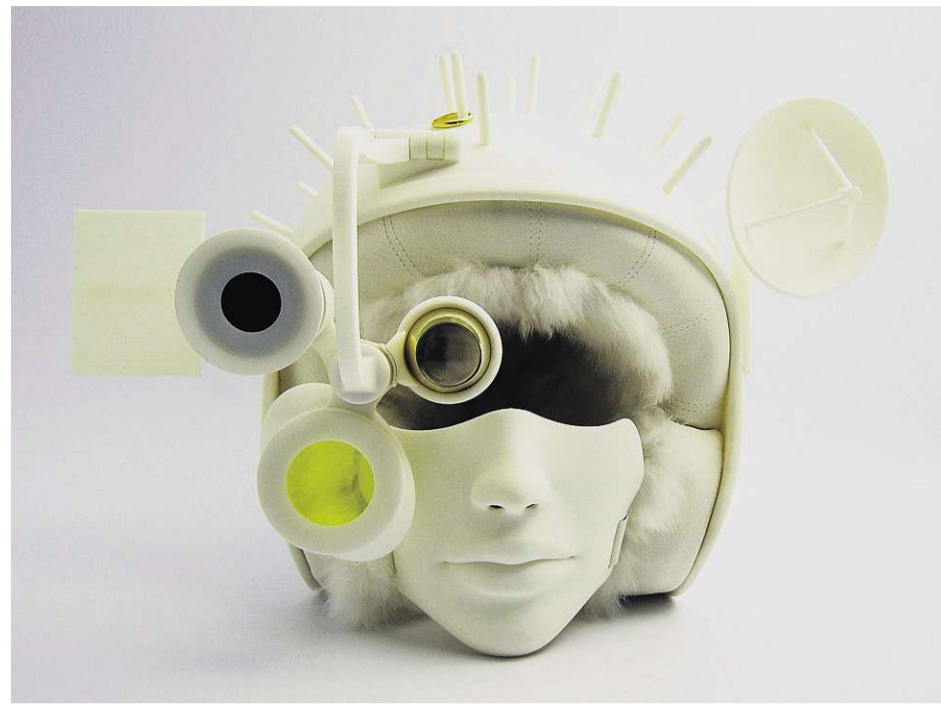


## A CUT ABOVE JEWELRY



## Into the bizarre world of Ted Noten

AMSTERDAM

Dutch jewelry artist is bringing his macabre work to Design Miami

BY NINA SIEGAL

Ted Noten has seen his future, and it's weirdly pretty.

"This is where I'll sit when I'm 80," he said recently, pointing to a dentist's chair on one side of his studio that he is retrofitting as control central for his old age.

"And this will be my cane." From a work table, he picks up a gold-plated walking stick with a gold bracelet and little containers, some he plans to fill with Viagra and other positive pills, and others lined with blackbird feathers, where he might keep memorable jewelry.



## Noten's world

Top row from left: "Trophy Helmet," "7 Necessities," "Lady K 4/7 Bag, Prada" and "Ageeth's Dowry Bag." Above, Mr. Noten's "Homage to My Grandma" roller suitcase. Center, Mr. Noten with one of his rings, and his notes and sketches for the installation of a "house" for the Design Miami fair this month. Below, a "Miss Piggy Ring" and "Mom," part of his series "Haunted by 36 Women."

The gold bracelet is both jewelry and a kind of handcuff — "so no one steals it," he said.

Mr. Noten, a Dutch conceptual jewelry artist, is known for whimsical, macabre and controversial work, such as a dead-mouse pendant, chew-your-own brooches made of gum, cocaine sniffing rings, a modern chastity belt made of gold and diamonds, and clear acrylic purses containing gold-plated pistols.

He will turn 58 soon, and lately he has been reflecting on his life.

His personal timeline will be part of an installation he is creating for the Design Miami fair this month called "Ted's House," that will include elements of his past, present and imagined future.

The installation will be a "house" of 100 square feet with a door and a window, set inside the booth of his gallery, Ornamantum, from Hudson, New York.

The house will be positioned at an angle, said Stefan Friedemann, the gallery's director, "as if a crane just carried it over and set it down there." Against the back wall will be an image of an urban cityscape.

"A lot of Ted's work is in some way a self-portrait, and so the booth itself tells a little narrative of his work," Mr. Friedemann said. "There's a suggestion of chaotic development into the future, combined with a traditional house. That mirrors his approach to his work, which usually has some kind of basis in the traditional, but he's always looking into the future with concept, with material exploration."

Among the items inside the house are "Homage to My Grandma," an acrylic table with a silver platter centerpiece containing a pearl necklace, a giant red ruby and an antique hand mirror, to represent the "past." In classic Noten counterpoint, etched into the surface of the table are a large rifle and a handgun.

To represent the "present" there is a silver necklace made of house plant leaves, which he calls "Home Is Where the Heart Is."

And for the "future," he has that gold-plated walking stick.

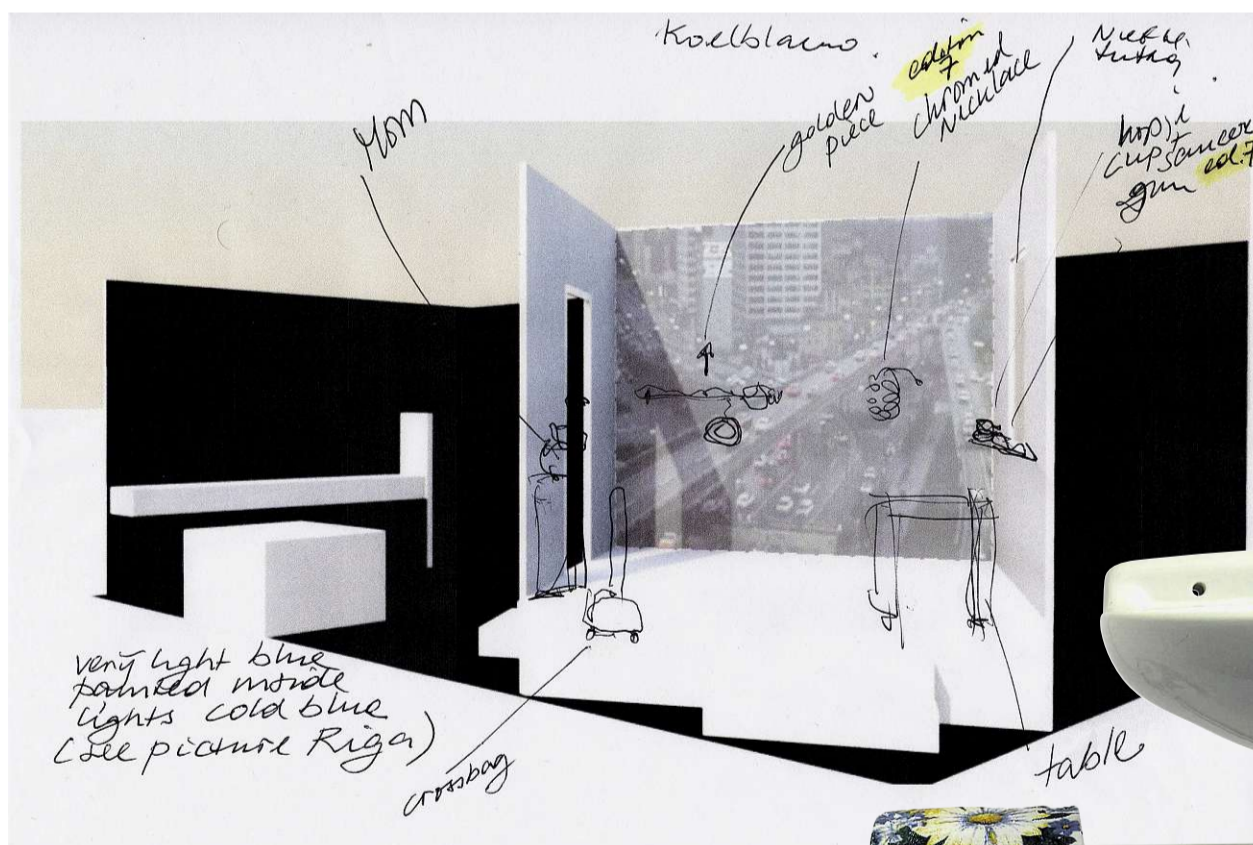
For an installation he is preparing for the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam in June, he has three rooms, which will make up the "Non-Zone."

In one room, he has created a huge, 3-D-printed archive of his work from 2006 until the present, made of paper.

In another room, the museum will



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ATELIER TED NOTEN; HANS DE BRUIJN, ABOVE



present a giant Tower of Babel constructed from everything found in his studio just before the exhibition begins. The third room will contain "a surprise," he said.

After everything has been removed from the studio, Mr. Noten will work for three months in an empty space, with no tools or materials, and "see what happens."

"Then I can make things as I did when I started as a student," he said. "Because I noticed that after 25 years you have certain patterns of creation, but I'd like to let go of some of those and see if I can do things that would never otherwise occur."

As a jeweler, Mr. Noten is difficult to categorize. "You would never link him to a school or a development or a group of designers," said Annemartine van Kesteren, design curator for the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. "He's true and specific, and he's carved out his own technique."

"He's one of the best jewelry designers," she added, "because he's investigating what jewelry and design and luxury are in our modern times. He's pushing the boundaries in a very sort of personal and autonomous way, very true to himself. It makes him more than just a jewelry designer."

Many of Mr. Noten's works have been collected by museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Los Angeles County Museum



TED NOTEN &amp; ORNAMANTUM GALLERY, SKETCHES; ATELIER TED NOTEN, LEFT AND RIGHT

of Art and the Royal College of Art in London.

His résumé opens like this: "Born 18-12-1956, Tegelen. 1975-1976, Bricklayer. 1976-1980, Nurse in a psychiatric hospital. 1980-1983, Traveler."

It was during that "traveler" period that he became a jewelry designer.

From a home base in Athens he went to various parts of Asia and Europe. Back in Greece, he would lay out a blue velvet cloth on the sidewalk, "hippie style," and sell jewelry he had made using silver wire and beads from India.

Mr. Noten eventually applied to the Academy for Applied Arts in Maastricht, the Netherlands. "I went to the school with my blue velvet and earrings and they said, Yeah, but this is artisan work," he recalled. "I said, Yes, that's why I'm coming. I had no mean-

ing. I had no concepts. That may be why they took me. They thought, 'this guy is completely unwritten.'"

He continued his education at a fine-arts school, the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. "They said, You're spoiled, Ted," he said. "You're too much a craftsman. A craftsman and an artist don't go together. I didn't agree with that. I said, if you want to be an artist you should have tools and skills to make something. If you want to come up with concepts, be a writer."

Mr. Friedemann, the Ornamantum Gallery's director, followed Mr. Noten's career for many years before he added him to his roster, saying that, in the jewelry world, Mr. Noten is regarded as a kind of "enfant terrible."

"He has an adoring relationship to jewelry that is behind most everything

that he creates, although more than anyone else, Ted has pushed his work into the other realms of fine art and the design world," Mr. Friedemann said. "He still makes jewelry, he hasn't left it behind, but his mind works in such a conceptual manner that even his jewelry pieces aren't about the wearable aspects of the work."

Despite the various paths he has followed, Mr. Noten still sees himself as rooted in jewelry-making.

"Jewelry is more directly related to human relationships and human behavior, even politics," he said. "There's much more emotional content and stories in jewelry, and I'm a storyteller. Only, I refuse to say that jewelry is only a brooch or a necklace or a ring."

Some of his jewelry requires a great deal of effort to wear, such as a 1995 ring called "If You Want to Be Beautiful, You Have to Suffer" and made of a collection of pearls, diamonds and other gemstones contained in a cup that must be held upright at all times to prevent the gems from falling out.

A 1999 piece, a bag called "Ageeth's Dowry Bag," was a bridal handbag with a strap made of a double strand of pearls, and containing dozens of gold rings and earrings that could not be accessed because they were contained in acrylic.

In "Revenge of a Pearl Necklace," acquired this year by the Zuiderzee Museum in Enkhuizen, the Netherlands, he placed a dead fish in a tank to decay until all that was left was the fish's skeleton and a black-pearl necklace that the fish had ingested.

Mr. Noten's large atelier, in a former school building in a western district of Amsterdam, is filled with playful artifacts.

In one room is his "Mr. Claw" funfair machine, with plastic balls inside con-

taining grown-up jewelry and a single bar of silver that you can try to grab, but probably won't get.

On a table are a number of rings that he plans to fuse to a gold-plated gun, as grip and trigger. "That's a lady's gun," he said jokingly.

Elsewhere is a necklace cast from of the leaves of common house plants, and elements of the transparent gun bags that have made him famous.

The use of dead animals suspended in acrylic recalls Damien Hirst's work, though Mr. Noten has been making them at least as long as Mr. Hirst has.

In his studio, he has a photo of Mr. Hirst's diamond-encrusted skull. Asked if Mr. Hirst is an inspiration, Mr. Noten said: "No, the skull is there because I'm angry at myself and at my colleagues because we didn't think of it first."