

# Christine Dhein Earth Friendly

BY JENNIFER CROSS GANS

REPURPOSING AND RECYCLING have become the new buzzwords in the field of contemporary jewelry. I wondered about the exact meaning of

these terms as I climbed the stairs to the San Francisco studio of Christine Dhein, an environmentally engaged jeweler and publisher of the online newsletter *Green Jewelry News*.

Dhein explained, “Repurposing is finding a new use for rubber or other existing material that would otherwise end up in a landfill. Recycling is the processing or transformation of materials, such as the meltdown of bottles or cans, in order to regain them for use.” She cites that every day, just in San Francisco, 1,800 tons of trash are generated—enough to fill a football field eighteen feet deep—and 800 tons of bottles, cans, and paper are recycled.

Looking around Dhein’s studio, tucked into the kitchen of her house in the Mission District, I learned that the two benches, hydraulic press (in another room), and rolling mill were bought from retiring jewelers. Obviously new were a small pickle pot and a cone-shaped piece of borax, which, as she demonstrated, was a good alternative to regular flux.

A display mannequin wore an elegantly draped necklace in green with gold

flashes, constructed out of repurposed circuit boards. This was one of the pieces in a show curated by Dhein titled “Jewelry Cycle.” “The circuit boards contain precious metal,” she said, “which adds a valuable element to materials that would otherwise be considered e-waste.” The show, held at the San Francisco Museum of Craft + Design in 2008, and produced by the Metal Arts Critique Group, of which Dhein is a founding member, was a resounding success.

On a separate bench was a selection of rubber tubing, O-rings, and gaskets, donated in two large boxes by an interested consumer. Over years of experimentation Dhein has been able to create original jewelry joined only by rings or rivets. A display box features pieces completed, or halfway there, including bracelets, rings, and pendants. The *keum-boo* pendants and earrings were made with a minimum of heat and inconvenience, with 24k gold originally rolled from recycled gold scraps applied to recycled, often pre-rolled, silver.

It has taken at least 15 years for Dhein to hone the skills for which she is now known. She graduated from Humboldt State University with a degree in fine art, with a focus in metalsmithing and photography. Inspired by the semi-rural setting of the college, she worked mostly in copper and silver, and learned a great deal from instructor David La Plantz, concentrating on a variety of cold connections. After moving to San Francisco in 1996, she joined the Metal Arts Guild and started a critique group, which has provided a wonderful focus for ideas and occasional group shows.

In 1998 Dhein joined the staff of the Revere Academy of Jewelry Arts as the school’s assistant director, and there has been able to upgrade her skills in photography, design, and administration. She has taught courses on jewelry in silver and gold, cold connections, and *keum-boo*, a technique on which she has produced two instructional videos. Her own jewelry has been featured in magazines and books, including four of the Lark Books series on rings, necklaces, pendants, and lockets, and plastic jewelry design.

Susan Kingsley’s 2004 *Metalsmith* article, “The Price of Gold,” intensified Dhein’s passion for the environment. She quickly became involved with Ethical Metalsmiths,

Christine Dhein at the bench in her San Francisco studio  
PHOTO: EMIKO OYE





ransacked the web for facts and figures, and contacted other artists' websites. Together with Jennifer Horning she developed a green class for the Revere Academy, and produced a guide to working sensibly in the studio. She joined forces with Christina Miller, another leader in Ethical Metalsmiths, to research various sustainable studio practices. And in November 2008 she published the first electronic issue of *Green Jewelry News*. Both the class and newsletter offer information on ways to make life in the studio more environmentally friendly, including how to reduce potentially harmful chemicals, and where to buy recycled metals and safely dispose of unwanted materials.

As the word spread, Dhein was invited to participate in the first seminar offered by AGTA on fair trade gemstones in 2010, and

she has lectured on clean studio practices at the Jewelers of America Show in New York, and at symposia in Australia and in England, where Fairtrade International and the Alliance for Responsible Mining together established the first third-party certification for gold.

Each issue of *Green Jewelry News* takes a solid two days in Dhein's home office to produce, and therefore it gets published intermittently. However, the readership has steadily grown from 200 to 2,000. Dhein works extremely hard, alternating between home (three days) and the Revere Academy studio (four days). Alan Revere says, "I admire Christine. She has taken up on a mission and it is both noble and correct. The jewelry work we do can be accomplished with a smaller footprint, and that will be good for all."

*Jennifer Cross Gans is a San Francisco-based metalsmith and writer.*

**Furthermore:**  
www.christinedhein.com

A design table in Dhein's studio with assorted rubber tubing, O-rings, and gaskets  
PHOTO: EMIKO OYE

Christine Dhein  
*Tribal Elegance: Silver Web*, 2008  
re-purposed rubber, recycled sterling silver  
PHOTO: CHRISTINE DHEIN



**Alan Revere says, "I admire Christine. She has taken up on a mission and it is both noble and correct."**

Copyright of Metalsmith is the property of Society of North American Goldsmiths and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.