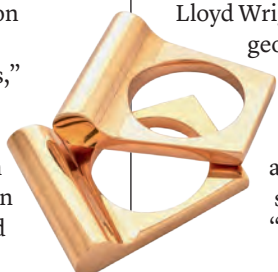
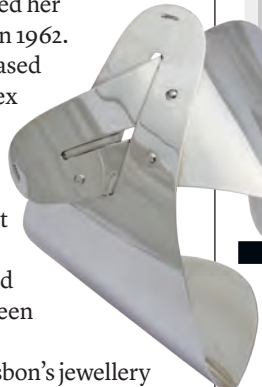


Pretty RADICAL

A grande dame of art-jewellery design, Kukas's geometric masterpieces are now on show in a career-defining exhibition. By *Aimée Farrell*



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MARIA DA CONCEIÇÃO de Moura Borges—who goes by the name Kukas—has been a provocateur of the Portuguese jewellery scene ever since she conjured her very first piece back in 1962. A gold band that encased the finger in a complex webbed construction, made for her aunt Eugenia, the piece set in motion a creative trajectory that blurred the boundaries between jewellery and art.

At a time when Lisbon's jewellery scene was incredibly conservative, and the focus was on precious stones purely as status symbols, Kukas was defiantly avant-garde. "I want my jewellery to be art in transit, with human function, mediating between the person who wears it and the outside world in which he or she lives," she said in an interview in 1977.

Inspired by the dynamism of modern artists such as Joan Miró and Fernand Léger, and

the work of architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, her minimal, geometric creations, which employed everything from moonstones and mother-of-pearl to pyrite and pebbles, were nothing short of radical. "The word *design* didn't

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Clockwise from top: silver and golden silver necklace, 2022; silver ring with rock crystal, 2022; re-edition of 1980s gold rings; silver bracelet, 2022.

really exist in Portugal back then," says Kukas, who studied interior design and art education in Paris, before launching her atelier with an exhibition of

KUKAS: RENTON THATCHER; JEWELLERY: RICARDO JUNQUEIRA



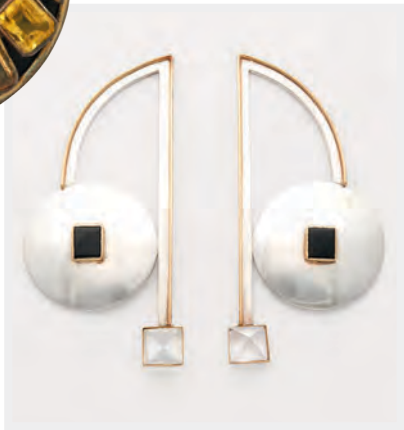
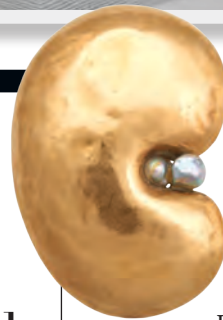
Above: Iarimar necklace, 2010.
Right: Maria da Conceição de Moura Borges in 1983.

jewellery at Diário de Notícias Gallery in Lisbon in 1963. Kukas was quickly co-opted by the city's bohemian community of artists, musicians and creatives, and she began exhibiting her work across the globe. From the start, Kukas also conceived objects for the home—from brass salt-and-pepper shakers to boldly monumental flower vessels—which nod to her past life as a decorator.

Fast-forward half a century, and the 95-year-old's creative flair shows no signs of abating. Working from the bedroom studio of her 19th-century apartment in Lisboa Pombalina, with arresting views onto the Tagus below, Kukas continues to design every day. Her process begins with a cut-and-paste technique that sees her recreate the shapes she envisages in her imagination. She then forms three-dimensional models forged from vintage magazines or even discarded



Kukas forms 3D models forged from **VINTAGE MAGAZINES** or even discarded Coke cans.



From left: Lake Shore Drive brooch, 1978; onyx earrings, 1990s; gold and pearl brooch, 1980s.

Coke cans, which are realised by local Lisbon goldsmiths. Her current focus is an exhibition, *A Tribute to Geometry* (until August 27), at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in

Lisbon, which delves into her passion for painting and architecture through a series of 30 new jewellery designs. The show is co-curated by Filipa Fortunato, one half of the architecture and design studio Casa Fortunato, with her husband António Falcão Costa Lopes. Fortunato champions Kukas's work, both in their Príncipe Real showroom and at their new Alcácer do Sal hotel, where guests can live among her vivacious creations.

A testament to Kukas's sheer eclecticism as a jewellery artist, the exhibition features everything from brooches encrusted with baroque pearls to conch-shell pendants and bangles whose undulating forms are akin to wearable sculpture. After all, for Kukas, Lisbon's grande dame of art jewels, creativity is life. ■

JOSÉ MANUEL COSTA ALVES