

# Discarded Objects Become Treasured Jewels in Elisca Jeansonne's Upcycled Jewelry

May 17, 2018

by Dakota Arkin Cafourek

East End artist Elisca Jeansonne creates upcycled jewelry from found objects: bright costume baubles that give new meaning to often cast-off materials that had lost their own. "I like to tread in different types of media," Jeansonne said in a recent interview. "Jewelry lends itself to that and the idea that you don't have to just wear jewelry for reasons of status or value. You can wear it for different reasons."

Differing from her art practice, part of the joy of making jewelry arises from a design process that can be very complicated, she said. Finding inspiration in the material she works with is one aspect she finds particularly enjoyable. Material for her joyful jewelry can include pieces from children's games, light fixture parts, thrift shop finds and intriguing forms discovered within plastics, metal and glass.

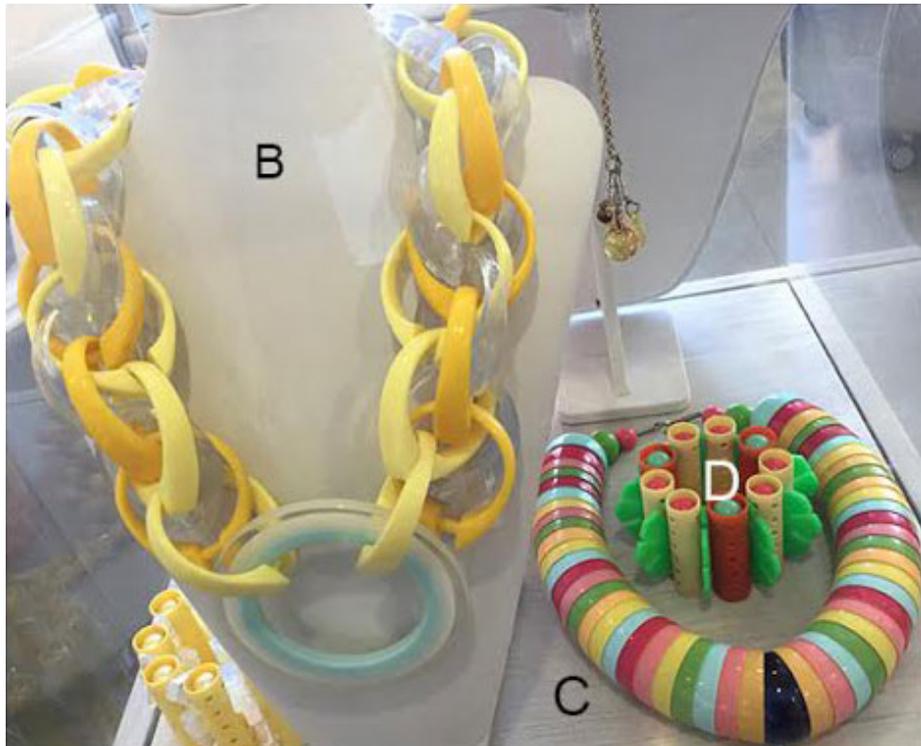
"I'll go to different places and look at different things," Jeansonne said, "and if something jumps out at me and an interesting idea jumps in my head, I say, yeah, that's what I'm going to try to make." Working with low value objects, Jeansonne sees upcycled jewelry as an opportunity to transform an item from its original purpose to create something completely different. "I am taking it and giving it a new meaning, a new life, and in another setting."



Jewelry pieces by Elisca Jeansonne featured in the 2018 “Breaking Boundaries” exhibition at The Lyceum Gallery at Suffolk County Community College Eastern Campus, Riverhead, NY. Courtesy of Margery Gosnell-Qua.

In addition, friends, artists and collectors get involved with the discovery and offer objects they feel might appeal to the artist designer, Jeansonne said. “Sometimes people save me their coffee stirrers,” she said.

Jeansonne’s jewelry was featured for the first time in an exhibition—a two-person show, “Breaking Boundaries”—at [Suffolk County Community College’s Lyceum Gallery](#) at the Eastern Campus in Riverhead, NY. The exhibition of collages and paintings by the Swiss painter [Garance](#) and jewelry by [Elisca Jeansonne](#) was on view from March 12 through April 14, 2018. The curator for the show, [Margery Gosnell-Qua](#), who is known for celebrating mixed media, selected some of Jeansonne’s boldest pieces for display—a combination of necklaces, cuffs, and bracelets—both to stand out on their own and to complement Garance’s large, bright paintings and collages, Jeansonne said.



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Her upcycled jewelry is permanently displayed at the [Romany Kramoris Gallery](#) in Sag Harbor, including many pieces featured in “Breaking Boundaries.” The gallery’s owner, Romany Kramoris said in a recent interview that she has known Jeansonne ever since she came to Sag Harbor. “She wanted to show me her jewelry pieces. I thought they were absolutely a knockout,” Kramoris said, noting that she began showing them in her gallery a few years ago. Kramoris added, “They’re great conversation pieces. They’re fun to wear. Everybody loves them!”

Jeansonne first arrived at jewelry making about 15 years ago as “an outgrowth” of her other artwork, assemblages created from found objects. “I ended up with a lot of smaller pieces that just were hanging around for a really long time,” she said, “and in the end I just started making jewelry.”

She began exploring found-objects assemblages while studying at [Rhode Island School of Design](#) in Providence, RI. “The idea of floating objects kind of gripped me. I would wake up in the morning and there would be this ray of light coming in my bedroom window and all the dust would be floating in the light,” the Baton Rouge, LA native said of her earliest influence. In Providence, she’d seek out materials and used what she found as floating media across her paintings. “I didn’t have a car, so in the beginning it was stuff I found while I was walking,” she said.

Kramoris said thoughtfully of Jeansonne’s salvaged materials, “We’re all so aware of plastics floating around making that enormous whirlpool in the ocean. I think recycling and repurposing is a

wonderful way to take care of a very tiny amount of our problems here on this planet.”

While Jeansonne had summer jobs assembling jewelry in Providence as a student, she had never formally trained in jewelry production. “It’s not that traditional,” she said of her work, “I just use the tools I have.” Her approach, she said, is to “mess around with the pieces until something falls together,” adding that the pieces are meant to be worn and she approaches them being mindful of their functionality. “Jewelry is pretty basic in terms of what it has to do; [you] try to make your vision exist,” she said, noting that she always wants it “to be functional.”



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She wants to move jewelry beyond its symbolism as a means to display wealth or status into a different kind of measurement. What if wealth was instead measured by “happiness,” she asked, “and spirituality?”

“I try to advance or change what is expected of jewelry,” the artist said. “The meaning of jewelry is constantly changing: It’s a signifier of what the person wearing it is interested in; it’s a reflection of the wearer and their aspirations.” Kramoris said of Jeansonne, “She is non-conventional and she likes the happy, kooky, funky fun side of life.”

Looking ahead, Jeansonne plans to add brooches to her repertoire. She finds inspiration and encouragement in historic jewelry designs from other cultures: Etruscan, Medieval, Viking, and retro looks from the 1930s and '50s. "There's just so much great jewelry out there," she said. "My thing, it just happens. I try not to make it a reflection."

For a decade, Jeansonne owned and ran Gallery Merz in Sag Harbor, where she also occasionally presented her jewelry. Remarking on her transition from the role of curator to featured exhibitor, she said that "it's less free in a way because you're relying on someone else's vision of you. In this case, I am fitting into someone else's vision." Still, she said this experience gives her a different kind of inspiration, adding that "I was pretty pleased with the way this show turned out."

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**BASIC FACTS:** Elisca Jeansonne's jewelry exhibition presented in tandem with paintings by Garance, "Breaking Boundaries," collages and paintings by the Swiss painter Garance and jewelry by Elisca Jeansonne, was presented March 12 through April 14, 2018 at the Lyceum Gallery at Suffolk County Community College Eastern Campus, Orient Building, 121 Speonk-Riverhead Road, Riverhead, NY 11901.

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