

Challenging Times

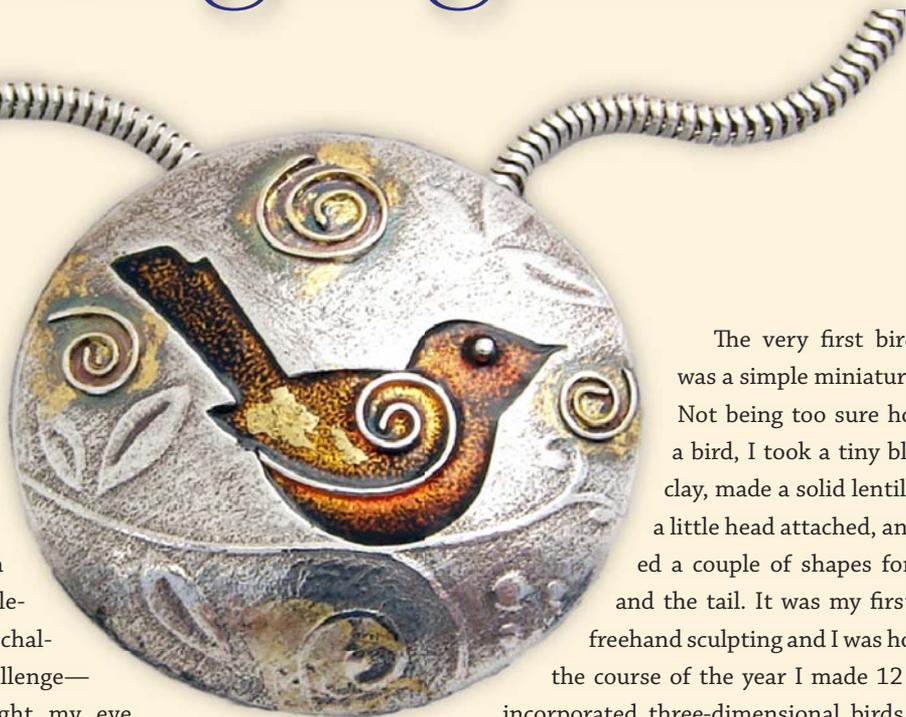
By Joy Funnell – UK

At the start of each New Year there always seem to be plenty of creative challenges around that we, as artists, can decide to undertake. One of the best known was probably the Ring a Day challenge, which after its completion evolved into the Ring a Week challenge. Last year one particular challenge—the Bird a Week challenge—caught my eye. Although I had never made any birds in my jewellery nor had I undertaken a challenge before, I immediately was inspired to sign up for it.

It proved to be a wonderful journey for me. The need to create a new piece every week pushed me to try out new styles and techniques and to explore a bit outside my comfort zone.

Looking back at it, I covered quite a variety of birds. In addition to 19 generic birds, I also made a lark, blackbirds, owls, a crane, doves, a phoenix, penguins, flamingos, hummingbirds, a wren, a cockatoo, a macaw, a duck and ducklings, a kingfisher, a red-breasted blackbird, a seagull, puffins, rainbow birds, a swan, a robin, a dodo, an eagle, a northern cardinal and a peacock feather mask. Phew! Sticking mostly to jewellery and always working in silver clay I made 28 pendants, five brooches, nine earrings, a pin, three rings, a thimble, and five miniatures. Thirty-two were enamelled and 20 were not. I could go on...

During the course of the year, my passion for birds evolved and I developed better skills. As a result, I made fewer generic birds and moved more into specific breeds, realising that I actually could make a bird whose breed was recognisable! The Bird a Week challenge helped me develop a stronger style in my work and discover new passions and new techniques.



The very first bird I created was a simple miniature sculpture. Not being too sure how to make a bird, I took a tiny blob of silver clay, made a solid lentil shape with a little head attached, and then added a couple of shapes for the wings and the tail. It was my first foray into freehand sculpting and I was hooked. Over the course of the year I made 12 pieces that incorporated three-dimensional birds and found a great love for this form. In my miniature owl-sculpting project, “Twit-Twoo,” I’ll share with you the bird-sculpting technique that I have developed and refined.

If you have never undertaken a challenge, I highly recommend doing so. Time and materials can be a big factor in committing oneself, but most challenges allow you to use any medium you wish, so find ones that will suit your budget. I combined making challenge pieces with making stock that I needed for selling. If you do not sell your work, you could make your challenge pieces as presents. This year I am undertaking a Bird a Month challenge and also the Four a Month challenge.

When you undertake a challenge, its biggest value is as a personal challenge to yourself. It is never too late to start, and you can choose to miss a week or a month; it’s up to you. There are no prizes, but there is immense satisfaction both in saying, “Yes, I did it!” and in the recognition from others for your achievements.

RESOURCES

Flickr Bird a Month 2012. <https://secure.flickr.com/groups/1868603@N21/>
Flickr Four a Month. <https://secure.flickr.com/groups/1890560@N22/>
Flickr Bird a Week 2011. <https://secure.flickr.com/groups/1552405@N25/>

Photo: Lark in a Meadow



Nestled In



Biba Birdie



Blossom Time



Northern Cardinal



Tweet Tweet Brooch



Nature's Way



Rainbow Birds



The Blackbird



Soaring High



Two Hoots



Silvery Moon



Wot, No Fish?