



Showtime for WA jewels

London Design Week is a major opportunity for our gold and silversmiths to shine, writes **Stephen Bevis**

Dorothy Erickson concedes it is not the best time to be taking the largest jewellery exhibition by WA artists to London. In the wake of the recent riots in the British capital and the European economic meltdown, Erickson is under no illusion that the buyers will be thick on the ground for the exquisite creations from her Cottesloe studio and those of six other leading WA artists taking part in London Design Week.

But you can't help bad timing, shrugs the artist and author of a recent book about the history of gold and silversmithing in WA.

"The first things cut from people's spending are luxuries and jewellery is top of the list," Erickson says. "This exhibition has been planned for five years. Once these things are in train, it is almost impossible to stop them because it will be a long time before you get the opportunity again. We are making the best of it as a great way to build awareness."

For more than 30 years, Erickson has been making kinetic works that often feature fine steel cable, weighted at the ends by gold or precious stones.

Other items are inspired by WA flowers or the bejewelled paintings of Gustav Klimt, the talismanic artist from Vienna where Erickson is a regular visitor.

From this weekend, she will be exhibiting at London's prestigious Lesley Craze Gallery, alongside other WA artists Carlier Makigawa, Felicity Peters, Gillian Rainer, Brenda Ridgewell, Christel van der Laan and David Walker who have found appreciative audiences in Europe previously.



ALL THE GLITTERS Artists Dorothy Erickson, Gillian Rainer and Christel van der Laan are heading to London to show off WA's gold and silversmithing wares. PICTURE **MICHAEL O'BRIEN**

Because of the isolation and relatively small population of WA, local artists have had to exhibit elsewhere to sustain their practice. Some have been exhibiting overseas since the 1980s and their work has also been collected by major art institutions in Europe, America and Asia. Erickson says the high regard held elsewhere for the quality of local artist-jewellers is one of the State's best-kept secrets.

The title of the London exhibition, *Cinderella's Stories: Contemporary Jewellery from Western Australia*, takes its name from the colloquial name for the State which struggled until the discovery of gold in the late 19th century.

With the availability of the precious raw material, and a suddenly wealthy local client base, WA goldsmiths and jewellers also prospered.

This aspect of WA history and its portable heritage is one that Erickson says she is on a crusade to promote.

"Adversity bred self-reliance, which is still a characteristic in an area where there is little manufacturing and little technical support such as is found in larger industrial communities," she says.

Unable to pursue her art for a lengthy time after developing RSI and chronic fatigue syndrome, Erickson devoted herself to a doctorate which led to the book *Gold and*



ON SHOW Sticks and Stones brooch, by Christel van der Laan.



A sterling silver pendant by Gillian Rainer.



Memento mori, by David Walker.

Silversmithing in Western Australia: A History. The London exhibition has been arranged to coincide with the international launch of the book.

Of the seven artists, only Walker originally trained overseas. The others, excluding Van der Laan, trained at what is now Curtin University. All of them will also be showing at Sydney's Artsite in November. **G**

Gold and Silversmithing in Western Australia: A History (UNSW Press, \$89.95) is in select bookshops. The London exhibition opens tomorrow.