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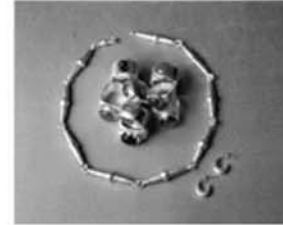


Dangerous Curves
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Artsy

Kristina Pitaniello

"It is widely believed that the likelihood of becoming exceptionally competent in certain fields depends upon the presence or absence of inborn attributes. It is theorized that talented individuals demonstrate "exceptional pre-tuning to an already existing body of knowledge, one that countless others had spent time and energy developing and refining."¹



Jeweler and industrial designer Kristina Pitaniello is a self-taught talent. When I asked her how she found her way into her particular creative niche she stated simply, "It comes completely naturally. You wouldn't believe how easy it is. It's like writing on a piece of paper...it's that easy for me."

Pitaniello recognizes that the ease with which she works with metal to construct jewelry and other sculpted or crafted object d'art is a talent on her part but it is not a talent totally free of hard work. The distinction is that while the work is easy for her to execute, she devotes her effort and concentration over long periods of time to complete it. Genius cannot move forward without dedication and according to Pitaniello had it not been for her obsession to create jewelry and a concentration to learn the skills needed she would never have gotten to where she is now. There was a time, she explains, when "I was in that kind of period where you don't know what you're going to do with your life. I was in the wrong field. I was lost. I didn't know what to do. I always wanted to learn how to make jewelry so I bought a torch, learned how to use it, started melting things and then just felt my way around that. I was obsessed with it. I would come home from waitressing and work on the jewelry until 4 AM. If I wasn't so concentrated during those first two years I would never have learned or have started a business," she explains.

Pitaniello's metalwork has a minimalist elegance to it that seems more like sculpture than jewelry. I first became acquainted with her work two years ago during an open studios tour. I immediately purchased from her a thick silver ring designed to look like tree bark.

Like a hollowed out tree trunk, textured by rivulets of undulating surface and form, the ring is one of the only items of jewelry I wear that matches my own design sensibility. I wear the ring like I would wear a tattoo; to me it is very personal and illustrates something of my inner self. Furthermore, it is a totem of how certain design appeals to me. It expresses something of me that I probably couldn't have expressed myself and therefore completes a sense of total art appreciation, a case in which I, the appreciator can personally relate to the expression and/or the resulting creation from the artist.

Despite appreciators like myself who may look upon her work as fine art in this sense, Pitaniello claims that she hopes only for people to see her as a true and humble craftsperson, not necessarily a fine artist.

It is common for metalworkers to consider themselves craftsmen before they admit themselves artists. It may have to do with the fact that metalworkers have a certain set of skills reliant upon the precision of tools. In other words, the final product of a metalworker is not based on one's creative ideas alone but also on one's technical skills with uncommon tools. Before one studies sketching one often has basic command of a pencil, and most of us have dabbled with paint on occasion, but few of us grew up around torches, have practiced melting things or used dangerous acids on a regular basis to produce art. The craftsperson must master the proper (and safe) use of the tools of their trade if they hope to execute their creative vision in a manner that is both personally fulfilling and artistically expressive.

But Pitaniello goes beyond craftsmanship - beyond the acquisition of mere manual skills. With an absolute love for what she does, her tools, her equipment and the honesty behind the work, Pitaniello backs up her technical skill with a keen sense of aesthetic sensitivity. It's irrelevant to contest the difference between craft and art in her case as the craft is driven by the creative talent and thus becomes fine art for those who wear her work.

"I would never have been able to make the kind of designs I've created by developing my craft through classes," she states, warning would be jewelers who might be tempted to learn straight from class instruction. "I think that [art] classes inhibit you. Everything I learned, I got from a book. All a class does is empower you really."

The same can be true, she recounts, in regard to apprenticeships as learning platforms. Engaging as an apprentice to another jeweler did little to embellish her knowledge. For

Pitaniello her passion compelled her to learn everything she needed. Self-motivation paired with an understanding that her creativity drives her. Pitaniello has learned to respect her ingenuity and the limitations therein.

"You go through periods where you are bored and then you get inspired. You have to go through some stagnant intervals before you can become inspired again. I go through periods where I'm just producing previously designed work but then I start to create again. I take things from everywhere. When you have down time, you have to give yourself that or you won't create new stuff. Creating is not endless. It's not infinite. I know at some point I'm going to be totally lost but that time won't come for a while," she admits.

Certainly it will be a long time before Pitaniello runs out of ideas because she has more than just jewelry design to feed her creativity. As an industrial designer to boot, she has the added bonus of the inventor's mind. To accompany and play off of her silver work she has developed a line of jewelry based upon color-changing material entitled the *Reactor* line.



"The *Reactor* line began with an idea I wanted to try; to reverse the stone and the metal." Rather than the typical precious metals inlaid with precious stones, as most jewelry is basically comprised, Kristina wanted pieces that looked as if they were made of stone and played with light in their own unique way. "The only way to do this in a production mode is to use plastic. When I started out I wanted [the pieces] to look like Bakelite (a colorful resin developed at the turn of the 20th century synonymous with molded jewelry. Bakelite is now popular for its vintage quality) but I really needed to expand it. I wondered, 'How can I keep the same design but give it another look?'"

Pitaniello came up with an idea she now co-produces with another company. She uses a unique chemical combination of plastics molded into the shape of rings and bracelets that change color in the presence of heat. This line of plastic jewelry has proven highly profitable for Pitaniello and along with her five trademarks, one patent, and contracts to sell to over eight-hundred stores including Sundance Catalog, Natural Wonders, and over one hundred museum stores it is unlikely that there will be an end to her success.

For further information see her website at www.pitaniello.com. She offers studio tours, custom work and listings of events where her work will be shown.

- Anne Weeks

¹ Howe, M.J.A., Davidson, J.W., & Sloboda, J.A. Innate Talents: Reality or Myth? Behavioral and Brain Sciences.