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Belle Armoire: An Art-to-Wear Magazine By Trina Williams

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It all started with a purse, a polymer clay purse, made by Becky Brooks, from our Orange County, California, guild. Quite a purse, it caused a furor at our Christmas party as members stole it from each other.

How it got into the Summer 2002 Belle Armoire is another story, but suffice it to say I was determined that it be seen.

[Belle Armoire](#) is a full color art-to-wear magazine that was launched in the spring of 2001. It is published four times a year and patterned after its sister publication, Somerset Studios, which caters to rubber stampers and is known for its Expressions section in which readers can submit their artwork for publication.

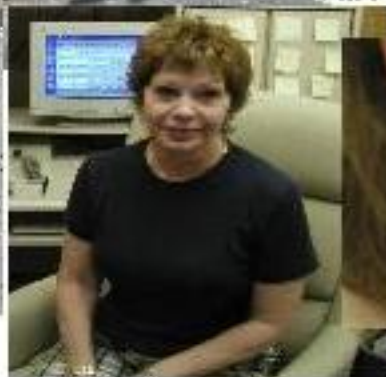
I first visited the offices of Belle Armoire last summer when Kathy Davis and I decided to submit some pieces. We decided to save postage and go in person as Laguna Hills is only a short drive from us.

Finding the place was rather daunting. On a tree-lined street of look alike industrial offices, Belle Armoire has no signs. And, we found out, the main offices and the editorial offices are in separate buildings.

However, we eventually made it, and editor Sharilyn Miller greeted us very warmly and showed us around. I was very impressed with the hundreds of submitted pieces filling several rooms and wished I had had my camera. In spite of the overflow of items, Sharilyn looked at all of the pieces we brought and kept them for consideration. (My frog pendant was in the Spring 2001 issue.)



The Offices of
Belle Armoire



The famous purse Becky Brooks and her formerly famous earrings

As I have read each new issue of Belle Armoire and seen the wonderful polymer clay pieces and articles, I felt this publication was something readers of Polyzine would want to know about. So when Becky's purse was accepted as the focus of an entire article, I decided to use the opportunity to write my own article on Belle Armoire. We were all very excited for Becky. Her only claim to fame was as a manufacturer of ladies headgear who had once made hundreds of polymer clay earrings a season to go with her customer's sportswear.

I once again got lost trying to find Belle Armoire's offices, but I managed to arrive on time for my interview. This time, I had camera in hand, ready to shoot the sea of boxes and the wonderful treasures they contained, but I was met with disappointment -- all of the pieces for the next issue had already been selected.

Additionally, Sharilyn was reluctant to have me photograph the piles of accepted submissions that were tagged and waiting to be photographed. She felt the mess would give our readers the wrong impression. On the bright side, she told me that people who submit pieces have very good odds of being accepted. "We get thousands of pieces and can't publish all of them", she said. "But we reject very few. We usually publish about 75% of our submissions."

On a table in the foyer were several dozen dolls that had been submitted for "Responding to the Call," an article in the September issue of Somerset Studio. Sharilyn said there were so many great dolls that didn't make it into the issue they are going to be in a new publication, Art Doll Quarterly, set to hit the newsstand May 1, 2003.

Sharilyn showed me a variety of items waiting for their place in the magazine, including clothing and a variety of jewelry from shrink art to found items to polymer clay. I was particularly interested in the necklace by Sherrill Kahn made from painted plastic that could easily be done in Polymer Clay.

My biggest question was how selections were made for publication. Sharilyn told me that originally a panel of about six staffers, including the publisher, editor and art director looked at every piece and voted for the ones they liked. The pieces that got the most votes were automatically in, while the pieces with the fewest votes were most likely rejected.



too many dolls!

Getting their chance
May 2003
-
The
Art Doll Quarterly



Unfortunately, this process consumed time, a resource the staff of 26 doesn't have much of. Besides Belle Armoire, the staff is also responsible for the other activities of the parent company, Stampington and Company. They publish Somerset Studio, Stamper Sampler, Inspirations, and Legacy, as well as many specialty issues. Additionally, they operate a web site and sell a variety of related items like books and rubber stamps. Next year, they will be adding The Art Doll Quarterly.



Sonia Adame



Sara Jane's Mask

To cope with time demands, now Sharilyn and the art director, Sonia Adame, make all of the selections. "We try to be fair," says Sharilyn. "It is important to us. I wish it were more objective but we are human beings."

The turnaround time for projects to be accepted is about six months, I was told, and sooner if an item is not accepted. "We try not to return things too quickly," says Sharilyn, "so people don't think we haven't given items enough consideration." She says that even if something is truly unattractive they seriously consider it. Maybe there was an interesting detail, like an inset pocket or unusual stitching. "We look for possibility," says Sharilyn. "Most of what we receive is wonderful."

One of the reasons for the popularity of both Somerset Studio and now Belle Armoire is that readers have a place to show off their art. Kellene Giloff, the publisher, started the Stamper Sampler with reader artwork in mind, and published simple photos of the reader's stamped card, accompanied by a brief description of the process the reader used to create the card, along with the reader's name and city. This technique carried over to Somerset Studio.

With Belle Armoire, some interesting problems have surfaced in Salon, the reader contribution section. "It is a lot easier to describe how to do a card", says Sharilyn, " than a full fledged silk garment or a polymer clay necklace with leaves and wire." She adds that some people send in whole pages of instructions too long to print and that some readers have complained that the brief instructions made it difficult to try to duplicate an item.

To solve the problem, Sharilyn usually directs inquiring readers to the artist so they can discuss the details more fully. She is also considering renaming the instructions section so that readers don't expect a full tutorial.

It's no surprise that Sharilyn can deal with all the problems that come her way -- she brings a diverse background and a wealth of experience to Belle Armoire. She was editor of Somerset Studios for 5 ½ years before creating and launching Belle Armoire in April of 2001. She will also edit the new doll magazine and will have an associate editor for the three endeavors.

Sharilyn has a degree in Communications/Print Journalism from California State University, Fullerton and an associate's degree in Visual Communication from Northwest College of Art in the state of Washington. Her passion is making jewelry from wire, polymer clay, shrink art and found objects, and shares photos of her artwork on her [website](#).

An author as well, Sharilyn has written three books. The most recent one, which will be released in 2003, is *The Complete Guide to Rubber Stamped Jewelry*. She's also written *Stamp Art* and *The Stamp Artist's Project Book*, both available from Stampington and most booksellers.

Although Sharilyn has a strong



Waiting for their 15 minutes of fame



**Talisman Necklace
Susan Lenart Kramer**

Susan Lenart Kramer

background in rubber stamping, she doesn't neglect the art of polymer clay. "We get a lot of Polymer Clay articles," says Sharilyn. " It is one of the most popular art forms out there." She's especially impressed by the creativity polymer clay generates. "I've seen thousands of pieces in five years," she says, "but I may open a box today that is a complete surprise." (Look out after this article runs, Sharilyn. You will be overrun with polymer clay items!)

The Summer 2002 issue features the purse Becky Brooks submitted, and in the next issue, we have a rare treat: Sara Jane Helm's article, The Blue Moon Mask. My picture doesn't do it justice, but I hope you will get intrigued enough to purchase that issue. According to Sharilyn, Sara Jane uses her waste clay in "a really beautiful technique" and bakes her masks on a bisque form that goes in the oven and allows the mask to pop right off.



Sherrill Kahn's
Paint and plastic beads

Gold Clay Necklace
Gillian Smith



Ethnic Clay
Figures
Michelle Anne Marie

In addition to polymer clay, there are hundreds more wonderful creations that Belle Armoire brings to us.

If you are a regular reader you have been following Jane Dunnewold's *On the Surface*, detailing her adventures with a piece of cloth. Using the same piece of cloth, Jane first used a dyeing technique (Spring 2002) then a discharge dyeing technique (Summer 2002). The next treatment, which will be in the Winter 2002 issue, will be a foiling effect. I was lucky enough to see the final permutation in person, but didn't photograph it. You will have to see it in the magazine to get the true effect.

As most of us come to polymer clay from other art and craft backgrounds, Belle Armoire appeals to all our skills and truly draws all of us in. So pack up your favorite art-to-wear project and send it on out to California! Like Becky Brooks, you could go from purveyor of ladies head gear to artist.

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