



Jo shows off her passion for jewellery

Sarah Walters finds out what inspired gallery's latest exhibition

WITH a prestigious archive of Pre-Raphaelite paintings to choose from at Manchester Art Gallery, Jo Bloxham was spoiled for choice when she set about picking 12 images to inspire a collection of unique jewellery.

"At first, I chose about 30 pieces," says Jo about the beginnings of the project, "but I quickly realised that they were disparate images and they needed a theme to unite them."

"So I settled on 12 that had the femme fatale as their theme."

"Manchester has a lot of these paintings and people probably walk past them and think they're very pretty. But I want to make them look a bit more at them, especially their more sinister aspects."

A jeweller and curator, Jo researched the paintings and approached some of her favourite international jewellers with her findings, bringing together a creative pool from the UK, Germany,

Belgium, Norway, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland, Mexico and America.

And the show, *The Sting Of Passion*, which opens at Manchester Art Gallery tomorrow, makes the most of the show's origins by displaying the work 'within' a reproduction of the image that inspired them – the jewellery pieces are mounted in glass boxes and hung in front of the paintings.

The paintings include Arthur Hughes' magnificent portrayal of Shakespeare's Ophelia as she contemplates suicide, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's seductresses Astarte Syriaca and Joli Coeur, John Stanhope's menacing portrait of original sin in *Eve Tempted*, and Charles-August Mengin's dark temptress Sappho.

"I got the idea two years ago," Jo explains. "I used to be a jewellery designer but for the last two years I've been organising contemporary jewellery exhibitions."

"I organised a one-week show at Manchester Town Hall in 2007 called *Romancing The Stone*



UNIQUE Jewellery from the *Sting Of Passion* exhibition

which involved creating jewellery pieces for the statues in the hall and square.

"I saw all this marble being ignored and it made me feel sad that they weren't being appreciated. I wanted to draw attention to them, so we created pieces for them. We even blinged up Prince Albert with a neon cross!"

"Many people were disappointed that they didn't get to the exhibition because it was only open for a week, and I think they will be very excited to see this one in this formal gallery setting."

The jewellery pieces are, says Jo, a real mix of styles – and some of them are likely to attract more attention than others.

Germany's Nanna Melland has created a new girdle for Astarte Syriaca that could raise a few eyebrows with its genital piercing ring, while Kepa Karmona's concrete neckpiece (a response to Ophelia) is perhaps one of the most unconventional jewellery items in the show.

"I gave the artists a brief and total creative freedom to work how they wanted with very few rules."

Jo smiles. "I was really excited by the pieces when they arrived. It was like Christmas morning."

"Each time a parcel arrived, I didn't know what was coming out of it, but I recognised which artist it was by immediately."

» From tomorrow until October 25. Free.