

SEATTLE METALS GUILD

i-Monthly newsletter

May-June 1999

STUDIO TOUR AND YEAR END PARTY

Date: Sunday, June 6, 1999
Tour Time: Tour begins at 1 p.m. (see below for full schedule)
Party Time: Lincoln Park, Site #4, at 5:15 p.m.

The blooming of the cherry trees marks the advent of spring as well as the winding down of another eventful Seattle Metals Guild Year. To celebrate, the Guild invites all members to the annual Studio Tour and Year-End Party.

The Guild heads to West Seattle for this year's tour. Well... Francis and Micki's studio is in central Seattle, but we didn't want to pass up the chance to view this dynamic duo's new set up. (Although Francis recently co-leased the studio with Micki, West Seattle remains Francis' home base.) The Tour will commence at Micki and Francis' studio then move to West Seattle where the group will stop in to visit glass jewelry artist, Julie Mihalisin and her partner Philip Walling to view their workspace and collaborative pieces. The final studio will be that of Peter Rowe who is rumored to boast an enviable and extensive collection of tools. The day will conclude with the annual Potluck Party at a sunny beachfront spot in Lincoln Park

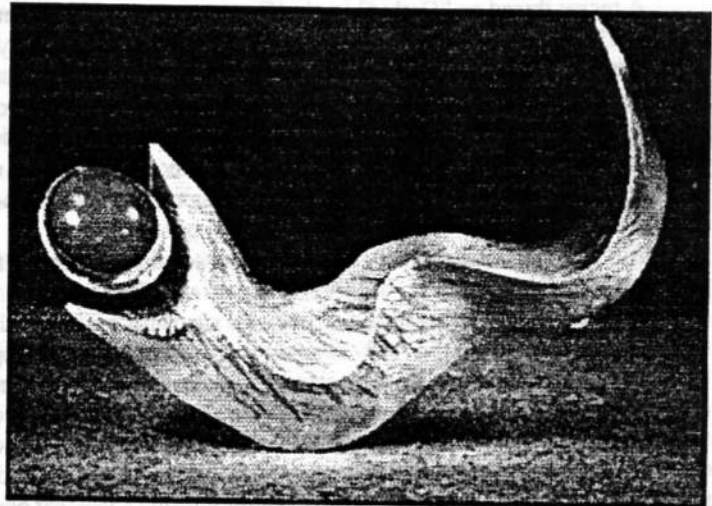
To ensure a successful tour, please adhere to the schedule below and the following guidelines. Each studio will be toured for one hour. There will be 1/2 hour between each studio to allow for commuting time. If you are unable to get to a studio during the allotted time, please move on to the next studio according to the schedule.

<u>Time</u>	<u>Studio</u>
1-2 p.m.	Francis Smersh & Micki Lippe 1426 Jackson (4 blocks West of Pratt Fine Art Center on North side of Jackson near intersection of Rainier and Jackson) (206) 328-9252
2:30-3:30 p.m.	Julie Mihalisin & Philip Walling 4418 SW College Street (one block NW of the intersection of Admiral Way and California Ave. SW) (206) 923-1037
4-5 p.m.	Peter Rowe 1406 SW Henderson Street (1 mile east of Westwood Shopping Center at the southern end of West Seattle) (206) 762-5665
5:15 p.m. - sunset	Lincoln Park Picnic Shelter #4 (directions follow)

(continued)

The Potluck style party will be held at an outdoor picnic area at Lincoln Park. Although the weather WILL be sunny and warm, throw a warm, waterproof jacket in the car just in case. The Guild will provide snacks, juice and pop. Join us for the party whether or not you can make it to the tours, it's always fun and a great way to meet fellow members. Remember to bring a salad, something to grill or dessert to share with the group. Bring some fun outdoor games.

Directions to the Party at Lincoln Park: off I-5 North/South bound take the West Seattle Exit. Follow signs to Fautleroy Way SW. Stay on Fautleroy Way SW until you come to the Park. The park is on the right hand side of the street. Shelter area #4 is the northern most picnic area along the beach.



**FOLD FORMING WORKSHOP
WITH CHARLES LEWTON-BRAIN**
See Page 3

SMG Calendar

May 5	Lecture: Miriam Works (FREE)	
May 26-29	SNAG Conference	
June 6	Year End Party	p. 1
Sept. 17	Lecture Charles Lewton Brain	p. 3
Sept. 18-19	Workshop Charles Lewton Brain	p.3
Oct.	General Meeting	
Nov. 13-14	Workshop Bill Ayers	
Dec.	Ornament Party	

QUALITY

BY ANDY COOPERMAN

Coming home from Pratt one evening I heard an advertisement for a large and well known jewelry business. This particular jeweler — who, it turns out, is my friend in the diamond business— is a large mainstream establishment that deals in safe, uninspired, bread and butter, pump it to the masses, “affordably” priced jewelry. The radio spot was one in a series featuring a variety of employees sharing their personal histories and some of their thoughts about making a career with this establishment. Their enthusiasm for the company was so inspiring and their behind the veil glimpse into the company so reassuring that my faith in the big world of commerce was practically restored. I was moved. I was also irritated and fairly disgusted.

The word “quality” is being bantered about with out, it seems, any regard for its definition: adj. having a high degree of excellence. The “bench jeweler” in the radio spot explained how each piece is carefully constructed with each customer in mind and lavished with attention to details of fit and finish. You could really tell that quality was a point of pride with this gentleman, and so with his company, and that their merchandise was “crafted” in the truest sense of the word. (Another over and misapplied word: consider the “craft brewer”.) Trouble was, I couldn’t knock the real image of their merchandise out of my mind. Shoddy polishes lead to poorly set stones; corners that are meant to be sharp are rounded by being forced into the tripoli wheel; designs that may have been crisp on the rendering board are mushy and flaccid in production. Surely this business has the right to consider the quality of their product superior. But if they have any experience in the jewelry trade at all they must know the truth: just look in the cases.

Perhaps what they mean to say is that the quality of their merchandise is appropriate to the prices that they charge; after all you get what you pay for. (“Whadda ya want for \$99.95?”). But their pretense to old world craftsmanship and the one-of-a-kind posture that they seek to project is insulting; and the public doesn’t seem to care. Certainly a portion of the buying public could be educated as to what are the hallmarks (clever jewelry pun) of quality craftsmanship and materials; but the majority are satisfied with the status quo. While there is a chicken-and-egg partnership between what the public wants and what the manufacturer, craftsman and vendor offers, what I find so disturbing is not so much the public’s lowered expectations, but the willingness of the “craftsman” to produce a substandard or merely adequate product and clothe it in the rhetoric of quality. It seems that simply attaching the word “quality” to something is enough to make it so in peoples’ minds.

A recent thread on “Orchid” (orchid@ganoxin.com), an internet forum on jewelry and metalsmithing, has been occupied with the idea of quality. What is quality? What are personal standards involving quality? How far should you go to provide it? Many old timers log on and their experience, insight and points of view are invaluable. One post lamented the mall redefinition of the term “custom” from meaning an object built from scratch to fill the particular needs and desires of the client to an object assembled from prefabricated, factory produced die struck elements chosen from columns A, B and C. The commitment to the piece just isn’t there. What was at one time a fully realized, carefully considered piece is now part of the equation of commodification. The notion of “quality” is simply one element that has, at best, equal weight to the other elements of labor, material cost, packaging and volume and, at worst, no weight at all. And maybe this is okay —within the venue of mass production: high volume and rock bottom price tags.

But when the image of the craftsman is evoked things change. It becomes personal. Real hands, connected to real people who are governed by real brains which, hopefully, ponder real issues of ethical import are involved in the making of a piece. Real senses of pride and accomplishment come into play and so personal standards are established. These standards, of course, vary from person to person and from job to job, but for the maker who really believes in the making they can supersede matters of hourly wage and the price bid. To be sure, a base line for quality can be drawn on absolute standards: an object must conform to the accepted standards of the industry. For jewelry this would include solid connections, thick enough material, even finishes, etc. More specifically, for the metal smith or art jeweler, I believe that the selection of materials and the commitment to craftsmanship should never interfere with the intent or content of the piece. If for instance the object at hand were a cube, then the attention to edge, surface, line and corner should be such that nothing stands between the “cubeness” of the piece and the viewer. Sloppy, rounded edges become a veil that obscures what the piece is about. With mainstream jewelry formal concerns and quality of material are what the piece is about and so their excellence becomes paramount. Jewelry is an art form that carries some baggage, wearability and intent being two big ones. Pins stuck on as an after thought (“look, it’s a brooch and a tree pruner”) are, to me, bothersome and indicative of lack of faith in the initial piece, especially when the “brooch” hangs wrong or simply won’t function well.

Quality is a matter of personal responsibility. As a student I would often seek out my instructor and thrust my piece under his nose asking if it was “done”: either clean enough to solder (regardless of its encrustation of fossilized pickle) or ready to go to the rouge wheel despite the gashes that I’d just inflicted upon it with a flailing #2 mill bastard file. It was as if his nod was dispensation, justifying my incomplete workmanship. I certainly knew better; I possessed eyes and a rudimentary tactile sense that could distinguish between a smooth and even surface and one cratered like the moon. The point is that I wouldn’t acknowledge my capacity to discern or define what is quality. (And doesn’t the buying public suffer from this lack of confidence; aren’t they looking to the makers to tell them what is good?) But at some point— in a blinding flash of epiphonic insight—the answer came to me: It’s ready when it looks ready. No amount of squinting, head tilting or hand jiggling will make the piece right when it’s not right. Wow, that realization, that commitment to honesty, was a turning point.

Something marvelous happens when I pick up a piece of jewelry that is well made. I usually say “Man, this guy really knew what he was doing,” (no gender slight intended). If the piece is old, with no known provenance it becomes perhaps the only tangible manifestation of who, on one level, this person was. That piece communicates volumes to those who understand the language of craftsmanship.

If a piece is significantly wrong— that is, there is something about it that interferes with what I’m driving at—I’ll redo it. But to be honest, as perfect as I’d like to try to be, the unfortunate truth is that the bottom line is out there lurking somewhere and I occasionally slip, cramming that substandard ring into the shipping box, getting it onto the UPS truck and crossing my fingers. (There’s really nothing more that I can do once that truck rolls away...) But every time the phone rings for a while I’m apprehensive. And maybe that’s one thing that keeps me straight: the knowledge that one day someone else— some other craftsman— is going to pick up that piece and say “Man, this guy really cared.”

