

Green jewelry, simply amazing!" "This is recycling at its best." These are the comments of shoppers as they stop by the booth of Holly Anne Mitchell at an arts show in her hometown of St. Petersburg, Florida, as they suddenly realize that the jewelry on exhibit is made from newspapers. "People react to the jewelry for its 'green' aspects but more so because they realize it's made from something they just read that morning, the newspaper, and probably threw in the trash," comments Mitchell. "They're surprised first, then pleased that it's green. It feels good as an artist to see people's reactions."

From brooches, neckpieces and bracelets to earrings and cufflinks, each piece is repurposed from discarded paper. Newspapers are the number one recycled material in the country. But what motivates Mitchell more are the aesthetics of the unconventional material, particularly its textural aspects. "I want my jewelry to be aesthetically pleasing, both on and off the body," she states. "My goal is to inspire people to take a second look at everything around them and discover the beauty in the most common, ordinary items."

Mitchell's surprising and fun newspaper jewelry utilizes headlines, stock listings, sudoku puzzles, and color comics. The faces of Charlie Brown, Dagwood and Garfield peek around the curve of a bead hand-rolled from the Sunday newspaper comics. Mitchell takes care to allow the expressions of each character to show on the tubular beads. The vibrant colors of the comics provide a contrast to stark black-and-white headline text. Richly colored Swarovski crystal beads pull out the colors in the comics, making them even more apparent to the viewer.

As a contrast in content, most of Mitchell's one-of-a-kind neckpieces, which she began making about six years ago, make a political statement. "Like everyone else, sometimes I just have to shake my head, so I try and express that," she says. Large tube beads allow the headlines to be easily read. Each neckpiece is reversible, so both sides of the story are presented: for example, George Bush on one side, John Kerry on the other; the despair of Hurricane Katrina on one side, hopeful rebuilding on the other. "I felt that I just had to make a statement about Katrina, so I made a neckpiece," says Mitchell. The artist also feels strongly about the statement made in the limited-edition Martin Luther King, Jr. commemorative necklace, The Vision. Multiple strands of small beads are devoid of newsprint, cut from full-page newspaper advertisements. In colors ranging from beige to reds to brown tones, each represents a color of the human race and how the races blend together.

Mitchell uses not just the comics, crossword puzzles and headlines from newspapers but expired grocery coupons, losing lottery tickets and sweetener packets, too. All of her

materials, like newspapers, "are here today, gone tomorrow," explains Mitchell. "A newspaper is current one day, but by tomorrow there's a new newspaper. It's the same with the expired coupons or loser lottery tickets. They have really lost their purpose." For the artist, the textural patterns in beads repurposed from bar codes on expired coupons are reminiscent of African textiles. Shiny sterling silver beads highlight the textural elements of the newsprint in black-and-white beads made from stock listings, her favorite textural contrast.

She subscribes to three newspapers: USA Today, The Wall Street Journal and The St. Petersburg Times. "I nag my dad to save his Indianapolis paper because I use the black-and-white comics," laughs Mitchell. When it comes to newspaper inks, you might say she is a connoisseur. Sunday is a big day because the coupons and color comics are in the papers. Mitchell takes plastic boxes and scissors into the living room of her cozy apartment/studio overlooking a small lake and settles into a comfortable chair to start the clipping and filing process. Compartmentalized containers stack up around her workbench, all neatly cut and filed: one for coupons, one for bar codes, one for puzzles, one for stock quotes, and so on. Comics with expressive faces are clipped and filed separately from comics she will use in smaller beads for the color only. Her favorite comic to read is Cathy, but her favorite for facial expressions is For Better or For Worse.


Mitchell rolls the beads by hand, one at a time. Each tube is backed to provide support and enhance durability. Without measuring, she expertly cuts the long tubes into uniform lengths with scissors. The beads, which range from three to fourteen millimeters in diameter, are coated with clear acrylic as a protection against moisture, then hand-stitched together. All embellishments, such as crystals and bead ends, are also stitched.

While Mitchell may appear shy and retiring at times, her sense of humor shines through in the names of her pieces. The None Of Your Business! brooch is made of business reply mail cards; A Penny Saved Is A Bracelet uses expired grocery coupons and UPC bar codes; and the Shattered Dreams neckpiece is, of course, losing lottery tickets. A pendant called What's Black \& White And Red All Over? is composed of newspaper headlines. I'd Like To Solve The Puzzle (the same refrain used by contestants on the television game show Wheel of Fortune) is an asymmetrical bracelet of newspaper crossword puzzles.
"Artistically, I'm inspired by Impressionist art because individual brush strokes come together to create a form. That speaks to me in terms of my style of juxtaposing colors. Andy Warhol showed how the ordinary can be extraordinary. That's something I strive to emulate," says Mitchell. Right now in her workbench, a plastic tub brimming with Campbell's soup labels waits, a nod to her inspiration. "And other artists at shows inspire me. Steven Ford and David Forlano take what's considered a simple jewelry material, Fimo, and transform it into amazing sculpture to wear. I also admire Mary Jackson's sweetgrass baskets for the history and simplicity of material." Indeed, Mitchell's newspaper beads share both a tonal and woven quality with Jackson's baskets.

Mitchell much admires African-American quilts, especially those made by slaves who may have only had snippets of fabric to work with but still produced beautiful works of art. The artist's pieces very much have a quilting quality about them; small but distinct elements, used for texture and color, are combined, then sewn together with needle and thread to create the whole. Those threads took root in Mitchell's childhood.

Both of her parents encouraged their daughter's artistic interests. "I was appreciative of the art classes I took as a child. I learned how to think creatively, how to express myself creatively," she says. Her path seemed set early in life. As a child, she was moved by some innate tendency to collect tiny bits and pieces, which she saved, but always with an eye toward using them for a larger purpose, creating something out of nothing.
"Ever since I can remember, I was always interested in art, particularly drawing," continues Mitchell. During her teen years living on Long Island, she took Saturday classes at Columbia University, part of an arts program for gifted highschool students. "Back then I was mainly exploring drawing people and cartoon art," Mitchell remembers. "I developed a comic strip about a little dog named Sport who was friends with a cat who wore sunglasses. I always thought that I was going to be a two-dimensional artist, a comic strip artist." Even when she decided to study fine art at the University of Michigan, it was still with the idea of becoming a comic strip artist. "It was not until my junior year when I could start taking courses in three-dimensional art, like jewelry and fiber, that I really started finding myself as an artist," she says.

In a traditional metalsmithing class during her junior year, instructor Hiroko Pijanowski (now retired) challenged students to create a piece of jewelry entirely from nontraditional materials. As Mitchell tells the story: "I couldn't think of


ARE YOU KIDDING BRACELET of recycled newspaper comic strips, palladium-plated beads, cotton cord, elastic cord, $5.0 \times 15 \times 1.0$ centimeters, 1999.

anything, but luckily, we got the assignment right before winter break and I went home to Indiana. My mother was working for Indiana University and getting a lot of newspapers. After she finished reading them, she would stack them up on a chair right by the trashcan. I remember seeing The Wall Street Journal and stacked on top of it was the comics section of the Chicago Tribune. The Tribune's comics at the time had really strong, bold colors. I just thought, now that's a really interesting contrast, maybe I should try using newspaper."

She laughs as she remembers her project, an elaborate neckpiece, which, she recalls, looked something like a Christmas wreath. "I was really taken with the color of the comic strips. I was hooked," says Mitchell. With a favorable response from the other students and the support of her instructor, she explored the form in independent study for her remaining three semesters. "I was intrigued with the material. It was bringing out a lot of artistic passion. My creative juices were flowing, and I still had the balance of learning traditional metalsmithing techniques."

In 1992, with a bachelor's degree in fine arts, Mitchell returned to Indiana. With the full support of her parents, she took time to develop her newspaper jewelry into a functional, marketable line. "I was very fortunate that my parents saw promise in what I was doing. They allowed me to develop a line of jewelry without worrying about how to make ends meet. It took me two and a half years to get to the point where I started to do shows," states the now-successful artist.

Her first major retail show was the Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show in 1995. Recalls Mitchell, "I got a great reaction, but I was so nervous." Her next show was the Smithsonian Craft Show in 1996. By then she had perfected the technique that she still uses today. In those first shows and through 2000, she was only using The Wall Street Journal, color comic strips and black-and-white comic strips,

Left: Obverse showing George W. Bush headlines. Right: Reverse showing John Kerry headlines.

incorporating matte metal beads to finish the ends. Grocery store coupons, dollar bills, sweetener packets, lottery tickets and more with sterling silver and Swarovski crystal beads came later. But over the years since she first explored the newspaper idea, she has continually expanded both her use of nontraditional paper materials and her artistic concepts.

To push her jewelry to new levels, Mitchell has lightened her show schedule and dedicated 2008 to developing commission work and to exploring new forms, like woven wallpieces. "Doing so many shows over the past two years, I feel like I'm not getting to where I want to be," says Mitchell quietly. "I'm a spiritual person, so sometimes I just pray for the wisdom of how to get from point $A$ to point $B$ because I don't really know. It's a leap of faith."

Her work has come full circle in the sense that she started out in her youth drawing comic strips and now they are an integral part of her work. She found her medium through a creative challenge as a student more than fifteen years ago. But that is not the end of the story for Holly Anne Mitchell, it is just the beginning. "Most people consider precious jewelry materials to be gold, silver or platinum," comments Mitchell. "I hope they'll include discarded paper on that list some day."包

## SUGGESTED READING/VIEWING

Fuller Craft Museum. "Pulp Function" exhibition catalog, essays by curator Lloyd Herman and museum director Gretchen Keyworth, 2007.
McDonald Moore, Betsy. "From Trash to Treasure: Holly Anne Mitchell creates useful beauty from yesterday's news." Mary Engelbreit's Home Companion Magazine, July 2006: 32-39.
Skelly, Heather. "Profile in Success: Holly Anne Mitchell, Making Art from Yesterday's News." Crafts Report Magazine, February 2005: 18-21.
Yung, Marilyn. "Artist Profile: Holly Anne Mitchell." NICHE Magazine, Winter 1997 (Vol. 9, No. 1): 135.
Mixed Up, Episode CW1205 featuring Holly Anne Mitchell's jewelry from grocery store coupons, Food Network's Unwrapped series, 2006 (last aired February 25, 2008).

