



Pythagoras' Theorem Nesting Ring



Lesley Messam

BY JULIA RAI - UK

Lesley Messam and I have been friends for many years and I've always been a big fan of her designs. She works in a number of different media and we're friendly rivals in the Metal Clay Masters Registry programme, both hovering at Level IV. We often compare notes on the projects and each of us has our nemesis as far as Level V is concerned!

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African Voodoo Doctor Mask

Lesley lives in the cathedral city of Chichester in West Sussex, a county in South East England. It's an ancient city with Anglo-Saxon and Roman roots and has some of the oldest churches and buildings in Britain. "I have always lived here and would never move from this beautiful walled city with all its history and charm," Lesley says. She and her husband Keith own a hardware store in the centre of Chichester which has a bead shop in the basement. Lesley cycles to work each day, "I love my Pashley," she says. "It's a hand built 'sit up and beg' bike made in England."

Lesley sells her work from the shop and I asked her what advice she'd give someone wanting to sell their work. "Don't undersell your work, it's hard work making handmade jewellery and it should be priced accordingly," she said.

Lesley is a naturally gifted designer and I asked her about her earliest creative memories. "I can remember as a child having a lap tray and I would sit for hours making Plasticine houses, furniture, animals and clothing, anything that popped into my head, but my favourite was making little houses. Funny that I am doing that

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in silver at the moment," she explained. She discovered metal clay some time ago. "I was at college in Portsmouth working towards an NVQ in Jewellery Making which I passed in 2008, and at that time a friend said she had heard about this metal clay stuff," she explained. "I was intrigued and booked a class and from that point I was addicted." Lesley uses a number of other techniques in her work. "I get bored really easily so go from one thing to another although it is all jewellery related," she explained. "I started traditionally with metal work in silver and still love the old techniques. I have a kiln for glass fusing and make large bowls, candle holders and just recently cat clocks; I also have a ceramic kiln and love combining ceramic with silver. I have a lamp work set-up as well and enjoy this too but metal clay is my passion."

I asked Lesley about her studio. "I have a beautiful studio, which is in my back garden so not far to travel to," she laughs. "It is 16 feet by 12 feet, purpose built under floor heating. I spend a lot of time down there and have to be very tidy as I teach in it as well. I am the messiest person when I work so have to tidy every time I finish otherwise it would be a disaster area." Lesley teaches a variety of subjects but I asked her what she likes to teach best. "The class I love to teach is beginner's metal clay. It's the thrill of seeing a complete novice make a piece of their own designed jewellery and finish it all in a day. Such a buzz."

Lesley is such a prolific artist, I asked her about the creative process she uses. "When I was at college my tutor would always go on and on at me to draw my designs," she explained. "I was a bit of a rebel and refused of course, but truly as my work has progressed I have to admit she was completely right. I draw all the time even at work in the shop. Keith is always telling me off for drawing on the headed paper which is expensive. 'Sorry Dear', he's right of course! I would honestly recommend drawing even if it's only a doodle. As long as you understand it, that's all that matters. I also make up models in either Plasticine or polymer clay really just to have a vi-



The Utilitarian Collection (Pens, whistles and perfume holders)



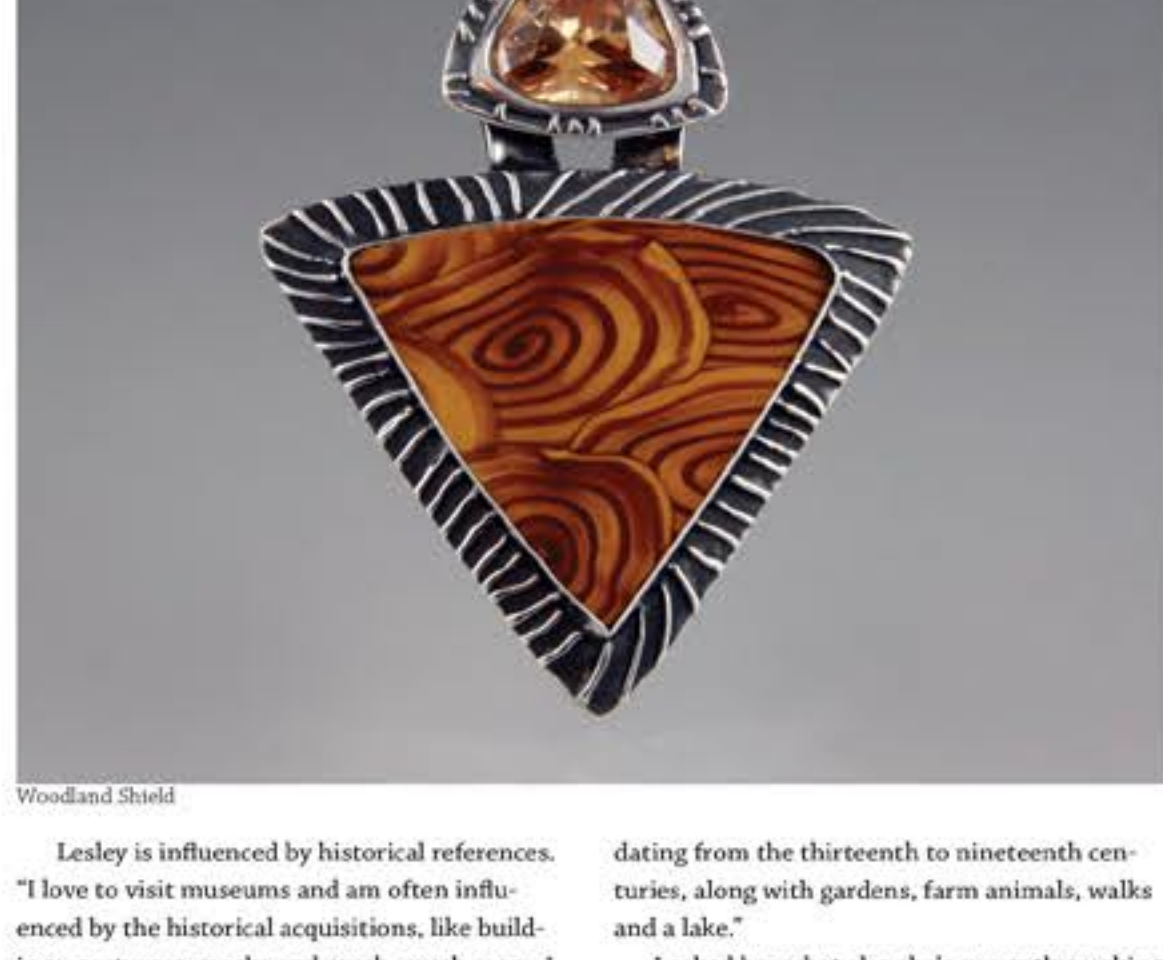
Elizabethan Ruffie Necklace

sual of the piece. This saved me a fortune in clay." Lesley's favourite tool is a needle tool. "I use it to cut out fine detail," she says. She also uses a variety of techniques in her work. "I think being able to solder and rivet are such an asset, no more gluing if you can do these."

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Woodland Shield

Lesley is influenced by historical references. "I love to visit museums and am often influenced by the historical acquisitions, like buildings, costumes, masks and much, much more, I am such a visual artist." These influences are reflected in the style of her work. "My style is most definitely Art Nouveau. I had a gentleman once say to me 'your work is quite Gothic'. I was really offended but now I understand what he meant. Art Nouveau is very Gothic and quite macabre when you look at all the fine detail." She is also currently working on pieces which reflect this influence. "I have three projects that show how much I am influenced by what I've seen at a museum; the 'Voodoo Mask', the 'Elizabethan Ruffie Necklace' and the 'Buildings'. These were inspired by a visit to the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum near my home. The museum covers 50 acres, with nearly 50 historic buildings

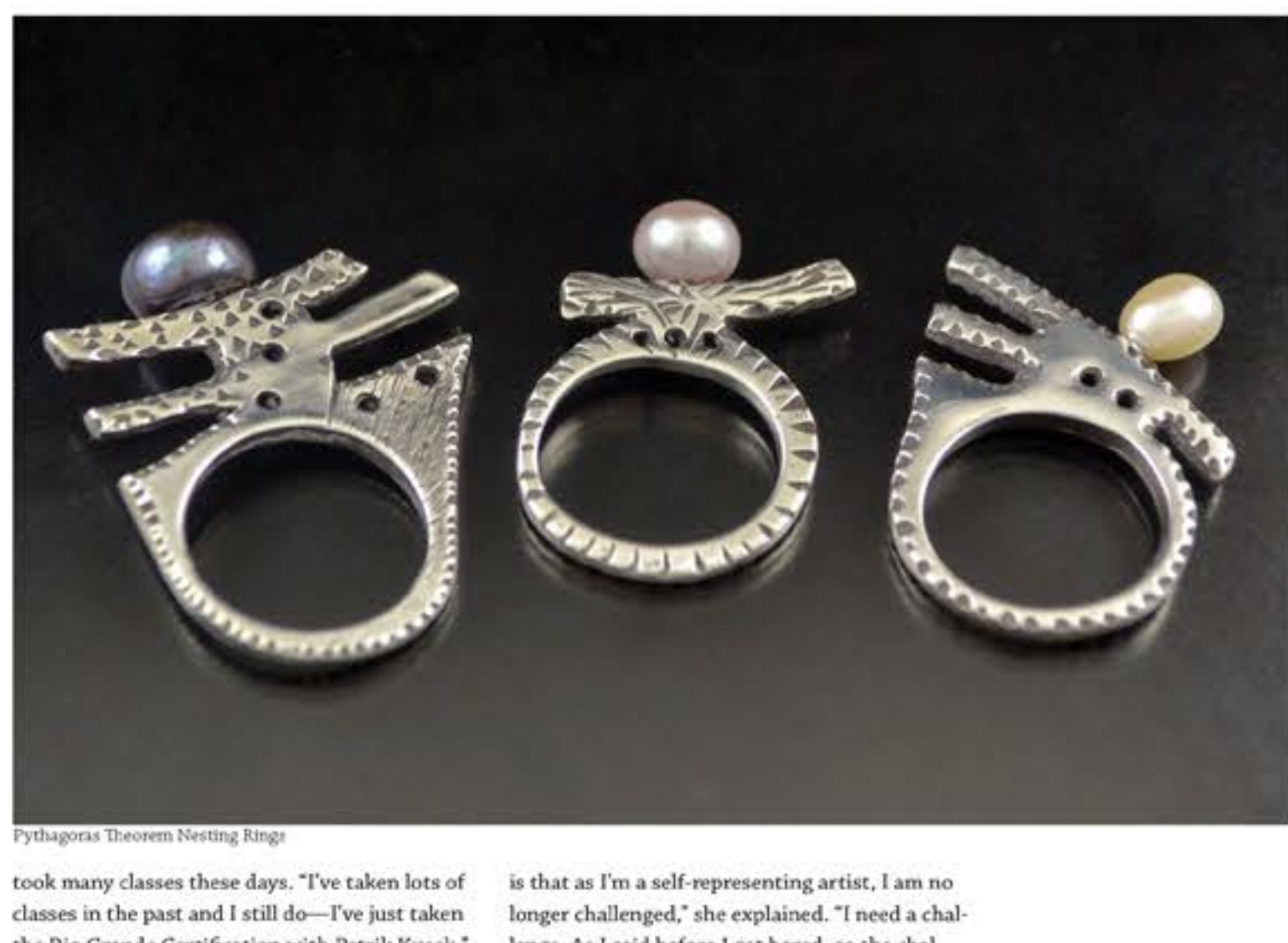
dating from the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries, along with gardens, farm animals, walks and a lake."

I asked her what else she's currently working on. "I have been working on a few things, mainly working with sterling silver clay. As I was taught traditionally there are benefits for sterling, the main being strength, and as this is a fairly new product I wanted to see what I could do with it. So I'm doing lots of fine work with CZs, filigree, chain making and building—literally building—little houses!" I also asked her what she does to relax. "Making flame work beads," she said. "Your mind just flows with the blowing glass. It's a great way to unwind."

As well as being at Level IV of the Masters Registry programme, Lesley holds a number of other qualifications in metal clay covering both brands of silver clay. I asked her if she

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took many classes these days. "I've taken lots of classes in the past and I still do—I've just taken the Rio Grande Certification with Patrik Kusek," she said. "I can honestly say that my work has not been influenced by one teacher in particular though. I have gained a great dictionary of tips and tricks that have helped my work move on and for that I thank every instructor that I've had the privilege to spend time with." She went on to explain how she chooses the teachers she trains with. "If I'm looking to be taught, I'll look at the instructor's work; if I like it then I'll look into the instructor in more detail on their website, but usually the work speaks volumes to me."

As the Masters Registry is a shared passion—or maybe obsession—of ours, I asked Lesley why she entered it in the first place. "For me the reason why I started the Masters Registry

is that as I'm a self-representing artist, I am no longer challenged," she explained. "I need a challenge. As I said before I get bored, so the challenge of the unknown is exciting and new. On the Masters Registry, I have been challenged at every level. I would never have a hallmark stamp or a cone, sphere and a cube. All of these projects have removed me from my safety net. I'm glad I'm taking part." Lesley has three pieces that have already passed at Level V so she has only a little way to go to achieve the pinnacle of the programme.

Lesley's work has been included in a number of books and competitions. "I have entered a few competitions and I came first in the Art Clay Guild Competition with 'Medusa' in 2011," she explained. "I have come second twice in the British Bead Awards. I am not great at entering though as I can't stand waiting and the not

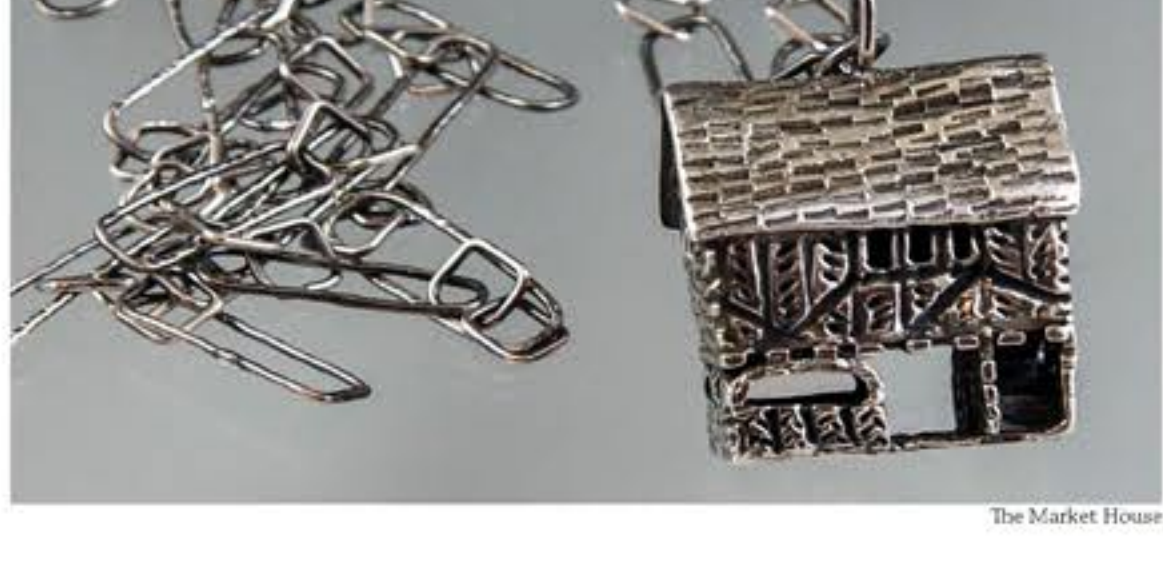
in the next five years. "I think right now I would like to finish the Masters Registry," she laughs. "In five years, who knows, maybe some day a book, but I'm not sure! I have no idea where I'm going with my metal clay work but I am enjoying the journey." 

To find out more about Lesley, visit her websites Web site: www.silverwithlesley.com Blog: www.silverwithlesley.blogspot.com Facebook: www.facebook.com/silverwithlesley Retail: www.dmessam.co.uk

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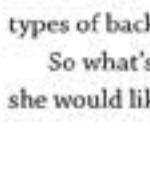
The Market House

knowing, so I tend not to enter things at all." Her book credits include the 'PMC Guild Annual' and 'New Directions: Powder Metallurgy in a Sheet Metal World'. "The latest book that I will be published in is the new Lark Books 'Showcase 500 Art Necklaces' due out in a June 2013. I'm particularly proud of being in a 500 book because it is juried," she explained. "It's a book with the most talented jewellery artists from around the world and they are makers from all types of backgrounds."

So what's next for Lesley? I asked her what she would like to achieve artistically or creatively

in the next five years. "I think right now I would like to finish the Masters Registry," she laughs. "In five years, who knows, maybe some day a book, but I'm not sure! I have no idea where I'm going with my metal clay work but I am enjoying the journey." 

To find out more about Lesley, visit her websites Web site: www.silverwithlesley.com Blog: www.silverwithlesley.blogspot.com Facebook: www.facebook.com/silverwithlesley Retail: www.dmessam.co.uk



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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