

ARTIST PROFILE



By Julia Rai

UK

Jennifer Kahn

Jennifer Kahn was born in Miami, Florida and spent her childhood in Marietta, Georgia. At age 10 she moved to Westchester, New York, where she lived until she left to attend the University of Vermont.

As she put it, "I seem to have slowly worked my way up the East coast, despite hating the cold!"

I asked Jen about her earliest creative memory. "My mom would say that it was the way I dressed, mixing colors, patterns, putting outfits together at a very young age. She gave me the freedom to be creative in everything I did. I loved to draw, paint, pretend, decorate things, build forts and create exotic mud stews. I remember making copper jewelry in camp and really loving it." Jen told me that she always has loved making things and working with her hands but that she didn't take those activities seriously until she was in college. "I was an English major and wrote poetry, but I didn't know how those things could have real world applications. I loved my art classes more than anything and my teachers were very encouraging, so I switched to a double major in English and Art. I took every art class available but nothing quite struck me. I knew I liked working small and I most liked the working properties of clay. After working with PMC for a while, I knew I wanted to be a jewelry artist."

PHOTOS: ROBERT DIAMANTE

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Jen discovered PMC in 2000 during her senior year at the University of Vermont while she was working at the Frog Hollow Gallery in Burlington, VT. "They carried Celie Fago's amazing jewelry. When she was the featured artist of the month they had a wall of photos of her working with PMC and a display showing a lump of PMC and her finished work. All I could think was, 'This made that?' I couldn't believe such a material existed and it was coming along at a perfect time in my life. I loved the fact that you could work it like clay but that the finished piece was pure silver. I also loved jewelry, so the idea of making my own was very exciting."

Jen didn't take to it instantly, though. "Initially I ordered some [PMC] and started working with it in the air, sculpting a little moon. It was drying and cracking before my eyes and the whole experience was very frustrating. I asked my pottery teacher to fire it for me and he was a bit put off [about] using the huge kiln to fire this tiny little cracked moon. I took Celie's class a few weeks later and learned to work on top of Teflon and under a sheet protector to delay the drying and cracking. The pieces were fired in a small jewelry kiln. By the end of the class I felt confident about working with this strange stuff."

That experience changed Jen's life. "Upon graduation I became Celie's live-in apprentice and teaching assistant and I accompanied her on her travels around the country and abroad," Jen explained.

I asked Jen what influences her work. "I'm drawn to and inspired by primitive and ancient artifacts and adornment because of the meaning infused into them. These pieces tell stories. They are connected to rituals, history, the land; they carry powers of protection, prosperity. They are culturally rich and full of identity. These days, it's hard to feel connected, to feel meaning. Everything is so anonymous and mass-produced. I like the idea of reaching back into time, reaching out into distant lands and pulling those primitive styles forward, adding my voice and giving them a contemporary edge."



Rings



Shell Pendant (front)



Shell Pendant (back)



Shield Rings

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Wabi Sabi Pendant (front)



Wabi Sabi Pendant (back)



Journey Necklace (front)



Journey Necklace (back)

She continued, "I'm fascinated by the way things are put together – patched, hinged, riveted, stitched – and often incorporate such connections in my pieces. I gather inspiration from a pattern on a textile, the texture of a leaf, beautiful, old rusty things. I'm constantly trying to fuse old and new, industrial and natural, urban and ethnic." Jen cites her Journey Necklace as a good example of her influences.

Jen does most of her work at a desk in her room. She's just now setting up a studio space in a spare room for her flex shaft, kiln and torch. "I end up doing a lot of wire work and finishing at the kitchen table by the fire – Vermont nesting tube set! She makes a favourite of brass tubes in eight different sizes that all telescope on a beautiful spiral holder," Jen explains. The tubes are used for cutting holes or small clay circles.

Her creative process is interesting and she sketches out designs whenever inspiration strikes. "I keep a few sketchbooks. I'll start one and too much time will pass so I'll start another, and before I know it I have three half-used books spinning around. Most often I'm sketching on the back of receipts or envelopes. My sketchbooks aren't organized at all. I guess I think of them chronologically and can find things that way."



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my work at an outdoor Artist Market in Burlington on Saturdays from May through October. I also have my work in a lovely accessory boutique in Burlington called Trinket and I do a few local holiday craft shows and trunk shows." I asked her what tips she had for artists who want to sell their work. "If you're selling online, take fab photos. If you're selling at a craft show, find or make great displays that jive with your work. And for selling in shops, approach shops/galleries very professionally and creatively. Remember, every part of everything is an opportunity to be creative! Use letterhead with an image of your jewelry on it. If you're delivering work in a box, make the box beautiful. These are all chances to show how passionate and how good you are and to impress that on people."

Last year Jen started Apprenticementor.com, a web site directory where would-be apprentices and mentors can find each other. "Apprenticeships aren't just a thing of the past, they're also the wave of the future, the way for young people to learn skills and to grow and for skilled artists to gain the help they need to keep growing." The majority of members are jewelry artists.

For more information about Jen and to see more of her work, visit her web site at www.jenniferkahnjewelry.com or her Etsy shop at www.jen.kahn.etsy.com and read her blog at www.jen.kahnjewelry.blogspot.com.

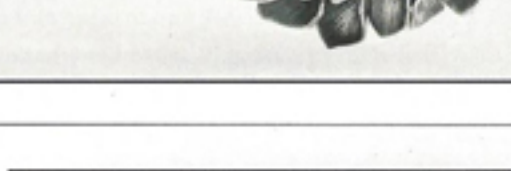


Meditation Ring

metalclay
ARTIST MAGAZINE

Congratulations

JULIA RAI on being one of the finalists for the prestigious Saul Bell Design Award in the metal clay category.



THERE'S A FINE LINE BETWEEN PRICELESS AND WORTHLESS.



Artist Diane Falkenhagen's Texas studio – destroyed by flooding during Hurricane Ike, 2008

What would you do if you lost your work, your tools, your images, and a lot more to a flood? Metalsmith Diane Falkenhagen knows what five feet of contaminated saltwater can do to a jewelry studio. CERF+ can help you learn how to protect your career from crossing that fine line.

cerf+ Craft Emergency Relief Fund Artists' Emergency Resources
www.craftemergency.org www.studioprotector.org

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JULIA RAI has been working with metal clay since 2004 and teaching it since 2007. She holds the MCSJ Higher Metal Clay Diploma, PMC Certification from Rio Grande and Art Clay Level 1 and 2 Certification. She also holds the City and Guilds 7407 Further Education Teaching Qualification. She teaches a variety of subjects for several jewellery schools in the UK.

She is also the Director of the Metal Clay Academy. Her spare time is currently taken up with working on projects for the metal clay Masters Registry and she has just become the first artist to achieve Masters Registry Level IV. www.juliarai.co.uk