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## Tracey Spurgin Craftworx

By Angie Boyer

A stylish studio set in stunning East Yorkshire countryside makes an idyllic setting for Tracey Spurgin's workplace. "I've been here since last June," Tracey tells me, "and I absolutely love it. Having my studio in these converted Victorian farm buildings has liberated my house back into being a home again!"

This spacious and welcoming studio is not only the place where Tracey creates her own work, it's also where she holds her Silver Art Clay Workshops, teaching others how to use the material that has become such a large part of her life.

"I originally trained in textiles and fashion design," Tracey recalls, "but I've always wanted to teach, so when the time was right, I took a teaching qualification and began by teaching soft furnishings and interior design at Hull College. Gradually the subjects I taught were extended to include other crafts, such as jewellery making, but when the funding for the courses ran out, I decided to set up independently with my own Jewellery Making Workshops."

For a time Tracey made and sold her jewellery at craft fairs, "but my main aim has always been to teach, so exhibiting at craft fairs also helped to promote my workshops," she recalls.

Tracey, who is the Education Officer for the Silver Art Clay Guild in the UK, tells me about the much acclaimed, but relatively new, Art Clay Certification Programme, which has worldwide recognition

"Level I of the Programme takes you to the stage of being qualified to teach introductory classes," she explains, "whilst those who successfully complete Level II become Senior Art Clay Instructors."

Although some still consider metal clay to be little more than a hobby craft material, Tracey's work is a fine example of how versatile this 21st century material can be. Developed in Japan and originally a by-product

of the film and printing industries, Art Clay is, in the most basic terms, a mixture of tiny particles of silver (or bronze, or copper perhaps) mixed with an organic binder (to make it malleable and easy to use). When fired in a kiln or with a blow torch, the binder burns away completely to leave only silver.

"This material is about creativity," says Tracey, "and not having to buy expensive tools and equipment. It's relatively easy to learn how to use it, simple designs can be achieved fairly quickly, but it's more difficult to really master the material, that takes more time and experience."

Mastering more complex and specialist skills is what Tracey is currently focussing on, as she works her way through 50 challenging projects for the Master's Registry, all designed to develop specific techniques and skills. This is the internationally recognised qualification that professional Silver Art Clay designer-makers aspire to achieve. Launched as recently as 2008 by US metal clay expert Tim McCreight, the Masters Registry not only aims to develop skills at a professional level, but also encourages innovation and experimentation.

"It really pushes out the boundaries of working with the material," says Tracey. "It gives people the opportunity and confidence to do things with it that have never been done before."

Although firing Silver Art Clay creates 99.9% hallmark quality silver, this clearly is not silversmithing in the traditional sense of the word and I ask Tracey whether she feels the occasional reluctance to see Art Clay work as true craftsmanship is valid.

"Traditional silversmithing has developed over hundreds of years and for contemporary silversmiths the skills and tools are all in place. However, Art Clay is only about fifteen years old, so we're still learning, we're still developing skills and finding out more every day about the potential of the material," she says.

"From a personal point of view," she continues, "I think there is plenty of room for both – the end product may be silver jewellery, but the starting and finishing places and the journey between the two are different. I see the development of a special type of designer maker who uses both silversmithing skills and Art Clay skills in their work."

Although much of what she does revolves around her bright, light studio, Tracey also travels extensively with her work. Much of what she's





involved with the Masters Registry for example, originates from America, where the material is being used in diverse and innovative ways. A week long trip to Chicago last July was one of the highlights of her year.

"A group of five of us attended the Art Clay World Conference," she says. "With three days of Masterclasses and two and a half days of lectures, it was brilliant. I find that people come to Art Clay from many different disciplines - sugar paste, ceramics, textiles, card craft - it's interesting and inspiring to see the work that comes as a result of these different backgrounds."

Now she's planning a week of teaching in Spain in April and, before that she'll be visiting Japan, home of Art Clay. "Ten of us will be spending a week working with the Masters, visiting the Art Clay factory and learning more about how it's used there. I'm always interested to see how other people work. I've already got lots of questions ready for them!"

There is information about Tracey's Silver Art Clay Workshops on her website [www.craftworx.co.uk](http://www.craftworx.co.uk) or email her for more information about her work: E: [tracey@craftworx.co.uk](mailto:tracey@craftworx.co.uk)

