

Pewter has a long history of use through human civilization but with that history comes a variety of associations and connotations, not all of them positive. Until recently, nearly all pewter was alloyed with lead which has given a certain stigma to the material. Also, due to the relatively low melting temperature and contamination risks with sterling silver if being worked in the same studio, many individual makers and most academic programs do not include pewter in the usual repertoire. These factors, along with changing stylistic trends, has seen significant decrease in the use of pewter, especially in contemporary art jewelry.

Through this exhibition, we hope to demonstrate the tremendous potential of pewter in contemporary art jewelry and generate renewed interest and excitement in those experiencing the exhibition. The makers invited to participate are from a diverse range of backgrounds and personal practices, with many of them not having significant experience working with pewter. Already many of them have begun work on entirely new pieces just for this exhibition and have shared their enthusiasm for the process. We believe that this positive response from the makers will certainly carry through into the works they create and to the international audience of the exhibition in its various venues.

Teresa Faris and James Thurman, co-curators

ESSAY ON PEWTER

Behind glass, on a shelf, in a drawer, the pewter serving set sits, patiently awaiting a dinner party when it can be called forth and put on display. This is the musty image most of us have of pewter: a less expensive, less fashionable, somewhat utilitarian (if not maligned) metal used by past generations to entertain guests at the dinner table. Often camouflaged to look like silver, its identity has been “polished” away, reducing it to a cheap imitation of its more prized cousin. Or its unfortunate historical relationship with lead has “tarnished” pewter’s reputation, often calling into question its health and safety. Perhaps it is best to keep it in that drawer or cabinet?

If there is a metal in need of a facelift, pewter is perhaps at the front of the line. Its potentialities have been long neglected, at least until now. With “Wearable Pewter,” we get a new look at an old medium. Curated by Teresa Faris and James Thurman, the exhibit features twelve jewelry smiths who each explore the unique properties of pewter through a wide range of artistic experiments. Taking advantage of pewter’s low melting temperature, artists play with the elasticity, pliability, and fluidity of the metal, fusing it with unlikely partners such as wood and sterling silver. And as pewter couples, merges, and blends with other media, it becomes a complex metaphor for cultural hybridization, evolutionary mutations, queerness, and translation. Thus, pewter’s material properties become vehicles for cultural, social, and sexual processes that speak to contemporary issues.

As noted French philosopher Jacques Rancière might argue, an aesthetic experience is a repartitioning of the sensible. By this, he means that sensation abides by its own hierarchies, which are habituated through rituals of seeing, hearing, tasting, and touching. Yet in aesthetic moments, there is a shift in what can be sensed. Aesthetic moments are forged through displacements of expectations, disorientations of sensations, and affective disjunctions that open the body's sensorium up to new configurations. Seemingly necessary connections between form and function are ruptured, producing unusual moments that grab the eye, snag the ear, and in turn, produce alternative sensorial partitions.

In *Wearable Pewter*, we have a collection of objects that, each in their own small yet powerful ways, offer up aesthetic events. Through displacements of the medium and experimentation with its plasticity, surface texture, and cultural meanings, pewter takes on new, dynamic possibilities above and beyond its traditional, utilitarian use as houseware. If pewter is the proletariat of the metals (a hard worker, given little credit for services rendered, and often dismissed by more nobler metals), then *Wearable Pewter* is nothing less than pewter's revolution. Or if pewter traditionally stands for a certain notion of the bourgeois, nuclear family, then this is its (queer) coming out party. In either case, *Wearable Pewter* finally liberates the material from being "poor man's silver," and in turn, offers viewers an unbridled celebration of a metal capable of expressing 21st century ideas, techniques, and styles.

Dr. Tyson Lewis

WEARABLE PEWTER EXHIBITION

featuring work by:

David Clemons

Umut Demirgüç Thurman

Dan DiCaprio

Teresa Faris

Frankie Flood

Ana Lopez

Kyle Patnaude

Juan Riusech

Michael Rybicki

Donna Sweigart

James Thurman

Jennifer Wells

WEARABLE PEWTER EXHIBITION

exhibited at:

City Soles
Chicago, IL, USA

Ayşe Takı Galerisi
Istanbul, Turkey

Alliages
Lille, France

Special thank you to all of the participating artists who donated the money needed to cover the costs of making this exhibition possible (and Phil Renato who contributed despite not having work in the exhibition)!

David Clemons

Interface

Pewter, sterling silver, white oak, milk paint
18" Diameter 3/8" Depth
2019

This exhibition posed an interesting challenge for me as I normally use pewter for utilitarian housewares and not for jewelry. The fundamentals for fabricating with any metal are essentially the same, so my driving question became why use pewter? The metal has some unusual properties in comparison to other nonferrous metals and my resulting designs focused on optimizing the use of those properties in a direct method. The low melting point and molten fluidity creates the potential to explore a variety of traditional and non-traditional mold material options so long as the material can withstand the heat. Within my piece, the casting process works simultaneously to generate form and create the physical bond with the wood. Graphic surface treatments and form manipulation were added to heighten the visual tension between the materials and project a sense of expansion.



Umut Demirgüç Thurman

Kusbakısı/Bird's Eye View

Sterling Silver, pewter, steel

2.5" x 3" x .25"

2019

In this brooch, I etched a Turkish textile motif, *Hatayi*, on pewter along with other stamped motifs. The motifs that I most often use in my artwork are derived from natural plant forms through stylized drawings of the bird's eye view of a flower. I used acrylic paint to add color to the etched surface of the pewter. The back plate of the pin is sterling silver. When combining the pewter and sterling silver in a single piece, it was interesting to discover the similarities and differences of the materials and the dialog between them.

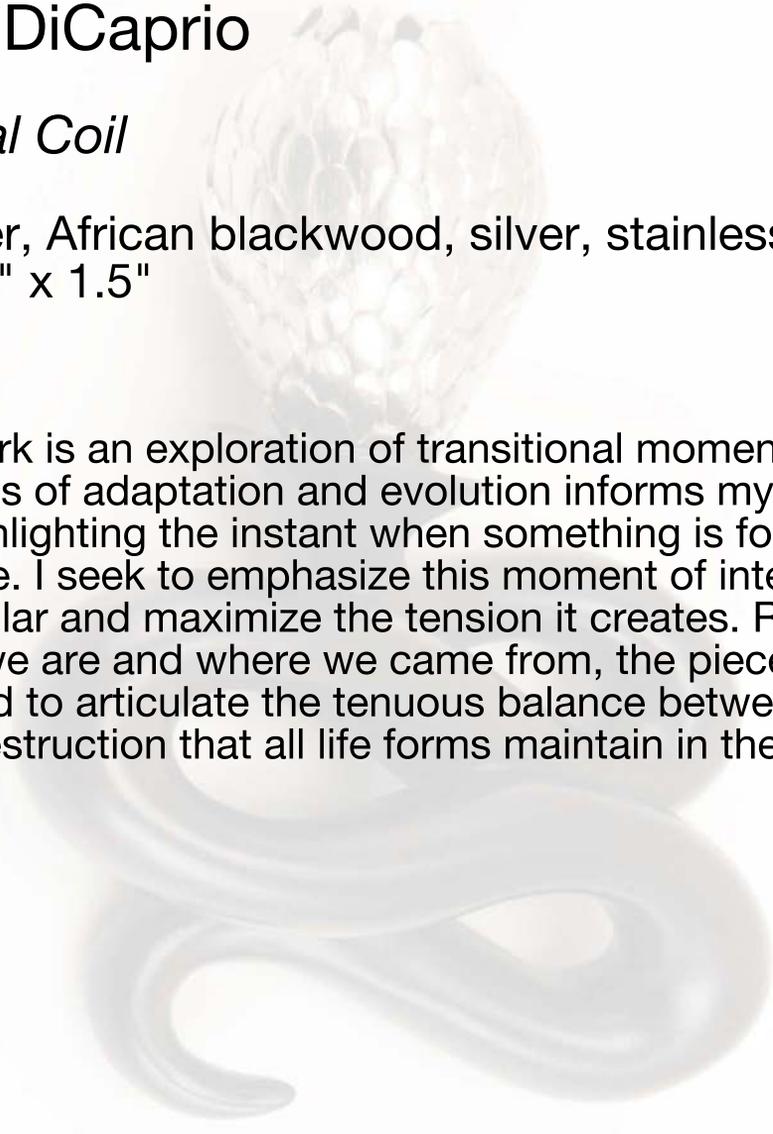


Dan DiCaprio

Mortal Coil

Pewter, African blackwood, silver, stainless steel
5" x 4" x 1.5"
2019

My work is an exploration of transitional moments. The process of adaptation and evolution informs my practice by highlighting the instant when something is forced to change. I seek to emphasize this moment of intersection in particular and maximize the tension it creates. Referencing what we are and where we came from, the pieces are created to articulate the tenuous balance between survival and destruction that all life forms maintain in the world.





Teresa Faris

Cwab: Lien

Pewter, wood altered by a bird, stainless pin stem

3.5" x 4" x .5"

2019

In the English language the word Lien is defined as a debt, birthright or spleen. This word is also the surname given to my great-grandmother. To assimilate is to assume that one has a profound understanding and has become similar to the those around them. Inherited genetics, trauma and knowledge is resistant to assimilation and feels like a vibration in the body while it works its way to the surface.

The choice to conceal and assimilate was made by my family three generations ago in order to escape genocide caused by religious misconceptions. This series of work addresses my desire to understand the overwhelming idea of birthright and the debts we must pay with our body and mind in order to fit in and survive.

Superstition is called upon when fear of the unknown is present. Animals and animal imagery have been used throughout history to offer hope, order and alarm to unsettled humans. These generations-old beliefs are impenetrable and often left unchallenged. I am interested in discovering the root of these habitual beliefs and challenging the way they dictate they ways in which I respond to the world around me. The objects are reminiscent of traditional (pewter and silver) jewelry rooted deeply in beliefs of folklore and superstition, through each cut and soldered piece I am moving closer to my truth.



Frankie Flood

Butterfly Pendant

Cast pewter, aluminum, stainless steel cable

12" x 8" x 3.5"

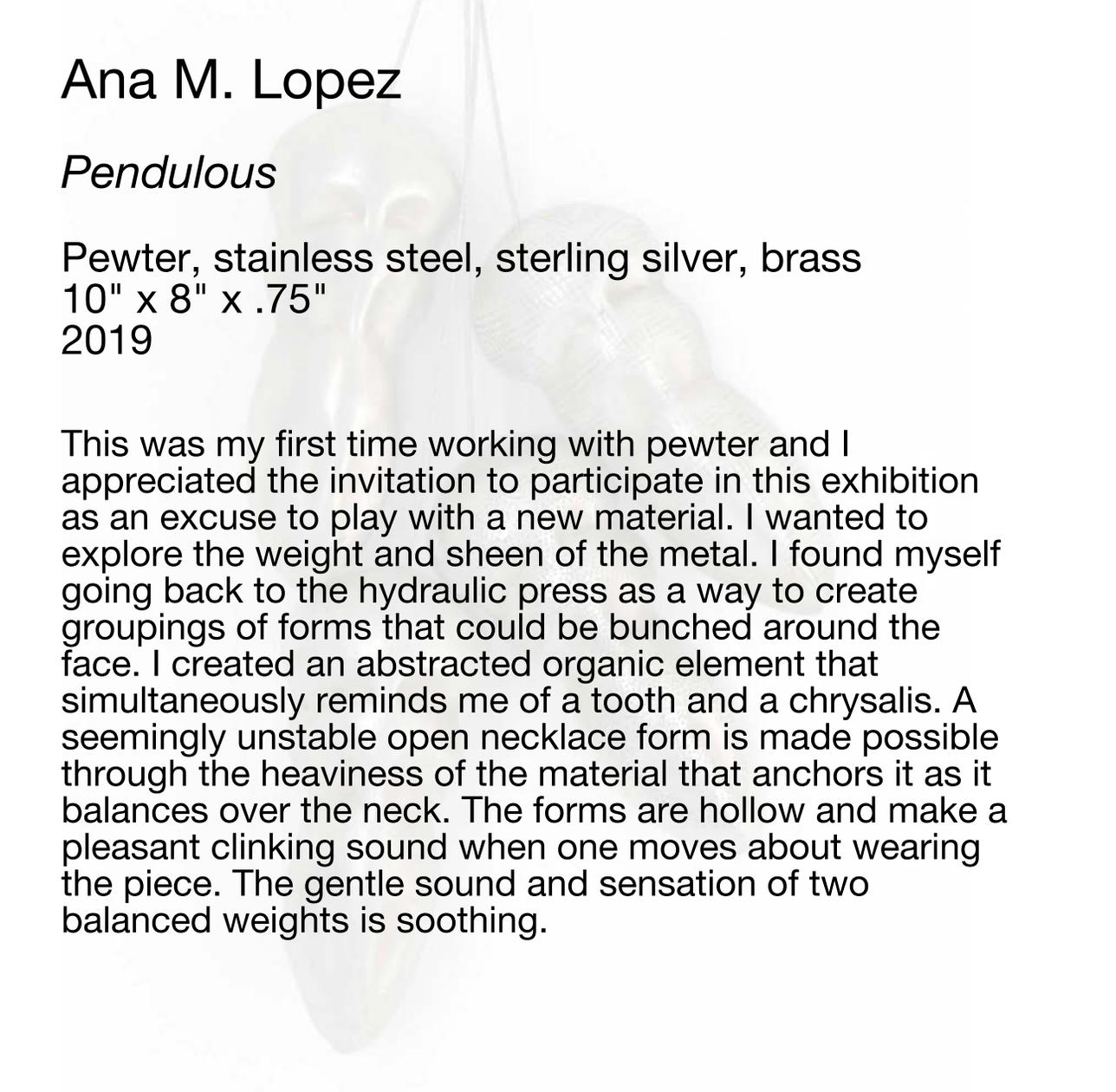
2019

I am devoted to a simple goal... to move the art and technology of Craft forward by looking to the past. I am an artist, with the hands of a craftsman, the mind of an engineer and the imagination of a dreamer. I blend traditional hand crafted artistry with cutting edge technology using methods from: industry, the tech lab, metalsmiths, machinists, computer programmers, and "blue sky" inventors.

This pendant has evolved through combining digital technology with traditional craft practices. The main forms were 3D printed via a stereolithography process of solidifying light sensitive resin with UV light; then the object was cast in Pewter in a similar method to that of the small cast toy figurines and die cast cars from my childhood . This object is reminiscent of the cast metal yo-yo that entertained me as a child but now imagined as a wearable pewter object.

With this work I get to do one of the most wonderful things imaginable, and that is, create new and innovative one of a kind objects. Taking everyday materials, metal, silicon, binary code; I mold, shape, and transform them into living Objects, with vitality, emotion and soul. I believe in the power of these living Objects to help tell a story. Bold, distinctive and enduring stories that make a difference in the lives of the people who use them.





Ana M. Lopez

Pendulous

Pewter, stainless steel, sterling silver, brass

10" x 8" x .75"

2019

This was my first time working with pewter and I appreciated the invitation to participate in this exhibition as an excuse to play with a new material. I wanted to explore the weight and sheen of the metal. I found myself going back to the hydraulic press as a way to create groupings of forms that could be bunched around the face. I created an abstracted organic element that simultaneously reminds me of a tooth and a chrysalis. A seemingly unstable open necklace form is made possible through the heaviness of the material that anchors it as it balances over the neck. The forms are hollow and make a pleasant clinking sound when one moves about wearing the piece. The gentle sound and sensation of two balanced weights is soothing.



Kyle Patnaude

Mighty White: Distortion #01

Pewter, leather, steel

7" x 1.25" x 6"

2019

The truncheon, once a weapon of police and a symbol of violent authority, serves the greater theme of my work as a token of masculine prowess and sexual deviance. The hypermasculine-queer is in my view, akin to the fragility and fluidity of pewter. Classified as a 'white metal,' pewter only becomes softer and malformed with increasing pressure and stress. The first of the *Mighty White Distortion series*, the cast pewter piece was put under physical stress while striking a steel form. The resulting blows deformed the surface and shape of the object, upholding my ascribed properties of pewter as a visualization for the phenomenon of white gay male supremacists. While white supremacy in the United States is nothing new, most are unsettled when confronted with the antithetical knowledge of rising gay male supremacists. In hindsight, that threshold of social tribalism between white supremacy and white gay male desire is quite synchronous. Both are cultivated on the notion of restoring ones battered powers of positional masculinity, a brotherhood of primal peril. Their existence confounds a clear distinction of the gay male narrative, and establishes themselves as the vanguard for the fringe outsider--where the marginalized find warped positions of power. Looking into the darker regions of my community and culture poses a counter to our out-facing marginality. Our insular states of communal sexism and racism are secretly rampant. Our seemingly fun and camp fetishization of police, the military, and leather clad bad boys, incites the very complex manifestation of homoromanticized masculine power constructs. Where much of queer work celebrates the prerogative of the progressive, I choose to cultivate from the darker regions of and alternate inceptions of our history.



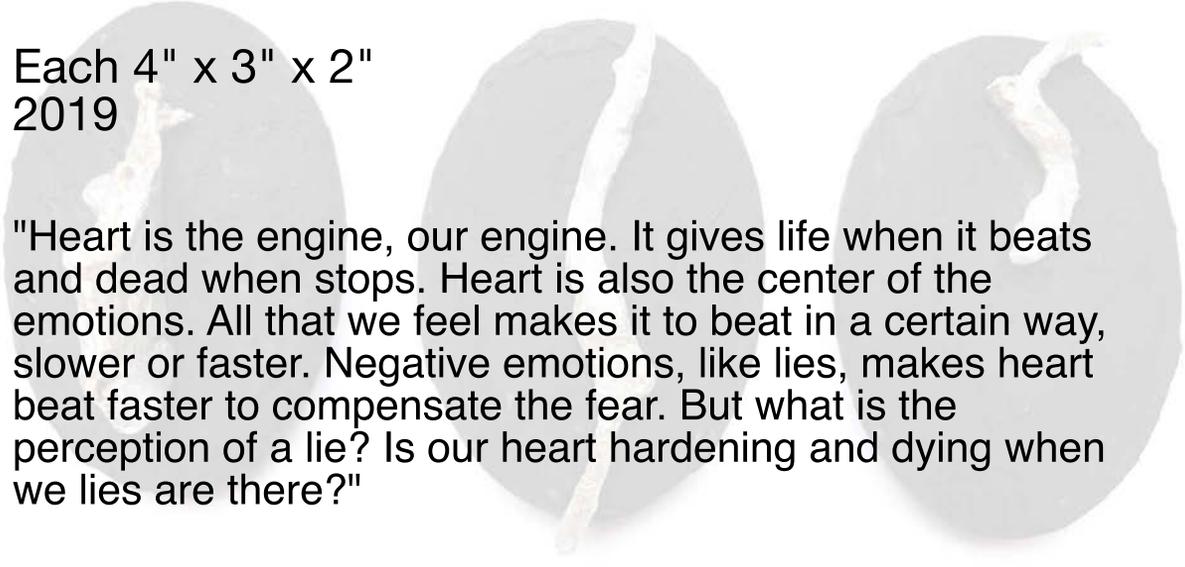
Juan Riusech

"Heart shadows, why are you lying to me?"

Brooches: 3D printed PLA, sandcast pewter, coating, pigments, copper, silver, acrylic paint.

Each 4" x 3" x 2"
2019

"Heart is the engine, our engine. It gives life when it beats and dead when stops. Heart is also the center of the emotions. All that we feel makes it to beat in a certain way, slower or faster. Negative emotions, like lies, makes heart beat faster to compensate the fear. But what is the perception of a lie? Is our heart hardening and dying when we lies are there?"





Michael Rybicki

Strata

Pewter, brass

8cm x 1cm x 4cm

2019

My interest of late has been exploring the poetic moments found when working with the natural properties of materials. Precarious compositions allow for materials and processes such as the melting and casting of metals, wood joinery and enameled surfaces to exist for their expressive qualities and my emotional connections to them.





Donna Mason Sweigart

Affection

Pewter, stainless steel

30" long

2019

This work is about play. The introduction of a new material such as pewter into my practice allows me a space to cavort with studio mates and far away friends. This work is a tribute to all of the remarkable female mentors and collaborators that I have had the honor with which to play. A necklace and its aggregate beads are a culmination of moments of joy threaded with them creating, laughing, distress, and tool hoarding.



James Thurman

Re-Turning series: 19-0228c

Spun and hammerformed copper, lathe-turned Thurmanite®, sterling silver, 3mm synthetic emerald, hand forged pewter chain (32")
2019

For nearly twenty years, I have been exploring a process of using eco-resin to create a composite material made of layered recycled paper, now called "Thurmanite®." I find both the conceptual as well as the aesthetic aspects of this material compelling, particularly as a material for jewelry and tableware. Throughout human history, we have adorned ourselves with materials found in our surroundings and I am interested in continuing that tradition. It is my goal that my jewelry and tableware is beautiful, functional, and thought-provoking.

Even before my work began with Thurmanite®, I was drawn to creating rotational and radial forms in my studio work, eventually leading to my Certification as a machinist. I've continued to utilize lathework in my studio, creating either entirely lathe-turned finished vessels and plates, or smaller components that are incorporated into my wearable jewelry.

In 2019, I began a new series of work that combines lathe-turned jewelry with spun metal vessels. By combining woodturning, metal spinning, and jewelry-making, I have fused together three of my seeming disparate body of studio production into a single format. When the jewelry component is not being worn, it visually recombines with the vessel to continue to adorn the environment where the vessel is displayed.



Jennifer Wells

Within/Without

Pewter, iron wire, cork tree bark/pewter, iron wire
2.75" x 2" x 1"/2.75" x 2" x .5"
2019

Recently I have relocated to Italy to be with my husband. I am within a new culture and life and I am without so many aspects of the life I had built. The iron wire in the pieces is a material that I am very familiar with and might consider an “old friend”. The cork is natural material that I found on walks not far from my new home, I'm hoping we will become friends. The pewter is the link between the two, allowing for the two materials to be joined together. These pieces are layered with the experiences of building a new home, studio and social life in a new place and culture.



