



Helga wearing the Playful Dragon collar and matching earrings. The ring on her finger is Furrow #1.

Helga van Leipsig

BY JULIA RAI

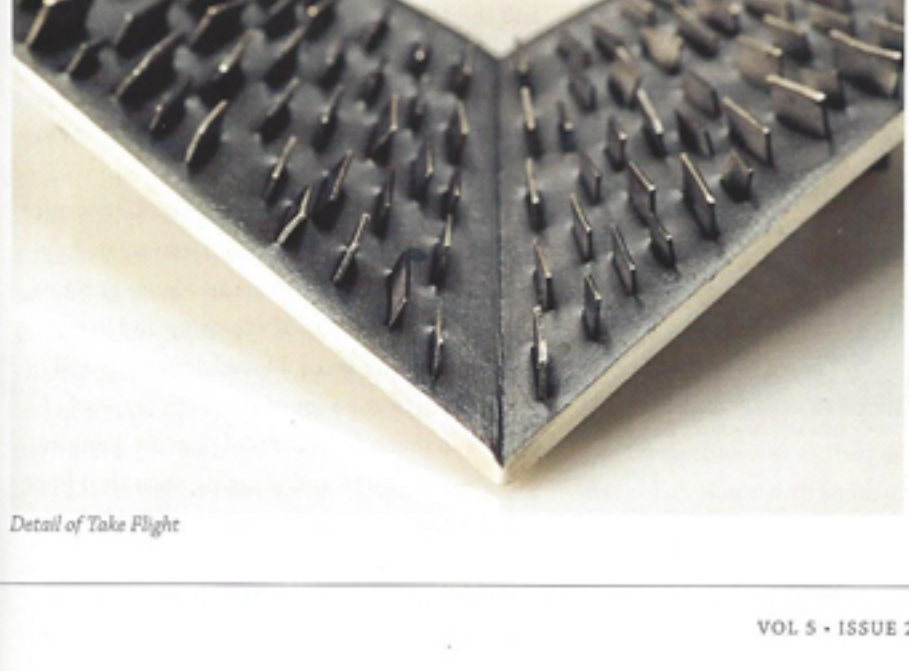
I first met Dutch metal clay artist Helga van Leipsig on a course in the UK and we hit it off straight away. I was very impressed with her precision and the clean way she worked with metal clay, very different from my own working style! Helga has been a regular at many of the conferences I've attended so it's been a great pleasure to keep up with her over the years. She's always fun to be around and I love her enthusiasm and passion for her work and life in general.

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Take Flight – pendant/brooch. Fine silver, 14K gold, sterling silver, steel



Detail of Take Flight

Saul Bell Finalist 2014

Congratulations to Helga on being nominated as a Saul Bell Finalist this year with her piece *Take Flight*.

"Take Flight helped me to focus on finding my voice in working with metal clay through combining silversmithing skills with this new material.

The pendant/brooch captures thin silver squares through pushing them into silver clay. After firing, they form a solid bond. The element is symbolic for ploughed earth but seen in line perspective.

After firing the clay, I soldered two 14K gold lines as a reference to the sky. It puts emphasis on the line perspective and gives it a focal point. The tight appearance of the gold is in contrast with the rough silverclay element.

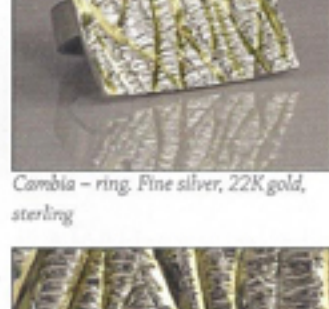
Just like the thoughtfulness and accuracy of metalsmithing is in contrast with the raw and playful way of metal claying."

I asked Helga about her earliest creative memories. "Stringing daisies into a chain using my thumbnail to make holes in their stems," she said. "Also drawing and colouring." Helga first discovered metal clay in 2005. "November 2005 I bought my first package of silver clay because I saw it in a jewellery material and tool catalogue and I got curious about it. I fiddled around a bit with it and it was love at first sight!" she laughed. "With my torch I fired the first batch and thought it was magic. I turned to the internet to find more information about the product. I soon found out there were two brands. PMC was the one I was most attracted to because there was a wealth of technical information on the PMC Guild's website which I was looking for at that moment. I had a desire to know everything about it, and that desire still fuels my passion for metal clay. I read and studied everything that I could find, I still do."

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Cambria – ring. Fine silver, 22K gold, sterling



Detail of Cambria



Inner Star – collar. Fine silver and sterling silver



Ridges #2 – earrings. Fine silver, 22K gold, sterling

Although Helga and I met on a course, she doesn't take many courses now. "A workshop with Ruudt Peters in August 2011 set me on my path of finding my true voice. It was the last workshop I took," she explained. "Nature and the clay itself are now my teachers. I try to listen to what they want to tell me. I combine it with my own personal development to create jewellery that has meaning to me. I try to be free of influences and make work that focuses on developing my own voice."

As an artist myself I know how hard it is not to be influenced by everything around us so I asked Helga to explain more about what informs her new work. "I try to answer questions like 'why I like metal clay so much' and 'how to get the best out of the material'. For what is it specifically suited? It starts as a malleable material and then it becomes solid. I find it unbearably fascinating. And I want to know why! My own personal development goes connected with answering these questions and I combine it in my jewellery."

Helga's exploration of her own creative voice was developed in an extraordinary way in July 2013. "I decided to do an art residence at home. This was a unique way of exploring and listening to my own inner voice. I loved doing this and it has brought me a lot of clarity in my work. I gained so much from it that I plan on doing another in July 2014 and blogging about it. I hope other artists will follow along in my endeavour



Inner star with Cambria relief – pendant. Fine silver, 22K gold, sterling

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ARTIST PROFILE



Commission work. Sterling silver, gold, and garnet



Sowing #2 – pendant. Fine silver, synthetic ruby

but on their own."

I asked her what she's currently working on. "A series called Flow/Inner Bark which emerged from my art residence." Knowing Helga's way of working, I wasn't surprised by how she describes her style. "Scandinavian/ Japanese – 'zen' like style: Less = More" she said. "The Earth Collection and the new Inner Bark pieces I'm developing I see as the beginning of my signature pieces."

Helga has a formal qualification - the Diploma in Design Crafts using Metals and Plastics, from The Academy of Fine Art Maastricht (ABKM) in The Netherlands. "This was a five year course and in the 4th year, I went on an eight month traineeship in Sweden with Kerstin Öhlin-Lejonklou," she explained. "I made a chess set and a chess table as a graduation project in 1993. It was made from copper, stainless steel and plastics."

With such an education and so much experimentation behind her, I asked her if she does this on her own. "Yes, but not very often. I like to give conference talks which are more geared towards motivating people to listen to their own voice, and giving tools and insights on how to do it," she said. "But making jewellery for sale is my priority. I'm now starting to have clients that, under my guidance, make their own Inner Star. People love it. They have their own personal story with the jewel."

I asked Helga about her work space. "I have a Studio which is close to our house. It's normally

organized, though it can be a bit messy at busy times," she explained. I asked her how much time she spends there. "Every day, because I love to be there. It's spacious and light, though very hot in summer as it is the top floor."

I asked her if she has a favourite tool. "My self-made hammer, made while I was on my internship with Kerstin Öhlin-Lejonklou," she said. "She gave me a piece of steel, a paper with the sizes and wood for the handle. I took a week from start to finish to saw, file and polish. It's the best tool I have. A perfect grip and the connection I have with it is just WOW! It taught me an important lesson in what you can make yourself. If you can make a hammer, you can make everything."

She went on, "With this do-it-yourself spirit I learned to make my website. It's a tool specific for selling my work and knowledge. During all the incarnations it had, I started to consider it a jewel." I asked Helga what advice she would give to other artists wanting to sell their work. "Consider your website as HOME. From there expand. Learn the basics of HTML and CSS, it will help you with setting up a website that distinguishes you. Or with this knowledge you are in a better position to give instructions to the web-designer. Follow your own instinct of beauty, you're an artist." Helga has her work at Art Markets as well as through her website and also collaborates with some galleries.

Helga uses several other techniques when

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working with metal clay. "I use all the techniques I am capable of as a silversmith to make a piece. Soldering, forging, stone-setting etc. I also explore extensively using porcelain clay. I have never fired this work, it is all test material." This led me to ask Helga about her creative process. "Sketching and planning, lots of writing and thinking and doing many, many tests in porcelain clay."

Helga's enthusiasm and dedication to her craft seems all consuming so I asked her what she does to relax. "I read graphic comics, juggle with the dog, and dance salsa with my man," she laughs.

Helga's work has been published in many magazines and books including *Art Jewellery Magazine*, the *PMC Guild Annual*, *Metal Clay Rings* by Hattie Sanderson, *Color on Metal Clay* by Mary Wohlgemuth, and *Zilverklei Technieken* by Noortje Meijerink. She also won a prize in the Small Treasures Competition.

I asked Helga if she is planning to enter the Masters Registry programme. "I do plan to, but most likely I will not go on," she explained. "A few pieces I made for the first level have been sold already. The 50 different tasks are great to ponder what to make. A challenge can bring you new insights. I consider these tasks as challenges to work within the limits as freely as possible. They let me do things I hadn't thought about. My Earth series evolved from a Masters Registry task - working with paper type clay."

Helga has some thoughts about what she'd like to achieve artistically in the future. "I'd like to find new ways to work with metal clay and to help in the recognition of how special this material is. Further, I would love to motivate other artists to find their unique voice" she explained. "I'd also like to establish my company, La Leipsig Jewels, as a well-known brand for metal clay

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Dragonskin – necklace. Fine silver, garnet beads, sterling silver

jewellery. I think all metal clay artists should be open-minded to the new possibilities metal clay has. I considered it still early days for this material. Look beyond your first idea and try to connect with your own personality. What do you have to say the world?"

To find out more about Helga and her work, you can visit her on the internet

Website www.laleipsigjewels.com

LinkedIn www.linkedin.com/in/helgavanleipsig

Facebook www.facebook.com/laleipsigjewels

Twitter www.twitter.com/LaLeipsig



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.