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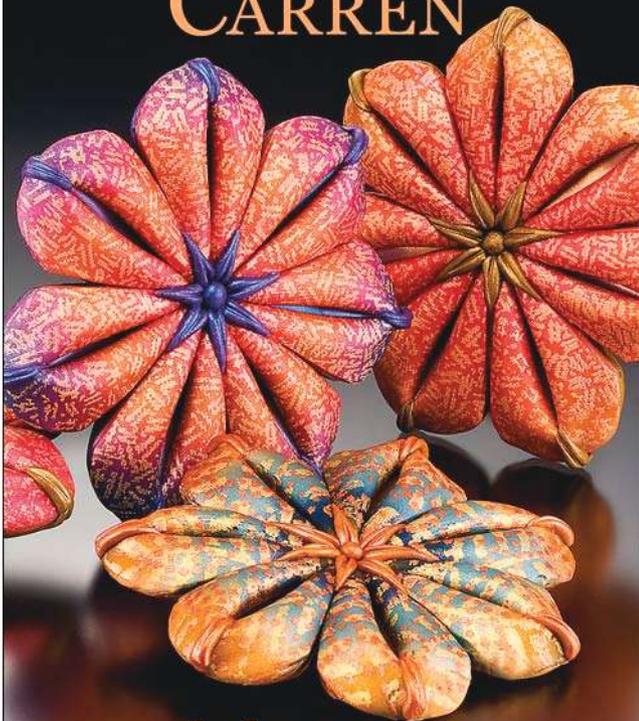


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Robin Updike contemplates how an artist's vocabulary is shaped and developed by personal experience. Her example here is Joan Tenenbaum, academically trained as an anthropologist and linguist, who irrevocably changed her life by becoming a jeweler, embracing her heart's desire. It was in Alaska that Tenenbaum did field work for her doctoral thesis, and she has never truly left her spiritual home. Her jewelry is grounded in her deep love of Alaska, its native cultures and its awe-inspiring beauty.

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Robert K. Liu, spurred on by last issue's article "Gold and the Gods, Jewels of Ancient Nubia," has researched Nubian mosaic tabular face beads and presents his findings on the unique tabular beads and what they might mean for ancient glassbeadmaking. Virtually all mosaic face beads of antiquity were of two types; a representation of Medusa as a Gorgon, and of Medusa as a woman. Originally thought to be different canes, the Nubian mosaic face beads suggest that one cane, that of Medusa as Gorgon, was used to make both types of beads.

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Collaboration in Absentia

Glen R. Brown brings to bear the contemplative and reflective nature of Kiff Slemmons's modes of ideation and how she transforms them into deeply considered and astonishing works of jewelry. Her ability to work in and through themes has long been recognized and applauded in the field of metalsmithing. This most recent act of retrospection has Slemmons taking Neolithic stone tools and refashioning them into distinctive new works, all while regardful of the ancient toolmaker and maintaining the inherent craftsmanship of the objects.

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Patrick R. Benesh-Liu visited this past summer with noted glass artist Svatopluk Kasalý where he lives and works in the small town of Třešt' in the Czech Republic. The short but intensive meeting was an illuminating and refractive experience in itself. Through the lens of Kasalý's work we find a sensual engagement with the world and a desire to improve upon it. Creativity, employed in this instance by Kasalý, adorns and expands ourselves and our environment, in a manner that takes the commodity of time and translates it into physical and material beauty. From the physical and material we are mentally inspired, and it is this joyous circle that Kasalý revels in.

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The Ebony Fashion Fair

Ashley Callahan takes us through the delightful experience of recreating the traveling show known as the Ebony Fashion Fair, which took place from high school gymnasiums in small towns to grand ballrooms in large cities. The audiences were composed of and targeted middle and upper-middle class African-American women. For its fifty years, there was never anything like it as it celebrated the beauty of the individual in its utterly unique presentations.

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Cover: **KIFF SLEMMONS: SNIPS** of silver and Neolithic stone, 10.16 x 3.81 centimeters, 2014. *Photograph by Rod Slemmons.*

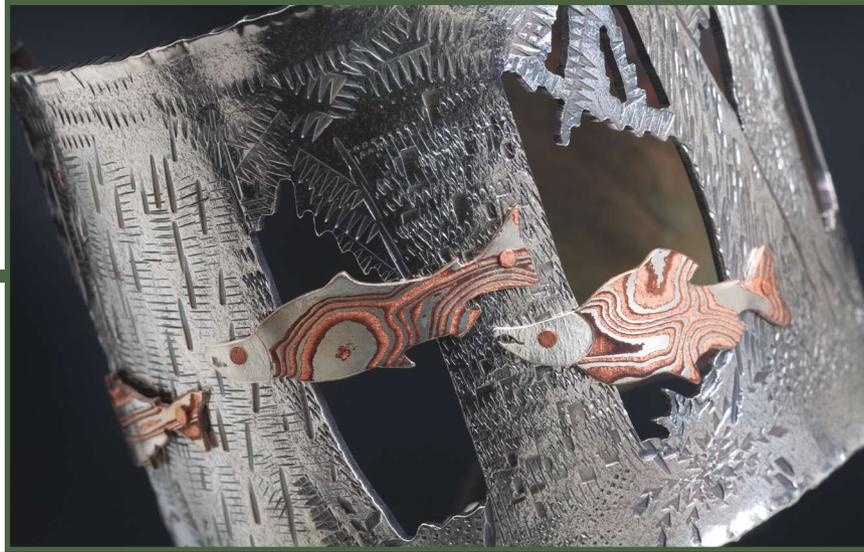
JOAN TENENBAUM: WOLF ULU LANDSCAPE brooch of sterling silver, copper, dichroic glass, 7.30 x 4.45 x 1.59 centimeters, 2008. *Photograph by Doug Yaple.*



JOAN TENENBAUM



ONE OF THE HALLMARKS OF TENENBAUM'S CAREER HAS BEEN HER RELENTLESS STUDY OF TECHNIQUES AND HER DESIRE TO CONTINUALLY LEARN AND GROW AS A MAKER.



VITAL AND FRAGILE INTERCONNECTIONS

Robin Updike

Joan Tenenbaum's cuff bracelet called *Salmon in the Trees* is a striking piece of jewelry. It is also an artful reminder that the ecology of our natural world hangs in easily disrupted balance. The sterling silver cuff is cut and engraved to show a dense Northwest forest inhabited, delightfully, by glistening copper-colored salmon that seem to be swimming through the trees. In the notes she wrote to accompany this 2011 piece, Tenenbaum explained that in the rainforests of Southwest Alaska salmon return to the streams where they were born and along the way many become food for eagles, bears and other predators. The predators digest the salmon and their droppings fertilize the lush streamside foliage and the forest trees. Salmon, the kings of the sea, and old-growth forests may seem worlds apart, but they are in fact dependent on each other for survival.

"Perhaps more than any other species salmon connect the oceans with the land," Tenenbaum says. Salmon need the cool, shaded nesting spots to breed,

and the bears, for instance, need to fatten up on the salmon in the late summer to survive winter hibernation. "The tightness of this web of interconnections is so vital and so fragile—paralleling the fragility of our indigenous languages and cultures—this kind of poignancy moves me to make pieces with these deep layers of meaning."

Jewelry infused with environmental and cultural content is Tenenbaum's signature as an artist. Virtually every brooch, neckpiece, bracelet, or ring she has made in the last thirty-five years is grounded not only in precise craftsmanship but also in her deep love of Alaska, its native cultures and its awe-inspiring natural beauty. Tenenbaum has created brooches that are abstracted aerial views of Alaska deltas, tidelands and mountain peaks. She has taken inspiration from traditional Yup'ik ceremonial masks. And she has made a series of "ulu knife" brooches that incisively symbolize the traditionally close relationship between Native cultures and the environment. An ulu knife is an all-

SALMON IN THE TREES cuff bracelet of sterling silver, mokume gane, copper, 4.76 x 5.87 x 5.08 x 14.29 centimeters, 2011. *Opposite page: WOLF IN BLACK SPRUCE IV: OUR LAND, OUR ANCESTORS* brooch/pendant of sterling silver, copper, eighteen karat gold, 5.87 x 6.19 x 1.27 centimeters, 2011. *Photographs by Doug Yapple*



RAVEN IN FLIGHT: THE SEEN AND UNSEEN necklace of sterling silver, 19.69 x 16.51 x 0.64 x 45.72 centimeters, 2009. FEASTS OF TRADITION brooch/pendant of sterling silver, fourteen karat yellow, pink and palladium white gold, eighteen karat green gold, keum-boo, champagne diamond, red, blue, orange, and green sapphires, 6.99 x 6.03 x 1.27 centimeters, 2011.

purpose cutting knife shaped like a wide slice of pie that, in traditional culture, is an Eskimo woman's tool for preparing food, cleaning meat and all manner of other domestic tasks necessary for survival. Tenenbaum also made real ulu knives, uses one in her kitchen and has given them as wedding gifts.

"I saw early on that ulu knives in the tourist shops in Alaska were worthless as useful knives, and I had seen how people in the villages made their ulus which they use every day. So I decided to learn how to make them. Considering that the development of the design of the ulu over the centuries was based on the work that needed to be done with it, it really does connect the culture to the land."

Trained as a linguist and an anthropologist, Tenenbaum did field work in Alaska in her late twenties while working on her doctoral thesis. She lived in a remote village and wrote a grammar and a dictionary for the Dena'ina language, which was the language then still

spoken by the villagers. After her first years of field research she lived in other native villages and worked to help young native Alaskan adults become teachers. Tenenbaum earned her Ph.D. from Columbia University in anthropology and linguistics in 1978, but it is fair to say that since she first set foot in Alaska as a young researcher, she has never really left. Physically and spiritually, Alaska has been Tenenbaum's touchstone for nearly forty years.

Tenenbaum's life as a jeweler, however, started well before her introduction to Alaska. The arc of her career is an unusual dual path of art and academia that, some decades ago, serendipitously merged into an art career fueled by her academic experiences. As an adolescent growing up in the suburbs of Detroit her parents stressed academics. Yet despite a full schedule of college preparatory classes, in the ninth grade Tenenbaum found a class period open for an elective. "So I signed up for something called craft. I liked to do

things with my hands and it sounded interesting. For a year we did block printing, some silversmithing, enameling. I loved it.” She was particularly fascinated by jewelry, and for the next four years she took classes from a well-trained teacher who taught her the fundamentals. Before she left high school in 1963 Tenenbaum had won awards for her work.

Looking back on her early love of jewelry, Tenenbaum says it was odd that no one suggested she attend an art school after high school graduation. Then again, her father was a chemical engineer, a metallurgist to be exact, and her mother was a teacher. They expected her to be a teacher, or perhaps a translator at the United Nations. Scholarship and academics were very important to her parents. She laughs when she notes that the only artist in the family when she was young was a relative called “crazy Esther.” A life in art was obviously not something to aspire to. “So my plan was to be a Spanish teacher. I was good with languages and was always friends with the foreign exchange students.” As an undergraduate at the University of Michigan Tenenbaum studied romance languages and literature before switching to anthropology. After class and during summer breaks she continued to make jewelry and take workshops to learn new skills. Art was strictly extracurricular.

Later there were occasions when the road ahead forked into very different directions. That happened in the late 1960s in New York, where she was employed as a caseworker for the city welfare department and taking classes in silversmithing at the Craft Students League.

Her teacher was William Seitz, a master silversmith who wrote one of the definitive books on silversmithing. She had applied to graduate school at Columbia University, but was also making jewelry. “I had been accepted to graduate school, and had decided to put my tools away for a while when I got a call from a gallery on Fifth Avenue that wanted to show my jewelry. Someone there had seen it at the Craft Students League. I said no. I was determined to get my Ph.D. But it wasn’t an easy decision.”

Within a few years she was living in Alaska with Athabaskan Indians and researching the Dena’ina language. She worked in a village for two years and it was the only time when she did not have her jewelry tools with her. When she moved to Fairbanks to finish her dissertation she asked her dad to send her tools from Detroit and she enrolled in jewelry courses at the University of Alaska. “In Fairbanks I was tortured by my burning desire to make jewelry. I felt I was in a cage and the door was the dissertation. Once I got the dissertation done, I could make jewelry.” Tenenbaum finished her dissertation, which she knew would be helpful in preserving the Dena’ina language, or at least in preserving its grammar and vocabulary. She also recorded, translated and edited twenty-four traditional native stories translated into an English language volume. Tenenbaum says it was a way “to give back to the people in the village.” The book was published by the Alaskan Native Language Center at the University of Alaska, and it is now in its third printing. All royalties go to the Language Center.



GLACIERS BEAD I pendant of sterling silver, fourteen karat yellow and pink gold, copper, mokume gane, champagne diamonds, citrine, yellow sapphire, 2.86 x 3.18 x 1.43 centimeters, 2009. **JOAN TENENBAUM** at her bench. *Photograph by Lee Giles III.* **BREATHE THE LIGHT** pendant of sterling silver, fine silver, cloisonné enamel, 4.45 x 5.40 x 0.64 centimeters, 2013.



After a trip to New York to defend her thesis, Tenenbaum was back in Alaska. She got a job distance teaching for the University of Alaska, which meant living in Eskimo villages. She needed the money from teaching and she wanted to help train native teachers, but the work was challenging. “Many of my students lived in villages with no electricity or running water. They were working as teachers’ aides, but it was difficult for them to keep studying. Not everyone made it through.” Despite her own demanding teaching schedule, Tenenbaum continued to make jewelry. “And all of a sudden mountains started appearing in my work. It was exciting. I decided to resign at the end of the year. I had to be a jeweler.”

In the early 1980s she married a lawyer and moved to Anchorage with him to pursue jewelry full time. Because his family was from Portland, Oregon, she often visited Portland, where she met a skilled jeweler named Stewart Jones. He agreed to give her private tutorials on a periodic basis and Tenenbaum describes Jones “as my mentor since 1985. He’s one of the reasons I can do the things I do in my jewelry.” One of the hallmarks of Tenenbaum’s career has been her relentless study of techniques and her desire to continually learn and grow as a maker. To this day she continues to take courses from master jewelers including many of the Northwest’s most acclaimed craftspeople. Her techniques include cloisonné enameling, engraving, chasing, repoussé, forging, roller texturing, foldforming, mokume gane, stone-setting, silver and goldsmithing. Although

Tenenbaum never had the opportunity to study art or jewelry as a college student, it is obvious she loves learning. “I’ve always wanted to expand my techniques, because then I can tell more stories.”

When her marriage broke up in 1990 Tenenbaum moved to Washington State, where she owned property. Today she lives in Gig Harbor, a picturesque town about an hour southwest of Seattle that, with its harbor surrounded by towering evergreens and mountain peaks, could easily be a small city in Alaska. In her house on a quiet cul-de-sac she has turned her yard into a lush vegetable garden and her dining room into a large, sun-filled work studio. It is here that she keeps the extraordinary archives of her work, including hardbound notebooks detailing the creation of every piece of jewelry she has ever made, complete with the amount of metal needed for each piece and preparatory sketches. As a linguist she learned to keep excellent records and cross references, and as artist she has applied the same systematic cataloguing and note-taking to her work archives.

Tenenbaum dates her professional career from 1985, when she was in a group show at Stonington Gallery in Anchorage. At about the same time she used her engraving skills to start adding images of animals to her jewelry. “So then I started to bring my Alaskan anthropology experience and my jewelry together. I could add caribou, migrating birds, fish. It brought more environmentalism to my work.”



RAVEN AND CARIBOU: A DENA'INA STORY pendant of sterling silver, fourteen karat gold and garnets, 6.03 x 8.26 x 0.64 centimeters, 2007. OWL MASK SPIRIT HELPER bracelet of sterling silver, fourteen and eighteen karat gold, mokume gane, 4.13 x 6.99 x 6.67 centimeters, 2008. *Opposite page:* HERON IN WETLANDS brooch of sterling silver, eighteen karat gold, mokume gane, Australian greenstone, green sapphire, 6.35 x 4.45 x 0.79 centimeters, 2009.



Her first solo exhibition was also at Stonington, in 1990. Since then she has had ten solo exhibitions at Stonington's Seattle gallery, which specializes in indigenous art. Given the themes of her work, it is perhaps no surprise that several pieces of her jewelry have been added to the permanent collection of the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

The names of her solo exhibits are telling. In 2004 she called her Stonington exhibition "The Yup'ik Family: Spirit and Connection." In 2008 the show theme was "Connecting Culture with Landscape." In 2001 it was "A Sense of Place—The Ways we Connect to Our Earth." In 2013 after she took a workshop in cloisonné, she added color to her work. A bracelet called Tundra Patterns I is a Google Earth view of the patch of Southwestern Alaskan tundra, reimagined in shimmering green and red enamel. Her Bunchberry Necklace has an almost Victorian look. It is a medallion of vibrant green, white and red cloisonné bunchberries surrounded by

smaller, colorful beads. Bunchberries, which are part of the cornus family, are low growing, common shrubs in parts of southern Alaska and their berries are important food for deer and other animals. This year Tenenbaum's Stonington exhibition, "Fifty Playful Things," was about challenges in creating line through folding, hammering, annealing, and other metal techniques.

Her connection to Alaska, its people and environment is so plainly interpreted in her work, that it is hard to imagine what Tenenbaum's jewelry might have looked like if, nearly fifty years ago, she had entered a university art program instead of anthropology. "I may have felt extremely frustrated for many years, but in no way do I regret either my education or the amazing experience of living in Native Alaskan communities and being accepted and loved by them. It has enriched my life beyond words. I can't imagine what my work might look like had I not gone to Alaska, or what my life might look like either." 