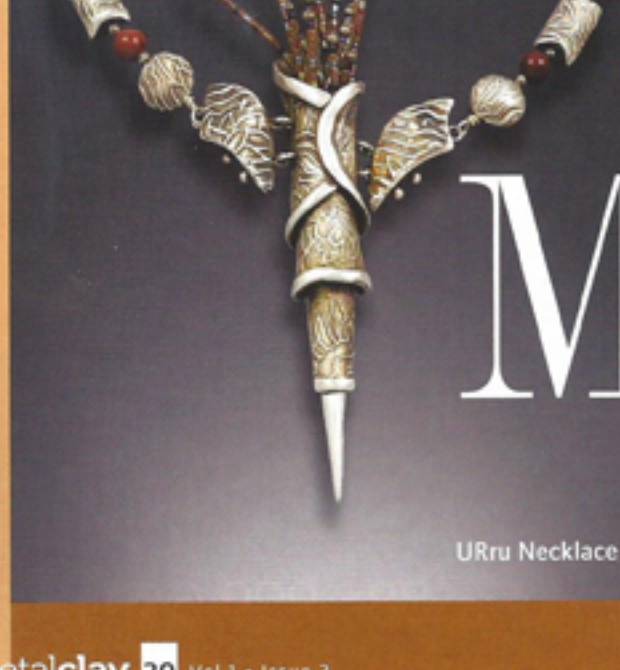




# Maggie Bergman

By Julia Rai  
UNITED KINGDOM



URru Necklace

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Maggie has been drawing since she was about four years old and says she's never stopped! I asked her how she discovered metal clay. "I got into metal clay because of the RSI (repetitive strain injury) I got from glass bead making. I had heard about metal clay on the glass forums, but when I checked it out I wasn't very impressed by what was shown there. That is, until I found out about Celie Fago and saw her straightening work. It made me want to get started straight away. I'm still a huge fan of Celie's!"

"There was no PMC™ in Australia at that time, but I found Art Clay™ Silver," she continued. "They were teaching in Melbourne 2000 km away from my home, and they were offering a Senior Instructor's course a month from when I inquired. I signed up, went to Melbourne for a week and did the certification course without ever having touched metal clay before—although my background in ceramics helped enormously."

"I loved the material and got very excited. I didn't sleep much that first week! My first impressions were that the possibilities seemed

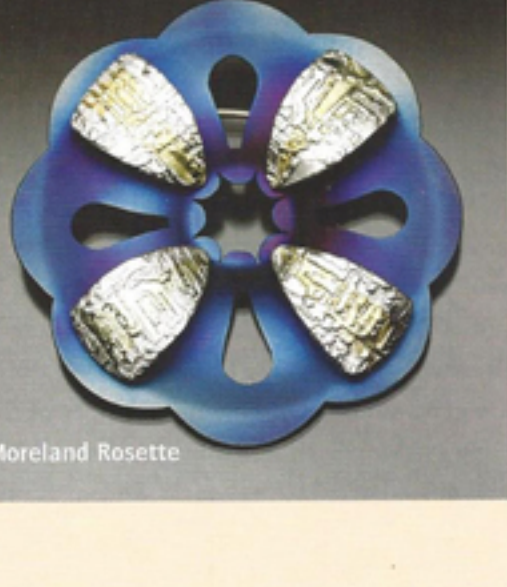
endless, which proved to be correct in the years to come. Most of the certification pieces were not very nice, but I was thinking of my own designs while making the pieces for the course."

Maggie is influenced by natural textures, organic shapes and architecture, old and new. I asked her which of her pieces she felt were good examples of these influences. "A few years ago I made my Brunswick Bracelet. It has the architecture and details of the street where I have my studio in Melbourne, Victoria. And my Pod Necklace shows the organic side of my work."

I asked Maggie about her creative process. "I draw all the time. I suppose art school got me into the habit of always having a visual journal. I don't draw with anything particular in mind. I just draw whatever catches my eye at the moment," she explains.

"When I design, I always make a sketch first that usually gets transferred to the computer. I make templates and texture plates that way. Sometimes I make a model in polymer clay to see how structures will work, or to figure out the easiest way to support things. In all my work, I also leave a lot of room for spontaneous interaction with my materials. If something unexpected happens, I might let that change the direction of the piece, and sometimes come up with something totally different than what I had planned to make. I believe my best work is achieved when I'm in 'the zone.'"

Maggie also uses a variety of traditional techniques in her work. "My early training was in metal work, so I use all sorts of metals with my metal clay work. I love titanium cold connected to the metal clay."



Moreland Rosette

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Pod Necklace

Maggie doesn't think she has a specific style. "I like to play around with lots of materials and concepts. This is what makes jewellery so exciting for me. I can use absolutely any material you could think of in my jewellery."

Maggie credits one of her teachers with turning her onto jewellery making. "The teacher that had a lot of influence on me was my etching teacher while I was at art school," she says. "He ruined me as a printmaker when he showed some very small copper etching plates he had. I saw the potential for jewellery and from that day on, I made my etchings on copper, took a few prints, and then made the

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plates into jewellery. He was not very happy with me. I still use etched copper a lot in my metalwork, combining it with sterling silver and sometimes with metal clay."

Maggie works from her studio on the Gold Coast in Queensland. "I try to be organised, but my bench gets in a mess no matter how hard I try to keep it tidy. I do like working that way, I guess. I'm never stuck for something to do; there's always something there that needs finishing."

Maggie's favourite tool is "a small, old hammer that my father used in his bike shop. It's about 70 years old. I filed, sanded and polished the faces, and it's now one of my favourite hammers to use."

Teaching is a large part of Maggie's life. "I teach nearly every weekend. It's how I earn my living. It gives me interaction with people who love what I love, and it gives me the freedom to make whatever I please. I don't have to let commercial decisions come into my work."

I asked Maggie what she particularly likes about teaching. "I love it when students 'get it.' The excitement of having made a gorgeous piece of jewellery to take home is great to see," she explains. "The other thing I have noticed is the change in some of my students' lives when they finally find something they are good at and spend more and more of their time working with it. Family and friends are astonished at what they make and, at times,

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Brunswick Bracelet - front



Brunswick Bracelet - back

the students themselves are as well! This is the most satisfying to me."

As she's such an experienced teacher, I asked Maggie what advice she'd give someone who is new to metal clay. "Have a clear idea what you want to make, be prepared and have all your tools ready. That way you can work quickly and prevent the clay from drying out while you work. Finish the piece to the highest standard possible before firing. This saves so much time. Trying to get scratches out of metal is hard!"

If you're looking for a metal clay teacher, Maggie has some advice. "If you have choices, ask around for recommendations. Otherwise, learn when and from whom you can! Every teacher will have something different to add to your skills."

I asked Maggie what additional skills she felt were essential for artists who work with metal clay. "Design skills! Keeping a visual journal," she says. "Once you've mastered the techniques, your design skills are the only thing that will make your work stand out. This is especially true for metal clay artists. The material is easy to use and many people take the easy way out, relying on moulds

and commercially available textures. I would hope that as their skills improved they'd spend more time studying good design."

Maggie has been a pioneer of the use of photopolymer plates with metal clay, which allow you to create your own unique textures. "In 2005 I shared one of my printmaking techniques with the metal clay community. The use of photopolymer plates has changed the way a lot of people work. In 2006 I gave a presentation at the PMC Certification on this subject. Photopolymer plates (or PPPs as they are now known in the metal clay community) were a runaway success and have contributed greatly to the range of tools available to metal clay artists. I hardly ever make a new piece now that didn't use a PPP in it at some time during its construction."

PPP's are made with a layer of a light-sensitive emulsion applied to a backing, usually steel or plastic. If you place a transparency printed with a design in opaque black on the emulsion side of the plate, expose it to UV light to harden the areas that are not blocked by the black ink and then wash out the areas that were not hardened, you create a texture plate that can make impressions on metal

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Brunswick Bracelet - detail

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was one of 15 people worldwide invited to be involved in setting up the program. I am planning to spend much more time to achieve the other levels when I can. The program is fantastic. It motivates you to try things you never would have dreamed of by yourself. I think it's important to actually join the program and get your work evaluated by master jewellers. That alone could make you strive for the best possible standard."

I asked Maggie what the greatest challenge was for her when doing the Registry Program. "The Brunswick bracelet. It was complex and used materials I had never worked with before."

So how does Maggie relax? "Make jewellery! Walk on the beach. Go for lunches with friends. Read, watch movies and listen to music. I'm a closet geek; I love playing around on my computer! It's the only thing that can take me away from jewellery! Of course I use the excuse that it's all business-related work I'm doing."

Finally, I asked Maggie what she'd like to achieve artistically or creatively in the future. "I'm thinking to do less teaching and work more on my own pieces in the coming years. Just to get extra time in the studio would be all I could hope for! I want to work with more complex designs, articulated pieces, work that moves when worn."

To find out more about Maggie, visit her website <http://Play-Design-Create.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. Her spare time is currently taken up with working on projects for the metal clay Masters Registry and she has achieved Registry III. <http://www.juliarai.co.uk>.

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