

## The Lover's Eye Jewelry

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**Abstract:** The term “lover's eyes”, which is now a reminder of archaic noble England, is coined by Edith Weber, an American vintage collector. This term was mentioned in old diaries as it has been done in Charles Dickens's novel *Dombey and Son*, 1846. In the late 18th and early 19th, exchanging “love's eye” was popular with wealthy British and European lovers for a brief period. It was a mysterious art form, a special jewelry with miniature painting of an eye setting in it. This paper will explore the collection of the love's eye jewelry and analyze how it influenced fashion and art jewelry design today. The paper will be divided into 4 sections. First, what is this jewelry like and the origin of eye miniatures jewelry in history; Second, the collector on this unusual type of jewelry; This will be followed by the meaning of this type of jewelry from different authors; Finally, it will look at the effect on eye miniatures to contemporary jewelry design and fashion.

### 1. Introduction

A lover's eye jewelry can be a ring, a locket, a brooch, any form of jewelry. It can even mounted onto a box. Generally, Lover's Eye Jewelry is a miniature portrait of one eye of a person that is important to the wearer, painted on board or ivory, mounted in metal and decorated with pearls, gem stones, enamel. Sometimes it has some inscriptions or memento on the backside. Most of the owners of these eyes are different to recognize only if there are inscriptions tell who it is.

The popularity of this art form originated from a royal affair. According to lore, the story traces back to the end of the 18th century, when the prince of Wales, who is known by George IV later, fell in love with Miss Maria Fitzherbert. He courted Miss Fitzherbert but unsuccessfully; And the king would never give permission to the prince to marry a twice-widowed Catholic woman who is six years older than him. As a result, Fitzherbert escape from Wales towards Continent, but the prince did not give up. On 3 Nov. 1785, he wrote to Mrs. Fitzherbert with a second propose. In that letter, instead of an engagement ring, he sent her a locket with miniature of his right eye set in it, made by his friend Richard Cosway, one of the most famous miniaturist of the time. Along with this eye miniature there was a note said: “P.S. I send you a parcel, and I send you at the same time an eye. If you have not totally forgotten the whole countenance, I think the likeness will strike you.” Sooner after that, Miss Fitzherbert was touched by his painstakingly request and returned to England. they held a secret marriage ceremony on 15 Dec. 1785. After that, the fashion of these jewelry suddenly became popular from late 17th to early 18th century. (Grootenbore,2006)

According to Emma Mustich(2012), there is evidence suggesting that the lover's eye jewelry first appeared in France a few years earlier, and the British were only ‘adopting a French invention’. In any event, there is no doubt that the romantic story between the prince and Miss Fitzherbert popularized a vogue that lasted long to the 1830s and even into the period of Queen Victoria, who was found of mourning jewelry and have custom-made numerous eye miniature jewelry during her reign. Now, there are still artists painting lover's eyes today. One of them is Thomas Sully, a Philadelphia portraitist who paint on mastodon ivory. He also points out that he usually commissioned by faithful spouses instead of lovers or valentine.

Nowadays, collection of “lover's eye jewelry” has attracted many collectors. It is believed by some experts that less than 1,000 eye miniature jewelry are in existence today (Mustich,2012). Nan and David Skier is a couple who have been collecting “lover's eyes” for about 20 years. David Skier is a prominent ophthalmologist in Birmingham, who deals with eyes for living. They came across their first eye miniature jewelry at an vintage exhibition in Boston and the doctor was

fascinated by it. David says that as an ophthalmologist who spent his whole life operating on people's optical problems, he was enthralled as soon as he saw these powerful, elegant small jewelry. In 2012, the Birmingham Museum of Art displayed 98 miniatures offered by them in the exhibition called *The Look of Love*. According to Nan and David Skier, there are also a few museums in Britain have small collections of lover's eyes; such as Philadelphia in America, which has about 30 eyes in its collection, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Royal Collection and the Victoria & Albert in London. But those collections are all smaller than those by private.

Lover's eye jewelry has a number of interpretations on it. Firstly, it has a meaning of secret and mysterious. It probably comes from its function at first as a secret gift for proposal. As Mustich(2012) claims that, initially, these miniatures could be worn publicly to commemorate the person they love underground by showing only one eye. It is difficult to recognize someone only by identifying their eye, which is a reminder of people who wear a mask and only show their eyes to keep their secret identify. Another implication of this kind of art is about contemplation and gaze. Grootenboer (2006) considered these eye miniatures as an individual's gaze rather than mere portrait of someone's eye. She believes that these portraits suggest an inversion of 'the object and subject of seeing'. That means in this situation the miniatures should be considered as 'being seen' when someone seeing it.

These implicit meaning was revealed and used in contemporary fashion and jewelry design. Contemporary jewelry pay attention to the relationship aesthetic. Eye miniature jewelry gives us a unique example to show the relationship between people through jewelry. As gifts and monuments, eye jewelry becomes an emotional jewelry giving the wearer an emotional expression. It connects the sitter and the wearer and shape a silent form of communication. There is also a number of design in contemporary jewelry that can be used to show a relationship with people. For example, jewelry made from materials from personal items such as photos, fingerprints, hair, nails. By drawing an eye instead of the whole portrait, lover's eye jewelry keeps these communications secret, and only the closest people can recognize the person in portrait at a glance. It like a secret signal, only the sender and the receiver can read it. This kind of personal jewelry does diminish the universality of the product, but they became more significant at the individual level.

Eye miniature jewelry also provides a way for designers to communicate with the audience through their works. Considering this type as a symbol, for instance, seeing them in an exhibition hall, the silent communication between the jewelry and the audience can be touched, which is, however, not the original purpose of artists who made these miniature art. Moreover, it is wondrous that almost all eyes painted are looking straight at the viewer. It feels like communication, scrutiny, and surveillance. The eye as a symbol always make spectators feel being watched and observed. There are many examples of eye used in contemporary jewelry. Nevertheless, an important feature about this jewelry is that these eyes are not symbolic. As Grootenboer(2012) claimed, the eye miniature should not be considered as a symbol or a picture. These gazes belong to the most familiar persons of the wearer, and they are portrayed very realistic. Thinking of the way you feel at the moment being watched by the closest person from the camera, and you feel like a person is there, very vivid, with you, and watching your every move. You can even feel his minds.

## **2. Conclusion**

In conclusion, lover's eye jewelry is a unique and fantasy jewelry, It suddenly arose in 18<sup>th</sup> century then disappeared quickly in the first decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century, like a flash in the pan. But just like those secret love story hidden behind the eye miniature for long, these mystery jewelries also became a treasure and a memory of an old time that would be hand down from age to age. In addition, collectors are paying more intention into it and these jewelry shows some significant theme that has exact concept as some contemporary jewelry design. Maybe one day in the nearest future, fashion and art of vintage style would have chance to make this lover's eye jewelry popular for a second time.

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