

THINGS TRAPPED IN ICE

Paulette Werger's metalwork incorporates themes and images from nature.

BY KATHARINE BRITTON

"I was always playing in the garage while my dad was fixing things," says Paulette Werger. Her father was a mechanic, and Werger notes, she had pliers in her hand from about the age of 9. "I was very curious about how things were put together and came apart, but I didn't like getting dirty." She found the perfect balance between art and pragmatism in metal smithing.

Werger, a resident of Lebanon, N.H., specializes in one-of-a-kind jewelry, vessels and flatware that incorporate themes and images from nature, as well as from the materials with which she works. She loves to garden — although when she's busy, as she was last year, the weeds start to take over. Never one to miss an opportunity for inspiration, Werger's tableware series, on display at the 2010 League of N.H. Craftsmen's Fair, was entitled, "Weeds for the Table"; the stems appear to have sprouted seed pods. She might also find the design of a piece in the formal elements of a particular gemstone, such as moss agate, American turquoise, jade and desert jasper. Most of her pieces begin with some thumbnail sketches and a vague notion.

"You know when ponds freeze in the winter, but the layer on top is still clear and you can look down through?" she asks. "That's what these two gems reminded me of: things trapped in ice."

The gems in question were quartz with hematite inclusions. She cut the two stones and enhanced the frozen pond image by adding elements behind the stones, which were then magnified by the stone. "Doesn't that look like the surface of a lake?" she asks. It did. She likes to work in series. She titled this piece, "Pond." Other pieces in this series are entitled "Water's Edge" (with opal, cultured pearl from Japan and 22-carat gold) and "Pebbles in a Stream," on which she collaborated with artist Marcia Herson, who made each of the 30 colorful glass beads.

Her husband is a biologist who often studies plants on a microscopic



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level. So does Werger. She points to a delicate silver neck chain of interlocking loops. “Tomato cells,” she states. She uses an ancient, Etruscan jewelry technique in which she makes each link individually and then, instead of soldering it to itself, she fuses each link and, link-by-link, constructs the chain. She likes this process, she says, because it allows her “to work in a really luscious material in a very slow way.” Werger generally disguises the clasps so they become part of the design. She likes versatility in her jewelry, wanting to include the wearer in the design — or the functionality — of the piece. She demonstrates: “This is the way it packs the wallop, with the pendant on there. But when you take the pendant off,” she slips it off, “you get a neck ring.”

While the majority of Werger’s business currently comes from her jewelry, her first loves were vessels and tableware. Because they are time intensive to create, however, they are expensive and can take a long time to find homes. Also, she notes that our grab-and-go, microwave-dependent culture, does not lend itself to handmade metal tableware. “It

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