





The Ann O'Brien
Jewelry Studio
- An Illustrated History

Edited by John Preble

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Page 1: Ann O'Brien with her silver wire, pliers, and sketchbook creating a Christmas tree ornament.

Page 2: A gold and silver cuff bracelet. This style of bracelet was her husband's (John Preble) favorite design.

Above: A sketch of a serving piece drawn on a blank banking check. The drawing was later taped into her spiral bound notebook that she titled *Master Book of Designs*.

Opposite: A large silver bubble blower. This style of bubble blower created multiple bubbles. Triple blowers, such as this one were not common because they did not fit into the normal bottle of bubble liquid.

Preface



This book is a presentation of photographs, sketches, interviews, and short essays by a variety of people who want to tell their story of the Ann O'Brien jewelry studio.
– John Preble

Ann O'Brien and I were married in 1979. I am an artist, and together we had two boys, William (b.1990) and Andrew (b.1985). In early 2006 Ann was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and on July 1, 2006, she died at the age of fifty-four.

The idea for this book began around 2003 during a discussion with my old friend James Baskett who is an Associate Professor (Accounting) at Loyola University in New Orleans. I had met James and his wife Judy when I was an art instructor at Loyola. James collects antiques for a hobby and investment. He explained to me that he felt Ann's jewelry would one day be very desirable to collectors because it fit many of the criteria that raise the brow of collectors: her work was produced for over 30 years; it always had the same look; it was not guided by 'fashion of the day' yet was very recognizable; it was well designed; her work had a high level of craftsmanship; and it reflected the times and locale where it was made. At that time, he told me that the only thing missing was a book or museum catalog of the jewelry. He felt that once the general public became aware of her jewelry, the jewelry lovers would really appreciate her work.

After that conversation I began looking for a writer who would be interested in telling the Ann O'Brien jewelry story. Ann was never one to toot her own horn so this book project became mine. When I finally found a writer interested in the project, Hurricane Katrina hit and our home received substantial damage. Four months later, Ann became very ill, and she died six months later.

The idea for the book was "revisited" when I was sorting through Ann's studio and discovered her *Master Book of Designs*. Although we were together for twenty-seven years and I saw her always making sketches of her jewelry, I really did not pay much attention to it all until I discovered this cache of incredible drawings. I knew after just turning a few pages of this spiral-bound notebook that the story of the Ann O'Brien jewelry studio could now be told.

So the book project was on track, but the writer I had planned to work with became too busy to now take on this task. While looking for another writer, I began to ask Ann's associates and friends to write something about the studio for the book. As these essays began coming in from different people, I realized that the book could be just a simple collection of these essays. – John Preble



Above: A page from the *Master Book of Designs*. The *Master Book of Designs* was O'Brien's last spiral-bound notebook in which she saved her sketches of her jewelry designs. The above page, like many, were actually created in an early notebook and then stapled onto a page of the current spiral-bound book.

Foreword

My wife Judy and I met Ann O'Brien sometime during the fall of 1980 because of a trip we made to Abita Springs, Louisiana, to discuss art pottery from New Orleans' Newcomb College with John Preble, Ann's husband. I had a common interest with her husband John Preble and John Hodge, their guest that day, both of whom had taught art (including pottery-making) at Loyola University in New Orleans where I was employed. Both Preble and Hodge are expert potters, so we had a lot in common. They have remained two of the most successful and influential artists in Louisiana (Preble has also become known as a painter of Creole scenes, while Hodge is widely respected as a potter and teacher). With them, we also met Francie Rich, an artist and teacher who is the wife of John Hodge.

My love of fine art pottery dates back to the 1960's, while Judy has always loved fine and imaginative jewelry, which she wears with greatest delight. Much to Judy's surprise, she found on that occasion that Ann, whom we had just met for the first time, was a devotedly expert jewelry maker – this gave Judy an instant rapport with Ann.

I must say that each of us fell in love with Ann and her jewelry at that first meeting. We recognized her as one of those persons with a quietly gracious *persona*, while her jewelry spoke instantly to us about Ann's fine sense of creativity and her devotion to the highest traditions of craftsmanship. While we were aware of Abita Springs' status as a growing art colony, we didn't know before that occasion of Ann's jewelry creations. The pieces Ann showed us that day were of elegant simplicity, of impeccable quality, and clearly steeped in originality, ranking with the best hand-crafted work we had ever seen. One seldom encounters a situation such as this, where the beginning of a lasting tradition of artisanship is manifest.

On that first occasion, we gravitated to Ann's pieces of sterling silver jewelry, partly as a result of our having lived in Arizona for several years, where we had grown to have an admiration for fine American Navajo silver smithing. That said, we have subsequently learned to admire Ann's work in solid gold, as well as some of the pieces she has created, lend themselves to that medium as well or better than to silver.

Judy and her daughter have enjoyed wearing Ann's creations for decades now, and I have derived just as much pleasure from seeing them worn. They often received nice comments on the jewelry from friends and

strangers who also admired Ann's creations. It is clear at a glance that these small art treasures are designed and executed by a master, so that people recognize the originality and are impelled to ask about Ann as well as her work. We would like to think that we have motivated lots of people to seek her jewelry, and then to purchase it and to enjoy it as we have. After all, the best advertisement for fine restaurants, great movies and superb jewelry is the kind of word-of-mouth praise that we and many others have given Ann's work.

I would place Ann's work clearly in the tradition of the American arts and crafts movement. At the same time, her work shows clear influences of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century Art Nouveau movements, but without the over-dramatization that might be found on some of the prized French pieces from that era or the subdued austerity of early arts and craft pieces. Her work is much more in keeping with present tastes although her creations show traces of and reverence for the past, a combination that is perhaps what we like most about her body of work. We believe that this melding of eras and styles gives her pieces their aura of lasting beauty. Whatever past artisans might have motivated her, however, her designs are strictly her own. Her single-minded devotion to excellence in execution is hers, as well as an extension of her determination to present her devotees with treasures of only the greatest beauty.

Both Judy and I have enthusiastically endorsed Ann's jewelry in the best of conscience, as we both continue to luxuriate in the intrinsic beauty of her work. Perhaps that is what Ann would have most wanted to accomplish, because we strongly believe her intent was to endow a legacy through her jewelry that would have lasting worth to its owners. We believe she cared little about producing in mass quantity, never wanting to cash in on her designs to maximize the financial potential of her work. For this we are grateful – her little gems of genius have truly enriched our lives as they smile at us through the decades!

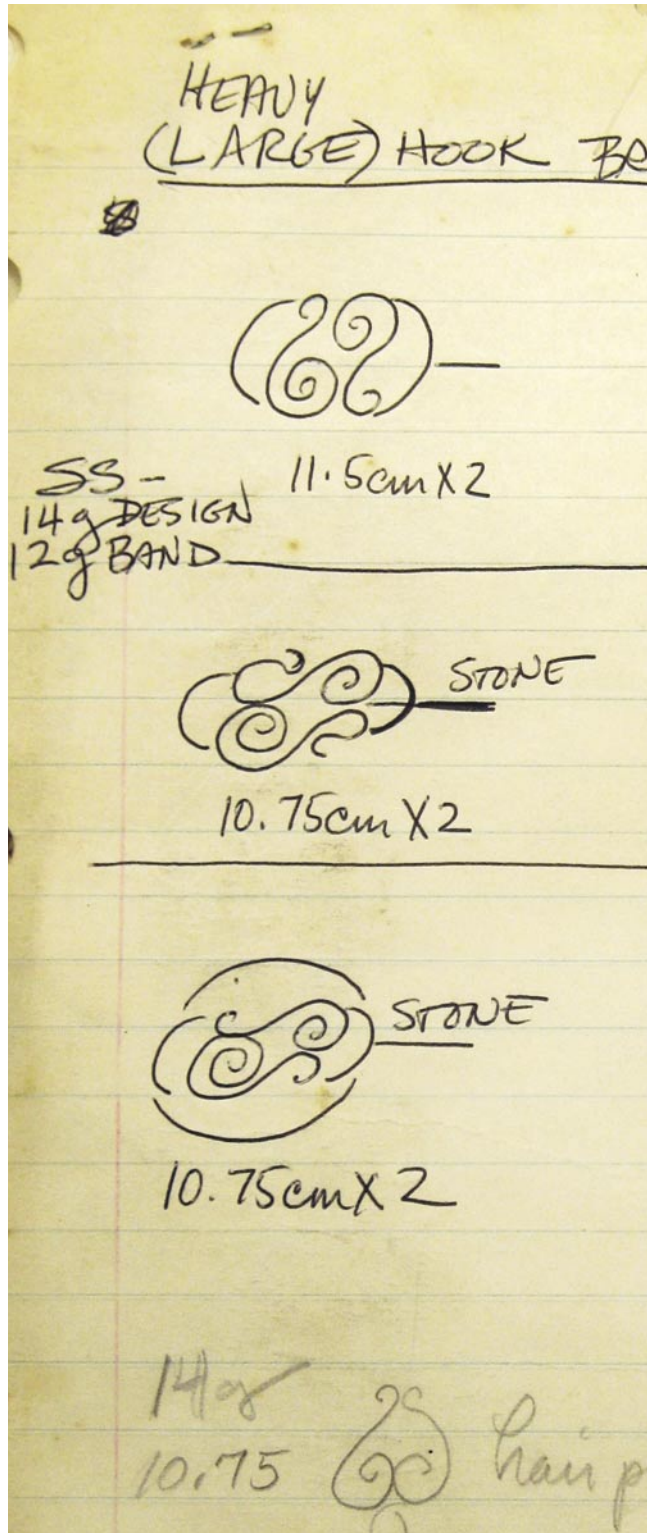
Abita Springs remains, all these years later, a quiet enclave for artists and artisans, including John Preble, but Ann is no longer with us except in spirit. Her legacy, however, will long remain a part of this quiet little place and she will continue to give pleasure to all those who knew and loved her and who have been fortunate enough to own and enjoy the fruits of her unique artisanship.

– James H. Baskett, Ph.D.



Above: *The Master Book of Designs.* This is the source for many of the sketches and drawings that are used throughout this book.

Contents



Preface	5
Foreword	7
Introduction	11
The Early Years	12
The Abita Years	24
Bracelets	38
Hair Pieces	48
Earrings	58
Pendants	64
Necklaces	70
Pins	76
Rings	80
Bubble Blowers	84
Serving Pieces	86
Special Pieces	96
The Techniques	102
The Abita Springs Art Colony	106
The Studio Continues	102
In Memory	124
Bibliography	126
Acknowledgments	127

Left: O'Brien's own sketches of bracelets from her *Master Book of Designs*. The artist drew hundreds of drawings of her designs; she often referred to these "working" illustrations to construct a piece of jewelry.



Above: A postcard picturing an old hotel in Abita Springs, circa 1915. The historic town of Abita Springs is located about an hour's drive north of New Orleans. In the early 1900's the small town became a popular resort for visitors from the New Orleans area. Ann O'Brien's studio is located in Abita Springs, a Gulf Coast artists' colony.

Introduction

Gulf Coast artisans Walter Anderson, Peter Anderson, George Ohr, and Sadie Irvine now have a new member in their club, Louisiana jeweler Ann O'Brien.

Ann O'Brien learned to make jewelry while still in high school. In the early 1970's she went on to Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge where she continued her craft. In 1975 when she graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting, O'Brien was already a professional jeweler and continued to make her distinctive jewelry for over the next thirty years.

I first met Ann when she was introduced to me by her friends, John Hodge and John Preble (who would later become her husband). As a collector and scholar of Gulf Coast artisans I often visited with Ann and purchased many of her beautiful pieces.

While I had always had respect for her jewelry, it wasn't until her death and the discovery of her numerous drawings and sketches that I realized that she was in the company of the other great Gulf Coast artisans.

During the formative years of her jewelry making, Ann was not very familiar with the history of the other Gulf Coast artisans. But during the latter half of her jewelry making career she did become familiar with what had happened in Ocean Springs, Biloxi, and Newcomb College. She became friends with some of the creative Anderson family in Mississippi and purchased many pieces from the Ocean Springs studio. Ann's mother had a piece of Newcomb Pottery that she had received as a wedding present and Ann's husband, John Preble, at one time created pottery that was very much influenced by Ohr, the Andersons and Newcomb Pottery.

While writing my book on Shearwater Pottery I learned a great deal about Gulf Coast artists – their influences, their motivations, their work ethic and their love for life. I was not able to sit across a dinner table with Sadie Irvine, George Ohr, or Walter Anderson, but I did with Ann O'Brien and I can now say I knew one of the great Gulf Coast artisans.

– Dod Stewart, author of *Shearwater Pottery*



Above: A large “spider style” silver ring, circa 1978 from the Margareta Lahme collection.

The Early Years



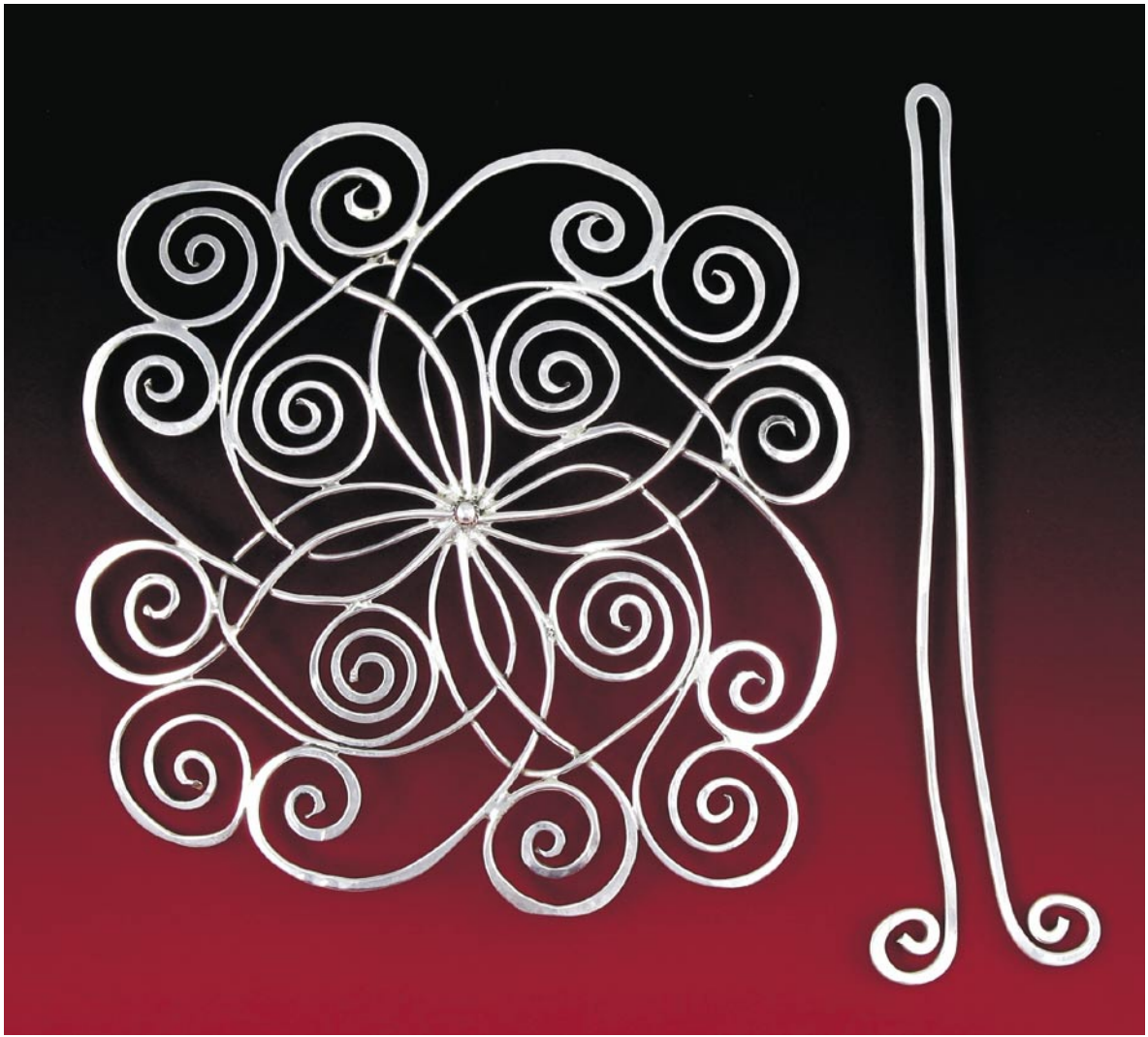
Above: A very early O'Brien brass ring. This design was created using the modular technique. This was the first jewelry making technique that O'Brien learned from Peterson. O'Brien's early brass pieces were very similar to work created by other jewelry artists who were working in the New Orleans area in the late sixties and early seventies. This piece is from the Margareta Lahme collection.

Opposite: A very large woven silver barrette from the Margareta Lahme collection. Jeweler Marcia Westerfield-Willis comments, "This is a piece made by soldering lengths of wire together before bending, weaving and shaping the design. I know we were both doing work like this by 1974-75."

On the next few pages is a contribution from Courtney Peterson, who was the first person to teach O'Brien how to make wire jewelry.

It was the end of the sixties. My first husband, two small children, and I had moved "across the lake" to a rather shabby but magical summer camp house on the banks of the Bogue Falaya river. Although I had taught at the first head-start center on the corner of Dryades and Melpomene (Mel-Po-Mean to locals), in New Orleans, this was to be my first real high school teaching job. In one of my first classes at Saint Scholastica was a tall, slender, blond young woman with a wicked sense of humor, and a good sense of self. I think because her mother was an excellent fellow teacher, I soon felt as if I had always been friends with the exuberant O'Brien clan. I loved teaching. I liked the give and take of the classroom. I liked seeing students start to think for themselves. I loved the whole teaching process. Although I thought I was imparting the wisdom of the universe to the girls, years later a student meeting me at some function exclaimed "This is Mrs. Miller, we could chew gum in her class!" Oh well!

Because I have a bad habit of trying to have more than one career at once, I was also busily making jewelry in my spare time. I was also raising a family, but that is another story. I had learned some very basic (I mean basic) jewelry techniques when my sister Pam and I owned a so-called shop called DECATURATION in the French Quarter of New Orleans. We sold a collection of 19th and early 20th century clothing, and also designed and had made various goofy items as well. TV channel 6, or 4 did a little show on us, and it was fun, while it lasted, but I had no idea that women wore make-up on their necks, or that fabric stuff was so fragile. It was so good to learn that metal was much tougher! Pam



and I learned our new craft from William Powell, an English travel writer turned French Quarter sandal and jewelry maker. It was primitive stuff! We could have been squatting in the dirt in Calcutta for all the techniques we picked up. But it was both fun and quickly done, unlike pottery and such, so I continued to make it when my first husband Skip was in college for “extra money.”

It turned out to be a hard habit to quit. While teaching, I’d peddle my little bits of brass and silver to shops on weekends and in the summer. I started participating in the Saint Tammany Art Association events, and I got to meet some wonderful artists.

Winkie Chestnut, the imperial Mrs. Barranger, Gail Hood, and others introduced me to a very sophisticated group of art makers and lovers. ART was happening in the quiet country town of Covington, Louisiana. I even took a pottery class at the time.

Maybe I was a lousy potter, but at least I stuck it out, unlike Walker Percy’s wife Bunt, who quit early on, because it was “too messy.”

When summer came around again, I invited Ann O’Brien, Connie Gamble, and some of their friends to come help me ‘make jewelry’. What I did not know about running a business was mammoth. Pricing? I hated math, so we made up numbers.

Display? We’d throw down some velvet material, lay out our pieces, and be satisfied. No lighting, no glass cases, no little velvet bags. Ha! But gold was \$35 an ounce, sterling was \$1.50, and brass and copper were dirt cheap by the pound!

With my husband Skip Miller working for the welfare department under the stately and wise Mrs. Arlene Johnson, and me, earning in a year what I now make in an average weekend show, the girls and I would make our little twisty (our term) rings and earrings, take our last ten dollars, drive into New Orleans, sell it all, then drive back across the single lane causeway (having eaten some satisfying crispy grease from Popeyes fried chicken) to our workshop on the river.

We made jewelry in our large family room. Ann and the others would twist, pound and polish



Above: A large brass “hippie” arm band. This is a very common piece of O’Brien jewelry during the early years of her career. O’Brien created thousands of brass pieces, but surprisingly only a few pieces of her brass jewelry can now be found. This large piece probably survived because it was later used as a Mardi Gras costume accessory.

while my record player kept us entertained. We had dogs, cats, and a large green parrot wandering in and out. The parrot hated the Rolling Stones, but loved the Beatles. Such a state of careless innocence pervaded that scene! Meanwhile, we talked, laughed, and helped each other shine. What a group we were. Ann still had braces, I had the usual long hair and blue jeans (I think), and my children Greg and Margaret were usually running in and out. I do not know how we made a penny, but it was a wonderful time.

When the school year started up we were back in school again. Eventually Ann and the others went off to college, and she continued her jewelry making at LSU. After college, Ann returned to the

Covington/Abita Springs area and became a strong voice among the many crafts people in the pines of Saint Tammany. Young artists came seeking the country life found on the Northshore, and became part of this vital community of like minded souls.

The beginnings of this so-called art enclave, or whatever it was, were so simple. We were so untouched by the world of real jewelers, or real business people, or even real artists. I guess we were like a bunch of errant summer campers. We all enjoyed life. We all enjoyed just making stuff. I feel very privileged to have been a part of it.

– Courtney Peterson



Below are some notes from Lary Walker, who first met O'Brien when they attended Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

Ann began her jewelry making when we were undergraduates at LSU. "We" were a small group of friends based around a core of Covingtonians, especially the O'Brien family, surrounded by a fluid cloud of transient or occasional members. In many ways, we were typical of most college students in those days, which is to say somewhat liberal, artistic (at least in sentiment), and cash-challenged. Ann's ambitious entry into the hybrid world of art and business was a needed eye-opener for many of us, especially me. She learned the basics of jewelry design and assembly, acquired the necessary tools, and began turning out increasingly intricate and beautiful pieces. Many of her early jewelry pieces were barrettes and bracelets, which were quite popular at the time, and most pieces were made of brass. At first, she made them entirely on her own, but as the popularity of her work (and the number of shows she visited) grew, she needed ever more help with manufacture. She continued to design and do much of the cutting, shaping, and soldering, but I became an occasional assistant in one domain where I couldn't mess things up too badly...polishing. I recall long hours sitting at the wheel, putting the final finish on pieces, learning how to keep friction burns to a minimum, and discussing the topics du jour with Ann and my other co-workers. The working hours were haphazard and often crammed into anxiogenic, pre-show days; OSHA would have been appalled by the conditions, but in many ways it was the best job I have ever had. – Lary Walker

Above: A silver ring from the Teague/Sasser family collection. This very early design was not an exclusive O'Brien design. It was made by several of the St. Tammany Parish jewelers in the early seventies.



Left: A medium-size gold and silver pendant from the mid-1970's. The early pieces were hammered until the whole piece was flattened. The twisting is well done but the soldering is crude. It was probably soldered using a small plumbers-torch. Many older jewelry pieces in this book were re-polished on the buffer wheel. This piece was not; it was simply rubbed with a polishing cloth; the editor wanted to illustrate how a piece can look in this 'condition.'

On the next few pages is a contribution from Marcia Westerfield-Willis, who was a high school friend of O'Brien's and who learned to make jewelry from Courtney Miller at the same time.

Courtney worked out of her house. I can't remember the addresses of the two or three houses she rented, but I know where they are or were. Chrissie and I were sophomores at SSA (St. Scholastica Academy). Ann was a junior, when Courtney and Skippy (Miller) appeared on my radar. I don't remember either of them teaching at SSA my freshman year. Courtney taught English, I think, and Skippy taught world history. I took his class my sophomore year, as did Chrissie (O'Brien) and Claudia (Seligman). That would have been the 1967-68 school year. I could look in my yearbooks.

It was when I took world history class, that the Millers began asking me, or Chrissie, and (maybe) Ann to baby-sit their two young children. I remember Courtney having her jewelry making stuff set up at her house. The Millers drove a VW van, the must-have transportation mode for any self-respecting hippie or hippie-wannabe.

I don't remember exactly when Courtney asked me if I wanted to help make jewelry. I remember that at first I just polished things. She paid per piece, with rings at five cents each. You could polish several at a time on a ring stick held

to the wheel. Larger pieces such as barrettes and bracelets earned twenty to twenty-five cents each.

Next, Courtney showed us how to make circles and various wire shapes with needle-nose pliers. I think she paid by the piece for these shapes too.

It wasn't very long before she was letting me solder together the pieces she had designed and laid out on the asbestos soldering pads we all used. These were about a foot or so square and about a quarter of an inch thick. I remember that sometimes Courtney would want to pay by the hour, and sometimes she would want to pay by the piece. I guess she paid in the manner she thought was most profitable for her at the time – remember, we were all just high school kids.

The 'polishing wheel' at first was just a refrigerator motor from Sears mounted on a heavy piece of wood with a spindle attachment for the wheels – at that time we got our supplies and silver metal from New Orleans Jewelers Supply. We got the brass brazing rods from a welding shop. The first pieces were more like 'crafts' work. We turned them out by the dozen or half dozen.

Right: A large “modular style” silver cuff bracelet, circa 1979, from the Margareta Lahme collection.



Once Courtney saw that we could put together pleasing designs, she let us have more freedom to design the pieces we made for her. Of course we tried to create designs that were pleasing and would sell well. I guess Ann and I might have made several hundred pieces during this time, but it was all ‘Courtney’s’ jewelry. I think most people thought she was making it all herself. Most of it was brass. She did a little silver, but that was by ‘special commission’ at first, and all we did was polish the silver pieces for her. I think she was afraid we would melt too much of the silver by mistake – silver cost much more than the brass stock.

We went to Courtney’s to work at first because we did not have our own stuff, and did not know where to get it. Courtney handled all the sales, and we did not even know how much she was getting for each piece. She sold a lot of it to various head shops in the Quarter. Of course, she sold retail to girls at SSA. Ann graduated in May 1969, but I kept working for Courtney because I was still in Covington at SSA.

Sometimes Lucius Minge worked for Courtney at her house at the same time I did. Courtney had her stuff set up on a back porch. I

remember that she was living at a house near the Bogue Falaya Park in Covington by then. I can remember listening to ‘In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida’ on Bleeker St. while working with Lucius. I think Courtney later moved to a house in Abita.

Later, I can remember Ann and me working together on the O’Brien’s back porch to make jewelry to take to the ‘Festival of Life’ planned in McCrea, Louisiana. I did not go, but I believe Ann and Courtney did. This was in the summer of 1969 or 70, I think. We drank gallons of iced tea and listened to the radio or to records. I remember listening to Simon and Garfunkel, Bob Dylan and to Nilsson Schmilsson.

Courtney used a plumber’s propane torch (Bernzomatic), and that is what Ann and I used for years – but Ann switched to a jeweler’s torch later.

When I worked as a bench jeweler at Wilson’s Jewelers at Cortana Mall (when it first opened in 1974 or ’75), I used an oxyacetylene rig too. I later used a smaller propane-powered torch at home to make my own jewelry.

I think Ann was selling her own stuff by the second or third semester of college when she was in Baton Rouge on Wisteria St. She lived on Wisteria



Right: A gold ring by Ann O'Brien. This ring was formed using the more "traditional Courtney method." Earlier rings might have had just a gold circle where the stone is. Later ones could have had either a "ball" of gold or silver or a gem stone as this one has. I liked to hammer facets on my metal balls to simulate a faceted stone.

—Marcia Westerfield-Willis

before she lived on Alaska St. This would have been in 1970-71. I don't know if she was making jewelry on her own her freshman year at LSU (Louisiana State University), which would have been 1969-70 (when Chrissie and I were still seniors at SSA.)

I know Ann was making jewelry when she lived with Charlie Sasser, Loretta Shelton, and Loretta's brother John Shelton on Alaska St., because by then I was at LSU. I remember buying a refrigerator motor for about \$35 (a lot of money for me back then) from Sears, and getting Charlie Sasser to hook up a switch to mine to turn it on and off, like he had done for Ann. Before that, we turned the motors on by plugging and unplugging them from an outlet. The switch was quicker and safer in case the wheel 'grabbed' a piece we were polishing. Sometimes this would happen. The wheel would 'catch' a piece if you weren't careful, and the wheel would 'throw' it back at you. Bent or twisted pieces were the result, not to mention a bump on your forehead.

In the summer of 1972, Chrissie and I went to Europe with Alyce (Ann's mother) on an LSU charter that was taking law students to study in Greece. I can't remember why Ann didn't go as well. We had Eurail passes to travel all around Europe. We stayed with Chrissie's grandparents in Ostende between trips. I remember that I brought extra hair barrettes and rings I had made to trade for stuff. Lucius and another boy went on the same chartered plane. We met up with them a couple of times during our treks through Europe. In Paris, we saw some French wire jewelry being sold on the street; we had some of ours, but Lucius and I were afraid to try to sell it because we didn't know if we needed a permit. I traded for a bracelet. Chrissie

and Lucius went to Spain while I stayed in France and traveled to Dijon and Taze alone. I traded several things for food.

Once Ann, Lucius and I were away at LSU, Courtney got Michael and David O'Brien to work for her. I don't remember Betsy ever working for her. Chrissie didn't do much, if any, jewelry work either.

Also, I never thought of working for Courtney as working in a 'studio.' Courtney set up her equipment wherever it was convenient at the time. Sometimes we worked in a "spare" room, but most of the time we worked in the kitchen or on a screened porch.

I became more of Ann's friend than Chrissie's after awhile because we both worked for Courtney and made jewelry. Chrissie did not like all the dirt from the wheel, if I remember right. Sometimes Ann and I would be black with rouge and metal waste from the elbows down. Sometimes, we would rinse as much as we could off, and take a break to eat sandwiches with that stuff still on our arms and faces. Also, we didn't wear masks, and we got all that black dust in our noses too. Polishing was the worst part about making jewelry. As soon as I could, I got a high school kid to help me polish once I had married and moved to Clinton.

I remember John Preble, when I came to visit Ann. I still have the "hippy" osterberger shirt I got from Margareta Lahme. It was trimmed in crocheted string. I added lots of colored embroidery and handmade silver buttons I made in an Art Nouveau-inspired design. At that time, Ann's work and my work were very similar.

— Marcia Westerfield-Willis

“Sometimes, if we were ‘short’ on rings, earrings, barrettes, or whatever we would take along each other’s work to fill out a display at a fair or market, for example. We had little string tags on our work that we would cut off when we sold something. The price was on one side, our initials on the other. That way, we would know who sold what, and how to split the money. We would often give the person who did the selling some money for their having hauled the stuff to the show, especially if we could not go because we had another commitment. We were very flexible because in the early days especially, we could sell all that we could make. If someone bought one of my pieces from Ann at a show, they might just assume she made it and vice versa.”

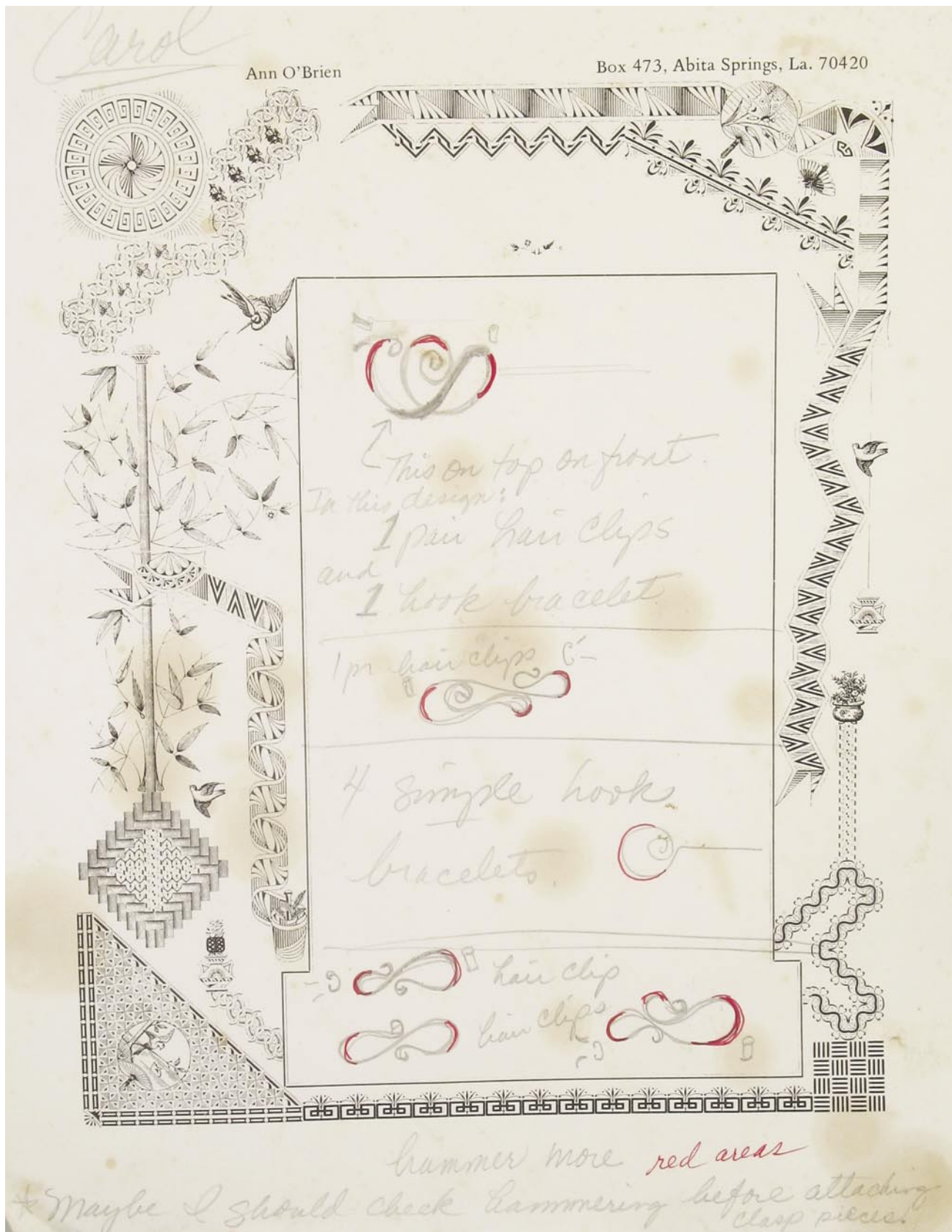
– Marcia Westerfield-Willis



Top: A large “modular style” silver cuff bracelet with stone, circa 1980, from the Margareta Lahme collection.



Bottom: A large silver hook bracelet with stone, circa 1980, from the Margareta Lahme collection.



Above: Ann O'Brien stationery. This stationery was created with the help of a Dover Publications clip art book. Note the written comments along the bottom of the page, "hammer more red areas."



Left: An early gold ring. This beautiful ring was created using the modular technique to create a design with four hearts.

Right: A 1971 passport photo. O'Brien was making jewelry at this time.



On this page are notes from David O'Brien, the jeweler's youngest brother.

Early on I heard Ann was doing jewelry and saw her nice-looking brass barrettes with curly wire sticks – really nice and original-looking. She realized it was a good way to make money while at college. Next thing I knew she was getting good at it.

Every now and then she'd go into a mass production mode. When she walked in carrying boxes with wire sticking out you knew something was coming up – a festival or road trip or something.

I never figured out how she got so much stuff in those boxes. She'd end up with a whole jewelry factory in the living room. There were brass wires and hammers and anvils and dowels in piles around the room. She would make circles and loops of all sizes and sort them into little boxes. If you wanted to help she had plenty of extra wire and dowels and cutters. She was very good at recruiting people in the room to help. We'd end up with our own tasks and work areas cutting circles or wrapping wire or whatever we were good at.

It was amazing watching what Ann could do with all those different shapes of brass wire. She could lay them out on a board and if she

liked it – *poof!* It turned into a new design. She'd solder the pieces together, then hammer them out into beautiful simple jewelry. Then the final step – polishing.

For me this would be a new level of helping out: I had to go outside. This was hardly as glamorous as wrapping wire inside, but I could pick up good money polishing. Getting ready for a festival, Ann would have ice chests full of bracelets and barrettes and rings and you-name-it. We're talking hours and hours of polishing. I even recruited friends.

But always in the swirl of production activity Ann would make her work fun. I have great memories of seeing Ann curled up on the sofa with her favorite needle-nosed pliers and brass wire rods. She could sit there for hours, all the while chatting along with everyone and having a great time as if she wasn't working at all. At some point I think she became one with her pliers – she could twist wire in a dark room watching *Star Trek* and not miss a beat.

Ann cranked out a lot of brass jewelry back in the early days. I don't know if anyone knows how many brass pieces she actually made, but I know it was a lot. I know because I polished thousands of them.

– David O'Brien



Above: A medium-size pair of silver earrings from the Teague/Sasser family collection. A simple design that may have been inspired by a much older ornament. O'Brien read many books on the subject of antique and ancient jewelry. Note that the pieces were hammered/flattened more than her later work. These earrings were well worn, as evidenced by the wear around the ear wire and the ring holding it.

On these two pages is a contribution from Marcia Westerfield-Willis

I traded with Margareta for some of the clothes I had gotten. I traded her some of my silver jewelry as well as paid her because I was not a good seamstress. I used to have a couple of her dresses – a wrap style and an A-line with short sleeves – as well as three or four shirts. I have only the one shirt left. I wonder if she kept any of my jewelry? So far, I have not found anyone who will part with any of the old stuff.

Just last year, a neighbor up here in Clinton asked me to repair a cross he had bought from me in 1973. I had forgotten that he had even bought one from me. He said he had bought two – one for him and one for his son, and he wears his everyday. I was glad I could fix it for him.

Thinking about why we all abandoned the brass work in favor of silver, and some gold, I remembered something. The main problem with the brass work was that it looked really good when it was just polished and still bright and shiny. But as the surface oxidized and the piece tarnished, the areas soldered with silver solder became very apparent in contrast against the brass. This really did not look nice. You could not shine the brass up again well enough unless you used a buffing wheel. Many people did not like the look of the pieces once they began to dull and tarnish. Polishing the jewelry with “Brasso” or a jewelers cloth would not work as well as using a wheel.

It was a shame that we couldn't solve the tarnishing problem with the brass. This jewelry was much cheaper than the silver to make, so much more of it was made – in much more variety

than the silver. In the brass, we made several large pieces like belts, buckles and hanging chains for potted plants, in addition to the bracelets, etc. We could sell more of these pieces, because they were more in the price range that students and other young people – our first customers – could afford.

In silver, we mostly made smaller things like rings, earrings, small barrettes and smaller bracelets. (We made few things in gold – mostly earrings and rings – unless we got a special order.) I also learned that it was best to get a deposit for gold orders. I think Ann did the same at first. When I say we, I am referring to the post-Courtney era when Ann and I were making our own jewelry either in Baton Rouge or Covington.

During this time, as well as when we worked for Courtney, Ann and I did not have a stamp to mark our work – or Courtney’s when we were working for her. This didn’t matter much since most of this was in brass. Later, I remember buying a “sterling” stamp to mark the silver work (when possible) since we both did use more and more sterling wire. I remember reading some jewelry-making book that said that by law sterling and gold work had to be stamped. We “shared” this stamp when we were both in Baton Rouge so we both didn’t need to buy one. We both used some wire as light as 22 gauge and as heavy as 10 gauge. By then, we had bought gauge wheels. Most of the jewelry was made with 18 and 16 gauge to keep costs down.

I clearly remember the tools we started out with, and the ones we added as we went along during these early years. I remember the kinds of polishing compounds we used and the types of cloth wheels. I remember the “design process” we used that we had learned from watching Courtney lay out the pieces she wanted us to work on after she trusted us to solder. Many things we learned to use were by trial and error.

We used library books on jewelry design and the history of jewelry to get ideas, as well as observation of things around us – this was especially true once we were working for ourselves and had begun to abandon the circles, half circles, “S”, “C” and “E” shapes and spirals that marked the early “Courtney era” work.

– Marcia Westerfield-Willis



Above: A gold ring by Ann O’Brien. This ring was made by soldering lengths of wire together first, and then twisting them. The balls of gold were formed by overheating a small bit of wire until it melted into a ball. These were then attached to the ring to break up the lines at the center of the design. Then the ring shank was applied and the whole piece was shaped into a ring on a mandrel. This is a later technique than what we learned from Courtney. At first these were “flat” wire designs. Very quickly both Ann and I did some interweaving of the wire in addition to finishing the ends in spirals and adding balls of metal.

– Marcia Westerfield-Willis.

The Abita Years



Left: Ann O'Brien posing for a publicity photo, Circa 2003. She never enjoyed the camera when it was used for business. There are few photos of the artist creating her pieces or even pretending to be creating her pieces.

Opposite: The work table where O'Brien created her pieces in Abita Springs. Sitting at this table she always had a good view of the natural gardens surrounding her studio and home.

On the next two pages is a July 11, 1985 Times-Picayune/States Item newspaper story by Pat Butters titled "Spoon Maker's Talent Is Sharp As A Knife"

Finding Ann O'Brien is no trick. Sure the 34-year-old artist lives in Abita Springs, a town with only one stoplight, so she shouldn't be that hard to find. But her two-story home is buried beneath a jungle of tall grass and various cars, including a vintage Checker cab.

The house may be hard to spot but the talent isn't. O'Brien just won the \$300 Barranger Award for her fruit spoon in the 20th Annual Juried Exhibition put on by the St. Tammany Art Association making her the only parish artist to win a top prize this year. To some, fruit spoons may not evoke as much emotion as Van Gogh landscapes,

but their craftsmanship makes them welcome additions to conventional art shows.

O'Brien's first love is making jewelry. She works out of the caretaker's cottage next to the home she and husband John Preble share. Boxes of silver earrings line the cluttered studio floor. Scattered on the work bench are needle-nosed pliers, metal cutters and other tools for her craft.

A wooden hand for fitting rings sits next to the door. Across from that rests a gray metal machine to polish the jewelry.

The atmosphere gives the impression of a starving artist devoted to her craft.

Then O'Brien tells you the real reason why she went into jewelry making as a sophomore at Louisiana State University.

"Money," she said laughing. "I just wanted to earn money. It seemed like an easy way to do



it. People would buy anything that was crafts.” O’Brien went to school in the late ‘60s, when love beads and brass trinkets were cool. She made more money to put herself through school making jewelry than she would have had she kept her \$1.35-an-hour library job.

After graduation, she took to the road for a few years selling jewelry out of the back of a van. “That was easier than you can imagine” she said. “Especially in the West, where it was dry. I tried it in New England and I found myself sitting in this van with stuff piled all around me, and it was raining all the time.”

In 1977, she “got serious” and went into business for herself. By then, she had expanded into silver and gold.

“Jewelry got tiny for a while,” she said. “Remember when gold chains were big and gold was \$1,000 an ounce? Nobody wanted anything bigger than an inch and there’s only so much you can do in a one-inch space.”

That switched her into making flatware and serving pieces, which have beauty and are still functional.

“I’ve used them at parties,” she said. “I’ve run them through the dishwasher.”

She didn’t make the winning fruit spoon because of the contest. She made it a few years ago to go with a fork as a salad set.

“I wasn’t ever sure whether the two ends worked together,” she said. “Somebody wanted

to buy the fork just as a meat fork, so I sold it. I decided to call the other piece a fruit spoon instead of a salad spoon.”

O’Brien estimates that it takes 10 to 15 hours “fooling with the metal” to complete an elaborate piece like the spoon. Since such projects are made in stages, she’ll set them down if she’s not feeling creative and whip out 30 pairs of disc earrings, which are her “bread and butter” for craft shows.

“They’re mindless” she said. “You turn the soap operas on the radio, and you don’t ever have to think about them.”

It has taken her 15 years to reach that point. The basic techniques she uses, as her sales brochure explains, remain the same: bending, soldering, hammering and polishing.

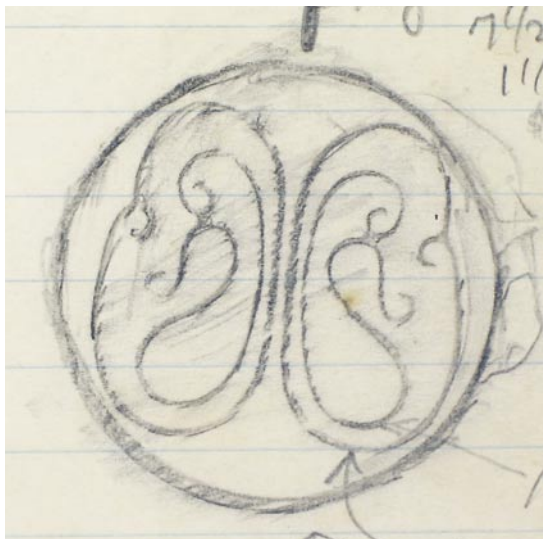
She sells most of her work to retail shops around the country and she does about four shows a year. But O’Brien said she’ll cut that number in half now that she has a 5-week old son.

Her larger pieces are priced by labor rather than the cost of the metal. For example, the silver in a serving piece weighing 2½ ounces might cost \$18. O’Brien would retail it for \$335.

“When you take everything into account it’s probably \$5 an hour,” she said laughing. “I could probably clean houses and make more money. I’d be happy if I got \$15 an hour. “For 15 years experience that doesn’t seem unreasonable.”



Above: The Abita Springs Studio and a view of the rear of the O'Brien/Preble residence. This photo was taken October 2, 2006; note the jewelry polisher on the left. The residence is being restored – missing from the house is a shed roof that once stretched across the rear wall that protected the rear steps and doors from rain and sun. The roof was destroyed by the winds from Hurricane Katrina (August 29, 2005). A small forest surrounds the studio. Local writer, William E. Sorensen, was living in the studio when the O'Brien/Prebles bought the property. He was renting the building for \$25 a month. The electricity supplied to the building was only adequate for either an air conditioner or a refrigerator. During the summer months Sorensen opted for the air conditioning, unplugging the refrigerator. The family planned to allow the very elderly Sorensen to stay in his home at the same rent, but he died before they had actually bought the property. It was then that O'Brien decided to use the quaint little building for a studio.



Above: The rear wall of the O'Brien/Preble residence after Hurricane Katrina (8/29/2005) pushed a large pine tree into the roof of the house. The attic was heavily damaged, along with its contents. Note the antique "saloon nude" painting hanging out of the destroyed wall. The home's large attic was used as a warehouse for everything from antiques to Mardi Gras costumes.

Left: A pencil rubbing of a pendant, found in O'Brien's *Master Book of Designs*. This style is called a "bracketed free-form" pendant.



Left: A silver cross from the collection of Connie Gamble. This piece was made very early in O'Brien's jewelry-making career.

Connie Gamble was a life-long friend of O'Brien's. She collected her jewelry and worked alongside her in the studio for many years. On the following pages are her notes and thoughts about her friend and the jewelry studio they shared.

Like everyone else, I would like to tell you about my history with Ann the person I knew, and Ann, the artist. I first met Ann when my family moved from New Orleans, Louisiana, to Abita Springs, Louisiana, in 1963 when the town was basically a geriatric community of about 600 people and not very much fun for kids my age. My father started – of all things – the Abita Springs Quail Farm, and I was sent to St. Peter's Catholic School in Covington, Louisiana, to begin seventh grade. I was anxious on my first day, to say the least. During recess, this very tall girl with long hair and a friendly smile came up to me and said

"Hi, my name is Ann. You are the new girl aren't you." With that introduction the die was cast and Ann and I have been friends for 43 years. We got to know each other as good friends throughout our school days at St. Peter's and then high school at St. Scholastica Academy. It didn't take me long to realize that when it came to math and science, Ann was one of the smartest girls in our class. I remember watching in awe when Ann was called upon to write out her mathematical solutions on the blackboard. Her answer usually took up two or three blackboards. I would look at my own work in disgust and realize the reason I didn't get the math was that we had one of the worst math teachers possible, and Ann must surely be some sort of genetically endowed mathematical expert – at least that was my take.

I certainly didn't believe then that Ann would grow up to be a jeweler. Looking back, there were plenty of hints that she had ability. Take for example Ann's handwriting style, which was distinctly lyrical and almost curlicue. If you



Above: An early silver hair barrette from the collection of Connie Gamble. According to Gamble, this piece was an experiment – the barrette’s “stick” was attached to the body of the barrette to keep the stick from getting lost.

examine her writing in her *Book of Master Designs* next to the drawings of the pieces you can see so much similarity between the two. One echoes the other in its pattern and design. It is almost as if her handwriting was a precursor to the artistic style she employed in her jewelry.

Another indicator was her artistic work for our extracurricular activities in school. When I was president of our junior class and we had a project to do, I knew I could depend on Ann to draw and paint whatever our theme was. For our annual volleyball tournament our class theme was that of a circus. I watched again in amazement as Ann painted a six or nine foot gorgeous, hilarious clown – all free-handed. This was the same clown mural that her sisters Besty and Chrisie hung in their respective bedrooms for years and years. That picture was full of swirls and squiggles just like her future jewelry.

After high school Ann and I went to different colleges. During this time her jewelry business really started working. On a weekend visit, I saw Ann’s jewelry for the first time. Most of her work was done in brass but she had already started working in sterling. I was very impressed, as she hadn’t been making jewelry that long, but it was all perfectly balanced; the earrings were symmetrical and clearly matched, and her designs were very integrated. I hadn’t seen anything like it in the early 1970’s so I bought my first piece that day, a sterling cross, very Celtic in style.

From my high-school friendship with Ann I always thought she would become a mathematician or a revolutionary scientist who would invent something totally unusual.

Instead, Ann used that incredible mind and latent ability to express her visions of art. You could look at Ann’s organic designs and be reminded of something you had seen in nature. You weren’t sure what. It was almost a message on a subliminal level. She conveyed her artistic imagination and consequently prompted you to delve into your own imagination.

I was very proud and somewhat envious of her ability to start her own business in a way that she loved and that also helped her put herself through college. How many college students could do that?

The day I visited her, there were other people in the room and I watched Ann looking at this gaggle of girls, talking and laughing while her hands continually twisted metal into various shapes in a non-stop motion while barely looking down at what she was making. My impression was that her hands had a mind of their own. Often it was difficult to tell what had control, her brain or her hands. Her ability to independently use her hands and be entertaining at the same time was obviously a quality that most of us around her at the time found highly unusual.

I didn’t see Ann for quite a while after this. One day in the late 1970’s, Ann and her then-



Left: A barrette from the collection of Connie Gamble.

Right: A beautiful 14k gold pin from the collection of Connie Gamble. This was a piece created especially for Gamble.

husband Jerry Thomas came to visit me and my boyfriend Kerry Prince in the small cottage we rented on the lake front in Mandeville, Louisiana. It just so happened that I knew of a great apartment for rent that was only a few houses away from us. It became their house and jewelry studio. Jerry made jewelry also, but in a different direction, experimenting with stones set in handmade bezels – often in designs that were very reminiscent of Ann’s.

We spent a lot of time together, often dinner parties. Every time Ann arrived to eat she would compliment me on my cooking by commenting that “I’m back in the saddle again.” It got to be one of her sayings that I could always count on before dinner. Another expression that she said a lot during our work together was “Golly” when she was surprised or impressed. I never knew anyone else who would say “Golly” on a regular basis. She would always stretch the word out like “G-o-l-l-y.” This was just one of Ann’s many charms.

By the time Ann had started using gold on a small scale, such as delicate rings and petite size

earrings, she had finished with brass for the most part.

Ann also started asking me to work for her. Several people had worked for her already and she believed our personalities would complement each other well. I resisted for quite a while, as I didn’t have many mechanical skills. Also I was a bit intimidated by her incredibly perfected skills, and knew I couldn’t duplicate them. But in retrospect my agreeing to be her apprentice was one of the best decisions I have ever made, and so for many years I worked for Ann, who was one of the best bosses that I ever worked for – to the point that I felt spoiled for any other job.

As a teacher she was so very patient, showing me over and over instructions ever so gently, no matter how long it took me to learn a particular skill. Then, of course, in my training time, Ann always let me know when I had perfected something. She used to tell me and her current apprentice Nancy, that we were much better at soldering metal than she was. I don’t know if that was true or if Ann was just boosting morale.



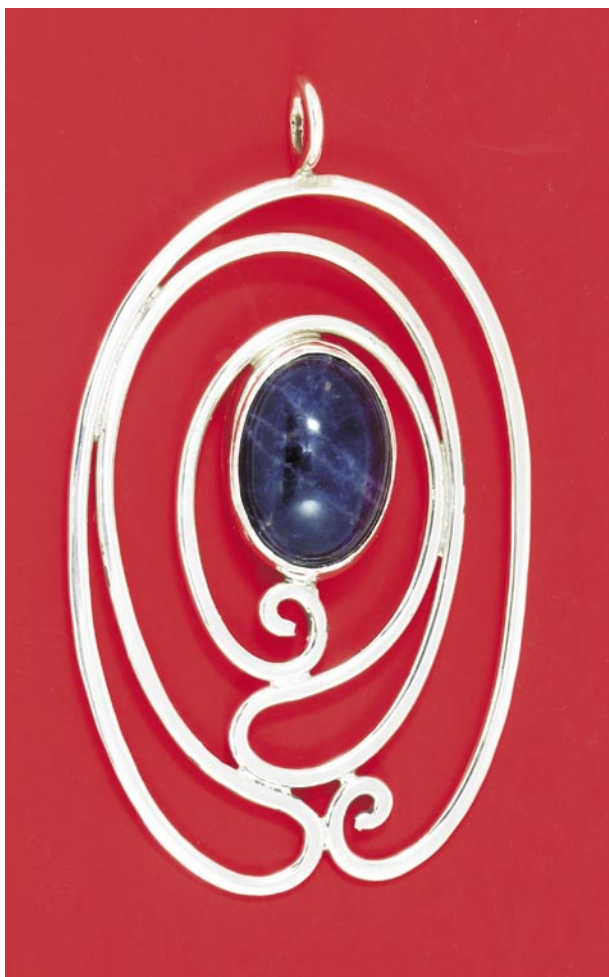
Above: A matching pair of silver barrettes from the collection of Connie Gamble.

Consequently I very rarely felt like Ann was my boss in the conventional sense of the word. To her, work was supposed to be enjoyable and fun in addition to helping her make a living. We worked the hours and days she wanted to work, which at that time, with both of us being night owls, starting at 10:00 a.m., taking a long lunch, and quitting at 5 o'clock. Sometimes we would stop and do yoga, or take a long walk along the lakefront discussing everything you could imagine. Of course, toward Christmas we worked long and hard – which you would expect for jewelry business. But Ann firmly believed that after all the hard work and long hours, we should take most of January off before delving into inventory. I always loved that attitude of hers.

Ann was becoming more and more of an influence in my life. I spent more time with her than with my soon-to-be husband. When I did get married, Ann, of course, was my Maid of Honor. She was my conduit to meeting and becoming friends with a sizeable number of people from the time of my working for her all the way to her passing. I will always be thankful for that in my life.

Ann was also the consummate business woman, which a lot of artists have difficulty doing in their own business. Many artists love making their pieces, but the art of pricing, hitting the pavement to sell, always trying to figure out if your prices are correct, and ultimately trying to figure out if your business is a success is troublesome to a number of artists. After all, the art is their main interest. Ann knew everything when it came to her business. She knew everything about her individual pieces, exactly how much metal went into each piece from start to finish. The cost of the labor, hers and mine, and the exact dimensions of each design. Ann was always aware of the changing cost of metal and which wholesaler would be successful with what type of pieces. With her mathematical skills, she created a formula to figure the price to charge for each design. Most of the time I worked for her, she did most of her own bookkeeping. Finally when her business became so large and busy, she hired Dianne Andry to do the bookkeeping while we worked.

I used to kid her when she would balance her monthly accounts and she would sometimes



Left: A free-form pendant with a set stone from the collection of Connie Gamble.

Above: A beautiful small 14k gold pendant pin from the collection of Connie Gamble.

come up a penny over or under. She would get so frustrated, endlessly trying to find out where that penny belonged. I would tell her at that time that I would be glad to give her a penny or she could give me one to make her account balance out. Oh no! That was just not Ann's way. When Ann made up her mind on something – that was it. The determination never stopped until the problem was solved and she always managed to do it. To better understand the IRS rules for her own business, Ann took a tax course with H&R Block. She could do other people's taxes, like mine, and have a great handle on her own business. I learned so much about business from Ann that I was able to do bookkeeping jobs at other businesses from time to time.

After a few years, Ann and Jerry's apartment became too small for a studio. Soon we all commuted from Mandeville to the wonderful

studio of jeweler Rene Chapotel in Abita Springs. While working at Rene's studio, Jerry taught me how to make handmade bezels for cabochon stones and then how to set them. I attempted to encourage Ann to set opaque stones in her designs. Ann was not initially keen on the idea, as she was afraid it would change the original look of her design into something else, where the stone would be the most prominent aspect of the work. I believed it actually complemented her designs. Since I had pieces made for myself from time to time, I would buy unusual stones from Jerry and ask Ann to make me a design that I could set the stone in. After working on enough of these pieces, she did become interested in the look of her designs that incorporated stones. For a while we made one-of-a-kind designs with a variety of unusual stones like watermelon tourmaline, chrysophase, and Louisiana petrified palm wood. Sometimes when customers came to



Above: A pair of silver earrings from the collection of Connie Gamble. The earring on the left was photographed with the removable clutch pin.

the shop they would peruse Jerry's stone collection, fall in love with a particular stone, and ask Ann to design whatever they were looking for around that stone. It was an era of experimentation in Ann's jewelry. Rene would sometimes set faceted stones in Ann's jewelry which gave another interesting look to her designs.

One of the most important aspects to Ann concerning the look of her jewelry was the finish on the metal. It had to be as brilliantly shiny as possible. Sometimes I would polish and polish a piece only to have Ann inspect it and point out to me a fault called fire scale. I can't tell you how long it took me to recognize fire scale on a design. Fire scale can occur when the metal gets too hot in one or more spots during the soldering process. It is a type of darkened, blighted area that is usually small and therefore difficult to identify and remove. The majority of customers would probably never notice it on their purchase unless they let the piece tarnish badly, as the fire scale would then become more apparent. Ann would never let a piece sell if it had one iota of fire scale or anything else on it.

This attention to detail was paramount to her. The intense sheen of the metal was another dimension of quality that further enhanced the designs. If the silver or gold has an exquisite shine, it actually draws the eye to the design first. To see a whole display of Ann's jewelry with its finish in bright light was spectacular. Learning how to appreciate this finish became one of my standards for judging other jewelers' works. By and large, Ann's finish was the ultimate.

When Ann and I started working together we did a lot of outdoor shows at art and craft festivals. Very often it went very well. Enough times, though, the experience was horrible. There was a craft show in Baton Rouge where we were caught in an absolute deluge, had no sales and an entirely wasted day. After that Ann made one of her absolute decisions that we were no longer going to do outdoor shows no matter how important they were in stature. With Ann's selling skills her decision worked out well. She pursued more wholesale shows and was able to acquire a variety of shops and she also sold "retail only" at indoor festivals.



Left: A silver hair comb with stone from the collection of Connie Gamble. Gamble was worked with O'Brien for many years and collected many outstanding pieces.



Right: A very unusual bracelet created in the modular style from the collection of Connie Gamble.

Unfortunately, from time to time, because of the worsening economy Ann couldn't afford to have an apprentice and would have to let me go. I would work for another jeweler who didn't work in gold or silver, and therefore had a lower overhead than she did.

When times improved Ann would call me back to work again. It was just like riding a bicycle. You don't forget; you just pick up where you left off.

Ann was always creating new pieces – lots of new whimsical bubble blowers, new Christmas ornaments, initial jewelry and, of course, new and different designs in hearts. She was also making incredibly beautiful serving pieces like cake servers. My guests always comment on my unique tomato server that Ann made for me.

Ann was always very generous with me as her apprentice and her friend. Every Christmas she would give me a great piece in gold in a design she knew I loved, or she would make me something custom out of an interest of mine, like the birthday gift of a 14k gold fan pin, since she knew I collected hand fans.

As I have mentioned before, Ann always made decisions very fast and very definite. She made the decision to divorce Jerry and that was it. He was out of the picture and Ann moved on. After Jerry left we made fewer and fewer designs with

stones unless there was a custom request or if Ann bought a particularly beautiful stone.

Sometime later, there was a dance that Ann went to at which she spent most of the night dancing with her artist friend John Preble, whom she knew since the early seventies. Though they had been friends for a long time, this dance made quite a different impression of John on her than ever before. I remember the next day at work Ann talked incessantly about how much fun she had with John and what a good dancer he was. I had never heard Ann talk like this about any man, and knowing her the way I did, I just knew something was fixing to happen. And very soon, at my house, the romance started. They were just so silly together and anyone could see they were headed to be together. John really encouraged Ann's wacky side and Ann really relaxed John's extremely wacky side. It was a great match, and the two soon married. This time I was Ann's Matron of Honor and artist John Hodge was John's Best Man.

John Preble, always an artist, and such a jack-of-all-trades, had been renovating a small house in Abita Springs that Ann and John moved into.

Soon Ann and John created a whole new business: investing and selling real estate. Ann kept track of all the paperwork and John did the renovation. They sold the little house in Abita and



moved into their present home, which was much larger, with a small building that became her jewelry studio. There I continued to work for Ann for many more years.

The picture of the studio in this book does not do it justice. It had infinite charm, with sunlight coming in all directions, perfect for stirring the creative mind while soothing the frustration of bringing that design to fruition. It was the perfect studio for Ann. There was plenty of room for all of the jewelry equipment, with additional room to grow. With all the glass surrounding us we had a great view of any approaching customers so we could get prepared. We did a fair number of experiments there, like gold plating the silver. In a sagging economy Ann was trying to give the look of gold jewelry while endeavoring to keep the cost of the piece more affordable. Customers liked gold-plated pieces because the jewelry could be large but affordable. Ann's 14k gold work was almost always smaller because of the price of the gold wire.

Ann's creativity was always expanding even past making jewelry, although she never tired of making her known production pieces. In conjunction with her good friend John Hodge, who made incredible hand painted and Raku pottery, Ann twisted sterling silver wire into a number of designs to create "frogs" (a device to hold flowers for flower arranging) that fit the opening on top of the pottery vase to arrange flowers in. Ann made it look so easy, as she did making all of her designs. But indeed, none of her designs were easy, especially the frogs for vases. With the frogs, the construction had to be symmetrical enough that when you put flowers in the vase all the openings had to be equal to each other, or the flower arrangement would be askew. The diameter of the frog had to relate exactly to the vase opening or



Top: A pair of silver barrettes from the collection of Connie Gamble. These barrettes were created using the modular method construction.

Bottom: A silver pendant with a stone from the Connie Gamble collection.



Above: An unusual silver bracelet from the collection of Connie Gamble. This is not a common piece of O'Brien jewelry. Its simple twisted shape illustrates the jeweler's sophisticated eye and elegant sense of design.

it would not work. The feet of the frog that held it in place had to be soldered at just the right points on the frog. I helped Ann make many of these, and I can tell you that she never had to redo them or fiddle with the design with any difficulty. It had the feeling of magic, as if she had been making these frogs from the beginning of her jewelry business. I wish I could express to you how unique and gorgeous these pieces were. Working with these two artists and sharing their inspiration was a joy. Again, the photo in this book doesn't convey what holding it in your hand would. My only real regret while working for Ann is that I never purchased one of these. I really thought she and John Hodge would always be making them but Ann felt they were too time consuming for the price she had to charge.

In addition to running a full-time business along with real estate endeavors, Ann and John also raised their two sons, Andrew and William. She told me once that she enjoyed being a mother more than she ever imagined she would. In addition, she and John got very involved with the town of Abita Springs as civic leaders as well. They created the

UCM Museum, one of the most unusual of places, which drew people from all over the country and greatly enhanced the town of Abita Springs. There is no way you could take the tour of the UCM and not have your spirits lifted.

Ann's hand can also be seen in Abita Springs every Christmas season, as she made very large lighted stars that hung in town along the main street. They were beautiful.

I could write so much about Ann because there is so much more to this very talented, energetic and creative woman. She has been an important part not only of my life, but of so many others' also. When Ann was in the hospital it was astonishing how many people came to visit and sent her gifts. Sometimes the hospital room was so full it was like the college antics you see with how many people can get into a phone booth. It was standing room only.

Just imagine if Ann had not taken the time to draw and describe all of her designs in her *Master Book of Designs*. The only way anyone could see and appreciate Ann's many pieces would be to see them on someone who had purchased them, and a lot

Left: A pair of large free-form silver earrings from the collection of Connie Gamble.

Bottom: A sketch of a free-form design from O'Brien's *Master Book of Designs*.



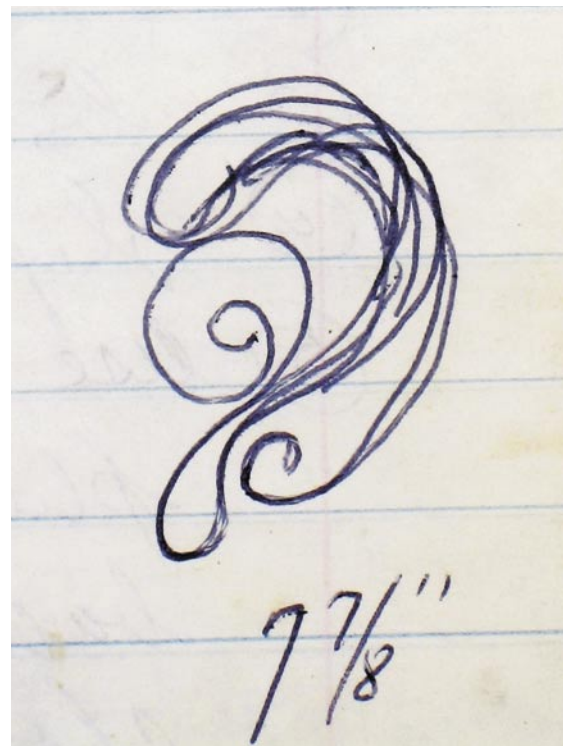
of these pieces are on people all over the country. How smart she was! It was as if she made her own history of her creativity before this book was ever conceived. I don't know of any jeweler who has their work so systematically categorized. It has enabled her latest apprentice, Nancy Ashworth, to continue her many designs.

I miss Ann terribly, but like John has told me, if anyone had a truly successful life, it was Ann. She had a husband and two sons that she loved dearly, a very inspiring and profitable business that she never tired of and that expressed her artistic talent every day since its beginning. The number of family and good friends who cared about her was incalculable. What else in life could anyone ask for?

John told me one day that a few weeks before Ann passed away, she told him that she was not afraid to die, and that she believed she would go to heaven, and that she would see her grandmother Carmen Marechal there.

I'm sure wherever Ann is, she is having a good time and doing good things. She surely made her own indelible mark in this life. I loved her.

– Connie Gamble



Bracelets



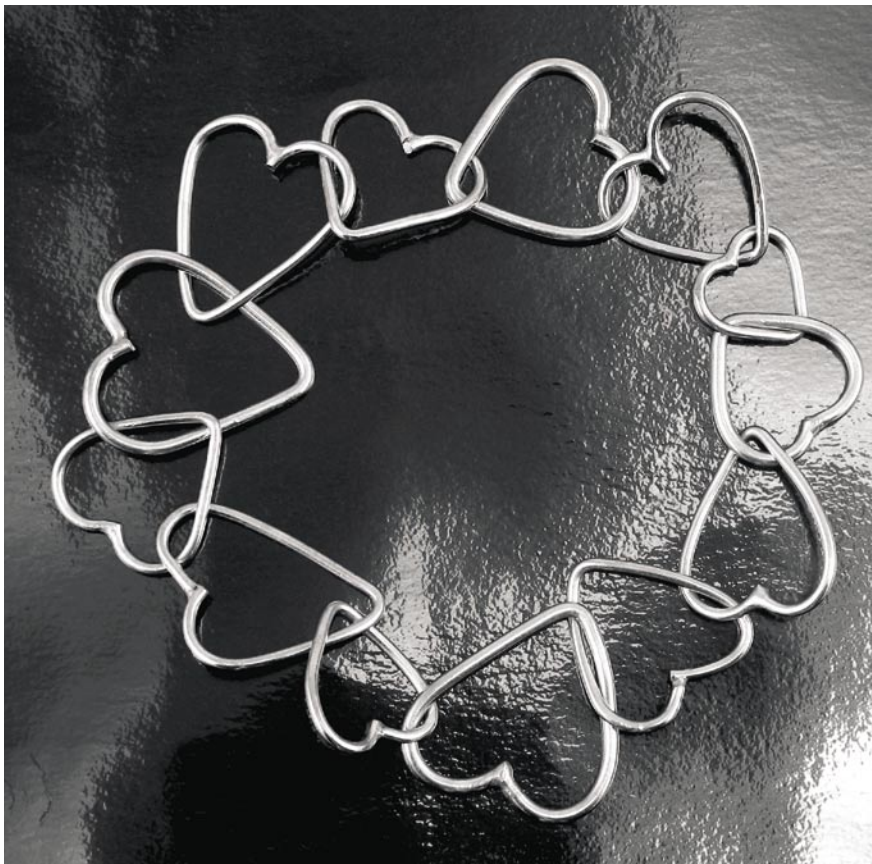
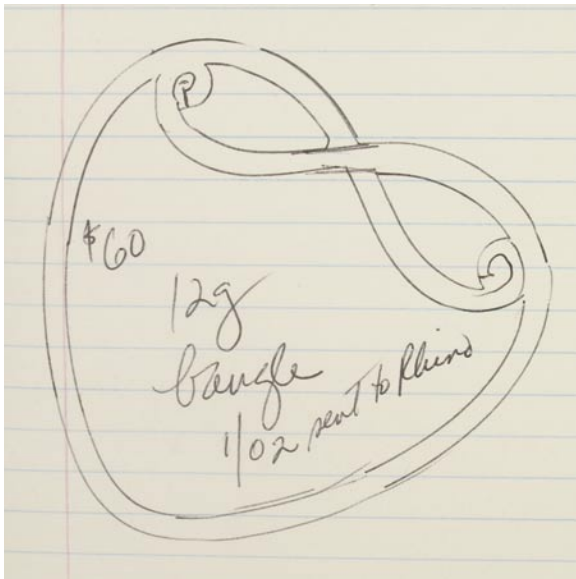


Above Right: A large silver free-form cuff bracelet. Free-form bracelets were very popular, and O'Brien made many different versions.

Opposite Top: A beautiful silver and gold "bracketed free-form" bracelet. This bracelet was also very popular and also one of the most expensive items to sell from the Abita Springs Studio. There were several different styles of this bracelet – they were created by inserting different designs in the brackets.

Opposite Bottom: A gold triangular swirl bracelet. This design, the triangular swirl, was one of O'Brien's favorites. It came into the studio years after the simple swirl design. Collectors of her work consider this design important because it exhibits O'Brien's interest and ability to "push the envelope" of "line" by taking the simple swirl and articulating it into her own design.

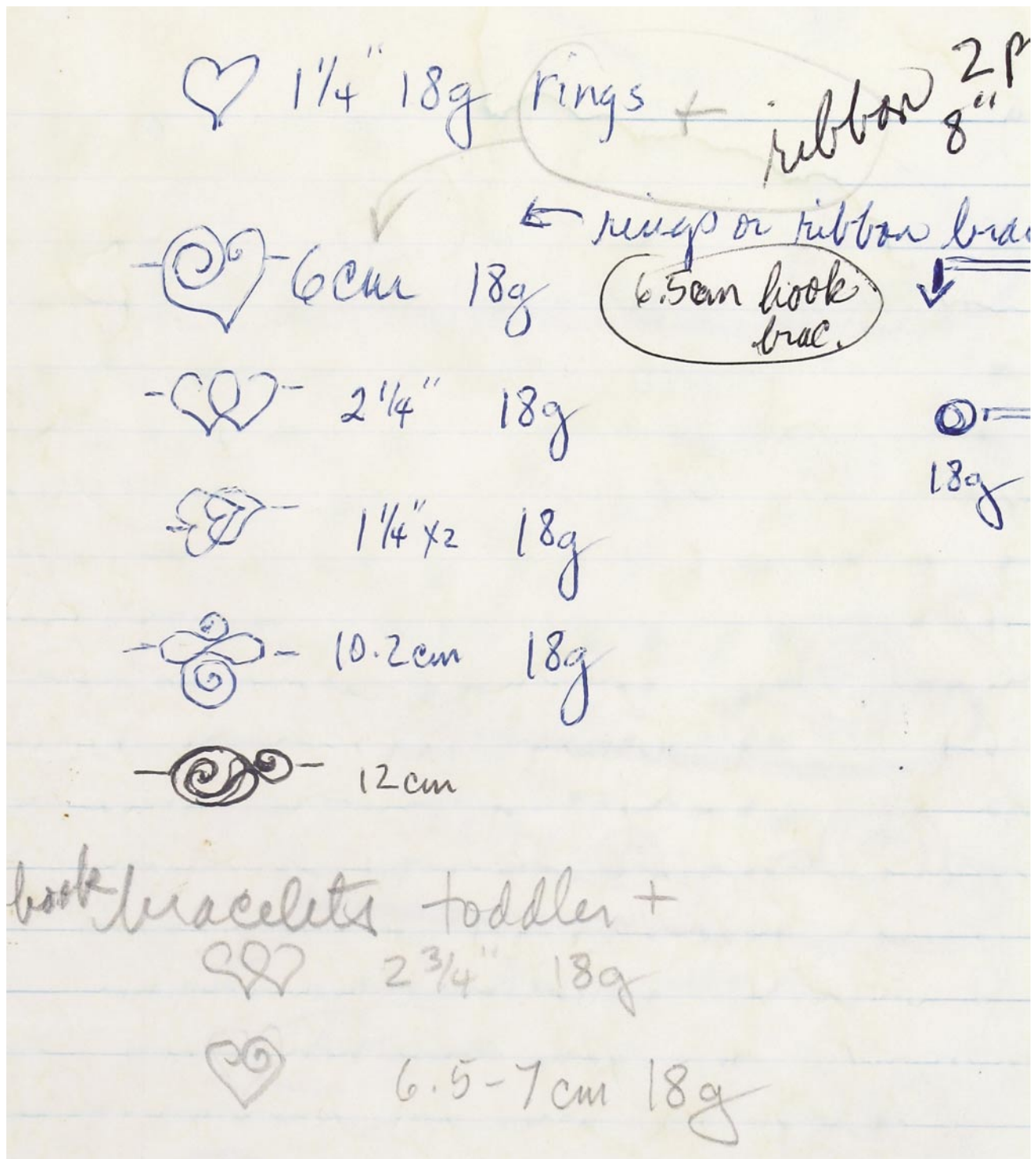




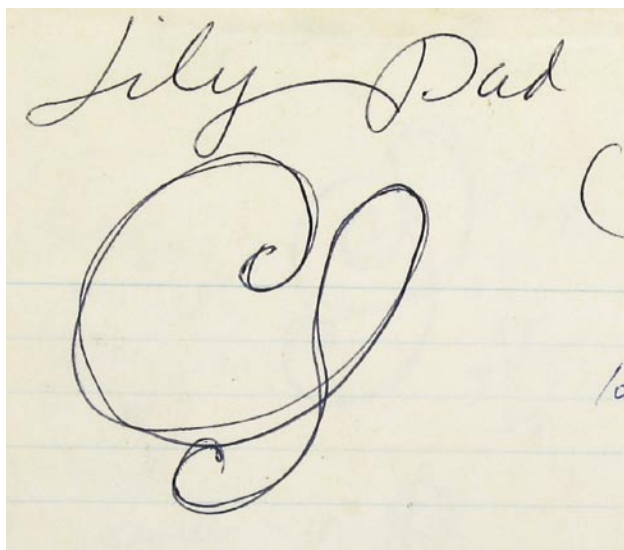
Above Left: From the *Master Book of Designs*, a tracing of the O'Brien heart bangle. The note on the page indicates the piece was sent to Rhino, a co-op New Orleans craft gallery. O'Brien was a long-time participant in this gallery.

Above Right: A silver heart bangle, circa 2002. Late in her career, the pieces with the "simple" lines became some of O'Brien's favorites.

Bottom: A silver link bracelet. An unusual bracelet attributed to O'Brien.



Above: Sketches of baby bracelets from the *Master Book of Designs*. The baby bracelets were a popular seller; O'Brien also created mother and daughter bracelet sets. Some baby bracelets were sold with an attached pink ribbon that helped secure the bracelet to the child. O'Brien sometimes made pieces that were inspired more by emotional challenges than design challenges. The heart motif was a design that O'Brien found rewarding both for herself and her collectors. Her heart bracelet was also popular as a child's bracelet. O'Brien used the heart motif singularly and in multiples.



Herman Mhire, artist, wrote these comments about O'Brien's jewelry.

Inspired by a line at once lyrical and whimsical, Ann O'Brien transformed silver and gold wire into exquisite earrings, neck wires, bracelets, rings, forks, spoons and servers. She translated forms found in nature into exquisite objects destined to enhance the human body.

While she achieved a mesmerizing stasis through the extensive use of symmetry in many of her designs (pages 13, 17, 72, 96), Ann also employed asymmetry in her free-form work, directing energized patterns in one direction or another (pages 46 top, 70, 78).

In her neck wires for example, silver wire progresses from a starting point along a single, gently curving path to a destination that is highly energized, taking the viewer on a roller coaster ride of graceful twists and turns (pages 71, 75).

Ann's *Master Book of Designs* reveals visual ideas she unconsciously shared with, and inherited from, cultures around the world - a universal language of patterns, signs and symbols. While an obvious comparison can be drawn to Art Nouveau (pages 48, 53 top, 62, 64, 70, 71, 94), surprising comparisons can be made to the linear energy found in the paintings of Brice Marden (pages 46 top, 43 bottom, 101), the surreal, somewhat anthropomorphic images of Joan Miro (pages 51 top, 57, 86, 88), the cut, sheet-metal pictures of Haiti (page 16), the drawings of Walter Anderson (pages 9, 53 bottom, 55 top, 66), and the lacelike ironwork balcony railings of New Orleans' French Quarter.

Regardless of the piece Ann was working on, she was always conscious of positive/negative spatial relationships (page 13). She created rhythmical patterns with great clarity that echo like ripples in a pond. Like a master composer exploring variations on a melody, Ann explored variations on visual themes (page 83). – *Herman Mhire, artist*

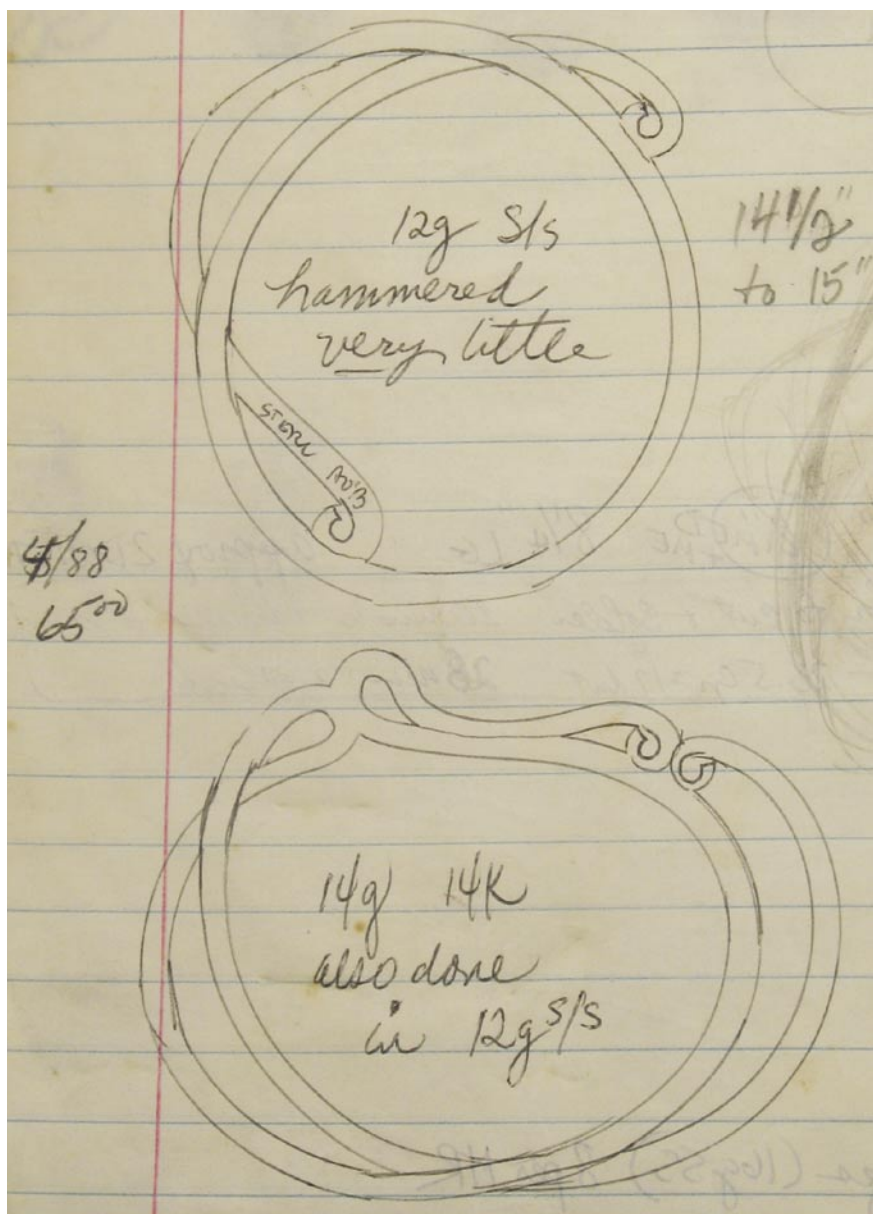
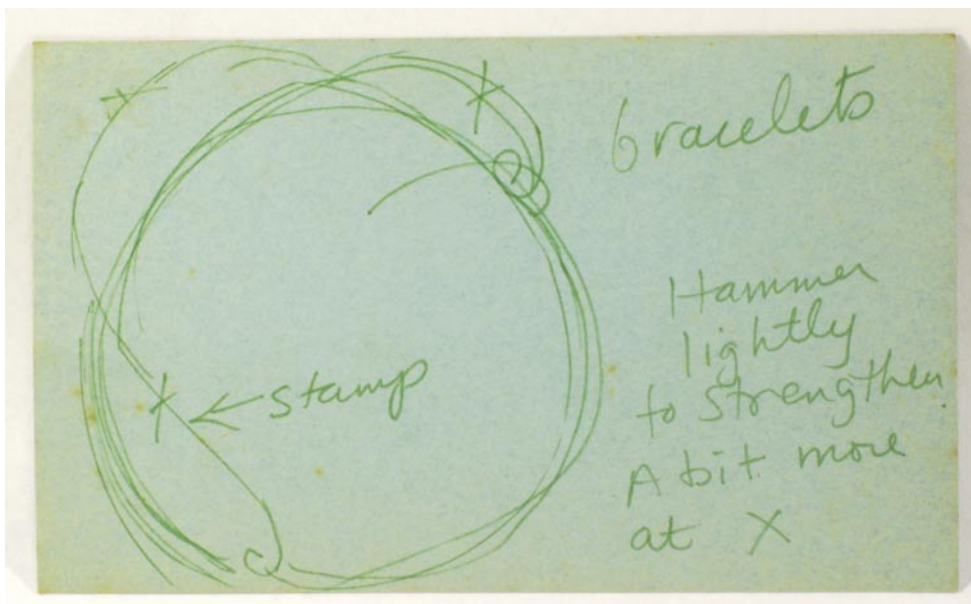


Opposite Top: A drawing of the “Lily Pad” from O’Brien’s *Master Book of Designs*. In the studio this design was also called the “knot.”

Opposite Bottom: A silver “Lily Pad” hook bracelet. O’Brien made many pieces of jewelry using this graceful design; the pieces included: bracelets, hair pieces, pins, pendants, and earrings. Many admirers of O’Brien’s jewelry believe that this design that came late in her career expresses her incredible “gift of line.” The studio continues to hand craft this popular design.

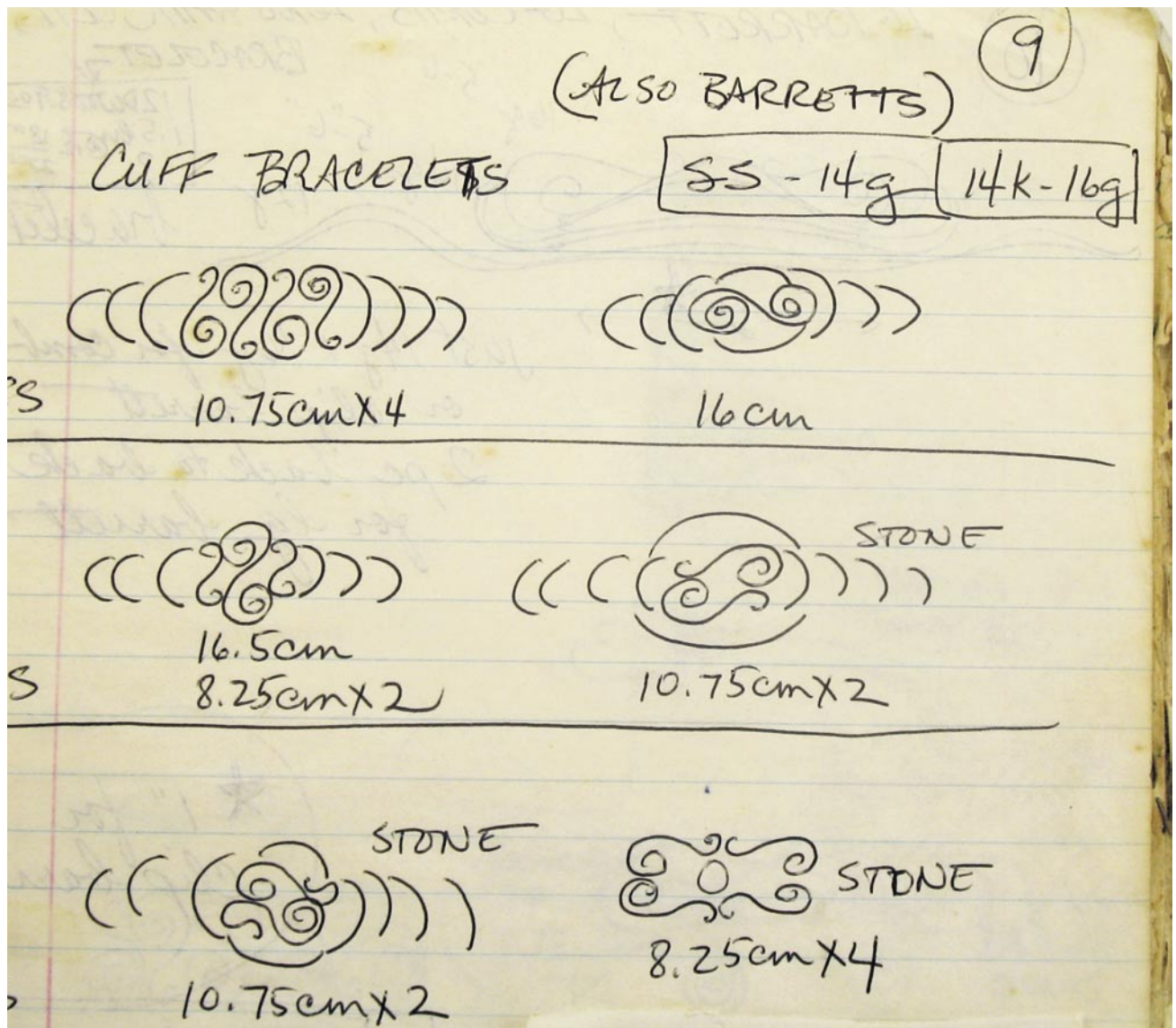
Top: A silver free-form cuff bracelet with stone. Circa early 1980’s. A beautiful example of a free-form design incorporating a large set stone. Late in O’Brien’s career pieces with set stones were rarely made.

Bottom: A silver free-form hook bracelet. This was a popular design that was produced for many years and is still in production.



Above: A sketch on an old 3x5 card. The finished bangle was later traced on the page below.

Left: From the *Master Book of Designs*, two tracings of a pair of wire bangles. The "12g" refers to the gauge of wire. The "14K" refers to 14k gold. The "S/S" refers to sterling silver. The "14 1/2"



Above: Sketches of modular bracelets from O'Brien's *Master Book of Designs*. Many of these designs date back to O'Brien's earliest jewelry-making days. Note that the designs could also be used as barrettes.

Right: A silver bangle bracelet. This attractive piece was an unusual design from the O'Brien studio.

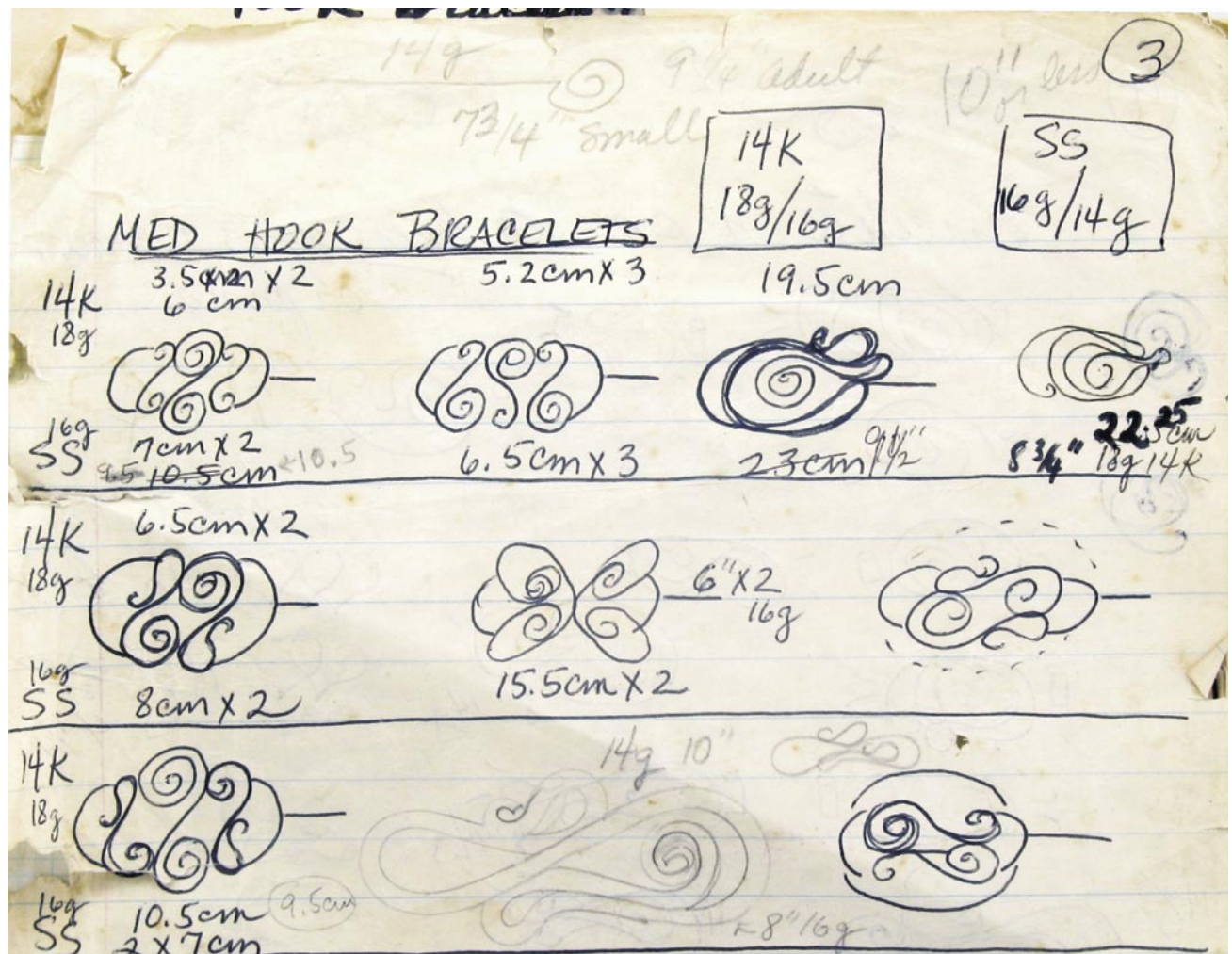




Top: A medium silver hook free-form bracelet. One of O'Brien's most popular designs from the Abita Springs studio.

Center: A silver hook bracelet. Hook bracelets were always popular sellers. This twisted wire design was called the "angel" design because it looked like an angel.

Bottom: A medium silver cuff bracelet. A simple design based on the "angel" motif and augmented by silver "C's" to complete the cuff.



Above: Sketches of bracelets from the *Master Book of Designs*. Some of these same designs were the foundation for hair pieces, and on a smaller scale, for rings.

Right: A silver free-form bracelet. This piece features a free-form design finished with seven "C's" to make a cuff bracelet.



Hair Pieces

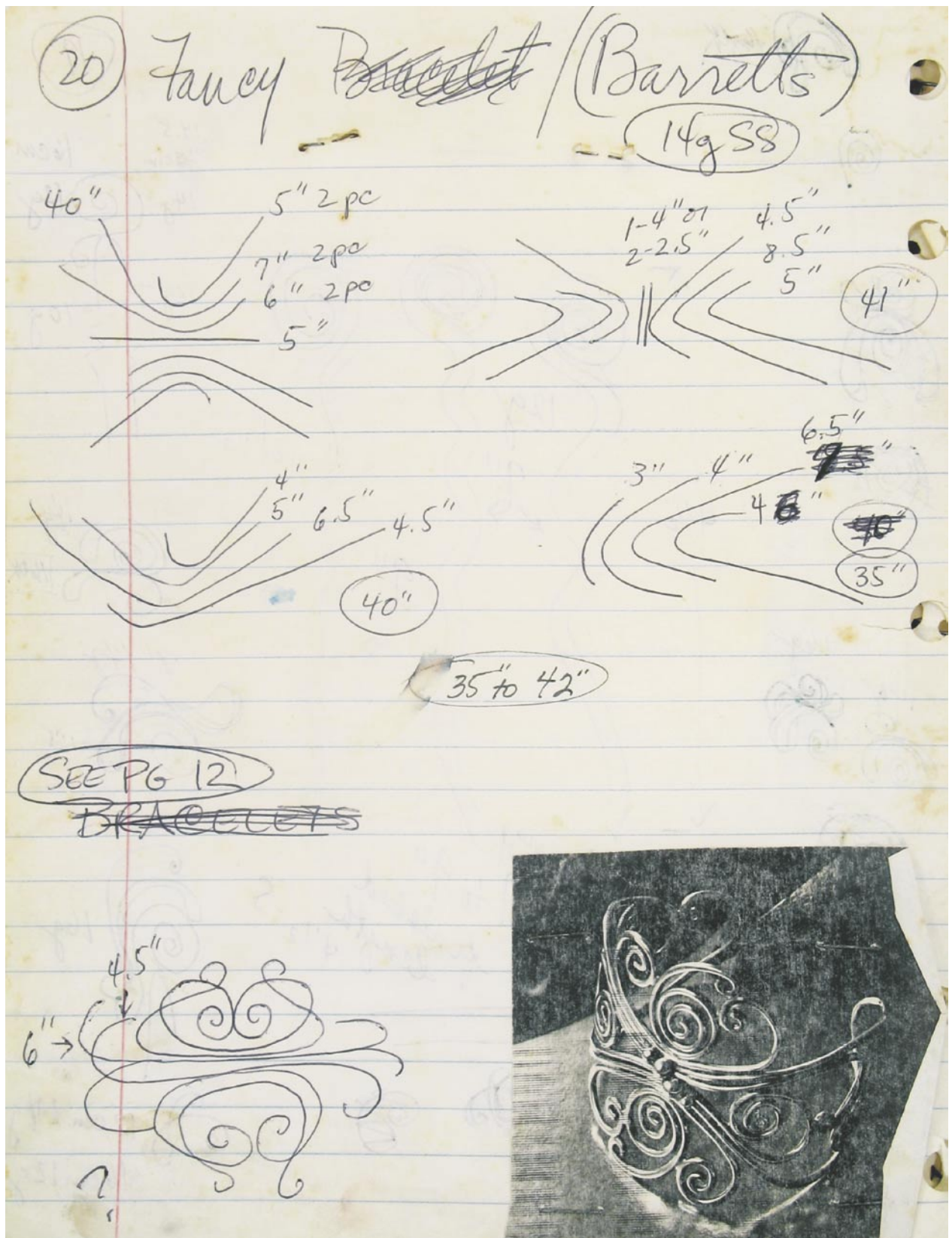


The “Artist’s Statement” below was written by O’Brien on January 12, 1992.

To briefly classify my art, I would say that my techniques are traditional, my designs are original. Each piece is individually constructed from sterling silver or gold wire. My raw materials are coils of precious metal wire in assorted gauges, and some commercial findings, such as earring posts and nuts, pin catches, etc. The hand tools I use include needle nose pliers for bending, twisting and shaping the wire, and hammers, anvils, mandrels, and files for further shaping and forming. I use natural gas and oxygen with a jeweler’s torch for soldering. To finish, I first clean up with various sand papers and needle files. I then take each piece through four stages of polishing, first tumbling each piece in steel shot, then using three different polishes on buffing

wheels with an electric polishing motor. I employ one person part-time who does some hammering and a lot of polishing and bookkeeping.

I keep a notebook where I record both details for executing past designs, such as the length of wire needed to create a certain shape, and ideas for future constructions. I can use this notebook to plan a new piece or to copy a successful older piece. Generally I do not plan very tightly. I like having artistic decisions to make throughout the process of constructing a piece. Some people have suggested that they see influences in my work such as Celtic, Islamic, Japanese, or Art Nouveau. While I am familiar with these styles, I usually only see the relatedness after the fact. I do not consciously draw ideas from any one style or place. I enjoy linear designs. – Ann O’Brien

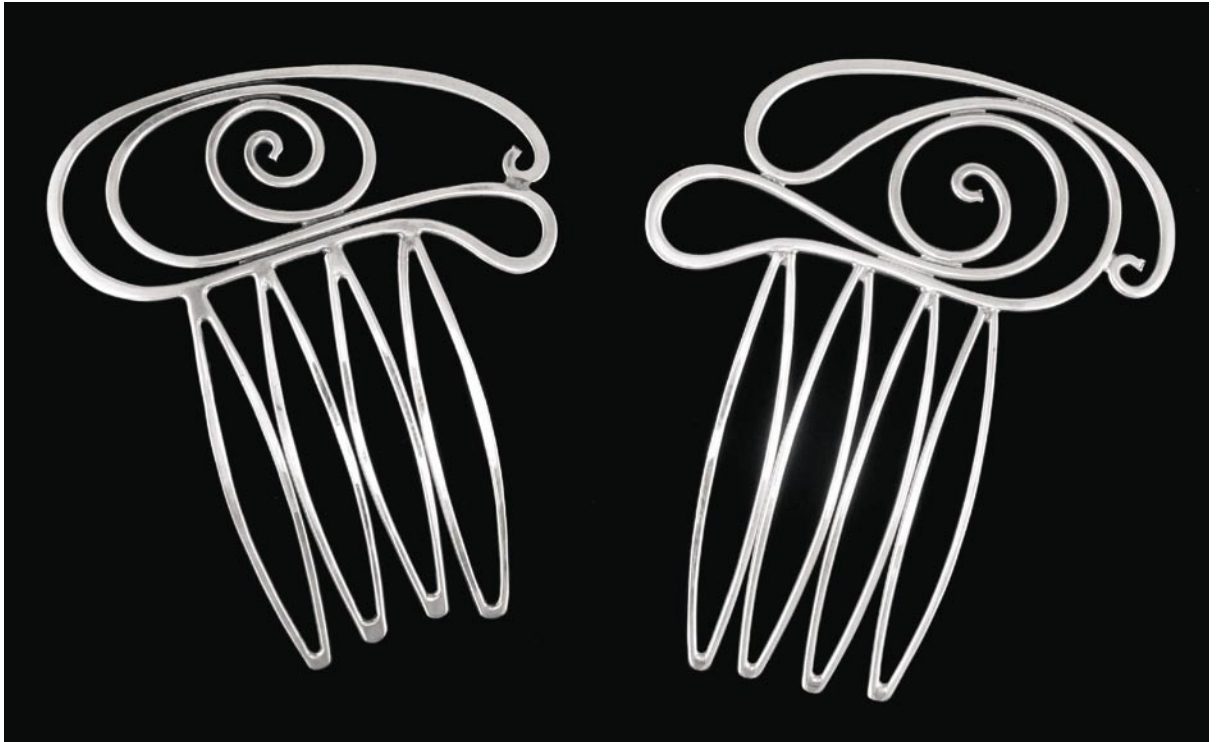


Opposite: A large free-form silver barrette. This was one of O'Brien's masterpieces created with a single piece of wire. This piece illustrates her concept of visualizing the wire as a piece of ribbon.

Above: A page from O'Brien's *Master Book of Designs* illustrating her "spider" technique of creating her pieces. O'Brien was an excellent speller, and her mother was a popular English teacher; thus the misspelling of the word "barrettes" at the top of the page is a surprise.

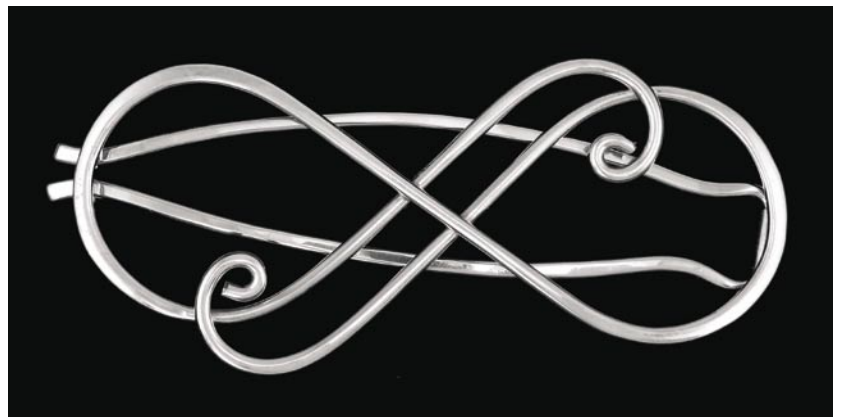


Above: A wonderfully complicated page from the *Master Book of Designs*. This page of drawings and photocopies of “jewelry for the hair” seems to be a work of art in itself.

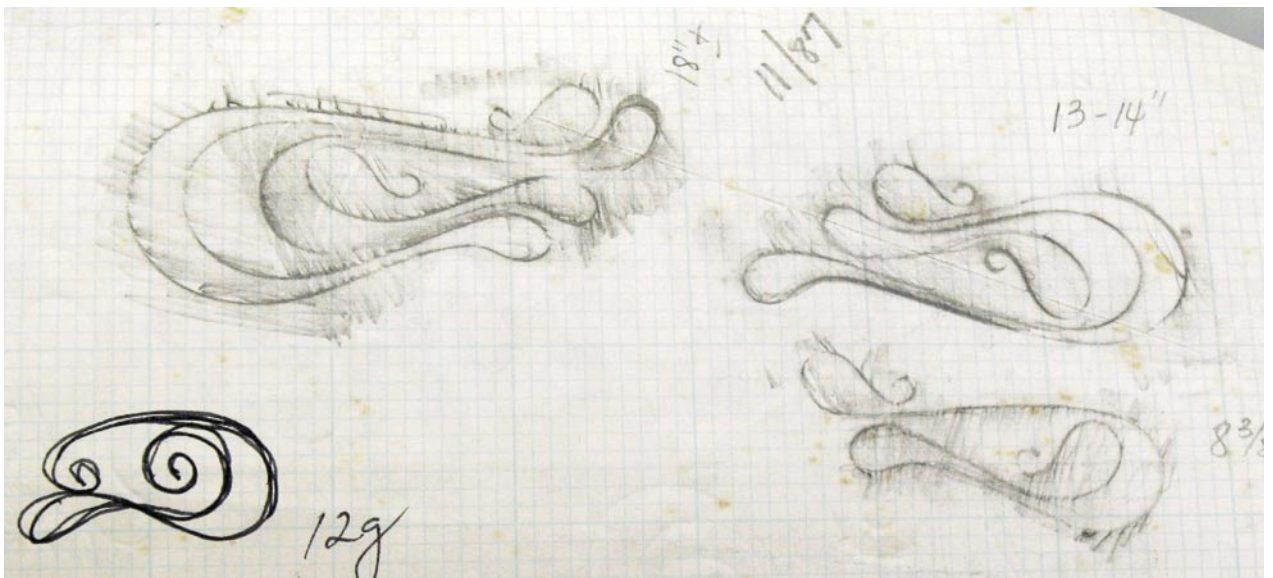


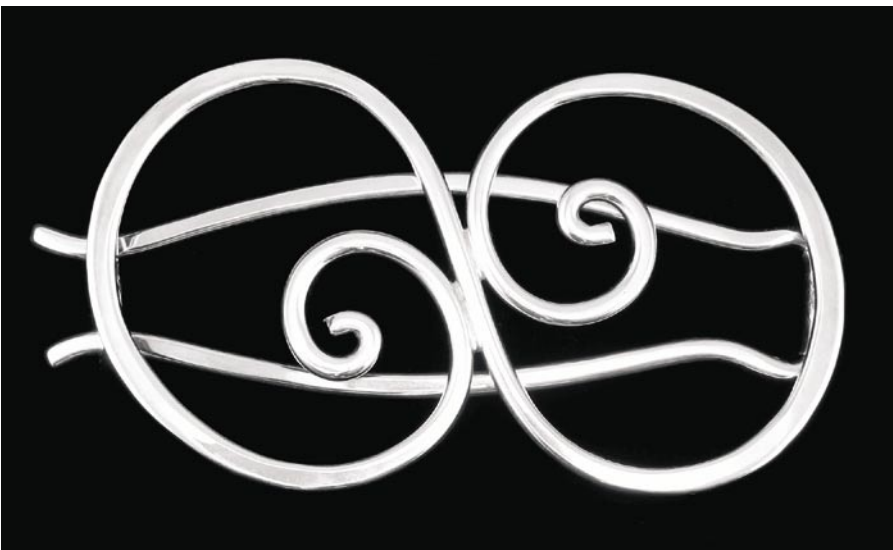
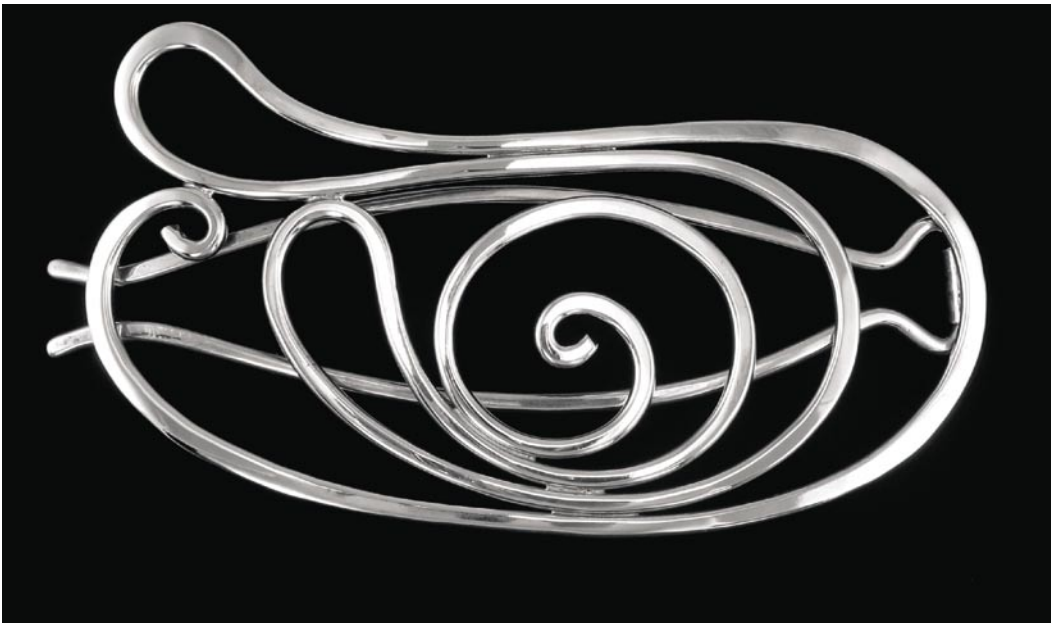
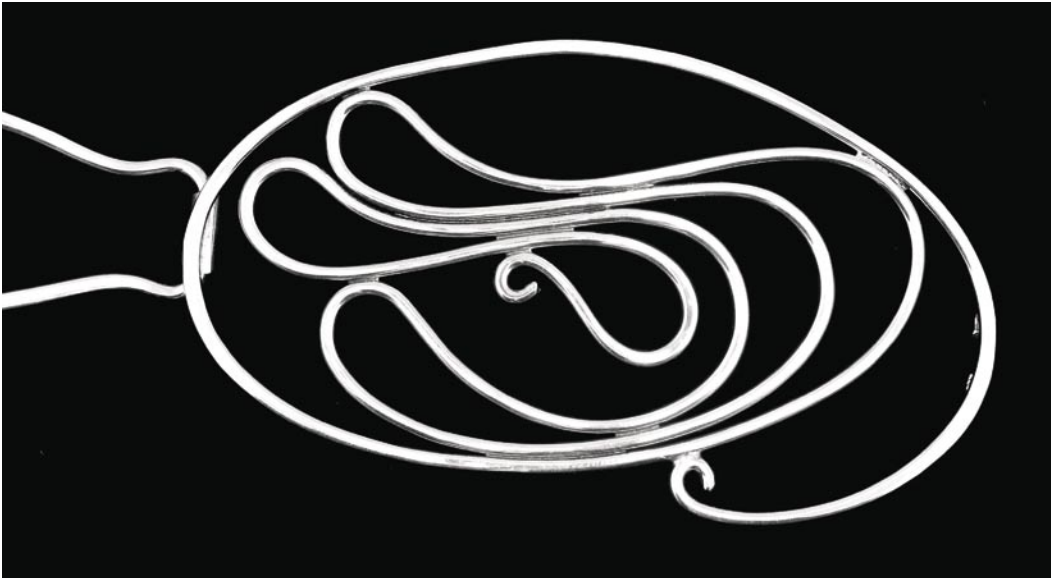
Above: A pair of silver barrettes. Barrettes were made from O'Brien's earliest days of jewelry making. These free-form pieces were well-designed and were very popular.

Right: A silver hair clip. This unusual hair clip features a truly beautiful design. It is masterfully created using one single piece of wire.



Bottom: Pencil rubbings dated November, 1987.





Above: A large free-form silver hair clip. A popular design that exhibited O'Brien's "gift of line."

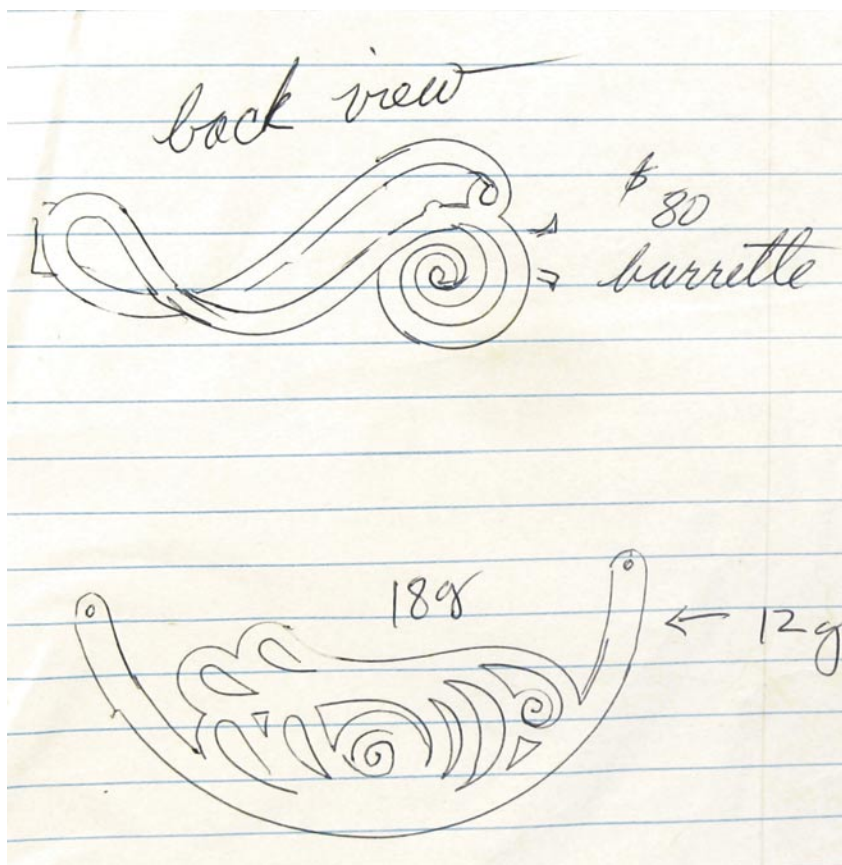
Center: A large free-form silver hair clip. Another popular design that again exhibits O'Brien's ability with a single piece of wire.

Bottom: A medium size silver hair clip. A simple design beautifully executed.



Top: A large silver hair barrette with a polished stone set in a bezel. This outstanding piece from the collection of Margareta Lahme is truly a work of art. Lahme designed and made cotton clothes and often traded with O'Brien.

Bottom: A silver bracketed hair clip with three free-form designs. In this design the free-form pieces are used as a decorative pattern for the total piece; this adds a formality to the overall design.



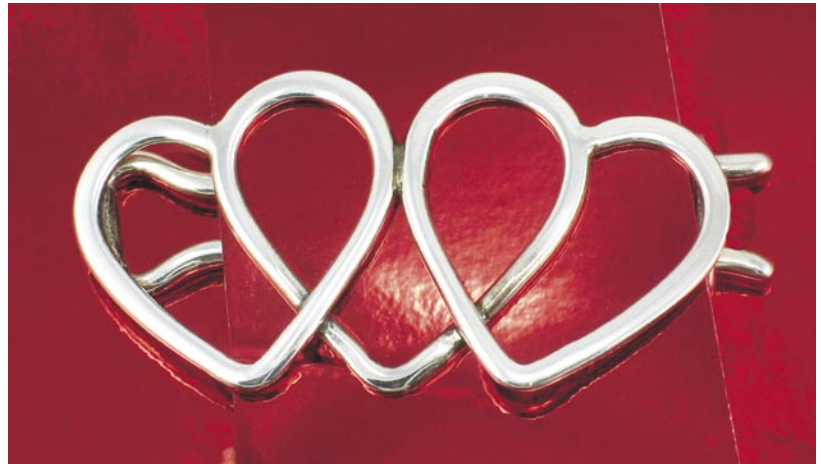
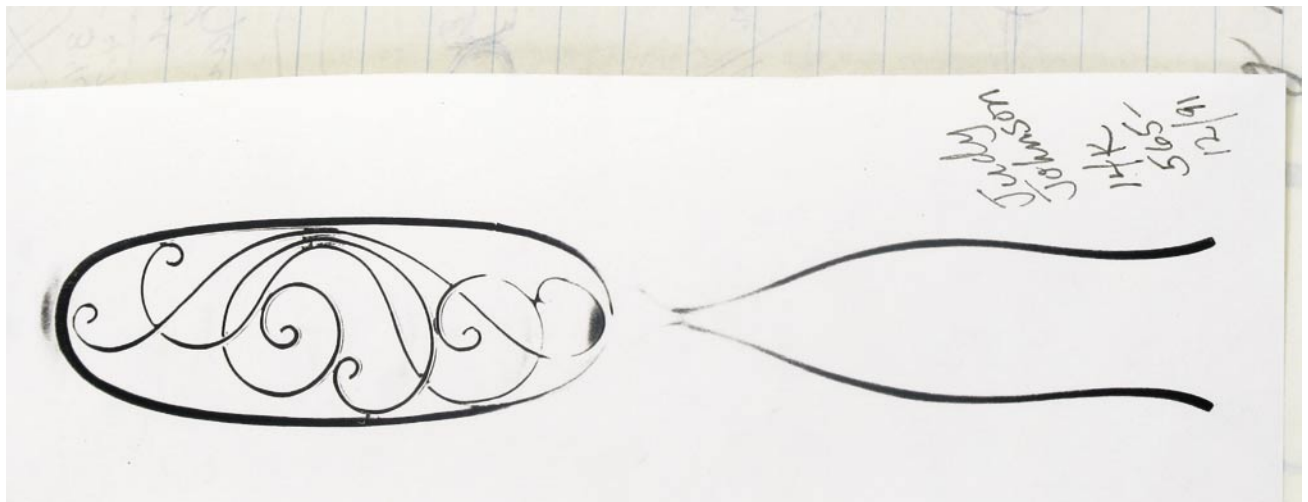
Top: Two tracings from the *Master Book of Designs*. After O'Brien finished a piece she liked, she would often trace the piece with pencil onto a page in her spiral-bound book. The tracing at the top is for a barrette or hair clip. Note the two marks on the right of the piece that represent the stubs where the two clip wires would meet the body to hold the wearer's hair. The hinge for the clip wires is on the left. The tracing at the bottom is of an unusual pendant to be worn with her specially designed necklace.

Bottom: A silver free-form barrette. O'Brien made this type of barrette, using the zigzag pins early in her career, and later she replaced the zigzag pins with a group of eclipse wire shapes.

Opposite Top: A printed copy of an unusual barrette design from the *Master Book of Designs*. This design was unusual for O'Brien, and original pieces are very rare.

Opposite Bottom Left: A silver swirl barrette. Although the swirl was a common design in the studio, swirl barrettes were not made often.

Opposite Bottom Right: A silver triple-heart barrette. O'Brien made designs with hearts throughout her career.

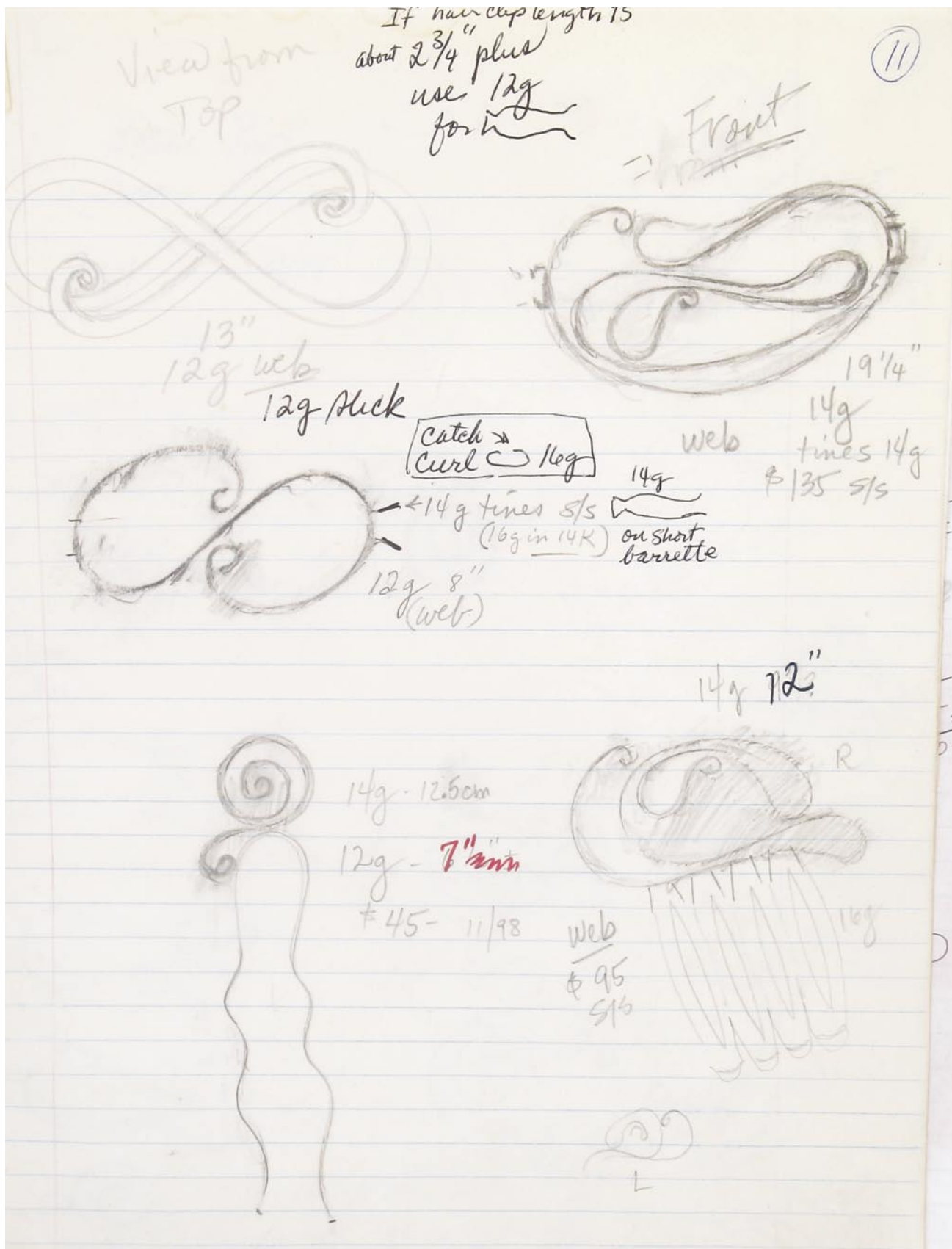


Mary Pramuk of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, remembers this story about O'Brien's early craft fair days.

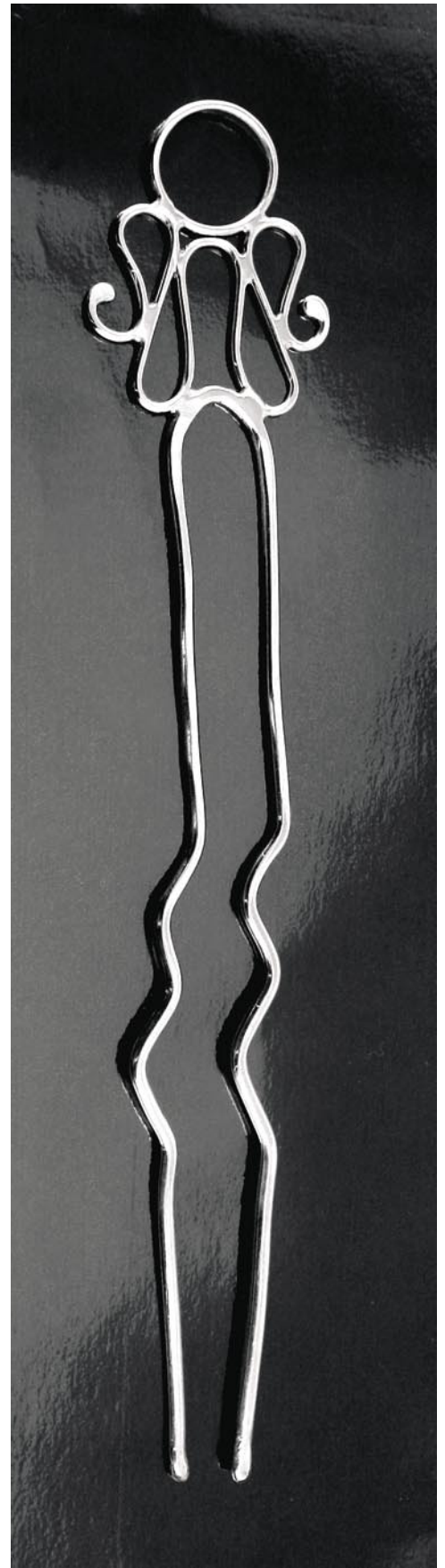
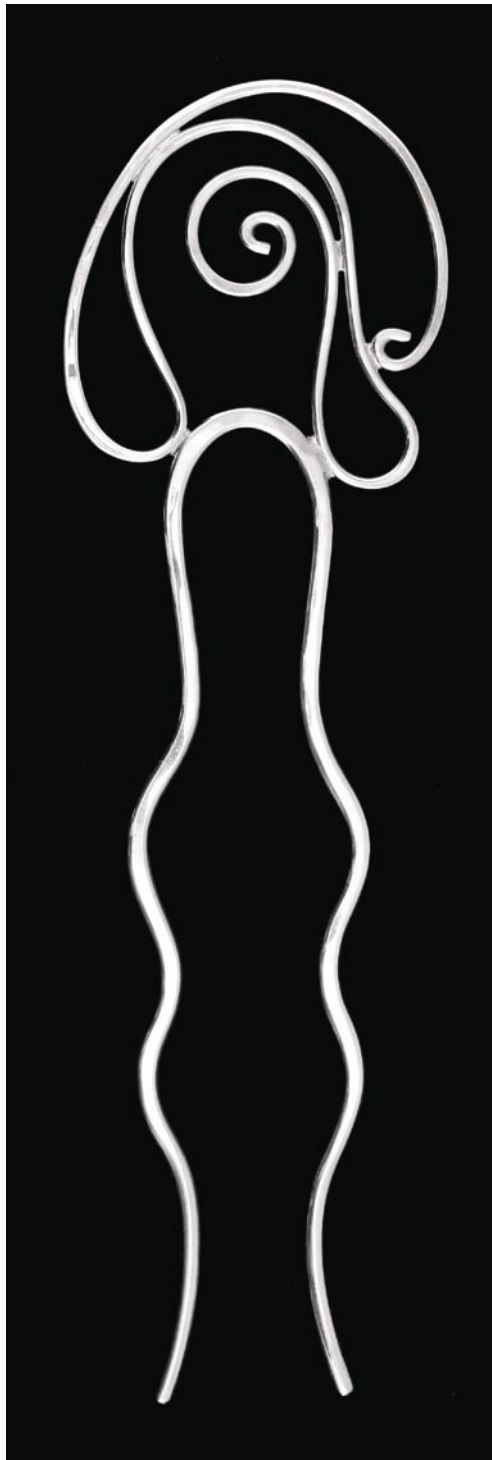
I remember once we saw Ann at a craft fair in New Orleans where she was selling her jewelry. She had spread her jewelry out on an Indian bedspread, which was her display. My husband Edward and I knew Ann because she was an LSU art student where Edward was teaching. We had driven in from Baton Rouge for the day with our two young daughters, Clare and Andrea, to enjoy the city and the craft show. Well, as the day was winding down and we were preparing to leave, Ann asked us for a ride back to Baton Rouge. I am not sure why she didn't have a ride back home; maybe she just got a ride one way and figured she would

meet someone heading back to Baton Rouge. That was typical of college students during those times I guess.

Well, we had a big American-made sedan, so she was able to fit comfortably in the back seat with the two girls as we rode back home. It was a good hour's drive, and while we were driving, Ann took out her brass wire and pliers and created a bracelet for each of my daughters. Of course, she may have done it as sort of her way to pay us back for the ride. Clare and Andrea, sitting with Ann in the back seat, were thrilled to watch her make their individual bracelets. They still have those wonderful pieces. I will never forget it and I know the girls remember it also. It was so nice of her.



Above: A page from the *Master Book of Designs*. O'Brien's hair pieces were always popular, and she was always creating new designs. Creating new designs was of course the artist's choice, desire, and perhaps "need." Her jewelry designs were never "market driven."



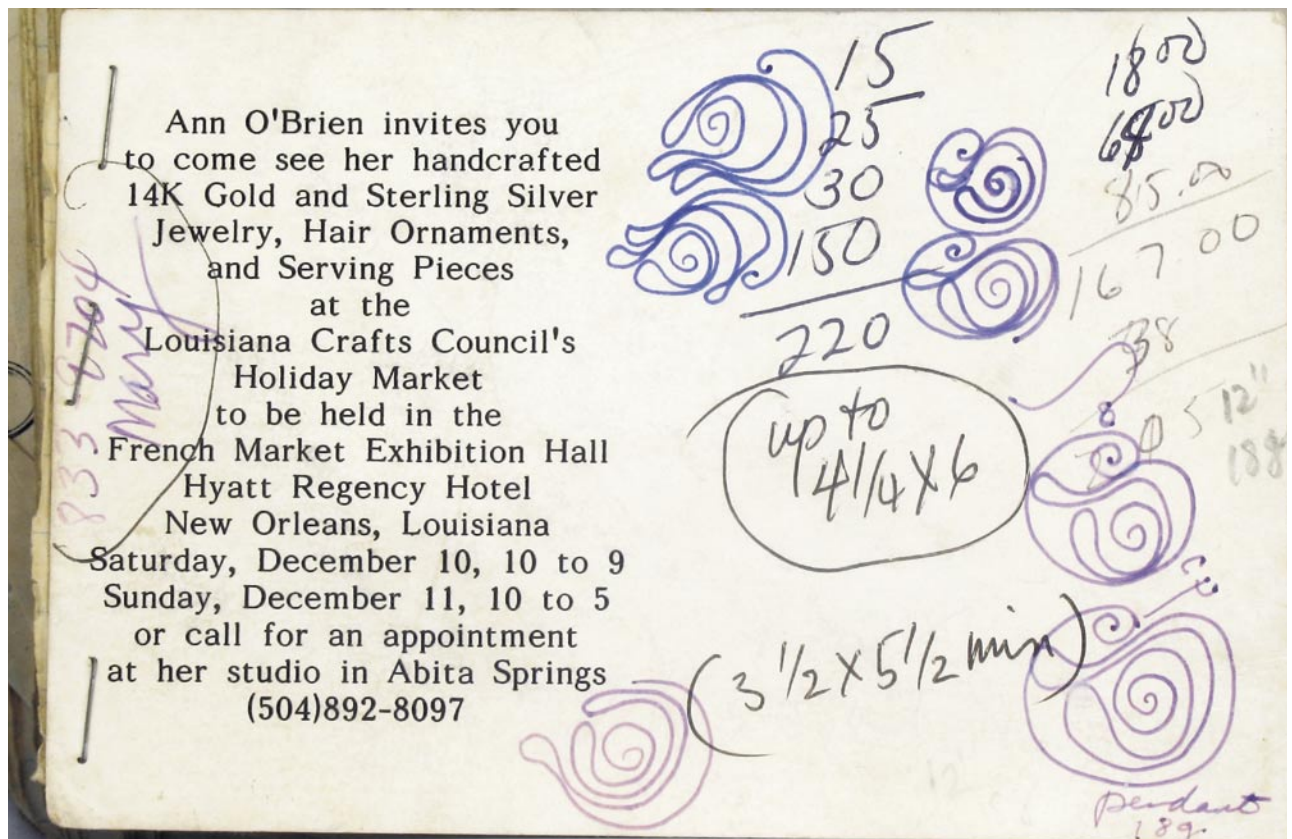
Above and Right: Silver hair pins. Hair pins were never big sellers, but O'Brien enjoyed making them and would always have some hair pins on display when she participated in craft shows. The hair pins were even made in the early "brass days."

Earrings



Top: Two pairs of silver earrings. The pair of dangling swirl earrings on the left are a popular O'Brien design. The pair on the right uses O'Brien's lily pad design with an ear-clip finding. O'Brien did not have pierced ears, and rarely wore earrings.

Bottom: A pair of large silver earrings. This pair of earrings was created late in O'Brien's career. The silver hoops overlap and frame an unusual symmetrical "twisty."



Above: Sketches on a New Orleans craft show invitation. O'Brien helped organize this 1983 event.

O'Brien participated in very few craft fairs. The only craft fair she attended regularly was the Chimneyville Crafts Festival in Jackson, Mississippi.

This annual December show is produced by the Craftsmen's Guild of Mississippi; she participated in this festival because it was indoors and she admired the Craftsmen's Guild's high standards of "exhibition." Jackson is about a three-hour drive north of Abita Springs, and O'Brien would often ride with Jayne DeMarcay to the crafts show. O'Brien enjoyed the camaraderie of the crafts-people in Jackson and always looked forward to seeing her friends at Chimneyville.

O'Brien bought and traded with many crafts-people at the show. Items she found at the festival wound up in her family's Christmas stockings and also on the shelves of the UCM Museum gift shop. Jackson is also the home of her friend and "business partner" Betty Hise. For many years, Hise hosted a trunk show of O'Brien's jewelry in her beautiful

home in Jackson, Mississippi.

Other craft shows O'Brien participated in include:

- Rhino Festival of Contemporary Crafts, New Orleans LA, 1987
- International Crafts Fair, Craftsmen's Guild of Mississippi, Biloxi MS, 1987, 1986, 1984
- Fall Crafts Festival, Arts & Humanities Council of Greater Baton Rouge, 1986, 1983
- The Fair at Dallas, American Craft Enterprises, Dallas TX, 1983
- 13th Annual Festival of American Artisans, Nashville TN, 1983
- Annual Christmas Fair, Louisiana Crafts Council, New Orleans LA, 1983 - 1981
- Summer Fair, Craftsmen's Guild of Mississippi, Jackson MS, 1982
- FestForAll, Arts & Humanities Council of Greater BR, Baton Rouge LA, 1982
- 9th Annual Great River Roads Craft Fair, Natchez MS, 1981



Above: A pair of silver fan shaped earrings. From the collection of Leesa Rupp who was once married to O'Brien's brother, Michael. Michael also made jewelry for a few years.

Below is a short résumé O'Brien used during the 1990's.

Ann O'Brien creates a line of sterling silver and 14k gold jewelry that includes hair ornaments and baby items, as well as the more usual bracelets, earrings, and pendants. Her design influences include New Orleans French Quarter ironwork, the organic and linear Art Nouveau and Celtic designs, along with many others ranging from the classical to the rococo.

Her work has appeared in national publications and is exhibited in craft shops and galleries across the country.

Except for time away traveling or studying, Ann has lived north of Lake Pontchartrain in western St. Tammany Parish since she was six years old. She grew up wading in the streams north of Covington and swimming until her skin turned blue in the cold artesian pools of Abita Springs, where she now lives with her husband, two sons, and several pets on four acres bounded by spring-fed creeks. Letting no water lap idyllically around their ankles, artist/husband John Preble and Ann

O'Brien have just opened the UCM Museum in Abita Springs. Three years and two lifetimes to develop, the museum is billed as Louisiana's most eccentric museum.

Professional artist and metalsmith Ann O'Brien has designed and crafted her original jewelry since she was a painting student in 1970. Describing herself as partially self taught, Ann earned a BFA in painting from LSU and has attended numerous workshops and seminars taught by nationally recognized metal workers. She is recognized as a Fellow by the Craftsmen's Guild of Mississippi, and is currently an exhibiting member of Rhino Contemporary Crafts Cooperative in New Orleans, the Louisiana Crafts Guild, and the Louisiana Crafts Program. Her work has appeared in national publications and is exhibited in craft shops and galleries across the country. With the lofty goal of preserving our culture by developing a pool of future art patrons, she also works as an artist-in-residence in the St. Tammany Parish schools.



The Attic Gallery in Vicksburg, Mississippi, sold O'Brien's work for many years. Owner Lesley Silver remembers the artist this way:

First there is that warm embracing smile followed by that voice that has a lilt and a sound like chimes being softly caressed by the wind – and then there is Ann. Ann always with dignity, always gliding without her feet touching the ground. It was always a mystery to me.

Spirals, tendrils, curves that made the silver seem malleable and soft and feminine. Having her jewelry at the Attic Gallery made our display more upscale in a subtle way. I loved having Ann's jewelry at our place because it was having a part of her there, and when you saw her work you saw her face.

– Lesley Silver

Top: A pair of silver earrings, circa 1985.

Bottom: A pair of silver earrings, circa 1985.

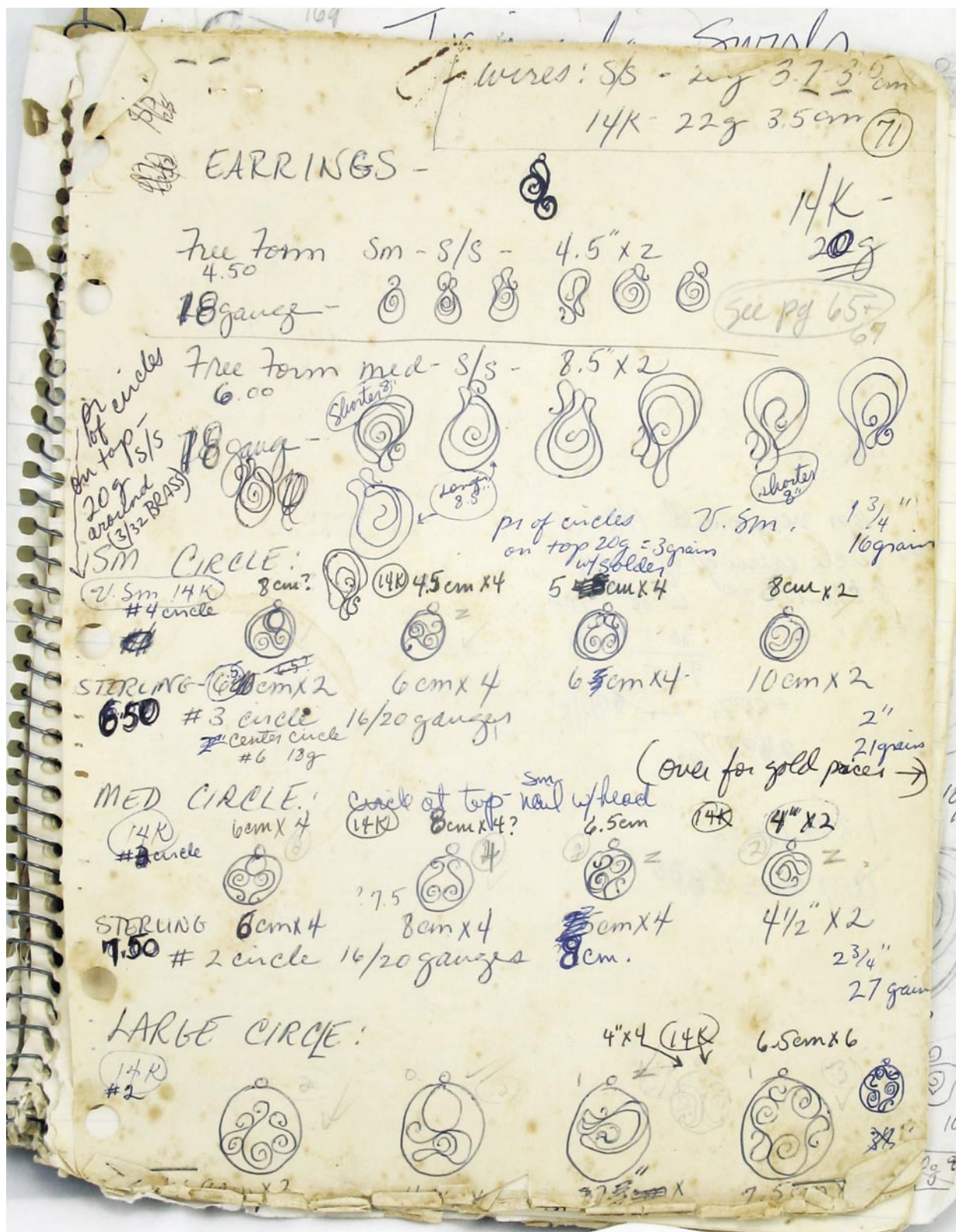


Above: A pair of silver free-form earrings. Each of these beautiful earrings was created using a single piece of silver wire by O'Brien. It was said that she could bend these shapes in the dark, using just her fingers to feel the shapes and the negative spaces.

Below is a partial list of locations that sold Ann O'Brien jewelry.

3RD Dimension Gallery, Jackson, Mississippi
 A Gallery, Hattiesburg, Mississippi
 Walter Anderson Museum of Art, Ocean Springs, Mississippi
 Abdallas, Lafayette, Louisiana
 Adorn Handcrafted Jewelry, Royal Oak, Michigan
 Aleksander's Jewelry Studio, Ocean City, Maryland
 Art Rageous Galleries, Houston, Texas
 Attic Gallery, Vicksburg, Mississippi
 Ballin's Ltd., New Orleans, Louisiana
 Barbara's Boutique, Jackson, Mississippi
 Bayfront Gallery, Pensacola, Florida
 Beau Coup Beads, Lafayette, Louisiana
 Beautiful Things, Scotch Plains, New Jersey
 Belle G's, Meridian, Mississippi
 Caffery Studio Gallery, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
 Chimes Antiques, Covington, Louisiana
 Chimneyville Crafts Gallery, Jackson, Mississippi
 Country Artisans, Keene, New Hampshire
 Dogwood's, Hattiesburg, Mississippi
 Elements, New Orleans, Louisiana
 Gayle Clark, Ocean Springs, Mississippi

Geode Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia
 Gulf South Gallery, McComb, Mississippi
 Half Moon, Covington, Louisiana
 Imago / The Wish List, Mandeville, Louisiana
 Jean Braly Gallery, New Orleans, Louisiana
 Josephine's Attic, Covington, Louisiana
 Lawson Gallery, Dallas, Texas
 Trace Gallery, Kosciusko, Mississippi
 Legato Gallery, Covington, Louisiana
 Louisiana State University Museum of Art, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
 Mississippi State Historical Museum, Jackson, Mississippi
 Nuance Gallery, New Orleans, Louisiana
 Old Trace Gallery, Kosciusko, Mississippi
 Pelican House, Mandeville, Louisiana
 Rhino Contemporary Crafts Gallery, New Orleans, Louisiana
 San Souci Gallery, Lafayette, Louisiana
 Soho Worthington, Worthington, Ohio
 The Craft Gallery, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
 The Toy Boat, Nantucket, Massachusetts
 Walter Anderson Museum of Art, Ocean Springs, Mississippi

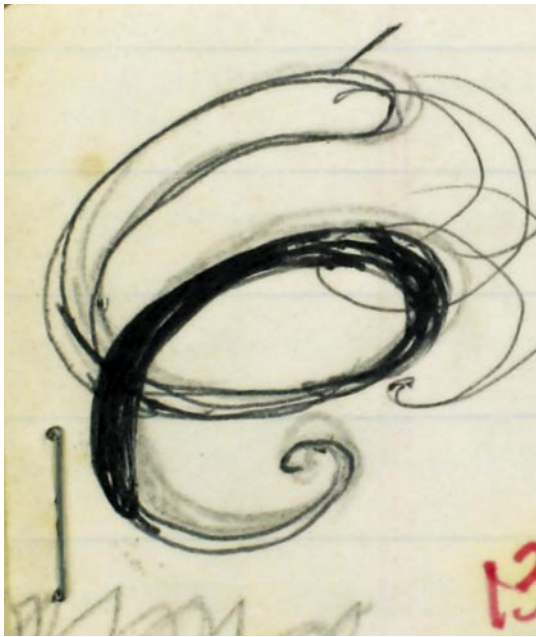


Above: Page 71 from the *Master Book of Designs*. This was O'Brien's last spiral-bound notebook in which she saved her sketches of her jewelry designs. The above page, like many, were actually created in an early notebook and then stapled onto a page of the current spiral-bound book.

Pendants



Above: A large free-form silver pendant. This very elaborate design exhibits O'Brien's "gift of line."



O'Brien participated in only a few juried exhibitions. Below is a list of exhibitions she listed on an older résumé.

- 1987 22nd Annual Juried Exhibition, St. Tammany Art Association, Covington, LA
- 1987 "Made in the Shade," Louisiana Crafts Council, Baton Rouge, LA
- 1986 18th Annual Louisiana Craftsmen's Show, Louisiana Crafts Council, Baton Rouge, LA
- 1985 20th Annual Juried Exhibition, St. Tammany Art Association, Covington, LA, Barranger Award for Crafts
- 1984 19th Annual Juried Exhibition, St. Tammany Art Association, Covington, LA, 2nd Place Award Crafts
- 1984 17th Annual Louisiana Craftsmen's Show, Louisiana Crafts Council, Hammond, LA, Honorable Mention
- 1984 FestForAll 1984 Gallery Show, Arts & Humanities Council of Greater Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge, LA
- 1984 Exhibitor National Craft Showroom, New York City
- 1983 16th Annual Louisiana Craftsmen's Show, Louisiana Crafts Council, Covington, LA
- 1975 10th Annual Juried Exhibition, St. Tammany Art Association, Covington, LA, Williamson Purchase Award

Above: This shape was called the 'Loose Spiral.' O'Brien wrote about this piece: "My bold signature design is also favored for its lyrical simplicity."



Left: A free-form silver pendant. This design was also used with earrings.

Right: A heart-shaped silver pendant. Throughout her career, O'Brien continued to investigate the "S" shape design. This simple heart shape is a timeless design – a design that could be found on an ornamental motif a thousand years old.

Ann O'Brien's education résumé

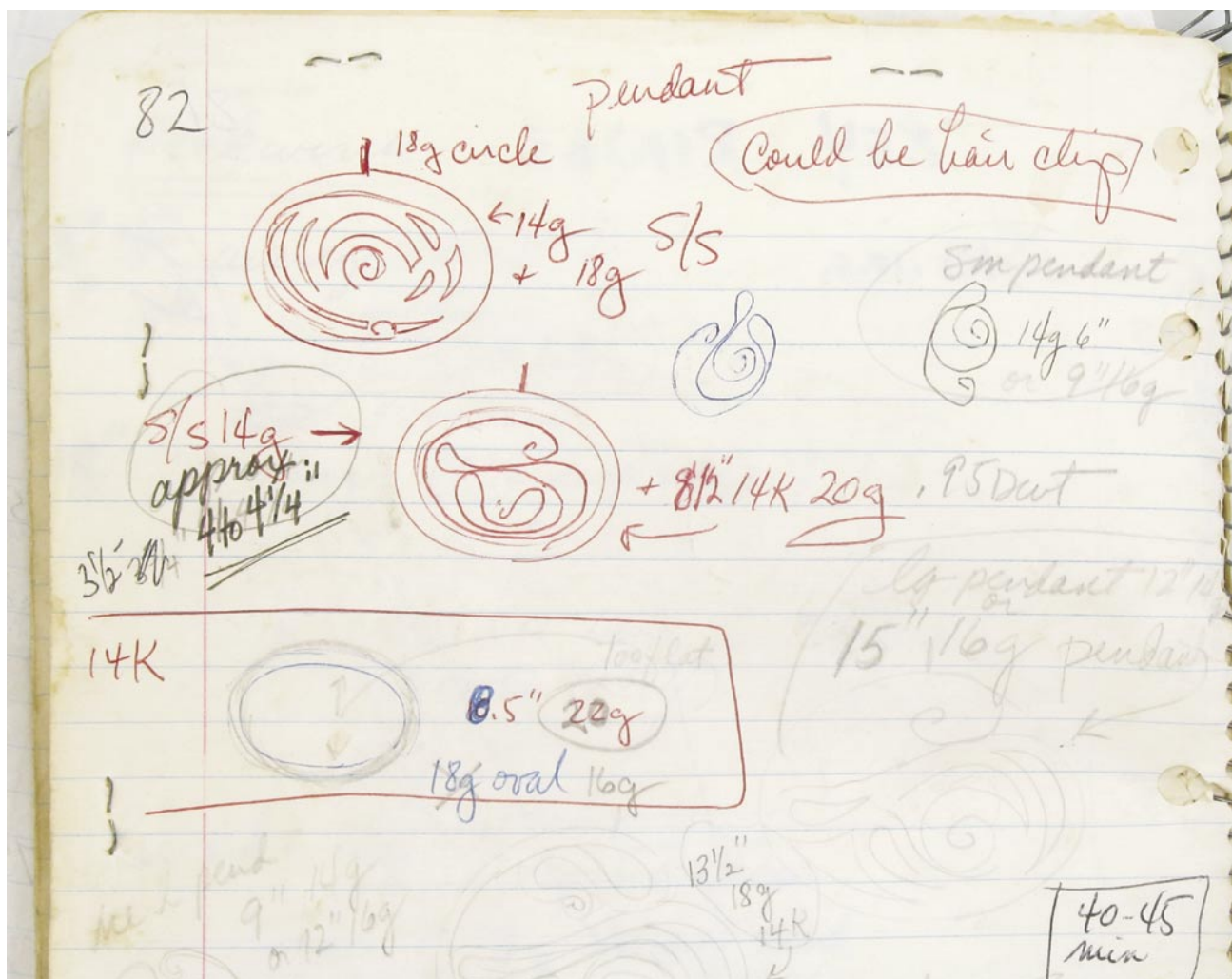
- 1969 Graduated from St. Scholastica Academy, Covington, Louisiana
- 1975 Graduated from Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting
- 1983 Richard Mawdsley, Metalsmithing/Jewelry Seminar
- 1983 Mary Lee Hu, Jewelry Seminar
- 1983 Richard Mafong, Metalsmithing Seminar
- 1984 David LaPlantz, Metalsmithing Seminar
- 1985 Dan Bailey, Craft/Photography Seminar
- 1987 Kate Wagle, Metalsmithing/Jewelry Seminar



O'Brien participated in a few invitational shows. Below is a list of exhibitions she listed on an older résumé.

- 1989 Craftsmen's Guild Invitational, Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, MS
- 1988 Winter Jewels, America House Gallery, Tenafly, NJ
- 1988 Personal Treasures, Crain/Wolov Gallery, Tulsa, OK
- 1988 Wearable Art Show, Rhino Contemporary Crafts Gallery, New Orleans, LA
- 1988 Two Man Show, Mandeville City Hall, Mandeville, LA
- 1987-86 25th Anniversary Exhibition of the Louisiana Crafts Council, University Art Museum, Lafayette, LA; St. Tammany Art Association, Covington, LA; Southdown Plantation Terrebonne Museum, Houma, LA; James C. Bolton Library, Louisiana State University at Alexandria
- 1986 Toy Exhibition Invitational, Northern Arizona University Art Gallery, Flagstaff, AZ
- 1985 St. Tammany Art Association Members Exhibit, Covington, LA
- 1985 Craftworks 1985, Louisiana Crafts Council and West Baton Rouge Museum, Port Allen, LA
- 1984 Mandeville City Hall, Mandeville, LA
- 1983 Opening Show St. Tammany Art Association, Covington, LA
- 1980 Crafts of Abita Springs, Louisiana Crafts Council, New Orleans, LA

Above: O'Brien with her jewelry at an indoor crafts show. O'Brien attended very few crafts shows. The annual Christmas season show produced by the Craftsmen's Guild of Mississippi in Jackson was the only show she attended on a regular basis; she participated in this show because it was indoors, she enjoyed the camaraderie of her fellow craftsmen and old customers, and she admired the Craftsmen's Guild's high standards of "exhibition."



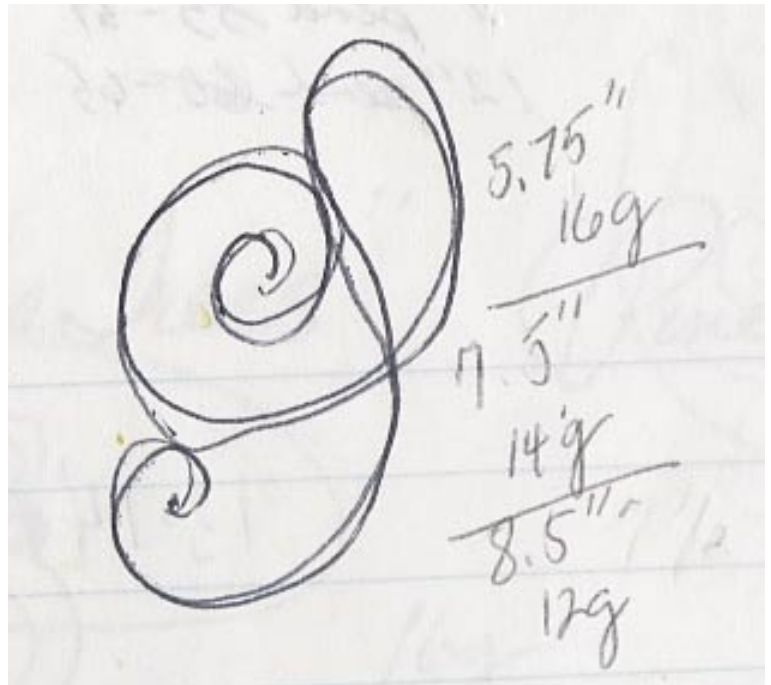
On July 12, 1988, O'Brien wrote the following short biography for the St. Tammany Art Association.

Jewelry artist Ann O'Brien has lived in Southeastern Louisiana most of her life. "I have traveled all over the United States and Europe, sometimes considering relocating outside of Louisiana, but I have always come back to St. Tammany Parish," says Ann. "I love the lush, wet environment here. I am emotionally attached to the moss and the crepe myrtles, the camellias and the bamboo. I even love that funky smell of wet rotting leaves down near the rivers." Working with an apprentice in a studio behind her home in Abita Springs, Ann supplies many shops around the country with her sterling silver and gold jewelry. She also displays her jewelry each year at selected craft fairs and private showings.

In 1970 Ann O'Brien discovered wire jewelry, but even as a high school student she remembers getting compliments on the strong "linear quality" of her art. Always interested in art, Ann also remembers some of her earliest art training occurred 25 years ago in the basement of the St. Tammany Art Association out in San Souci Forest.

Above: Page 82 from the *Master Book of Designs*. O'Brien traced and sketched most of her pieces. She also made notes of the wire gauges, the time to fabricate the piece, and the length of wire of her designs.

Right: From the *Master Book of Designs*, a simple sketch for a free-form design. This drawing is a good example of a simple yet well thought-out lyrical design by O'Brien. Note the double lines that suggest the design's volume.



Betsy O'Brien, Ann's sister wrote the following, in November 2006.

Although I was born without artistic sensibility, as Ann O'Brien's younger sister I appreciated the fact she was gifted early on. Recognition I understood, and when Ann's 6th grade painting won a place at the Covington High School gym, I was impressed. Her class in high school always won spirit day because of Ann's elaborate decorations. Her Lichtenstein Circus painting hung on my walls for many years, then on Chrisie's, Ann's other sister. Her college painting of me studying in a chair still hangs at my parents'. I loved that chair.

From walls, Ann moved to decorating people by making jewelry at college. She twisted brass bracelets until way past midnight, hammered rings on this tubular anvil, and soldered until the brass turned white hot. I can still see the blue flame on the torch, and Ann pushing the melting metal around until it fastened. Polishing was work, so she paid us students minimum wage to breathe in the polishing wheel flotsam through a hot bandana, 70's-style. True to form, she postponed senior year, took off in a van and traveled around the USA selling brass jewelry.

She moved on to silver and gold later. Ann loved the business of selling jewelry as much as she

enjoyed making it. She didn't just do flea markets and booths at festivals, although she did a lot of that. For years she delivered to high-end boutiques across the south. From Ann I learned such notions as "raw materials," "the sales call," "exclusivity," "on commission" and "retail markup." Yawn.

After she had kids, she visited with her box of metals and needle nose pliers, and twisted while we talked.

Ann loved decorating people. She traded with a clothes artist (Editor's note: Walter Anderson's niece reproduced her uncle's designs on clothes) whose squiggles and shapes on cotton are much like Ann's jewelry designs. It is thus that everybody Ann loved wears bright cotton with printed black circles, curlicues and pink hieroglyphics in shapes like her hair pins, olive forks and bubble blowers, in flowing patterns.

She decorated me for cold weather. Hats, gloves, crocheted woolens, and one very trendy scarf that she assured me wasn't alive when I first picked it up. The purple wool hat, my favorite, has a leopard-skin trim with a silver Ann O'Brien hat pin attached. I want to say the hat pin makes the hat, but the leopard skin trim is really close on the royal purple wool. An Ann O'Brien original acquisition. We miss you, Annie. We're still decorated.

— Betsy O'Brien

Necklaces



Above: A detail of an unfinished silver necklace. This beautiful piece was found on O'Brien's jewelry work bench after her death. It was one of her last large items she was to twist. It was photographed unpolished.

Left: A complete view of the same elaborate necklace whose detail is pictured above.



John R. Kemp, a writer from Covington, Louisiana, knew O'Brien and wrote the following paragraph for this book.

My wife, Betty, and I met Ann many years ago shortly after we moved to Covington. We immediately were struck by her delightful personality and even more so by her work, which reflected a fragile grace and elegance. The way she twisted and worked strands of silver and gold seemed almost magical and spontaneous as if a moment of imagination and light had been set in precious metals. Through her art, Ann has given memories to so many, even to those who never knew her. – *John R. Kemp*

Above: An unfinished silver necklace. This beautiful piece was also found on O'Brien's jewelry work bench after her death. It was one of her last large items she was to twist. It was photographed unpolished.



Above: A large silver wire necklace. This piece was one of O'Brien's most elaborate.



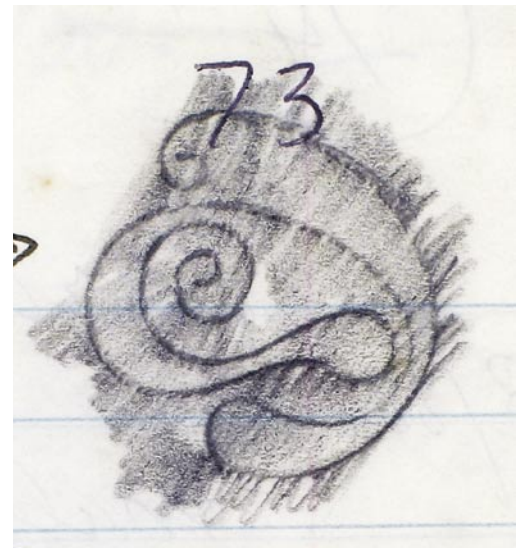
The following prose was penned by artist Tim Trapolin.

Ann O'Brien's soul was that of a seeker – a constant eye for that spark that would ignite her creative drive – was it the Celtic labyrinth, or the Mayan Codex Alphabet – or perhaps like wild salmon up stream and bees to pollen – her drive was her genetic compulsion to create! Amazing!The variety of forms that tantalize me is both intricate and firm – the exactly undulating silver umbilical line that twists – its siren's song – in necklaces, earrings, bracelets, or the fabulous whimsy of the bubble wands! Oh the muse in this splendid soul! Ann welcomed and nurtured variety – both in inspiration and companions and this inclusively led to countless opportunities for variation upon her theme – as Mozart and Bach elaborated on a simple or majestic theme.

Ann's art resonates with the same metronome – unity – simplicity – variety!

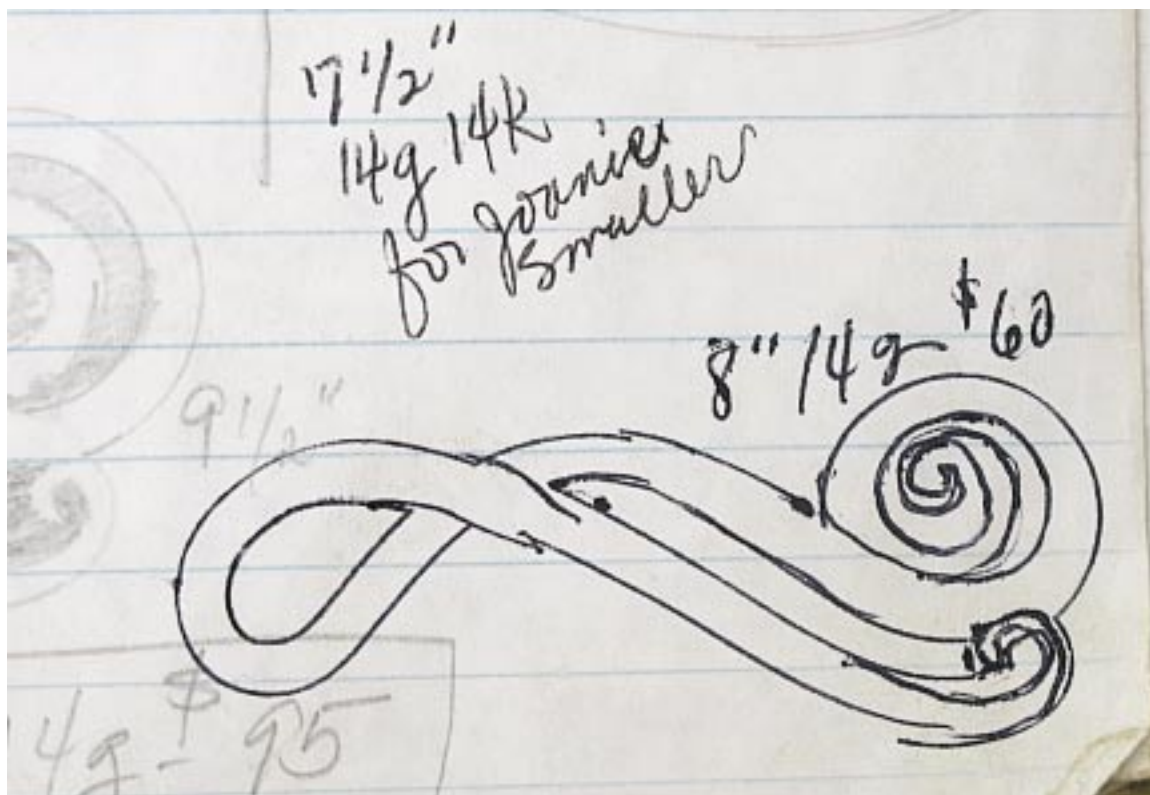
Her sketch books fill my heart with awe as I see hundreds of embryo forms there before me - all proclaiming her legacy of joy and celebration!!

Ann's gifts were shared so readily with all – for she truly welcomed strangers into her fold and thereby entertained many Angels – and now she is with them. I was lucky to know her and call her friend. Brava Ann! Always, Tim



Top: A publicity photo from the 1980's. This photo was taken in O'Brien's Abita Springs studio.

Bottom: A rubbing from the *Master Book of Designs*. O'Brien created new designs throughout her career. After completion of a new design, often the easiest way to remember the piece was to make a simple rubbing of the design before it was finished and not attached to a jewelry finding.



Abita Springs architect Ron Blitch contributed the following two paragraphs.

Ann's jewelry was as simple as it was complex. The pieces showed great restraint – sometimes what is not there (too much decoration/fussiness) is more important than what is there. A great watercolor shows the white paper coming through, a constant effort to understand voids. Ann's jewelry was Matisse-like, in that it was a sketch in silver or gold of a fluid, quickly-made idea. The flourishes and delicate lines made the jewelry timeless – it could be worn to the grocery or to the Metropolitan in New York (My mom said this). Classic, simple, beautiful, comfortable, cherished – all words used in conversation about Ann's work - worn every day.

Ann was always accessible, and loved Abita Springs and its quirky people. She was a good friend to so many – as evidenced by the wonderful event in April 2006 at the St. Tammany Art Association. Ann never complained about her sickness – which gave everyone such hope that she would beat it.

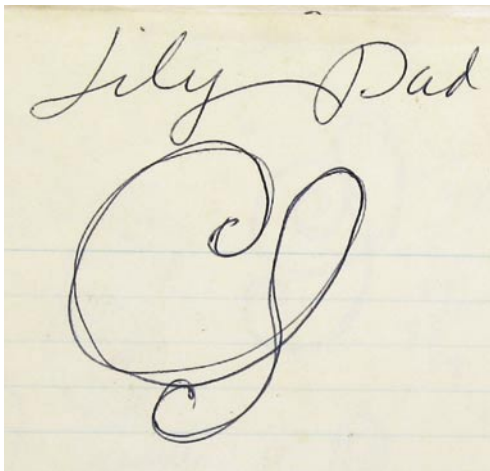
– Ron Blitch

Above: A tracing from the *Master Book of Designs*. O'Brien's spiral bound notebook included not just sketches but also notes about individual pieces. These notes may include: the date, the name of the customer, the retail price, the gauge of silver or gold, the length of wire, an outline of where to solder, where to hammer, and how to polish.



Above: A one-piece free-form silver necklace. Necklaces were not sold as often as other jewelry because the pieces required the “right messenger.” However, worn on the right person, the necklace was perhaps one of O’Brien’s most stunning pieces of jewelry.

Pins



Above: Two silver pins using the lily pad design. The above photos illustrate an interesting visual discovery. Although both pins use the same design, when placed on different jewelry findings, the visual effect is quite different. The pin on the left was designed to be worn straight – this creates a more formal appearance than the pin on the right; this pin presents a look that is 'light' and 'fun' when worn at an angle. It is also interesting to note that O'Brien's sketch of the design is placed at an angle.

Editor's Note: the photos above were 'flipped' horizontally to match the sketch.



Photographs of O'Brien's work have appeared in the following national publications

- 1991 *Fait a la Main: A Source Book of Louisiana Crafts*, Louisiana Crafts Program, p14 and p57
- 1988 *Fait a la Main: A Source Book of Louisiana Crafts*, Louisiana Crafts Program, p101
- 1988 *Lifestyle Crafts Directory*, Ohio Designer Craftsmen Ent., p31
- 1987 *Lifestyle Crafts Directory*, Ohio Designer Craftsmen Ent., p21
- 1985 *The Buyers Book of American Crafts 1985*, American Craft Enterprises, p42
- 1984 *The Goodfellow Catalog of Wonderful Things To Wear & Wear & Wear*, Goodfellow Catalog Press, Inc., Chilton, p128-9
- 1984 *The Buyers Book of American Crafts 1984*, American Craft Enterprises, p80
- 1984 *Ornament*, Vol.7, No.3, p10

Above Left: A large silver pin. This triangular swirl pin was the piece that O'Brien most often wore late in her life.

Above Right: A silver stick pin. This simple free-form design was probably designed specifically as a stick pin by O'Brien.



Louisiana artist Edward Pramuk writes about O'Brien's jewelry in the following paragraphs.

Ann's approach to design embraced line as the essential element, the basic building-block of her visual language. It can be argued that it is the building-block of most visual art and certainly is the source of the evolution of civilization. Eons ago, some unsung genius, picked up a stick and drew a line on the ground, and sparked the invention of script and hieroglyphics, which allowed for cultures to have cursive-memory that connected one generation to another.

Ann was aware that line can be stretched and opened-up. Her pieces suggest volume, which is why they work so well on clothing. The smaller pieces that touch flesh are not flat, but occupy space. That's a neat trick to pull off. Her instinct and her aesthetic sense of how things should look served her well.

Spiral forms are everywhere. She embraced that primary symbol of first-life, and it was enough for her. Observations of the mechanics of nature guided her to an elemental truth, and that truth sustained her over a lifetime.

She had no need to go searching for another source or to explore fashion trends. She recognized

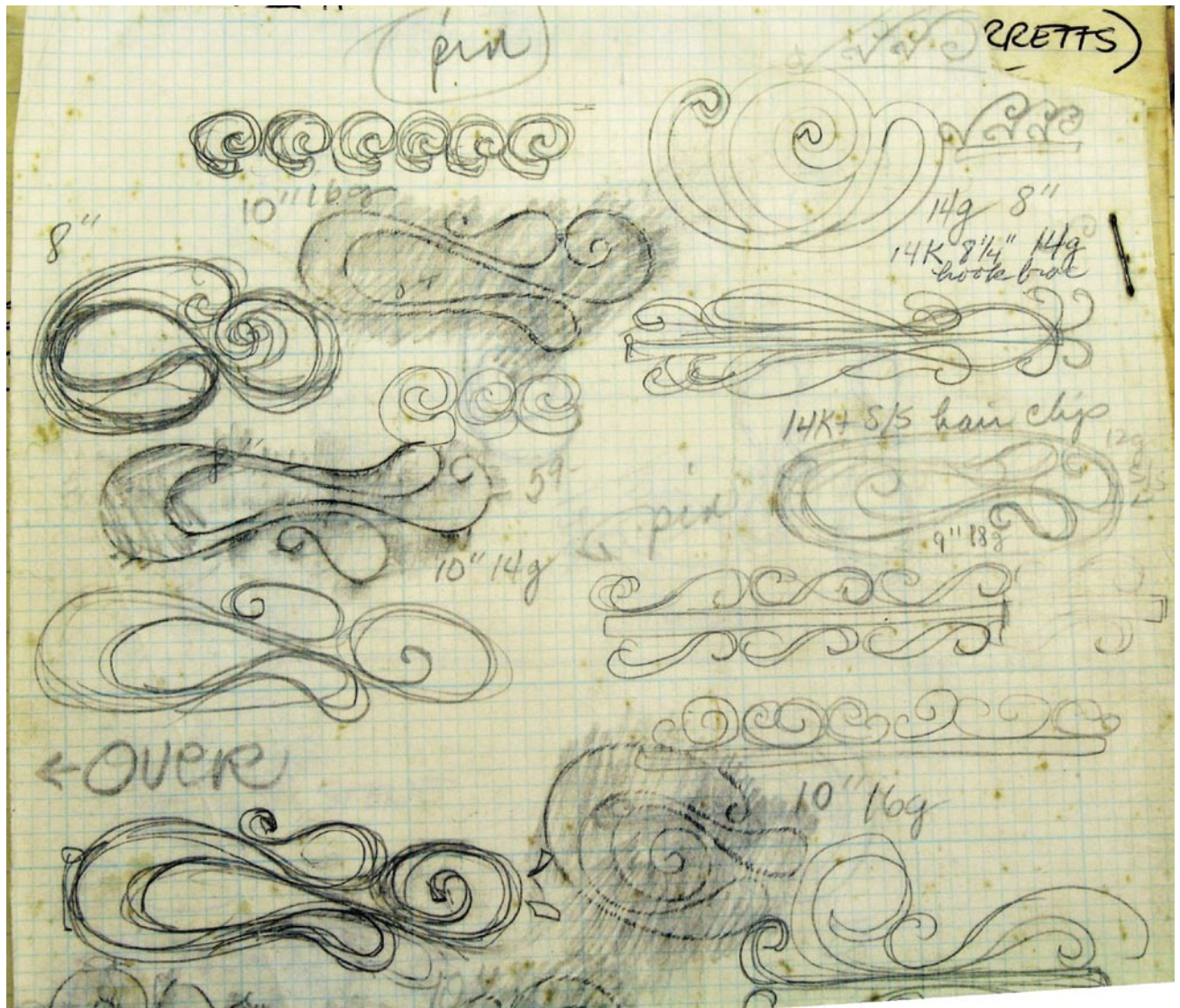
the truth of her art, which is a visual melody – a lyrical song.

Those flowing-rhythms are everywhere in her work and in the drawings that provided to her a diary of exploration; a place of delight, fun and experimentation.

Other practitioners of the spiral were artists like Picasso and Paul Klee. The late work of both these great artists contained strong spiral elements, and in Picasso's old age he seemed to return to childhood, where simple spiral-markings appeared in playful compositions. It indicates that a sense of play is what it is all about, and Ann never lost that impulse.

Her formative years began in the 1960s, and she absorbed many ideas from the music culture in particular. Art Nouveau ideas appeared on album jackets and posters promoting rock groups like Jefferson Airplane and Led Zeppelin. She was in harmony with the spirit of the times, but by mixing some very old ideas with the new, she created timeless forms that will speak to any age.

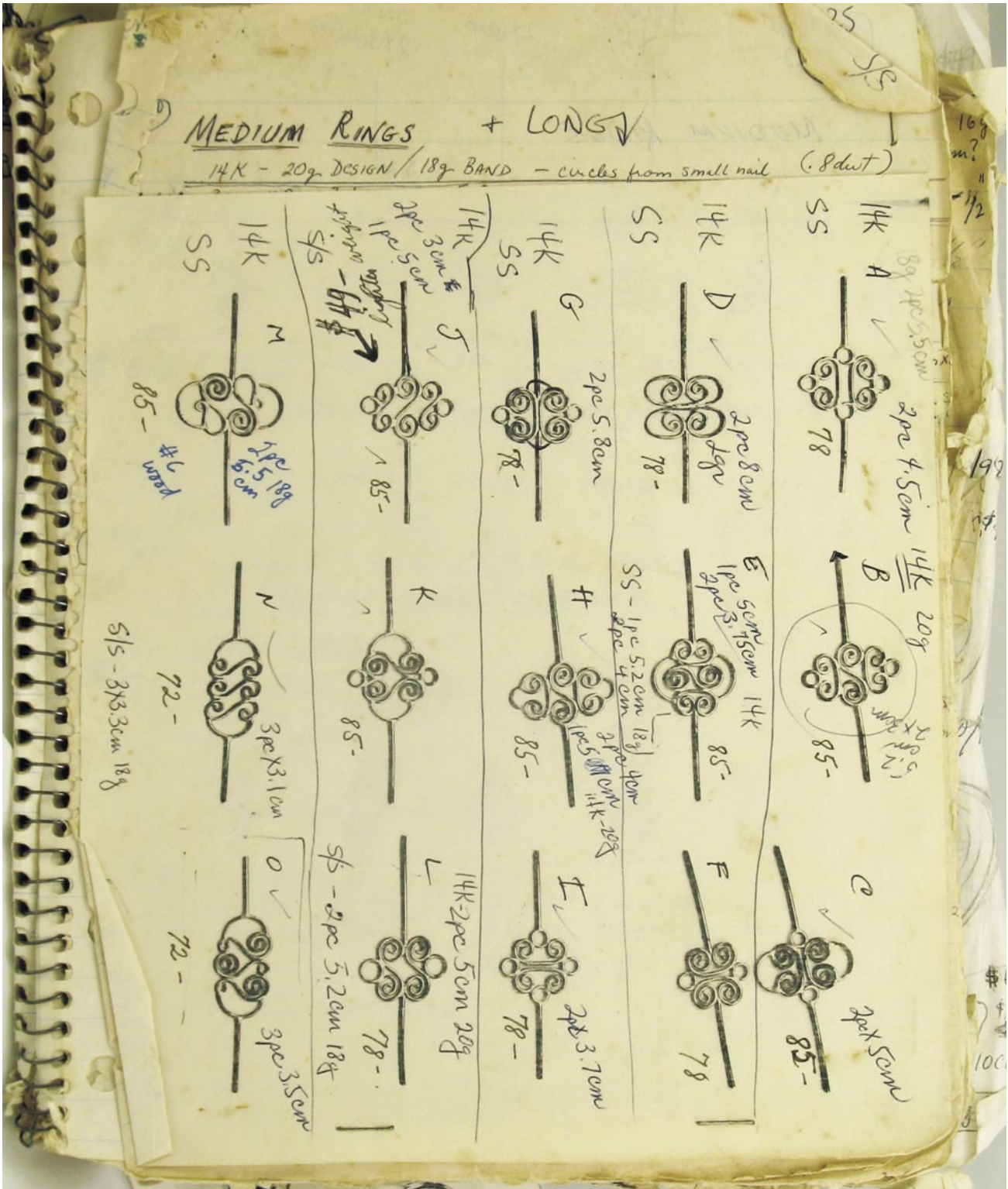
– Edward Pramuk

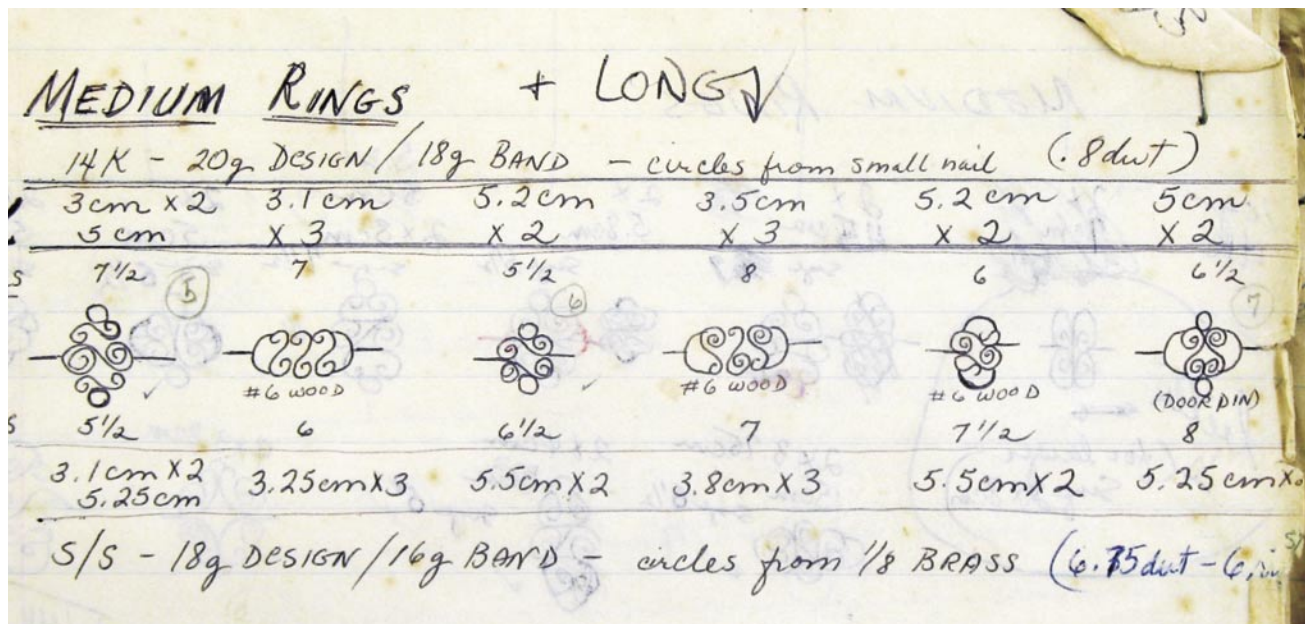


Above: Sketches, traces and rubbings from the *Master Book of Designs*. Over the years O'Brien added image after image using a variety of drawing techniques on this beautifully illustrated page. Throughout her life, O'Brien had an appreciation for drawing. She was never one to buy special drawing pencils or papers – her materials of choice were a spiral-bound notebook, some graph paper, and any handy pencil or ball point pen.

Opposite: A very elaborate free-form silver pin, circa 2005. Although O'Brien was twisting mostly simple (to the eye) pieces in the early 2000's, there were a few elaborate free-form works that she obviously paid a lot of attention to.

Rings





The following two paragraphs were written by artist Mary Davis, a long-time friend and neighbor of the O'Brien/Preble family.

Ann was not a cyclist – she was a cruiser. When I think of Ann, she is riding her big-wheeled bicycle in the neighborhood on her way to the UCM. She would often be wearing her favorite Walter Anderson-printed clothes or sometimes a colorful dress, and more times than not carrying something. She was never in a hurry, just cruising to her destination giving a gentle wave and sometimes stopping for a chat about kids, town politics or just to say “hello.” We shared 30 years of friendship and the knowledge that comes with it. But as always when a friend passes, there are regrets about not sharing enough or knowing enough about what was really going on behind that sweet smile.

The last time I saw Ann was at her house. It was very near the end, and we were talking in the living room. I couldn't tell you what we talked about, but I knew that she had reached that peaceful place of acceptance. She was smiling and laughing. It was going to be OK for her, and in her special way she made it OK for the rest of us. – Mary Davis



Top: Sketches of medium and long rings from the *Master Book of Designs*.

O'Brien made many of these rings during the first half of her career; later the simple small rings were produced more.

Bottom: A large 14k gold ring. The style of this ring dates back to her early days of making jewelry when she was a teenager. The ring is crafted in the modular style, using four “S” shapes and two “C” shapes for the design. In the early days, this design is shared by many of the local wire jewelers.



Left Ring: A medium size modular style silver ring. This design is an early creation – dating back to the first years of O’Brien’s career.

Right Ring: A medium size free-form silver ring. This ring is a late creation and reflects the mature understanding O’Brien had developed after years of studying the twisting lines of her designs.

In February of 1993, O’Brien wrote the following for the 1993 Louisiana Contemporary Crafts Exhibition Catalog.

Ann’s first craft show was the ill-fated “Festival of Life” held on the banks of the Atchafalaya River in 1970. Delayed in opening for a week by local resistance, the festival is as close as Louisiana has ever gotten to Woodstock. “When the festival delay was announced, most of the craftsmen were already set up in tents where we were supposed to live and work during the festival. During the week of legal siege, the festival organizers trucked in sacks of red beans, which were mostly sprouting since they had gotten wet in storage (but we knew sprouted seeds were higher in nutritional value.) We cooked and ate them in communal kitchen tents. We washed our dishes, our clothes and ourselves in the river. Eventually Chuck Berry and others were allowed to play, and those of us who had become accustomed to living as medieval merchants hated to see it end.”

I have since sworn off outdoor shows for myself. Little wonder. I think it was the show I did in gorgeous but windy weather where they were making squirrel gumbo on a loud-speaker across from my booth. The broadcast directions included detailed instructions on skinning the squirrel. We were set up in a dusty but thankfully shady spot – grass doesn’t grow under live oaks.

huge numbers of beer-drinking Party Animals trudged past us. And we were pelted with acorns by the resident squirrels.

It has been interesting and humbling to see how my friends, and sometimes my customers, take my work for granted. At the gumbo show described above, a woman quickly selected a \$495, 14k gold, 2” wide bracelet, pulled out her \$5 bill, and waited patiently for her change.

Then, last year, the Abita Springs Civic Association offered my donated work in a raffle. I was listed on the tickets just below the \$100 gift certificate donated by Walmart. But the most enlightening conversation I had about my work with a non-art friend happened several years ago. I used to carry my wire everywhere, like knitting, especially during busy seasons, and twist whenever I was sitting down. This friend of mine had lived around me and my work for years, helping me to move it, polish it, sell it, and he even bought some of it. One day he really watched me work, I guess for the first time, and he saw me cut two lengths of wire exactly the same size. I twisted the first piece into shape, designing as I went. I then started to twist the second piece, pausing to match the second piece to the first. He startled me when he exclaimed, ‘WOW... You have to do that every time you make a pair of earrings...’ I just looked at him incredulously and bit off the sarcastic response on the end of my tongue... The How-DID-you-think-I did-it? Since then, I try not to take peoples’ knowledge for granted.” – *Ann O’Brien*

We were consumed by swirling clouds of dust as

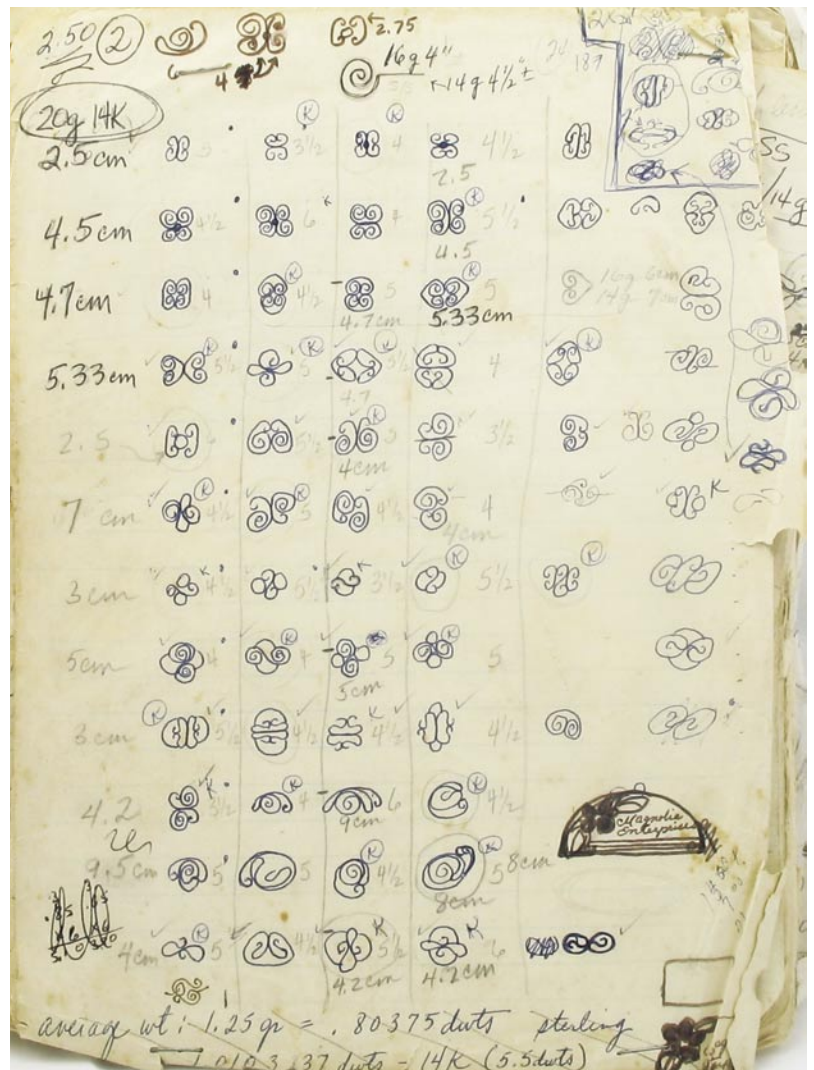


Top Left: A large elaborate woven silver ring. O'Brien's woven rings are highly prized by her collectors.

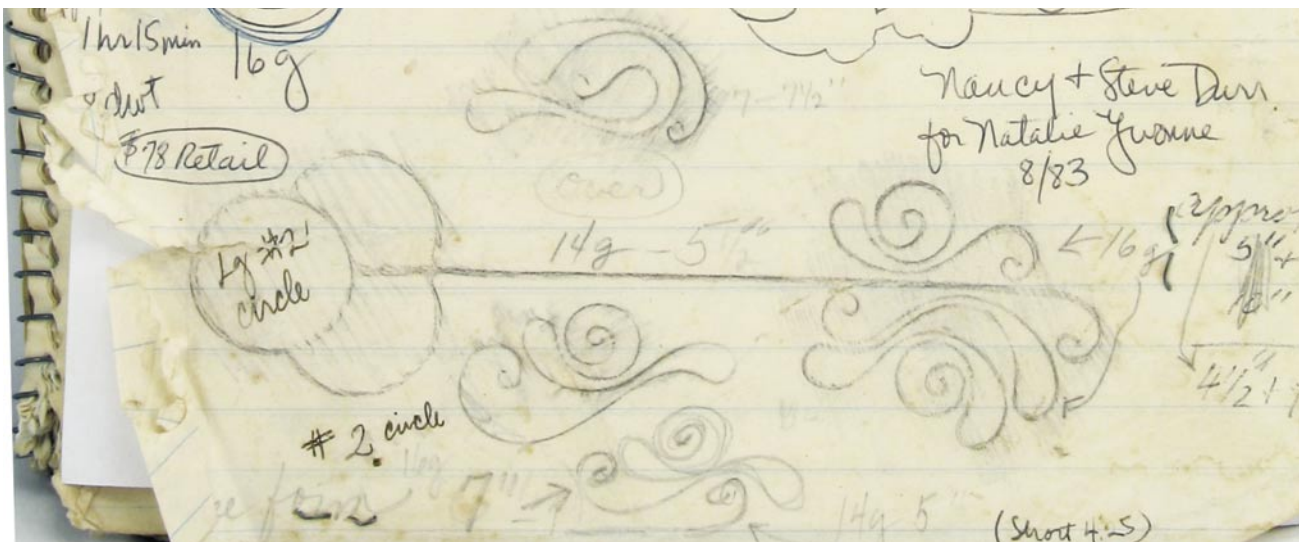
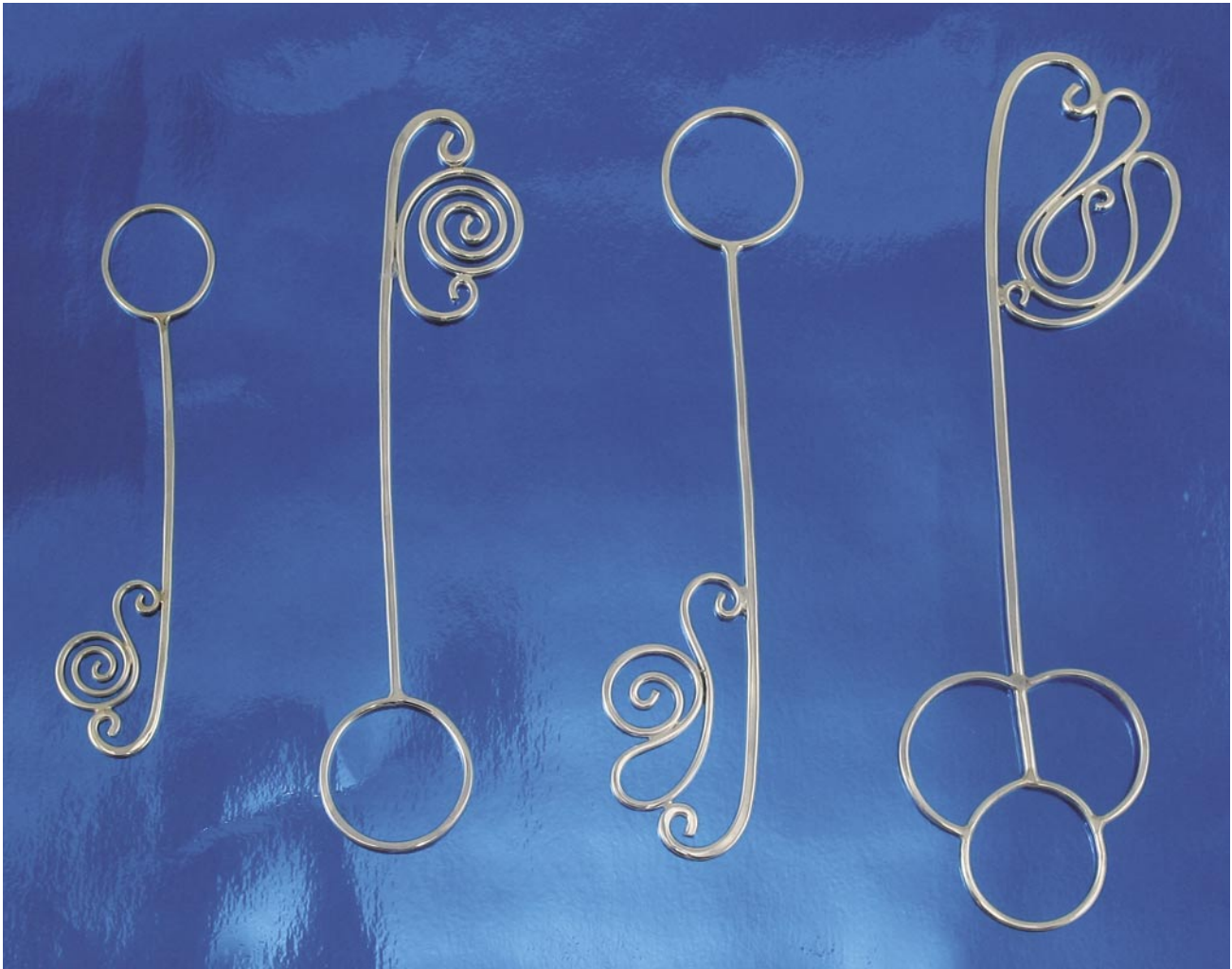


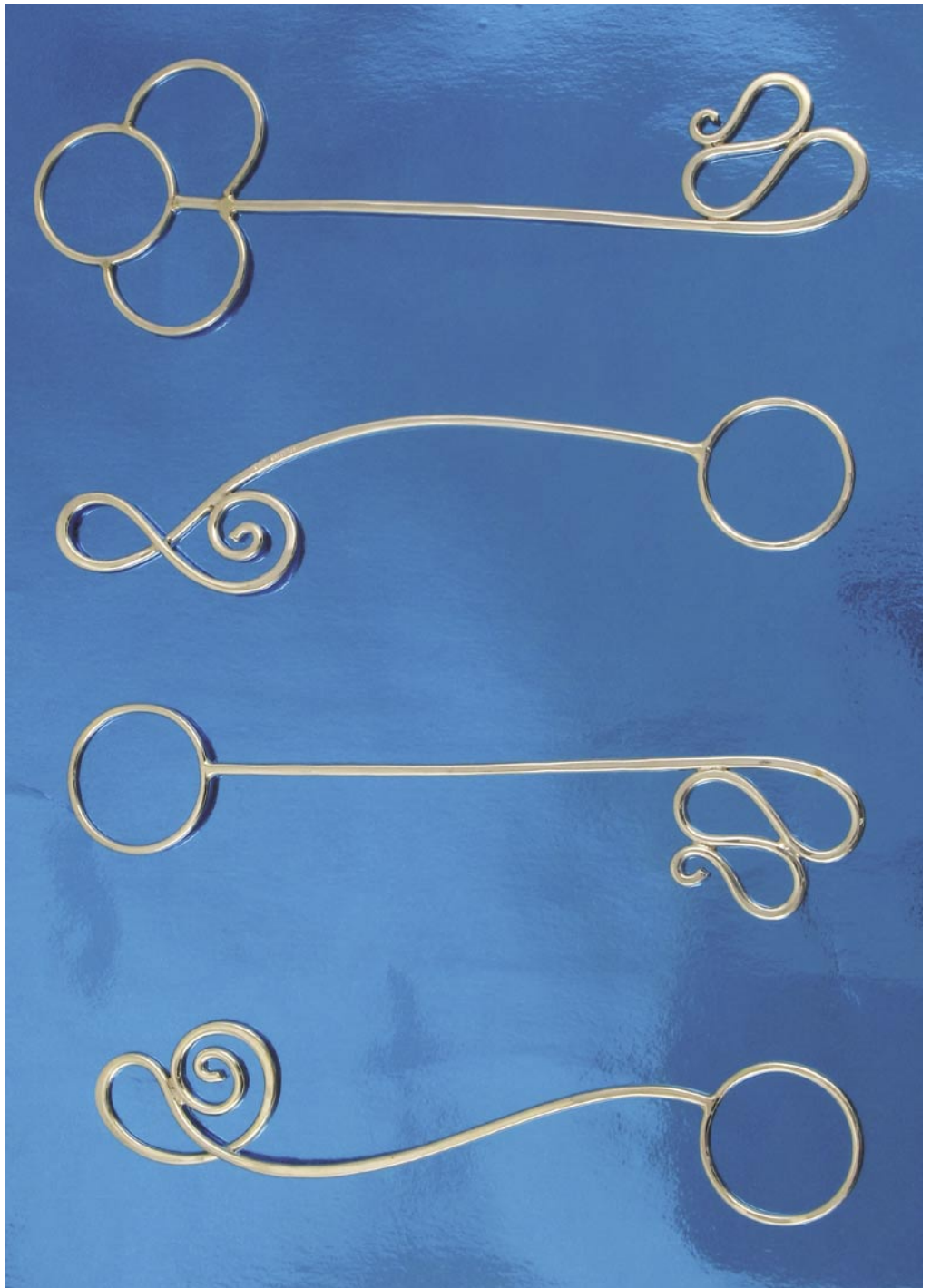
Top Right: From the *Master Book of Designs*, a stapled and taped sketch of initial rings. The original initial rings are very rare but she did make them throughout her career.

Right: From the *Master Book of Designs*, a 'recycled' page showing her sketches for ring designs. O'Brien used some of these simple designs repeatedly for 35 years. The simple small rings were always reasonably priced; O'Brien liked the idea of introducing young first-time jewelry buyers to her individually handcrafted pieces. Her later rings were often created with only one or two pieces of wire. Her earlier rings were created in the modular style which included circles, half circles, and the "E" and "S" shapes.



Bubble Blowers





Opposite top and above: Ann O'Brien designed many bubble blowers during her Abita Springs years. It is believed that the silver bubble blower was an original O'Brien idea. The bubble blowers proved to be very popular and were usually sold with a bottle of bubble liquid. The bottle of bubble liquid was relabeled with her own Ann O'Brien Jewelry Studio label.

Opposite bottom: A sketch of a fancy bubble blower from the *Master Book of Designs*.

Serving Pieces



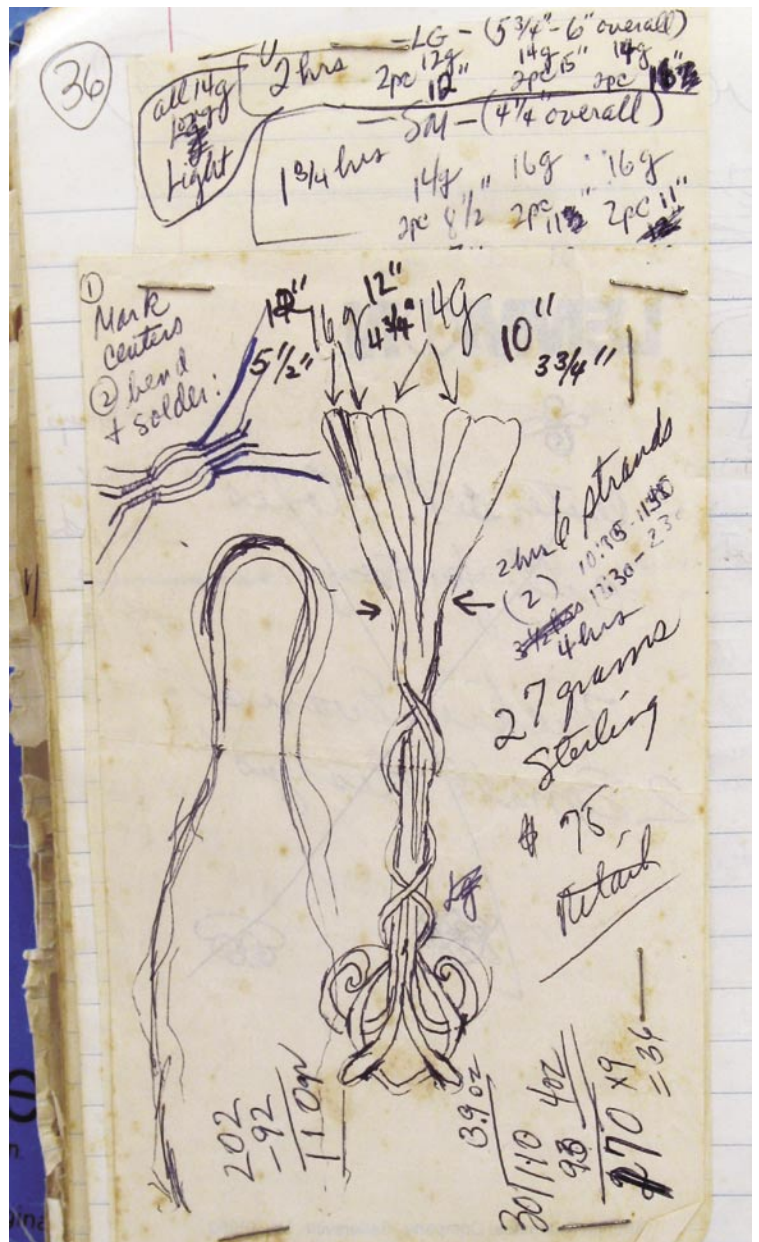
Above: A sketch of a serving piece drawn on a blank bank check. O'Brien enjoyed drawing new designs when the mood struck her.

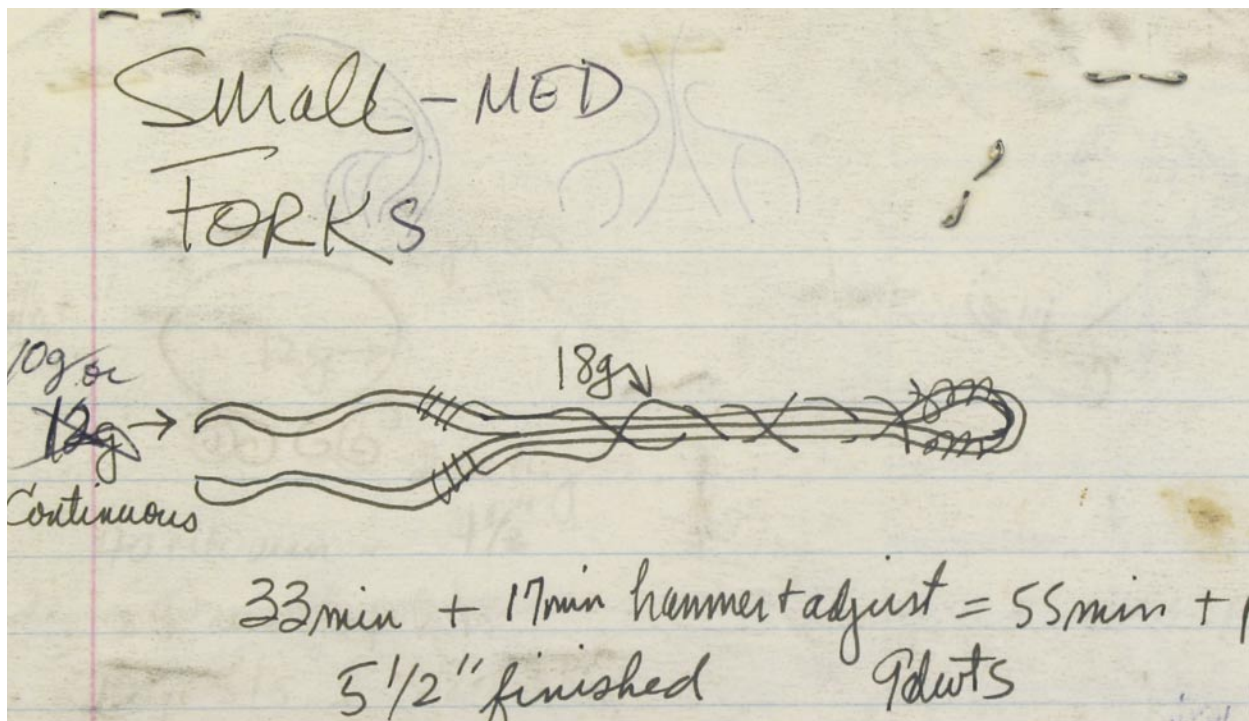
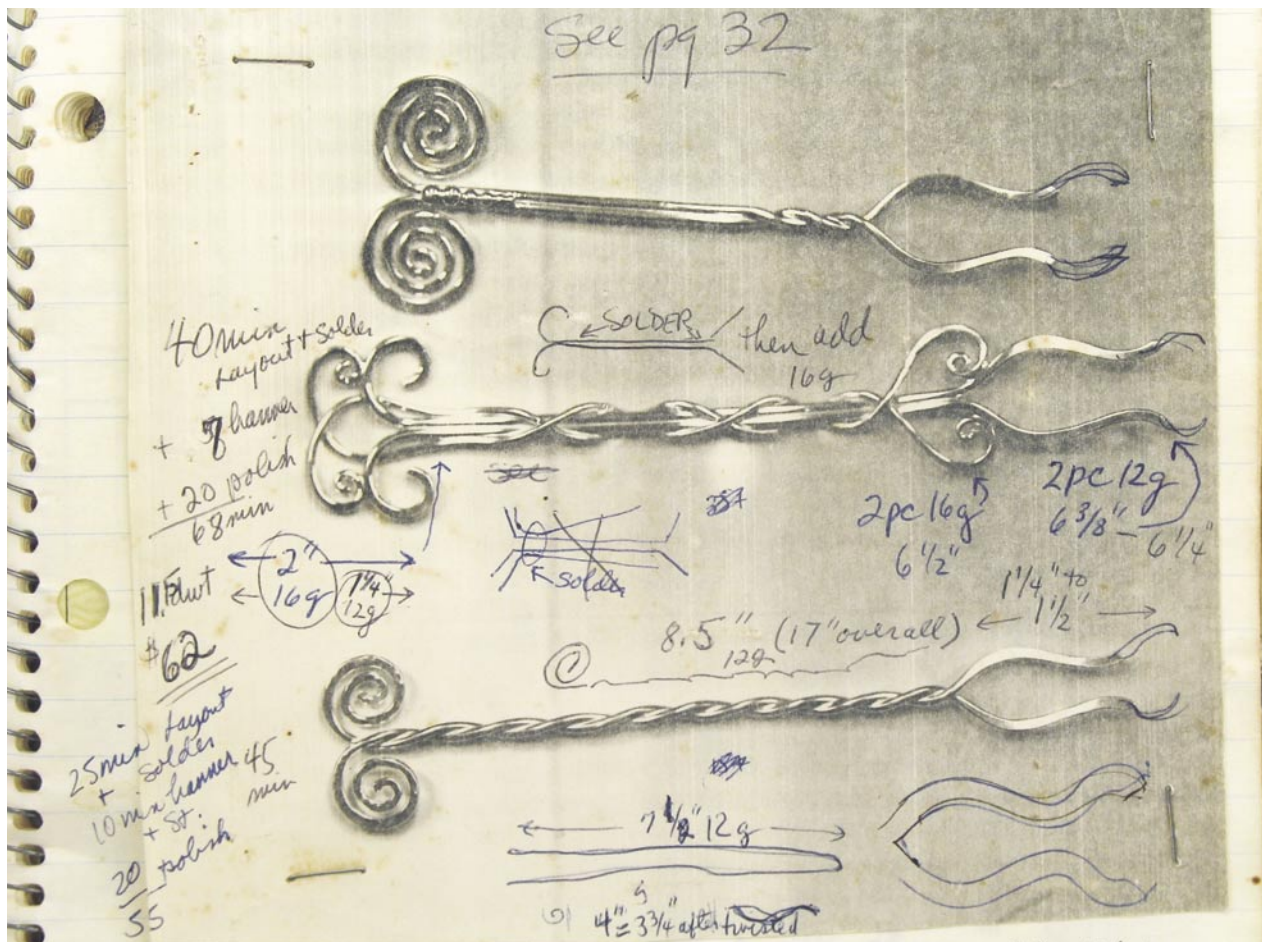
Left: A silver serving piece from the collection of Francie Rich and John Hodge.



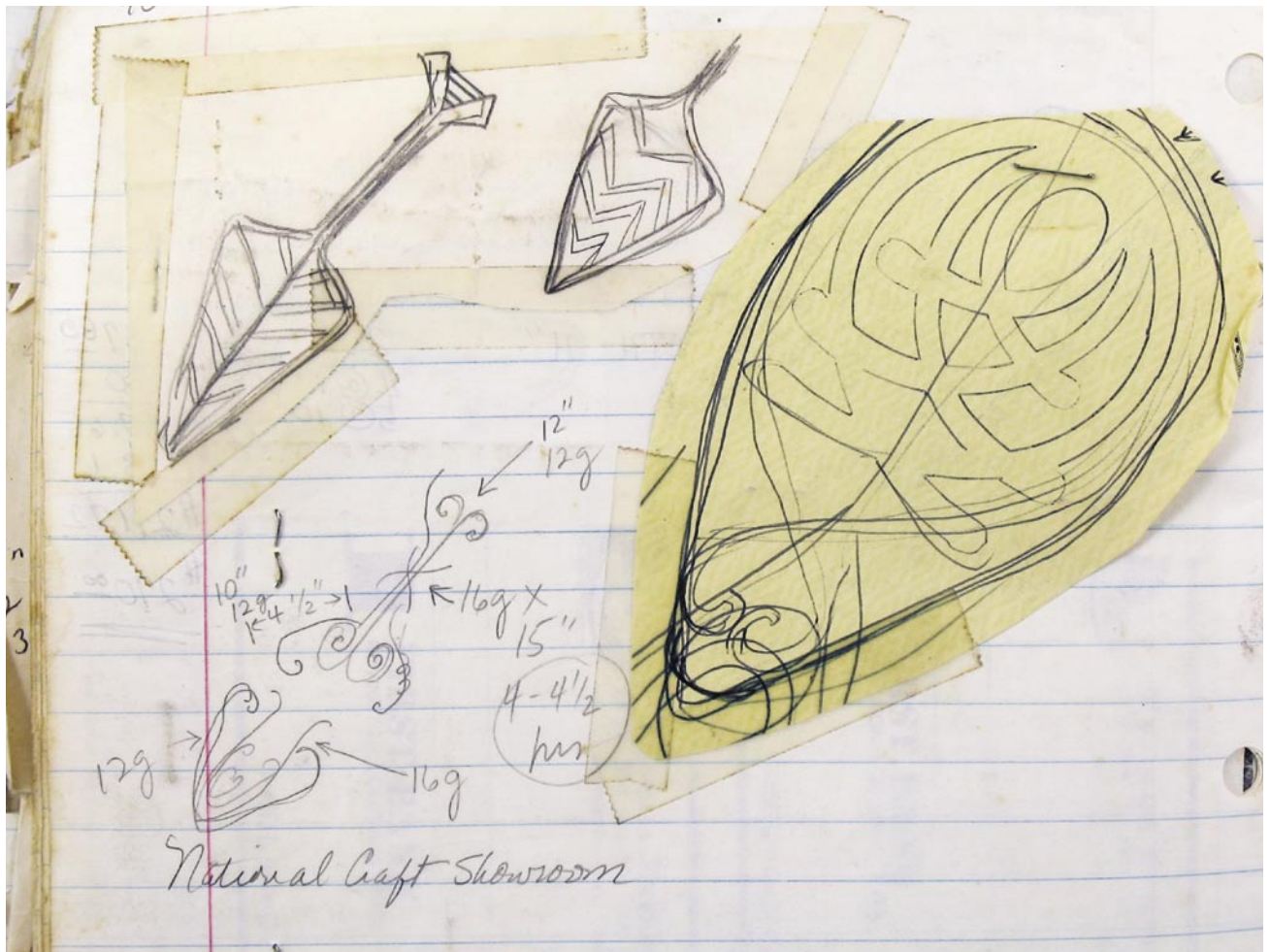
Top: Silver tongs, from the collection of the Teague/Sasser family. Silver tongs are rare and very desirable among collectors of O'Brien's work.

Right: From the *Master Book of Designs*, a 'recycled' page with a detailed sketch of a pair of tongs. Creating tongs presented O'Brien with a new challenge: how to keep the silver wire flexible. She met the challenge and went on to enjoy designing and creating these utilitarian pieces.





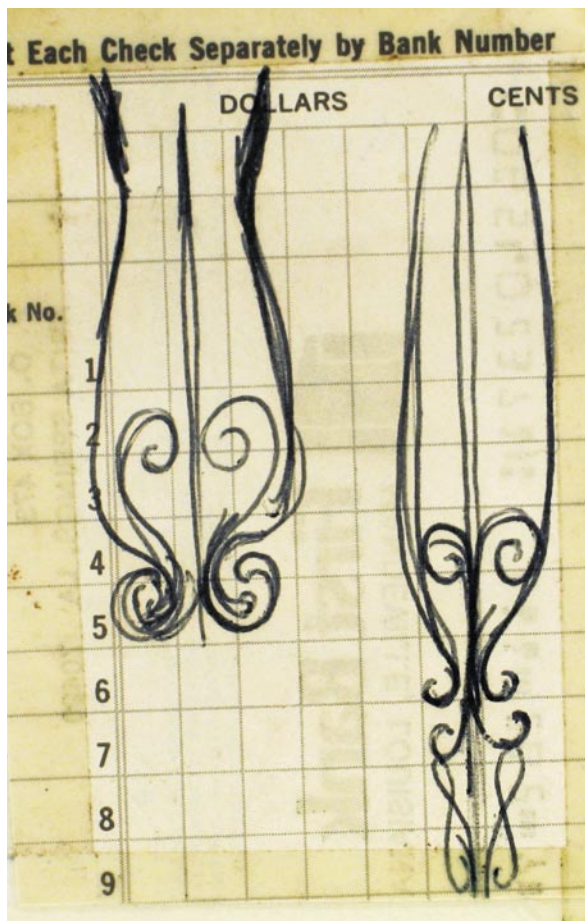
Above: Sketches of forks from the *Master Book of Designs*. Forks, spoons, and tongs were made, even in the early days.



Top: Illustrations of serving pieces from the *Master Book of Designs*. The notation at the bottom left indicates that a piece may have gone to the National Craft Showroom. It is unknown if the Art Deco looking pieces in the top left were ever created. However, the piece on the bottom left was.

Right: A photo of a large silver serving piece. This is similar to the piece that is illustrated in the sketch above. This photo was an early 1980's publicity photo taken by Bill Warner.





Above: A detail of a 'recycled' page taped in the *Master Book of Designs* that illustrates ideas for fancy forks. Compared to her jewelry pieces, very few serving pieces were made.

Below is a short biography written by O'Brien in the early to mid-eighties.

I operate my full-time craft business from a separate studio behind my home in a very pretty, very small town near New Orleans. Most of my sales are wholesale (or consignment) to shops around the United States. I also do occasional wholesale/retail craft shows and have been researching a retail catalog to encourage retail mail-order sales.

I am currently president of the Louisiana Crafts Council (7214 St. Charles Avenue #922, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118). I am also a member of the Society of North American Goldsmiths, (SNAG), the St. Tammany Art Association (129 N. New Hampshire, Covington, Louisiana 70433), and the Contemporary Art Center (500 Camp Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70130).

I first began making brass wire jewelry in 1970 after a friend showed me what she had been doing and how she wholesaled her work. I bought the equipment, and a business was born. I was a student at LSU in Baton Rouge. I eventually received a BFA in painting from L.S.U., but I took only one jewelry/metals course in my last semester at L.S.U. in 1975. After graduation I traveled and worked and sold my jewelry building up enough capital to work in silver and then gold. In the last 1 ½ years I have attended workshops by Heikki Seppa, Mary Lee Hu, Richard Mawdsley, and Richard Mafong.

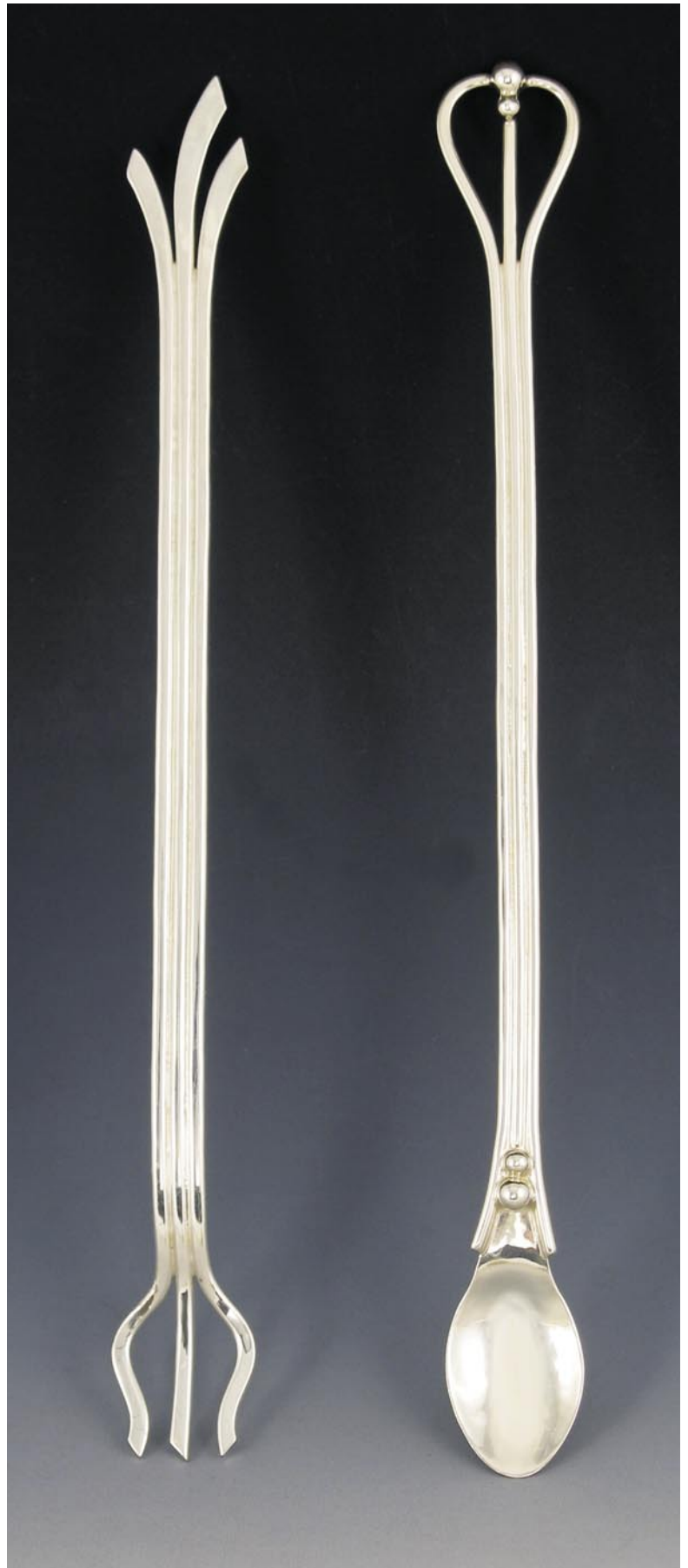
My work is production oriented. Recently, I am doing more and more experimental work because I have found that my most successful experiments can often become my most successful production pieces. I am just beginning to work out a line of sterling silver serving pieces, which I would like to enter in next year's Goodfellow Home Catalog. Occasionally a specially requested custom piece will also become a good candidate for production. I look at a lot of all kinds of antiques, and art, craft, antique, and design books and magazines for ideas.

I currently work with an apprentice with whom I went to high school. I do all of the bending and twisting; my helper does some soldering, and hammering and a lot of polishing. My husband helps me at shows, with general promotion, and with design ideas. I make earrings, rings, bracelets, etc., but I feel that my hair ornaments are the most unusual of my wearable pieces.

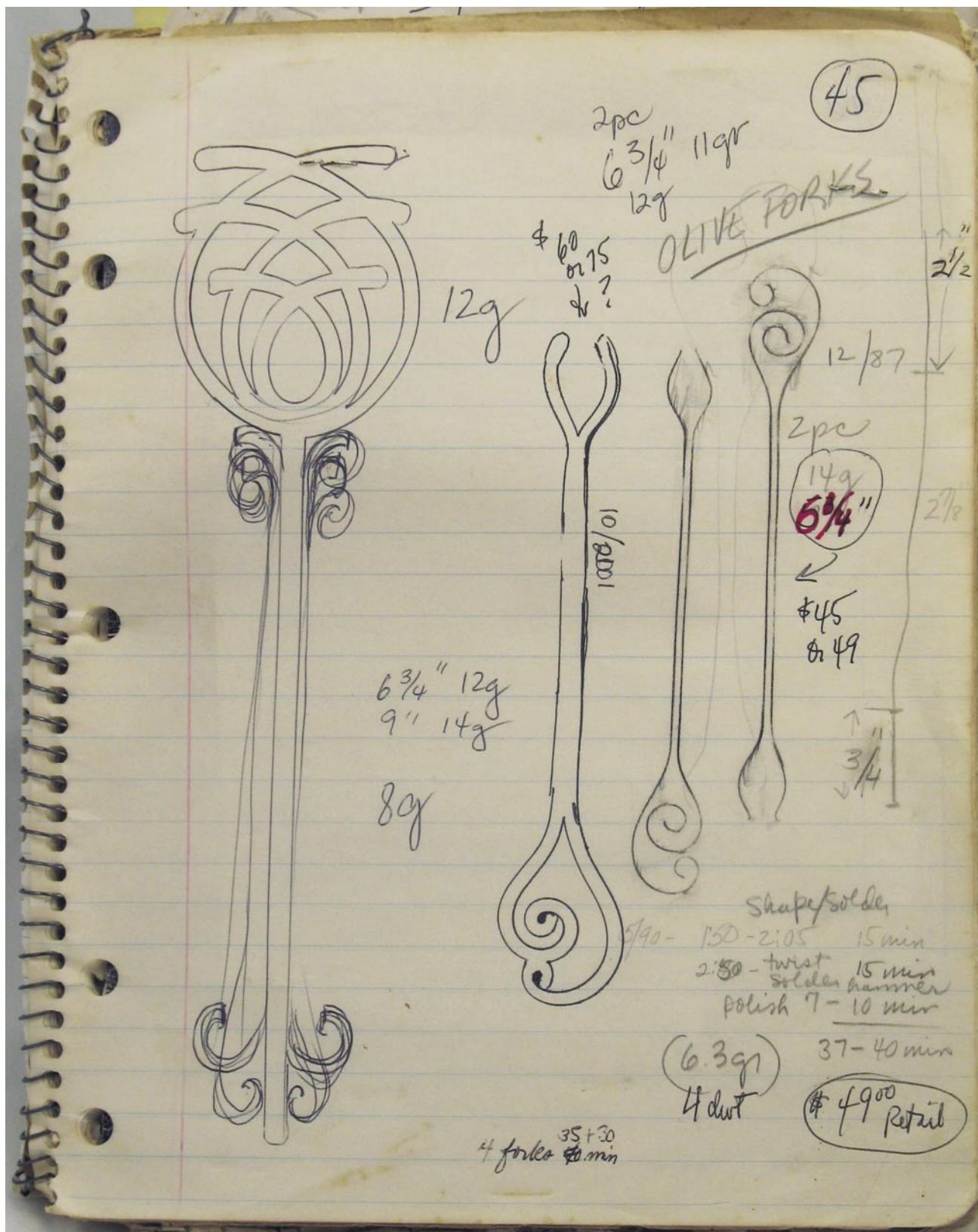
Below is a short résumé O'Brien wrote for Toni Eastham in the Spring of 2005. Eastham hired O'Brien as a part-time tutor.

Ann O'Brien has extensive experience working with children. Since 2002 she has trained with and worked for Toni Eastham as a learning specialist, first at One to One, and now at Mercy Learning Center. For several years in the later 1990's she worked as a visual artist in residence at many different St. Tammany Parish schools, teaching at every grade level K through 9th. During this time she worked with teachers to address different learning styles and to incorporate art lessons into their existing curriculums. For five years before that, she directed and taught a summer arts and drama camp in Abita Springs, and she volunteered as a docent for the St. Tammany Art Association's outreach program.

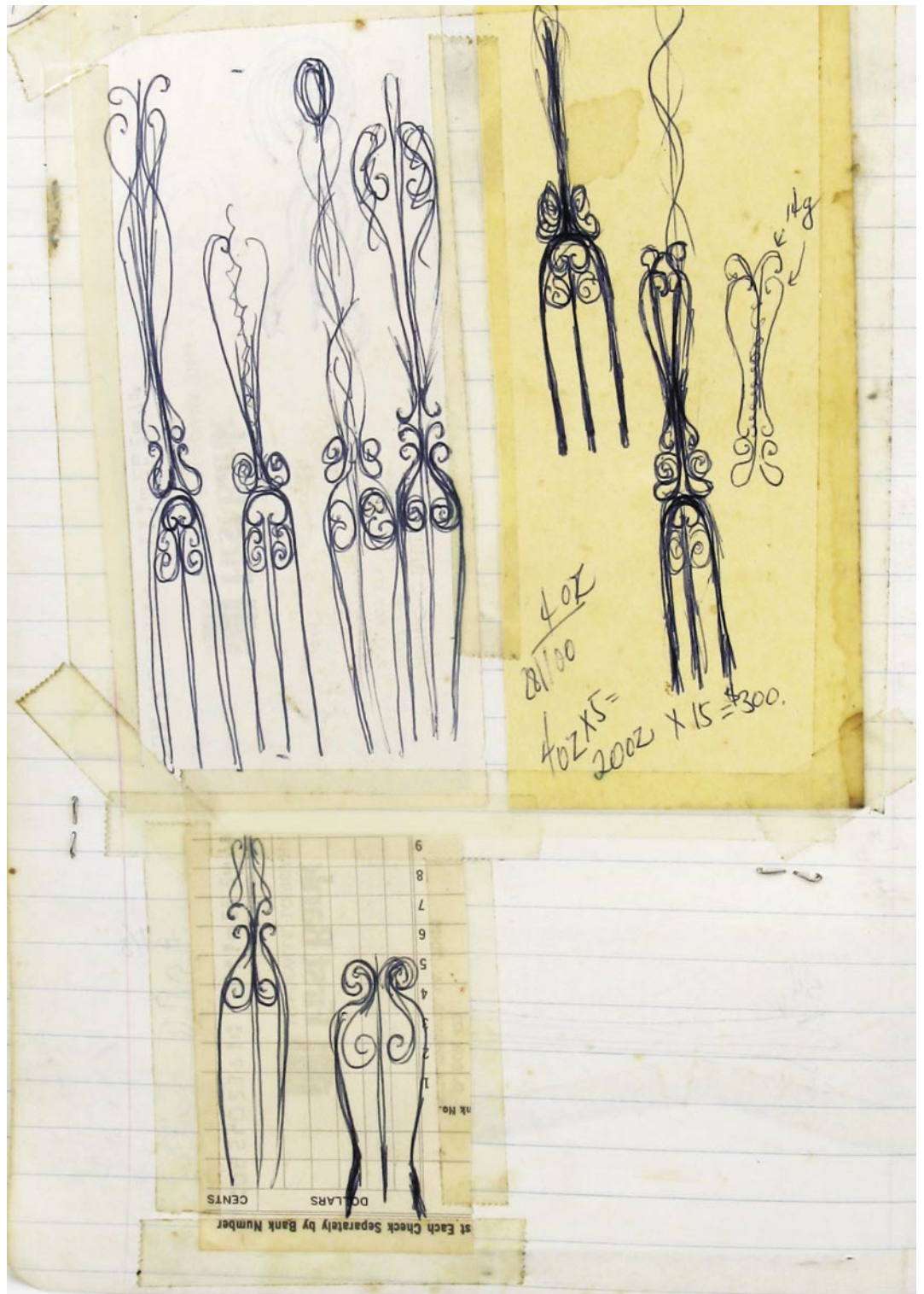
Ann O'Brien graduated from St. Scholastica Academy in Covington in 1969, and earned her BFA in Painting from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. In addition to working with children, she is a professional jewelry artist. She and her husband artist John Preble have two sons. They developed and currently operate the UCM Museum in Abita Springs, an interesting and interactive art environment that appeals to all ages.



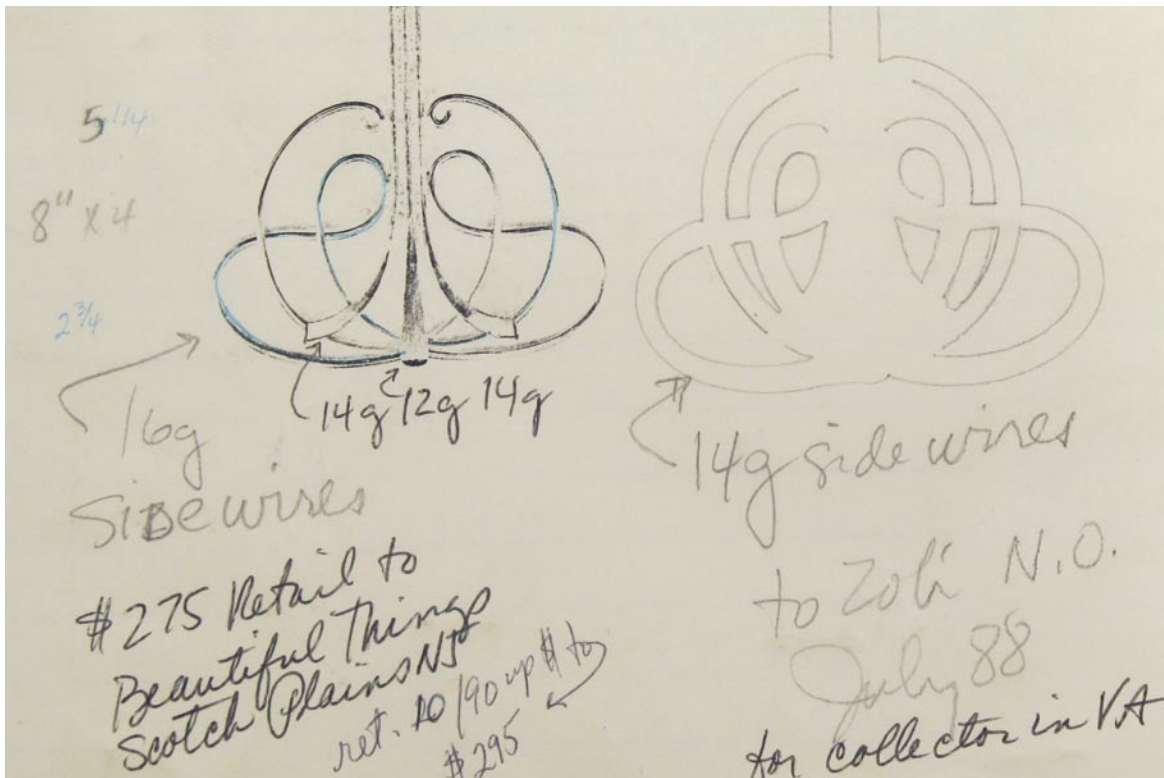
Above: A silver fork and spoon set from the collection of artists Francie Rich and John Hodge.



Above: Illustrations of serving pieces from the *Master Book of Designs*. O'Brien's olive forks may have been her best selling serving piece design.



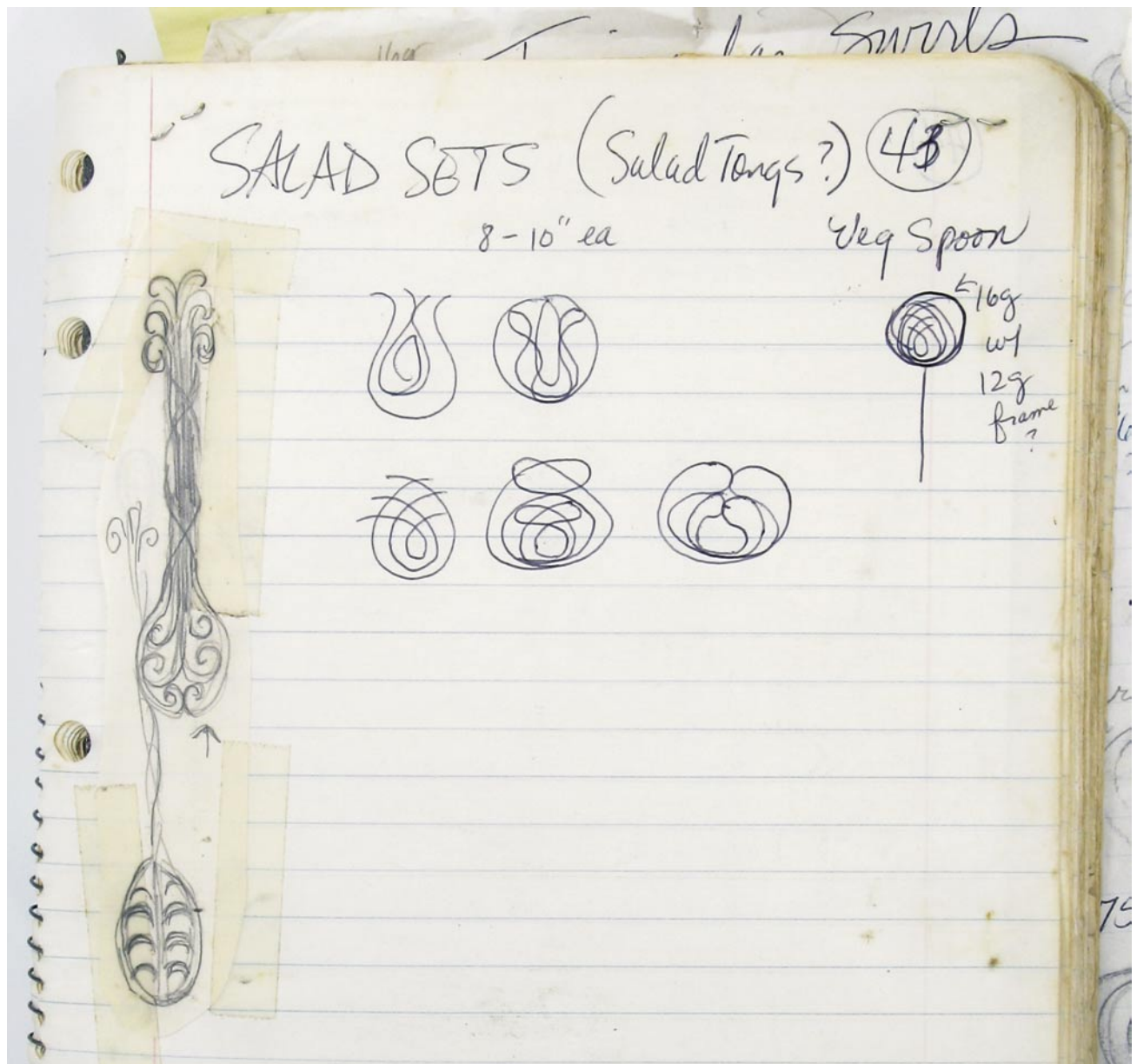
Above: From the *Master Book of Designs* – ‘recycled’ pages (taped to a page in her notebook) illustrate ideas for fancy forks. O’Brien often gave serving pieces as gifts to her friends and family.



Above **Left:** A silver fork from the Teague/Sasser family collection.

Above **Right:** A page from the *Master Book of Designs*, illustrating a design for tongs. O'Brien dated these July 1988; one item went to a store in Scotch Plains, NJ, and another to a collector in Virginia.

Opposite: A detail of a page from the *Master Book of Designs* illustrating sketches of serving pieces. Note on the upper right the small illustration of a vegetable spoon. It appears to be a fast sketch/doodle but at the same time exhibits much thought to the character of the 'to-be' finished piece.



The list below of memberships, activities, and honors is from an older O'Brien résumé.

Exhibiting Member of Craftsmen's Guild of Mississippi, since 1985
 Exhibiting Member of Louisiana Crafts Program, since 1986
 Panel Member: Doing Business as a Crafts person in the 1990's, Louisiana Crafts Council's 15th Annual Workshops, Baton Rouge LA, 1989
 Board Member of St. Tammany Art Association, Covington LA, 1984-87; Show Chairman 1986-87; Corresponding Secretary 1984-85

Board Member of Louisiana Crafts Council, 1982-87, President 1982-84
 Cochairman of Louisiana Crafts Council's 25th Anniversary Travelling Exhibition, which traveled to four locations 1986-87
 Coeditor Louisiana Crafts Report, Quarterly Newsletter of the Louisiana Crafts Council, 1983-1984
 Panel Member: Women & the Arts, Dominican College, Women's Office City of New Orleans, 1984

Special Pieces



Above: A Mardi Gras mask created using the spider technique, circa 1995. The carnival season was an important event for the O'Brien-Preble household. She and her family won several local costume contests, and it was O'Brien who in 2002 founded the still-rolling Krewe of Push Mow parade in Abita Springs. This parade traditionally rolls on the Saturday ten days before Mardi Gras. In 2007 the Push Mow parade had 475 costumed paraders.

KEY RINGS

81

Sterling

12 gauge 12cm long
 16g sm 1/2 circle soldered here
 #5

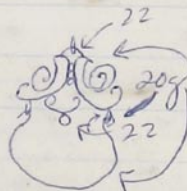
For initials

18g sm circle left open to solder closed later
 14g #2 circle (26.00 Retail)
 16g initial
 * don't hammer

For other designs use 16g design from stick (22.00 per)

Hammer each piece, then assemble w/ 18g circle - soldered closed
 stamp, tumble, + polish

14K PENDANT Charm holder



$$1.5 \text{ dwt} \times 20 \times \frac{1}{10} = 30$$

$$\text{\$} 1.5 \text{ hrs} \times 8 \text{ \$/hr} = 12$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 42 \\ \times 1.1 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$$WS \rightarrow 67.2$$

$$\text{Pearl} = 6.0$$

$$74.2$$

Above: From the *Master Book of Designs*, a 'recycled' page illustrating ideas for key rings and a pendant charm holder. O'Brien enjoyed the challenge of creating very utilitarian pieces and put a lot of thought into the practicality of these types of pieces.



Left: An art glass vase with silver flower stem lid (frog) from the Warren and Marie Louise Preble collection. O'Brien collected antiques; this glass vase was bought as an antique and later O'Brien constructed its decorative silver lid.

Much of the text on this page and the one following is from an article that was published in the November, 2005 issue of Country Roads, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Nine Inches of Silver - Thirty Years of Jewelry Making Ann O'Brien

By Maggie Heyn Richardson

Long about 1970, Ann O'Brien and her hippie friends were casting about for a reasonable way to make a living. Many of them were fine art majors, and as artists do, needed a practical means to define themselves outside of the frustrating, institutional mainstream. For O'Brien, that mainstream was a work-study position at the library that involved turning over albums for students on music appreciation class assignments.

"Can you get any more boring than that?" she says.

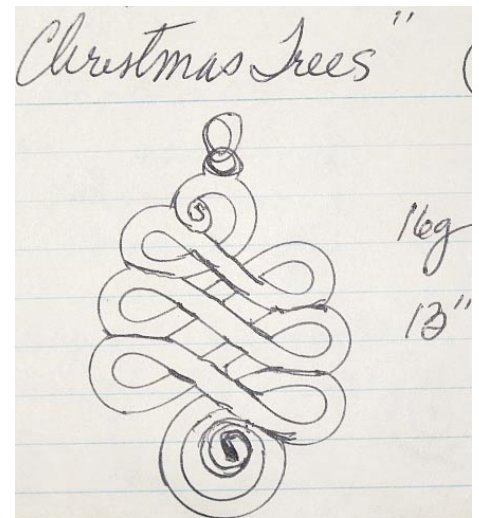
A friend, Courtney Miller, shared the art of making brass wire jewelry with the group – and a few twists and turns later – O'Brien had found a way to ditch her LP-flipping job.

The group of friends went their separate ways, but 30 years later, O'Brien still makes jewelry, (so does Miller in Pennsylvania). Her earrings, necklaces, bracelets and such – easily identifiable by their consistent style over the years, are sold throughout the US and have been extolled by crafts experts for their steadfastness – something that adds to their value. She no longer works in brass – now it's silver and gold – but her original loops and twirls have changed very little from their first conception.

And if she ever forgot those early designs, she need only turn to the series of tattered drugstore notebooks she has kept throughout her career. There's something about the handwriting and doodles of an artist. They look, well, artistic. In one notebook from the early 1980s, O'Brien drew a column of designs – each a slightly different variation on her anchor curly-cue. Each abstract image ever-so-subtly resembles something real: an angel, a heart, a nautilus. But this is accidental, says O'Brien. She regards them simply as patterns that have remained interesting enough to repeat for three decades.

O'Brien, who is married to artist John Preble, started off as a painter, eventually completing a

Right: A silver pendant Christmas tree ornament. O'Brien made several versions and sizes of the Christmas Tree design. Although the design was named 'Christmas Tree,' the pendant sold year round and was sometimes known as 'The Pineapple.'



degree in art at LSU. But tricks with light, shadow and color, she says, never moved her. Instead it was work that was more linear in style that got her attention.

"I've always been attracted to anything having to do with a line."

And that's exactly how each piece of jewelry starts out. In her notebook, O'Brien has documented exactly how long each length of wire must be before it's twisted into an earring, a bracelet, or a child's bubble blower. She's so precise that she has only produced enough scraps over the years to fill the bottom of a small Tupperware container in her studio.

O'Brien starts by twisting the wire by hand into her signature arcs and swirls. It's soldered, hammered and tumbled for up to three days to insure a smooth surface. Working with metal is technical – it conducts heat well and can melt and contort quickly. "What's really interesting about metal work," says O'Brien, "is that if you understand the principles behind making jewelry, you understand something like body work on a car."

Before they were married, O'Brien and Preble and a group of their artist friends were looking for a place to live in semi-commune fashion.

We wanted to be able to make things and show them to each other," she said. They settled on Abita Springs – then sparsely populated, cheap, and thick with vegetation. It inspired them. Later, she and Preble married and were among the early settlers of Abita's shady, tree-happy downtown.

Her studio is adjacent to their house and looks out through huge windows onto what used to be woods thick with pine trees and vines.

The damage from Hurricane Katrina is still seen throughout the small town, and O'Brien notes her studio's view has been tremendously affected. "More trees fell than are standing," she says. One side of her studio is completely covered by once vertical, stately bamboo, now bent permanently by the storm.

This month, O'Brien heads to the only arts festival she attends annually, Chimneyville, in Jackson, Mississippi. One-hundred-sixty artists will showcase their work at the 28-year event. Elsewhere throughout the region and country, her work is sold in specialty stores and through her website, www.aobjewelry.com.

O'Brien is about as authentic as you can get. She wears little make up, works in Birkenstocks, and despite selling thousands of earrings over the years, doesn't have pierced ears. She says she secretly chuckles when people try on jewelry and ask her for fashion advice. "I'm the last person you oughta ask," she says.

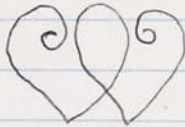
But she loves it when customers say that no matter what trends have come and gone, her sensual swirls always appeal to them.

"I'm never more flattered than if someone comes up and says, 'I wear these earrings every day.' My vision is that somebody wears my jewelry for thirty years." – *Maggie Heyn Richardson*

Bookmarks 16 gauge



7 3/4"
(3 7/8" = 1/2")



7"

← no solder at cross overs



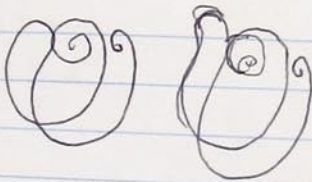
6 1/2"

3 7/8" / 2 5/8"

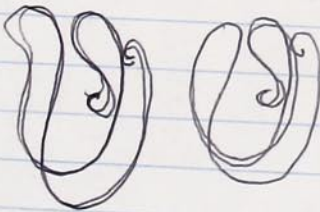


← hammer a lot at top

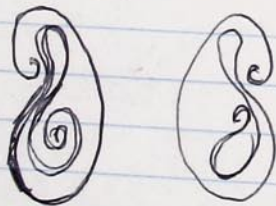
free form 7 1/2"



← no solder at crossover



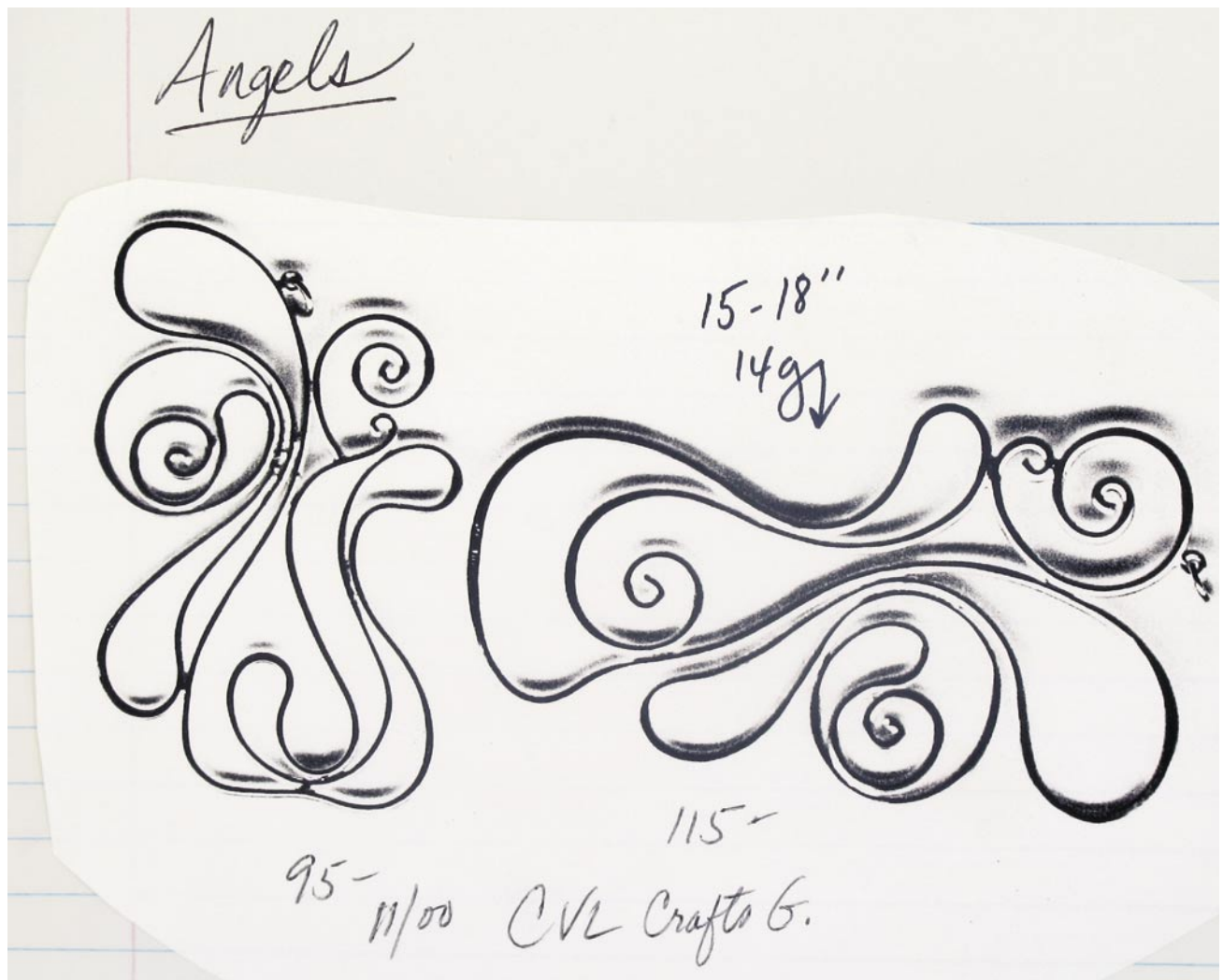
hammer a lot all around here



no solder here

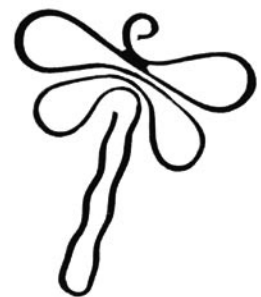


hammer a lot here



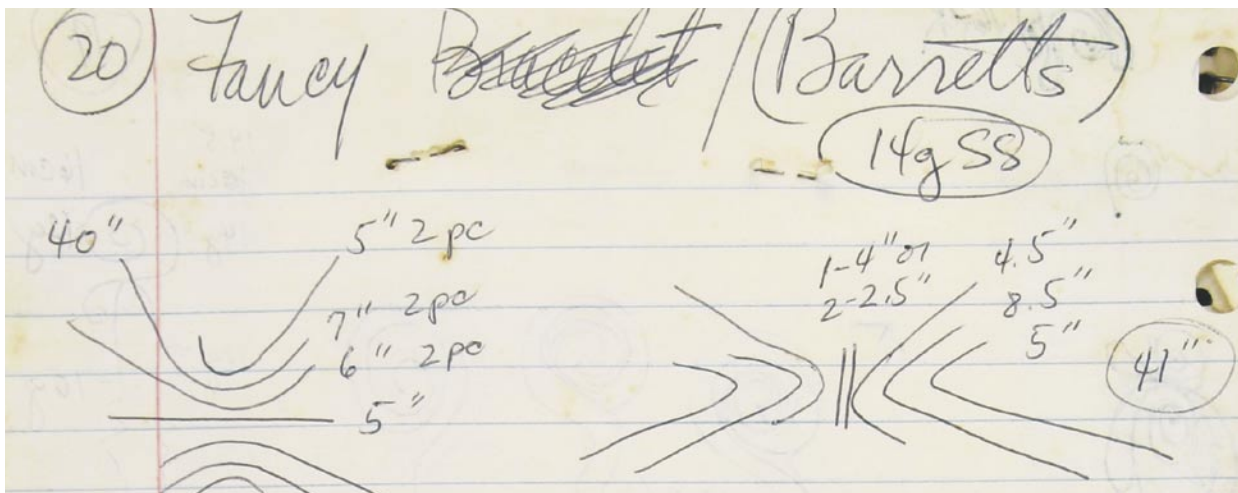
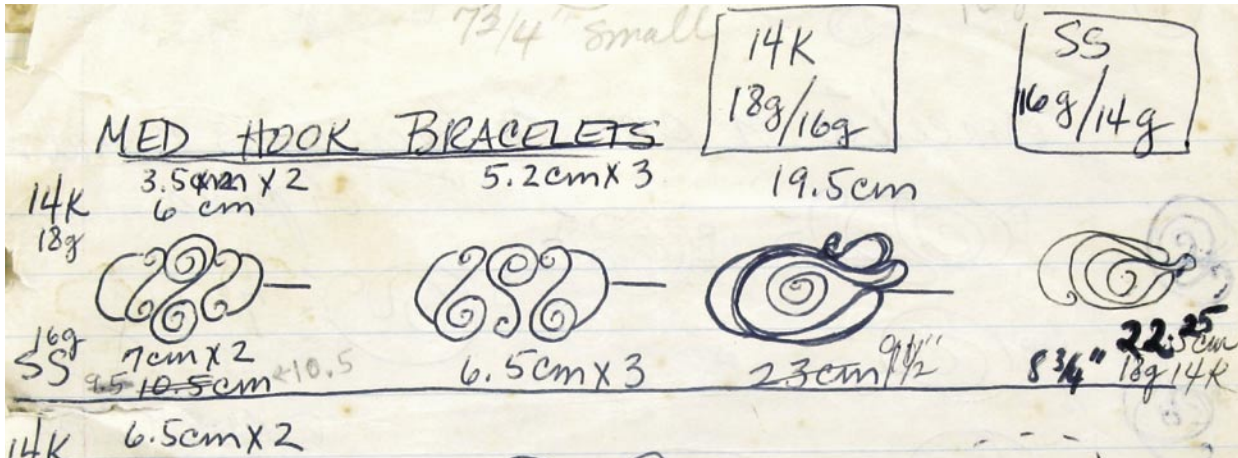
Above: A copy of angel designs found in O'Brien's *Master Book of Designs*. These could have been used as pendants or Christmas tree ornaments. Each design was created using a single piece of wire.

Right: A dragonfly design. This design may have been used for a pair of earrings or a pendant. The dragonfly design was created using a single piece of wire.



Opposite: From the *Master Book of Designs*, a page illustrating ideas for book marks. Note the instructions for hammering and soldering. O'Brien never discussed the idea about what would happen to her jewelry studio after she died; however, some readers of the *Master Book of Designs* believe that the notes throughout this journal were written with the thought that the work would continue after she passed.

Studio Techniques



Top: Sketches of bracelets from O'Brien's *Master Book of Designs*. For most of her designs O'Brien employed three techniques of fabricating her jewelry. One method was the modular technique, represented by the two designs on the left. This was the first technique she learned. The second technique was the free-form design created with just one wire. This technique is represented by the sketches on the right in the top photo. O'Brien's notebook includes meticulous notes on all aspects of the jewelry making process. The jewelers who work in O'Brien's studio, re-creating her designs, refer to these notes on a daily basis.

Bottom: Sketches of barrettes from O'Brien's *Master Book of Designs*. The third technique was the use of multiple pieces of wire that would be soldered together, flat, and near the center. The sketch from page 20 of her notebook illustrates the length of wire, how many pieces of wire, and gauge of SS (sterling silver) wire. After the piece was soldered, the artist would bend and twist each piece of wire and then soldered the twisted pieces where they may touch. After soldering, the piece was cleaned with chemicals and placed in a rock tumbler to clean off the soldering residue. Sometimes pieces needed to be filed in areas or "re-bent."



Top: Ann O'Brien soldering. This publicity photo was taken in her Abita Springs studio in the early 1980's.

Bottom: O'Brien's soldering pad in 2006. On the heat-resistant pad is an oxygen/natural gas torch, a "striker" to light the torch, and some special tweezers to hold the solder in place.



Top: Wooden dowels, 2006 studio photo. O'Brien used a variety of wooden dowels, and a Tabasco hot sauce bottle to create hoops and circles.



Bottom: O'Brien's tools, 2006 studio photo. The tools are basic: the snippers cut the wire, the round-nose pliers bent the wire, the hammer and anvil flattened the wire. The small anvil was placed on a post to absorb the hammering.



Above: Oxygen tanks and a primitive sink with hot and cold faucets. The gold and silver wire is soldered using a combination of natural gas and oxygen. The soldering torch can be seen hanging on the side of the sink. There are two valves on the torch; one controls the compressed oxygen from the tank and the other valve controls the flow of natural gas.

Right: The polishing motor. The jewelry is polished using two buffing wheels. Each wheel uses a different buffing compound; one wheel removes the large scratches, and the other wheel removes the smaller scratches.



The Abita Springs Art Colony



Once a Choctaw Indian village, Abita Springs is now part of the New Orleans North Shore community.

In the early 1900s the small town was a popular resort because of its “healing waters” and “ozone” air. Guests came from New Orleans to enjoy the large hotels, tall pine trees and scenic rivers.

Today the old train tracks are now bicycle trails and visitors are once again appreciating the attractive historic district, shaded sidewalks, friendly restaurants, country stores, and the popular brewery.



Top: An old postcard of the swimmers at Morgan’s Pool. This was a popular place for both tourists and locals since the early 1900’s. It closed in the mid 1900’s but the pool and its outbuildings are still there and very picturesque.

Bottom: An old postcard of the Abita Springs train depot. Visitors arrived every day from New Orleans when the train pulled into this quaint resort town.



Above: The current Abita Springs town hall is the home of the Friday night bingo and the Abita Springs Opry. The Opry presents live Louisiana roots music about once a month. During the day, the building functions as the actual town hall and police station.



Below: The Abita Springs pavilion. The pavilion is located next to the Abita River in the Abita Springs Tourist Park. It was designed for the 1884 Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans and was later disassembled and brought to Abita Springs. It was heavily damaged when the strong winds of Hurricane Katrina (2005) pushed large trees into the structure.



The idea for the UCM Museum started by chance, when Ann and family met Ross Ward at Ward's Tinkertown Museum near Albuquerque, New Mexico. Not only was Tinkertown fun, but Ann and John could sense the presence of Ward's deep commitment to a quality of aesthetics that is rarely found in any artistic endeavor, much less a "roadside attraction."

Ann saw that Andrew and William, who were then ten and five years old, respectively, really enjoyed Ward's museum. They were entertained by pushing buttons to activate the animated dioramas. This visit would change their lives forever. After talking with Ward they decided to return to Louisiana and create their own museum/attraction.

The UCM Museum opened September 1, 1996. In 2006 the name was changed to a name that would attract more families: the Abita Mystery House.

Top: The entrance to the Abita Mystery House, aka UCM Museum. This old gas station is also the gift shop; it was built in 1910. The gas pumps no longer function.

Bottom: The much-photographed "House of Shards." On the grounds of the UCM Museum, this building started out as a horse barn; it now has thousands of pottery shards decorating it, both inside and out.



Above: *"Martians At Mardi Gras"* is an animated diorama by John Preble. 24" x 24" x 48." The Abita Mystery House has many motorized animated displays created by Preble. They were inspired when the Preble/O'Brien family visited Carla and Ross Ward's creative folk art environment Tinkertown in New Mexico.

Bottom: *"Aliens Crashed Into Our Trailer"* is an outdoor exhibit at the Abita Mystery House.



Top: “*Buford the Amazing 24’ Bassigator*.” An outdoor exhibit at The Abita Mystery House. Buford was built by Dave Kelsey and John Preble. It is mounted on a boat trailer and is sometimes exhibited in Mardi Gras parades.



Left: An oil painting titled “*Creole Sunrise*” by John Preble, 12” x 16.” Preble’s Creole portraits have become well known in the area. One of Preble’s paintings has been exhibited in the White House in Washington, D.C.

The Abita Mystery House is your basic family fun roadside attraction. It includes a vintage service station that is now utilized as the gift shop, an original 90-year-old Creole cottage that was moved on to the museum grounds, and a large exhibit hall, the “Shed of Revelations” and other out-buildings. An old concrete stucco house that was on the grounds became the “House of Shards” with the help of over 15,000 ceramic and glass fragments.

The grounds feature lots of bamboo and vines and aquarium ponds that have fish and turtles. An old Airstream travel trailer with an attached flying saucer is a popular photo spot. One of the main

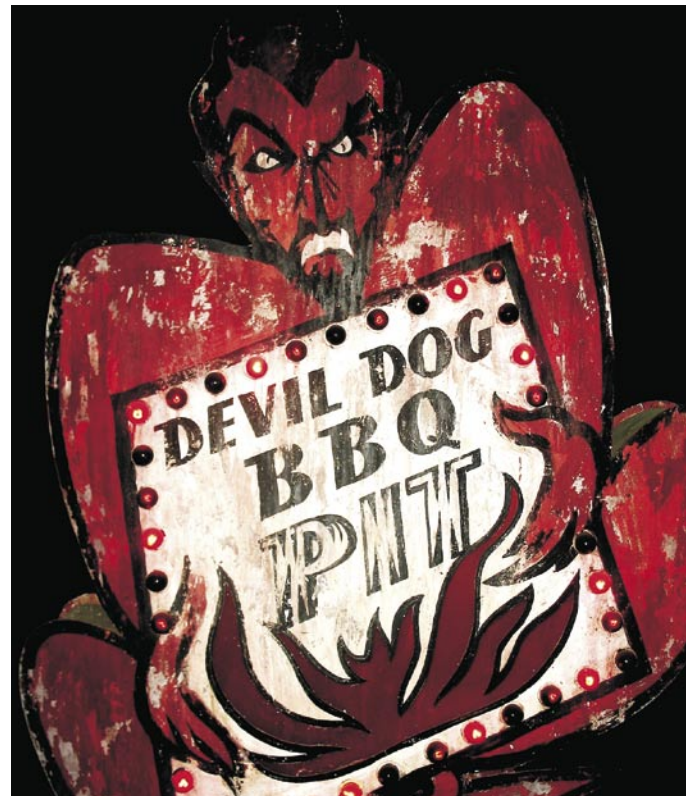
features of the Mystery House is Buford, the world’s largest “bassigator” (22’).

The museum is decorated throughout with tens of thousands of bottles, bottle caps, license plates, springs, motors, and “what-all.” Numerous found objects, and home-made inventions create the incredible miniature animated Southern town called “River Road”. The museum includes a large exhibit of Abita Springs Pottery by John Preble.

The Mystery House’s gift shop sells many local crafts and is now a good place to purchase Ann O’Brien Studio jewelry.



Top Left: A molded vase (10") with matte white glaze by John Preble. Preble created art pottery in his Abita Springs Pottery studio in the mid 1970's in Abita Springs, Louisiana. A display of the pottery is on exhibit at the UCM Museum in Abita Springs. Collectors associate this work with that of Walter Anderson, Shearwater, Newcomb, George Ohr, Roseville, and Rockwood Pottery. Pieces range from 4" to 14" tall.



Top Right: A sign painted and constructed by Dave Kelsey. Kelsey painted this sign while working as a scenic artist for the motion picture industry. The sign (on loan from Kelsey) is exhibited at the Abita Mystery House.



Middle: Dragonfly earrings by Courtney Berry Peterson (Formerly Courtney Miller), 2006. Peterson taught O'Brien how to make jewelry.

Bottom: A 2006 silver pendant with set stone by Dyane Mitchell. Dyane Mitchell was from the New Orleans area where she created crafts. She moved to the North Shore in the early 70's and lived for a short period in Peterson's house (Peterson was then married to Skip Miller.)



Vitrice McMurry lived and worked in Abita Springs in the early 1970's.

My memories of Abita are very special. I do remember one crystalline, beautiful fall day there, looking out my back door over my yard of pines and camellias and thinking "Someday I'll look back at this with wonder"...I went there with no particular direction, but found a town of 500 that had 10% of its population being hippie jewelers! Having had one course in jewelry-making at LSU and vaguely interested in pursuing it, I found myself inspired by the craftsmanship and design integrity of Michael Curtis and the commercial chutzpah/earthmother spirit of Courtney Miller. I started doing craft fairs and thought how cool to not have to have a job, little realizing that self-employed people work longer and harder. Life in Abita was pretty idyllic, with food co-ops, metal-buying co-ops among the craftsmen, pot-lucks at

the Longbranch and such. The architecture, the relatively crisp and almost alpine air and wonderful water of Abita and the incredible group of artists and such folk really made Abita wonderful. I count my days there as the most inspirational and beautiful of my life.

It was pretty amazing, living in a turn of the century center-hall cottage ("Pine Cottage"), furnished with antiques, for \$75 a month. It came complete with a little old French landlady (the upstairs maid for an elite New Orleans family) who came over on weekends and expected to share the kitchen and bath with us – until we straightened that out! The town was filled with these wonderful old houses, most given affectionate names posted over the doors. The longer I lived there, the more unique artist-types I met. I remember Ann most fondly as one of the most gracious and lovely folks in Abita.

– Vitrice McMurry



Michelle Kelsey shares her thoughts on the Abita art community in the following paragraphs.

We moved over to Abita in July of 1994 from Gentilly, a neighborhood in New Orleans, with a rambunctious toddler and another on the way. It rained a little bit everyday for three months. Abita was like the rain forest, lush and moist. The sound of the frogs kept us up at night. It didn't take long to fall in to our place in this harmonious little town with a single red light and a micro brewery. Our small circle of North Shore friends swelled quickly, with our amazingly talented and diverse new neighbors; painters, photographers, sculptors, jewelers, brewers, potters, playwrights and madmen. We had found our Elysian Fields. Our kids rode bikes to the river to fish, to the ball park, to the sno-ball stand and to each others' houses. Their afternoons were spent in the Snellings's spring-fed pool with the moms on the side, working on whatever random project one happened to bring along: decorations for upcoming weddings, giant Christmas ornaments for the town street lights, costume-making...it didn't matter, everybody helped. The annual Halloween "*Trail of Spooks*" in Ann and John's back yard was a production equal to one on Broadway. The "*Abita Stories*" shadow

plays in the park were charming and embracing, the montage of Abita's old-timers memories played out as silhouettes by local actors.

When Ann and John opened the UCM Museum, it quickly became the home base for the artistic Abita experience. On any given day, you could drop in and run into other artists bouncing ideas around. The "shed club for men" as it came to be known, a tin garage that John shared with many local men from one time to another (when their wives made them clean out at home) was coveted space. John and Ann started the North Shore Art Academy and allowed the whittlers club to meet there one evening a week. Ann started the Push Mow Parade, a Mardi Gras parade with floats based on lawn-mowers. It is home to the Abita Queen-Bees social and pleasure club. The Louisiana Bicycle Festival is held there on Fathers Day weekend. Ann started the Annual Eclectic Wreath Auction that is held there every December, with artistic and sometime off-color wreaths being auctioned off to a raucous crowd with standing room only and the money going to the charity of the artist's choice. They always had some of the best parties – the combination of good people and the UCM's visual chaos created an energy where you couldn't help but have fun.

– Michelle Kelsey

Alan Flattmann, nationally known artist and author noted the following:

From 1987 to 1995, I rented a small rustic house in Abita Springs to serve as my painting studio. It was on St. Joseph Street, just about a block from John Preble and Ann O'Brien's home. The house looked like a cabin or barn and was set way back in the woods almost hidden from view from the road. The interior essentially was one large open room with large overhead beams, a loft, small kitchen and attached bathroom and porch. The setting proved to be peaceful and inspirational. I would arrive every morning around 9 or 10 and paint till dark before heading home for the night. I had no telephone to interrupt me. Sometimes I would paint late into the night, and that is when the swamp critters would begin to show up at the door. I put out food for a few stray cats, but that soon attracted the raccoons, possums and foxes. Since the cabin sat in a low, almost swampy area, it would flood every time we got a heavy rain and I would have to wade through ankle-deep water to get to the studio – fortunately the studio sat up high and water never got in while I was there. Overall, my experiences in Abita Springs were very pleasant. My wife Becky would often meet me for lunch and we enjoyed many long walks on the town's shady streets and along the Tammany Trace. I reluctantly gave up my Abita studio in 1995 when we moved to Madisonville, and I had space for a studio in our home.

In 1998 I taught landscape and portrait painting classes at the Northshore Art Academy at the UCM Museum for several years. I particularly enjoyed painting on location with my students at such picturesque Abita sites as the Abita Park, the Hickory Street bridge and Morgan's Pond. – *Alan Flattmann*



Top: A turquoise, crinoid, trilobite and silver pin by Michael Curtis. Curtis hunts and collects fossils and rocks, which he often incorporates into his organic sculpture and jewelry work. Curtis has lived and worked in the Abita Springs area most of his life, and his work is in many local private collections.

Bottom: "Tujague's at Night," a pastel by Alan Flattmann. 22" x 32," 2006. Flatmann's work is represented in New Orleans by Bryant Galleries.



Top: Architecture by Ron Blitch. The multi-level residence of Blitch reflects the history of architecture from the old classics to the Abita style cottage, replete with tin roofing and wide veranda, but with exuberant Italianate flourishes and detailing. The wonderfully creative structures are elevated on timber piles on the banks of the scenic Abita River.

Middle: A detail of a painting titled "Datura" – oil on linen by Tim Trapolin 30" x 40" 2001. Trapolin is a well known artist in the New Orleans area.

Bottom: A silver Pendant by Carol Maschler, circa 2006. Maschler worked for O'Brien for several years in the Abita Springs studio.



We found our 1905 Abita Springs cottage on Hickory Street in 1974. It was one in a row of cottages belonging to the New Abita Springs Hotel. When we saw our house for the first time there was a handmade FOR SALE sign hammered onto a large pine that stood in front, asking a price of \$7,000. A former resident said that she lived on one side with her family of 9. We renovated the cottage and began the artist's life in Abita Springs.

I studied painting at the John McCrady Art School in New Orleans. In 1979 I discovered the multiplication of images by cutting folded paper. In the early 1980's I started walking the streets and wooded areas of Abita with my dogs. A lot of the early cuttings came from those walks. Eventually other themes developed, but my street and neighborhood are still an enduring influence on my work. For a brief period I opened the Hickory Street Gallery on one side of my cottage. In 2004 I started multiplying images using photography and that miracle of modern technology – Photoshop. Once again I am chasing the abundant lush natural beauty of Abita Springs and the parish.

– Mary Davis

Above Left: A pendant by Jayne DeMarcay, circa 2006. This contemporary piece features gold, silver, radolite garnet, tourmaline and tanzanite. DeMarcay lives on eighteen wooded acres near Abita Springs. She is an award-winning artist who exhibits in numerous museums and art shows across the country.

Above Right: “Japanese Climbing Fern” ink on cut paper, 17.5” x 17.5” by Mary Davis 1979.



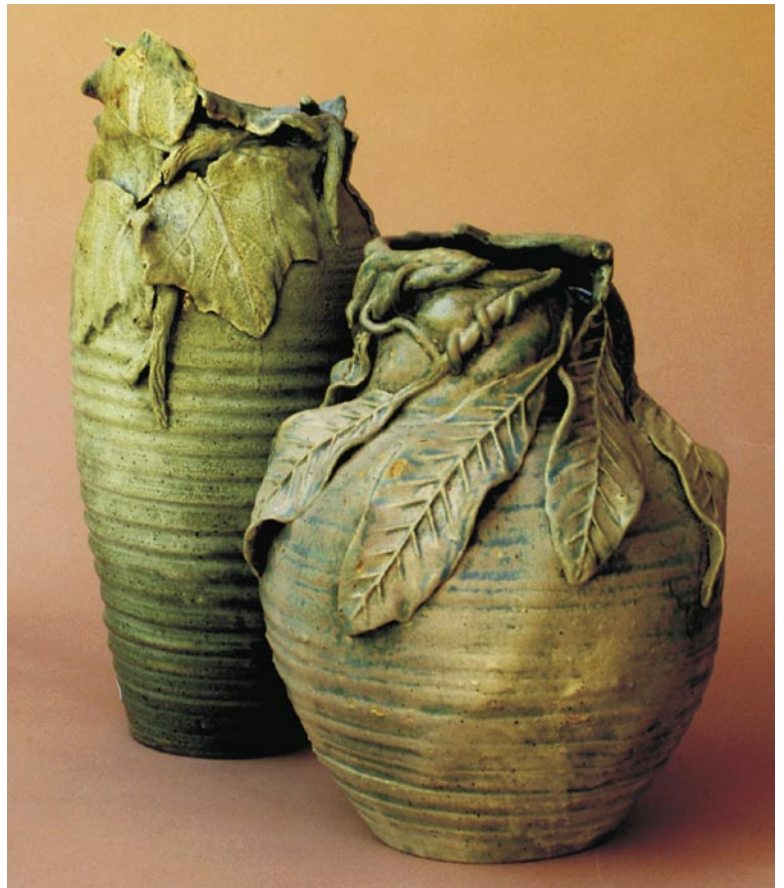
Top: A hand-crafted guitar by Phil Patterson and Joe Manuel. Manuel, who lived in Abita Springs, is a craftsman, master guitarist, music teacher, and performing artist. He plays regularly with his band, The Abita Strings, at the Abita Springs town hall for the well known Abita Springs Opry radio show. The Abita Springs Opry features musicians who play Louisiana roots music. Manuel's Abita Guitar company started around 1990.

Bottom: A detail of a watercolor by Dale Hauck. The original painting is 18" X. 24". From the collection of the O'Brien/Preble estate. In 1975 when the Hauck family moved to the North Shore, they did so with the assistance of Courtney Miller, who introduced them to other artists and encouraged them to buy a house in Abita Springs; their home cost \$13,000. O'Brien and Preble lived near Hauck and purchased several pieces of Hauck's. Preble's main painting easel was given to him by Hauck.

Below is a list of artists who lived in the Abita Springs area during the time when O'Brien created jewelry.

Gary Achee, graphic artist
 John Akers, artist
 Hardy Allbritton, artist
 Mary Allbritton, artist
 Paul Andry, musician
 Greg Arceneaux, woodworker
 Nancy Ashworth, jeweler
 James Bass, musician
 Mike Beverage, artist
 Bill Binnings, artist
 J. Buchanan Blitch, architect
 Ron Blitch, architect
 Jay Brady, graphic designer
 Katherine Brady, writer/director
 Benji Branson, musician
 Stephen (Sparky) Brick, artist
 Francis Broussard, poet
 Libby Buuck, artist
 Ray Buuck, artist
 Susan Carver, metal worker
 Rene Chapotel, jeweler
 Chris Chalmbers, artist
 Gene Culbertson, artist
 Mike Curtis, jeweler
 Memise Danielson, artist
 Mike Davis, artist
 Mary Davis, artist
 Jayne DeMarcay, jeweler
 Sylvia Dumas, artist/designer
 Camille Duplantier, artist
 Claire Duplantier, dancer
 Steve Duplantier, photographer
 Claude Ellender, architect / artist
 Kama Fischer, artist
 Alan Flattmann, artist
 Amedee Frederick, musician
 Steve (Ocala) Frewin, professor
 Judy Galloway, artist
 Robin Hamaker, artist
 Calvin Harlan, artist / author
 Dale Hauck, artist
 Jerry Hess, musician

John Hodge, artist
 Dave Kelsey, artist
 Tom Kerney, photographer
 Michelle Kelsey, artist
 Donovan Killeen, artist
 Karl Koenig, musician
 Margareta Lahme, designer
 Rachel Lambert, artist
 Joe Manuel, musician / luthier
 Julie Marshall, artist
 Carol Maschler, jeweler
 Bunny Matthews, cartoonist
 Jane Mauldin, author
 Vitrice McMurry, artist
 Constance McQuoid, designer
 Courtney Miller, jeweler
 Dyane Mitchell, jeweler / musician
 Wayne (Ashome) Morgan, sculptor
 Elena Mudge, jeweler
 David Mudge, blacksmith artist
 Nancy Mulligan, designer
 Ann Nalty, artist
 Lisette Norman, graphic artist
 Michael O'Brien, jeweler
 Loretto O'Reilly, writer
 Darlene Olivio, artist / photographer
 Owen Murphy, photographer
 Roc Paul, artist
 Lynn (Uranus) Peterman, artist
 David Pulitzer, woodworker
 Elena Ronquillo, actress
 Elise Roome, artist
 John Preble, artist
 Carl Putnicki, musician
 Robert Rucker, artist
 Roy Robinson, cartoonist/artist
 Rush, photographer
 Barbara Smith, artist
 Elliot Snellings, photographer
 William E. Sorensen, writer
 Michelle Sweeten, musician
 Pat Sweeten, musician
 Margie Tate, artist
 Aubry Thornton, artist
 Diane Trail, gallery owner
 Tim Trapolin, artist
 Ed Whiteman, artist



Top: Ceramic vases with leaves, hand thrown; and glazed cone 4, 2006 by John Hodge. Hodge and Preble were college roommates, and he was Preble's best man at the O'Brien-Preble wedding.

Bottom: A silver bracelet by Rene Chapotel from the O'Brien/Preble estate. This was a typical piece by Chapotel who often used floral motifs in his work. Chapotel shared his Abita Springs jewelry studio with O'Brien for a few years.



Above: O'Brien giving Dub Brock, aka Bobby Lounge, a good-luck kiss, while Edward Deano, aka Professor Calvin Tubbs grins at the camera. This photo was taken back stage at the 2005 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, when Bobby Lounge presented his first 'Iron Lung Show'

Below are lyrics to a Bobby Lounge song. Lounge gives a nod to John Preble for the song's inspiration.

Take Me Back To Abita Springs

Bobby Lounge ©2005 Bobby Lounge

He was a Louisiana regional phenomenon
Women called him Tipi but his name was John
Packed up all the junk he strewed out in his yard
He said I'm going west to become a movie star
Reduced to singing backup with Siamese twins
He cried out "Take me back to Abita Springs"

CHORUS

Take me back to Abita Springs
Take me back to Abita Springs
Carry me back to Abita Springs
Just take me down and let me rest forever
Down on the banks of Abita River

INSERTION: If the twins dress alike, why can't I

CHORUS (LAST LINE) Take me back to Abita Springs

Well the twins slip up Tipi went to drinking
Didn't realize just how far he was sinking
Till he became a poster boy for VD telethon
Use some protection don't wind up like John
They'd wheel him out on stage tell em boy say anything
He'd cry out "Take me back to Abita Springs"

Repeat Chorus and Insert:

Cause if you pledge on TV when the telephone rings

Became a voodoo priest out in Tyler, Texas
Stealing people's wallets while they genuflected
But they ran out of state on a moral's charge
He was entertaining truckers in the parsonage garage
Lonely wheelchair tracks cross the desert plains
Take me back to Abita Springs

Repeat Chorus and Insert:

Why can't a holy man get into kinky things
Take me back to Abita Springs

Escaped to Rio de Janeiro on a Greyhound Cruise
Ate some bad tamales got the Rio flu
Yeah nursed back to health by a Latin spit fire
Her name was Poncho Villa played the electric sitar
Extension cord wet in a monsoon rain
Knocked her castanets clear to Abita Springs

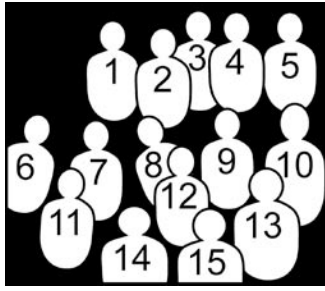
Repeat Chorus and Insert:

Electric enchilada like to fried off his blue jeans

Well Poncho had his baby and they named him Al Fresco
Six months overdue come out dancing flamenco
Strapped some tap shoes to his tiny little feet
He loved to tap in guacamole to a rumba beat
But they lost him one evening in some refried beans
Sent his sticky little shoes to Abita Springs

Repeat Chorus and Insert:

Al Fresco going down in some quicksand beans



Right: Circa 1980 photo
by Phil Caruso taken at
the O'Brien/Preble home.

- 1 Gary Donaldson
- 2 Jene Donaldson
- 3 Tom Kerney
- 4 Dale Hauck
- 5 Steve Duplantier
- 6 Rene Chapotel
- 7 Margareta Lahme
- 8 Laura Davis
- 9 Elena Ronquillo
- 10 John Preble
- 11 Mary Davis
- 12 Kate Hauck
- 13 Elise Roome
- 14 Phil Caruso
- 15 Ann O'Brien



Well he lost his little Poncho to a grease inspector
Said "I knew she was getting slimy
But I did not suspect her"
Commandeered a burro said "I got to go home"
But the donkey lost his mind around the Panama Canal
Zone
The mule was misdirected
He thought he could sing
He brayed out "My career will suffer in Abita Springs"

Repeat Chorus and Insert:

A mule with aspirations ain't worth anything

Well Tipi hopped a freighter and he saw the world
Met some communist Chinese out in Portugal
They toasted him with wine till his head was spinning
Tattooed him all over with motorcycle women
He said "Before I got tattooed I just had splotchy skin"
Take me back to Abita Springs

Repeat Chorus and Insert:

Tattoos begin to droop if you get too thin

He traveled far and wide searched high and low -
Vandalized a statue by Michelangelo
Shot down in Great Britain on the palace grounds
Baying at the moon in the Queen's night gown
The Queen said we do not loan out our under-things
He said Ma'am just send me back to Abita Springs

Repeat Chorus and Insert:

I expected nicer lingerie from a Queen

Well Tipi disappeared he went underground
Years went by he could not be found
Till they received a parcel at the Abita station
It was plastic tombstone with a single notation

I have traversed the world in search of my elusive dreams
Let my life serve as example for what idle pleasure brings
And as my demise shall be soon forthcoming it seems
Place my body beneath local landscape verdant and
green

And on the plastic tombstone ever let my epitaph read
Home at last, in Ponchatoula

Repeat Chorus and Insert:

I guess he must of got the names confused

Repeat Chorus and Insert:

Artesian water flowing through his veins

Take me back to Abita Springs
Carry me back to Abita Springs
Take me down and let me rest forever
Carry me back to Abita Springs
Take me back to Abita Springs
Take me back to Abita Springs

The Studio Continues



Left: A silver bracelet from the Ann O'Brien Jewelry Studio created in November 2006. During O'Brien's six-month illness (1/06 - 7/06) the work was not sold, much to the disappointment of her collectors. But now with a team of like-minded artisans Ann O'Brien's beautiful designs are once again for sale in jewelry stores, art galleries and museum shops.

For collectors of Ann O'Brien jewelry, the good news is that the pieces will continue to be made. Below are notes by John Preble regarding this new phase.

Abita Springs resident Nancy Ashworth, Ann's assistant for twelve years, also worked part time at the UCM Museum – which is only a few shaded blocks away from the jewelry studio. Ann had a lot of admiration for Nancy and appreciated her in many ways. Ann told me once that Nancy actually soldered better than she did. Over the years, as Nancy became better acquainted with jewelry making, Ann felt comfortable turning over more responsibilities to her. Although she was originally hired to polish and solder, Nancy learned to twist wire, and created many of the simpler pieces for several years.

Shortly after Ann died Nancy and I talked about the fate of the studio and her job. I was at a

loss in many ways. A real loss. Although the studio was only a few feet from our house and I saw Nancy and Ann every day working, I really had no idea of what kind of business Ann had. I didn't know how much money the studio made, what the salaries were, Nancy's hours, the utilities, the retail shops, the consignment arrangements, special orders, internet orders, nothing. At one time Ann had named her jewelry business Magnolia Enterprises - this may have been done when both her first husband, Jerry Thomas, and she, were making jewelry together. The name Magnolia Enterprises is now being phased out in favor of Ann O'Brien Jewelry Studio.

So with Nancy's guidance the studio that Ann O'Brien founded is back in operation. We have re-enlisted some former employees and old friends of the studio, and are once again placing the jewelry back in the display cabinets to sell.

– John Preble



AOB •

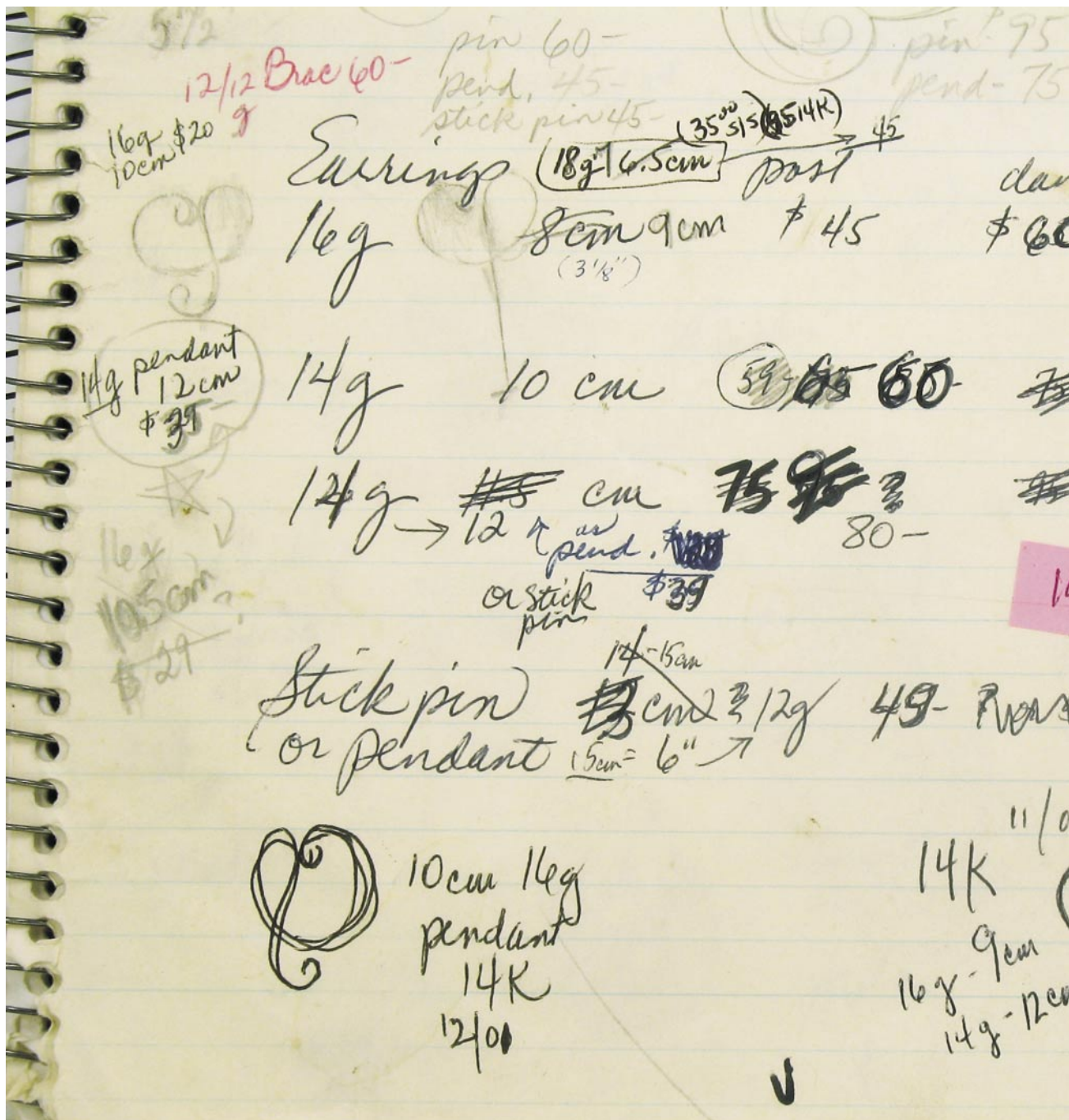
AOB



Top: The Abita Springs jewelry studio. The Ann O'Brien Jewelry Studio continues to handcraft the designs of the artist Ann O'Brien.

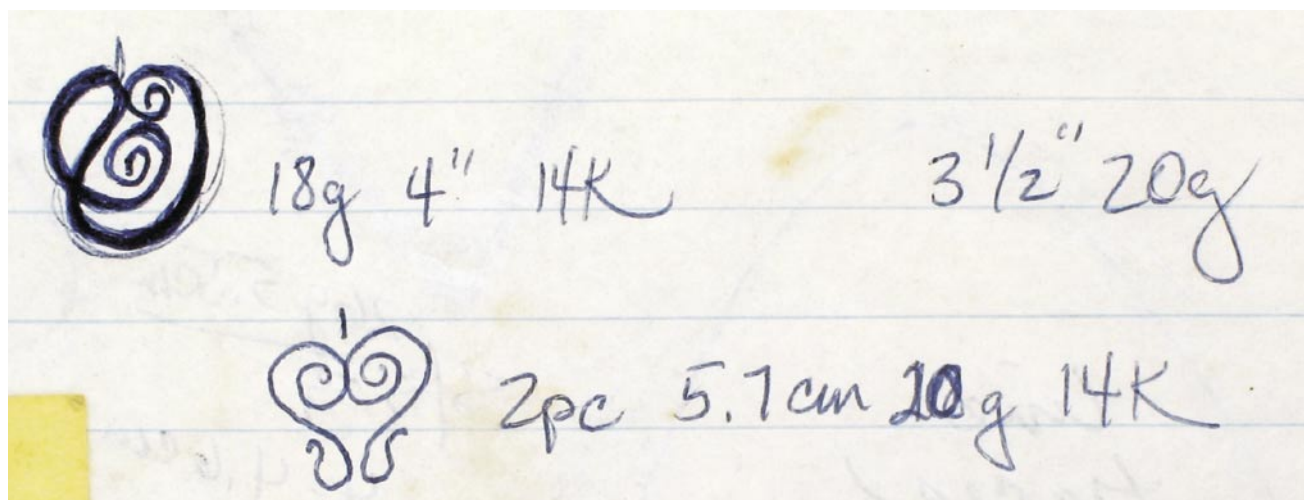
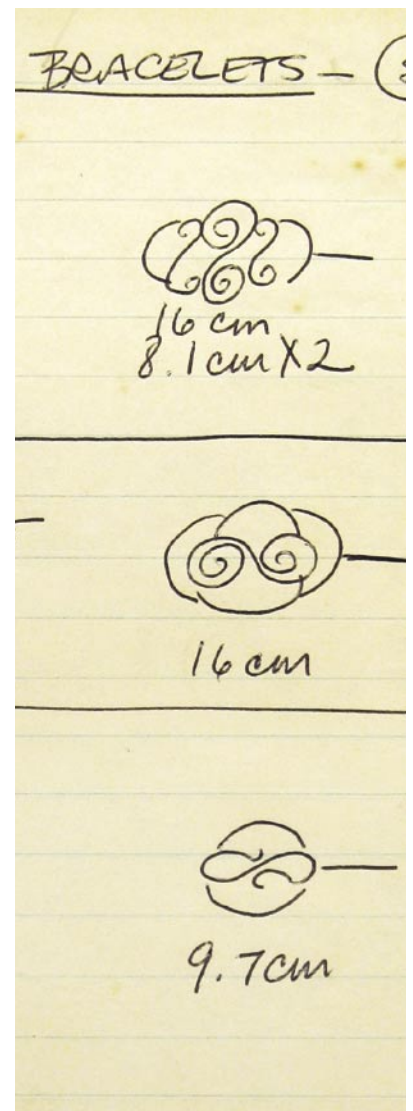
Center: This hallmark "AOB •" is stamped on each piece of Ann O'Brien jewelry created after July 1, 2006.

Bottom: This hallmark "AOB" is on each piece of Ann O'Brien jewelry created before July 1, 2006. Early pieces were not stamped.



Above and Opposite: Sketches and notes from O'Brien's *Master Book of Designs*. The illustrations on these two pages demonstrate the attention to detail that O'Brien exhibited during her jewelry-making career. Thanks to this wonderful notebook, the Ann O'Brien Jewelry Studio artisans will continue to create her beautiful pieces. This continuation of high-quality craftsmanship is not unusual and can be compared to other craft studios that have continued their founder's tradition, i.e. the Gustav Stickley furniture studio of New York or Christian Frederick Martin guitar company of Pennsylvania.

pin - 75
 pend - 75
 dangle
 \$60 -
 14K brac
 16g 9.5cm
 web
 Bracelet \$48 -
 14g 12cm / 14g back
 Stick pin web \$65
 12g 6" / 12g back
 14g - 12cm - 80/earr
 11/04 pendants
 14K
 16g - 9cm
 14g - 12cm
 \$39
 \$49
 \$65
 Rings
 18g 7cm \$19
 16g 9cm \$22
 14g 11cm



In Memory



Ann O'Brien (July 21, 1951 - July 1, 2006)

The following obituary was written by Francie Rich, parts of which were published in the *New Orleans Times Picayune*, July 3, 2006.

Ann O'Brien (July 21, 1951 - July 1, 2006)

Ann O'Brien

I have always wanted to write an obituary but I always thought it would be my own, not that of my friend Ann O'Brien, who died on July 1, 2006, twenty days shy of her 55th birthday. Her sister Betsy O'Brien told me I could make it long.

Ann O'Brien is now playing with my dead dogs, cats, her grandparents, Carmen and Leandre Marechal and Mary and William O'Brien, her Uncle Rene Marechal, her dear friend Elliot Snellings, other family members, my parents, friends, and total strangers, because that was the kind of person she was and still is.

Ann is survived by her wacky but loving husband, John Preble, and sons, Andrew and William Preble, of Abita Springs. She is also survived by her parents Alyce "the storyteller" and Charlie "God-Loves-You" O'Brien of Covington along with her sisters, Christine Lozes and her husband Bill and their children, Brian and Allison, of Covington, Betsy O'Brien of Washington D.C., brothers Michael O'Brien of Folsom and his children Wesley of New York and Chris of New Orleans, and David O'Brien and his wife Lillian and children Maegan and Sean, of Mandeville. She is further survived by her mother and father-in-law, Marie-Louise and Warren Preble, her brother-in-law Warren Preble and his friend Lillian, Uncle Paul "Brother Elias" Marechal, and Uncles William and Edward O'Brien and their families. And oh-my-gosh so many friends, more friends than anyone I've ever known, at least two thousand six hundred and forty-nine of them, including myself, Francie Rich, and my husband John Hodge, and others who can't be listed because they didn't pay to have their names listed in this obituary.

Ann O'Brien was born on a really poor sharecropper's farm in Oklahoma...skip that part, I'm saving that for my obituary. She graduated from St. Scholastica Academy in Covington and, as long-time SSA teacher Alyce O'Brien remembered her, she was a "pleasant child, with street smarts instead of book smarts." Oh, I'm sorry, she was referring to Cathy Deano, not Ann. Ann studied painting and got her BFA at LSU before becoming the famous jeweler she is today. She was a president of the Louisiana Crafts Council, a member of the Rhino Gallery in New Orleans, the Mississippi Craftsmen's Guild and a host of other organizations. Her work has appeared in national publications and has been exhibited in fine crafts shops around the country. As Ann perfected her craft she also perfected the craft of helping other artists sell their work. In addition to her own work and helping other artists, she has done extensive volunteer work with children. She also worked as an artist-in-residence in St. Tammany Parish schools and as a tutor at Mercy Family Center in Mandeville. She and her husband, John Preble, founded the UCM Museum in Abita Springs, where Ann

loved leading the Push Mow Parade on her bicycle.

She traveled with her grandparents to Europe as a child and made yearly visits to Uncle Paul at the Trappist monastery near Atlanta and to Navarre Beach, Florida. Ann didn't like to be alone and she never was and isn't now.

Ann was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer earlier this year. She never liked going to doctors but ended up caring deeply for her doctors, Drs. Carinder, McCormick, Saux, Suarez, Groves, Seicshnaydre, Ehrensing, Bobrowski, and Torcson. Her hospital room was party central and the place to be. Ann's illness turned out to be an incredible gift to her family and friends. Her room was always full of laughter, love and joy. Personally I'm not one for large group gatherings, but I loved going to see her in the hospital and at her parents' house, where her mother would tell fabulous stories and I met old and new, all wonderful people who have enriched my life.

Whenever Ann called she would say, "Hi, this is Ann O'Brien," as if her thin shaky voice and caller ID didn't give her away. She didn't like change, so dying is a major step for her. She laughed easily, could talk about anything to anyone and her only fault was that she never talked ugly about anyone. She is the epitome of a gentle soul even when she got mad at John Preble, which to know him is to get mad at him. She was kind and generous and we are still expecting great things from her.

Ann treasured the trees on her property in Abita Springs. She would often give us plants and trees and office supplies for Christmas gifts. Hurricane Katrina took most of her trees in Abita. Maybe she went to be with them. Many of us will think of Ann when we see camellias, azaleas, and trees.

One consolation of dying young is having a large funeral, and anyone who could figure out a way to sell tickets to Ann's would be set up for life. John Hodge had a dream at the moment Ann died. Ann was driving a truck in Mexico then riding a bicycle with flowing skirts. He kept thinking, "doesn't anyone know she is sick?" She fell off her bicycle and everyone "tackled" her with love. When it's your turn to go, be sure to look for Ann if she's not already at the entrance waiting for you. My only regret is that Ann didn't have a goofy nickname.

Please feel free to send flowers, plants, or trees, or send donations in Ann's memory to the Leonard C. Thomas Hematology and Oncology Specialists Foundation, 339 Starburst Circle, Covington, LA 70433, (985) 892-9090.

Relatives, friends and total strangers are invited to attend the Memorial Mass at St. Benedict Catholic Church, 20307 Smith Road, Covington, LA 70435, at 11:00 a.m. on Monday, July 3, 2006. E.J. Fielding & Sons is in charge of arrangements.

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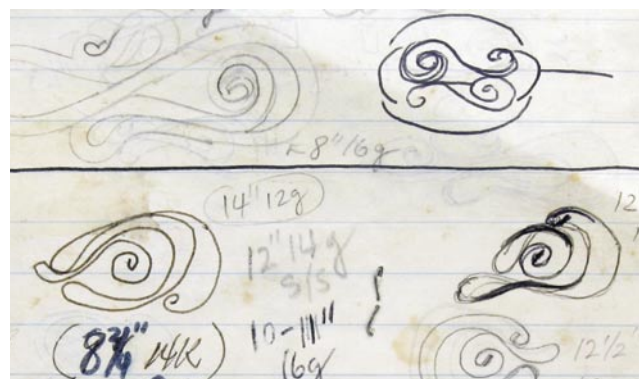
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The Ann O'Brien Jewelry Studio



An Illustrated History

Edited by John F. Preble