

SECRET SHOP WEAPONS

Jeweler as Sculptor

This month, we asked Michael David Sturlin of Scottsdale, Arizona: If you were stranded on an island (that just happened to have a bench in the middle and some metal hanging around), what tool would you want to have that allows you to do things you can't do with any other tool?

So tell us. What's your secret weapon?

Goldsmith's hammer.

Why do you love it so much?

I can make an endless body of work with this tool, using the technique of forging.

How do you use it in your work?

I use the goldsmith's hammer to change the shape and dimension of metal. Through the process of forging (pounding directly on the metal), I can alter the shape from round to square or square to round. I can make the metal tapered, flattened, pointed, curved, domed, arched, thickened, or thinned. In addition to stretching and spreading the metal by forging, I use this hammer to work-harden the metal as I refine my objects into their final shapes. I then planish, or texture, the surface.

What discoveries or breakthroughs have you made with this tool?

Recently, I have been working on an extensive body of fine-silver forged objects. In doing so, I had a realization that my use of the hammer on metal in this capacity is actually a direct form of sculpture. Sculpture is often perceived as either an additive process or a subtractive process, where the material is built up or removed to create a form. In this case, my use of the hammer is a *transformative* sculptural process. As I direct the metal under the hammer, I change the dimension, shape, form, elevation, surface, and texture of the material. Many of these changes are occurring simultaneously during the process of forging the object. This *sculptural trans-*



formation is done without adding or removing material, but through plastic deformation of the metal. The resulting jewelry objects are thus miniature sculptures—art to wear or art to be displayed as sculpture. I plan to create a line of forged 18k neck rings that bend around the neck and are more sculptural in nature than the crocheted work for which I am known.

Forging is tactile, auditory, and visual, much like sculpting. As you strike the metal, you can feel through the hammer how much it's spreading, you can see how much it's moving, and you can hear the changes in the metal. There is a very different sound produced when hammering on dead-soft fine silver versus work-hardened

fine silver: The sound changes as the metal gets harder. I once tried wearing earplugs when forging and I found it disorienting because I couldn't hear the metal.

I try to teach this to my students. The first exercise in fundamental goldsmithing is pounding metal with a hammer and seeing what happens. There is so much focus on technology that sometimes we lose sight of creating beautiful jewelry with simple tools. It's the most natural thing we can do. ♦



All of the forms pictured here started as 3 mm square wires, which Sturlin forged into various shapes using a goldsmith's hammer.