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MAY 2011

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## A Conversation with Christy Klug



Born in Germany, world traveler Christy Klug spent her childhood in England and traveling through Europe and Scandinavia. For high school, she stayed in Toronto. Her jewelry is all about strong lines and personal expression. —HLW

### **Do you remember how you first become aware of jewelry?**

I had two very stylish grandmothers! I was kind of a tomboy, but I loved playing dress-up, and they had all this great costume jewelry and vintage clothes. I loved the drama of it all. That's part of what draws me to jewelry — the intimacy and the personal quality. I love wearing it, so I started making it and redesigning it and putting things together just for myself, and then was doing art in other mediums on the side. When the pieces came together, it was like, 'I can do the art, the style, and the drama all at once!'

### **Did you take jewelry classes in school, or did that come later?**

I took painting, drawing ... studied a lot of stained glass and print-making, a lot of different media. I never took a metals class in school. I took a beginning fabrication class about 12 or 14 years ago, because I was starting to make jewelry for myself and it seemed like fun. That's when the jewelry thing really started for me. I learned what I did and didn't like. The simplicity of just picking up a saw and cutting into the metal seemed really immediate and kind of pure. I love that; it's kind of Zen. Because I have the art background, I would do the line drawings, and then sawing them into the metal was like instant gratification.

Then I started working with an art jeweler in [Austin] named Bob Weaver. He's this amazing guy who teaches an open-style studio class. I would take in my drawings and say, 'Show me how to do this!' He's the kind of guy who knows how to do everything and if he doesn't have a tool, he makes it. I still go every Tuesday. I'm at a point where I can work through and problem solve and figure things out on my own, but he's good for if I want to venture into and try new things.

### **What has surprised you about jewelry making?**

I don't think I anticipated the learning curve. You realize once you really get into something that you don't know *anything!* There's so much more to learn and so much more to explore. I definitely didn't know with enameling how much was involved — how much the different types of enamels, and the firing times, and the different layering, and the different kinds of metal. I feel like I've just scratched the surface of that. It's exciting, because I don't feel like I'm ever going to be *done*.

### **Do you approach your enamel work differently than your earlier metals work?**

My work has always been about line, and exploring line. I don't think my aesthetic has changed. Sometimes I'll fire something three or four or five times before I get what I want, or put the lines on and wash them off, and put the lines on and wash them off, but when it does work and when it comes out of the kiln right, I feel like it's *mine*. I labored over it, and now it's this work of art, finally! It's kind of crazy-making but really gratifying at the same time.

Metal, you can hammer it and saw it and form it and solder it and mark it and run it through the rolling mill, and it's so malleable and that's really fun. Enamel is fragile and finicky and inconsistent and infuriating! But there's more I can do with it; there are more options. There are different colors, the opaques and transparents, and marking. I can express my ideas more fully through enamel. It pushes me to keep exploring.

I get a little ... I don't want to say bored. But once I figure something out, it's like the excitement is over: What's next? How can I make this better, how can I push myself? But it's more that I'll have an idea for something, and then say, 'How can I achieve this aesthetic?' I don't necessarily say, 'Oh, I'll become a stonemason!' I don't change to gain a technique. It's really, 'How do I actualize this idea that I have?' I'm always sketching and drawing, so it's the ideas that drive the exploration of new techniques.

I still love the purity of just a pierced piece of jewelry with simple sawed lines. I want to do some pieces that evoke that early work in a different way — maybe a little more complex construction. It's always just this slow movement forward. I want my work to seem fresh. I don't want to just keep recycling it.

### **What initially prompted your move into enameling?**

I tried enameling because I heard that you could fire graphite lines into enamel, and I thought, 'Wow, it would be like a canvas!' I could actually draw directly onto it. I bought a used kiln. I'd never taken an enameling class; I just started messing around with it. And I'm really stubborn — that's the way I learn. Don't tell me what to do; don't tell me what I can't do! It takes me twice as long, and it's probably way more frustrating than if I just opened a book and *read* something. But then I have some happy accidents. I've been told, 'That enamel's not supposed to do that,' or 'That's not going to work on that,' when I call people to ask for advice. And I'm like, 'But it did! It was cool, and I made it work.' That's one

[Above] *Gris Pin*. Vitreous enamel, 22k gold, fine silver, oxidized sterling silver, copper. 2½ x 2 x ½ in. (64 x 51 x 13 mm). Photo by Peter Harris.



reason I like enamel, because I think I'm doing it in a way that other people aren't. And it's really important to me that my work be fresh and my own.

Having integrity in your work is so important. In enameling, I feel like the way I'm working it and the way I'm figuring it out on my own, it has a more personal touch, my personal aesthetic. I don't feel like, with metal, I was able to do that as much.

**As artistic influences, you cite some amazing painters, sculptors, and graphic artists, including Jean Arp, Gerhard Richter, and Cy Twombly. What is it about an artist's work that resonates with you?**

When I think about all these artists that I love, the common thread is that they have a strong, confident approach to line and they're really disciplined technically, but they have a spontaneity to their work. It's that combination of really well conceived, disciplined work that still has a kind of effortless freedom to it.

**You used the word 'drama' to describe the appeal of jewelry. What do you want a wearer to get from your pieces?**

My favorite pieces are definitely the big statement pieces, which would be for someone who wants to make that statement! When the right person falls in love with the right piece, and they're all excited about it, it's such a great thing. It's so personal. They're putting it on their body and wearing it out in public, and no other kind of art can do that.

I've started doing more retail shows. I enjoy it, because I meet people and get their reaction to my work first hand. Talking to people, and seeing how my work looks on them, and hearing what they have to say about it — I think that changed my work ... or changed my relationship to it. I've got customers who have started collecting my work and maybe started out with the little, simpler earrings, and each year they get a little bolder. 'I think this year I want a big bracelet! I don't know, can I pull that off?'

**So you're drawing them out of their shells a bit.**

I think that's cool! I think a lot of it's just an attitude. A lot of women think, 'Oh I can't wear that; that's not me.' But if you own

it, it's you! Just do it! Then they're kind of excited and out of their box a little bit. And I can do that with them, when I'm relating with them personally.

**Has that interaction affected what you do in the studio?**

I'm making a living at this, so I can't just make only what I like. Having women say, 'I love it, but it's too big for me,' has made me approach my work in a broader sense. I have to have smaller rings and small earrings. And a lot of women on the East coast prefer clips. Just that kind of nuts and bolts thing. I mean, my work isn't for everyone, and I'm not trying to be for everyone, but to have a range is important.

And then, I know I can go big, huge, over the top, go crazy, and I have more confidence that yes, there is that person out there. They're not at every show, but I used to think, 'Oh, I can't make that. Nobody's going to buy that! I'm the only one who's going to like that!' I've made those pieces that I've thought were kind of over the top, and they became really good-selling pieces to a certain customer. So it gave me confidence to step out even more.

**I like that: You draw your customers out, and they draw you out.**

I can't design in a vacuum. It does have to be a symbiotic relationship. Jewelry is so personal. People are wearing it on their bodies. It is a relationship with the wearer, in a way that making art that would hang in a home isn't. ■

[A] *Les Oeuf Pendant*. Vitreous enamel, 18k and 22k gold, sterling silver, copper. 2 in. (51 mm) high. [B] *Triptych Cuff*. Sterling silver. 2 1/4 in. (57 mm) wide. Photo by Ralph Gabriner. [C] *Deconstructed Graphite Pendant*. Vitreous enamel, fine and sterling silver. 2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (64 x 64 mm). [D] *Okano Cuff*. 22k gold, sterling silver. 2 1/2 in. (64 mm) wide. Photo by Ralph Gabriner. [E] *Ink Pin/Pendant*. Vitreous enamel, 18k gold, 22k gold, fine silver, oxidized silver. 1 1/2 in. (38 mm). [F] *Pebble Brooch*. Sterling silver. 1 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (38 x 64 mm). Photo by Ralph Gabriner. [G] *Graphite Ring*. Vitreous enamel, 18k and 22k gold, sterling silver, copper. 1 1/4 x 1 1/4 in. (32 x 32 mm). [H] *Herrera Earrings*. 22k gold, sterling silver. 3 in. (76 mm). [I] *Arp Pin*. Sterling silver, diamonds. 2 x 2 in. (51 x 51 mm). Photo by Ralph Gabriner. [J] *Die Fumage Pendant*. Vitreous enamel, 18k and 22k gold, sterling silver, copper. 1 1/2 in. (38 mm) high. Photos by Hap Sakwa unless otherwise noted.



