

Local Artist Profile:
Jason Adams
By Kristina Malcolm

It is my esteemed pleasure to introduce to you my great friend, mentor, and colleague: Jason Adams. Jason and I met in the beginning of our metalsmithing careers at the University of Akron about twenty years ago. Jason has made jewelry (and art) his lifetime journey. Starting at a very young age, jewelry enthralled Jason and has held him captive all these years. Jason controls his life by constantly evolving his passion into the roles of a jewelry detective, jewelry historian, jewelry conservator, and jewelry collector. Working alongside him has been a great adventure, honor, and benefit for me.

Presenting Jason Adams, an Artist Profile by Kristina Malcolm.

KLM: Jason, how did you become a jewelry historian?

JMA: When I was fifteen I started buying Native American silver and began wearing and enjoying it. I also started going to antique shows and flea markets and that expanded my interest. Looking at things I couldn't afford motivated me and I started hoping that one day I could afford to buy them. And then, when I was 18 or 19 years old, I began realizing that I could sell some of the things that I had bought for more money. I started selling jewelry to antique dealers for \$30 or \$40 dollars when I purchased them for \$15 or \$20. That was when I realized that I could turn a hobby or something that I enjoyed into a business.

KLM: Please explain what a jewelry historian is and what you do. What is your role as a jewelry historian?

JMA: In terms of my personal collection, it is important to me to honor the things that have been made in years past. I do this by keeping a live library of actual items that describe what has happened with the history of jewelry from the early Victorian movement through the 1980's. Also I keep the chronological history of the jewelry world alive as an archive of the different materials used during those movements. And I further the current research on these pieces, designs, artists, and materials to keep these pieces alive and cherished. That's where the history part comes in.

KLM: I'm sure people out there are interested in how you support yourself financially.

JMA: I'm a male prostitute and it's going well. But seriously, how I've made money, well, that's tough with the economy being the way it is, currently it's hard to make a living. I've had to reinvent myself a few different times – being flexible and bending with the curve. I started by selling on EBay and that was about seven years ago and that was a great way to sell the things that were less important to the history of my personal collection, things that may have been a duplicate or weren't as important historically but were still attractive and sellable. I was of the mind set that as long as I doubled my money that I was pretty safe and successful but I didn't use that as a golden rule, just as a gauge. I've reinvented my current curve by branching out into different areas. I moved into an antique mall in Media and have been selling there successfully since April (2009). I also sell through national auctions and Aspire auctions in Cleveland to deaccession [to remove and sell a piece of art from a collection] the more expensive things that have a finer audience. Some of the national auction houses bring in finer audiences and that equates to people having more money and finer tastes and that equates to them spending more money than in the average retail outlet.

KLM: You have an extensive collection of antiques. Please tell us about why and what you collect and about some favorites.

JMA: That's a loaded question and I could talk about that for an extremely long period of time. As a collector my focus has, at times, become more broad ranged – branching out from jewelry to artwork: clothing buttons, art pottery, art glass, sculptures, paintings. Basically anything that I felt was good at the time. I buy for resale and collect in two different ways – they are very different from each other - I wear two different hats and wearing those hats at the same time gets tricky. But I discovered that I could make money by reselling those things and started studying those pieces and fell in love with them. I began to see that those pieces were jewelry to decorate the home. So I'm still collecting jewelry but it's sitting on a shelf instead of on a finger or around my neck.

My collection has diversified over the past ten years. It's gotten out of control. Different time periods have always interested me as well, Art Nouveau and Art Deco are two of my favorite movements and I collect many different things from those movements. When I started researching the jewelry made during those time periods, I realized that other things made during that time were just as beautiful and that's where it gets out of control.

And as for things that I like out of my collection, that's impossible to answer. Literally impossible because many of these things I consider to be my children that I truly love and cherish them. I have rescued them and I think they are beautiful and I am honored to own them and there are so many that I could narrow it down to say just a few but there are certain ones that I admire for what they are and those would be excellent examples of any of the different eras that I've collected.

KLM: What is your favorite part of your job?

JMA: My favorite part of my job is knowing that I was given this talent from a young age and not being afraid of it. Also, listening to my inner voice and never doubting myself. That has to be my favorite part – that it comes completely natural. I have honed that ability by doing research every day and I feel blessed and thankful that I was given the opportunity that I've been given to collect and salvage and respect these things that have seemingly fallen through the cracks. So I think that's the best part of my job -the exhilarating feeling I get finding these wonderful things.

KLM: What are some of your goals as a jewelry historian?

JMA: My goal is to remain true to myself, to listen to my inner voice, to listen to my guides, decide what's right for my collection and expand it. I've also realized that if something eludes my collection, if it was meant to be, it will find a way to me. Whether it's from across the globe or right next door, there is always a way for it to find its home with me. The ultimate goal is to eventually leave my collection to a museum or to open my own gallery or museum to share these items so that other people can feel the joy that I've gotten and get an education while viewing them as well.

KLM: What advice would you give to people who are following their dreams?

JMA: When you're sure of your goals, follow it 110%. Live, eat, and breathe it. But make sure you have fun. Make sure it's not a job and it doesn't get old, make sure that if it does get old that you have the ability to reinvent it and redirect yourself. Just make sure that it feels right. It should feel like 100% what you should be doing and chase it down and go for it. I can't tell you how many people said that this couldn't be what I would be doing. There were many times going through school and doing this job that I was viewed as unsuccessful but that couldn't be more untrue. My success level is off the charts. Don't listen to the outside forces just do what's best for you. Chase it down and go for it but be really smart about it.

KLM: What makes you excited about your job?

JMA: When going to a flea market, I'll get up at 4:00 in the morning to put myself together. Then I trudge out and fight against the other dealers that are there and then having that exhilarating feeling that when you locate something that is fantastic and wonderful that as a craftsperson I am stimulated by or as a historian I feel is historically important. That internal feeling is just pure joy. It's unexplainable. I'm addicted to that feeling of accomplishment.

KLM: Any fashion predictions?

JMA: Everything comes in cycles, as we know. Everything comes back. We have consistently borrowed from the past and looked over our shoulders in terms of everything. Especially in fashion things are borrowed and things are reinvented. My prediction would be just that something that has happened before us is definitely coming back. More than likely it will be the awful 1980's shoulder pads and neon colors. It's going to be disgusting. We lived through it and hopefully we can live through it again. But I would say fashion is revival and throughout time we see constant revivals of things that have happened before. So we're just going to borrow from things that have happened before us and proceed forward. And, of course, there will be a couple genius designers that will project forward and then we'll have something new and then in 10 to 20 years there will be a revival of what just happened new.

KLM: Did I miss asking about anything that is important to you?

JMA: There is a lot that I wish I could say that I could let people into my world a little bit more. It seems like I've been cold or distant. I have to say that if I were showing people my collection, I think it would make more sense. I think seeing what I do and the pieces that I've acquired would help people understand what I do. So someday they will have to come see my collection and see what I do so they can understand what I do and decipher my code through seeing the objects.

KLM: how does tarnish or oxidation affect art jewelry?

JMA: Being a jewelry historian, I've become very sensitive to how we find these art objects and the condition in which we find them. It's extremely important to let people know to leave it alone. That's the biggest advice I can give. To clean a patina on silver, and again this is my personal feeling, but I think most conservators will say don't clean it, don't polish it. A piece from over a hundred years ago has a patina or a surface that hasn't been touched for a hundred years and that's part of the history of the piece, that's what makes it what it is, it's not a mirror finish but then again, it probably was never a mirror finish. So if you put a mirror finish or a polish on a silver piece that was made a hundred years ago that wasn't polished originally, you've altered that piece. It's not what the artist intended any longer. Many of the Art Deco silver pieces that were made and Mexican silver, were not mirror polished. They were not polished on a wheel. They were polished by hand. So their polish originally was not a high polish. The patina on the surface of a piece is an integral component of what it is – both as what it once was and what it has become. So by polishing it you completely change what the artist's intention was. I don't polish or clean any of my things. Currently, I've actually refinished a piece by adding a patination to the surface that had been overly polished in hopes of letting the eye see what it once was and to enhance the pieces' features. It does affect the value as well – by polishing a piece you could decrease the value 10-20%.

Also, polishing something will take detail out because you are removing the top layer of metal and minor details, at times, were the most important part of the piece. You are removing metal if you

polish a piece, regardless of how much you polish it so over time if you polish a piece and then in 20 years when you've decided you don't want that piece or it's been passed down to somebody else and they polish it again and then someone else polishes it again, you're losing metal. With that loss of metal, you're removing the surface design so you're removing the artists' intent and you're actually changing the piece. Through normal wear, some metal does wear away. I wear a bracelet every day that I've had on for 10 years and the raised silver dots are now half of what they were 10 years ago so through normal wear you're already wearing away metal.

So if you have older things, respect them for what they are and if you don't understand the patination process or if you like things to look new, then buy new. If you like authentic characteristics in a piece, leave the patination alone. Don't polish it.

Jason works and lives in Akron, Ohio and can be reached through his Ebay seller name: Vanitysugarbush. Support your local artists and contact me, Kristina Malcolm (metalsmith extraordinaire) at fluxusmetalworks @ gmail.com and www. fluxusmetalwork. com.