

ROBERT LEE  
MORRIS

## A Letter from ROBERT LEE MORRIS: In appreciation of Patrons & Collectors

The arts have always depended on the patronage of the **COLLECTORS**. The De Medici family in Italy was one of the primary patrons of the Renaissance, sponsoring artists to create masterworks for the public and for them personally. It can be said that due to the vision and generosity of the De Medici patronage, arts on planet Earth flourished as never before in history. It was established that the patronage of the wealthy **changed the course of human history**. With the birth of Modern Art in the 1800's, the role of the patron became more accessible to the common man and the **visionary art dealer** became the liaison between the artist and the public; the middleman between the wealthy, museums and the artists who spent their efforts on their creations.

I created a public forum, a gallery, for selling and showing my studio jewelry in the late 70's called **ARTWEAR**. I was both an artist / maker and also the dealer for my stable of artists as I pursued patrons and collectors diligently for successful recognition of our work. My gallery was an off-shoot of the mothership gallery called Sculpture to Wear, located in the Plaza Hotel in the early 70's. Owned by Joan Sonnabend, a major art dealer and collector based in Boston, her love of jewelry by artists led her to open this groundbreaking emporium. She focused on hand-made, one of a kind jewelry by established blue chip name artists, such as **Picasso, Man Ray, Braque, Calder, Fontana, Louise Nevelson, Soto** and many more. From this salon, the **world of Studio made jewelry was launched into the U.S. Market place**.

Joan discovered my work while I was living in Vermont teaching myself how to make jewelry. One of her employees, purchased my necklace at a craft fair at the prestigious Putney School in Vermont in 1972. When Joan saw the piece she invited me to show her all my work, at which time she exclaimed the she would "**give me a one man show** in the Plaza gallery and **make me famous**". Joan delivered.

My career exploded from the moment my work began to fly out of Sculpture to Wear. This was widely due to the continued editorial coverage by the fashion magazines: **Vogue, Elle, W, WWD, Vanity Fair**, et al. In 1977, I built my own gallery **ARTWEAR** that flourished for 18 years, as I promoted jewelry artists such as Cara Croninger & Ted Muehling and built a wide array of high profile collectors. I was always more than thrilled to achieve the patronage of **serious art** collectors who **recognized the value of my wearable art**, portrayed on the catwalks of the top designers like **Calvin Klein, Donna Karan, Karl Lagerfeld, Kansai Yamamoto and Geoffrey Beene**.

In life (and business), we are lucky enough when good things come back to us full circle. Recently, a substantial collection of my personal archival pieces, were purchased by a discerning patron and collector – the type as I had always strived to cultivate at **ARTWEAR**. You can imagine my delight and surprise that the **single largest sale I've had in my career took place during these trying times** globally. It seems cosmic synchronicity that these iconic, museum pieces were sold by **Lisa M. Berman**, the new owner **SCULPTURE TO WEAR**.

Even after my **fifty years** in the varied genres of fashion, studio and fine jewelry, art business as a sculptor, having been awarded three **CFDA awards** (Council of Fashion Designers of America, including a **Lifetime Achievement Award**), this particular collector wasn't familiar with my work. This new patron collects fine Art and contemporary art jewelry, whereas my archival work was edgy, upfront and synonymous with the makers of bold American Fashion. It wasn't until **Berman made the introduction of my wearable art** to the collector, that **the patron understood my contributions to the history of studio jewelry**. It is both a marvelous and small world when this kind of irony can exist. Having a new a steward of my work is always appreciated and having one that will **ensure my original designs remain part of our culture, is truly a gift to an artist**.

Now as I enter my golden years, I find enormous pleasure, gratitude and deep satisfaction to know the value of my rare archival pieces, some 40-50 years old now, have increased in value and are appreciated as I dreamed they would be. **This inspires me to create even more...**

ROBERT LEE MORRIS May 5-20-2020