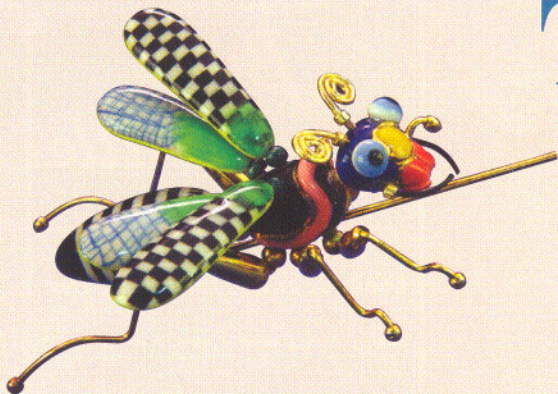


# The Creatures of Jewelry 10

*Diane Fitzgerald*



Butterflies, bats, and beetles are just a few of the many miniature creatures depicted in the jewelry of Cynthia Chuang and Erh-Ping Tsai under the brand Jewelry 10. They are surprising, vibrant and colorful little characters, and each is handmade and handpainted.



Cynthia Chuang and Erh-Ping Tsai in their studio.

attending the National Taiwan Academy of Arts where both majored in crafts and ceramics. Then they came to America and studied at New York's Parsons School of Design, both graduating with a degree in sculpture in 1984. During their first year at Parsons, the couple married, and after graduation they entered the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture.

Besides sharing an interest in crafts, Cynthia and Erh-Ping share a common history and artistic background: Both were raised in small villages in southern Taiwan and both were influenced by the rich colors and exquisite designs of Asian ceramics and Egyptian dynastic jewelry and beads.

It's their common love of nature, however, that now dominates their work. "We truly believe that nature is a common ground for every human being in the world," says Cynthia. "No matter who you are, you are able to appreciate the natural beauty of wildlife." Erh-Ping's family farmed, and their land was filled with the natural beauty of trees and plants. He loved being outdoors and observing nature, especially the life and habits of insects.

The animal pins began when the couple's young nephew came for a visit. Playing with him and showing him their work helped them see things with a new perspective—the fresh approach of a child's point of view. Later, inspiration also came from small clay works made by their daughter Sue San. "Our studio was in the basement of our house," said Cynthia, "and often Sue San would sit on her dad's lap and watch and help

Made of porcelain, metal, wire, beads, and paint, each piece is recognizable as a particular life form, but there the similarity ends. To me the pieces are reminiscent of a 1980s design style known as Memphis, a colorful, off-beat approach popularized by Ettore Sottsass as a way to shake up post-modern style and establish a fresh and stimulating approach to furniture and object design. Its bold emphasis on color, pattern, and shape was a reaction against the minimalist black and chrome austerity that design had descended into in the 1970s.

Cynthia and Erh-Ping began making jewelry under the company name Jewelry 10 in the mid-1980s. They met while





PHOTOS BY JERRY ANTHONY

as he created animals out of small lumps of clay. At first, all our pieces were made only from porcelain. We gradually added metals and beads.”

Their design process begins with inspiration that can come from anywhere and it is fueled by their ability to observe details closely. “Designing is not a difficult process for us,” says Cynthia. “We could be walking around in the city and something might spontaneously inspire us. Then we go home and work on it. Erh-Ping and I discuss our designs a lot,” she adds. “He is more sensitive toward nature and the design aspect. I have more of a people sense, and I know what people look for in creative designs. Together, we make a great team, because both aspects are essential for creativity.”

When making a piece, Cynthia and Erh-Ping first create the clay body and any appendages. After a series of glazes and firings, the clay parts are assembled and metallic liquid gold trim is finely drawn on the assembled piece. At this point, wire extensions and beads are added for decoration.

Many customers are devoted collectors of Cynthia and Erh-Ping’s jewelry and write to say how the jewelry has a special meaning for them. These touching stories help Cynthia and Erh-Ping connect to their customers and inspire them to create new pieces. “The most distinguished pieces are the ones with the long beaded tails,” says Cynthia. “But every piece is my favorite because each means something different to me.”

Like the critters that inspire them, Erh-Ping and Cynthia’s jeweled pieces are always changing. New pieces are continually added to their repertoire, while the beloved classic pieces are maintained. As a result, many people have accumulated extensive collections of Jewelry 10 pieces and display them as small works of art. The couple also makes one-of-a-kind auto-

graphed pieces that possibly could become collector’s items. Jewelry 10 work is available at several galleries, at upscale craft shows, and on the couple’s website.

Cynthia credits Jewelry 10’s success to its individuality. “It is important to find something that will make your work stand out from everyone else’s. People have to be able to say, ‘Look at that! I know whose work that is,’” she says. “We have thrived these twenty years by being unique and different from every other jeweler, and that is what makes people remember us.”

Don’t miss Cynthia Chuang and Erh-Ping Tsai’s work at <http://www.jewelry10.com>. Contact the couple at (516) 869-1200 or [cynthiac@jewelry10.com](mailto:cynthiac@jewelry10.com).

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