

An interview with CoMA member Pamela Webb June 2020



Tell us about yourself.

My name is Pamela Webb. I own Phryne Metal Jewelry and Webb-Shafer Fabrication LLC. I'm a jeweler, fabricator, sculptor, and educator. I attended Metro State here in Denver with a little jaunt across the pond for a year at the University of London. Instead of a master's degree, I opted to work my way into a lot of desired skills and learned blacksmithing, welding, machining and fabrication while working for several custom architectural shops in the San Francisco Bay Area. I also taught metalsmithing for the first time, at Studio One in Oakland. I took workshops and classes over the years with the California Blacksmith's Association, ABANA (Artists and Blacksmith's Association of North America), Denver School of Metal Arts, and Clear Creek Academy. I went back to Metro for my teaching certificate and have been teaching high school

Jewelry/Metalsmithing and Sculpture for 15 years.

What brought you to metalsmithing and how long have you been doing it?

I was lucky to be introduced to metalsmithing early, in high school. Norman Finrock, still making work himself was my teacher/ mentor. We had torches and forming tools for fabrication as well as centrifuge casting. He and our painting and drawing teacher, Elenore Huntley were big influences on me, and probably why I am teaching high school jewelry now, in the same district. That makes about 34 years!

Tell us a bit about your practice.

In my daily practice, I am currently a teacher first. Most of my creative energy goes to this job at least 10 months of the year. Thankfully, I teach high school metals, jewelry, and sculpture. I do not have time to work on my own pieces at school, in fact often putting in extra hours to get that job done. I work on my own pieces most evenings and weekends and sometimes it takes forever to finish things. I also run our small fabrication business with my husband, Will. Summertime is when I get to do more large fabrication projects and come up with my best jewelry design ideas, which I then slowly manufacture during the school year. Spontaneity like that really doesn't happen for me very often, so I really appreciate it when it does!

In my jewelry, I tend to use Sterling the most, followed by steel and gold. I create a lot of commissions and try to show my work in interesting places, for example, I have a large functional sculpture piece still in use in a local Masonic temple. I am currently building some sculptures for Meow Wolf Denver.



What was the most memorable thing you have made?

I think my most memorable piece would still be an installation I created in 1996. It was a very important piece, in terms of skills I learned as well as discovery of myself as an artist. At the center was a large (25 feet in diameter), mechanical, kinetic, musical instrument that used water to create rhythmic sound.

It was the first time I tried casting larger bronzes in a friend's backyard foundry. I had only done centrifuge casting in high school and college. I also got better at welding and engineering something large, heavy and rotating. I learned that big, overwhelming projects are not impossible, but in fact, I might just be stubborn enough to make them happen. I began to trust myself to figure things out more. It was a huge confidence builder and set me on the path of learning more about architectural metal work.



What do you love about working with metal?

I am initially drawn to metals as I crave control. Although I do enjoy processes like fold-forming and casting from nature, which have less control, I like that metal stays where I put it. It doesn't warp or shrink and crack like wood or clay. I'd much rather be covered in grease and metal filings than sawdust. Also, I can readily use recycled materials. All of the metal I buy in shapes for fabrication, like sheet metal and wire, have been recycled over and over. I love that there are particles of history in my hands.

Where can we see your work?

Currently, I am showing at Balefire Goods in Olde Town Arvada and on my website. I was showing almost exclusively at Mai Wyn Fine Art in Denver until they were forced to close by the Coronavirus pandemic. My Etsy store is currently a source of fundraising for social justice

and food insecurity causes in my local area. I feel strongly that my role as an artist now is to use my skills to funnel much needed funds to ACLU-Colorado and the Jeffco Action Center food bank, who are helping people struggling with homelessness in my neighborhood.

balefiregoods.com
pamelawebbart.com
phrynemetal.etsy.com

Why are you a member of COMA and what do you get out of it?

I love being a member of COMA! Coming back from the Bay Area, after learning about steel fabrication techniques in Oakland from some pretty great artists, I met and took some workshops with Ira Sherman. This was my introduction to COMA and I've benefited from my membership ever since. From forging hot copper with Ira to stone setting with Jaime McLansborough, I have found my nerdy metallurgical tribe. The conferences are a great way to connect and continue discovering new tools, techniques and friends.



Anything else you would like us to know?

As this is a new page on the COMA website and I am one of the first artists featured, I feel a responsibility to address the moment we find ourselves in. We are in the middle of a global pandemic as well as a national reckoning on how black people are treated by police and by white society. It has been a time for someone who looks like me to listen and learn. The uncomfortable but necessary topic of institutionalized racism is forefront. Now is a time of upheaval and difficult, but necessary changes. It's prime time for a human renaissance. Art is essential in times like these, especially art created by Black people. The old ways are being turfed into the bay along with the statues of slave traders. It's about time. Our work as artists

and allies is far from over!

PamelaWebbArt.com

Pamela Webb on Facebook

@PhryneMetal on Instagram

PHOTOS

Pamela Webb headshot by Hali Webb-Shafer

Steel Cuff Bracelets, by Pamela Webb, forged steel, some with yellow or rose gold rivets, 2020, photo by Pamela Webb

Sterling Twigs Statement Necklace, cast sterling silver twigs, leather and handmade Sterling chain, 2020, photo by Pamela Webb

Fossil Statement Necklace, sterling silver and Orthoceras fossil, 2020, photo by Pamela Webb