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WALKER

A tiny space snipped from the vast outer space
where the air is quiet and transparent





Wearable Forms: Jewelry as Art

Left to right: Alice Roche, Tia Keobounpheng, Amy Torello at the Walker's Jewelry Mart in November 2008 Photo: Cameron Wittig

Bling? No. Good design? Yes. Custom jewelry you want to wear and can also afford? Yes. Three designers whose work is currently featured in the Walker Shop—Minneapolis-based Tia Salmela Keobounpheng; San Francisco-based Alice Roche; and Mexico City-based Amy Torello—were kind enough to talk briefly about their work and inspirations.

Who do you design jewelry for—who do you see wearing it?

Tia Keobounpheng: When I first started making this line of jewelry, I designed for myself, but it also became an exploration of form, material, and technology, translating concepts from my environment into wearable forms. Ultimately, I want my pieces to be practical, easy to wear, and provocatively simple so that they can be everyday pieces and/or worn for special occasions.

Amy Torello: Basically, I design for myself and my friends—young-at-heart gorgeous women who are dynamic, individual, hard-working, and in love with their lives and want to show it off to the world.

Alice Roche: The person I make jewelry for is someone who appreciates jewelry that is well-designed and contemporary—something that stands out because it is unusual. I try to make a range of work that maintains my design aesthetic but pushes the boundaries at one end and is quite simple at the other end.

What is your process like?

TK: I work part-time for my father [architect David Salmela] doing architectural-based work and also a bit with my husband [design professional Souliyah Keobounpheng]. I find myself working at all hours of the day—inspiration can hit while I'm out on a run or just before I fall asleep or while I'm sitting at my work table.

AT: I definitely don't have a work week. When it comes to developing new ideas, my brain is always mulling things over: concepts, colors, shapes, textures. I will sketch and make notes . . . seeing things in the solid form of the silver really allows my mind to run with a concept.

AR: The first four years I was making jewelry, I was also working 30 hours a week for an architect, so I was forced to be very efficient when I was in my studio. For the past year I have been making jewelry full-time. I think I am always designing in my head; ideas can come at any time.

Talk a little about your inspirations, your materials, your beginnings in this field.

TK: I am a huge fan of product designer Hella Jongerius from the Netherlands, who masterfully balances art, design, and craft without ever losing the edge or the refinement. I find myself straddling the lines between art and design and craft in my own work—particularly because I need to work with my hands to feel truly satisfied.

AT: I work in enamel, and more generally, color, because there is something so ancient about enamel, and so counter to this rapid, modern world. Also, I find the quality and luminescence of the enamels over the silver to be mesmerizing. Color is the package that life is wrapped up in, and each separate hue defines a mood or conveys an emotion.

AR: I got started making jewelry because I needed to balance my AutoCAD-heavy days when I was working as an architect with something very hands-on, so I took a jewelry class and was hooked from the start. I loved the relation to architecture, and the best part was that I could complete a project in a matter of hours rather than years. I think the process of building something with my hands is the easiest way to explore and ultimately express my ideas.

If you couldn't make jewelry, what would your creative outlet be?

TK: Over the past 15 years, I have found outlets in photography, drawing, weaving, bookmaking, and block printing, and currently supplement my creativity with knitting, sewing, pastel drawings, digital artwork, and graphic/promotional materials for my jewelry, in addition to working in the architecture/interior design world.

AT: If I couldn't make jewelry, I would dance. Maybe salsa, or flamenco.

AR: In my spare time, I draw, paint, and take photos. I find that these things constantly feed my jewelry design process, whether I intend them to or not. My favorite outlet that isn't directly tied to jewelry design is cooking (though the process seems so similar).

See full interview at blogs.walkerart.org/offcenter. For a look at some of the jewelry, visit shop.walkerart.org or stop in at the Walker and browse.