For best view on your cell phone, turn to landscape.



The Washington Guild of Goldsmiths

Newsletter
Spring 2026

Curating a unique theme for our newsletter is one of the most rewarding challenges, a creative mission to bring you content that truly resonates. For this edition, we invite you to explore a theme that celebrates craftsmanship and history:
"The Enchanted Filigree." From ancient to contemporary design, the intricate beauty of this 'metal lace' remains a timeless favorite for all ages.

This month, our editor, **Noha Nader**, reflects on her artistic journey and how she fell in love with filigree. We also dive into the world of our special feature, **Marjorie Ransom**, a former US Diplomat who has preserved jewelry history by collecting over 2,000 antique pieces. Plus, get the latest updates on **METALWORK 2026** and more!

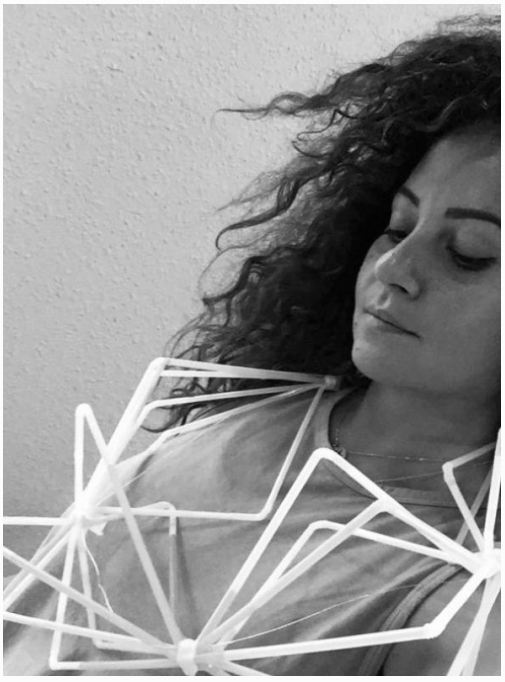
Old Yemeni bracelets with Filigree work
Photo credit: Marjorie Ransom
Photographer: Robert Liu

Editor's Note

Reminiscing

Growing up, art wasn't a distant subject found only in museums, it was the very pulse of our household. Our dinner table served as a nightly masterclass in aesthetics, where the conversation was as vibrant as the food. We would take turns describing the projects of the school's art class, reflecting on a historical show and its beautiful creative costumes. This constant dialogue taught me that beauty is found in the details: the texture of a fabric, the dramatic colors of spring flowers, and the structural grace of a well-made object, a perspective that ultimately defined my career and my style.

Photo credit: Noha Nader





I translated my lifelong love for art into a career as an interior architect, where I dedicated myself to the magic of turning flat drawings on paper into tangible, three-dimensional realities. I took pride in creating spaces that were as comfortable as they were beautiful. Yet, over time, I felt a persistent pull toward a more intimate scale.

Photo credit: Noha Nader



I remembered, when I was seven years old, every Sunday while getting ready for church, grandmother would entrust me with a very special family ritual. "Noha," she would say, "would you like to choose my earrings?" I would carefully lift the lid of her heavy, old wooden box, tracing the mother-of-pearl birds inlaid across the grain.

Photo credit: Noha Nader

As I sifted through the velvet-lined compartments, she watched me with a smile, sensing a hidden talent in the way I carefully picked my favorite jewelry. That simple task did more than just brighten my day, it sparked a lifelong dialogue between my hands and jewelry, transforming a childhood ritual into a future calling.

It was then that I immersed myself in every class I could find, determined to master the intricate techniques of jewelry making. I found a deep, meditative satisfaction in producing neat, finished pieces with my own hands, constantly exploring different metals and materials. However, the true turning point came when I took a course in **filigree**. It was an epic discovery! The delicate, lace-like precision of twisting fine wires felt like the perfect bridge between my architectural background and my new creative calling.

While my own style leaned toward the modern, I realized I could use my background in architectural design to connect these two worlds. By mixing this ancient, traditional technique with a contemporary touch, I found a way to honor the craftsmanship of the past while creating something entirely new and relevant.

Filigree at last made sense for me. It was the thread that connected my past to my present. I grew up admiring my grandmother's heirloom jewelry, and I vividly remember the jewelry history books where I would always pause, captivated by the intricate details of a wonderful filigree piece.

Photo credit: Noha Nader



Looking back, I finally realize that my family hadn't been teaching me how to paint or build, they had been teaching me how to **see**. Whether I am shaping a living room with a flowing circulation or the curve of a wide bangle, I am still speaking the language they taught me at the dinner table: the language of form, purpose, and beauty.

Noha Nader, *WGG Newsletter Editor.*

Photo credit: Noha Nader



Workshops

Doug Wunder's recent workshop on crafting wearable jewelry from titanium and niobium was a great success! The session was so well-received that we're already in talks to bring him back for an intensive **three-day class**. One day simply wasn't enough to cover all the techniques.

Stay tuned for official announcements regarding our upcoming workshops!

Estelle Vernon and Nil Van Order, *Workshop Coordinators*
evernon@estellevernon.com**,** nilvanorder@gmail.com



METALWORK 2026

WAVERLY STREET GALLERY

METALWORK 2026
A Juried Show and Sale of Jewelry, Sculpture, and Hollowware.

May 7 - May 29
Reception May 8, 6 - 8pm

WAVERLY STREET GALLERY
4600 East West Hwy #102, Bethesda,
MD. 20814



Artwork: Michael Brehl
Photo credit: Greg Staley

Gallery Details
Opening Hours
Thursday - Sunday: 1:00 pm - 6:00 pm or by appointment.

About the Gallery
Waverly Street Gallery is one of the oldest fine art galleries in the Washington DC Metro area. Opening as Creative Partners in 1993 the name was changed to Waverly Street Gallery in 2007. The Gallery features contemporary visual artists working in a wide range of media. Gallery artists include painters, printmakers, sculptors, ceramic artists, digital artists, photographers, and jewelers. Monthly exhibitions showcase original artwork in many genres.

Volunteers Needed!

Metalwork 2026 is fast approaching, and we need your help, even if you are not participating in this year's show. Relatives, friends, neighbors are all welcome to help out.
We need:

- volunteers with strong backs to help load the roll-along crates that house our cabinets.
- volunteers prior to the show and again after it closes for a variety of tasks that don't require heavy lifting.
- a low-loader van/truck (UHaul style) that we could borrow or rent out at a special WGG rate. If you have an available van/truck or contacts at a rental agency with special low rates, please let us know.

For more information and to volunteer contact us at wggmetalwork2026@gmail.com.

Nick Grant Barnes, *METALWORK 2026 Coordinator*

Special Feature

Marjorie Ransom



Ms. Marjorie Ransom is a former U.S. diplomat who lived twice in Yemen in a thirty-year career that also took her to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, Syria, and Egypt. She and David Ransom, her late husband, were the first Arabic-speaking tandem couple in the United States Foreign Service. Over the course of their career, they assembled a collection of some 2000 pieces of Middle Eastern silver jewelry. Ms. Ransom is the author of *Silver Treasures from the Land of Sheba: Regional Yemeni Jewelry.*

She has three daughters and six grandchildren and lives in Washington, DC. You can find live video interviews with Ms. Ransom which include images of the work she has collected as well as her descriptions of their history and meaning at https://www.ransomsilverspeaks.com/marjorie ransom

Photo credit: Gabriel Silliman

WGG: **You worked many years in the United States Foreign Service while simultaneously collecting and preserving beautiful old jewelry pieces from the countries where you were assigned. How did the work influence your collection?**

Marjorie: My late husband, David Ransom, and I were the first Arabic-speaking "tandem" couple in the Foreign Service that we were aware of. (I was a Foreign Service Officer from 1962 to 1965 when we married. Women FSOs had to resign when they married until the implementation of the Civil Rights Act in 1972).

In 1985, we were assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Damascus, Syria. David was the Deputy Chief of Mission and I the Public Affairs Officer. Shortly after our arrival, the Ambassador took leave and David became Chargé d'Affaires. Shortly after that, we received word that Senator Charles Mathias of Maryland would visit Syria.

Foreign Service officers were familiar with the challenge of making their residences "representational" for important occasions before the special items of personal effects arrive. We had not received our shipment of personal effects yet and knew it was important to beautify our Damascus residence for our first representational event in Syria, to have a special impact on the visiting Senator, but more importantly on the ranking Syrian officials who would attend our first public dinner. We always brought our jewelry in our air freight for security, so that was what we had. Our challenge was how to hang it quickly.

Time was of the essence! I remember locating a skilled Syrian carpenter who could work quickly to create strong frames with sturdy wooden backings that could hold heavy jewelry from our collection. In the textile part of the old city of Damascus, I found a deep maroon velvet for the background. I drew the inner part of the frames and laid out the jewelry until the jewelry told a story. Our Damascus apartment provided an ornate background with its traditional design.
We were able to hang the frames the day before the Senator's arrival. The deep, rich maroon velvet showed off the glitter of the intricate designs of the old pieces. The Senator was impressed, but the Syrian visitors were much more impressed!

It became clear that our hanging traditional Arab jewelry told our new Syrian acquaintances that we respected their culture. They would never have purchased and hung old silver themselves, but it

was important to our new Syrian friends, and all the Arab friends we made after that, to feel our admiration for these handmade items.

WGG: **How did you start developing an interest in old silver jewelry? Do you remember the first piece you owned?**

Marjorie: I had some pieces of my mother's old jewelry that I wore, but I never paid much attention to jewelry until the Director of Columbia University's Middle East Institute granted me the cost of travel to visit the Middle East in 1963 to learn to speak a dialect of Arabic. It was in the market of the old city of Damascus that I found an antique hinged bracelet that I had to have. It clanked and attracted attention. From that day, I wore it for any special occasion. Years later, I gave my gold jewelry to my three daughters.

Photo credit: Robert Liu



The first assignment my husband and I had together in the Arab world was in Yemen in 1966. We bought our first piece of Yemeni jewelry together in Taiz, Yemen. He shared my passion for silver jewelry from that earliest purchase.

The Taiz necklace with beautiful Filigree and granulation work.

Photo credit: Marjorie Ransom



WGG: **You lived in many countries in the Middle East. Would you tell us which one(s) you liked the most in terms of old jewelry history and why? Any similarities in the designs or craftsmanship?**

Marjorie: I researched Yemeni jewelry so thoroughly I find it difficult to compare other jewelry. There will be a chapter in my second book which describes how I happened to research and write about Yemeni jewelry. With the help of two grants from the American Institute of Yemeni Studies, I spent a total of about a year of visits to Yemen in the period 2005 to 2009 to research Yemeni jewelry. My book, *Silver Treasures from the Land of Sheba*, was published in 2014 and republished in 2023. It is available at Middle East Books in DC or on Amazon.

Only in Yemen did I have in-depth exposure to a culture over a lengthy period. Because of its mountainous terrain and the special need for silver jewelry for the wedding contract, Yemen had silversmiths in most settlements, even small ones, and most places had their special jewelry designs. Because of Yemen's early isolation in the north during the reign of the traditional Imams and the British occupation of most of south Yemen, the silversmiths continued to work more years in Yemen than in other countries. I had the opportunity to interview at least forty silversmiths and silver dealers. I visited most of Yemen and recognize most of the jewelry. The silversmiths were

always thrilled to tell their stories. My research was based on oral interviews; I tried to convey the humor and openness of Yemenis. Yemeni silversmiths worked in many locations in Saudi Arabia, making special jewelry types for that clientele in the 1900–1980 period.

Until 1948 and 1949, Yemen had a large Yemeni Jewish population, probably more than 50,000. Most worked in Sana'a, northern Yemen, and in Aden. A few worked in the Hadramaut. In the North, they specialized in fine filigree and granulation. I was able to collect many examples of their work. Most Yemeni Jews (Yemenites in Israel) left Yemen in the Operation Magic Carpet program in the 1948–1950 period.

WGG: **How did the idea of donating the Yemeni collection to the Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology come to life? Would you tell us more about the exhibition?**

Marjorie: I visited many museums in Europe and the U.S. looking for a place to donate my Yemeni collection. I noted that the museums would put up an exhibit for four to six months and then the items would be stored out of sight. I needed another approach. I found a good appraiser and selected the best 400 pieces and costumes of my collection. I wrote a contract that stipulated that the jewelry be exhibited for a period of two years.

With some help from a daughter, I found a young woman who was writing her Ph.D. thesis on Syrian jewelry and costumes and was an Assistant Curator at the Indiana University museum.

I shared with her my intent to donate a sizable, well-documented collection of Yemeni jewelry and costumes. She showed my proposal to the Senior Curator of the new Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, who contacted me almost immediately. I mailed the proposal with a copy of my book, and we had an agreement in two weeks. The museum in Bloomington was brand new with state-of-the-art equipment.



Marjorie Ransom with the Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology director, Brandie Macdonald.

Photo credit: Robert Burke

Indiana University is well-endowed and has an impressive reputation. They planned the opening exhibit last October. I was writing my second book, so I could not visit beforehand. Twelve members of my family decided to come with me to the exhibit opening. I was thrilled that they would all turn out for me; our audiences at the museum were also impressed with their support. I had spoken to the Museum Director about my interest in inspiring graduate students to research my collection, so she deliberately placed the exhibit cases on both sides of the corridor that leads to the graduate classrooms. The students would pass them every day.

There was an enthusiastic reception for the exhibit. The attendees appreciated the rare quality of the pieces. The Museum Director had drawn on talent from different departments of the university to mount beautiful cases. They used my documentation to tell the importance of the different pieces. The exhibit will be open until October 2027. I plan to take several people to Bloomington to see the exhibit. I have promised to do one more lecture and want time to spend with the exhibit. I urge you to read my first book, and the second one when it comes out. The jewelry occupied a unique and important role in the marriage, and because it was the property of the bride, it had special importance in the society until the Yemenis turned to gold jewelry in the late 1970s and

invested in items other than jewelry for their household needs.

WGG: **We learned that you shared your collection of vintage jewelry-making tools with metalsmithing students. How would you describe that experience? Would you share some photos of the tools and information here with our readers?**

Marjorie: I had established a good rapport with the "Aqil," or head of the Sana'a silver market, who oversees the activities of the silver dealers and silversmiths in the Old City. He agreed to sell me his old tools, which date from the beginning of the twentieth century, for use in my second book. He also sent me some molds to add to my collection.
I carried the tools to Bloomington in a heavy cloth bag for my private meeting with the metalsmiths my first morning there. No one introduced me, and I was not sure how to begin the meeting, but I had brought the tools to show and I began with them.
As goldsmiths, you are probably familiar with all the tools. I described to the metalsmiths how I became a researcher and writer about the jewelry, and I regaled them with tales of unique things about Yemen's jewelry. They sent me a thank-you card after my visit with nine individually recorded thanks. I was very touched.

I will describe the uses of the tools as best I can. The five pieces on the right are for incising wires for decoration. The long piece to the left, along with the two smaller pieces, is for making rings. The two punches in the middle are for placing beads or stones in bezels. At the top left are two heavy punches with handles for making small holes. Finally, the small doming piece at the bottom is for shaping silver beads into half-domes.



Photo credit: Marjorie Ransom

The hammer is a good size for the silversmith to handle. The next four wrenches are for pulling wire. The three tools on the right are tweezers for handling small items.



Photo credit: Marjorie Ransom

WGG: **I read your wonderful book, *Silver Treasures from the Land of Sheba: Regional Yemeni Jewelry*. I felt that it was not only about the design and materials of old traditional jewelry. It was also a study of anthropology: how people lived, their traditions, values, how they celebrated family events, and more. How did you manage to explore all these facets of life in the Middle East?**

Marjorie: I was fortunate to have financial support to live and travel in Yemen and to have the invaluable support of the Yemen American Language Institute for my interaction with the Yemeni government for travel permits to certain areas and for exit and entry visas. I spoke passable Arabic and was doing research that pleased my interlocutors. Of course, I had lived and traveled in Yemen for four years as a diplomat.



Marjorie Ransom with her well-informed Yemeni driver and guide, Abd al-Rahman al-Sabri.

Photo Credit: Peggy Hanson

I had two excellent book advisers. The one in Sana'a gave me the use of an apartment in the silver market of the Old City, which was an invaluable experience. Kamal Rubaih was fluent in English, one of the very few translators I had access to. In the Hadramaut, Hassan Bahashwan welcomed me to his home, introduced me to the jewelry of the Hadramaut, and made it possible to have access to some Hadrami homes.

I would not have thought myself capable of such research and writing had I not been asked by Dr. al-Eryani to do it for Yemen. I had just retired from the Foreign Service and suffered the loss of my beloved husband, so I had free time. My Arabic was better than I thought.

My project would not have worked were it not for the exceptional openness and hospitality of the Yemenis. Early in my stay in Sana'a, I was invited to an extraordinary *iftar* meal with a member of a large Sana'ani family. I was the only outsider among more than forty attendees. I was privy to a discussion about a marriage proposal which came from a neighbor's family. The women monopolized the discussion, reviewing all the things that could matter in such a session. My host translated the local dialect into clearer Arabic for me. The decision was made that the girl was too young for the big responsibility she would have in caring for an elderly family member. The consensus decision was that the couple should wait one year to marry.

Yemenis knew that few outsiders knew and respected Yemen, and they welcomed the opportunity to teach me.

I sometimes made mistakes in my social manners and lost opportunities as a result. I became more sensitive the more I traveled and experienced different opportunities. A couple of them still pain me.

WGG: **"Once a collector, always a collector." Did you ever imagine that one day you will own a collection of 2000 pieces of Middle Eastern silver jewelry? How did this have an impact on your life?**

Marjorie: I am happy that I bought so many Yemeni pieces, for it allowed me to have a professional photographer photograph them for my first book. It also allowed me to donate a wonderful collection to the Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, which has mounted a superb exhibit using my best pieces and ample information from my database and the appraisal.
I regret buying so many pieces from other cultural groups, but I found it hard to resist the lovely items from other cultures. I will have to spend the remainder of my life placing them through sales or donations when I would be happier traveling.

WGG: **What advice would you give to art enthusiasts who are starting their journey as jewelry collectors?**

Marjorie: I would advise a collector to sell as you collect and build small, high-quality, well-

documented collections. I was sure to document my pieces by date and place of purchase, including all the data I could get on the silversmith, the geographic area, the date something was made, and more. This information is what sold my book, that and the wonderful photographs.

I took all the photos in Yemen except for some jewelry photos and others I was able to borrow that featured women. When negotiating with the publisher of *Silver Treasures from the Land of Sheba*, there was opposition to my request to include 320 photos until they saw them by chapter. I had more photos than text in that book because the photos told such a story.

I relied on an American professional jewelry photographer for most of my jewelry photos. He is Robert Liu, the editor and publisher of *Ornament* magazine. I hope to be able to give what remains of my Yemeni collection to someone who will place it in a Yemeni museum when the country is stable.

A photo from Marjorie's book.

Photo credit: Noha Nader



Special Picks for Our Readers

Filigree has sparked creative inspiration far beyond the world of jewelry. As our editor noted in her previous column, this delicate lacework can even become a beautiful feature in architecture, most notably in David Adjaye's design for the National Museum of African American History and Culture. In this article, we take a closer look at the stunning metal facade that defines the museum's unique character and charm.

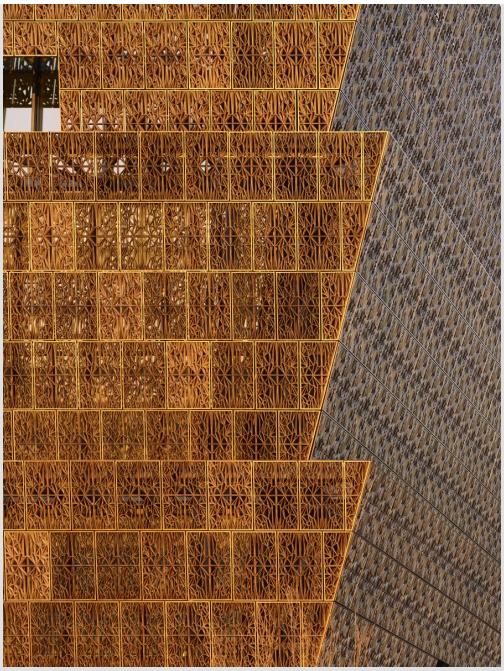
David Adjaye on the National Museum of African American History

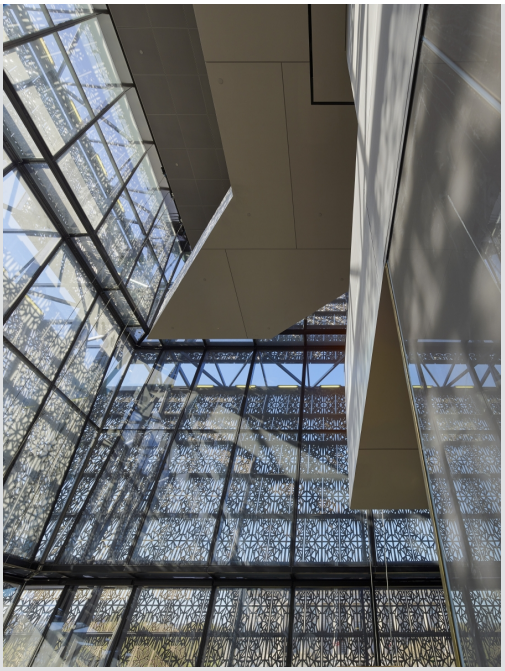
https://metropolismag.com/viewpoints/david-adjaye-national-museum-african-american-history/

METROPOLIS Magazine

By: Vanessa Quirk
Photographer: Alan Karchmer

"The facade system is an aluminum substrate with bronze finish inspired by the work of African-American ironworkers, who contributed greatly to the architecture of the American South.
The three tiers of the building organize the spatial experience of the museum into past, present, and future."





Jewelry artist Filipa Oliveira lives between Portugal and Scotland, crafting exquisite, modern interpretations of traditional filigree. In this article, she explores why this delicate, refined technique is increasingly rare and sheds light on the challenges facing today's filigree artisans.

Filipa Oliveira on the History of Filigree

By **Filipa Oliveira**, 18 Mar 2021

"While the extraordinary craftsmanship of the intricate pieces captures the senses, at the same time, as with any handmade object, filigree has suffered because consumers search for competitive prices and filigree isn't suitable for mass production".

https://www.goldsmiths-centre.org/learn-and-upskill/resources/knowledge-history-of-filigree-filipa-oliveira/



Handmade Filigree Jewelry

By MetDaan Magazine

Follow this comprehensive guide to craft a filigree flower medallion from start to finish.

Premiered Jan 1, 2021



How is it Made - Yemenite Filigree Jewelery

By **Ben-Zion David**

Step into the world of traditional Yemeni jewelry making. Ben Zion reveals the fascinating step-by-step process of turning wire into a work of art. Sit back and enjoy the transformation!

"Yemenite Culture Museum "Yemenite Art" presents: Famous

8-th generation silversmith, Ben Zion David, showing how a traditional silver bracelet is made. For more, go to "Yemenite-Art.com".

SNAG Society of North American Goldsmiths



Join in Detroit, MI **June 10th–13th** for SNAG's 2026 Conference: *Labor & Legacy*. Celebrate jewelry and metalwork as both practice and inheritance, honoring the labor of makers and the knowledge they pass on. This intergenerational passion drives the future forward.

Link for more information: https://snagmetalsmith.org/conference/

Announcement

The newsletter team would like you to be part of the upcoming issues. Here's how:

Did you experience an unexpected hurdle while making a piece? Did you successfully overcome it and is this piece now one of your favorite pieces? Was it a different technique you used or maybe a design alteration that saved the day?

If so, would you like to share your story with the WGG community?

We would love to hear your experience!

Send us a short paragraph (about 250 words) with a photo of the piece. If you don't have a photo, send a sketch.
Your write-up will be included in the newsletter on a first-come, first-served basis.

We need you! Don't hesitate to join in!

WGG Newsletter Team
Contact us here: wggnewsletter@washingtonguildofgoldsmiths.com

Events in the Area

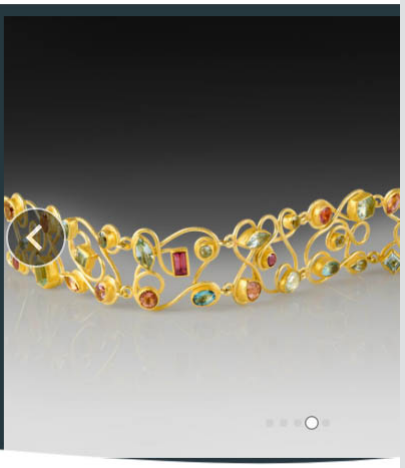
Smithsonian Craft Show

The Show | The Art | Awards | Sponsorship | Exhibitor Login | Donate

AMERICAN ARTISTRY

2026 Smithsonian Craft Show

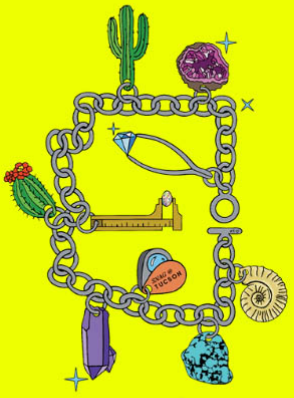
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International Gem & Jewelry Show Virginia/Maryland

Montgomery County Fairgrounds (Building 6), 16 Chestnut Street, Gaithersburg, Maryland, 20877
United States

GEM-AD Member

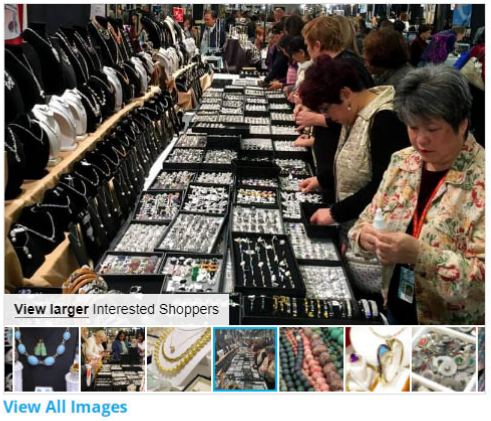
The "Original" Classic INTERNATIONAL GEM & JEWELRY SHOW INC.

Show Dates:
May 15-17, 2026

Region 1:
Atlantic South States

Hours:
Friday 12-6
Saturday 10-6
Sunday 11-5

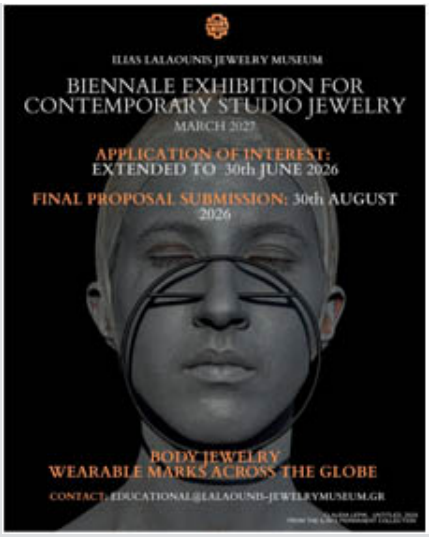
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Events around the world



ilias lalaounis jewelry museum

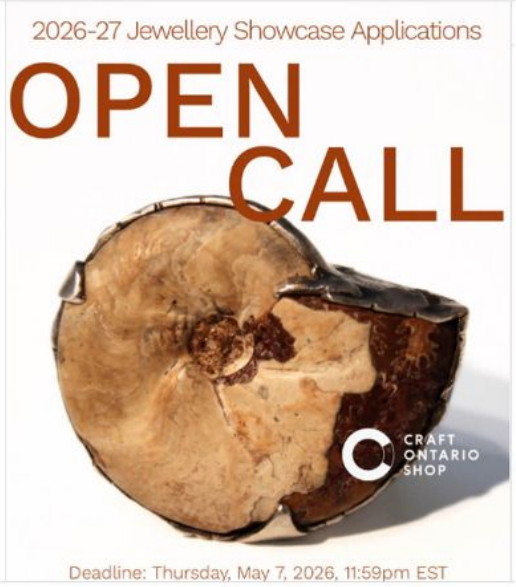
OPEN CALL FOR THE Biennale Collective Exhibition
Body Jewelry & Wearable Marks Across the Globe

Deadlines for:
Application of Interest: extended to 30th of June 2026
Final Proposal Submission: 30th of August 2026

If you have not received the information by e-mail, please DM your contact details and we will get back to you.

Let's shape this Biennale together





CRAFT ONTARIO

Opportunity for Jewellers at all Career Levels!

The Jewellery Showcase Program is now open for applications!

This program gives members the opportunity to highlight a collection of jewellery at the Craft Ontario Distillery Shop for approximately 8 weeks. All work displayed in the Showcase must be made by the applicant and should have the potential to sell in a retail setting.

-

Deadline to Apply: Thursday, May 7, 2026 at 11:59pm ET

Application Responses sent by: Thursday, May 21, 2026

Find the full details and how to apply on our website: https://craftontario.com/blogs/participate/craft-ontario-jewellery-showcase-application-information

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Artwork pictured: Silver and shell ring by Vivienne Jones @viviennejones.studio

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Learning Opportunities:

The WGG has compiled this list of locations that offer jewelry and metalsmithing classes in the DC-Maryland-Virgina region (aka, the DMV). We'd love to expand it! If you know of other venues offering classes and workshops, email us at: wggnewsletter@washingtonguildofgoldsmiths.com. Also let us know if you offer instruction and where you teach.

- **Baltimore Jewelry Center** https://www.baltimorejewelrycenter.org/classes-workshop
- **Jewelryclassdc** https://jewelryclassdc.com/