

The Life of a Piece: Interview with Rebecca Hannon

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Margaret Penney



Rebecca Hannon's jewelry designs can be found in public and private collections internationally. Rebecca lives and works in Nova Scotia and also travels the world teaching and lecturing about jewelry design and the art of craft. Her designs are distinct, vibrant and unexpected. In her work, she strives to create evocative objects that double as fine souvenirs. Place and time are documented through the process of making. A fleeting memory, a lost bauble or an everyday object are refashioned to create a small celebratory ornament.

Tell us about your design style. What makes your collections unique in the industry?

In my jewelry, I employ traditional goldsmithing skills as well as digital forms of fabrication. My starting point is often a new material, in tandem with a new line of inquiry I am pursuing- be it travel, folk traditions, pop-culture and more. My pieces are colorful and bold, but it is important for me that they still function as jewelry. I think it is for someone else to say what make me unique in my field.

Like many artists, I have a sort of "magpie eye" and I always seem to be on the hunt for new materials. Searching for interesting new materials and found objects is an excellent way to travel through different countries and understand people and their cultural histories through material culture. When a new material catches my eye, I put it through a research process to discover it's strengths and limitations. Ultimately I choose a material that supports the story I'm trying to tell with a new series of work.

What inspired you originally to be an artist and then a jewelry designer? Can you discuss with us some of your early influences and how that shapes your perspective as an artist?

Growing up, my hands were usually making something. I come from a creative family, so I had examples of people

thriving and making a living in the arts. My art teachers in high school exhibited a kind of professionalism and seriousness about their subject matter that inspired me to delve deep.

Learning about art history was really quite vivid for me and it shaped my understanding of history, geography, and religion, as expressed through visual language. Understanding that the “Dark Ages” in Europe were not dark at all in color, learning about the struggle to create the valuable lapis blue paint, often reserved for Mary’s clothing in medieval altarpieces — these kinds of realizations inspired me and my work. I learned that a crafted object has held



power across culture and time, and that understanding shaped many of my future life decisions.

You have such a great color sense. When you are working on a new piece how do you go about choosing color?

I learned color theory the first time around in undergraduate school. I think at some point it becomes intuitive, but I really hadn't thought about color in a concrete way until I began teaching foundation level color theory at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 2010. It was really exciting for me to re-learn about optics, color families, color relationships, the psychological power of color, different uses/meaning for color across cultures, blending light-based primaries which is vital for our screen-based world.... Although much is not fully understood about the way color works, there is a power in working with color families. Something happens when you pair compliments, split compliments, add a tint, and create a chromic grey. I had the pleasure of seeing my students apply these color relationships in all sorts of applications and I really learned alongside them. In my own work I often seek high-contrast, so compliments come into play. Recently I have gotten re-interested in a style I formerly despised—"Memphis style" design. Their color families don't make any sense, but taken together they seem to work, (perhaps because they are also sprinkled with nostalgia?)

You gravitate toward orange as a favorite, can you tell us more about why you like this color?

I love orange and I always have. I have an orange pen in my bag, and every time I pull it out I get happy again. I'm currently doing an artist residency in Amsterdam (<https://rebeccainamsterdam.wordpress.com/blog/>) and it's fun to be here because it's a country filled with people who also love orange. Dutch people even celebrate a national day of orange (King's Day). Orange seems to be integrated into all aspects of daily life here. In my own work I use many colors but I always try to find a way to inject some orange.

You work with a wide range of eclectic materials and your work values process, can you tell us a little more about how materials and process matter?

in my work and in the world of adornment, pieces are much stronger when they utilize a blend of traditional (analogue) and digital types of fabrication. I wouldn't say this is true for everyone but for me watching a craftsman make their work, be it throwing a ceramic cup, weaving on the loom, designing sneakers on the screen, I could honestly do this all day. I'm really interested in watching and understanding people who are knowledgeable about their craft. Because I am trained as a traditional goldsmith but I often use digital processes in my work I've become interested in the hierarchy of handmade versus digitally made. I need to use computers in my current work and that allows me to have very tight fitting tolerances as well as increasing the number of components I can personally manufacture. But I believe viewers give these pieces a different "weight". I think they believe a computer made it, somehow it wasn't that hard, and so has less value. I made a series of videos that show the work involved in assembling a piece, the hours, the patience. Honestly, sometimes I do wish a computer could make it, but they still seem to need plenty of guidance. I posted this video online and called it "The Life of a Piece."

Do you have favorite stones or materials you are drawn to?

Colorful Formica laminate has been my material of choice for many years now, and I am currently working on a series of jewelry called "Crown-of-Thorns". The linking system for this series was derived from a piece of folk art I found at a second-hand store. After understanding the system of interlocked pieces, which do not need glue, nails or

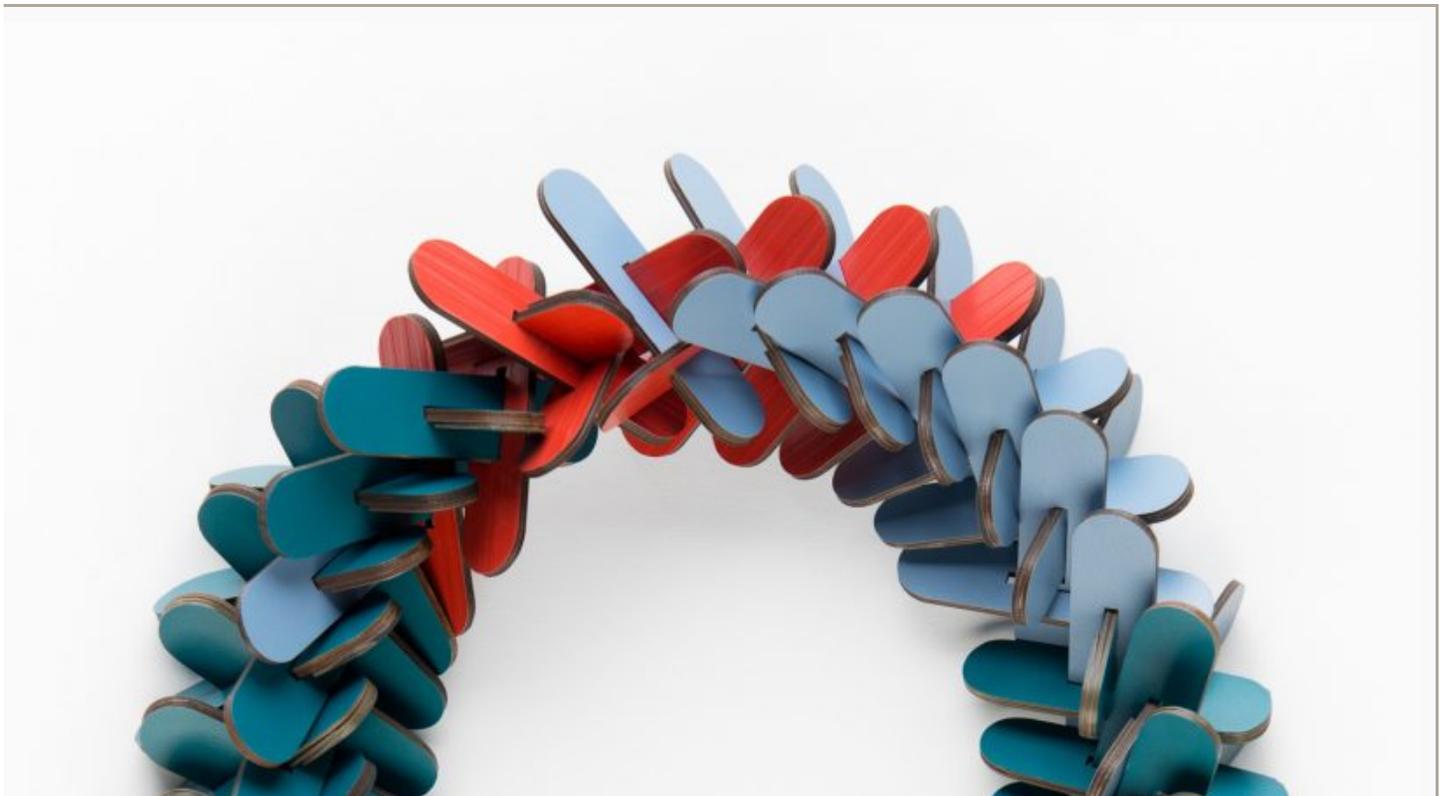
other connectors, I found this pattern could be endlessly variable. I create a CAD drawing and laser cut my shapes out of colorful laminate materials. I am currently doing a sabbatical year and after spending 3 months in India, I had the opportunity to spend 3 months in San Francisco doing an artist residency at TechShop (a fablab). This was a really fruitful time for me as I had concentrated time to manipulate the patterns and create a new level of intensity in my work. I am working toward a solo exhibition at Galerie Noel Guyomarc'h (Montreal) in September 2016.

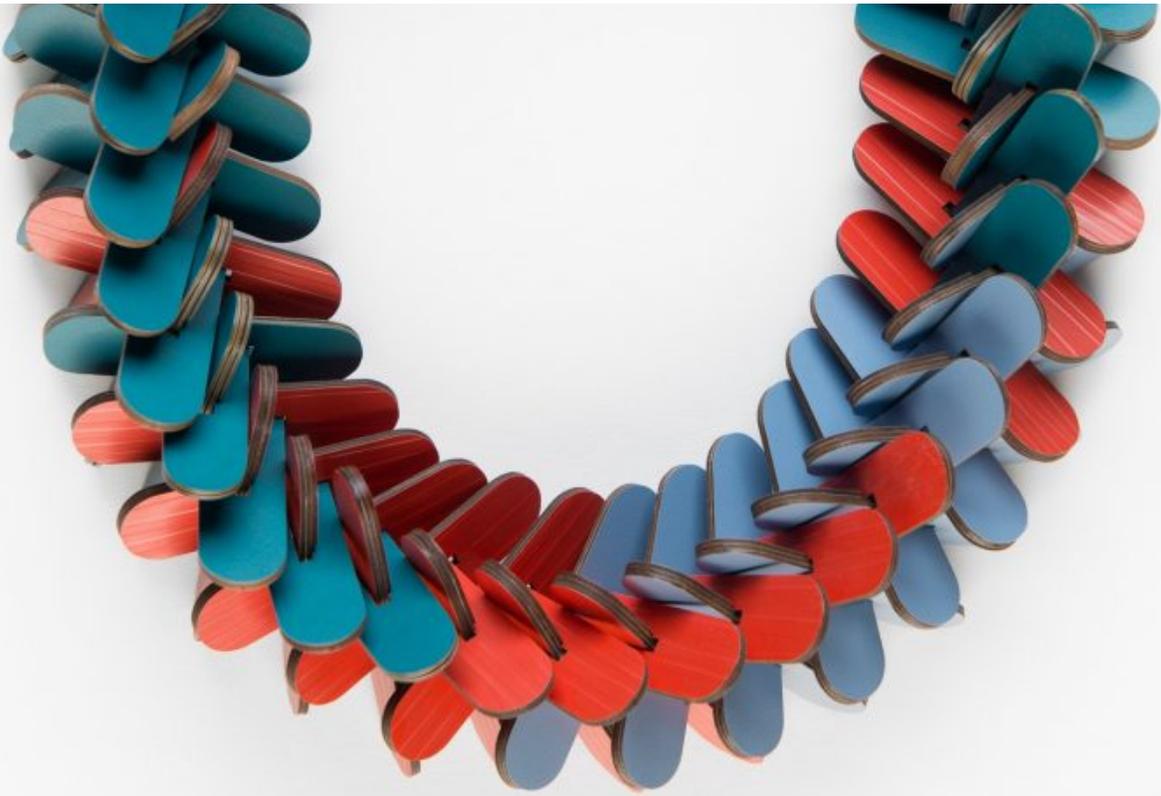
Do you have any advice for jewelry designers and creatives who are just starting out?

Find a school with some good intro classes, or find a local jeweler and see if you can work with them for a while. Find out if this field is right for you- it isn't right for everyone. If you do choose to go ahead, learn all the traditional hand skills you can. They will forever be in your "toolbox" even if you choose later to have someone else make your work. Learn your history, art history, craft history, so you can eventually locate yourself on this spectrum. Digital knowledge is also essential, but it can't be the only knowledge. Spend some time understanding where your materials come from and if they are sustainably sourced. Don't spend too much time on the Internet looking at what other people have made. Just do your own thing!

To see Rebecca's work and learn more about her process, please visit her website <http://rebeccahannon.com/>.

A great place to start your art and design career is to pursue a course or program at [Sessions College](#). Try the fully online [Color Theory](#) or any of the [award-winning design programs](#).





Crown of Thorns (red) by Rebecca Hannon





Circle Crown of Thorns by Rebecca Hannon