

Profiles Of Modern Day Silversmiths

Julia Woodman

by Fiona Urquhart

Julia Woodman's specialty is a silversmithing technique called "tessellation" – a word derived from "tesserae," the individual pieces that make up a mosaic. She shapes sterling discs, squares, triangles, and chain links into three-dimensional units, which are assembled to create a larger single unit suitable for use as a fork or spoon handle. The technique produces a texture that gives the effect of volume while limiting the weight of the piece. Disks can be crimped and formed to look like a cylindrical honeycomb, or they can be domed and put together to resemble an accordion.

Julia was inspired in the technique by master silversmith Heikki Seppä (see Profiles of Modern Day Silversmiths, *Silver Magazine*, January/February 2004), with whom she studied at the Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina. She completed a master of fine arts degree in metalsmithing at Georgia State University and subsequently won a Fulbright Scholarship to spend a year studying in Finland at the Lahti Polytechnic Design Institute, Upper Goldsmith School, where she became the first American to be certified a Finnish master silversmith.

While at Georgia State, Julia won first place in the Presidential Medallion Design competition in 1990. The following year she won the flatware award in the National Student Sterling Design competition. Metal is not the only material Julia has worked with, however. Some thirty years before she developed an interest in silversmithing, Julia studied pattern making and sewing at the Pratt Institute in New York City. She became accomplished in needlepoint and in 1968 was commissioned to produce the dining chair seat covers for the North Carolina governor's mansion. She also was invited to design the memorial acolyte kneeler cushions and communion rail kneeler for St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Asheville. Needlework

Fig. 1. Fish servers, 1991. Sterling, vermeil, citrine. (Winner of the special flatware award, National Student Sterling Design competition.)

kept her busy for the next decade while she followed her army officer husband, Dick, to Norway. On Dick's retirement the couple settled in Atlanta and Julia decided to pursue a degree in metal arts.



Fig. 2. "A Lady's Pearls" ladle and slice, 1998. Sterling, glass.

Fig. 3. Honeycomb boney pot and dip, 1998.
Sterling, vermeil.



In 1993,

while she was working on her master's degree, she was commissioned to produce a new processional cross and two torches for the Cathedral of St. Philip in Atlanta. Employing the negative spaces created by the tessellation technique and adding 24-karat gold plating, she designed the cross and torches to look like a honeycomb, a metaphor inspired, she says, by an excerpt from Psalm 19: "His words are sweeter than honey, even than the honey that drips from the comb." The three-pointed crown atop the cross and torches is a design that can be interpreted in several ways, Julia says. It may represent the tongues of fire symbolizing the Holy Spirit, or hands outstretched in adoration of God.

Julia has incorporated the tessellation units she has created into handle designs for various serving pieces, stems for goblets, and a child's rattle or spoon. Some of the patterns suggest a tangle-weave design, cockleburrs, or blue-colored moons. Some are enhanced

with gold leaf or the incorporation of lampworked beads to give contrast to the sterling components.

In 1998 she created a sterling slice and punch bowl ladle for the *Benchmarks:*

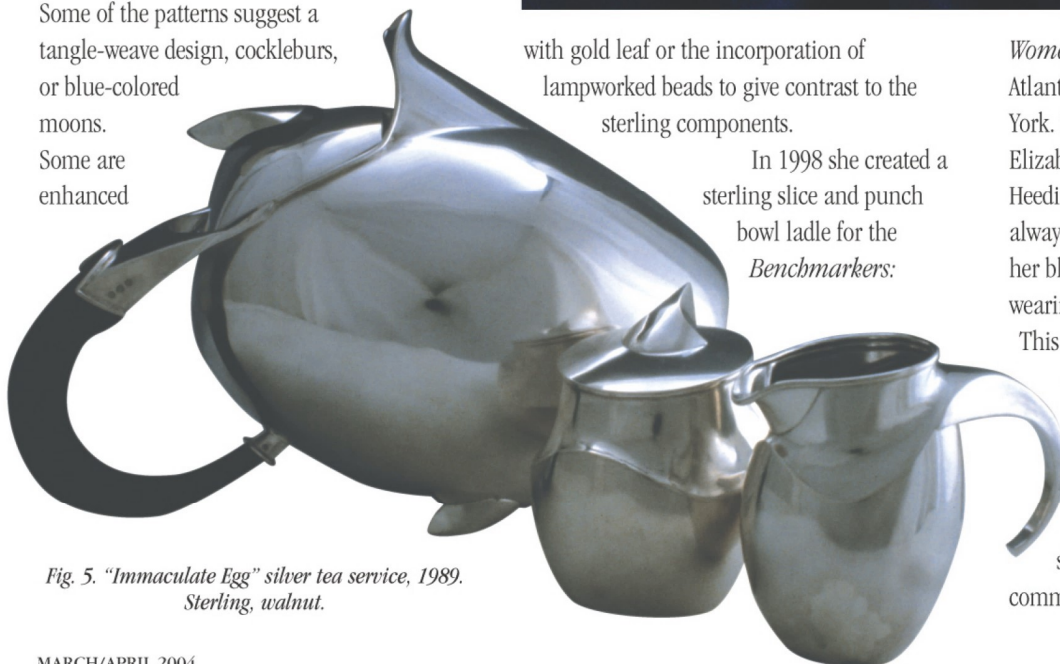


Fig. 5. "Immaculate Egg" silver tea service, 1989.
Sterling, walnut.



Fig. 4. Tangle-weave brunch servers and honey dip, 1989.
Sterling, glass.

Women in Metal exhibition, which showed in Atlanta, Memphis, and Saratoga Springs, New York. Both pieces represent her friend Elizabeth Brim, a distinguished blacksmith. Heeding the Southern admonition that "a lady always wears pearls," Elizabeth forges metal in her blacksmith overalls and steel-toed boots wearing a strand of pearls around her neck.

This image inspired Julia to design two pieces of flatware – the traditional pastry or ice cream slice, which conveys Elizabeth the lady with her pearls, and the non-traditional punch bowl ladle representing Elizabeth the blacksmith, still adorned with pearls. A glass bead common to both symbolizes the pearls.