

Local Artist Profile:
Katie Mullins
By Kristina Malcolm

The intent of writing Local Artist Profiles is to provide readers with the history and background of local Ohio artists, giving the artist a chance to describe their expertise and influences. I also want to help stimulate the artists sales by educating the public and promoting their business by providing contacts and website information.

The following is an interview with Katie Mullins, a chain maille artist from Seville, Ohio. I devised these questions for Katie based on information I found on her website ([www .bonyas.com](http://www.bonyas.com)) and from personally knowing her and exhibiting with her.

Q: How did you become a jewelry artist?

Katie: "About four years ago I started dabbling around playing with gemstones and beading – you know, how allot of people get started in playing with jewelry."

Q: What drew you into creating chain maille jewelry?

Katie: "The philosophy I have, I guess, of creating jewelry from scratch. Taking a piece of wire and making a jump ring and then putting together into a piece of jewelry with the flexibility of fabric."

Q: Would you please give our readers a brief history of chain maille including its use in modern jewelry?

Katie: "Well, a brief history of chain maille would be its connection with protection during war. Some of the first folks to use/incorporate chain into battle gear were the Romans who used it to reinforce the leather that they used [for armor]. From there, the biggest resurgence is what we all think of when we think of chain maille - the age of the knights in shinning armor – which started probably around the 10th Century. They incorporated quite a bit of chain maille because the technology of the weapons changed, more than anything else. When it started to really hit [it's stride was during] the Renaissance, the technology had improved enough that decoration became almost as important as the use of the battle gear. Think of some of the highly decorated armor pieces exhibited in Cleveland (The Cleveland Art Museum) – it's just gorgeous. With the decoration, all of the different types of metal engraving and metal forming – I think that's when people really started understanding that it could be used for something other than protection and war. That's my personal opinion but that's really when they started getting into playing more with the chain.

Chain maille has evolved, of course, and the more time we have for leisure, I think there's more of an opportunity for an interest adornment and using different types of materials and construction [techniques] for that propose."

Q: How do you challenge yourself as an artist?

Katie: "I try to keep learning – finding something different – pushing myself into something that makes me feel a little bit uncomfortable."

Q: What was your most satisfying moment as a jewelry artist?

Katie: "Putting jump rings together, I would imagine."

Q: Do you have any historical influences?

Katie: "I love to look at the jewelry discovered in archeological digs. It absolutely amazes me -the quality, the artistic expression – especially considering the limited amount of technology – it isn't like these folks had torches and tumblers and power tools. They did all of that with just a few tools – gosh, what they could create now if we could just grab them and bring them up to this century. It would be phenomenal. As a matter of fact, I was looking through some sites that were talking about some artifacts from a Viking [excavation] and one of the rings that they had on display, which was made out of iron, was extremely close to a ring that I had made during last year and I just thought that was so neat- it's like you're carrying on a tradition that is just so ancient and has such deep roots in all of us."

Q: How did you come to your business name (Bonya's)?

Katie: "My step-daughters' oldest [son], who is now seven -when he was starting to talk, he already had two grandmas, I didn't want to confuse the poor kid – so I thought –ok, I'll get him to call me Nana. I don't know if it was because he was just getting into bananas at that time or what the deal was but somehow Nana came out as Bonya – that became my nickname and when I was searching for a name for my business, I thought – there it is."

Q: Why do you choose to work with argentium?

Katie: "I don't have to polish it. It fuses just like fine silver, I can fuse links together, and I can fuse pieces together. I do solder but it is just a beautiful, beautiful material – I think it has a brighter color than sterling silver – it polishes beautifully – [it has] all the things you wish your sterling could do."

(Argentium was developed in 1990 and is a new sterling silver alloy. Sterling silver is 92.5% fine silver and 7.5% copper (which is why sterling is stamped .925). Argentium has the same 92.5% silver but replaces some of the copper with germanium.)

Q: What are your goals as an artist and businessperson?

Katie: "As an artist – keep learning, keep sharing the knowledge I have with others but always keep learning – always keep trying. As far as my business, right now, in this economy, I'd like to sell more! I don't see myself having a traditional studio in the way that, you know, you get a place with others that work for you – I continue to see myself a one person business but with a following and hopefully a little bit of notoriety."

Q: Do you have any advice to other jewelers or small business owners?

Katie: "As far as other jewelers – learn everything that you possibly can -just keep learning, just keep learning. As far as small business people – leave no stone unturned, if somebody wants to interview you, don't think to yourself 'oh gee, I wouldn't know what to say or do' -go for it, try it, you never know. Talk to people, walk around town and introduce yourself. There is a lot of information out there. There are really a lot of resources. Networking is a wonderful, wonderful thing to get into."

Q: What would you like readers to take away from this article?

Katie: "That there are many different facets to jewelry - it's not just cut gems set in traditional cast setting. That there are other mediums in jewelry [making] out there, be it chain or wirework or whatever, there are plenty of alternatives. And always remember to dream."

Q: Is there anything important to you that I neglected to mention?

Katie: "I'll tell you one thing I'm glad you didn't ask me - 'what is your inspiration?' – that's junk. I've always had a really hard time with that because I think a lot of times people that don't create things ask people that do [about inspiration] because they think there is some kind of secret formula. I really think that all of us can create and all art is created through our perception of the world. We're all different – that's what makes art so wonderful - you get a glimpse of a different way of perceiving the reality around you."

Artist Katie Mullins teaches chain maille at Edybeady's in North Canton, Beadtini Boutique in Copley, and Lake Erie Artist Gallery in Cleveland and sells her work online at [www .bonyas .com](http://www.bonyas.com) and at art and craft shows across Ohio (visit her website for a detailed listing of shows and classes). Contact Katie at [bonya @ neo.rr.com](mailto:bonya@neo.rr.com).

Support your local artists and contact me, Kristina Malcolm (metalsmith at [www. fluxusmetalworks .com](http://www.fluxusmetalworks.com)), with questions or comments at kristina.learningpost@gmail.com.