Spot Light

MANDY SPITZER GOES WHERE WATER AND METAL INTERSECT

Christa Martin

Discovering metal clay

Julie Packer is always on a learning curve — she’s been taking classes (many of them for fun) at Cabrillo College since the 1970s and as a result, she holds a bunch of certificates in various fields. But it wasn’t until seven years ago that she discovered a class that would change things forever.

Packer, who grew up in an artistic family — architects, woodworkers, craftswomen — had been working in fiber arts since she was a youngster in 4-H, growing up in Santa Cruz County.

She’d long been making quilts and at one point began embellishing them with beads and other materials. This led to eventually tinkering with the beads and adding in some wire, which culminated in teaching herself to make jewelry. “I engulfed myself in books and videos and learned I had a knack for it,” she says.

Then one day she read a magazine article about precious metal clay — pure silver minute particles that, when water and a binder are added, turn into silver clay. She was smitten with the discovery and began using it as a way to incorporate metals into her work. Still, she didn’t yet have the skill set to use the mighty tools required for metalsmithing. And that’s when she stumbled upon a metal arts class at Cabrillo seven years ago.

Since then, she’s been crafting wearable art pieces that are made of copper, brass, silver, and precious metal clay, often adding etching and enamels onto them. While she works a day job with long hours in the real estate industry, her weekends and evenings are devoted to her art, which has been shown at places including the Museum of Art & History, Open Studios and Many Hands Gallery, among others.

Take a look at her work at packerdesigns.etsy.com or find her on Facebook.

Always learning: artist Julie Packer

Julie Packer’s wearable-art and jewelry work uses copper, brass, silver, and precious metal clay.