

BLANK CANVAS

“A Different Shade of Orange: An Interview with Tory Legg”

BLANK Canvas – February Edition

By Allie Stoehr

With the first quarter of 2015 nearly under our belts, the dominate fashions and styles of 2014 have closely vanished. All except jewelry, that is – perhaps making the biggest comeback of the decade. The styles of so many minimalists dominating the runways over the past few years have met their match in a simple, organic fashion of jewelry made by freeform artists all over the world. A local artist, Tory Legg, prides herself in the uniqueness of each of her pieces and strives to create matchless designs to fit any identity. This unregulated method of jewelry design is making a statement in all styles and all scenarios, as I was eager to be able to sit down with Knoxville’s own Tory Legg to discuss a few of her favorite methods of design.

BLANK: Give us a little background, how did you get into art, designing jewelry?

TORY: I moved here five years ago, coming in as a freshman at UT. I hated Knoxville at first and it was random that I decided to come here from Baltimore, but after a while it kind of stuck! After a few months of being unsure of my major and spending a lot of out-of-state tuition money, I decided to take some time off and get a job. That’s when things started falling into place for my designs.

BLANK: So you went from Orioles’ orange to “Big Orange” – that’s a culture shock. Expound a little on what you mean, though - how did it all fall into place once you decided not to go back to school for a while?

TORY: I was home for Christmas one year and I was really bored; I decided to go to Michael’s craft store and buy some hardware to make a really elementary pair of feather earrings. I remember being in my room and texting my friend a picture of them when I was finished - she was like “those are so dope, you should sell them at school.” So, I started with these feather earrings, and turned it into a 3-day multi-step process to make them waterproof. I took them to festivals a lot, and they sold really well, but I realized the feather earrings were sort of limited to

a specific crowd and that I wasn't reaching as many people as I could if I expanded my designs. I had a chance to get a booth at the market here in Knoxville and that's when the business really started growing. It all started as a side hobby and slowly developed into something more prevalent.

BLANK: I know you're at the holiday market here in town, and at the Farmer's Market in Market Square. Where else do you sell your jewelry?

TORY: I try to get around; I've been to festivals such as Fly Free Fest in Chattanooga, and I'm also vending as a part of the Mischief Collective - a group that started at UT and who are now expanding into other areas and venues all over the country. It's cool because it started as this close-knit group of friends with this common denominator of traveling, art, and music, and now we're surrounded by a community of young people that are striving for the same things creatively.

BLANK: I noticed that some of your displays are themed around plants, moss, trees – really organic designs. Is this an inspiration for your jewelry or just something you use to accentuate your designs?

TORY: I feel like a lot of my stuff is derived from nature – I'm definitely attracted to that organic look, but I would say I get a lot of inspiration from my materials. I'm addicted to gemstones and rocks, so I'll see one and know that I need to have it. I don't always know what I'm going to use it for, but I know that when I get home I'll be able to look at the colors and the textures and see how the copper or sterling can complement the stone, and I make it work.

Tory and I discussed the jewelry she was wearing while we spoke. A copper ring featuring a labradorite stone with an iridescent play of color caught my eye; I had done my research on her jewelry via Instagram and Facebook, but hadn't noticed any ring designs until today. The fashion industry has made it apparent that statement rings are back in the game for 2015, so I was curious if Tory would jump on the train and start a new line.

BLANK: Do you plan on expanding your business to make a more diverse collection that includes rings and hand jewelry?

TORY: This one I just made last week – it was my first ring. I would like to expand, people ask me all the time when I'll be putting out more rings. I have this list of things I'd like to accomplish in the off season between now and May; I want to focus on rings, getting my stuff into stores, and looking into becoming involved more regionally at craft shows. Lately I've been working on getting into shops and salons around town. I've got a great chance to showcase at a high-end local salon and spa, and would love to be able to reach that client base that maybe

doesn't spend time at the Farmer's Market, but does spend time getting their hair done and shopping outside of Market Square.

BLANK: So when you want to put together a piece, where do you go to find the perfect stone or gem?

TORY: I get a ton of stuff from Etsy - it's hard for me to not spend every dime of each Pay Pal order that comes in on gems and stones. There are also a couple great shops in Knoxville I frequent, but my favorite is a really amazing bead shop in Baltimore I explore and stock up at every time I go home. I often order from India, which is cool because it's so cheap to buy, but it takes at least three weeks for it to get here. It's like a waiting game. I think my mailman probably thinks I'm crazy because I'm constantly getting tiny little packages in the mail with just one bead or gem inside.

BLANK: So what's your favorite technique when making these jewelry pieces?

TORY: I would say my go-to is probably hammering wire and wire-wrapping gems. I don't have too much experience with soldering yet, but I like it. It's something I'd have to practice more. But using a hammer is probably my favorite way to create new designs.

BLANK: I'm sure your neighbors love that!

TORY: Well that's the thing - I do a lot of my work at my boyfriend's mom's house where she has a little shed in the back where I can set up shop. I have asked my neighbors before if they can hear me hammering away and they said no, but I've never done it late at night. Sometimes it's hard to resist because I'll get a really great idea for a piece, but it's the middle of the night and I can't do anything about it because I don't want to disturb anyone. Aside from that, I'd say that's probably my favorite technique.

BLANK: It's apparent that you've made some serious strides with your company in just the last five years. What are your plans for the coming future and spring season? Where do you want to see yourself a few years down the road?

TORY: To put it into perspective, I'll look at pictures of my first booth where I had my designs on display, and it looked so sparse; I hardly had enough jewelry to cover the table back then, and now I have a hard time deciding which pieces to bring and which to leave at home because I have so many. It's just really cool to see how much has changed in a year. For the future, I want to be at a point where I'm reputable enough that other people and stores will want to carry my designs, so I can be represented in all different genres of places with different clientele. I'd like to eventually travel around the country doing trunk shows where I'm able to look for new inspiration and bring fresh ideas home. For now, I'm focusing on developing my skills and putting a lot of effort into learning new things while I have all this off-season free time.

It was great to feel the positive vibes coming from Tory in regard to the future of her designs. We wish her the best of luck as we near the final months of winter and begin to think about the upcoming spring season. If you're interested in getting in touch with Tory or to view today's available designs, visit her Facebook page, Tory Legg Designs, or website at www.toryleggdesigns.com.