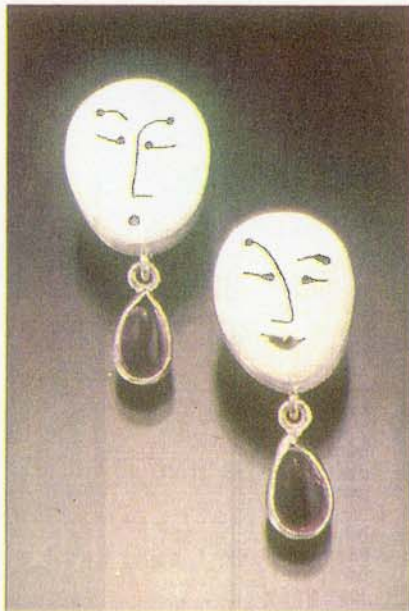


Unmentionables

Ling-Yen Jones' latest jewelry honors common activities that are rarely mentioned



A Ling-Yen Jones necklace in sterling silver, pearls and rose quartz.



Sterling silver earrings with amethyst and 14k gold posts.



A sterling necklace with blue chalcedony, salt water pearls and pearls.



ORVILLE MYERS/The Herald

Ling-Yen Jones displays some of her jewelry at Loes Hinse Timeless Clothing in Carmel. "People often comment that my designs have an Oriental influence," said the Chinese-American artist. "Look at me. What kind of art should come from me?"

By LISA CRAWFORD WATSON
Special to The Herald

If you are drawn to the artistry, you are drawn to the artist. You may never meet her. But somewhere behind the clean lines and smooth form, the low profile and subtle inference of a simple sculpture lurks a complex artist. She is there, in the hollow of a carving, the shadow of a curve, the polish of a stone. You sense it well before you understand why you are so engaged by the piece.

To encounter one is to experience the other.

Ling-Yen Jones designs and handcrafts fine-art jewelry of a distinctly Asian attitude that transcends culture to speak to the universal sentiments of beauty, grace and the natural rhythms of life. Her work is an embodiment of herself — her beliefs, her joy, her reverence for the most common of life's rituals and blessings.

Her most recent edition, "Unmentionables," is a signature line inspired from the faces of Japanese Ukiyo-e prints, which honors activities — such as bathing, consuming and lovemaking — rarely mentioned yet essential in everyday life. It features simple faces in hand-pierced sterling with pearls or semi-precious stones in pendants, bracelets and earrings.

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Born 32 years ago in San Francisco, Jones

To see her work

► Ling-Yen Designs are exhibited at Ansel Adams Gallery in the Steinbeck Center on Cannery Row, The Clothing Store in Pacific Grove, Loes Hinse Timeless Clothing in Carmel, at The Phoenix at Nepenthe in Big Sur and at select fine-art galleries across the country.

was adopted at age 6 and raised primarily in Berkeley. Her parents named her Ling-Yen, which means "Spiritual Swallow." They either inspired or understood her soaring spirit.

As a child, Jones developed a fascination for color and form, putting pieces together in arresting patterns.

"I started with glass beads," she said. "That's how the addiction begins. Then I moved on to rework old, funky jewelry into new forms. But the idea of crafting precious metal, of heating and cutting it to create my own designs was what really got me."

Jones attended Humboldt State University, where she studied both ceramics and painting. But neither proved the right fit.

"Ceramics are heavy and use a huge kiln," she said. "And painting, well, the bigger the better, and that's too big for me to handle. With jewelry, I can put it all in a bag and run. Sort of like what the Chinese women did when they sewed their jewelry into the lining of their clothing and fled during the Revolution."

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Before graduating from Humboldt in 1994 with a bachelor of fine arts in studio arts with an emphasis on metalsmithing/jewelry and photography, Jones created a metal arts guild called Out of Hand, which gave her and other young artists the opportunity to develop and exhibit their work.

"Once I got used to the place, I loved Humboldt," she said. "It was a place where you were free to experiment, try something new. If you fell on your face, you knew you wouldn't scrape it off. You could get up gracefully, face intact, and move on."

But the big break came when she moved to Monterey to apprentice with locally renowned artist Alexan Cerna and begin developing her own body of work for exhibition.

"I moved to Monterey on the day Princess Diana died," said Jones. "An icon was gone. Nothing felt right — except moving here. I arrived in a 20-foot truck filled with junk that probably should have gone to St. Vincent dePaul. What I discovered was what an opportunity it was to move here. In Humboldt County, you can live poor. You can't, here. But, the wonderful thing is that here

you have a cosmopolitan area — where people come and go from New York, Australia, Germany — a place where you can show your jewelry and these people will find it."

Jones continued to develop her skills and her style through various programs of study with established artists and Monterey Peninsula College instructors Theresa Lovering-Brown, Angela Gleason and Carol Holaday. She has since become president of the Monterey Bay Metal Arts Guild.

"Ling-Yen is a very energetic and serious jeweler," said Holaday. "She has her work in quite a few places. I think her style, which is very recognizable, was on its way to being established before she studied with us. Her work seems very personal and evocative, as is she. Even though she knows who she is, she continues to take classes to expand her ability and direction. She's also been active and has accomplished good things, encouraging other artists through the guild."

In 1997, she applied to Pacific Grove Art Center to present a one-woman show. To her amazement, she was accepted.

"Most of the places I applied to in those days, I didn't expect to get accepted," she said. "But they accepted me. I saw it as my

'window of opportunity,' which is what I designed for the show."

"Windows of Opportunity" is another signature line of Jones' that uses a three-dimensional window form in sterling silver, often with a semi-precious stone or pearl incorporated into the design. Because all of her work is individually handcrafted, each piece is unique to the moment, the method and the mood.

"I have a thing for hollow forms," said Jones, "making things you can see into and become a part of, like a window or a house. The beauty of jewelry is that it's very intimate. You have to go up to someone and basically say, 'Can I be in your space and see your jewelry?' I really like the openness and the intimacy of it."

Jones also appreciates the rhythm and movement of jewelry, both in the development and design of it, as well as the wearing of her work. A dance minor at Humboldt, her designs are at once static and gestural in both form and the interplay of materials. Pearls or precious stones, which often drop from the center or side of the piece, move to the beat of the wearer.

For Jones, there is nothing more exciting than studying a broad stretch of silver as her blank canvas to discover what it wants her to do, what it needs her to say. If she's quiet enough, she can hear it. So can we.