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With its awkward long legs and small downy body, the golden baby bird looks like a fossil preserved forever in bas-relief. Perhaps it is the fossil of a tiny chick just minutes from hatching out of its egg, an image suggested by the fact that the little golden bird is inside an oval locket, the locket itself carefully hinged open to give a glimpse of the delicate mystery inside.

A color photograph of the golden hatchling takes up the entire page; and the description notes that the pendant/locket is called Young Lily-Trotter. It is made of sterling silver, with a ruby cabochon set in fourteen karat gold, gray pearls, red silk thread, small brown diamonds set in eighteen karat gold, and repoussé fourteen karat gold. It was created by Linda Kindler Priest, a Massachusetts artist.

On the page opposite is a poem called Young Lily Trotter. Written by Linda Bierds, a poet who lives in Washington State, the poem is about a young girl poised, alert and expectant, in that moment between childhood and the first twinges of adolescence. The poem describes the girl as “downy still, preadolescent, her knees a double-joined symmetry;” and in the poem the young girl seems to decide to linger a bit longer in her childhood world, as if reluctant to leave its magical charms quite so soon.

The pendant and the poem clearly are coupled, but in what way exactly? The pendant shows a bird. The poem describes a girl. Elsewhere in the glossy, twenty-two-page publication there are eight other pairings consisting of photographs of art jewelry and, on the opposite page, a poem, short story, essay or fable that seems to be connected to the artwork, though rarely in any way as direct as the lily-trotter match. The publication is called *Signs of Life* and someone thumbing through it for the first time understandably might be confused. Is *Signs of Life* an exhibition catalog? A literary journal? An elegantly published

compendium of lapidary literary miniatures and jewelry artworks that tells stories?

Signs of Life is all of those things. Now in its third year, the journal serves as the catalog for an annual group show of art jewelry organized by Facère Jewelry Art Gallery in Seattle, Washington. But it is also a literary journal in which accomplished and in some cases renowned writers from around the country write brief literary works inspired by specific pieces of jewelry. For Karen Lorene, founder and owner of Facère, *Signs of Life* is a way for Lorene to bring together her twin passions, art jewelry and writing. The 2006 exhibition and journal are described here but Lorene says she intends to hold a *Signs of Life* group show every spring, as she is this spring, and also to publish a journal to accompany it. The show does not travel, although the journal is available for purchase.

An energetic woman known for the dogged pursuit of projects, ideas and artists who interest her, Lorene has been a dealer of art jewelry for more than twenty years. She has also spent the last fifteen years, as she puts it, “trying to learn the craft of writing.” In her hours away from her gallery and its business she writes fiction, organizes writing groups and attends writing workshops. She has completed her first novel and has published a book on antique jewelry, which was her specialty for nearly twenty years before she fell in love with art jewelry. Lorene says the idea of publishing an annual journal that would combine art jewelry and writing occurred to her more than a decade ago.

“It was a natural for me,” she says. “And of course I had artists in mind. But I wanted professional writers for the journal and I realized I had to approach them with the same respect that I would have for an artist. I also knew that if I could get one writer of note I could get more.” Finding the artists for her initial show was not difficult. Lorene has long

LINDA KINDLER PRIEST: YOUNG LILY-TROTTER PENDANT/LOCKET of sterling silver, ruby cabochon set in fourteen karat gold, gray pearls and red silk thread. Brooch of fourteen karat repousséd gold with six brown diamonds set in eighteen karat gold; 6.4 centimeters high, *Signs of Life* 2006. Photograph by Gordon Bernstein.

shown work by such acclaimed artists as Ron Ho and the late Ramona Solberg, and both agreed to participate. Other jewelry artists in the 2005 exhibition included Cynthia Toops, Jana Brevick, and Roberta and David Williamson.

But when Lorene started hunting for writers for her debut journal, she went straight to one of her favorite long-time clients, science fiction writer Greg Bear, who lives just outside of Seattle. Bear says he was immediately intrigued. "Being asked to do something off-the-wall and unexpected is always good exercise. And I knew the project would be stylish and arouse some buzz," he states. Bear ended up writing a hilarious and extremely witty parody of a book review based on a "robot" necklace made by Seattle artist Jana Brevick. Lorene soon had seven other writers lined up for that year's project and she herself wrote one piece. Finding accomplished writers for the 2006 *Signs of Life* was easier, she says, since "by handing them copies of last year's journal they could see the high quality of the paper and the reproductions, and the quality of the work done the previous year." Lorene's criteria for inviting writers is that they must already have had literary work published and, of course, that she admires their work.

Part of what makes *Signs of Life* such an unusual project is Lorene's imaginative process of matching writers with artworks. Though the jewelry pieces and the literary works stand alone as artworks, the pairings bring additional depth and meaning to both the jewelry and the writing. It starts in August when Lorene sends invitations to artists and writers to participate in the upcoming show and journal. Lorene invites artists who do narrative work since narrative jewelry gives the writers "a point of departure" for their work, as Lorene notes in her introduction to the 2006 journal. The artists make a piece specifically for the show, to be completed and professionally photographed by early January of the following year. Artists who participate exhibit a total of eight to ten pieces at the group show at Facèré, but only one piece per artist is included in the journal.

Once Lorene receives an image from each artist she matches writers with artworks. Lorene says she makes pairings based on what she knows about the writers and their work, and she tries to follow her intuition. Then she sends writers the image selected for them and they have six to eight weeks to write something. The written pieces may be up to one thousand words or, if poetry, twelve to sixteen lines. In her cover letter to the writers, she says, "I tell them that in no way must you talk about the piece of jewelry except as a jumping off point." Although the writers occasionally ask Lorene technical questions about the artworks, such as what the piece is made of, no writer has ever asked to speak with the artist. All the writers base what they write on the slide or photograph Lorene sends them.



YOUNG LILY TROTTER

*Downy still, preadolescent, her knees
a double-jointed symmetry
hinging earth to sky, she stops below
a small, red-gripped trapeze,
a vehicle for flight. Time yet, for escargot
and champagne's larval bubbles:
the playground's free, the oaks and clouds
are beckoning. She almost leaps.
But no, there's time as well
for weightlessness.
And so she turns and slowly, as if
to leave no track, presses out
across the floating world – that, axis-wrapped
in finite green, slowly presses back.*

—Linda Bierds





JANA BREVICK: SNACKBOT NECKLACE of fabricated sterling silver with found ceramic pushbuttons, vintage dial, socket, knobs, cable and bicycle brakes, polymer clay, steel and plastic; 21.0 centimeters long, Signs of Life 2005. Photograph by Doug Yaple.

drawn to. So I was thrilled to have gotten it. It just couldn't have been a better match."

Another serendipitous pairing is a brooch by Arizona artist Jessica Calderwood and Seattle poet and essayist Frances McCue. Calderwood's enameled brooch shows the lower half of a woman's face as she pops into her mouth what appears to be a small, discreet white pill. Though her eyes are not visible the prim pearls around her neck and the wedding band on her finger suggest a well-mannered wife of a previous era. McCue's response was to write a short story that she calls "a parody of a Hemingway story, maybe one of the Nick Adams stories. I saw the image on the brooch as the image of a woman taking a pill in the 1950s, and it seemed like a classic gender fable." In her taut tale, called *Desire*, the wife's apparent passivity gives way to a surprising ending.

Calderwood says McCue's story "was perfect. I love it. I was very excited to see what someone created based on my work. It is a strange feeling to read it, because I know I indirectly participated in the creation, even though I gave her no input as to how she approached the work."

Even when it turns out that the artist and the writer have different visions of what the jewelry piece is about, Lorene's match-ups still work. The New Orleans-based jewelry artist Thomas Mann says his brooch *Float Coral Series* refers to marine life. "My thinking about it was that it was entirely

One of the most sublime writer/artwork match-ups is the pairing of the poet Bierds with Kindler Priest's *Young Lily-Trotter* pendant/locket. The exquisite, haiku-like delicacy and detail of both the locket and the poem seem to have sprung from a similar point of view, though the poet and artist have never met or even spoken together. Kindler Priest, who says she has often taken her inspiration from nature and birds, decided to make the locket after seeing a photograph of a baby lily-trotter, a marsh bird so light that it walks on lily pads. "The photograph I saw showed the bird as a fuzz ball on top of long, gangly legs so I made the bird all in gold repoussé," says Kindler Priest. "The small brown diamonds under its feet are like the earth, and the ruby on the locket and the red silk thread are kind of like blood, which are signs of life." The oval locket itself can be seen as either an egg or a lily pad.

When she read Bierds's poem, Kindler Priest says, "I was totally delighted. I was very impressed." For her part, Bierds points out that, "when I first saw the print of the pendant and read what Karen told me about a lily-trotter, which is a bird that walks on lily pads and eats snails and larvae, it was almost immediate that I wanted to respond to the piece as if it were an adolescent girl instead of a bird. I turned the snails and bubbles of larvae that the lily-trotter eats into the escargot and champagne that the young girl would have later in her life. But I wanted to describe the gangly moment right before flight into the world."

Bierds, who has received numerous major awards and grants including one of the MacArthur Foundation "genius" grants, states that although she admires the other artworks in the 2006 journal, "*Young Lily-Trotter* was the one I was most



JESSICA CALDERWOOD: MOTHER'S LITTLE HELPER II BROOCH of enamel, copper, sterling silver, stainless steel and pearls; 5.7 centimeters high, Signs of Life 2006.

ROBERTA AND DAVID WILLIAMSON: I AM NEVER ALONE IN MY GARDEN NECKLACE of sterling silver, quartz crystal, antique lithograph, collage, rubber ball, quartz crystal; 7.3 x 1.6 centimeters, *Signs of Life* 2005. Photograph by Jerry Anthony.

underwater,” says Mann. Texas writer Paula LaRocque, however, saw the brooch as a tree and a metaphor for the contradictions and paradoxes in human relationships. “I was drawn immediately to the juxtaposition of the raw and refined, strong and delicate, and I loved especially the jewel at the heart of the piece,” says LaRocque. “Once I conceived of the homely oak with a shining and breakable heart, I also had the idea of the rooted—the drawn yet immovable.”

Mann says he likes LaRocque’s poem very much. “It’s really wonderful,” he states, “an interesting artistic perspective in what she saw in the piece,” adding that one of the enduring delights of art is that it allows for multiple interpretations.

Besides indulging in her own dream of being the publisher of a literary journal that marries art jewelry to writing, Lorene says that *Signs of Life*, the journal, is also her attempt to introduce a new audience to the artistry of jewelry. She laughs that “though my accountant thinks the project is stupid, I think it introduces jewelry to writers and their friends, a whole new crowd.”

Certainly *Signs of Life* causes the writers to spend time contemplating jewelry. When Lorene described the project to Washington state novelist Laura Kalpakian, “I had my doubts,” Kalpakian remembers. “It sounded better suited to a poet than a fiction writer...But then, voila! She sent along first the jpeg and then the full photograph of that utterly unique piece, and



I was captivated. I pinned it to the wall above my desk, for weeks, maybe months. I let it speak to me, as it were. I listened.” The result is a delightful fable about Isaac Newton discovering gravity in a garden so beautiful and tranquil that it seems to be Arcadia. Kalpakian based the fable, published in the 2005 journal, on a romantic and evocative necklace by Roberta and David Williamson called *I am Never Alone in My Garden*.

Like other artists involved in the project, the Williamsons say they were interested in what the writer would make of their piece. “When you make narrative jewelry, you don’t want to be so obvious and direct that it takes the mystery out of it,” responds David Williamson. “So for us it was wonderful to pass on the necklace to another artist, a writer, who would see something else.” The Williamsons were enchanted with Kalpakian’s interpretation.

Lorene prints one thousand copies each year and pays for the design and production of the journal, as well as a small stipend to the writers. The journals themselves are not moneymakers, she says, but it is the process and final product that she loves. “On the tenth anniversary of the journal I’d love to be doing a bound volume,” she says, laughing, “I’ll certainly have a celebration.”

Brevick, whose retro/techno necklace *SnackBot* was included in the 2005 journal, points out that *Signs of Life*, the journal, is something new, and very welcome, in the world of art jewelry. “The journal speaks to a different audience and brings a new kind of weight to the genre. The idea that somebody thinks enough about the studio art movement to produce this sort of thing speaks a lot about where the studio art movement is and where it is going.”



THOMAS MANN: FLOAT CORAL SERIES BROOCH of aragonite (140-million-year-old fossilized coral), Australian Boulder opal, amethyst, sterling silver, eighteen karat gold and iron, 8.9 x 10.2 x 1.3 centimeters, *Signs of Life* 2006. Photograph by Thomas Mann Design.