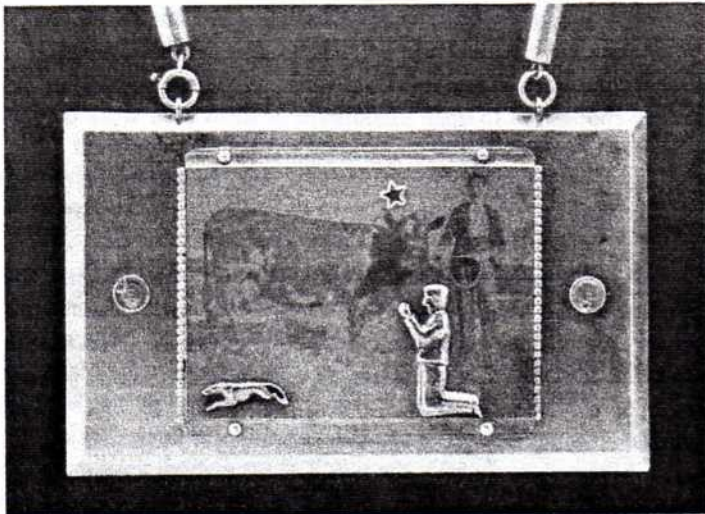


# SEATTLE METALS GUILD

i-Monthly newsletter

March-April 1999



"West of Jersey" mixed media pendant by J. Fred Woell

## ART BY ACCIDENT:

### WORKING WITH FOUND OBJECTS

BY J. FRED WOELL

**Workshop:** Saturday-Sunday, April 17-18, 1999  
**Time:** 9:30am-4:30pm  
**Location:** Highline Community College  
**Deadline:** April 1st  
**Cost:** \$88.00 (see registration on back page)  
**Lecture:** Friday, April 16, 1999 at 7pm (FREE)  
**Location:** University of Washington  
Art Building, Room 3

Creating art jewelry and small objects from assemblage of found objects will be investigated from the notion that chance and serendipity are major influences in the resulting work. The importance of this will be a well spring for work done in this workshop. Students will make several pieces using found objects with instruction on the variety of cold connections available to accomplish the sometimes difficult task of combining dissimilar materials that are often a part of this type of work.

J. Fred Woells metalwork and sculpture has been exhibited nationally and internationally for the past 37 years. Most recently Woell exhibited a retrospective of 25 years of work at Maine Coast Artist in Rockport Maine. He received his MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art and has served as Assistant Director at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts. For additional information on J. Fred Woell, please see the current issue of Metalsmith Magazine.

Call Leslie MacInnes for more information on the workshop 425-391-0995 or e-mail at [foundaround@earthlink.net](mailto:foundaround@earthlink.net)

## PAINTERLY ENAMELS

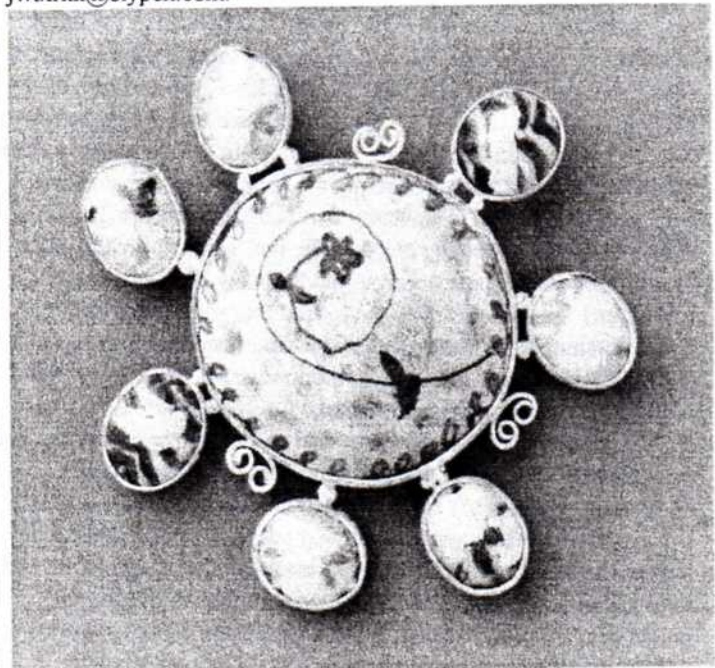
BY JAMIE BENNETT

**Workshop:** Saturday-Sunday, March 27 & 28, 1999  
**Time:** 10:00am - 5:00pm  
**Location:** Pratt Fine Arts Center  
**Deadline:** March 5, 1999  
**Cost:** \$120.00 (see registration form on back page)  
**Lecture:** Friday March 26, 1999, at 7pm (FREE)  
**Location:** University of Washington, Art Building, Room 3

Jamie Bennett, currently Full Professor at SUNY at New Paltz in New York, offers us his extensive expertise on painting enamels. He most currently had his work shown at a selected exhibition at the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. Additional exhibitions have included: The Susan Cummings Gallery, in Mill Valley, CA, The Mobilia Gallery in Cambridge, MA, and the Helen Drutt Gallery in Philadelphia, PA. His pieces are held in collections at Museums around the world including the Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C., the American Crafts Museum in New York City, and the Dorskey Museum in London.

Enamels allow for the addition of a full range of color to jewelry. Jamie's workshop will be 'hands on' with an emphasis on the 'painterly' approach to working enamels. Whether you have projects waiting to be enameled or plan on producing copper samples, this workshop is suited for those who want to explore painting with enamels. All skill levels are invited to participate. Price includes use of a variety of enamels supplied at the workshop and firing of finished pieces. (Both lead and lead-free enamels will be used during this workshop.)

If you have any questions about the workshop or the types of enamels used, please call Jen Thacher at 360-379-3989 or e-mail at [jwtxrkk@olympen.com](mailto:jwtxrkk@olympen.com).



"Jurjani 17", enamel, gold & silver by James Bennett, 1998

This afternoon I revisited a brooch that I'd made in 1996. The piece came back to me from a gallery that was having trouble selling it. The interesting element of this brooch is a large seal tooth that, it seems, customers have an aversion to. There is a hairline fracture that runs from the tip of the fang to its base. I'd found this "flaw" to my liking in 1996, but another gallery owner pointed out that this feature might, in fact, be the reason that the piece hadn't sold: collectors would consider the fracture a defect and so would dismiss the brooch entirely. Perhaps the line could be covered by an additional element that would complement the piece itself. Mmmmm. I decided to go ahead and fabricate an element that would solve this problem. As it turned out, the solution worked quite well and indeed may have enhanced the brooch considerably. But I was left with a sour metallic taste in my mouth.

It's not that I consider finished pieces inviolable. At a recent lecture, hollow ware artist Greg Wilbur stated that he never considered his pieces to be finished; to his mind the door was always open to further tinkering, consideration and fine tuning. While I don't often rework a piece— unless I'm recycling it—I don't consider it wrong to do so and I like the tech. and conceptual challenges inherent in altering a "finished" piece. No, what disturbed me was my motive. Where was my decision coming from?

Certainly I was allowing the market place into my work in a way that I wouldn't have just a few years ago. Then, I would have shuffled the piece around some more, perhaps even tinkered with the price, donated it to an auction or simply added it to my personal collection. At the very least, I would, have felt really bad about changing it. But the thought of another piece gathering dust was just too unpleasant, especially when the sting of my last show — in which NONE of the newest body of work sold— was so fresh.

This line between personal vision and commercial viability, once so sharp, has been growing wider and fuzzier to me lately. Used to be that custom, special orders and limited production were over here in this pile and "one of a kind" pieces were over there in that one. In pile "A" the marketplace was welcome but in pile "B" it was considered persona non grata. When gallery people would tell me that what collectors are looking for are smaller, more intimate pieces, suggesting that I might want to consider scaling down my brooches, I'd smile, nod enthusiastically, tell them I'd certainly think about it and basically continue doing whatever I felt like. But I began to find that my hand hesitated when reaching for a green garnet, moving instead to pick up a diamond—green is a tough sell, diamond says "value"— and I began to use more gold than perhaps I normally would.

Choices of material, conceptual and aesthetic concerns, and questions of wearability are decisions that confront jewelers at every turn. For some it is simple: production jewelers may make most of their choices with the buying public firmly in mind. The custom jeweler helps their client to establish their parameters and then makes his or her decisions based on those client driven guidelines. So called academic metalsmiths are seemingly unconcerned with the market place per se but, I'll wager, may be hearing the quiet murmur of other voices. Their decisions may be

affected by the perceived need to produce work that would be considered socially significant, artistically referential or conceptually driven. The voices that they hear are those of their colleagues, critics and of the pundits in the field. So we'll give the "marketplace" a broader interpretation and include external influences that can change the direction of a jeweler's work or cause them to second guess themselves and opt for a path that is less than innate. Publications such as *Metalsmith*, *Exhibition In Print*, *American Craft and Ornament*, trips to galleries or even studio visits can deeply affect the direction that an artist's work can take. Some simply choose not to open *Metalsmith* or show their work before it is completed to anyone, be they galleries, friends or other metalsmiths. I certainly never show my work to anyone before it is finished and in the bag. But, as with most things, this presents its own set of problems.

Choosing, for instance, to abandon a piece because you've discovered that another artist has, unbeknown to you, taken a nearly identical path is self defeating. You simply don't know down what road a piece may lead or what unanticipated ideas might be shaken loose in the process. Discounting an idea because you feel that the finished piece may not ring the proper critical bells is dangerous. Even in the world of the custom jeweler, where the line seems so clear, it's unwise to abdicate control and cater to whatever whim the client may express. After all, they came to you because of who you are and the pieces that you've produced; if you don't truly speak your mind, step in and gently steer them away from, say, cramming seventeen disparate design elements into a 10 millimeter space, neither of you will be happy in the end. And, sure, there's a segment of the buying public that's only comfortable with medium sized, shiny hammered hoops or hearts or small silver teddy bears but "dumbing down"—look at the film industry— will eventually catch up with you. You must never lose respect for your audience.

Perhaps the hardest place to be is right after a body of work has been particularly well received. It's tough to move in another direction when the applause for the last work are still ringing in your ears. If the work has sold particularly well the infusion of money— maybe real money— feels sooooo good. The stakes have suddenly jumped. It's common in the music world: with a debut album garnering critical praise or commercial success, the pressure to follow up is enormous, and expectations — especially one's own— are just too high. This is the freezing point. The point where you'd like to start something new, but you're reluctant to come down from the high of your recent success. If you could just do it again, only maybe with a few subtle differences.... And what's wrong with that? After all you've worked hard to get to this place, it's your work, and if you want to repeat it for a while then so what: hey, if you can't steal from yourself, yadda, yadda, yadda.

Well, maybe nothing is wrong with that. If you pause there for a while that's probably fine. In reality, the world of the market place is going to have some kind of effect. Compromises will always be made. But the compromises that you choose to make and for how long you stay in the safe zone is up to you. Sooner or later, it's time to move on. The chattering voices inside your head won't let you stay in one place long—they know what keeps you fresh and your work vital: risk. And if you pay too much attention to the chorus outside your head, you'll stop taking risks. And that can be the kiss of death.

