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Noticed: emiko oye

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emiko in her studio

There are few people as seriously FUN as [emiko oye](#). She's one of those spirits who, when you meet her, projects such vivacity, energy, generosity, and intelligence that you can't help but smile. And that's exactly the same feeling you get when you see her work, too. In the soulful, often subtle, sometimes sedate world of craft, this woman lets it rip. No wonder she's making waves.



Lilac Voyageur Pendant: repurposed LEGO®, Argentium silver, strung on sterling silver neck cable

San Francisco-based emiko is best known for her inventive found object-based jewelry line (called emiko-o Reware) that frequently uses new and used LEGO® bricks. The jewelry is fresh, vibrant, dramatic, and instantly memorable.



Cartier Blanc, repurposed LEGO®, rubber cording, sterling silver

emiko is also an established artist, creating exhibition pieces and selling her jewelry everywhere from the Virginia

Museum of Contemporary Art, to the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, to the Racine Art Museum.

She hails originally from Cleveland, the daughter of a Japanese-American father and Caucasian mom with firm roots in the Midwest. A maker from the start, as a kid she played with things she found around her house (“including my mom’s nylons”), and then, naturally gravitated toward studying art at Syracuse, where she focused on metalsmithing and fashion and costume design. (Now that’s a combination.)



La Reine necklace, repurposed & recycled LEGO®, Argentium silver, coated copper wire, coated steel cable

A desire to reconnect a little more to her roots (her father’s family had been based on the West Coast prior to WWII), brought her to the Bay Area, where she started out in costume design. But jewelry called her name, and she soon found herself working to create installations out of the only thing she could afford: materials from SCRAP, San Francisco’s beloved center for Creative Reuse.

In particular, she was drawn to plastics, loving their color and translucency, and began to create a line of ready to wear earrings out of plexi. During those years, she was working for the dynamic Harriete Estel Berman, a passionate champion of craft in general and a jewelry designer known for her ebullient creations and love of post-consumer recycled materials.



Brac Brights, ready to wear bracelets

Says emiko, "Harriete was the person who recommended that I look at using LEGO® bricks and I fell in love."

There's definitely much to love about LEGO® in general, but what's the draw for an artist? For emiko, it wasn't just the availability or the sheer accessibility of it. It was the opportunity for storytelling and self-expression—not her own, but that of the customer. "I loved watching people interact with the pieces. And the material itself has a story for people: gold and silver don't really have that. It's funny, so many artists want to have their own unique voices and have those be what people interact with. But with LEGO®, I found that since people had their own associations with the material, I didn't have to impose my own story on it."



The Duchess 2, repurposed LEGO®, rubber cording, sterling silver, paint

This love of LEGO® hasn't dissipated one bit over the years. In describing some of her recent work at the Racine Art Museum, she said, "I also love playing with the concept of LEGO® as heirloom. The old vintage pieces work interchangeably with new pieces. I really ran with this idea of mixing old with new."

emiko's fearlessness around scale and drama and the eye-popping but tasteful color combinations (clearly influenced by her stint as a costume designer), are evident not only in her ready to wear pieces and installations but in the design of her sales booth, as well. She received a well-deserved award for best booth at last year's [American Craft Council](#)'s show in San Francisco (awarded to her by the Handful of Salt team).



emiko's award-winning booth design

Generally, the roles of artist and business-savvy maker don't leave a whole lot of time for anything, but emiko finds it. She's got what she calls a "second life" as a certified yoga instructor at [California Yoga Company](#) and is the President of the [Metal Arts Guild](#) of San Francisco. She also dances as an active member in the [Bay Area Flashmob](#) with her specialty being Janet Jackson.



La Ceremonie, recycled and repurposed LEGO®, Argentium and sterling silver,
fine silver tag

We're not sure that she sleeps.

A look at the five objects she's currently obsessed with tells her story—a vivid blend of creativity, love of story, and practicality:

1. Translucent pink sparkle LEGO® brick
2. Vintage Cartier
3. CW-X Stabilyx Ventilator Shorts
4. My purple ceramic neti pot
5. Adobe Lightroom

You gotta love this woman.

Details

<http://rewarestyle.com>

All images courtesy of emiko oye

Posted on April 9, 2013 by Regina

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