

Art Unfolding by Rod Drown Featuring Jewellery Artist Laurie Parish

Halle Berry, CTV anchor Mi-Jung Lee – these are some of East Vancouver jewellery artist Laurie Parish's better known customers. But she appreciates all of her clients – one of whom, “a best customer” from the Drive's well-known Doctor Vigari Gallery, is a charming and stylish music therapist, who owns many of her “most favourite” pieces.

Parish deals with adornment – something purely about beauty enhanced by colour and light

She often uses a variety of animal/nature motifs in her work with semi-precious stones -- creating onyx kingfisher birds, jade butterflies, sterling dragonflies, amber, sterling and Italian enameled ladybugs, jade peonies and lilies, sterling roses, dogwood blossoms and mother of pearl flowers. Some of her most intricate pieces are those arising from “Picture” or Moss Agate.

“These stones can appear to have Zen like landscapes in the stone's colouring,” she explained.

Born in Montreal, Parish worked for many years doing wardrobe on Broadway touring shows. It was then that she began to make jewellery. However she had long been fascinated with the light contained within gems. As she puts it:

“I imagine it was my first sight of sparkling, holiday lights on that snowy Christmas Eve when I was just 7 months old, that really captivated me and I've been crazy for beautiful 'sparklies' ever since.”

Formerly found in almost a dozen locations around BC, her creations are now concentrated in very large collections in selected stores.

“I [originally] chose the ladybug for my business image because of her appeal-



ing graphic shape and as a symbol of good luck, protection and prosperity for the garden, I thought she'd be a lucky charm for a blossoming business,” and added, “Also, I just love that glossy red and black colour combo!”

As her website puts it, “Her [works] embrace many eras and eclectic styles using lustrous, fresh-water pearls, semi-precious gemstones, sparkling crystals, rare and vintage ‘treasures’ and exotic beads from around the world.”

Laurie Parish continues to be fascinated by the lore and legend surrounding semi-precious stones and gems.

“The Vikings believed that Moonstones contained a piece of the moon's light and that, by putting them in necklaces around their necks, they would never get lost,” she explained and added with a laugh, “I

would wonder how they explained seeking Greenland and always ending up in Scotland or Ireland!”

Collecting colourful stones was always a passion: as a child she lived by the St. Lawrence River. Back then, the Expo Islands were being made and there were many stones to be found along their emerging shores. “Chore money” was spent buying “treasures” at second hand stores and yard sales, providing her with vast strings of vintage beads and many heritage broaches. Laurie has been making jewellery full time since about 1999. Jan Arden was one of her inspirations to take that particular step.

She has a history in what might be called the “Adornment Trade”. For some years, she worked in New York for the Estée Lauder Company .

“They had exquisite marketing techniques,” she recalled. “You had to be really on your toes and possess in depth knowledge of how it worked and what would sell. It was good preparation for my present life and a lesson in keeping customers.”

Parish knows that there are many people out there who would love to do jewelry and that singularly satisfying her customers’ needs is very important. Even during the interview for this article, a young waitress descended somewhat shyly upon our table asking, essentially, if Laurie could provide a few minutes of mentoring time at some future occasion. Parish, ever gracious, handed the young woman her card and asked her to get in touch..

“Certain pieces really blend with certain women. It is a matter of the piece’s colour, texture and scale and how they blend with the woman’s complexion, personality and presentation,” she said.

One of her favourite posters is one showing a very adorned 1920’s Nancy Cunard, the shipping heiress.

“She has bangles all the way up to her elbows – on both arms! What a great picture that is,” she enthuses.

Philosophically, Parish reminds herself of the value of each day’s existence by keeping a poster from that vintage movie *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Quietly she explained how some years ago she was involved in a terrible accident she was lucky to survive and so now she lives each day to the fullest. Hence her glowing, smiling openness. Live each day to its fullest!

Her workspace is a treasure trove of semi-precious stones. Everywhere in this “L-shaped room” they reside in the little boxes she purchased from a “fabulous art store in San Francisco”. She has “thousands” of gems, crystals, many semi-precious stones from which she draws upon to create the accoutrements to adornment.

“They are a cascade of colour surrounding me”.

Though in a few cases, she does make multiple copies of her work, most of her pieces are singular in design and creation. Loyal retailers such as the Barefoot Contessa on Main Street have sold thousands of her pieces over the years. The Drive’s well-known Vigari gallery is her first and largest account.



Top Left: Black Beauty;
Top Right: Green Fringe;
Bottom Left: Jade Garden;
Bottom Right: Cabana Cutie.
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