

FIVE JEWELRY ARTISTS TO SEEK OUT

By Sylvia Rubin

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

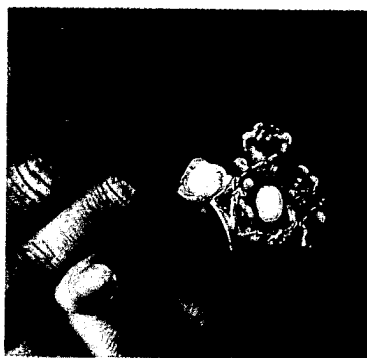
Somewhere near you right now, someone is hammering silver into a bracelet or necklace. In garages, rustic studios and hole-in-the-wall spaces, dozens of Bay Area contemporary jewelry artists are hunched over their benches, torch in hand — or standing over a bucket of water like Christine Guibara of Burlingame, who drops molten metal into water to come up with unique, amorphous shapes.

After New York and Los Angeles, San Francisco is the biggest hub for the American jewelry market, said Jennifer Heebner, the market editor at JCK magazine, a trade publication for the jewelry industry. "You have the Revere Academy there, which has long trained many excellent jewelry designers who stay and work there, and many retailers who appreciate handmade pieces like Manika in San Francisco and Meadowlark Gallery in Corte Madera."

One of the largest forums for art jewelers to sell their work, the American Craft Council show, is coming up Friday through next Sunday at Fort Mason (www.craftcouncil.org.) Also coming up on Labor Day weekend, the Kings Mountain Art Fair in Woodside and the long-running Berkeley Artisans Holiday open studios at the end of November.

"In art jewelry today you will find artists who are busy pushing the boundaries," says Jeffrey Snyder, author of the "Art Jewelry Today" series of books by Schiffer Publishing.

Here are a few Bay Area designers who caught our eye:



Multiple silver water-cast rings with pearl, sapphire, opal, \$315 to \$330.

Christine Guibara, Burlingame

Guibara grew up around metal and steel, crucibles and torches. She learned the basics from her father, Albert, a nationally known sculptor of whimsical, huge bronze and copper pieces. Guibara, who has fashion and business degrees, began her jewelry career less than two years ago after training at the Revere Academy of Jewelry Arts in San Francisco. Working out of an airy loft upstairs from her father's studio in Burlingame, she creates delicate, feminine pieces out of gold, Argentium sterling silver, pearl and gemstones.

Her tools range from a simple hammer and file to a state-of-the-art fusing machine ("I bought the laser machine last year instead of a car") to an ordinary bucket of cold water. She creates her signature water-cast small gold or silver jewelry by sprinkling molten metal into cold water to create tiny one-of-a-kind discs she uses in her work.

"Every single time I drop the metal into the water, I'm still amazed at the shapes that I get," she says. "No two are ever alike. And I want to be eco-conscious by using scraps, which I can melt many times over."

An up-and-comer, she's beginning to make a name for herself: Actress Ahna O'Reilly is expected to wear one of her pieces to the red carpet premiere of "The Help" on Tuesday. She sells out of the Burlingame studio, at Manika in San Francisco and from her website. www.christineguibara.com.



Three glass necklaces, ranging in price from \$250 to \$900.

Marna Clark, Berkeley

Much to her surprise, Clark's art career began with an out-of-the-blue invitation to a glass-bead-working class 10 years ago. Even a lifetime of exposure to contemporary art through her mother's San Francisco gallery didn't push her in that direction until she melted her first rod of glass. A fundraising consultant for 30 years, she suddenly saw another path.

"I took to glass like a duck to water," she says. "It was instantly gratifying, and I knew I'd found a new passion." Largely self-taught, she trained at a studio in Murano, Italy, as well as Penland School of Craft in North Carolina and Pilchuck Glass School in Seattle.

Working out of her basement, Clark melts, then twists, stretches and shapes thin borosilicate glass rods into necklaces and earrings.

"I didn't follow the traditional path of making decorative beads and developed my own vocabulary of shapes," she says. She creates flowers, geometric shapes, spiky feathers, amorphous rings and swirly, woven pieces. Lightweight and translucent, the pieces hang on hand-dyed silk cords or seven strands of plastic coated stainless steel with sterling silver closures. The jewelry catches the light and feels soft and smooth to the touch. Her pieces are sold at the Gardener in Berkeley and San Francisco, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, F. Dorian in San Francisco and from her website. www.marnaclark.com.