

The PMC Studio

Meet Helen O'Neill



Helen O'Neill founded The PMC Studio – the official UK distributor of Precious Metal Clay – in August 2005. This is an extract from an interview which originally ran in an American magazine.

Q: Tell us a little about your life and your family.

A: I was born and brought up in The Netherlands by a Dutch mother and English father. My father's work took him around the world and I was educated at boarding school in England. After obtaining a European Business degree I went into the world of marketing and worked until I had my second child. My job was great but I always seemed to be working away from home and spending most of my Saturdays at the supermarket! After having my third daughter I decided I needed a change of direction in my professional life.

Q: How did you become involved with PMC?

A: Some girls love shoes, other like handbags. I simply love jewellery, and necklaces in particular. However, I often found that I wanted to modify them to suit my own style. This drove me to make my own. I spent a fortune experimenting in order to get it absolutely right. Along the way people would often ask me to make something for them, which I was happy to do, but I didn't really want to go into the business of mass production. Subsequently I started to offer lessons to teach others what I had learnt, which became quite successful.

While perfecting my techniques, I heard about precious metal clay and decided to find out more, as I was having difficulty in sourcing particular sized beads and clasps. I contacted the PMC company in London and took my level 1 Certification with them. There, I met Mary Ann Devos who inspired me to take on the UK distributorship in 2005.



Q: What do you like best about PMC?

A: Like other artists who have worked with this material, I love the versatility of the product, particularly the way the new PMC3 works with glass. This complements perfectly the PMC+ which, although ideal for enhancing definition, is fairly limiting because of its high firing temperature.

Q: What inspires you when you create?

A: I am fortunate in that I work with the clay almost every day, and the more I work with it, the more I am convinced that it has a personality of its own. Some might say that I have been working with the stuff too long, and that I should get out more! However, I am finding that it responds to my handling quite differently each time I use it, depending on the temperature, the condition of my hands and how I work it.

It is for these reasons that the clay itself inspires me as soon as I take it out of the packet. I simply 'go with the flow'. My favourite pieces are always those I haven't worked out beforehand.

Q: What is your favourite PMC technique?

A: I simply love Keum Boo. 24k gold complements PMC so well. It's quick, relatively easy to work with and can turn a really good design into something quite stunning and beautiful. To me it's a bit like putting the icing on the cake.

Q: You obviously love making jewellery yourself. Do you get the same satisfaction from teaching and demonstrating?

A: Absolutely! Although I have taught many courses, I still enjoy it immensely. Each class is different. I particularly enjoy teaching the Level 1 Certification. You get to know your individual students, from meeting them on Day One and – from being quite hesitant and unsure – you watch their confidence grow, so that by Day Three they are astonished by their capabilities. For most people it is an amazing journey, and I find it very satisfying to watch their transition.

By Level 2 Certification, groups often exchange contact details and stay in touch with each other, or meet up at one of our Monthly Master Classes. It is very rewarding for me, as a teacher, to be part of this whole process.

Q: How do you envisage the future of PMC?

A: Until now, we have focused on telling people about PMC and showing how anyone can get a professional result with some good education. Obviously PMC won't replace traditional sheet silver and other jewellery making methods but it can be used hand-in-hand with these traditional techniques.

The discerning European customer is now far more prepared to pay for good design instead of mass produced items and, with the excitement currently surrounding PMC and with the increasing demand for individual, high-quality pieces, I see it becoming an integral element of jewellery making. There are ways in which PMC is particularly time-effective for the traditional silversmith, such as producing masters for casting and one-off pieces.

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