

JEWELRY ARTIST THOMAS MANN BIO

Thomas Mann has been an active participant in the contemporary American craft movement for the past thirty years as an artist, gallery owner and lecturer.

He describes himself as an artist working in the medium of jewelry and sculpture. The primary design vocabulary which he employs in the making of jewelry objects combines industrial aesthetics and materials and with evocative romantic themes and imagery. He calls this design system Techno.Romantic". Though it is not the only design mode in which he works, it is the one for which he and his work is best known.

Thomas Mann lives and works in New Orleans where he oversees a jewelry design and production studio, a sculpture studio, and gallery. He currently exhibits his jewelry and sculpture with some [250 galleries and stores](#) in the US and abroad, and at premier craft [events](#) around the

US. **Thomas Mann** describes himself as an artist working in the medium of metal. Actually he sees himself more as a sculptor than a jeweler, a term he denies as inaccurate with vigor. A self-employed artist since 1970, he is best known for his Techno-Romantic Jewelry Objects,® a style he invented in the late 1970s and pursued intensely over the next 20 years. Originally from Pennsylvania, the artist exhibited his work at The New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival in 1977 and has called New Orleans home ever since. Though it might be more accurate for him to call the United States at-large his home, since he spends most of his time on the road exhibiting at as many as 15 nationally juried craft and art events each year, in addition to teaching workshops and public speaking. Somehow, he still finds time to oversee the management and art direction of a jewelry and sculpture studio and retail gallery with a very capable staff of fourteen. Since the turn of the century he has moved away from his signature Techno-Romantic® design vocabulary towards edgier jewelry designs that are, in some cases, models for large-scale sculpture.
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PERSONAL STATEMENT

It was several years after I started making jewelry professionally, in the early 1970's, when I first experienced a true revelation of the creative mystery. That moment of illumination which every artist deserves to have at least once in their creative lives, but if you're very lucky, you get to experience on many occasions. That moment which delivers the clear but numbing realization of the numerous, interconnected machinations between the hand that moves and the mind that moves it, and the knowledge of the role you play in the manifestation of objects of meaning and importance for you and, more importantly for others.

In my case, the realization was that my love of making jewelry was not just about making jewelry but about making "objects". That designing and making jewelry could actually mean more than producing objects of adornment. That it could be a means of personal expression which might affect people in a much more serious and purposeful ways. That it might provide an opportunity for the real communication of ideas and, most importantly, that it could provide the stimulating and inspiring raw material for the imagination. In short, I no longer saw jewelry as jewelry but as a medium of artistic expression akin to that of painting or sculpture.

From the mid to late 70's I experimented continuously with the application of the ideas and techniques of collage and assemblage to jewelry making. I'd been heavily influenced during my college theatre days by the work of Joseph Cornell, Max Ernst, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and especially Picasso and George Braque. Collage and Assemblage techniques, invented by the cubists and developed by the Surrealists, DaDaists, the Italian Futurists and the Russian Constructivists represented art thinking and making totally peculiar to the Twentieth century.

I assumed the personal challenge of finding my own way to apply these influences and techniques to the making of jewelry objects that could have a wide public audience. Potent examples from the field of contemporary metals, which confirmed me in this direction, were offered in the work of metal artists and teachers such as Robert Ebendorf and Fred Woell in America, and Anton Cepka, Claus Bury and Herman Junger in Europe. All of whom were influenced by these same 20th century art movements. The "Techno-Romantic" style that I developed from this investigation has become the guiding vocabulary for a significant portion of my work as an artist and it continues to be a powerful resource.

I adopted the techniques of collage and assemblage and applied them to making of jewelry objects with the intention of making them available to as wide an audience as possible. In a conscientious decision made in the late 70's I eschewed the use of precious metals or gemstones and concentrated solely of found and alternative materials. I was determined to have the work for of the imagery and meaning encompassed in it rather than the perceived intrinsic value of the materials employed in it's making. It is my hope that my work will challenge the viewer and the wearer to derive a common denominator of personal meaning and value from the assemblage of components presented.

I also assumed the personal mission to bring this amalgam of materials, techniques and influences, in the form of wearable jewelry objects to the general public, exclusive of the museum and gallery system. In the early years of my career the primary means of reaching the public was through the craft fair system. At that time, (early to mid 70's) the contemporary craft gallery system was still developing, so there was not much choice for the artist except to exhibit via the art fair, and later the craft fair systems.

In an ongoing effort to define this work with words other than those employed by the art establishment I came up with a succession of terms that evolved over time into Techno.Romantic®. First in the series in the late 70's was Heartwear (post hippie mysticism), then in the early eighties I switched to Future Primitive (the discovery of primitive multicultural design roots). Having gotten a cease and desist letter from the owners of the copyright to that name I switched once again to the eclectic handle of Para-Normal Jewelry Objects (new wave technofreneticism).

Techno-Romantic® encompasses each of these phases. It is home base. It was always there waiting to be recognized. I had been a Techno-Romantic all along. It just took the time and life experience to find out. I invented this phrase in 1984 and immediately trademarked it. It is the guiding vocabulary for most the my work as an artist and continues to be a powerful resource.

Now, at the end of the century that provided me with the impetus and opportunity to become an artist and to thrive one, I also have the internet available a fluid and meaningful way to bring my work to the public as well. The Internet is definitely a Techno-Romantic@ event. To find out why please read Techno.Romantic Philosophy in the next section of the site.