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# **ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

A Thesis Submitted To The  
Faculty Of The College Fine And Applied Arts  
In Candidacy For The Degree Of  
Master In Fine Art

## **ELEMENTS AFFECTING STYLE**

By

**Aminta C. Romaguera**

**June 8, 1989**

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# INTRODUCTION

In order to make a comparison between the elements that affect the changes and the dominant tendencies in the design of jewelry at different times, I will briefly trace its development since the beginning of the twentieth century. This historical background will also allow me to point out how the style of jewelry has changed in the past decades, and the events influencing these changes, while also giving me a better idea of how these have influenced my thesis work.

# **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF JEWELRY DEVELOPMENT DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

At the turn of the twentieth century people as a whole started changing their way of thinking, dressing and acting. These new values encouraged a new vision for the artist. We noticed drastic changes in the field of jewelry design as well as in other areas of art and design.

Industrialization brought the development of new techniques and the use of new materials for jewelry. The work created during this time was mass produced for a new market,--middle and lower class customers for whom jewelry was an unfamiliar luxury. With time, influences from the Industrial Revolution caused impersonal and unimaginative design. In this avalanche of mass production, many artists and craftsmen felt that the human touch -- respect for materials and the satisfaction of a fine finished piece -- were being lost. This dissatisfaction caused a revolt against the rigid styles of mass-production. This revolt

taking place at the end of the century was called the Art Nouveau movement. It appeared in the context of a broad artistic movement that embraced the art world through many different media. Jewelry of this period was inspired by natural forms showing free lines with asymmetrical natural motifs, such as floral patterns, butterflies, dragonflies and female faces. Rene Lalique is considered the most outstanding artist jeweler of this period who created new techniques and highly original designs. The reason he is considered so important is that he exemplified the characteristics of this period. Many of his pieces were made from non-precious materials and he upheld a high quality of craftsmanship.

Lalique, as well as other artists from the Art Nouveau movement, influenced Art and Craft style as we moved into the twentieth century. Artists from the Arts and Crafts Movement wanted to bring art to the masses, producing hand-made jewelry from less expensive materials, yet with the same care and quality used in work for the wealthy and aristocratic clientele. In spite of all the Artists's efforts and the support they did receive, the Arts and Crafts Movement could not survive its lack of wider

commercial appeal.

During the First World War artists were called up to join the armed forces. Precious metals became scarce and people donated their jewelry to the government to help its cause. By this time the jewelry was made of less valuable materials like silver, copper and iron. The end of the First World War was followed by an economic crisis that was felt worldwide. Everywhere the social structure changed dramatically -- women were taking a greater part in public life; speaking out for equality, fighting for the right to vote and engaging in careers. Because of this , women needed an entirely different kind of jewelry to wear on bodies that moved freely and contained active minds. These developments did not occur overnight, but a few years after the war we see reflected in jewelry design the same basic changes in concept that were in other forms of art.

The Bahaus represented a solution to problems faced by the artist after the First World War. Bahaus was a school founded in Germany in 1919. They wanted to return art and craft to its basic formal concept of order and precision. At the same time, Dadaism and Surrealism were introduced to the jewelry field. Their style

was based on illogic, fantasy and non-realism. These movements helped unite jewelry and art.

Art Deco style originated in France between 1920 and 1930. This style emphasized abstract designs and geometric patterns applicable to any medium. The jewelry in this period was very exciting. It introduced geometric forms and brilliant colors. The principal motifs in Art Deco jewelry design were simple geometric forms, often juxtaposed or overlapped, creating complex linear configurations. They incorporated gold, silver, precious and semi-precious stones in their designs.

The 1920's introduced air travel, radio and movies. The court in Europe began to disappear, and with them many of the wealthy aristocracy. People wanted to wipe out the miseries of war, revolution and economic catastrophes. The rich were looking for opulent jewels and duplicating designs from films as well as imitating other styles of fashion. This was an extraordinary era in many ways, full of changes in many fields as well as the economy. In education we see the development of arts and crafts, taught at all levels.

Jewelry design had evolved from the thin delicate creations of



the early 1920's into bolder larger designs. From the 1930's, effects of the depression were felt in luxury items. After the Stock Market Crash of 1929, multiple-use jewelry became popular. These were pieces that had two or more components which could be dismantled and used separately. Color was toned down until black and whites predominated. The spirit of the depression severely reduced the demand for luxury goods.

The Second World War affected costume and fine jewelry trade in the same way the First World War did. Many European costume and fine jewelry factories were closed due to the destruction of the actual buildings and the need for workers in munition factories caused a shortage of skilled labor.

In the next decade, costume jewelry manufacturing was re-established. It was in great demand and it offered the masses inexpensive jewelry with an elegant appearance.

During the 1950's and the 1960's some great artists like Picasso, Max Ernst, Alexander Calder and Dali involved themselves with jewelry. Most were not very serious, except Dali, whose excursions into fine jewelry represented an important contribution to the art. Such jewelry helped to pave the way to a

new generation of artists-jewelers to use the medium as an art form. At the same time other craftsmen experimented with new techniques and materials.

In the early 1960's designs tended to emphasize a pure use of materials, the direct impact of tools and techniques, and a quality of genuinely worked metal. Forms were simple, and classic, and jewelry was relatively flat. Some artists started using non-precious items like wood leather, beads, plastics and vinyl as alternative materials. One of the artists using some of these materials was Wendy Ramshaw. This group brought forth abstract ideas in jewelry rebelling against traditional notions. They promoted purely conceptual pieces.

In the late 1960's the routes followed by hippy travelers opened many eyes to the magnificence of natural materials, such as African string jewelry hung with wood, bone and ivory. Many of the hippies and the flower children who rejected conventional life styles turned to handicrafts as an alternative means of making a living.

Throughout the 1970's the price of gold went up drastically. Because of that designers turned to alternative materials.

Consumers could no longer afford fine jewelry--even silver went up. Precious metals were too expensive and inevitably, as cheaper forms of adornment were sought, many women turned to wearing costume jewelry. Artists and craftsmen, working both in precious and non-precious materials were lionized by new jewelry galleries in cities like London and New York. They promoted hand-crafted jewelry in limited editions as collectable art forms. Craftsmen introduced more and more explicit contents into their work. It was common to find pieces of jewelry that made a definite statement; political, social, cultural or simply nostalgic. The most extreme example of alternative adornment during this decade was provided by the punks who adorned themselves with creative savage safety pins, rubber bands and paper clips. The designers who marketed creative savage jewelry were against craftsmanship, believing that too much emphasis on technique obstructed the spontaneity of a piece.

By the early eighties the costume jewelry market had expanded. Accessories, particularly costume jewelry, gradually assumed greater importance in both women's and men's dress. There is also a greater interest in the revival of craftsmen. This



has grown to such an extent that government subsidies have been provided to help individuals, organizations, workshops and exhibits in their attempts to expand. Many of these exhibits have contributed to the promotion of contemporary jewelry by honoring the most interesting pieces.

This new jewelry has been instrumental in eliminating cliché in designs. The new tendency is the creation of exciting pieces with a definite individual character, which may on many occasions, be worn by men and women. The most noticeable aspect of modern jewelry is the use of different elements and materials and how these are complementary to the human body and to the individual who wears them. Many pieces are seen as mini-sculptures rather than as wearable ornaments.

This historical background shows that there are many influences upon design. They are usually related, to culture, economy, and political happenings during a certain period of time. The mixture of these influences and how they are interpreted by various people of the same time period can cause several diverse movements during that period.

# ELEMENTS AFFECTING THE EVOLUTION OF MY WORK

*"Questions on the morality of materialistic attitudes, on the role of the individual in society at large, on freedom of expression, the economic climate and political situation - all these are factors that change the role, form and material content of jewelry." <sup>1</sup>*

As a growing artist, the objects and elements I am surrounded by, influence the way I perceive life. These influences also have effects on the way I approach my work. Since my surroundings are constantly changing, my work also continually evolves.

It was quite a shock coming from a small City in Puerto Rico to an environment like the one at Rochester Institute of Technology. I was used to more traditional values and people of a similar cultural background. This new environment allowed me to experience many different cultural ideas and ways of looking at life. Language, the transition from Spanish to English, also played a major role. I did not feel comfortable speaking or writing in English, this limited my ability to communicate ideas. The most important stimulus in the environment was the overwhelming amount of technology. I found myself surrounded by computers, large machines and technical processes.

As I familiarized myself with them, they became an integral part of my daily life, influencing my work.

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Cartlidge, Twentieth - Century Jewelry (NewYork: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1985), p. 112.

When I first started the Metalcrafts program at Rochester Institute of Technology, my work was traditional -- representing natural and simple forms. Within a year, my work began evolving into complex ideas with the use of less traditional materials, processes and techniques. The resulting pieces reflected my vision and reaction to the new world I was discovering.

I see a lot of similarities between the evolution of my work and the changes the fashion world has gone through during this century. The factors mentioned previously, explain the elements affecting each of them. In both cases, the modifications are due to the demands of the surrounding environment. In my case, the need to feel a part of the new environment has been as important an influence on my work as the needs of each wave of society has influenced the fashion world. Through my work I reflect my perception of today's world and how it relates to the jewelry field.

# DISCUSSION OF MY WORK

In preparation to make the pieces required for my thesis, I became acquainted with the environment around me. I noticed that the new surroundings were influencing and changing my ideas towards life and my work. I wanted the pieces for my thesis work to reflect my perception of the new world I was trying to assimilate.

I perceive society as a complex group of people. As an individual, there are many conflicts to overcome in trying to be a part of that society. My thesis work represents this struggle and complexity through the use of appropriate materials and processes.

My thesis work consists of a series of three bracelets and six brooches. Each unique in their own form yet related through the main elements and structure of their creation. The pieces are made of sterling silver and anodized aluminum; connected by small brass nuts and bolts. I used, geometric forms with defined edges to represent the technological influences of the new world I was discovering. In my work we can notice a contrast between

the materials. For this I used the opaque appearance of silver with a brass brush finish of anodized aluminum. I also incorporated various textures in the aluminum to complete the elements that are essential to have a finished piece.

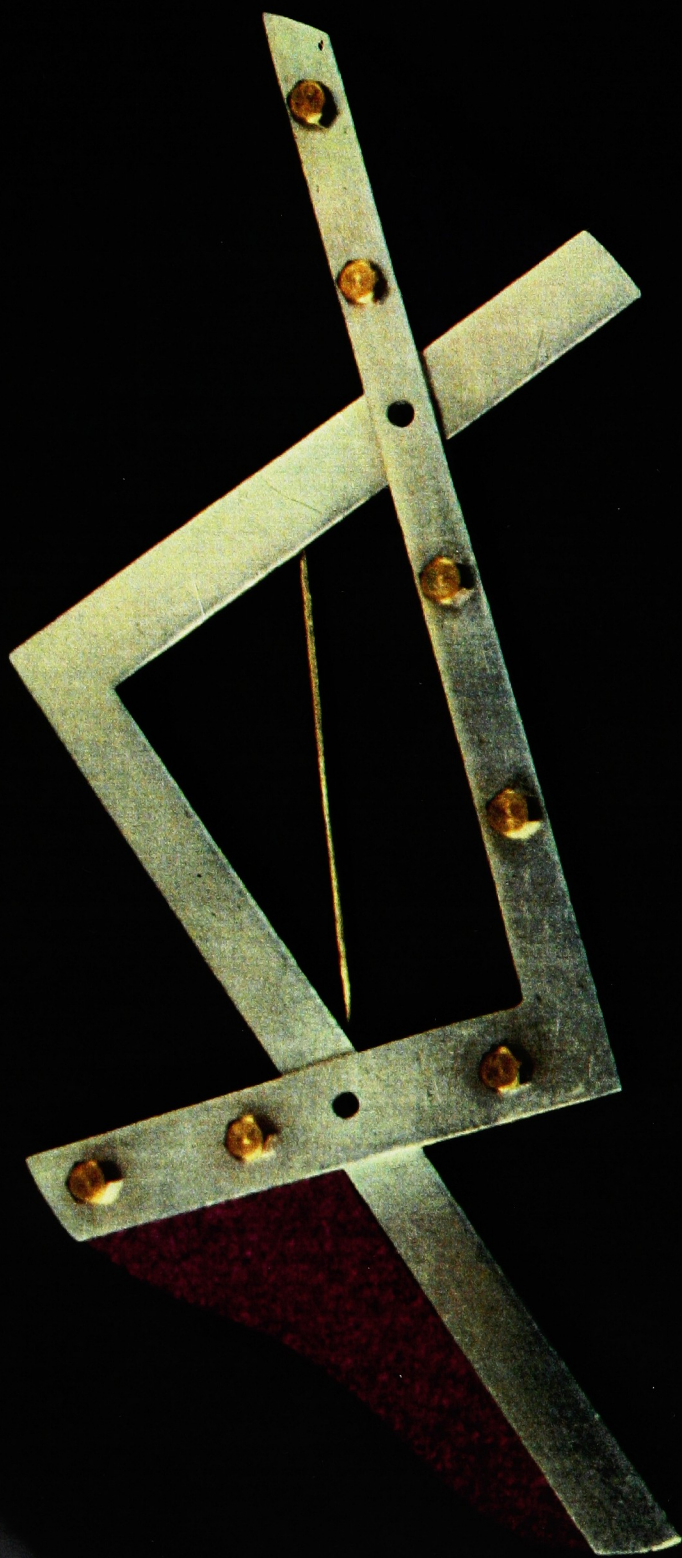
## **CONCLUSION**

Jewelry today is more than what we see in jewelry shops or what people wear. It attempts to identify what makes each individual unique and what reflects his or her personality. Jewelry creates an impact on the wearer and on the people with whom he or she is in contact with. This is why even though we may not define exactly the elements that influence style, human beings and the values they hold, form an essential part of what was, is and will be the development of jewelry as an expression of art.

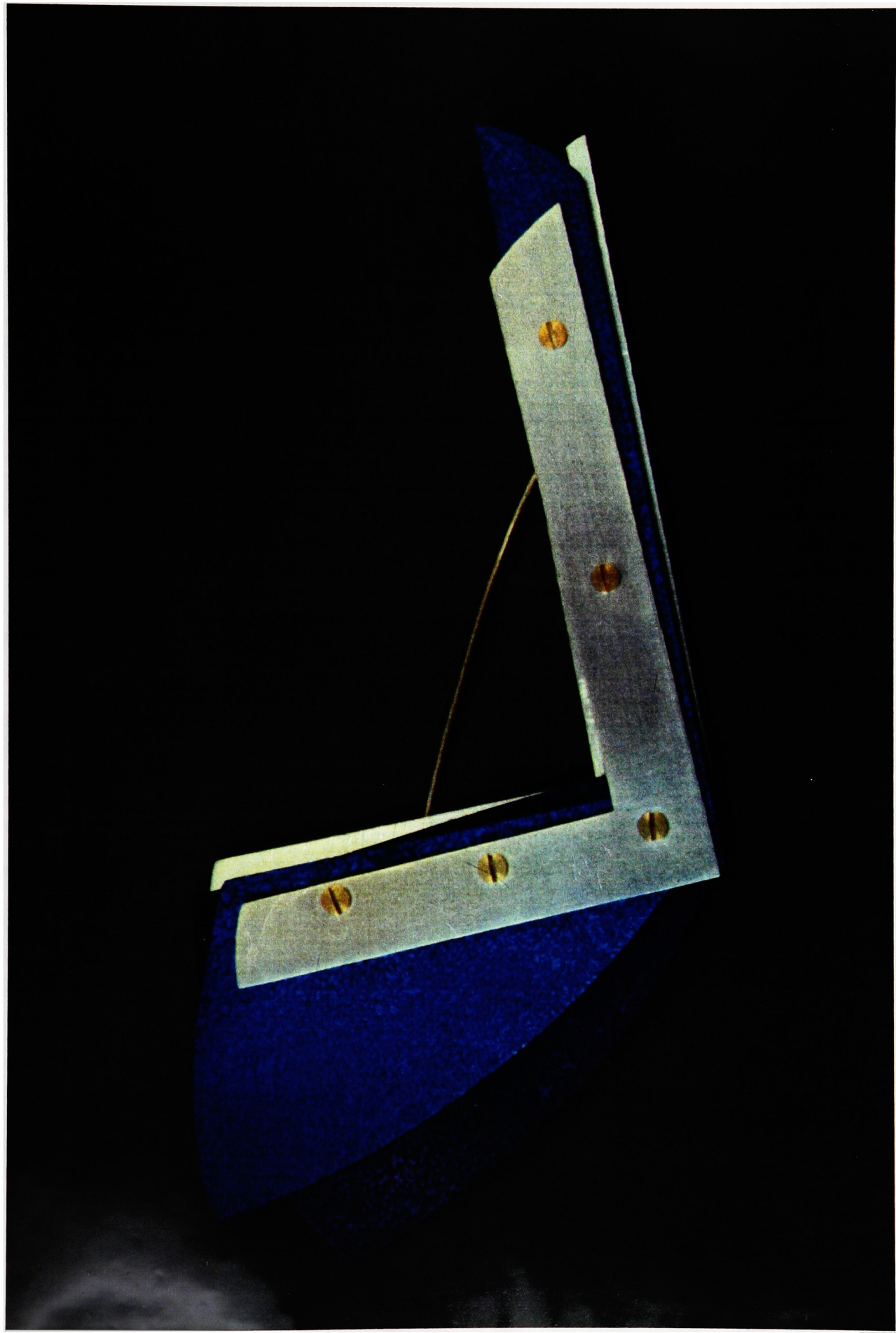
I have expressed my desire to be assimilated into a new culture and how this has influenced my growth as an artist. This has culminated in a decisive collection of work.

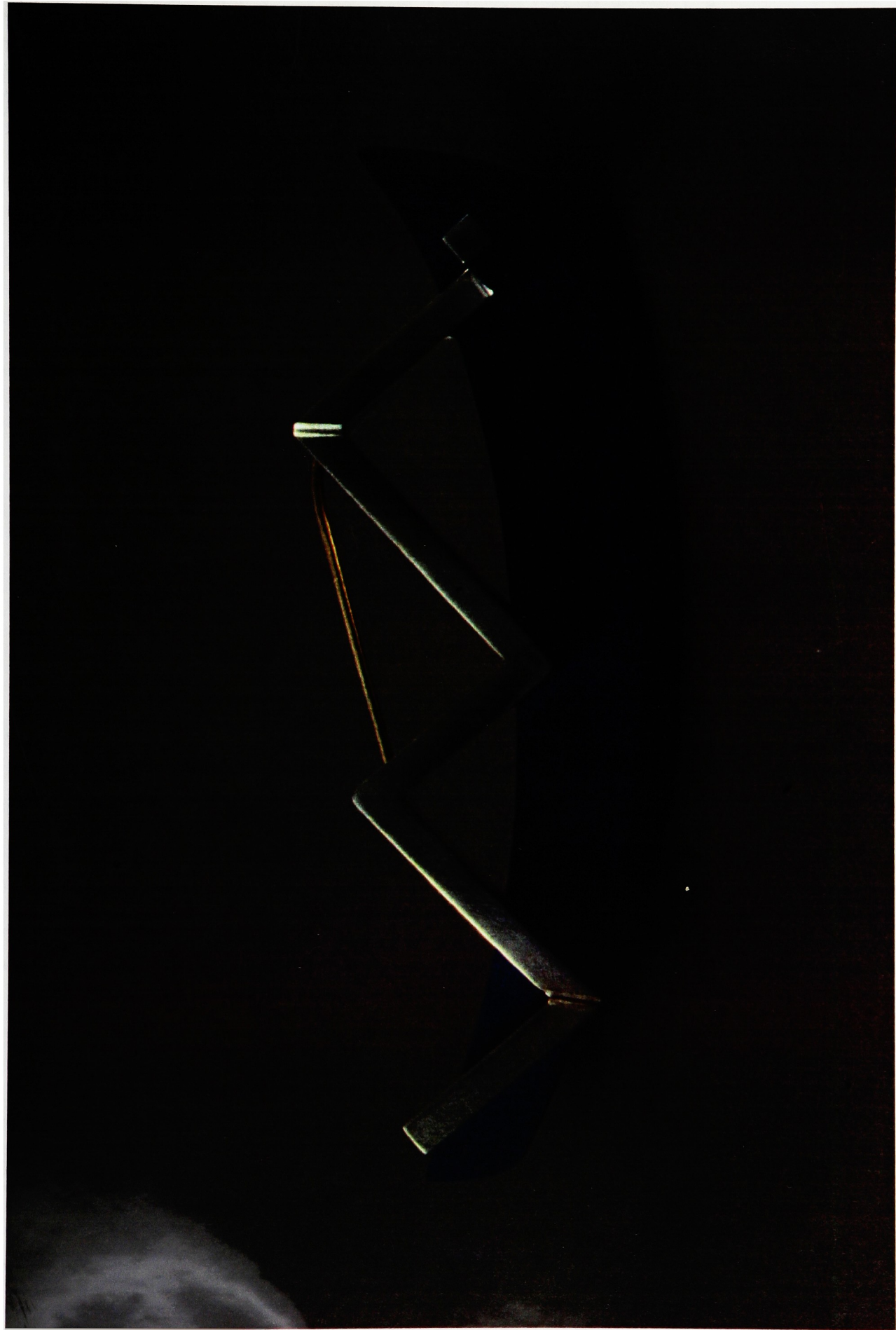
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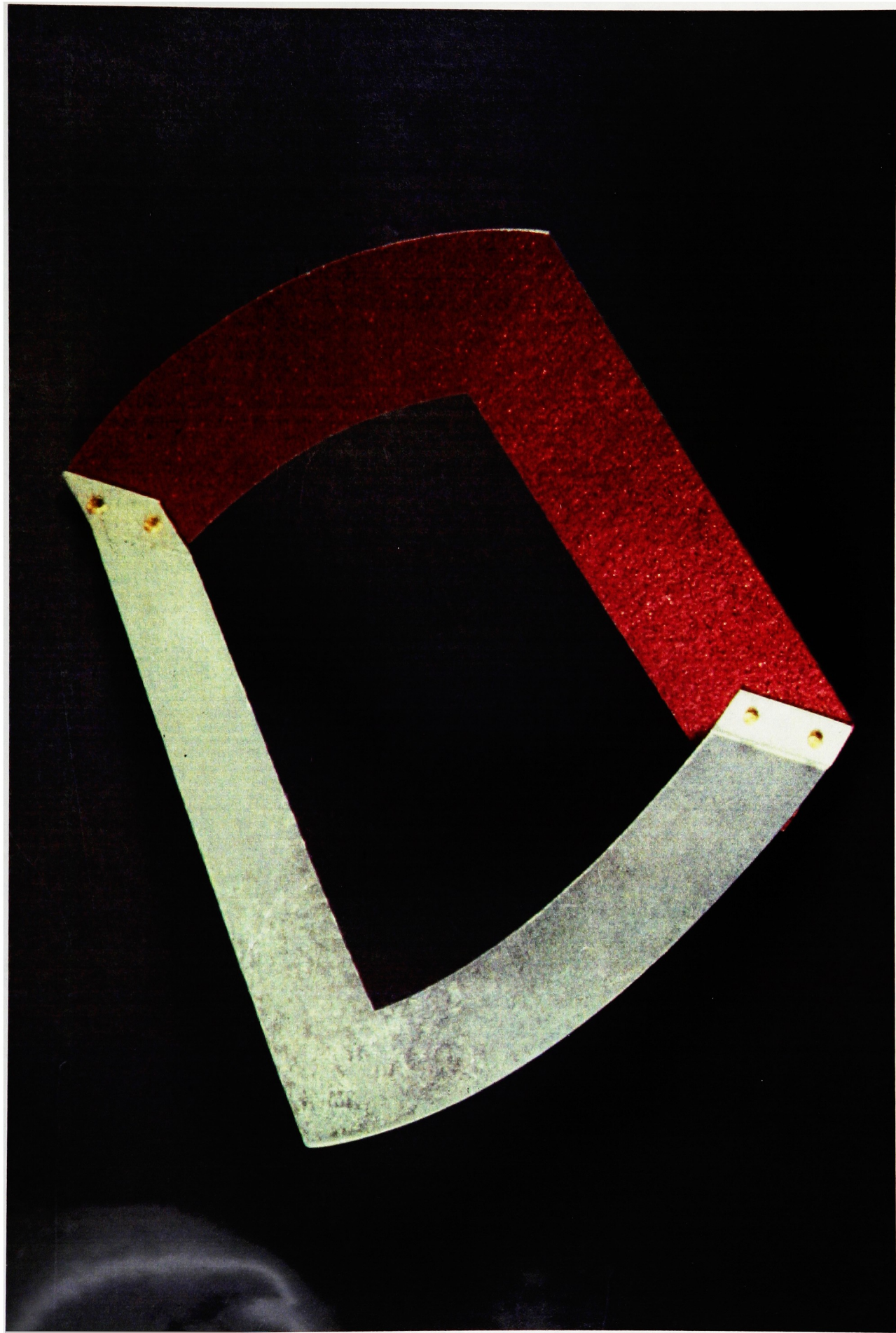












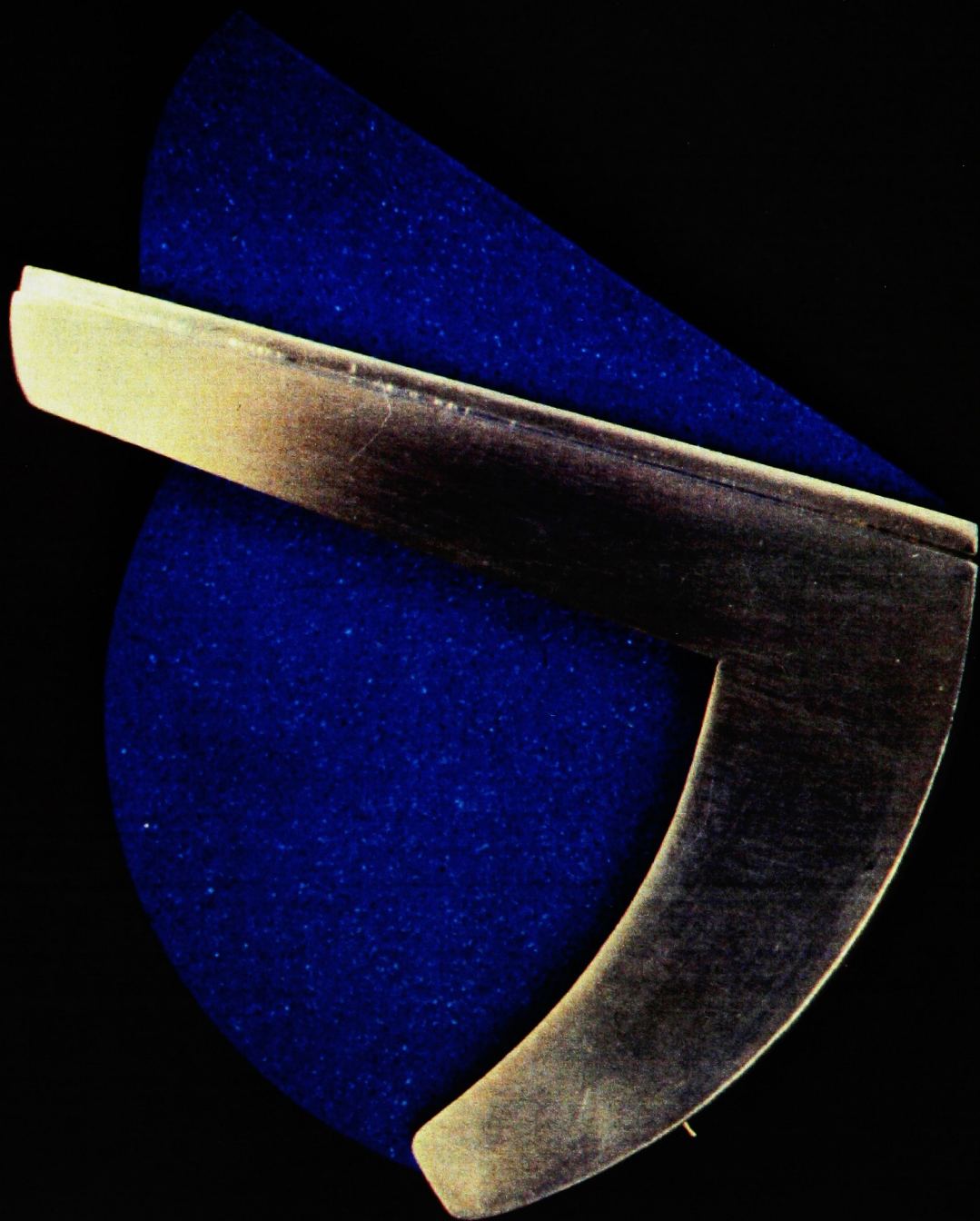




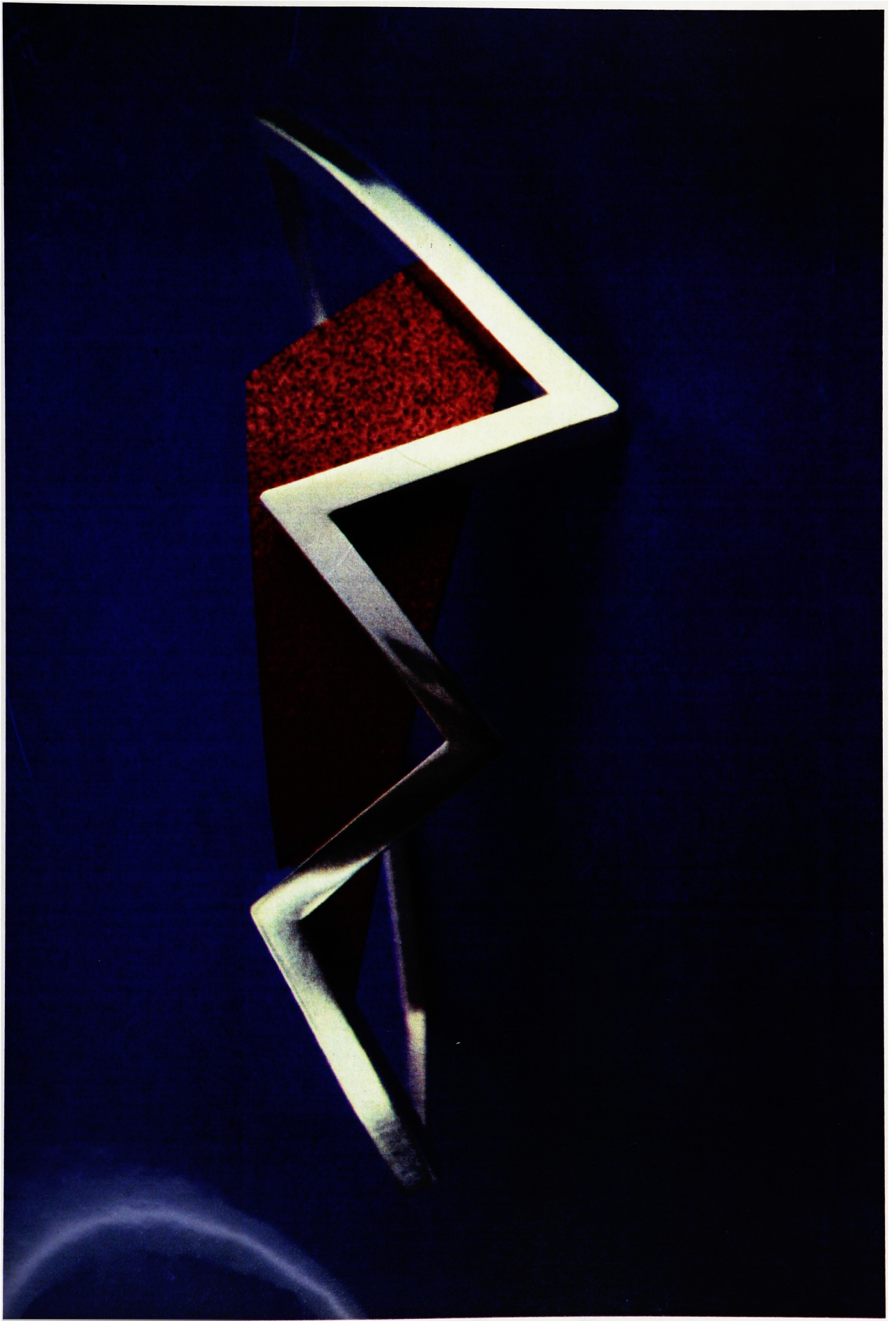














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