

Interviewed by
Julia Rai
UK



KATHLEEN Nowak Tucci

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEN TWINGLEY

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PHOTOGRAPHY JAMES AMERSON - MODEL CAMELLE DAUCICIZ

Alabama Gulf Coast eco-artist Kathleen Nowak Tucci was featured on the cover of the controversial oil-spill issue of *Italian Vogue* magazine in August 2010. It was the first time an eco-artist's work had been featured on the cover of a mainstream fashion magazine.

Kathleen has been creating art for 25 years and recently has begun working with recycled bicycle inner tubes. This work with recycled rubber has brought her to the attention of a number of prestigious magazines, such as *Marie Claire*, *Elle Decor*, *Ornament*, and *Interior Design*, and high-end boutiques and galleries across America. "My work was also recently included in the Smithsonian Craft Show 2011," she said. "There were 1300 entries and only 120 juried artists."

Kathleen has always been creative. "I have no choice but to be creative," she explained. "Even as a child, I always had some art project going. On both sides of my family there were very creative women."

I asked her to talk about her introduction to metal clay. "I had worked in polymer clay and ceramic clay so I must have read about metal clay soon after it came out on the market." Kathleen and her long time friend Jeannette Froese LeBlanc (*Metal Clay Artist Magazine*) took a metal clay class together in 2001. "We made all the usual beginner projects, which we found very unsatisfying because both of us knew the great potential of metal clay as soon as we touched it. I love rings, so shortly after that I made my first ring out of silver metal clay."

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This "Lizzy Bracelet with Metal Clay" was made from Harley-Davidson motorcycle inner tubes, bicycle inner tubes, plastic snaps and FASTfire BRONZclay™.



PHOTOGRAPHY JAMES AMERSON



PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT DIAMANTE



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Kathleen has continued to develop her skills as a jeweller since her initial introduction to metal clay. "I went to college to study Computer Science and didn't take any college art classes until recently," she said. "Since my first metal clay class, I've taken college classes in silversmithing and jewellery. I've learned that working in metal is hard and dirty and that metal is often difficult to form. To be able to manipulate it like clay is amazing." I asked her what she feels is particularly important for people working in metal clay, based on her personal experience. "To take full advantage of metal clay, you should learn everything that you can about metalsmithing: riveting, bezel setting, soldering, torch firing and enamelling can all be used with metal clay."

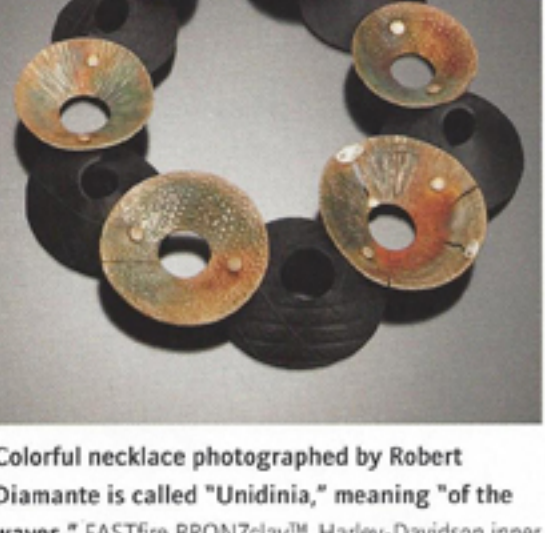
She cites several influences on her work. "I have always liked 'C' and 'S' curves juxtaposed with geometric shapes. Art Deco furniture, jewellery and

architecture have been an influence in much of my artwork." Her creative process is very immediate. "I have never been a sketcher. I get an idea and then work directly with the materials. Because of the way I work, I may begin in one direction and quickly move in another. I love that freedom to change. I have always made my work in components - smaller parts of a whole work. I like to have many parts pre-cut out ready for whatever combination strikes my fancy."

I asked Kathleen about her working environment. "I have a studio in the middle of my home. I've learned that I'm most happy creating at home and not at a remote location. I often wake up and go immediately into my studio and spend most of the day there." When I wondered if her studio were an oasis of calm, she laughed. "I'm terribly messy. My studio is large but I seem to always be working in

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Colorful necklace photographed by Robert Diamante is called "Unidinia," meaning "of the waves." FASTfire BRONZclay™, Harley-Davidson inner tubes, Gilders Paste.



Green Necklace photographed by Robert Diamante is called "Venilia," meaning "of the winds." FASTfire BRONZclay™, Harley-Davidson inner tubes, Gilders Paste.

a 10-inch by 10-inch space that I clean by pushing any of my messes to the sides. I get to a point where I have to straighten it up (usually when I can't find something), but it's a mess again in no time!"

Kathleen's favourite tool is "a good idea! For most mediums you can improvise after you have the basic tools, but having a creative vision is more important than any tool."

With the incredible rise in her profile this year, I asked Kathleen how she relaxes. "Hmmm, I've had such a busy year with my eco-jewellery line that I've had very little time to relax. I watch very little TV, but I do listen to books on CD as I work. Listening to the books is one of my biggest pleasures. I am an unabridged book snob when it comes to audio books and I listen to at least three a week. I have been known to listen to a book several times if I don't have time to get to the library to check out a new one."

Kathleen still likes to attend classes regularly. "I take classes whenever I'm able. So much has happened in the world of metal clay, I think it may be time to take another metal clay class," she said. "I've learned something in every class that I've ever taken. My favourite teachers have been the ones that have been flexible and free with information. I

Those who are observant may notice that the necklace on the model on the cover changed in the above photo (left). Here's the story:

When I fired the pieces for this necklace, I did a lot of carving, and the main piece cracked all the way through. Instead of fixing it and refiring the piece, I decided to use the crack as a design element and "patch" it. I cut a piece of sterling silver and then riveted the piece on with copper rivets. I was quite happy with the results.

The model shot was taken during the latest photo shoot of my work on Pensacola Beach, with the sea lapping up onto the shore. The day after the shoot I realized that the heat and saltwater had removed all the patina on the bronze clay. So I refired all the bronze clay pieces hoping to add patina again. Well the sterling silver "patch" fell off during the firing. Plan B - I patched the crack with fresh bronze clay and refires. All seemed great until I looked at it again after a couple of weeks and the patina had faded, once again. Having worked in metal before I knew that it was a losing battle to try to keep the patina. In the end it would always fade no matter how it was treated. So I used the Gilders Paste to add color back to the bronze pieces. Because Gilders Paste comes in so many colors and in metallics, I was able to reproduce the original patina. No more worries about fading!

For the construction of the necklaces, I made little rivets out of bronze metal clay to attach the piece of rubber and metal together. The closure is a larger rivet and then a piece of rubber that acts as a clasp. Works well.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: In the summer of 2010 the horrendous oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Using fashion as their media, The Italian edition of *Vogue* magazine released a controversial issue called "The Last Wave". In the 23 page editorial photo shoot styled by Karl Templar and photographed by Steven Meisel, named "Oil and Water", models posed as dying birds, animals and mermaids among the oil, rocks and debris on the shores of the coast. Their shoot was staged outside of New York City and included the works of many high fashion designers such as Calvin Klein, Donna Karan, Valentino as well as Kathleen's jewellery. The photo stylist wanted jewellery made from synthetic rubber, whose principal raw material is crude oil, and chose some of Kathleen's jewellery to accessorize the fashions. The photos were graphic and disturbing and exactly the political statement Italian *Vogue* wanted to make about the oil spill and the damage that was done to nature.

Kathleen is a Gulf Coast artist and saw the devastation to the environment and the economy of the oil spill. To mark the one year anniversary and to show the healing powers of nature photographer James Amerson and Kathleen collaborated on the new photo shoot. They wanted to show the beginnings of the rejuvenation and renewal to once-again beautiful Pensacola Beach shoreline. The inspiration was a young, vibrant, "rising" mermaid in contrast to the dying mermaid on the *Vogue* Italian cover. Kathleen's work is as creative and instinctive as ever as she leverages her enormous talent to share this important message of hope and renewal with the world.

like when a teacher will move faster or slower depending on the students' experience."

I asked her what tips she'd give to someone looking for a class. "Make sure you know exactly what will be taught, how much experience the teacher has and if the teacher's work reflects good technique and understanding of the medium. Find out how many people will be in the class and talk to previous students and get recommendations if you can." Good advice. She also offered specific suggestions for artists who are new to metal clay. "Right now start off with some of the less expensive metal clays so you're not so worried about experimenting. Take a class with a good teacher; you'll save money and frustration in the long run. Believe me I know! I've learned many things the hard way, with trial and much error!" she laughed.

Kathleen's work has been featured in prestigious venues. I asked her what else she wanted to achieve going forward. "The most important thing to me as an artist is to be able to continue to create," she replied. "I like the option of working in many mediums and also being able to combine mediums. Recognition is nice but not the reason that I am an artist." She shared a favourite quote from 1938 Nobel laureate Pearl S. Buck that sums up her own feelings about creativity: "By some strange, unknown, inward urgency, they are not really alive unless they are creating."

To find out more about Kathleen or see more examples of her work, visit her web site at www.kathleennowak-tucci.com.



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. www.juliarai.co.uk

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