



Two pieces by Shahasp Valentine, two of her *Four Petals* necklaces from her *Precieux* series (above), in which she sets white sapphires either in silver (left) or 24K gold (right) bezels. Below is one of her *Knife Edge* necklaces, made of 24K gold PMC with pearl. Photos: Shahasp Valentine.



### Shahasp Valentine: Evolving Organics

"My work really has evolved quite a bit since I started with PMC," says Valentine. "I've had some of these ideas in my head since junior high school, but to try and execute them traditionally is a really big deal. Like my lily pendants — to do that traditionally would require a ton of work in wax, and then casting, or hammering or texturing endlessly. I find PMC is so gratifying because it's so tactile. I can execute these textural ideas and concepts in my head in a way I can't get from any other jewelry technique."

Valentine's work is currently split into two distinct collections: the *Precieux* series, which uses historical motifs, and the *Organic* series, inspired by nature. Both take advantage of different features of metal clay.

For her *Precieux* series, Valentine scans designs, such as a fleur de lis, into her computer, and uses an illustration program to produce perfectly symmetrical patterns. The pattern is printed and traced onto soft polymer clay, which is then partially baked and carved to form a mold for the metal clay. Although she may create up to 50 pieces from each mold, each is individually decorated and shaped for a one-of-a-kind look.

For the *Organics* series, Valentine works directly in metal clay, shaping pieces inspired by the ocean. "A number of years ago I went on a trip with my boyfriend to South Africa," Valentine recalls. "I was sitting on a beach and looking at these amazing tidepools filled with little creatures and it just hit me. I came home with all these sketches and photos. My *Habitat* rings and necklaces are my interpretation of the tidepools."

Valentine's *Knife Edge* series came out of this type of hands-on shaping in the days after September 11, as the pendant she was working on inexorably took on a sharper, harder edge. "Right after 9/11, I just wasn't feeling very fluffy and happy. The *Wave* pendants are very undulating and textural, and I was feeling, 'life is harsh,' and the *Knife Edge* design just kind of happened," Valentine recalls. "I started making the pendants really straight with a super fine edge, a knife edge, representing how harsh life can be and that the world can be a really harsh place."

"PMC just allows me to so easily create whatever has popped into my head," concludes Valentine. "It also keeps me interested in what I do. I don't want to make 100 of the same necklace. With PMC I do multiples, but every single one is different. It's always changing, everything's always fresh and new. With traditional lost-wax casting, once you get it cast, that's all you've got, and that's not interesting to me. PMC has given me the freedom to really create in a more one-of-a-kind way."