

Michelle Fantaci Threads campaign. Opposite: Harwell Godfrey Baht tassel pendant in 18-karat yellow gold with turquoise.

THE FABRIC OF CREATION

Jewelry designers are drawing on clothing trends for their collections, employing lace, tassels and other textile-inspired styles.

BY BETH BERNSTEIN

Fashion and textiles have inspired jewelry design for over 100 years. Mesh chain mail, macramé, Native American fringes, Art Deco tassels and Venetian lacework are just some of the styles that have come and gone — and occasionally endured — over the decades. But new jewelry-making techniques and runway trends have recently revived them, and these textural designs continue to evolve as the next generation discovers them for the first time.

Traditionally, it's been costume jewelry that's taken its cue from the catwalks, but over the past several years, fine jewelry has also looked to couture and ready-to-wear for more individualized themes. Designers have found inspiration in intricate tactile details and the fluidity of fabrics that move with the body. This theme offers a range of looks in all categories, allowing for more expression on the part of designer and wearer alike.

The returning popularity of fabric-inspired jewelry began with petit point and Venetian lace around five to 10 years ago, which translated well to details on engagement rings and chandelier-style earrings. Today, the fashions and fabrics that most influence independent jewelers' collections are delicate embroidered lace, ruched and draped designs, and mesh and fringe.

Fringe is one of the most recent favorites. It evokes the rugged suede of the Wild West, but also the swaying hemlines of 1920s fashions. Designers have also tapped into the functional details of ready-to-wear, such as fastenings, trims and closures. Mesh and macramé, meanwhile, are spun into high-karat gold with gems in colorful patterns that conjure up global travels.

Fresh from the runway

Nak Armstrong and Megan Thorne are two jewelry designers who began their careers in fashion and have used their industry knowledge to create beautiful, textural collections. Armstrong employs ruches, drapes and ruffles in everything from earrings to statement rings. One of the biggest challenges is emulating

the essence of soft fabric using hard elements, he says. "I am always inspired by textiles and figuring out ways to replicate them in jewelry." Armstrong uses various stone sizes and cuts, including tapered baguettes, to create the illusion of fabric with "voluminous, organic motifs."

Thorne employs textures in more delicate engagement ring styles and believes the pandemic has created a shift

toward more feminine fabrics in fashion this season. "It makes sense that fashion is embracing a softer, more fluid sensibility as a response to

"DIFFERENT CULTURES AND COUNTRIES SUCH AS INDIA AND TURKEY PROVIDE INFLUENCES FOR A RANGE OF LOOKS"

the rigidity of everyday life during the pandemic. Don't we all want softness and movement right now? Lyrical and sinuous, lace winds and weaves, often with floral or botanical motifs, which feel feminine and renewing with a promise of something beautiful to come."

Among the other brands taking inspiration from fashion is Alberian & Aulde, which creates chain pieces with gemstones stationed throughout in mesh-like and tassel styles. Designer Michelle Fantaci just introduced a new line called Threads, which focuses on the details in apparel: stitches, buttons and buttonholes, cords and eyelets.

Fringe benefits

The resurgence of fringe in the jewelry world "has to do with people craving a bit of fun," believes Vanessa Chilton, creative director of fine jeweler Robinson Pelham in London. "I think customers are going to be excited for the holiday; they will want to dress up in pieces with beautiful movement, that are comfortable on the skin, and of course in fine gold that is enduring."

Lauren Harwell Godfrey agrees that fringe's comeback is about a desire for frivolity. "Fringe, to me, is all about fun, and I think we're looking for feel-good moments these days in any way we can ►

TEXTURAL TREASURES: A HISTORY

The turn-of-the-century Edwardian and Belle Époque periods were a time of luxury in fashion. High lace collars and a profusion of lace trim defined women's clothing styles. Jewelry followed suit with lace-inspired openwork patterns and light, airy garland motifs. In the early 1920s, these looks gave way to fluid freedom with blouson dresses and swinging hemlines. During the Art Deco period, this translated to long sautoir necklaces, many of which dangled from diamond and seed pearl chains with tassels of seed pearls or small briolette diamonds.

Fringe is a traditional element of Native American dress, conceived as a way to make clothing dry faster when it rained. It was later adapted for Wild West-style jackets and other pieces of clothing. From there, it filtered into jewelry in leather and suede, eventually mixing with gold in chokers and bib necklaces.

Heavy mesh, part of armor in ancient times, developed into draped gold necklaces as we moved into the 19th century. It featured in lariats during the 1920s and '30s, and the freewheeling disco era of the 1970s saw it appear in graduated and lariat-style yellow gold necklaces and drape earrings.

IMAGES: MICHELLE FANTACI; HARWELL GODFREY



find them,” says the founder and designer of the Harwell Godfrey brand, which is based in California’s San Francisco Bay area. She has added tassels to her new collection as well. “Creatively, it seemed a natural progression, as I work a lot with stones and beads. I wanted to create some motion and lightheartedness to the line. I think that collectors love pieces that feel good and have some flexibility, and my new tassels, which have a fringe-like effect, create swing and depth that allow for a 3D experience.”

Global patterns

Just as fringe draws on Native American textile traditions, designers have looked to other textile cultures as well. After learning macramé while hiking through South America, Sarah Freedенfeld from

Amali Jewelry has become well known for weaving 18-karat gold chain around gemstones in her handmade pieces.

New York jeweler Mallary Marks has always been a fan and collector of textiles from around the globe, and has recently incorporated style elements and colours from different cultures into her jewelry. “I have added more fringe and tassel looks into my collection, along with more mesh-inspired necklaces,” she says.

Like Chilton and Harwell Godfrey, Marks believes consumers and designers alike are welcoming joyful, light-hearted motifs these days. “This type of styling reappearing in jewelry feels a little extravagant, decadent and celebratory, with painterly colors vividly mixed together. The tassels and fringe have a definite feeling of dancing the night away in the 1920s. This theme [signals] that we are happy to be out in the world again as much as we can.”

Shannon Green of Shannon Green Jewelers in Naples, Florida, has also seen “different cultures and countries such as India and Turkey provide influences for a range of looks, from the more exotic fringe and tassels to the feminine laces and the sensual mesh styles.” But current trends are about the appeal of yesteryear as well, she adds.

“The return of all of these styles is connected to our love for vintage jewelry and how modern jewelers are incorporating aspects of earlier pieces from the 19th through mid-20th century into their collections.”

There’s also a practical reason for the endurance of textural trends, according to Green. “True jewelry devotees dress in neutral colors and wear clothes as the backdrop for their pieces. Therefore, they are always looking for styles with personality. These fabric-inspired pieces add texture, color and dimension to an outfit and offer a look that’s elegant, chic and fun to wear.” ■

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Mallary Marks lace choker with multiple gemstones in 18-karat gold; Megan Thorne Wood Nymph Faye wide eternity band in 18-karat yellow gold with diamonds. Opposite, clockwise from top: Michelle Fantaci Button Threader earring in 14-karat gold with diamonds; Alberian & Aulde Ribbon necklace with labradorite cabochons in 18-karat yellow gold; Nak Armstrong Ruffled Girandole earrings in 20-karat recycled rose gold with tanzanite, peach tourmaline, brown zircon, aquamarine, and reclaimed champagne diamond baguettes.



IMAGES: MICHELLE FANTACI; ALBERIAN & AULDE; NAK ARMSTRONG; MALLARY MARKS; MEGAN THORNE

