



“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.

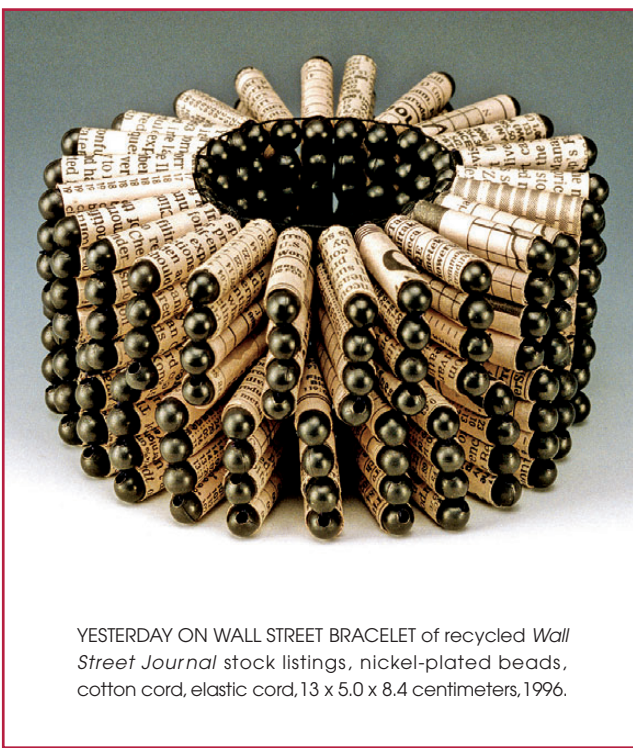
As a contrast in content, most of Mitchell’s one-of-a-kind neckpieces, which she began making about six years ago, make a political statement. “Like everyone else, sometimes I just have to shake my head, so I try and express that,” she says. Large tube beads allow the headlines to be easily read. Each 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*.



YESTERDAY ON WALL STREET BRACELET of recycled *Wall Street Journal* stock listings, nickel-plated beads, cotton cord, elastic cord, 13 x 5.0 x 8.4 centimeters, 1996.

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.

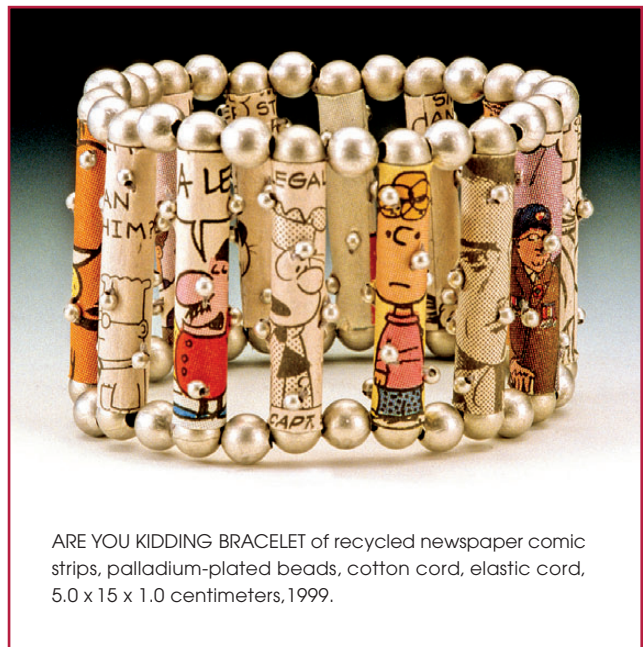
"Artistically, I'm inspired by Impressionist art because individual brush strokes come together to create a form. That speaks to me in terms of my style of juxtaposing colors. Andy Warhol showed how the ordinary can be extraordinary. That's something I strive to emulate," says Mitchell. Right now in 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 high-school 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 x 15 x 1.0 centimeters, 1999.

