

Green Jewelry Focus, p.44

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# JEWELRY ARTIST

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# FOUND MARKET

Ordinary objects in a jewelry context connect with buyers

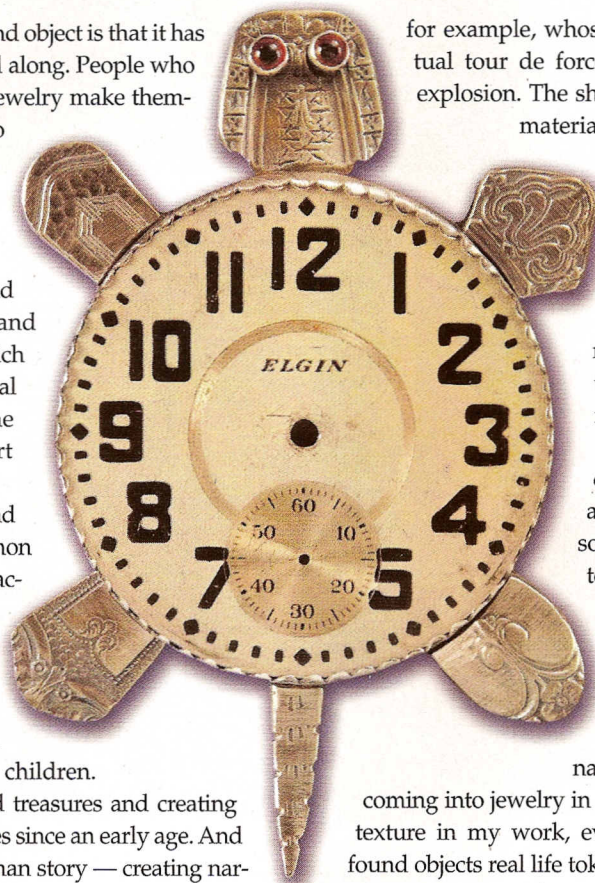
BY ANNIE OSBURN

**T**he power of the found object is that it has a story that's passed along. People who wear found object jewelry make themselves available to others, who are then drawn in by the object, conversation starts, and the story is carried on," notes Roberta Williamson, who with co-designer husband David, creates wondrous and thought-inspiring jewelry which can be found in international collections, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Renwick Gallery.

Be it two or a dozen found object jewelry artists, a common thread of inspiration and character defines this talented group. Almost all have collected minutia, odds and ends, vintage wares, and trolled garage sales and flea markets since they were children. Almost all recall taking found treasures and creating wearable objects and sculptures since an early age. And all share an interest in the human story — creating narrative designs that evoke emotion, memories, and response from the viewer.

Although the moniker "found objects" has become interchangeable with "recycled" and "repurposed," the genre has been around as long as jewelry, itself. Iconic mixed media metal artists, such as Fred Woell and Robert Ebendorf, cleared the path for contemporary artists to break the rules. Thinking outside of the box (and sometimes within it) using unconventional materials, these free thinkers gave permission to create adornment by any definition.

Eclectic sensibility is easily found in the work of Susan Lenart Kazmer,



for example, whose talisman necklaces are a virtual tour de force, a mélange of pure creative explosion. The sheer number and complexity of

materials and intricate constructions defy the senses, begging one to pause and analyze the visual feast. "I am incorporating a lot of nature, paper, even robins' eggs into my work now. I bring in real life from the cultures of my travels to keep my work current," says Lenart Kazmer.

A trip to France resulted in dried flowers and ribbons appearing in necklaces; a personal challenge turned handwritten letters into the necklace, "Letters to My Lover." Through a multitude of treasures, Lenart Kazmer uses found objects as gems to adorn sterling silver with steel-like patinas. "I'm a fiber and fine art artist

coming into jewelry in a different way. There is a lot of texture in my work, even with the metal. I consider found objects real life tokens, an extension of my life as a jewelry artist and as a person."

Roberta and David Williamson imbue similar depth of vision into their pieces. Be it vintage bird prints or buttons, dice or bottle caps, the Williamsons bring new definition to narrative detail. "We just love those moments when a found object brings up a strong personal memory," says David Williamson. "You can find a little thing that someone carried in their pocket and see the wear and history in that piece, because of how it was used."

The Williamsons share a 40-year history of creating and working together since meeting as students at

## WATCH FACE TURTLE

Susan Skinner. Sterling silver pin with vintage enameled metal watch face, bezel set glass eyes, and vintage silver-plate flatware. Photo: Margot Geist.







**SEVEN PIECE**  
Bottlecap bracelet.  
Ben Beamer & Laura  
Robson, Beamer Arts.  
Photo: Beamer  
Arts Design.

age 18. Their home studio is the “clean area,” a virtual archive of collections where designing and planning take place. The dirty work of fabrication unfolds on a large, double-wide table surrounded by carts of objects and tools in their working studio at Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio. “If our eye selects a piece, even if there’s no purpose for it at the moment, it becomes part of our working vocabulary. It’s like a museum here!” jokes

Roberta Williamson. Much excitement is derived from the dialogue created between viewer and object. “There’s an element of communication when people look at found objects. They remember people, times, and places. Emotions help transport them and make a connection with the artist,” adds David Williamson.

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Showcasing some 40 jewelry artists, Influx Jewellery Gallery, of Calgary, British Columbia, supports contemporary and mixed media endeavors. “The patrons who are really interested in found object work are generally art collectors or people enamored by the materials in the piece,” says Kari Woo, one of four Influx gallery owners. “This type of work generates a dialogue that is really quite interesting. If someone sees a vintage button, for example, it sparks memories that may not happen in a formal presentation of work with silver and gemstones. Often, it’s about taking something that’s garbage, like rusty metal or bolts found in junkyards, or something recycled, and changing the context of the material.”

A veteran of the contemporary found objects movement, Thomas Mann made a major shift in the mid-1970s from polished, Scandinavian-style jewelry to designs of industrial aesthetics and found materials. Strongly influenced during his college theatre days as a set designer and model builder, Mann later translated the techniques of collage and assemblage into his jewelry.

While his peers scrounge, collect, and make sense of miniature drawers of treasures, Mann has been casting many of his own since the mid-1980s. “I made an important, philosophical transition in making objects appear as if they’re found. They reference the found object for its serendipitous qualities. In building on my own proprietary designs, I needed an inventory of objects that I could use in a multiple of applications in order to satisfy the wholesale craft industry,” admits Mann. “That doesn’t mean that I don’t go back to the found object resource in order to keep that voice alive. A couple of years ago, I traveled to Boeing Surplus, which was a real resource for me in the ‘80s and ‘90s. I purchased a quantity of pipette cleaner brushes from which I made a whole series of work.”

Acknowledging a growing trend in recycled and repurposed jewelry, Liz Dineen, co-owner of Albuquerque’s

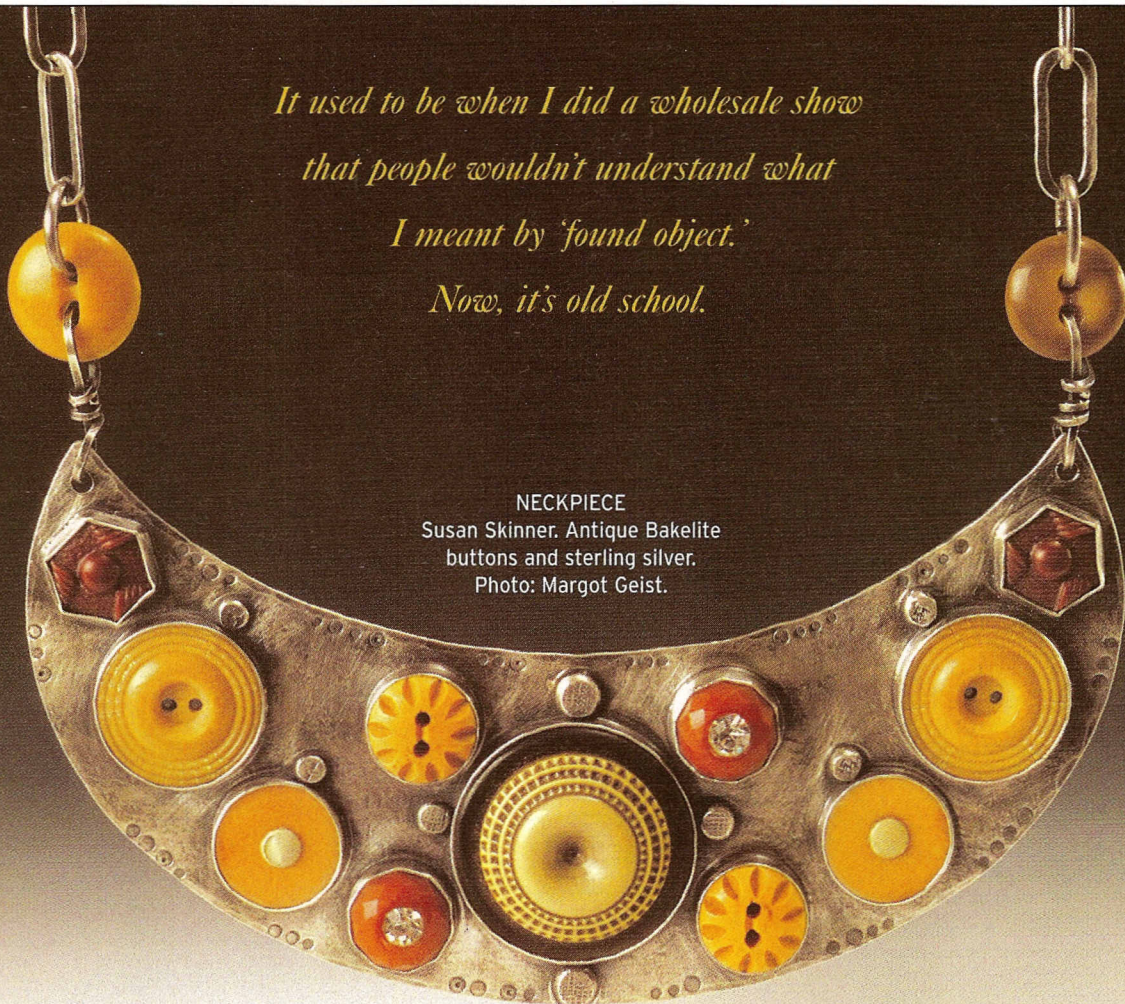


**LIMITED EDITION HAND PIN.** Thomas Mann. Nest: nickel silver, sterling silver, brass, carved acrylic, pearls, and found objects. Photo: Thomas Mann Design.



*It used to be when I did a wholesale show  
that people wouldn't understand what  
I meant by 'found object.'  
Now, it's old school.*

NECKPIECE  
Susan Skinner. Antique Bakelite  
buttons and sterling silver.  
Photo: Margot Geist.



Mariposa Gallery with Jen Rohrig, finds growing appeal among customers. "The aspect of recycled materials appeals to people, as well. There is a lot of nostalgia around the objects being used, whether it's something off an old bus, subway tokens, or old photographs," notes Dineen. "Found object jewelry is unique and that's what appeals to us as a gallery. We find that people who make this kind of art have a similar philosophy about reusing things and not exhausting more natural resources."

#### MINDFUL REUSE

Instead of gemstones, designer Susan Skinner makes good use of tin cans and rulers to fill the beautiful wings of her trademark dragonfly and bug brooches. "I try to use something found and make it something precious. Some of the jewelry practices that I used to take for granted, I can't anymore. Mining is not a good thing, nor is China's practices with human rights," says Skinner. "Jewelry makes



people feel good, but I've got to feel good about what I'm doing, too. When I see what's going on in the world, I want to push myself more in the repurposing direction."

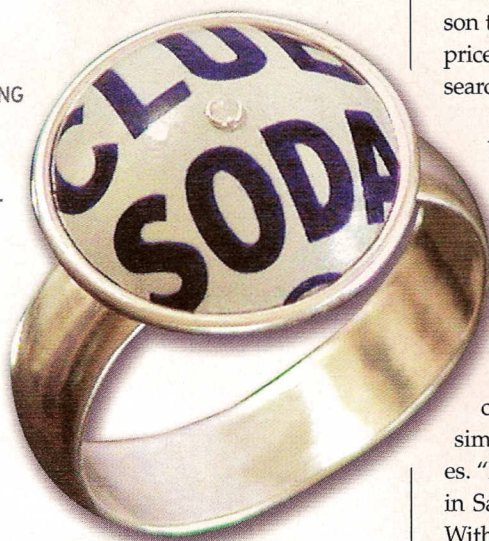
Skinner, who has a degree in anthropology and has long held an interest in objects of other cultures, became fascinated with how other cultures use things that western cul-

tures throw away. "I began playing around with buttons initially and it just grew from there. It used to be when I did a wholesale show that people wouldn't understand what I meant by 'found object.' Now, it's old school," she laughs.

In the spirit of reuse, Ben Beamer and design partner Laura Robson make big business out of reusing two simple objects: bottle caps and vinyl records. In these days of juice boxes and flip tops, the team's collection of bracelets, necklaces, and earrings evolve from a seemingly endless supply of materials that are the real deal. "We use both current and vintage bottle caps. We don't reproduce anything. Our focus



**CLUB SODA RING**  
Ben Beamer &  
Laura Robson,  
Beamer Arts.  
Photo: Beamer  
Arts Design.



is on recycling," says Beamer, whose jewelry line with Robson took off nine years ago. "We do a lot of casting to keep prices low and accessible. We get Googled a lot by people searching for recycled work."

Is it recycled, or has it found a new use? This Oregon-based duo takes pride in their state's recycling history and being the home of the first bottle bill. "When we first started, our market niche was boomers who remembered bottle caps and vinyl. But now, we're seeing a younger, hip, eco-groovy crowd that can afford to buy something nice," adds Beamer.

Another designer makes good use of antique typewriter keys, Bakelite game pieces, and Asian calligraphy brushes. Debra Dresler keeps her work simple in form with her collection of embellished watches. "I'm always on the lookout for stuff. I go to Chinatown in San Francisco or to a Paris flea market," says Dresler. With a studio filled with collections and a devotion to her original Snow White watch, Dresler struck on the watch as her canvas.

"Rather than gold and stones, I used rust and what I could find on the streets. This started me on a quest before recycling was a cool thing. Now it's beyond that. This is what the future is about. It's no longer a trend," adds Dresler. "I hope my watches give people pause to take another look at the moment, rather than seeing so far ahead." As for the future of found object jewelry, Dresler agrees that nostalgia is fueling interest. "People look at this jewelry and it's a little salute to their past."

If nothing else, a unique type of customer seeks out jewelry where the object and the story transcend precious metals and gems. "The found object jewelry collector is someone who wants something eclectic and different. Truthfully, we're passionate about it because the customer who buys it, really appreciates it," notes Lisa Glosserman, co-owner of High Gloss in Houston, with twin sister, Kim. "We've found that people love the narrative from this jewelry. The biggest underlying thing is that people can relate to what they see. It conjures up fond memories."

**RECORD**  
Debra Dresler.  
Watch with vintage  
record album  
sections. Photo:  
Stroke of Art.



## FIND THEM

**Benjamin Beamer & Laura Robson**, [www.beamerarts.com](http://www.beamerarts.com)

**Debra Dresler**, [www.strokeofart.com](http://www.strokeofart.com)

**Susan Lenart Kazmer**, [www.susanlenartkazmer.net](http://www.susanlenartkazmer.net)

**Thomas Mann**, [www.thomasmann.com](http://www.thomasmann.com)

**Susan Skinner**, [www.fibulastudio.com](http://www.fibulastudio.com)

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