



Loveable **BRUTES**

The pared-back shapes and textures of midcentury architecture also informed jewellery designers—and this daring vision is being revitalised for today, says *Emily Zak*

HER LOVE OF brutalist jewellery started early in life, explains Mahnaz Ispahani Bartos. For the Pakistan-born New York-based CEO and founder of the Mahnaz Collection, the 1960s and 1970s was a revolutionary period, a “breath of fresh air” with jewellery designs that increasingly resonate with collectors today.

What does Ernő Goldfinger's Trellick Tower share with one of Princess Margaret's favourite brooches by Andrew Grima? Brutalism, recognised by its stripped-back aesthetic and rough-surfaced buildings—the term itself borrowed from Le Corbusier's *béton brut* (raw concrete). As Europe emerged from the upheaval of postwar reconstruction, designers inspired by brutalist architecture reconsidered what was precious, using materials in their raw state. Think “natural uncut unfaceted gemstones, uncut crystals, and heavily textured gold nuggets,” says Bartos. The period also saw a sharing of ideas across disciplines, including the work of Finnish artist and designer

Björn Weckström, Danish furniture and jewellery designer Nanna Ditzel, Italian artist and jewellery designer Afro Basaldella, and the multi-talented Brazilian brothers Roberto (a modern landscape architect) and Haroldo Burle Marx. For both jewellery and architecture, the materials dictated the design. “The value of the gem was far less relevant than the visual effect created by the totality of the jewel,” Bartos continues.

THE 1961 INTERNATIONAL Exhibition of Modern Jewellery, curated by Graham Hughes, then art director of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths,

further elevated modernist jewellery designers, including Andrew Grima, John Donald, Gerda Flöckinger and George Weil. It was Grima's pioneering exploration of less traditional materials that led the Italian-born designer, based on London's Jermyn Street, to be recognised as the father of modernist jewellery, says Gemmological Association of Great Britain fellow and Goldsmiths adviser Joanna Hardy.

“The lessons of **MATERIAL INNOVATION** continue to shape much jewellery design today.”

“There was as much excitement among craftspeople working with him as there was from those buying his jewellery. Instead of triple-diamond rings, they used uncut geodes and giant, coloured stones from Brazil.”

WHILE CONTEMPORARY DESIGNERS such as Christopher Thompson Royds, Alice Cicolini, Melanie Eddy, Francesca Grima and Julia Obermaier continue experimenting with new materials and treatments, they do so in very different ways. Look to Jonathan Boyd's oversized chain links made up of words, for example, or Andrew Lamb's use of upcycled tin cans, transformed into a refined brooch. Hardy points out that jewellery design reflects its time. Though visually distinct from their brutalist predecessors, the lessons of material innovation continue to shape much jewellery design today. ■