

LIN STANIONIS
Between Nature and Grace, 2006
18k gold, pate de verre, sterling silver
3 ¼ x 3 ¼ x ½"
PHOTO: JON BLUMB

The Mystery of Existence

AS WE HAVE seen, many natural forms—bones, thorns, snakes, skulls—carry powerful symbolic meanings. The artist Lin Stanionis combines and modifies them to emphasize the “shifting and unresolved nature of the symbols in the context of uncertain fate.” According to Stanionis, “Almost all of these forms are either cast or modeled from plants and the remains of animals I collect outside my studio in rural Kansas.” For example, in her work *Rapture*, she explores “the idea of death as the final release—there is fear (the rattlesnake head) and hope (the broken egg with the knotted rope) and inevitability (the clutch of tiny rattlesnakes hidden in the grass).” Similarly, *Between Nature and Grace*, which includes casts of bones and flowering plants, “originated from temptation and... the anxiety caused by desire.” Here, she suggests, is “that luminal moment... where one is straddling the plane of transformation.”

Stanionis views such works as gothic because they evoke “the notion of the sublime, the mystery of existence, and the accompanying sense of awe and fear.” In addition, she says her “ornamentation is in some ways Gothic, since the “symbols and the ornament are one and the same, it is a dense ornament, one that is primal and speaks on an emotional level.” Gothic work, Stanionis suggests, has a “dual emotional quality of fear and attraction; it is “a pleasure to the eye but fused with a sinister undertone.” It “engages the imagination” at the site where “visual pleasure is offset by what is dark, uncertain, and confused.”

So here is gothic jewelry in all its sinister beauty and mystery—contemporary works that transform fear and desire into living art.





Valerie Steele is director and chief curator of The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. The author of more than a dozen books, including *The Corset and Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Culture*, she is also the founder and editor-in-chief of *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*.

LIN STANIONIS
Rapture, 2010
cast urethane resin, 18k gold
4 x 3 x 1/2"
PHOTO: JON BLUMB