

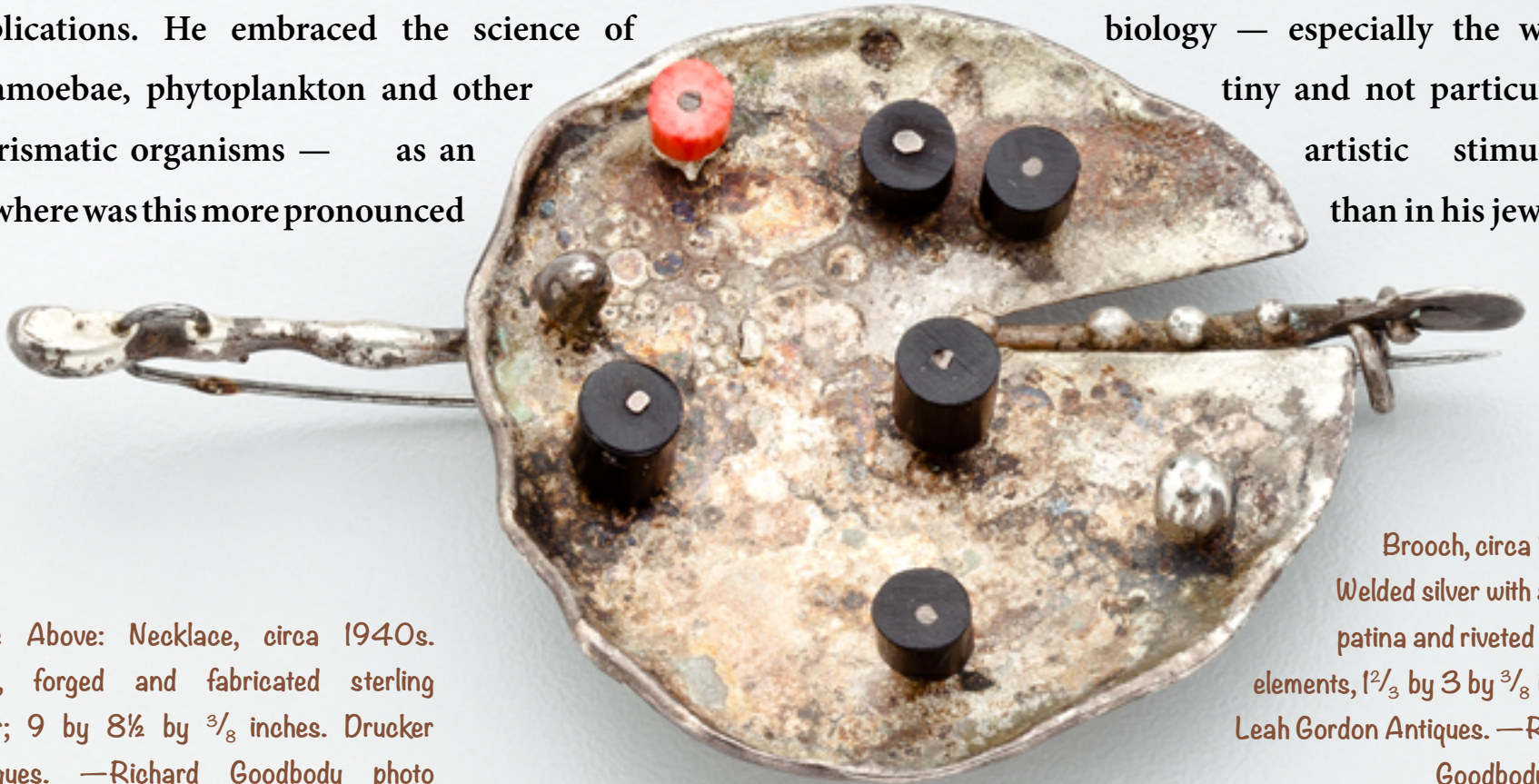


The Jewelry Of Harry Bertoina

At Cranbrook Art Museum

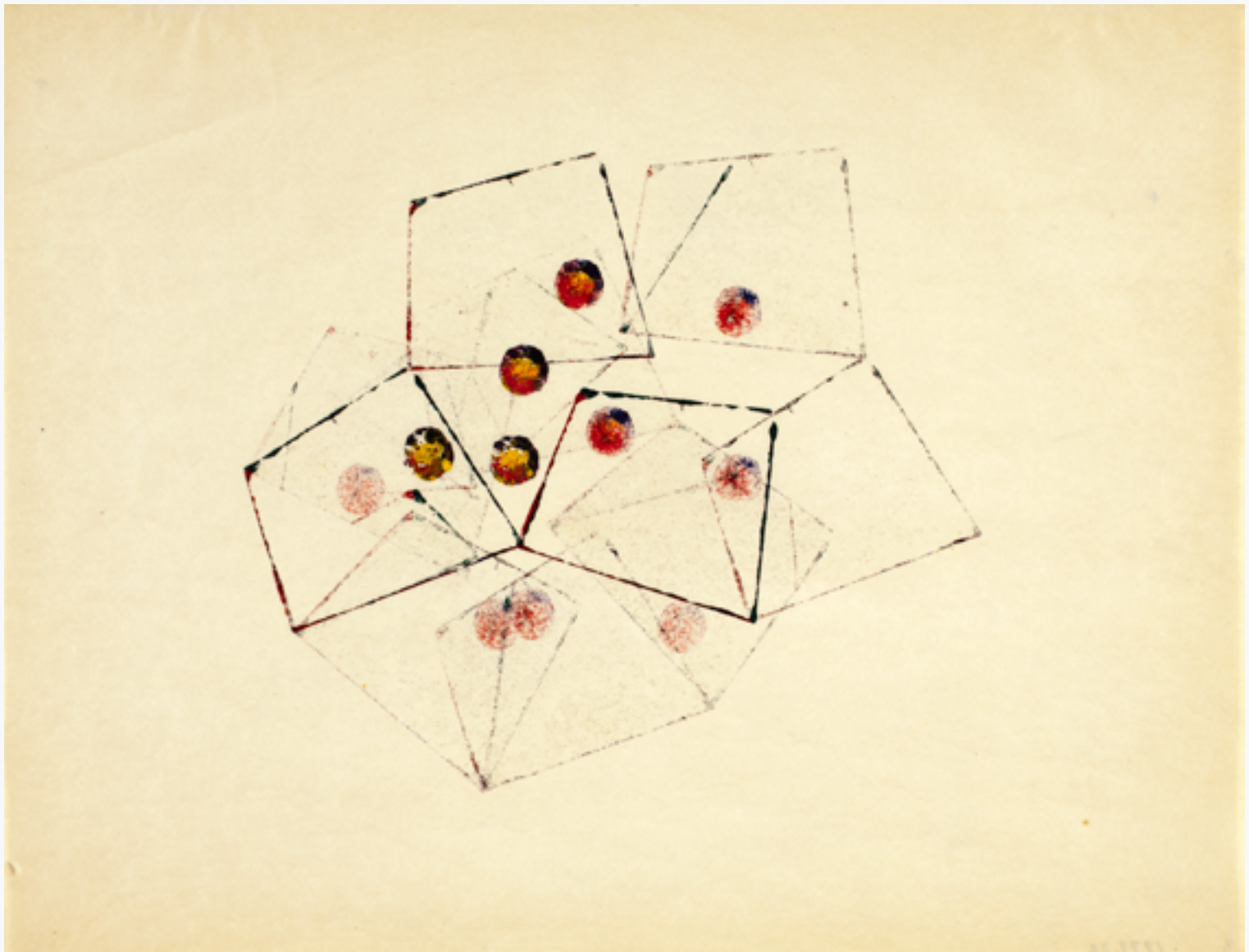
By Kate Eagen Johnson

BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MICH. — The phrase “Modernist design” typically evokes images of machines, mass production and manufactured materials. Its relationship with nature was often contested, if not downright hostile. Yet within the movement, biomorphism ran strong and the artist Harry Bertoia (1915–1978) numbered among the Modernists fascinated by its conceptual and aesthetic implications. He embraced the science of biology — especially the world of amoebae, phytoplankton and other tiny and not particularly charismatic organisms — as an artistic stimulant. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in his jewelry.



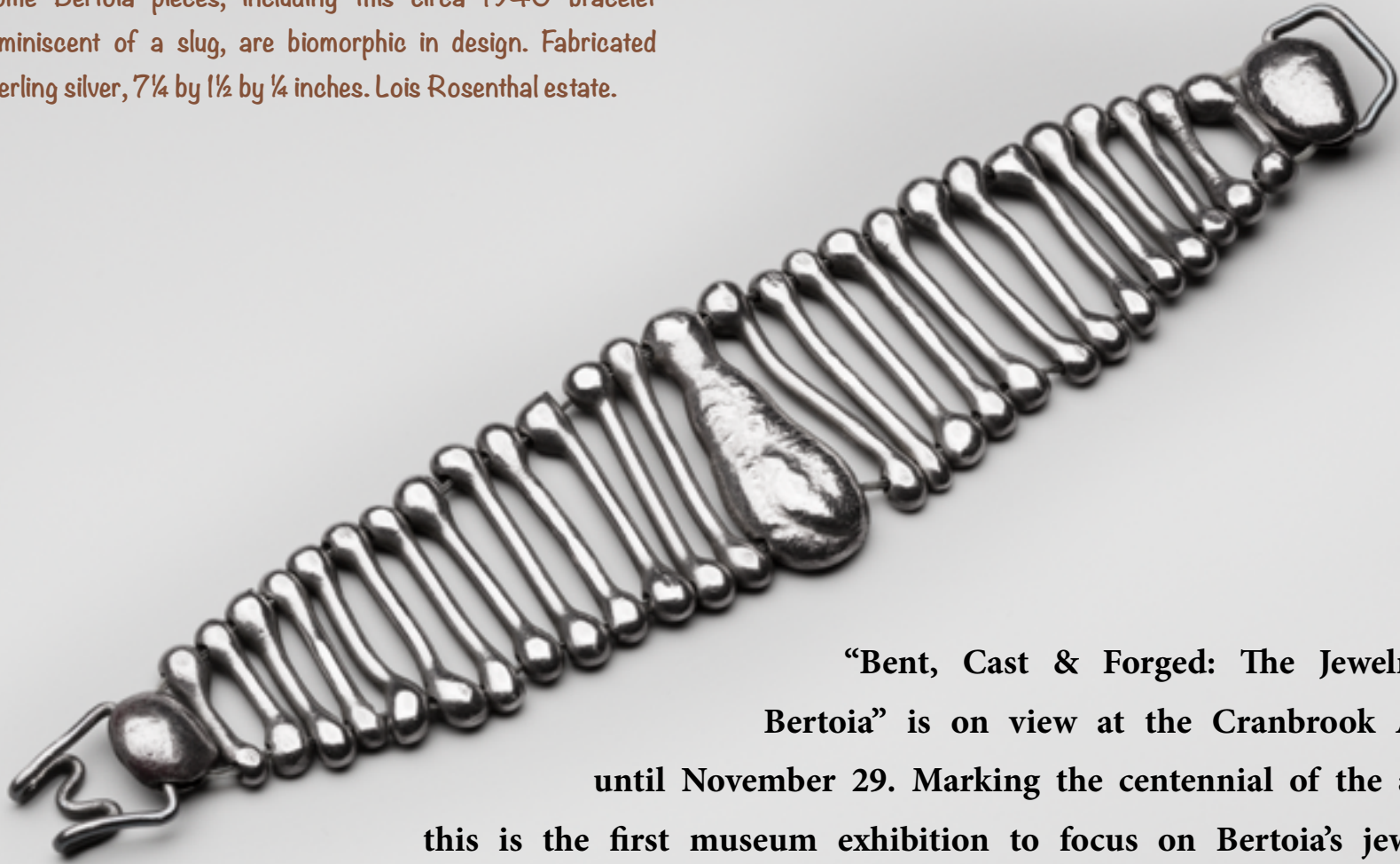
Page Above: Necklace, circa 1940s. Cast, forged and fabricated sterling silver; 9 by 8½ by ¾ inches. Drucker Antiques. —Richard Goodbody photo

Brooch, circa 1943. Welded silver with applied patina and riveted plastic elements, 1⅔ by 3 by ⅜ inches. Leah Gordon Antiques. —Richard Goodbody photo



Untitled monotype (non-objective polychrome block print), circa 1941. Ink on tissue paper, 8½ by 11 inches. Cranbrook Art Museum.

Some Bertioia pieces, including this circa 1940 bracelet reminiscent of a slug, are biomorphic in design. Fabricated sterling silver, 7¼ by 1½ by ¼ inches. Lois Rosenthal estate.



“Bent, Cast & Forged: The Jewelry of Harry Bertioia” is on view at the Cranbrook Art Museum until November 29. Marking the centennial of the artist’s birth, this is the first museum exhibition to focus on Bertioia’s jewelry, and is accompanied by a full-color, 64-page catalog. The multifaceted Bertioia is perhaps best known for his “Diamond” chair, a design he created for Knoll, but he also produced large-scale public sculpture, three-dimensional “sonambient” or tonal pieces, prints, drawings and jewelry.



For her exhibition, Shelley Selim, Cranbrook Art Museum's Jeanne and Ralph Graham assistant curator, has selected 30 examples of Bertoia jewelry and ornament from the collections of Renee Murphy, Kim and Al Eiber, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Leah Gordon Antiques, Drucker Antiques, the estate of Lois Rosenthal and Cranbrook Art Museum. She enhanced the display of jewelry through inclusion of 13 Bertoia monotypes drawn from Cranbrook Art Museum's collection. The aim here is to demonstrate the connections between Bertoia's small-scale metalworking and his printmaking.

Forged and fabricated gold, chain 9 inches long and pendants: $1\frac{3}{4}$ by $1\frac{1}{8}$ by $\frac{1}{16}$ each. Kim and Al Eiber.

Forged silver, woven silver wire and ebony; 4½ by 5½ by 5⁄8 inches. Leah Gordon Antiques. — Richard Goodbody photo

In her thorough and scholarly catalog essay, Selim relates how Italian-born Bertoia came to the United States, specifically to Detroit, as a teenager in 1930. He attended Detroit’s Cass Technical High School and the Art School of the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts. He was accepted at Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1937 and was awarded a full scholarship with the proviso that he run the metal studio...

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