



The Washington Guild of Goldsmiths

Newsletter

Summer 2026

This issue of the newsletter celebrates WGG's members by offering a kind of retrospective with a selection of past "Member Spotlight" interviews. It was difficult to choose which interviews to feature. Given the wonderful array of artistry, accomplishments, and interests, we wanted to republish all the spotlight interviews! Since space doesn't permit, however, we've attempted to offer a representative sample of the styles, designs, materials, backgrounds, and inspirations that have engaged the WGG. In addition to this retrospective, you'll find a thoughtful and engaging essay by Ellie Rose Portillo, this year's WGG Scholarship Programs recipient. Nick Barnes has also provided a report on MetalWork 2026, detailing the hard work that many of WGG members contributed to make the exhibition a success.

Photo credit: Anna Nava-Liess

Editors' Note

A New Chapter

It has been a wonderful four years working on the WGG newsletter. Over this time, we've learned so much from one another... agreeing, disagreeing, and growing together. We've had the privilege of meeting incredible new artists, finding endless inspiration, and best of all, building lasting friendships!

As life moves in different directions, we are also stepping into a new phase of our journey. It is now time to pass on this incredible mission, and we do so with the sincere hope that we managed to provide fun, engaging, and interesting content to all of you.

Art is a true blessing. Never stop creating wonderful things, and always remember to be kind.

Au revoir!

Noha Nader & Ruth Beer Bletzinger
WGG Newsletter Team

Photo credit: Bill Bletzinger



Want to share your time, expertise, and enthusiasm? WGG is looking for new board members! Check out the vacant positions listed at the end of this newsletter and reach out to us today.

METALWORK 2026

Annual Board Report for METALWORK 2026 Nick Grant Barnes, METALWORK 2026 Coordinator

The biennial juried show and sale of WGG members' jewelry, sculpture, and hollowware showed from May 7 – 29, 2026 at the Waverly Street Gallery located in Bethesda, MD. Waverly Gallery liaisons were show director Jeff Bulman, Rachel Carren, and Jan Long.

The opening reception was held on the evening of May 8 for entrants, friends, colleagues, customers, and special guests. An artist talk/show-and-tell happened on May 23 by WGG members Kit Aikin, Alice Kresse, Melissa Lovingood, Rachel Carren, Candice Stribling, and Adriane Burton. They presented their work, educated visitors, and promoted the guild to all guests, which included students, collectors, and special guests.



Photo credit: Waverly Gallery

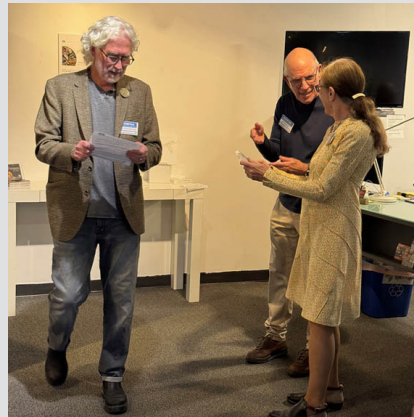


Photo credit: Natalie Barat

METALWORK 2026 had 28 entrants with a total of 70 pieces and was the culmination of many hours of work by numerous guild members: Kit Aikin, Jowita Allen, Nick and Diane Barnes, Michael Brehl, Jeff Bulman, Adriane Burton, Tina Chisena, Nancy Kahn DeMulder, Elyse Demaray, Maggie and Doug Gamboa, Ellen Krieger, Alice Kresse, Jan Long, Robin Morgan, Sarah and Buddy Porter, Louise Rothenburg, Cyd Rowley, Marla Rudnick, Jody Sachs, Peggy Shiffrin, Manny Simantiras, Jan Solomon, Laura Summer, Nil Van Order, Nancy Thompson-Yonehiro, and Sandra Zacharia.



Photo credit: Natalie Barat



Photo credit: Waverly Gallery

Special call out to the wonderful vision and artistry of show designers Louise Rothenberg and Elyse Demaray.

Jurying was held January 10 – 11, 2026. Our distinguished jurors were DC-based jewelry artist, Jen Pape, and Pennsylvania-based jewelry artist, E. Douglas Wunder. Photo images were captured by Greg Staley.

Special call out to Marla Rudnick for coordinating the entrant applications into spreadsheets to use for jurying, and to Cyd Rowley for the use of her studio space for jurying.

The show catalog and postcards were designed by Lori Schulman, printed by Linemark Communications, and funded by the WGG and our catalog advertising sponsors.

Special call out to Jan Solomon and Peggy Shiffrin for their patience, keen eyes, and dedication to excellence. This meant the catalog was spot on once again.

Each day METALWORK 2026 was open, it was hosted by Waverly Gallery member docents, who greeted and educated visitors, answered their enquiries, took sales, and made sure that each visitor to our biennial show had a good experience.

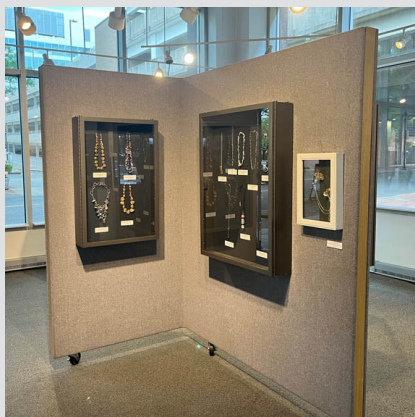


Photo credit: Noha Nader

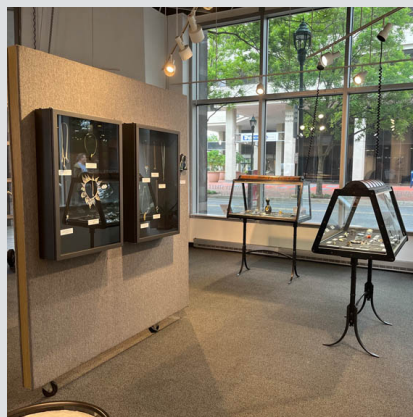


Photo credit: Noha Nader

This year saw the fourth version of the WGG “LINKED” necklace, which was organized and presented by guild members Nil Van Order and Ellen Krieger. The necklace consists of a collection of links that were donated by WGG members Kit Aikin, Nick Grant Barnes, Elyse Demaray, Maggie Gamboa, Ellen Krieger, Louise Rothenberg, Peggy Shiffrin, Jan Solomon, Nancy Thompson-Yonehiro, and Nil Van Order. The winning auction bid was for \$440. These funds go toward the WGG Merit Scholarship Awards, which help up-and-coming metal and jewelry artists to fund tools or material purchase and introduce them to the Washington Guild of Goldsmiths.

Photo credit: Noha Nader



Looking forward, METALWORK 2028 will be the 50th anniversary of the founding of WGG back in 1978. A good reason to celebrate!!! We are currently courting dates and final offers from The Mansion at Strathmore Hall and the Village of Friendship Heights Village Center.

So, start planning your ideas for work to be entered, get involved on the ground level to help the show be what you want it to be. Many hands do make light work. It's a great way to get to meet other guild members and to take pride in what we and our organization do best: Make fabulous artwork and put on one heck of a grand show.

Nick Grant Barnes
METALWORK 2026 Coordinator

Imaginative Captures with Andy Cooperman: *A New Way of Thinking*

By Ellie Rose Portillo

WGG Scholarship Programs 2026 Recipient

Thanks to the generous support of the Washington Guild of Goldsmiths Scholarship Programs, I had the opportunity to attend "Imaginative Captures" with Andy Cooperman at the Cyd Rowley Studio in Bethesda, Maryland. The experience was both technically challenging and creatively transformative, and it has already begun to change the way I think about jewelry and object making.

Before taking this workshop, I viewed stone setting as a separate technical skill that came after the design process was complete. Andy challenged that assumption from the very beginning. Rather than teaching traditional stone-setting techniques or step-by-step formulas, he encouraged us to think about the underlying principles of capture itself. The question shifted from "How do I set this stone?" to "How do I hold this object?" That subtle change in perspective opened up countless possibilities.

Throughout the workshop, we explored ways to capture and secure found objects, unconventional materials, and elements that might not traditionally be considered "settable." Andy emphasized problem-solving, experimentation, and curiosity over rigid technique. The class became an exercise in rethinking assumptions and finding solutions that were integrated into the design rather than added as an afterthought.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned was that a setting can become an intentional design element rather than simply a functional necessity. Andy's inventive approach encouraged us to create captures that respond directly to the character of the object being held and the visual language of the piece itself. This challenged me to think more holistically about design and gave me greater confidence to use the skills I already have in new ways.

The workshop also strengthened my technical confidence through exercises involving soldering, riveting, fabrication, and mechanical attachment. More importantly, it taught me to approach technical challenges with flexibility and creativity instead of searching for a single "correct" solution.

During the four-day workshop, I created a silver scarf ring incorporating a pair of dice carved from cow bone. Because the dice could not be soldered without damaging them, I had to find an alternative way to secure them. Through Andy's guidance and our discussions about capture, I ultimately incorporated a rivet through each die to attach them to the piece. The solution was simple, functional, and fully integrated into the design. It was also something I may not have considered before taking the class. Seeing that piece come together showed me how creative problem-solving can become part of the artistic process itself.

Photo credit: Ellie Rose Portillo



Member Spotlight *Retrospective*

Kit Aikin, a native of Montgomery County, MD, is a social scientist and artist who makes organic-inspired adornments. She has a Ph.D. in social psychology from Penn State University and has been active as an artist since 2011.



Inspired by the strange and unusual, and with a strong dash of nerdy, I create one-of-a-kind jewelry using resin, aluminum, silver, and brass. My modern resin works are created by combining ink with epoxy resin. Utilizing a selection of handmade molds and abstract shapes, the resin is poured and layered to create bright, vibrantly colored jewel-like shapes. I explore the hidden and changing natural world such as the secrets of trees revealed in growth rings, midlife stalactites, ephemeral sandcastles, and abstract representations of the moon. Beautiful on the outside as well as the inside, layered pieces can be read like tree rings: Each layer is a day's work, showing the time it takes to build the piece to completion.

Having a lifelong fascination with jewelry and adornment, my journey as an artist was jump-started by a class in metalsmithing at Montgomery Community College. From there I proceeded to teach myself how to work with resin. I chose resin because the material offers me the flexibility to create my own shapes and colors. My artistic process draws on my training as a scientist, using scientific techniques of random assignment and experimental control combined with trial-and-error learning. Resin reflects the conditions under which it is poured: warm weather pieces are clear, while cold weather pieces are cloudy and filled with tiny effervescent bubbles. I embrace this randomness, making each piece a representation of the seasonal weather and humidity in which it is created. My future work will seek to push the limits of resin, moving beyond resin as a medium and into resin as form.

Photo 1: Sandcastle drip ring. This ring was inspired by the drip sandcastles my Grandfather taught me how to make. It brings to mind being with him at Assateague Island in the summer, sitting in the sand, creating fragile towers of dripped sand.

Photo 2: Asymmetrical horseshoe earrings. These earrings combine two of my favorite techniques; building layers through dipping and asymmetry. They're both complex and whimsical.

Photos credit: Kit Aikin.

Growing up in the French Alps, **Réjane Pratelli** never imagined she would someday live in the US and design jewelry. The bookish and annoyingly curious child was meant to become a lab rat. After earning a Ph.D. in plant biology and pursuing her research in half a dozen countries, she finally dropped her suitcases in Blacksburg, VA. There, an aneurysm left her without being able to speak and use her fingers for a number of months, bringing her academic career to an end. She then turned to art to heal and ground herself. She took a number of workshops at Blair Anderson's SilverWorks Studio & Gallery and started her journey into the world of metals. Read on to learn more about Réjane, and check out her website at <https://www.anvilfireandtime.com/>.



I consider myself as self-taught mainly. Even though I'm a technique junkie and take as many workshops as possible, it's a struggle to hone in my skills: My underlying health issues affect the way I handle tools or move my fingers. Thankfully, my science background gave me great problem-solving abilities, from organizing my bench to holding my tools to actual designs. My body never lets me forget the number one rule: Rather than doing things the right way, I have to make them the way that's right for me.

I fell in love with sterling silver early on, its plasticity and the way it lends itself to texturing experiments. Texture and space are at the center of my practice. My pieces are purposefully a bit rumpled, multilayered, wrinkled, or downright brutalist. They also display touches of light and color brought in by gold, gemstones, or pearls. They are simply a summary of life and of the complexity of the human psyche: a mix of ups and downs, dark and light. I also want to question the pressure society places on all of us, but especially on women: We are supposed to present a flawless appearance no matter how broken we might feel inside. And don't get me started on mass-produced jewelry! We have to acknowledge and emphasize that we're all unique, with our own set of flaws, contradictions, worries, little joys, and big bursts of laughter. I strive to create rebellious, unapologetic, one-of-a-kind jewelry that says, "This is who I am, not who you expect me to be." If my personal journey has taught me anything, it's that being yourself is more than enough (everybody else is taken anyway – attributed to Oscar Wilde).

Photo 1: *Between the lines*. Tapered, etched sterling silver cuff. Fused 18K yellow gold, pink sapphire flush set in 14K yellow gold, black patina

Photo 2: *Panache*. Sterling silver cuff. Fused 18K gold, 14K rose gold pellets, purple sapphire, distressed black patina

Photos credit: Guillaume Pilot

Having earned a bachelor of fine arts (BFA) degree in painting and printmaking from Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, **Alice Kresse** worked for many years in the news and publishing industries as an art director and graphic designer. She enjoyed her career, but still made time for her own work. With regard to jewelry making, her interest wasn't at all planned! Read on to learn more about Alice's fascinating artistic journey. To take a look at more of her creations, check out her jewelry website (www.akresse.com), printmaking and design website (www.alicekresse.com), and Instagram page (@alicekresse).



My entry into the jewelry realm was accidental. In 2004, I saw Robert Ebendorf's* retrospective show at the Renwick Gallery. I'd never heard of him and hadn't planned to see the exhibition; I didn't know there was such a thing as studio jewelry. I was stunned. I saw a necklace that seemed to be made out of gilded papier-mâché and newsprint. Later that year, the Corcoran School of Art + Design announced their new jewelry certificate program. I'd been taking continuing education classes there for years so I immediately signed up for Jewelry 101.

Metalwork was fun, but I found that working with alternative materials really spoke to me. After experimenting with all sorts of materials I settled (mostly) on paper and epoxy resin as my favorite mediums.

The financial crisis of 2008 and a buyout offer from my employer suddenly made me a self-employed artist. I now work out of my home studio and do not miss the corporate world.

A few years later I returned to printmaking. Again, this was accidental. I hadn't pulled a print since college graduation. A friend had found a printmaking workshop and thought it would be a fun thing to do together. I fell in love with printmaking all over again, even though she dropped out.

I figured that my jewelry and printmaking disciplines would eventually meet, and they have. I have a line of paper jewelry. I handprint my papers on an etching press at Pyramid Atlantic Art Center in Hyattsville, Maryland, and fabricate the jewelry in my studio in Bethesda, Maryland.

Having two disciplines keeps things fresh, I think. Common motifs in my printmaking find their way into my jewelry and sometimes my prints are about jewelry. A couple of years ago I began a series of book pendants, literally tiny silver and paper books on a long chain. In my previous career, I designed many newspapers, magazines, and books, so this seemed to make perfect sense. And now I've been inspired to make actual books from my printed papers.

*The June 2024 issue of *The WGG Newsletter* features some of Robert Ebendorf's work.

Photos credit: Alice Kresse.

Merrilee Harrigan first engaged in jewelry making when she was in high school, setting up a table on Telegraph Ave in Berkeley, California. She sold little wire earrings in the shape of flowers with yellow beads. (It was the 60s!) Merrilee moved East and immersed herself in solar energy and energy efficiency for more than three decades, making glass art and glass jewelry in her spare time. It wasn't until she quit her day job in 2015 that she got serious about jewelry, learning silver techniques so she could make silver settings for her glass. Merrilee studied first at Silverworks Studio & Gallery at Glen Echo Park in Maryland, took classes with Ronda Coryell in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and learned various techniques from myriad wonderful teachers. Her style and discipline always incorporate glass into her jewelry. Read on to learn more about Merrilee's jewelry-making journey and go to her website (<https://www.joyofglass.com/>) to see more.



The beauty of nature inspires everything I do. Beyond that, I look for the beauty that is all around us. I once took a design from a pattern in the wood floor where I was exercising. I am also inspired by the materials I work with, especially the dichroic glass that is featured in my designs. I usually begin my jewelry creation process by making the glass, and then listen to hear what it wants in the way of a silver setting that highlights its beauty. (Yes, I do anthropomorphize my glass!) My pieces are mostly one of a kind, which means that I spend quite a bit of time in the design process.

I love learning new things, experimenting with the materials, and creating unique effects. For example, I find synergy between my glass art and jewelry creations by incorporating silver filings into the glass. When heated together, the glass and the silver produce a unique turquoise color that I use in my glass art designs. My jewelry always incorporates glass; and, for my silver work, I exclusively use Argentium sterling silver.

My studio is my happy place, and I love making jewelry, as well as glass art. Of course, if you keep making art, eventually you have to do something with it. So, I had to figure out how to sell it. I concluded that for me, the best way to sell my art is to do art festivals. Now, I usually do four or five spring art festivals and the same in the fall. It is a lot of work! But I enjoy talking to people, answering questions about the art, and seeing that magical moment when my art makes people

happy.

Making art is an act of faith and not for the faint of heart. It takes courage, both in the making and putting your work out in the world. So many things can go wrong; and, of course, not everyone loves my style. But it is a wonderfully rewarding creative journey, and it's good to have a community of artists to share it with.

Photo 1: *Mountains Interrupted*. Dichroic glass with Argentium sterling silver.

Photo 2: *Red Canoe*. Dichroic glass set in Argentium sterling silver

Photos credit: Greg Staley

Carol-lynn Swol, a studio jeweler who lives and works in Hyattsville, Maryland, has an MFA in metalsmithing and jewelry design from Indiana University, Bloomington. Before relocating to the greater DC-metro area in 2012, she was tenured art faculty at Kishwaukee College in Illinois for seven years. She is an open water swimmer who has swum the English Channel and around Manhattan. Check out her Carol-lynn Swol Jewelry Design website at <https://clswol.com/>, where you'll find her work. Read on to learn more about how she integrates her inspirations with her art.



My default inspiration is water. As an avid open water swimmer who regularly trains in the pool as well as in natural water, I spend a lot of time swimming laps. The repetition of that back and forth often allows me to mentally design jewelry or work through a technical design problem. These designs sometimes remain in mind after I exit the pool and can be rough-sketches for later review. When in the open water, I capture many images of waves and the water's edge to inspire contour lines.

I create abstract sculptural forms from laser-cut and stacked Tyvek and hand-fabricated or CAD (computer-aided-design) shapes, using line or surface undulations to imply waves. These contour lines also imply topographical map lines, inspired by my passion for travel (which almost always includes water).

My obsession for repeated line and form comes through no matter what material I use. The visual and tactile effect of my stacked Tyvek pieces evokes both books and geologic formations, such as hoodoos and sea stacks. Other pieces reference places I have been and experiences I have had without being narrative. As much as I like a good story, I avoid being too literal. Even though there's often a visual narrative, it too is usually abstract.

A variety of technologies are involved in my work, from a small collection of antique hammers and tools from the past century to laser cutters and CAD software for designing forms that are then cast or 3-D printed in plastic. There is a hand-made quality to the CAD work. Even though I use third parties to produce the CAD objects, I surface-finish each piece by hand with texture, patina, and stone setting. There is an interaction in all artists' work between the tool used, the material it is applied to, and the vision for the final design. This interaction not only inspires me as I work, but I think it also comes through as a dynamic undertone in the finished pieces.

Photo 1: *Waves/Topographic Pendant*: CAD Designed and Cast in Sterling with Rhodolite Garnet.

Photo 2: *Winter Swims at Sandy Point Necklace*: Hand Fabricated Sterling and Recycled Karat Gold.

Special Feature

An Interview with the Founder of WGG

WGG Newsletter- Summer 2022

Ever wondered who was behind starting the Washington guild of Goldsmiths?

*Founding member, **Gretchen Raber**.*

We got in touch with Mrs. Raber asking her to give us a glance about herself and how it all started.

WGG: Please tell us a bit about yourself.

Mrs. Raber: I am a metalworking artist who feels an obligation and joy in teaching. I've been doing it since 1965. I am also a mom of two and a grandmother of four. That is to say, I juggled work and home as so many women do. My great mentor, Kurt Matzdorf at SUNY New Paltz, was critical in directing me to study abroad with a grant to facilitate it. My apprenticeship with him also played a large role in all the architectural metalwork that I created for a period of time.

I am most contented with my recent work that reflects the synthesis of influences over the course of my career.

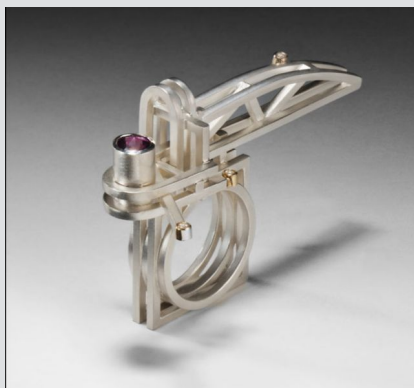


Photo credit: Gretchen Raber



Photo credit: Gretchen Raber

WGG: What inspired you to start the guild?

Mrs. Raber: I was inspired to start the guild as a response to the Creative Craft Council's requirement to only be able to enter their show through guild membership. We needed a metalwork guild.

I rounded up the practicing local metal artists at that time. They were a remarkable group of Evie Lurie, Fridlle Blumenthal, Jusy Frosh, at first. Each meeting brought in more artists.

WGG: What was the most challenging part of the experience?

Mrs. Raber: The most challenging part was to find places to meet. Having just returned from Germany and my studies there, I presented techniques and images from the artists from my school.

WGG: What's your source(s) of inspiration when designing a piece?

Mrs. Raber: Inspiration for my work comes from a lifelong interest in architecture and structure. Even as an eight-year-old, I drew floor plans for houses.

WGG: What's your favorite tool and why?

Mrs. Raber: My favorite tool is the vernier caliper. Couldn't work without it. Pretty much any tool for

measuring is vital. The micrometer, the divider, the angle, the miter jig are crucial. Lest I forget, the humble sharpie makes it all work. I learned in Germany to work accurately, which fits my style. It is impossible to do mechanics without these aids.

WGG: Tell us about a jewelry piece that is dear to you (please attach a photo) and why?

Mrs. Raber: A favorite piece is one I did for the WGG years ago. Should be familiar to all. It came out fully formed as a concept. It incorporated all the elements that interested me: structure, form, weightlessness, and sculptural integrity. It just flowed. A series of rings grew from it.

WGG: What advice would you give to artists who are just starting.

Mrs. Raber: What advice would I give beginning metal artists? Explore. Metal is an astounding material.

There is a world of ways to make your mark on the medium. Literally. Learn as much as you can about what metal can do. Bring that which resonates with you emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually to guide your direction. Make sure you are grounded in design and technique. Use all tools including the computer to enhance your toolbox and skill set. Make friends with other metalsmiths. Bake brownies.

Best wishes,

Gretchen

Learning Opportunities:

The WGG has compiled this list of locations that offer jewelry and metalsmithing classes in the DC-Maryland-Virginia region (aka, the DMV). We'd love to expand it! If you know of other venues offering classes and workshops, email us at: wggnewsletter@washingtonguildofgoldsmiths.com. Also let us know if you offer instruction and where you teach.

- **Baltimore Jewelry Center** <https://www.baltimorejewelrycenter.org/classes-workshop>
- **Jewelryclassdc** <https://jewelryclassdc.com/>
- **Joy of Glass** <https://www.joyofglass.com/>
- **Montgomery College Jewelry and Metalsmithing** <https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/academics/departments/art-rockville/student-artwork/jewelry-and-metalsmithing.html>
- **SilverWorks Studio and Gallery at Glen Echo Park** https://www.silverworksglenechopark.com/silver_works_glen_echo_park/home.html
- **The Art League** <https://www.theartleague.org/>
- **Wear Ever Jewelry** <https://weareverjewelry.com/>

The Washington Guild of Goldsmiths (WGG)

The Washington Guild of Goldsmiths is a cooperative association, a community of creatives whose members' skills, energy, and enthusiasm promote its successful programs. One of its purposes is providing a means for the exchange of information and ideas, as well as educational opportunities. We welcome new members who share our goals!

Not a WGG member? Join us today!

The Washington Guild of Goldsmiths is dedicated to furthering knowledge and interest in all things metal. We welcome jewelers, metalsmiths, artisans, and other interested individuals. Join our lively group to share ideas and techniques and to improve your skills. For more information, click below.

Membership

Would you like WGG to feature your work here? Get in touch with us!

We want to continue featuring our members, their work, achievements, recognition, and awards! So if you are interested, please send a brief write-up about yourself (450 words or less) and a photo of your work to wggnewsletter@washingtonguildofgoldsmiths.com.

We are so excited for you!