

Maker Magic

How To Develop **Your** Voice
Designing Art Jewelry



By Connie Fox

Maker Magic

How To Develop Your Voice
Designing Art Jewelry

By Connie Fox

Copyright © 2014 by Connie Fox

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, mechanical or electronic, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission from the author. Reviewers may quote brief passages.

All jewelry images are shown with the permission of the artist unless the jewelry is in the collection of the author.

While all attempts have been made to verify the information provided in this publication, the author/publisher does not assume any responsibility for errors, omissions, or contrary interpretations of the subject matter herein. The author and publisher are not responsible for any injuries, losses or other damages that may result from the use of the information from this book.

Please follow appropriate health and safety measures when working with materials and equipment. As this is not a book on fabrication of jewelry, few safety guidelines are covered. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions and seek professional guidance in the use of materials and equipment.

Self-published by Connie Fox, 2014.
If you have any questions, please contact:

Connie Fox
1761 Hotel Circle South, Suite 208
San Diego, CA 92108
Email: <mailto:connie@conniefox.com>

Editor: Jonna Faulkner

Art Director: Christine Shearer

Technical Support: Jim Fox

Cover: "Wooing," by Robin Kranitzky and Kim Overstreet.
See Chapter 8, Collaborative Designer

Introduction

*"The one thing that you have that nobody else has is you. Your voice, your mind, your story, your vision. So write and draw and build and play and dance and live as only you can." **Neil Gaiman***

If you are making jewelry without the benefit of design information, you are a bird trying to fly with one wing. I know, because in the beginning I was clueless. At some point during the process of gathering technical skills, I realized I couldn't design. Having no art background, I rarely came up with a composition that was pleasing to my eye. The colors were wrong, the constant symmetry made me yawn - there was no life to my work. This early frustration led me to study design, and later to write this book.

If you resonate with this story, know that you can transform your work into art that is deeply satisfying and visually pleasing. I bet you too have taken your share of classes, seen plenty of instructional videos, and have an abundance of jewelry books on your shelves. You are doing what you thought was necessary to develop your skills.



Jane Adam: "Large Orange Leaf Necklace," 2013. 33 leaves of dyed anodized aluminum with stainless steel wires. Photo: Joel Degen. Example of art jewelry.

The problem is that technical instruction rarely teaches you how to compose a piece of jewelry, nor does it teach you how to put your heart, your thoughts and your experiences into your work. You need design information to acquire a second wing. When you have it, you will fly.

I am going to show you how to design. I have made this book as straightforward as possible, and, in truth, you don't have to learn it all. Sometimes a minor adjustment will make a big difference. But, why not learn it all? Be as good with your design strategies as you are in making jump rings, setting stones, making canes, or stringing beads.

I'm Making Art Jewelry?

It was some time before I realized I was making "art jewelry." Although I could see the difference between my work and fine jewelry, I lacked an understanding of the difference. At its core, art jewelry is self-expressive and provides an open door to using virtually any material that supports this expression. Fine jewelers focus on using precious materials such as gold, silver, diamonds, rubies, etc. The "value" has more to do with the arrangement of precious materials than with what is being communicated through the design.

Contemporary art jewelry is rooted in the work of René Lalique from the late 1800s. René veered from tradition when he broadened the scope of materials used in his jewelry. Enamel, baroque pearls, horn and coral were among the materials he brought to the bench. René, along with many other jewelers influenced by modernism and abstractionism, helped lay the foundation for the art jewelry movement.

Example of Art Jewelry

Jose Marín's "Red Maple Leaf" ring is an example of art jewelry. It is his intention to convey the intangible characteristics of nature in his work. Focusing primarily on botanical themes, he wants the viewer to experience joy, nostalgia, sensuality, and even the smell of nature.



Jose Marín: "Red Maple Leaf," ring. Titanium. Example of art jewelry.

Design Skills Will Fuel Your Expression

Oral language is made up of words and a system for arranging them. Design is a visual language. The “words” are visual, such as “line” or “color.” These visual elements are then arranged in such a way to tell a story, inspire a feeling, or convey a message the artist intends. The more adept you are at speaking design language, the more successful your artistic message will be.

Using design language is not an inscrutable ability unique to gifted or highly trained artists. It is learned. And best of all, even if you improve your fluency in just one area, you can see a difference in your work. I repeat this refrain to encourage you. Years ago, I taught a design class in which one of the students was dressed entirely in beige. Even her jewelry was colorless. With a little nudging from the class, she returned the next day wearing a turquoise top and a newly made, bright and sassy necklace. From then on, this one change, adding color, became central to her creative expression.



Sabrina Meyns: “Untitled Flower Brooch,” 2011.
Handmade paper seeds, oxidized silver and steel.
Photo: Sylvain Deleu. Example of art jewelry.

How Do You Know When You Are Doing Good Work?

At some point in your life as a jewelry maker you will ask yourself how good your work is. The problem with answering this question has to do with that tricky little word “good.” By “good” do you mean your work is well known? It has achieved financial success? Earned you a degree? Galleries seek you out? While these external achievements might mean your work is evolved, I think other criteria are more useful:

You Push Through Your Own Creative Limitations

It takes courage and persistence to move through your limits to creativity. Fear of failure, fear of success, a preference for safe ground, and an endless array of blocks can stifle creative energy. A certain amount of pluck is needed to achieve your full potential.

You Respect Your Creative Process

You may be a maker of different stripes, but they are your stripes and you respect them.

Your Work Is an Authentic Representation of Your Sensibilities

Does your work spring from you? Even when you are inspired by other jewelry, do you transform it to express your voice?

You Have Choices Available that the Study of Design Provides

There is no need to create jewelry in the shade or with one arm tied behind your back. Delve into your work confident that you have a full palette of possibilities to manifest your intention.

You Strive To Develop Sound Jewelry Making Techniques

Inspired design is not going to work if the technique is wanting. It is when both technique and design are well executed that a piece of jewelry sings.

You Learn

Devote yourself to improving both your fabrication and design techniques on a regular basis.

You Work

Ruudt Peters, a well-known jewelry designer from the Netherlands, admits that he was not always well known in the jewelry world. When asked by a student at a San Diego State University lecture how to be as “good” as he is, Ruudt said, “Work -- when you make one design, make it again. Only stop when the design is no longer improving.” He didn’t mention marketing or developing salesmanship, he focused on the simple act of working.

Reaching for external validation can inhibit growth and take you down a path that can be disappointing once you reach the end of your trails. The criteria I have listed are not as concrete as getting your work into a gallery. They have to do with the quality of how you work. When you take this route, you are training yourself to be a skilled artist, a process that can be profoundly rewarding. I do understand the need for financial support, and this must be addressed in practical ways; just don't stomp all over your creative spirit to pay the bills.

My “21 Day” Book

I took the plunge to write this book after reading *How to Write a Non-Fiction eBook in 21 days – that Readers Love!* by Steve Scott. That was a year ago. Twenty-one is pretty close to 360. Uh, maybe I missed something.... The title's hook may have grabbed me initially, but it is my passion for this topic that carried me through. I look at street signs and reconfigure them. I plan to redecorate my house often and can't afford all the things my mind would like to do. I appreciate a well-appointed doctor's office (though I've seen only one). When I complimented the ophthalmologist, he was thrilled at my appreciation and chatted tirelessly about the design process. Should I really have had to pay the bill?



Beyond my own enjoyment, I want you to have this knowledge. The information is powerful - it can transform your work in ways you had not dreamed possible.

Yael Friedman: *Untitled ring, 2009. Stainless steel, photo etching. Photo: Nir Friedman. Example of art jewelry.*

As you know, I have no “formal” art training. My dad threatened to pull the financial plug if I even glanced at the art department when I was in college. Being a very practical guy, he must have feared I was a starving artist under my academic robe. So, how have I learned jewelry design?

I have read many books on design from numerous fields – architecture, graphic design, printmaking, jewelry design, interior design and painting. Each author had something exciting for me to learn. I have watched every design film I could get my hands on.

Related topics such as color theory, creativity, emotional components of the creative process, and methods taught at the Bauhaus were also part of my study. I’ve read each of the 1,300,000,00 sites referenced to “design” on Google. (Don’t believe everything I say.) I have consumed design information like an Argentine Horned, Wide Mouthed Frog (one of the more voracious animals in the world). You can believe that.

Beyond all this viewing, I practice, practice, practice. And this is what you will be doing too.



Cynthia Toops, Metalwork by **Chuck Domitrovich**: "Yet Another Road Trip," mosaics brooch, 2009. Polymer clay, sterling silver. Photo: Doug Yaple. Example of art jewelry.

How To Use This Book

Start by getting your bearings. There are 17 chapters that cover the topics of creativity, inspiration, design process, design language, and practical matters, such as developing your drawing skills. Images of jewelry from talented designers are included throughout the book. These images, reflecting the design information being covered, are as instructive as the text. Each section has a set of exercises – do them. Designing in your mind is not the same as designing with your hands. And, when you find a topic of particular interest, research it further. In many cases I have listed resources for your exploration.

I was uncertain where to place the chapter on drawing and model making. Knowing that many of you struggle with this skill, I did not want you to feel overwhelmed from the beginning. So it is the last chapter of the book. Think of this topic as an exquisite dessert at the end of a meal. Or, simply feel free to indulge in sweets at any time.

