



Evelyn Pelati Dombkowski

BY JULIA RAI



Evelyn Pelati Dombkowski, an artist based in Windsor, Connecticut, USA, first discovered metal clay in 2006 but only started working seriously after she was given a special gift. "For my 50th birthday my husband bought [me] my very own kiln," she explained. "That was when the metal clay elf in me became unleashed!...I took the fortuitous opportunity to become Rio Rewards-certified with Tim McCreight as my teacher in April of 2009."

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Evelyn always has been creative. "As soon as I was able to hold a crayon [at] age two or three, I was 'drawing' in my mother's books," she said. "I would make marks on a page, turn the page, mark some more. Every now and then I will still come across some of my 'art' in one of her old books!"

After graduating from the Paier School of Art in New Haven, Connecticut, Evelyn worked as a graphic designer for 30 years. Twenty of those years were spent designing toy packaging. "The segue[way] from graphic design to jewelry design was fairly natural for me. I find working on jewelry to be very graphic in its nature." Evelyn sees metal clay as a graphic medium, too. "Working with shape, line, texture, light and dark—it's a lot like print work. Also, the skills with one's hands—cutting, carving, etc.—much of it is similar to creating dummy models of packages in my graphics career."

"Design-wise, the biggest influence on me is the Arts and Crafts movement from the turn of the last century," she continued. "I love so much about it. It seeps into my work...I want my work to look well-designed and well-crafted, but distinctively not machine-made. It has to have the mark of my own hand in it." This influence is most apparent in her copper work. "Maybe because copper was also a favorite metal in the Arts and Crafts days," she says. "This copper bracelet [1] represents everything I feel that I do best...a simply designed bracelet, in the style of Arts and Crafts, that is basically a chain."

Bracelets have become a favourite for Evelyn. "I've been very interested in chain making, and bracelets are a great way to explore all sorts of chains without committing to the full length of a necklace. Cuffs are another form that I really enjoy playing around with."

I asked Evelyn about her style. "My style is still evolving. But when I show my work, the same comments come up over and over—clean, uncluttered, retro, slightly edgy and industrial, architectural. And I'm happy with those words!" she laughed. "Most of those things come about organically for me, but one thing I do very purposefully is keep it simple. I don't make fussy work. I like that clean look. And I love the combination of elegant and delicate with rough and industrial." [2, 3]

Evelyn doesn't teach, but she does take classes as often as she can. "I regard every class like adding another tool to my toolbox," she explained. "The most influential teacher for me has been Lis-el Crowley. I took a class in 2006 with her as she had just opened a gallery/workshop in my town. She was offering a class in metal clay and my friends and I went to the class, just for fun, to check it out."

"We all sat around a big table, Lis-el taught us the basics, and then we played. We had a really delightful time, laughing and talking and making things. I was grieving the loss of my mother at the time and it was good medicine, this creative outing. She gave me my start, and over the years she has been a friend, teacher, and mentor. Although our work is completely different, I have learned the most from her."

Evelyn says that Tim McCreight also left a lasting impression on her. "He is an outstanding teacher, and the three days of certification class became my base that I have built upon in my metal



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ARTIST PROFILE



clay work. Also, I refer to his book *The Complete Metalsmith* quite a lot."

Maybe the most noticeable influence in her recent work, though, comes from Robert Dancik. "Robert's class in concrete, Faux Bone™, and cold connections really spurred me on to new things," she explained. "I went to that class thinking I was mostly interested in learning about cold connections and Faux Bone™. And I came out of it totally fascinated by concrete!" [4, 5]

Since Evelyn takes quite a few classes, I asked her how she chooses the ones she attends. "I choose classes based on the subject matter," she explained. "I go into them with enthusiasm, but the rest of it just unfolds. Sometimes classes are game-changers, sometimes I only take away a little bit of information that I will use. I do get at least a little something out of every one."

I asked Evelyn if she had a tip for someone looking for a metal clay teacher. "It's a very personal experience, that student-teacher relationship. Sometimes something about the teacher strikes a chord in the student. I don't really know what that magic chemistry is for others, I only know for myself that the teachers I've liked best have encouraged me to think deeper and delve into my work further. Something about their way of teaching inspired me to pursue the next step. I don't know how one can find that special teacher without simply taking classes and seeing how it works out. There is no way to know ahead of time whether a certain teacher will inspire."

I'm always interested in artists' workspaces, so I asked Evelyn about her studio. "I'm very lucky to have a nice, cosy studio in a room in my house. It's a little small (who doesn't think their workspace is too small?), but it's very functional for me and I'm happy in there. I have a large window looking out over the backyard. I feel like I'm up in the treetops...I spend time in there

mostly every day.... It varies from a brief period of time to several hours, depending on what else I've got going on. I do try to make it a priority."

Is her studio organised? "I keep it fairly organized. I'm a neatnik at heart, so I can't let it get too messy or I'm unable to think! I work, I make a big mess. When that project is complete, I clean up before I start the next one."

I asked Evelyn about her creative process. "Oh, I'm a big planner!" she laughed. "I sketch almost everything I make first. I do a lot of measuring and calculating shrinkage and engagement, maybe because I make so many bracelets and they need to finish to a proper size. But I think it again goes back to my life in graphic design. I think on paper, I draw. I work out proportions with sketches. Then I also make a lot of decisions about my work as I'm making it."

She uses some traditional techniques alongside her metal clay work. "I do soldering and sawing, different kinds of cold connections, and make my own clasps and findings. A lot of times I make my own chains. I really enjoy chain making when I have the time to concentrate on it." In fact, Evelyn believes working with metal clay is very similar to working in traditional ways. "You must have the ability to plan out the construction of your piece, whether you visualize it in your head or do it on paper. In order to be successful, it's step after step after step. This is how you can build some really nice designs in metal clay. It's a lot like the process of traditional metalsmithing in that way."

Evelyn's work has been published during the last few years. "I've had two of my bracelets published in *PMC Guild Annals*—2010 and 2011—and some of my work was published in the *New Directions: Powder Metallurgy in a Sheet Metal World* exhibition catalogue. My work has been in *Metal Clay Artist Magazine's*

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gallery and also *Art Jewelry* magazine's gallery [6, 7]." She went on, "Recently, my 'Sea Flower' brooch was selected for *The Art and Design of Metal Clay Jewelry and More* 2013 calendar [8]. That was a quite an honor. I enter competitions and challenges when I can. It makes me stretch my abilities."

I asked Evelyn whether she sells her work. "I sell at art and craft festivals, online on Etsy, and in a few galleries," she explained. I also asked her where she, as a relative newcomer to metal clay, sees her work going in the next few years. "I plan to keep my head down and keep practicing. There are many techniques to master and skills to develop. That is what I want to do. I hope to keep learning and improving," she said. "I've been evolving into a method of combining traditional metalsmithing techniques with my metal clay work. Also, along with mixing techniques, I've been mixing metals. I see myself continuing down that path. I'd like to explore more work in concrete. I'd like to learn more about working with gold." [8]

Keep up with Evelyn at:

www.evelynpelati.com
www.metalclaymagic.com (guest blogger)
www.evelynpelati.etsy.com
www.facebook.com/evelynpelati



JULIA RAI is a teacher and artist working in a variety of media. She finds inspiration in science fiction and fantasy and loves a good story where disbelief can be suspended in favour of wonder. Her practical and ultra-organised side is always vying for attention alongside her creative and messy side. Each is trying hard to learn from the other and live in harmony.

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