

Vail Daily



- Special to the Vail Daily/Carolyn Tyler

Vail jewelry: Finding the diamond in the lotus

Jewelry artist Carolyn Tyler brings her newest designs to Karats for a trunk show this weekend in Vail

CASSIE PENCE
SPECIAL TO THE DAILY
VAIL, CO COLORADO,

VAIL, Colorado — Buddhists describe spiritual quests as searching for the “diamond in the heart of the lotus.” For jewelry designer Carolyn Tyler, who will be in Vail this weekend, the expression is a perfect metaphor for her life and work as an artist.

Tyler's jewelry design business is closely linked to a series of events that some people might describe as karma, good luck, serendipitous. Naysayers might refer to the events as mere coincidence.

An opal pendant that Tyler bought in college while traveling in Greece was stolen by her husband in the midst of divorce. That lost opal sent Tyler on an odyssey to replace it, eventually leading to her life in Bali and thriving jewelry-making career. The precious pendant

was eventually returned — 15 years later — in the hands of a stranger.

Tyler has other examples of the undeniable spiritual interconnectedness swirling around her art career, like her famous duck ring.

Tyler commissioned her craftsman in Bali to shrink the gold arm cuff worn by the mummy of Egyptian King Ramesses II down to a ring, complete with the two duck (or geese) feet that are symbolic protectors who escort the spirit or soul back to heaven. Tyler reluctantly sold the ring to a woman from Georgia who fell in love with the piece. After it left her finger, Tyler's “luck” changed for the worst. Hearing of Tyler's misfortunes, the woman sent the ring back, and Tyler then made the woman her own ring. Since then, Tyler continues to make duck rings for people, one which adorns Goldie Hawn's hand.

“My life has been a series of beautifully inter-linked cosmic parables,” Tyler says. “At least, I prefer to see it this way because it is so much more rich and meaningful than saying it is just a coincidence. Everyone has these serendipitous happenings in life, and they can create their own life stories by tying the threads together to find the significance in events, like the old connect-the-dots puzzles. This is the power of myth and the joy of storytelling, which our culture has gotten away from. I think this lack of imagination is why so many people are bored with their lives—they are ignoring the magical moments.”

Stones that speak

Tyler is on hand this weekend at Karats in Vail Village to discuss her jewelry pieces and the stories that precede them during a trunk show. She's open to talk about commissions and has recently worked with clients to “recycle” their heirloom or inherited jewelry into something new and wearable.

Tyler has always thought of her 22-karat designs as classic. They have the look and feel of ancient treasures with whimsical shapes formed in her signature warm gold, “ the color of a nugget if you were panning for gold,” as Tyler describes it. But it's no wonder that Tyler's jewelry-making always begins with the gemstones. Their power is undeniable to her. She collects only the ones that “speak to her,” she says. Some nights, she'll just spread the stones out on a table to play, to feel their energy with no intentions of sketching a design.

One of Tyler's favorite authors, Aldous Huxley (“Brave New World”) wrote an essay called “Why are Precious Stones Precious?” In it, Huxley investigates why humanity places tremendous value on bits of colored rock.

“If you think about it, it could seem fairly frivolous and arbitrary for people to ascribe such significance to gems that wars have been fought, lives lost, and huge personal risks taken to acquire ownership of polished bits of rock used for decorative purposes,” Tyler says. “Huxley proposes — and I concur — that things that glisten and gleam, sparkle and glow, remind us on a very cellular/DNA level, of the radiant other-worldliness of our previous home in the light. Gems and precious metals subconsciously jog our memory of the Mysterium Tremendum from whence we came.”

'Heirlooms in the making'

At Tyler's workshop in Bali, Balinese goldsmiths — some decedents of jewelers for royal families and priests — bring Tyler's designs to fruition using ancient techniques. Tyler is helping to preserve the ancient craft of granulation, a painstaking embellishment technique where goldsmiths drop gold filings onto a hot stone or brick and the pieces sizzle into tiny, perfectly round balls of

If you go ...
Who: Jewelry artist Carolyn Tyler
Where: Karats in Vail Village
When: Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Information: Call 476-4760 for more information

gold. The Egyptians invented it, but very few cultures still practice granulation. All of Tyler's pieces are crafted by hand.

The techniques used to create Tyler's "heirlooms in the making" may be old, but she is constantly reinventing herself as an artist. Travel is often a source of inspiration for Tyler, and her recent Indiana-Jones-style adventure to Peru — where she spent most of her time hanging with Amazonian shamans — proved no different.

"I just love travel of all kinds - into the unknown regions of the planet, the soul, the psyche — it's all grist for the mill of the imagination," Tyler says.

In Peru with the spiritual healers, she gained a renewed interest in the psychedelic visionary experience. Tyler has always appreciated altered states of consciousness and expanded awareness as aids to creativity and visualization, she says, which is necessary for the continued development of her artistic pursuits.

"I have gotten some interesting new ideas from my recent expedition to Peru, journeying with the Shipibo shamans, whose weavings and paintings are decorated with the very fine digital maze-like patterns characteristic of the DMT-fueled ayahuasca imagery," Tyler says.

Amazonian shamans throughout South America have used ayahuasca, a vine, for centuries for healing, divination, and "seeing" into the invisible landscapes of alternate realities and multiple dimensions.

"I also like the shamans' unusual juxtaposition of colors, so you will start seeing some daring gem color combinations, and intricate wirework and granulation emulating their art," Tyler says.

Tyler was recently asked by the American Museum of Visionary Art to submit a piece. In subtle Tyler fashion, she called the piece "Tryptamine," a nod to her understanding of life and spirit, an understanding which has weaved its way into all Tyler's jewelry since the onset of her artistic career.

"I named it after the neurotransmitter Dimethyltryptamine (DMT), which our own pineal gland creates and releases at certain times — notably, at 49 days after conception, which is when the Tibetans say our soul enters the embryo, during dream states, and at the moment of physical death," Tyler says. "It is interesting that this gland is located behind what hindus call the Third Eye."

Cassie Pence is freelance writer based in Vail. She also does marketing work for Karats.

<http://www.vaildaily.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090723/AE/907239972&parentprofile=search&template=printart>