

for Derek Jarman's Caravaggio, exhibited at jewellery gallery Silver's and the Victoria & jewellery gallery Silver's and the Victoria & Albert Museum, and designed a birthday pre-sent for the late fashion illustrator Erté.

He still makes jewellery on commission. 'Clients often give me precious objects like talismans, amulets, teeth and hair to work with,' he says. 'Most of my pieces use the real McCoy birds, animals, sperm - which gives them potency. But the jewellery was starting to get so nwearable that it became sculpture."

The latest work consists of innocent-looking little tableaux with a distinctly warped content. Here a stuffed weasel in stiletto heels decapitates a finch, there a monkey ('that's Cupid') writes 'forget-me-not' in pins on a flayed mouse skin - the effect is high Victorian sentimental-ity twisted into scenes from a Gothic nightmare. Or in Costin's words: 'Little fictions, little otherworlds." **OLIVER BENNETT** 

Curiouser And Curiouser, an exhibition of sculpture by Simon Costin, is at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery, 35 Windmill Street, WI, from 6 December to 6 January.

## **SIMON COSTIN** Sculptor and jeweller

Simon Costin achieved notoriety two years ago after exhibiting a necklace in the Royal Festival Hall. Called *Incubus*, it featured five phials of sperm (belonging to the creator and four of his special friends respectively) worked into a delicate filigree structure of silver and copper. The Vice Squad was not amused.

'I did a radio interview and some bigots com-plained, saying that God's precious fluids shouldn't be used for adornment, he explains scornfully. The police tried to get me on a charge of outraging public decency, but as it wasn't graphically obscene, it didn't go to court.' So *Incubus* survived, and appears in an

exhibition this month, Curiouser And Curiouser,

along with various other 'profanities'.

Now based in Bloomsbury, Costin's studio walls are lined with stuffed monkeys, amputated birds' wings, strange and erotic photo-

graphs, antiques and books on deviancy, sex, Objets d'art get death and art. The same themes run through all my work - obsessions, secrets, love and loss of innocence, Costin explains.

At the age of 11 he belonged to the children's Costin's hands club at the Natural History Museum. While the others were out on bracing walks, he majored in taxidermy. His parents were antique dealers: 'As a child I was surrounded by Victorian dolls' houses, penny machines, peep shows and toys.' The Costin aesthetic was forming. He studied theatre design at Wimbledon School Of Art, then built a reputation on brooches made from fish heads, dead lizards, birds' wings and other animal bits, the material gleaned from pet shops, friends and old curiosity outlets, 'and the cat brought me the odd pigeon'.

Discovered by Liberty, his organic accessories went down the catwalk with fashion designers such as Arkitect and John Crancher ('not a good time, I'm afraid. Fashion doesn't give you the chance to develop ideas').

Then he designed the period-style jewellery

ser in Sir aside Tom Cruise when Dick Bradsell (right) is mixing the