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# Dawna Gillespie

Texas Metalsmith and Jewelry Designer Extraordinaire

Photos courtesy of Dawna Gillespie by Gay N. Lewis

Art comes in many forms. Canvases to admire, photographs to cherish, statuary to respect, and Texan metalsmith Dawna Gillespie creates stunning wearable art from metal. Dawna stated, "As a metalsmith, I hand-fabricate never-reproduced adornments to defy a world inundated with mass-produced accessories. Fabricated from flat sheets of raw copper and brass, my adornments take shape using a jeweler's saw and techniques such as: piercing, patina, oxidation, etching, hammering, forming, forging, stamping, and cold-connecting. I use symbolism to share details of my soul through: the intensity of colors and texture, hand drawn designs and motifs, significance of scale, and rarity of the piece itself. Furthermore, the layering of motifs and shapes that I design are then manipulated and sawn to symbolize various aspects of my life; while examining the theories of femininity, fertility, domesticity, marriage, and sexuality. The result is a wearable artwork that is truly distinctive."

The Texan artist creates body ornaments by layering metals together to form unique, one-of-a-kind pieces. Dawna never duplicates her work, and she will never generate mass production. Each piece is a guaranteed original. The person who wears her art won't see the jewelry copied and sold to another soul. She believes no two pieces should be identical.

And speaking of soul, her motto is "From the soul—for the soul."

Dawna exclaims, "When surveying society, there is a realization of the excessive need in identical and mass-produced accessories. Transcending the allure of simply adorning the body, my artwork consciously explores the illumination of personal presentation and facilitates an individual expression."

I truly believe that my pieces "connect" with the wearer and whenever a person places a piece of



my art on their body, or in their home, our souls are forever joined through the energies of shared space and time.

With an unwavering purpose to restore and reunite: individuality, reverence to craftsmanship, and the world's intrinsic beauty; I am connecting never-reproduced adornments and beautiful souls together, one at a time."

Dawna appreciates the sensual progression of creating beauty for others, and she bonds with a client through her art. When a purchaser places Dawna's handiwork on their body, or displays it in their home, Dawna feels their souls are joined together through energy, space, and time. She connects—one soul at a time. Perhaps they share different perspectives, but the two, artist and wearer, are linked.

Dawna's ideas for her artwork come from life-story events. The sawing of metal evokes a deep, passionate response within her spirit, but designs can take an emotional toll also. She explains how the complicated shapes are like pages from her diary. For instance, marriage inspired one of her pieces. This exquisite design from metal symbolizes a private event for her.

Creating artwork is not just making jewelry. She says, "In my life, I've gone through hardship and joy. I turn any negative experiences into positive ones through my art, and I give back beauty." Even though special events inspire her, she chooses not to divulge the motivation behind the designs. Dawna prefers for the wearer to connect in his/her exclusive way. What Dawna perceives as a self-portrait incident, the majority might identify in an alternative fashion. Just as a canvas evokes various emotional responses from an onlooker, Dawna hopes clients will experience a personal reaction to her metal sculptures. Perception of art depends on one's senses. Each person sees, feels, tastes, or hears something exceptional in a painting, photograph, or sculpture. Dawna wants people to relate to her artwork in their own way, not hers.





Dawna orders her sheets of brass and copper from Albuquerque, New Mexico. The weight depends on the gauge of metal, but she says it's usually 18-24 gauge. She draws a pattern on paper first and then glues the design onto metal. The time-intensive process requires cutting out the pieces with a special saw. Dawna can spend hours cutting, sawing, and hammering a necklace. The procedure can take as much as 80 hours or more, but when she's finished, the piece is almost weightless—and it's a gorgeous piece of wearable art. There's something special about taking a flat sheet of metal and turning it into a dimensional piece of jewelry.

Metalsmithing became Dawna's overwhelming desire and aspiration. Along with her family, metalsmithing is deeply ingrained in her spirit. She says, "If I couldn't create and sell art, then teaching would be the next realm for me as an artist. If I couldn't craft art as I do now, I wouldn't know what to do with myself. Creating one-of-a-kind pieces is therapy for any challenges that come my way."

So, how did Dawna fall in love with metalsmithing? Her early life always centered on art, but she started out with acrylic paints. When she enrolled in a metalsmithing class at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, she was hooked. She graduated from Texas Tech with a degree in Art Education, and metalsmithing became a permanent career and passion.

Dawna Gillespie is a native Texan, born in Fort Worth, and she moved to Lubbock when she was only 17 years old. In Lubbock, she met her husband on a blind date, and together, they are rearing a five-year-old son. Now that her son is in school, Dawna has more time to devote to metalsmithing, but family remains the top priority. Her studio is in her home, and working from home gives her more flexibility as a wife and mom.

Her artwork is sold all over the country, but most people order from her website. She also exhibits nation-wide.

Dawna loves Lubbock's wide open spaces. The vista extends for many Texas miles. Like most Texans, she doesn't care for the heat, but the Lubbock three-digit days are dry with no humidity. She says the campus of Texas Tech University is a show-place for sculptures, and she directs visitors to her alma mater to see them. Some are life-sized and all encourage appreciation.

To see Dawna's gorgeous artwork, visit her online at [www.dawnagillespie.com](http://www.dawnagillespie.com) and Instagram @copper.d.studio.

*About the Author: Gay N. Lewis, a Texas pastor's wife, is the author of more than a dozen novels and writes an award-winning blog. Find Gay on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other online stores. Visit her blog: [gaynlewis.blogspot.com](http://gaynlewis.blogspot.com).*