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3 Inspiring Black Jewelry Designers to Elevate Your Style

by Clark Tate | Mar 2, 2021

There are so many talented Black jewelers doing work they love to help you decorate and declare yourself. To get a sense of the scope and scale, read [this article in Vogue](#), this [one in Forbes](#), [another in Cosmo](#), and The Every Girl's [gorgeous instagram amalgamation](#).

To tell a small piece of this sprawling story, we pulled on a single thread offered by Omonivie Okhade. It's a glimpse into her work, the work of her idol, and that of a bold designer who does some of her casting.





Omonivie Okhade likes warm colors and works primarily in sterling silver, brass and copper, often using recycled metals.

Omonivie Okhade of Tula in Bloom

Sacramento, CA

“I gravitate toward really clean lines,” Omonivie Okhade says of her design style. “I like the idea of beauty in simplicity and highlighting a singular shape as a focal point rather than a lot of embellishments.” Okhade likes warm colors and works primarily in sterling silver, brass and copper, often using recycled metals. Her interests in modern design and architecture shine through.

“Also, being a child of a Nigerian immigrant, I have that sense of cultural history and style,” Okhade says. She inherited another birthright of many second-generation Americans, the pressure to succeed spectacularly and conventionally. “I didn’t have the opportunity as a child to explore my deep interest in art,” she says. Instead, she earned a Master’s in healthcare management and worked in that field until 2010. Her mom got her into jewelry.

After losing her job, Okhade wrote and illustrated a children’s book. She also started making jewelry, inspired by her Mom’s practice of finding, fixing and reselling vintage pieces. The book stalled. The jewelry sold. To her, it’s the same core interest with a different outlet. The book is about accepting and loving yourself as you are, so is the jewelry.

Support from the close knit Sacramento art community, loyal clients, friends, and family keep Okhade going. And she appreciates the challenge of entrepreneurship. “It’s like a really intensive form of therapy,” she says, forcing you to face the obstacles you put in your own way.

Making jewelry also keeps Okhade connected to her mother, who died three years ago. She’s currently donating a portion of proceeds to support victims of domestic violence, a cause her mom cared about deeply. “It’s a way to keep her in the studio

with me,” she says. “I’m doing heart work when I’m making jewelry, because I can think of her.”

Website – tulainbloom.com

Instagram – [@tulainbloom](https://www.instagram.com/tulainbloom)





Kenly Warren has a bold and avant garde style, he'll initially create a bold fashion piece then whittle it down to something practical.

Kenly Warren

San Francisco, CA

Okhade outsources her casting to Kenly Warren and describes him as a “bold designer” in his own right. While much of his work at the moment is in rendering other artist’s visions, he has plenty of his own. “At heart I’m a designer,” he says, and he seconds Okhade’s assessment.

“The style is definitely bold and avant garde,” Warren says. “When I create a line, I’ll initially create a bold fashion piece,” Warren says. “Then I’ll whittle it down to something practical.” That first explosion of creativity is a signature. “I’m more of a show off when I begin designing,” he says.

To Warren, designing is intrinsic. “It’s just what I do naturally,” he says, creating an impractical concept and making it work out in the world. “I’d say it’s an expression of my personality,” Even as a kid, he would change his style every year and tailor his clothes for fit and flare. He brings that same creative energy to his jewelry, which is his primary outlet these days.

Warren was studying business when he took his first class in metal arts. He continued learning the artform while earning a degree in databases and information systems. It’s the metalsmithing, jewelry design, fabrication and casting that stuck. “I like it. I like to create,” he says of his design work. “I like the freedom of my own business.” Otherwise, he’d put his professional geek skills to use in Silicon Valley.

A decade later, Warren runs his own jewelry design and casting business, mining inspiration from his culturally and ecologically distinctive hometown, San Francisco. He’s never had trouble finding inspiration and his continually evolving city likely to let him down anytime soon. As Warren says, “If I still have more ideas and more things to contribute, that’s what keeps me going.

Website – kenlywarren.com

Instagram – [@kenlywarrencasting](#), [@kenlywarren](#)





Alicia Goodwin's work is is textural and organic. It's inspired by nature and meant to invoke a casual power.

Alicia Goodwin of Lingua Nigra

Chicago, IL

Okhade looks up to Alicia Goodwin, who took a jewelry class in summer school before studying fashion design at the Fashion Institute of Technology. “After I got my degree in fashion, I just went across the hall and got my degree in jewelry,” Goodwin says. “I guess I just got the bug.”

“My jewelry is textural, organic. It’s inspired by nature,” she says. “Meant to invoke power, but, I guess, kind of a casual power when one wears it.” Her brand is Lingua Nigra. It’s Latin for //black tongue//, a little-known disease she came across in a book. “I thought that was pretty weird and memorable, and it kind of goes with what I do on a bigger scale,” she says.

From what I can tell, that is to engage with life as it is, a celebration that ends. Much of her work is vital, using brass, silver, and gold in nature-based designs. She manipulates the metal with acid and heat to add light-catching textures and often incorporates unexpected materials like sea urchin spines, dentalium shells, and beetle wings.

Yes. Coruscating, blue-green beetle wings. They are currently featured in a stunning pair of earrings called *The Body That Remains*. And so there is a death too.

Victorian era mourning jewelry sparked her interest in sentimental, memorial designs. Princess Victoria loved her Prince Albert. When he died, the princess elevated mourning jewelry to new heights. Pieces often incorporate a loved one’s hair or ashes, and Goodwin loves the creativity in it, and the frank reckoning. She now has a mourning line. “It’s been well received,” she told me. “I have ashes on my bench right now.”

Goodwin works a lot, and has a few other businesses, like her stationery line at Black Tongue Press. It’s a grind. She didn’t succeed overnight, but she’s committed.

“I mean, I feel like I have to do it,” she says. “I have so many ideas. I don’t know what I would do if I couldn’t create.” Sweet notes from her customers and clients help.

Websites – linguanigra.com

Instagram – [@linguanigra](https://www.instagram.com/linguanigra)

Okhade also recommends [Karen Smith’s jewelry](#), which spans from wearable to whimsical fine art. Smith is somewhere in the arch of a hero’s journey. She founded [We Wield the Hammer](#) in 2019. The nonprofit offers metalsmith training programs to women and girls of African descent in Oakland, CA with aspirations to expand to Dakar.

If you need more inspiration, we recommend reading [Wield the Hammer’s blog post](#) about Winifred Mason Chenet, a jewelry pioneer and contemporary of the famed Art Smith. If you’re in need of an opportunity, the Fashion Institute of Technology recently [launched the Art Smith Memorial Scholarship Foundation](#) to provide scholarships for Black students studying Jewelry Design.

If you know an inspiring Black jeweler you’d like to celebrate, please share their shop or social accounts in the comments below.



Clark Tate

contribution

Clark Tate is a freelance writer and lifelong knitter. After graduating from never-ending scarves to more complex projects, Clark also graduated with a Master’s in Environmental Science. She then worked as a restoration ecologist for six years, before moving on to an obsession with braided hats and writing articles about people and the environments they live in. She’s written for Hakai Magazine, Summit Daily News, Salt Lake City Weekly, and [GearLab.com](#). You can find further examples of her work at lclarktate.com.

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