METAL ARTS

The Journal of the Metal Arts Society of Southern California

Jan Feb 2009

Mixed Media Techniques for Jewelers and Metalsmiths

With Diane Falkenhagen

January 31st & February 1st, 2009El Camino College - Torrence

$140 for MASSC members

$165 for Non MASSC members

In this fun and experimental class, Diane will lead students in an exploration of a variety of non-conventional materials, surface treatments and cold-joining methods as they relate to jewelry and small-object making. Emphasis will be placed on mixed-media fabrication strategies and creative solutions to the technical challenges of combining unlike materials and diverse techniques.

Students will be encouraged to create samples, not finished pieces, of the following techniques: Eggshell Mosaic; image transfers on metal and on polymer clay; surface treatments using fine art media such as paint, pigmented hard wax, colored pencil, metal leaf, art markers; and cold-joining techniques using screw threads and advanced rivets. For many students, highlights of the class are learning about image transfers and how to make their own nuts and bolts.

Read more about Diane's workshops and see images of her work at: www.dianefalkenhagen.com

This workshop will be filled via the MASSC lottery system with MASSC members receiving priority. To put your name in the lottery, contact Ketarah Shaffer by January 4th. Everyone will be contacted on January 5th with the lottery results. Send an email to ketarah@earthlink.net and put MASSC in the subject line. Or phone: Day 714-556-9286 Evening 949-643-9693. Please ask for Ketarah if phoning.

8 Sales Secrets of Successful Artists

Many of our MASSC members are in the business of being creative and fabricate jewelry or other works of art for retail purchase. Contrary to what you may think, our industry isn't dead in the water because of the current economy.

During 2008, I've encountered many artists who are selling their work at the same volume or higher than last year. Why are they succeeding? What are they doing to keep their boat afloat? The successful artists who I've spoken with were kind enough to pass on some business practices that they implemented for 2008:

1. They've taken the time to look at the current market and buying trends for craft and wearable art.
It is so important to know your market and what they want. Right now, a downturned economy prompts our customer base to seek out value and uniqueness in hand made pieces.

2. They've analyzed their sales for the past years and calculated median price points.
If you see that price points have dropped then it's time to re-evaluate your inventory. What can you create that will appeal both aesthetically and price wise to a changing market?

3. They planned unique and beautiful pieces to meet current price points.
This is long term planning for your customer relationships. You are not giving a discount but you are providing something more affordable that is still unique and precious to the customer. I can't begin to tell you how many artists have expressed that their relationship with a good customer begins over a small but unique piece and grows over the years to include expensive one-of-a-kinds.

4. They featured at least 50% of their inventory as fresh work.
Customers will come back each year if you give them something new to look at. Yes, having some older material displayed is good too. Some customers come back hoping to see those earrings or the bracelet they missed buying last year. The thing you don't want is to hear someone commenting "They always have the same thing each year. Why even stop and look?"

5. They did not offer discounts to customers.
Your work is worth your price on the tag. If you have a variety of price points within your display and plenty of eye catching merchandise, the thought of a discount won't be an issue.

6. They had a special story for each piece they created.
Every customer loves a story behind the piece they purchase. It makes the piece special. It gives the piece value. The customer sees it a something that will be treasured.

7. They remained calm and didn't knee jerk react to the economy.
Rather than fight the system, figure out where you can fit in. Research, analyze and plan for your retail or wholesale year. Make informed decisions about production, gallery selection and retail shows.

8. To put the cherry on the cake, one artist added this comment: "Art is purchased with the heart and not necessarily with the pocket book." It's something to keep in mind when you create your next pieces and develop some fantastic stories for them.

Corliss Rose
President, MASSC

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MASSC serves the needs and interests of artists working in metals and provides an environment for the exchange of information, instructional workshops, demonstrations, lectures, and panel discussions. Annual dues Sept 1-Aug 31); Regular Member, $30; Family, $45; Full-time Student $20. Please add $5 to your annual dues if you would like to receive a printed copy of the MASSC newsletter. All others will receive the newsletter via email. Membership forms are available at www.MASSConline.com

Tricks & Tips

from John Rose of 2Roses

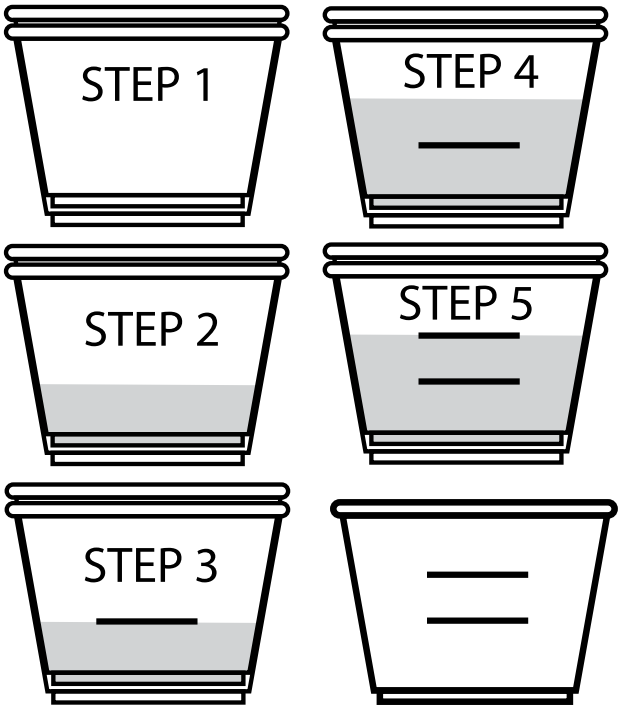
Fast & Easy Precision Resin Mixing

Manufacturers suggest measuring by weight but this is usually not practical to achieve accurate mix ratios for most small scale art applications.

Clear plastic disposable "dosage" cups are cheap and available at any drug store. They come in a range of sizes that are perfect for most small art projects. We will assume that you want to end up with 1 ounce of resin to demonstrate the process. To set up your measuring system you will need two dosage cups.

1. Place one dosage cup inside the other, make sure they fit snugly and are on a flat level surface.
2. With a measuring spoon or measuring cup fill the inner dosage cup with one half-ounce of water.
3. Mark the outer cup at the level of the water.
4. With a measuring spoon or measuring cup add another half-ounce of water.
5. Make a second mark at the level of the water.

To use your measuring system place a fresh dosage cup inside your marked cup and fill with resin and hardner to the marks. I have a set of marked cups for a calibrated range of batch sizes.



Got a tip or trick you want to share ?
-send it to DukeSprue@massconline.com

Victoria Lansford is truly a multi-talented artist. The day before our workshop on Russian Filigree she taught a workshop on rings. She is also extremely talented in chasing and repousse as well as granulation, and chains. She said her influences began with an Egyptian board game as a child. Inspiration comes where you least expect it. She is an excellent instructor as the information just

Victoria

flowed the entire time. There was an incredible generosity with it.

Filigree has two components. First you construct the frame out of thick wire, then you fill it with very fine twisted wires (filler wires). These wires are much smaller than the frame so they set down below the top. This is not only for looks, but also to protect these very fine wires. A contrast in both color and light between the frame and the filler wires is desired. This is done using twisted wire for the filler wires to get the light play against the smooth high polished surface of the frame wires. To achieve the color contrast, sterling was used for the frame, and fine silver was used for the filler wires. In gold you would use two different Karats (18 and 22) to achieve this contrast.

Two types of solder are used. We used hard paste solder to construct our frames and a homemade solder for our wires. The solder is also available for sale on her website. **www.victorialansford.com**. The solder came as a block, but you use it as a coarse powder. We had to file down the block and use the powder for soldering our filler wires. A cheap coarse file was suggested. This caused grief for a few participants as they got iron particles in their solder causing some pieces to turn pink in the pickle. We learned not to use rusty files, and to be careful to avoid the vise while you file.

We stared out by making our own filigree wire. What is available out there was not suitable for our project. We wound it so tight that you had to anneal it in the process. You don't want to see a diagonal twist, you want the twist almost straight across. We then partially flattened our filigree wire in a rolling mill. This helps it to sit side by side, fit snugly in the frame, and solder better. The frames may be made of square wire or slightly flattened round wire. If you want to put hard curves in it, then you will want to use the square wire. For more gentle curves the flattened round wire was suggested. Obviously you must pick one, and then stick with it for the entire frame. For our projects we used 16g for the frame and 26g (before twisting) for the filler wires. You may find for smaller objects that you will want to use 18g for the frame, and 28g (before twisting) for the filler wires. These ratios were suggested to keep the twisted wires down below the level of the frame.

We then constructed our frames. The more frame you have, the less wear the filler wires will get. The frames were soldered with hard paste solder in the standard fashion. The solder is put on the back to keep the front pretty. If you get too much solder in some joints you need to clean them out using a saw blade as a file. This helps the filler wires to 'stick'. The frame must be flat before inserting the filigree, so after soldering, we gave them a good whack between steel blocks. Oh how good it can feel to whack something now and again in the studio… We not only had permission, but it was required.

We then inserted our filigree wires with the frame right side up. We shaped our filigree wires with fine tipped tweezers, fingers, and thumbs. Pliers are tough on the fragile wires. The wires need to fit in with tension so you can actually pick the frame up and turn it over before soldering (You insert them right side up, and solder from the back). To measure the right size we marked the spot with our tweezers and cut a smidge larger. You then need to press the wire all the way down and snug in the frame. This process did yield some vocalizations in the workshop. It is easiest if you start with the plain end of the wire (one end usually has an eye on it) in a 'v' somewhere on the frame. It is difficult to get tension in the middle of a curve. It is also best to solder every few. To solder the filigree wires you had to turn your piece back over onto a charcoal block. It is no fun to turn over a filled piece to have half of them fall out. We then used 'liquidy' paste flux, and applied the 'shavings' of solder. We scooped some on the end of our tweezers and tapped it over the wires. You need to solder wire to wire, wires to frame, and the eyes of each wire so they don't snag later. This is soldered with a reducing flame on a charcoal block. The charcoal block helps to reflect the heat back for better soldering. If things fell forward you turned it over, reheated, and pushed it back again.
Once the filigree is soldered it can be shaped. Sometimes you will hear the wires pop. If you do, you must stop and re-solder before continuing with the shaping. Stones, findings and 'extras' like balls are soldered on using easy solder at the end.

Polishing was shown using knife edge silicone wheels. She liked to use the side of the wheels so she did not 'dig' into the frame. She brought it all the way to a high shine with different wheels. Stay off the filigree wires or you will flatten them. After a good polish you want to raise the fine silver by depletion gilding. This is to give the filigree wires that truly white appearance. After that you set any stones and once again give any polish needed. She likes blue rouge on the edges of the frame.

Lansford

If all this has peaked your curiosity and you want to learn more she does have a video out. This can be purchased from her web site.

Workshop Review by Brenda Wey

Metal Arts students in Southern California have many choices of instructors and curriculum. This series spotlights the instructors, how they approach teaching and their own creative work. We hope this information provides students with a better insight into the opportunities offered by different schools.

Michael Dale Bernard teaches metal arts at Long Beach City College. He spoke to John Rose.

Please, tell us a little about yourself, who you are, what you do and how you came to be involved in the metal arts.

I am a Chicago, Illinois transplant. I earned my BFA in metalsmithing from the University of Illinois in 1999. I completed the metals MFA program at California State University in Long Beach in 2007.

I originally took a metals course as an elective in 1996. I wanted to be a graphic designer. The physical connection with the tools and materials found in the studio won me over from the virtual experience of design on a computer screen.

While in Illinois, I was exposed to traditional silversmith techniques as well as more industrialized processes such as electroforming, anodizing, and powder-coating.

I began teaching in graduate school and firmly believe in the potential that each student represents. Seeing a student explore and achieve a new skill is extremely rewarding, for the teacher and the student. It is an enabling moment that opens doors of all sorts.

What is jewelry and metal arts today, and where do you see it going in the future?

Jewelry and Metal arts is in a transition and I think it has been the entire time I've been a part of the field. Maybe that transition started the moment the word 'arts' replaced the word 'craft'. The scope of the field is broader than ever. More materials and working methods are absorbed all the time. The jewelry label seems to be expanding to the diversity of fashion. Metal arts seem to have the freedom that has come to the field of sculpture. It is difficult to define a field that was once defined by materials boundaries, but is no longer. Ultimately, I am encouraged that Jewelry as adornment is continuing to move away from a symbol of status and toward a sign of self-expression. The increasing presence of concept and art dialogue in Metal Arts continues to elevate the intellectual aspects of our trade to the same level of importance as we have always held skill. The most intriguing segment of the field, however, is what is happening between these two bookends; sculptural-scale art pieces that embrace alternative materials and reference the body, but are not necessarily practical as adornment.

How does your vision of the metals arts play out in the curriculum you offer.

First, I try to recall all the projects that were given to me as a student that made me think "what in the world am I going to do with one of those when I am done?" I try to tailor my projects in a way that promotes creative freedom while emphasizing exactly what the technical requirements are and why they are important. There are always the basics that need to be learned and accomplished, but I encourage my students to really take ownership of their designs and really try to satisfy themselves while addressing the project requirements.

I believe in a progression of skills above all, but designs can be adapted to take advantage new skills. I try to embrace the radically different responses that each of my students has to the projects that are proposed to them in class. I am excited by a passionately-presented, off-beat idea and am a big proponent of those that relish in the grey-area. Artists need to explore. I want my students to be able to feel around and realize that there are always creative solutions to projects. Active discovery, energetic design, and the mastery of new skills bring incredible artistic freedoms.

What is the purpose jewelry in the 21st century?

Commercial jewelry will always have a tinge of status to it. Art Jewelry, however, doesn't necessarily serve the same

SPOTLIGHT ON THE METAL ARTS PROGRAM AT LONG BEACH CITY COLLEGE

An Interview with Michael Dale Bernard

purpose. For that matter, purpose may be the wrong thing to investigate. I believe that the making and wearing of hand-made jewelry fulfills a passion, not a purpose. Individualism is a big deal in our culture, but in reality people aren't that different. Commercial suppliers offer ways to customize your belongings and attire, but for someone who wants to be truly unique, hand-made is the answer. I don't believe it is a movement of non-conformists; rather a different view of what is high-end. I suppose the purpose of Art Jewelry is to satisfy those who value people, skill, creativity and time more than the rarity of a material.

What are the sources and inspiration for your work?

Process is at the core of my current work, both in the manipulation of imagery and the development of art object. My work includes wearable art pieces and small sculpture that draw on the imagery and tools of urban street artists and the language of metal artists working in architectonic styles. I am inspired by artists working with graphic images, complex structures, and alternative materials and processes.

I am drawn to instructional diagrams, transit maps, warning striping, and logos. I would rather take a bus to brainstorm than to get somewhere. All the signage that directs us makes me wonder. I am attracted to ornate fabric and wallpaper patterns. I love to graphically break them down and mix them with the more purposeful images I see around me. It is an act of cross-breeding the informative with the decadent.

What materials do you prefer to work with, and why?

I work with several materials in combination for their respective qualities. I utilize a lot of aluminum for its light weight and ease of cutting, stainless steel for components that I do no want to tarnish, silver for complex components that must be soldered or cast. For color I prefer paint, powdercoating, and the use of alternative materials like silicone, vinyl, and formica. I value sourced materials that I can prevent from ending up in the landfill. The act of gathering materials is important to me and allows me to practice visualizing the potential of what others discard.

What challenges and opportunities do you see for metal artists entering the field?

The challenge for new artists entering our field is the complex world of self-promotion and networking in a digital world. Programs are primarily charged with teaching students how to make jewelry, not how to make themselves into visible artists. The trouble is that there are many varying definitions of the phrase "in the field." Many students and artisans associate themselves with the Metals field, but when issues such as promotion, networking, and critique arise, they are quick to dismiss them as unimportant to their self-betterment. They don't really want to get "in." These subjects are seen by many as elements of the Art world, not the Jewelry and Metals world, when in fact they are just obvious aspects of the professional stage of any field. Regardless of why an artist makes work, if the work is good, they should share it.

•How does your curriculum prepare students for those challenges and opportunities?

I try to incorporate as many opportunities as possible for my students to explore the aspects of promotion and networking on a very casual level. I emphasize the importance of critique in class and the development of a personal feedback circle outside of school. I also encourage my students to incorporate any digital knowledge that they may already have. Skills from drawing programs, to photography, to blog and website design all can be adapted to both creative and promotional ends. I provide my students with digital slides of their work and encourage them to start an online portfolio. I provide all my visual slides through online photo services and try to make my students see the computer as just another tool that deserves a place in the studio!

Do you have a work philosophy or concept?

Philosophy: There is nothing more impressive than practiced and mastered skill. It shows dedication, passion, and true growth. Anyone can buy tools, but a much smaller percentage actually affords the time to master them.

Concept: Keep the ornate in perspective without sliding too far into the decadent.

See Michael Dale Bernard's work at:
www.dvatelier.com

See Michael's Student's work at
www.flickr.com/photos/csulb_metal

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1644 S. Clementine St. Anaheim CA 92802

Upcoming Workshops

January 31st- Feb 1st, 2009
Diane Falkenhagen - Mixed Media Techniques For Jewelers

May 2009 Demo Day

September 2009
Kathy Palochak - Tufa Casting

Barbara Minor Enameling Workshop Back By Popular Demand!

Barbara Minor has been invited out to do another enameling workshop for MASSC because there was a large wait list for her previous workshop. The workshop dates are March 7th & 8th, 2009 at LBCC. The price will be the same as before $130. There are a few extra spaces to fill and those will be filled on a first come basis. If you are interested in attending this event, please contact Ketarah Shaffer at ketarah@earthlink.net or Day 714-556-9285, Evening 949-643-9693. Please ask for Ketarah if calling.