Mah Jong Making a Comeback - Designer Recycles Vintage Tiles into Jewelry

As the game of Mah Jong makes a comeback many antique and vintage sets are beginning to surface from attics and basements. Some sets are intact, but some sets are beyond repair. Recycling these old "orphan" tiles into jewelry gives them new life and brings back fond memories for people who grew up playing or watching parents or grandparents play the game.

(PRWEB) June 1, 2004 --Mahjong is an ancient Chinese game that is very popular in the Jewish community in the United States. It is gaining popularity again. The most basic form of the game is similar to Rummy, but is also a complicated gambling game in which certain "hands" are valued with certain points. There are many rules to play by and some are related to the country in which the game is played.

Sam, owner of Eclectic Elements, collects full sets, restores nearly full Mahjongg sets and turns vintage "orphan" tiles into chunky, funky bracelets and other retro jewelry. "If the set is full or nearly full I add it to my collection, my infamous "Mahjong closet." If the set is only missing a few pieces I can usually find "orphan" tiles to complete the set. If many pieces are missing I use the tiles for jewelry and other collage and assemblage art."

The lovely Asian characters are what drew Sam to these game sets. "I am a hunter-gatherer in terms of art supplies. I find interesting items, move them from place to place in my home/studio, look at them occasionally and trip over them for 2 years until finally one day I figure out how to use them."

"The Mah Jongg bracelets started by accident. I saw someone throwing out a half set of Mahjong tiles. They were too lovely to wind up in the trash so I offered to give them a good home and left. They sat in a box in my studio for over a year until about 2 years ago. I found them again while hunting for new materials to work with and laid them out on my work table to contemplate their future. A few days later I decided that they would make fun jewelry."

Mah Jong tile materials include: Bakelite, Catalin, Bone & Bamboo, Bamboo, Marblelite, Celluloid and Lucite. Many of the tiles Sam uses in her designs date back to the 1920s.

Sam's partner, contemporary outsider folk artist Zeke, enjoys watching people relate to the Mah Jongg sets and jewelry. "People are drawn to these game sets and bracelets. They wonder what they are, they tell Sam stories about how their Grandmothers taught them to play the game when they were children, they smile and laugh. It is a wonderful experience to watch...life can be so serious, and Sam loves being able to bring a smile to someone's face or bring back a fond memory."

Zeke, co-founder of The Shaman's Walk, also recycles found objects and other vintage material to create fascinating mixed media art. He finds inspiration from ancient cultures and has a new line of Kachina and Art Totems. The Kachina, or Katsinla, figures are handcrafted from reclaimed lumber, antique beads and other found objects. They are in the style of ancient Kachina and are more graphic and simple than many of the Kachina available today.

When asked about Zeke's work, Sam responded, "Zeke's work is very different from mine. We both focus on using reclaimed and recycled materials, but that is where the similarity ends. His work has a mysterious quality about it."
Sam's game piece jewelry and Zeke's contemporary folk art are available on their websites and locally in Albuquerque, NM at the Downtown Grower's Market. The Market runs late June through mid-October and meets every Saturday from 7-11. Both Sam and Zeke also participate in shows in the Albuquerque area from time to time.
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