



Igniting Your Creativity

by Holly Gage

There is no doubt artists have a burning desire to create. It is part of who we are and how we express ourselves. When we hit a roadblock in our creativity it can be frustrating and stifling. New artists and experienced artists alike encounter periods when the ideas are not flowing as freely as desired. It hits us like a tall wall we need to climb at different points in our artistic journey and for different reasons. We need to be reminded how to turn our many inspirations from a mere catalyst of thought and ideas, into artistic creations through an action plan of seeing, experiencing, exploring, playing and doing. So how do you take the leap from wanting to discover new modes of creativity to actually igniting your creative desire?

Joining in on this journey will engage fresh new ideas by presenting: inspirational sources in our everyday surroundings, suggestions on how to engage with these various sources to stimulate your imagination and senses, and pose a “What if” action to ignite free thought and new ideas meant to snuff out the doubts and help you along a new path of creative discovery. The very first step is moving forward with an open mind.

Inspirational Sources

The best sources for inspiration are your immediate surroundings, your senses, and your experiences.

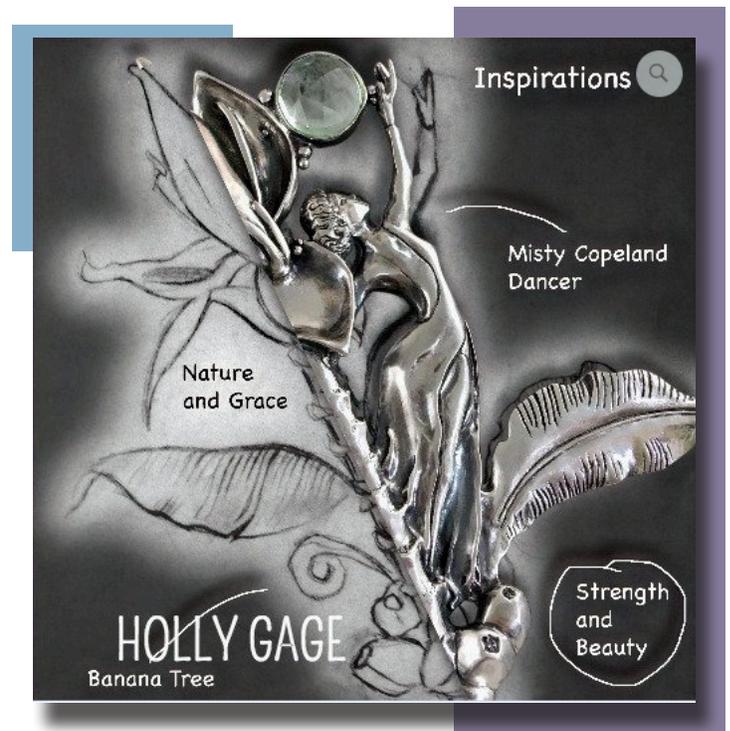
1. Hearing

Use your auditory senses as a way to interpret commonplace sounds into a visual vocabulary. You will find it is hard to isolate this sense on its own because sound stimulates other senses felt throughout your body. Go with these sensations and see what happens.

- Music genres: Opera, Jazz, Rock, Classical, and Pop.
- Movie scores: Drama, Action, Romance.
- Sound of a faucet dripping.
- The Sound of a deep temple gong.
- Sounds you hear while outdoors with your eyes closed.
- A squawking bird.
- A live musical experience.

Close your eyes and really listen and observe the music or sound, concentrating your attention on:

- The mood set by melody.
- The tempo and how it makes you feel.
- The rhythm, picturing how to interpret this in terms of pattern.
- The emotion it elicits within you, while paying attention to how it feels in your gut.
- The meaning or the memories that come to mind.





Now engage all of your observations and take action. What if you...

- Let the tempo of the sounds guide free-formed sculptural play with polymer clay, which then can be cured and placed in a two-part mold for replication or used as part of a jewelry piece?
- Draw to the music and create a series of texture plates based on the rhythms you observed?
- Use the emotion elicited by the music interpreting what you hear by using just one of the following: lines, dots, curves or shapes?
- Look around and try to locate a found object fitting the sound, or the music, and incorporate the item into your work?
- Select a cabochon or gemstone from a stash you've collected and draw around the stone to create your jewelry piece using music, rhythm, or a common day sound to draw upon for the pattern?
- Use the conjured meaning or the memory of the music as the subject matter in your piece?

2. Touching

By touching we connect with the outside world in a physical way. We gather information by feeling the tactile sensations. We also borrow textures and items from our surroundings and use them in our work, now let's explore some less obvious inspirations from our explorations.

- Feel the softness of dryer lint.
- Observe the coarseness of concrete.
- Touch the smooth skin of young person or the aged skin of an older person.
- Feel textured tapestry against the smoothness of silk.
- Feel the various textures of different plant species.

Observe the items you have collected. Pay attention to their details. What are the qualities making a soft item supple, flexible, smooth, and enticing to touch?

- What are the qualities making a rough item coarse, textural, interesting, and curious to touch?
- Walk through an arboretum guessing the feel and texture of the plants of many species before you touch them.
- Close your eyes and feel various textures and picture them in your mind.
- Wiggle your toes in sand, mud, grapes or jello.

Now engage all of your observations and take action. What if you...

- Have someone put various items in a closed box? Instead of trying to guess what they are, try to interpret what you feel in a physical form.
- Photograph, and create a visual diary of textures from your walk at the arboretum and recording your observations?

- Think of various ways to capture these textures: using molding compound, pressing it into your Metal Clay, taking a picture and manipulating in a photo altering program, drawing it on paper, sculpting a replica of it, or coming up with your own idea?
- Try to use your recorded observations about what makes something look smooth, rough, or flexible to create something with those similar qualities? For instance, what makes an old dried up leaf look that way? Can you use those same qualities to make your project look aged and dried up?
- Try to create an item that people “just have to touch” by giving it a curious texture?



3. Seeing

We are attracted and exposed to visual stimulation constantly. Pay attention to things you seem to be attracted to and just importantly the things you do not like. Start keeping a notebook of your results. Also spend 10 extra seconds observing the elements in your life with deeper concentration on the small details.

- Nature forms: fresh and dried
- Architecture styles: buildings, bridges, factories.
- Sculptural forms made of: metal, clay, large, small.
- Art from various cultures.
- Art through the ages.
- Different artistic styles.
- Technical mechanisms .
- House and home design .



Observe the items you have collected. Pay attention to their details.

- While observing nature consider using a magnifying glass or a close up view of a plant, pod or flower. Pay close attention to the curves and the lines of the form, the repetitive patterns, and smaller shapes constituting the bigger form.
- Study sculptural forms for their shape, size, mass, volume, and 3-dimensional qualities.
- Pay attention to the details of architecture by isolating individual elements how shadows are created when the sun hits at different angles; color and style.
- Pay attention to the style, color, symbolism and traditions influencing the art and jewelry of different cultures. Are you drawn to any particular influence?
- Styles change dramatically through the ages, from Art Nouveau, to Deco, to Modern Simplistic, to Steampunk. Pay attention to your attractions and dislikes; the simple lines or ornate scrolls: the soft color palate or bold contrasting colors.
- How do the technical mechanisms work? Can you take it apart for a closer look? How could these items be used in your jewelry or the mechanics be used in your jewelry?
- Look at the items in your home and write down why you selected them. Look at the lines, curves, color and function.

Now engage all of your observations and take action.

What if you...

Select a single elemental pattern from your nature observation and repeated it to create your own made up nature inspired form?

- Used the iron work in a balcony to create a bracelet; isolate an individual architectural element to create a focal of a necklace ring; use the lines in a bridge as a pattern of a texture plate; use the billowed factory smoke to create a 3-dimentional hollow form vessel?
- Sculpt a human form to be the subject for pictorial pieces; use pottery forms to suggest the shape of a pendant; use sculptural forms to motivate movement in your jewelry?
- Try to design a piece of jewelry based on popular themes of another culture; use the color and design of typical dress as the theme of your design; how about a popular symbol or icon; and maybe a material such as leather, wood or stone used?

- Try designing a piece in a style from another time period, which interests you; try a style never used before; try combining two seemingly opposing styles in a harmonious fashion?
- Try creating your own mechanism to make jewelry with movement and function; how about using an old mechanical idea in new and unique ways, turn an ugly, but useful mechanical idea into a beautiful centerpiece closure?
- Look at the back support of an interesting chair, draw the negative spaces around the rungs and back, cut out and organize the parts in a whole new design; use a window to the outdoors to frame a scene and interpret what you see in a stippled pattern; use the pattern in a rug, pillow, or curtain fabric as a design element around a stone?

4. Smelling

Smell can elicit many reactions from pleasure to disgust. It can be a powerful trigger for recall memory associated with places we've been, past events, or moments in time. Some use it in aromatherapy, but it may be less obvious how it can be used in our art as a catalyst, so let's explore.

- Essential oils.
- Rotting food.
- Earth and nature.
- Flora.
- Herbs
- Baby Powder.
- Medicines.

Observe the items you have collected. As you smell them pay attention to their association for you and try to match those associations with images.

- How do the smells make you feel? Describe that feeling in terms of your body's reaction to them.
- Are there particular memories they trigger? Describe the memories, the images, and all the thoughts and sensations associated with the memory.
- Do the smells make you think of a person or subject matter?
- Do the smells take you to a certain age or place?
- Is there an emotional reaction to any of the smells?

Now engage all of your observations and take action.

What if you...

- Sit an open bottle of essential oil on your work desk, while smelling the oil use the technique of slip trailing to interpret your feelings of the moment in terms of line quality to make a pendant in which to hold the oils?
- Make a literal representation of the memory triggered by a particular smell by filling each panel of a hinged bracelet with the journey of your memory?
- Put a frame around the image of your strong association with a person or place associated with a scent, and fill this frame with other items giving viewers information about this place and time?
- Use the emotional reaction to a scent to create a pattern or match up emotion with the pattern on a found object, and with it create a piece to express this mood using the pattern as the background and something pictorial in the foreground?

5. Taste

It is fun to use taste as stimulation in our art. Just as some foods make us feel full, others make us happy, and some just pucker our face. Throughout our life we have used food for festivities, to gather with our families, and express our culture.



- Eat something tart or sweet.
- Enjoy a piece of chocolate, candy, or something you really like.
- Eat in a comfortable place or setting.
- Try food you have never had before.
- Feel the sensation of food with lots of textures.
- Eat your “go to” food when you are sad or happy.

Observe the items you have collected.

Pay attention to their details.

- What were your facial expressions when you ate something tart or sweet?
- Pay attention to how you feel when you eat something you enjoy, like chocolate.
- How do you feel when you eat food you are comfortable and familiar with having?
- Pay attention to your reactions as you try something new.
- Pay particular attention to the textures of the foods, what is appealing or disapproving about it?
- Do your emotions affect the taste of food? Compare eating in a joyful setting and a sad setting.



Now engage all of your observations and take action.

What if you...

- Eat something sour and your face makes an expression? Think how can you capture this expression in a piece. Your reaction may elicit a humorous or whimsical piece, or it might elicit disdain or disgust.
- Eat something of total indulgence, something creamy, smooth, and tasty? Feel the endorphins feeding not just your soul, but also your brain. What would a piece look like expressing total joy? Would it be symbolic of what you ate, or would it represent the feeling?
- Eat at your favorite restaurant in total comfort and contentment? Can you capture the elements that make you feel comfortable? Maybe the pattern on the dishes, maybe the colors on the wall or in your meal? Choose 3 – 5 elements to your experience to include in your piece.
- Use food textures to motivate design? You could put the textures right in the Metal Clay: take a small 2” x 2” frame and select a portion of the texture to abstract; or draw what you feel as you explore the food in your mouth.
- Eat at a festival, wedding or funeral and record your feelings in words? Now take those words and design a piece based around them. You could use the letters or words themselves; hide the words in the body of a piece; or embellish a piece with the words as texture.

6. Emotions

Emotions are a great source, and can be highly charged with meaning. Because they are so personal they can be very easy for some to express and quite difficult for others.

- Anger
- Fear
- Love
- Hate
- Sorrow
- Elation
- Empathy

Most of us are aware of our emotions, but let’s observe the less obvious details and nuances while tapping into these emotions by taking a deeper look:

- What kinds of things trigger our reactions to emotion? Keep a diary and observe the patterns of stimulation and behavior combinations.
- Use a mirror to see what you look like when we experience different emotions, such as laugh or cry.
- Where in your body do you feel the emotion? Tightness in your chest; a lump in your throat; tension in a specific part of your head?

Now engage all of your observations and take action.

What if you...

- Look to the violence of nature and selected an element of destruction such as a lightning struck tree or a storm leveled building to express Anger?
- Looked up words, symbols, and images of different cultures to use in your jewelry to express Fear?
- Focus in on a sensual part of the human body and let the soft curves, shadows and shapes enter into a sculptural interpretation of Love?
- Allow the explosive force of Hate tensing your muscles in your face to be expressed in a collage or mosaic of facial expressions?
- Make a small vessel containing memorabilia, textures, or a poem of a Sad episode? The outside of the container can represent what average people see, but the inside of the container would be the items and the feelings you don't wear on your sleeve.
- Close your eyes and picture a happy moment in your past or present? Use a Mandela design, which is a concentric ring of patterns with the most important of these feeling in the middle. Find or make up your own symbol and repeat them until you complete each ring. Each ring should contain a different symbol.
- Make a jewelry item having two parts that can be worn by yourself and someone you feel Empathy? In the piece, express the subject of your empathy in abstract or literal terms.

7. Life experiences and Popular themes

Life experiences and themes are riddled with meaning and symbolism. Some of the themes in life are universal as portrayed in movies and some take on a more personal meaning as we experience them in our own lives.

- Important Events.
- Personal life tragedy.
- Painful encounters.
- Joyful moments.
- Romance.
- War/peace.
- Love.
- Deception.
- Adventure.
- Suspense.
- Comedy.

Observe the experiences in your life. Pay attention to their details, patterns and themes.

- Are there colors you associate with different themes, events?
- Although difficult, what image plays over in your head as you remember a particular tragedy?
- Painful and joyful moments can instantly make you smile or scrunch your face, pay attention to your reaction when you think about these moments.
- Think of a romantic time in your life. How did you feel? What were you doing? Who were you spending times with at the moment?
- What colors and activities do you associate with war and peace? Are there symbols that come to mind, heroes, or villains?
- There are strong reactions with love, deception, adventure, and comedy. Your heart may race, your pulse intensifies, a sensation goes through your body, and feelings may overcome you with little control. Take the time to write down all these body sensations.
- Fantasy allows your mind to wonder. You can dream, plan, and put yourself in new and unusual situations without risk. Verbalize your fantasies in a journal and record these thoughts.

Now engage all of your observations and take action.

What if you...

- Recorded the stories of your life in images? Take pictures of those important events and use one of the photos in



a multi-media piece by adding the photo under clear resin with some other items from the event. Incorporate the colors reminding you of the event.

- Close your eyes and picture the lines on your face as you think of joyful or painful moments? Can you interpret these lines in a 3-dimension piece expressing your feelings in abstract form?
- Pick an emotion and try to capture those body sensations you feel in your body with a sculptural vessel? Fill the vessel with a fragrance reminding you of the emotion you selected.
- Recall a suspenseful moment by creating a piece with a brand new material or technique incorporated into the design?
- Think of your favorite belly rolling funny moment? Create a piece that captures the moment in cartoon, stylized or whimsical form.
- Create a fantasy piece. Sculpt a piece using your fantasy images and characters.

Stretching Those Creative Muscles — Hands on Creative Play

Try engaging in interactive play. Hands-on experiences will aid you in experimenting with various ideas in a fun way, while allowing you to see solutions in multiple perspectives. While trying the exercises consider starting with a highly detail description of the things you see, hear, feel, and experience. The more detailed the list the easier your design ideas will come to you.

Hearing Dramatic Music

Listen to a Dramatic Score of Music.

(Movie scores are particularly moving— preferably the score should be without words.)

Draw to the music and create patterns based on the rhythms you observed. Use lines, dots, curves or shapes to interpret what you hear. Use these textures in a 3-piece jewelry suite such as a pendant and matching earrings.

Touching Mysterious Items

In a closed container slip your hand in to find 3 mysterious objects (have a friend hide items with different textures in the container). Design a kinetic piece of jewelry, something based on the feel of the objects, however one of the 3 objects must dominate the design. Example of items:

- Walnut.
- Concrete.
- Burlap.
- A kitchen utensil.

Seeing Things Differently

View 4 different architectural styles of a single item. For instance, windows, lighting, doors, buildings, or roofs. Zero in on a single portion of the total design as motivation to create a bracelet. Your bracelet should be influenced by the design, but doesn't necessarily look like the entire design.

- Find pictures in magazines or the Internet.
- Drive around your neighborhood.
- Go to a big city.

Scents Trigger Reactions

Smell several different items, which have been hidden from sight. You can randomly grab jars of spices from the cabinet and not look at the label. Pay attention to your thoughts and reactions to the aroma. Put a scene, setting, time and place to one of the smells and see if you can picture it in your mind. Draw the image on paper and create a design for a shadow box. Examples can be:

- Herbs and spices
- Grass and earth.
- Orange peel or scallion slices.

Tasting Explorations

Use every observation possible to study a food article. Smell it, taste it, cut it, look at it close up, crush it, feel it, and now interpret it in an abstract focal of a pendant. Try something simple:

- Walnuts in the shell.
- Cracked walnut.



- Viewing through a magnifying glass.
- Tasting them.
- Examine them as halves, then pieces.
- Feel them with your eyes closed.

Emotional Expression

Create a small vessel containing memorabilia, textures, or a poem using emotion as your inspiration. The outside of the container can represent what average people see, but the inside of the container would be the items and the feelings you don't show the world. You can use:

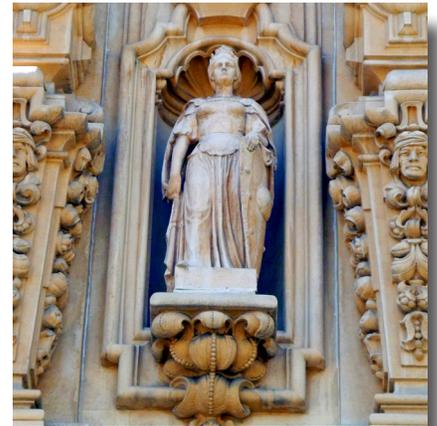
- Photo from your wallet.
- An item that sits on your desk.
- Piece of jewelry you are wearing.
- Something from memory.
- Something from a sad or happy event.
- A keepsake.



Life Experiences

Collect 4 styles of period jewelry and select one, which inspires you, (note why you selected it). Use a piece of jewelry you have on or borrow one from your neighbor. Redesign it based on the period style you choose retaining key elements. For instance if it has a stone, design around the stone. If it has vines and leaves the new design needs vines and leaves stylized in a new way.

- Find or collect 4 pieces of period jewelry.
- Include descriptions that are key elements for that period.
- Add new elements to complete your idea as needed.



Combining Themes

Using the influence of 2 different sculptures and the theme of Love, come up with a piece of jewelry in a multi-media expression of jewelry. You can weight the design influence anyway you want. Heavier on the architectural side or the love side. Your goal is to make the elements work harmoniously.

- Find 2 sculptures in a magazine or in your neighborhood.
- Figure out which elements should dominate.
- What elements of love can you incorporate?
- What materials would express our idea best?

Biography: Holly Gage of Gage Designs is a 2015 Saul Bell Design winner recognized for distinction in jewelry design. She creates contemporary jewelry and teaches her unique techniques with a gentle blend of design instruction and technical proficiency. Holly brings her innovation, creativity, and gift of helping others find their artistic voice through classes, mentoring programs, and master workshops. Classes are available live Online, throughout the US, and abroad. She is a full-time jewelry artist, Certified Metal Clay Instructor, author, and conference speaker. In addition, Holly holds a BS in Fine Art and Education. Her jewelry and articles on techniques and design can be found in over 75+ regional and national publications including the Best of America Jewelry Artists; Named 3rd in Handmade Business: Top 12 Makers, Movers, and Shakers; Metal Clay Today; Art Jewelry and Lapidary Journal Jewelry Artist; Making Jewellery; among others. You can find more information about Holly's jewelry, classes, and awards, along with numerous Metal Clay tips, tutorials, and blog on her web site at <http://www.HollyGage.com>

