

Johnny Swing

Vermont artist and designer Johnny Swing was early on the upswing in terms of upcycling. In the late 1980s, one of his first works was a chair made of 35 steel dock washers. In the '90s his coin furniture made art world headlines and sold quickly; today it can command up to six figures.

"This dual idea between art and functional craft I love," says Swing, who continues to create his nickel couch and quarter lounge. (The penny chair, no longer made, used 6,500 pennies, required 30,875 welds and took a couple of months of steady labour to produce.) "I want to entice a person into an art experience. I want people to have an inner expansive experience with my work. I want it to be approachable."

Playing on the monetary value placed on art and consumption, "I wanted to use something that was everywhere but had little value to people," he explains. He also reworks dollar bills into teddy bears, and glass baby-food jars into beautiful light fixtures.

"Your creations are kind of like your children," says Swing, acknowledging the large price tags associated with his work. "You want nothing more than for them to go out into the world and succeed. The monetary value is today's modern 'thank-you,' and that's fine," he says with a laugh. "So what if I can't afford to purchase my own work?" www.johneyaring.com

Lulu Frost

Big, bold and reborn—this describes the jewellery designs of New Yorker Lisa Salzer, whose antique-inspired Lulu Frost line culls quirky heirlooms from the past. Upcycling vintage pieces from the years between 1860 and 1950, she mashes up cool Deco Bakelite, 19th-century cut steel buckles, even long-lost hotel room numbers into beautiful modern jewels.

Salzer, a Dartmouth art history major, started her line in 2004 and now sells worldwide. Her grandmother Elizabeth Rock Frost owned a store that

dealt in estate jewellery, and Salzer's mother helps shop for pieces used in her designs.

Salzer says she loves mixing elements of distinct historical periods, unusual reclaimed and found materials, and multi-ethnic patterns. "There's a real sense of individuality and a certain global 'togetherness,'" she says of her one-of-a-kind "100 Year" collection pieces (bottom). "Perhaps as the world gets smaller via technology, our influences converge into a more globally influenced style. Upcycling adds richness while paying homage to the past." — www.lulufrost.com

Thierry Jeannot

It can take nearly 500 years for a plastic water bottle to decompose. But French-born artist Thierry Jeannot, currently living and working in Mexico, gives bottles new life in a much shorter time frame. He transforms plastic PET bottles into spectacular 18th-century-inspired "crystal" chandeliers (top). It took the designer years to translate his vision for the ubiquitous plastics into what can only be described as breathtaking light fixtures.

To collect his materials, Jeannot works with locals who also help cut and sometimes paint the plastics. His first "Green Transformation" chandelier in 2010 reworked 500 meticulously curated bottles, while his 2011 limited-edition "Transformation Number 1" fixtures—with 16 arms, 16 light bulbs, and aluminium and steel weldings—upcycled 1,000 PET bottles each.

"I always see transparent plastics as crystal, and I wanted to work with PET as if it was crystal, yet also wanted to maintain a strong traditional and Baroque structure," says Jeannot. "When a woman saw one of the chandeliers at an exhibition in Washington, DC, and thought that it was an original part of the historic house, I knew that my goal had been reached." www.marcofridin.com and www.marcofridin.com



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