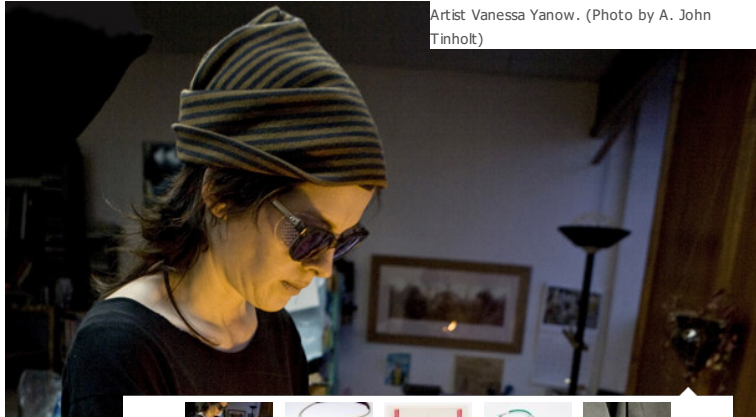




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Artist Vanessa Yanow. (Photo by A. John Tinholt)

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April 8, 2014

Vanessa Yanow: Montreal Artist-at-Work

by Katia Jean Paul / Photos by A. John Tinholt

"I knew I was an artist since I was in grade five. Art was in the fibre of my being," recalls Vanessa Yanow, seated in her luminous Park Extension studio where we recently had the chance to chat.

Yanow's inking as a child was spot on. Since those days spent putting on breakdance shows with fellow classmates and painting murals at school, the Montreal born and based visual artist and costume jewelry designer has gone on to carve out a stellar artistic career. A Rhode Island School of Design graduate, Yanow's textile and flame-worked glass sculptures have been displayed in solo and group exhibitions throughout North America, Europe, Japan and the Middle East. Her work is part of the Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec and the city of Montreal's permanent collections. Her equally unique jewelry creations have been featured in fashion magazines like Elle Québec and are sold in more than 25 stores across North America—including **Les Coureurs de Jupons** on Masson Avenue and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal's boutique in the Quartier des spectacles.

For many aspiring artists, her resume is the stuff of dreams.

Yanow partly credits the city that fosters and celebrates art for her success. "I love Montreal. It's cheap to live. You can create and have a lifestyle conducive to creating," says the artist.

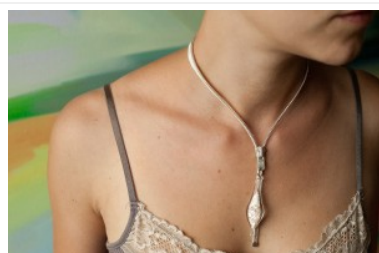
In addition to the tried-and-true formula of hard work and all the networking you can muster, her advice to aspiring artists alludes to the ease with which Montreal, what she calls the Mecca for artists, allows for one to make it professionally.

"Never get a full-time job," says Yanow. "If you can guarantee yourself enough money to pay your rent with a part-time job, combine part-time work and part-time art. Montreal is a great city for that."

Yanow also believes Montreal is replete with art ready for consumption.

"You can consume culture easily here for not a lot of money," says the artist. "There's always something to do."

When Yanow isn't

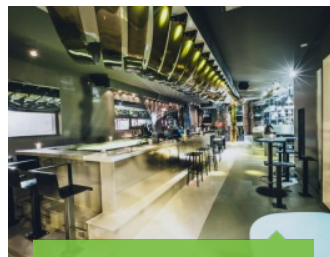


Model wearing a white zipper necklace.



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busy packing shipments for stores, going on supply runs at **The Little Shop**—a vintage and antique haunt on Ogilvy in Park Ex—assembling jewelry or embroidering, she takes in all the art—and food—she can get.

"I love the aesthetic at **Art Mûr**. When I have friends from out of town, I bring them to the **Belgo**," says Yanow. "For our weekly curry fix, we go to Indian Curry House, but I love going to **Santa Barbara** to treat myself."

Yanow cites American artists Tara Donovan and Ellen Gallagher, and local artists Pascaline Knight and Patsy Van Roost as inspirations, along with members of the **Long Haul/Le Corrid'Art**, a visual art workspace, gallery and non-profit organization located in Park Extension that she co-founded with her partner John Tinholt in 2001. The Long Haul's mandate: "To provide affordable studios to local artists so they can continue making work," says Yanow, whose studio is part of the 8,000 sq. ft. space.



"New Devotion" 2004. Flame worked glass, sugar, blank price tags, charcoal, gel medium, copper wire, thread, cotton, rubber wheels and down.

While Yanow's parents weren't artists themselves, their proclivity for aesthetics helped nurture the artist in her from an early age. "My father works in the textile industry, importing men's shirts, and he and my mother managed, designed and brought the first Laura Ashley stores to Canada," says Yanow. "There's always been an aesthetic, an eye for

beautiful objects in my family."

Throughout high school, Yanow focused on dance and theatre, with the intention to pursue acting while she dabbled in jewelry art, making and selling her own creations at the Tam-tams on Sundays in Mount-Royal Park. But at 17, her interest veered from performance to visual arts, namely painting and drawing.

After working and traveling in Europe and Asia following high school, she attended the Rhode Island School of Design on an international scholarship, where she obtained her BFA in painting with a minor in glass. The latter material, along with its antithesis textile, would later form an intricate part of her work. "I love the contrast between the two," says Yanow. "I love getting my hands into fibers, it's so tactile, whereas you can't even touch glass when it's hot. I find it [textile and glass] an unlikely and complementary combination."

In 1998, she returned to Europe, where she worked the concessions stands at the Expo world fair in Lisbon for a year before hitchhiking down to West Africa. There, she spent six months traveling from village to village, learning traditional African textile dyeing techniques like batik, and bogolon (or mud cloth) along the way.

Back in Montreal, in 2003, she spent the year building and documenting a cohesive body of work including 10 sculptures and five large-format drawings before applying for grants to exhibit them. The hard work paid off.

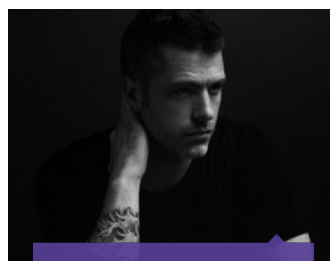
"I got a grant and a solo show," recalls Yanow. "That's when my CV started to look professional." Her sculptural creations soon put her in an artistic class of her own, with an aesthetic that, while quirky and colourful, also serves as social commentary. For example, her 2004-2005 series, "Consumerism."

"I really love taking everyday objects and turning them on their back; taking simple iconography and putting it in new context," says Yanow. This method informs her jewelry making as well, which she revisited after a 10-year hiatus when it dawned on her that visual art and jewelry making were worlds not too far apart.

"I realized my visual art explorations could be made into miniature things," says the artist. "My jewelry was derived from my sculptural explorations."



Two sided mercurial necklace, 2014. Embroidery on faux leather, flame worked glass and stainless steel.



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Her signature zipper necklaces, made from high end, top of the line zippers from Switzerland, from which a flame-worked glass capsule charm housing objects like feathers and pint-size cutlery hangs, launched her career as a jewelry artist. While the latter remain her best sellers to date, Yanow's jewelry collection, which is also sold online on [Etsy](#), extends to earrings, cuffs, shoelace necklaces, slap bracelets and even pocket watch inspired broaches, keeping to her customary mix of textile, glass and found objects.

What's next for the veteran artist? Yanow is currently learning soft circuitry to integrate lighting into textiles in the hopes of making light-based sculptures. On the jewelry front, her spring-summer collection is inspired by weather systems, and consists of digital embroideries on imitation leather with flame-worked glass and a two-tone chain. And her latest art work, as well as that of the 25 members of the Long Haul—a mix of emerging and established local visual artists—will be showcased and auctioned at Expo "L" Show, the Long Haul's annual silent art auction/fundraising event on May 30.

Vanessa Yanow jewelry, available online at [Etsy](#), [select retailers](#), [Braderie de la mode quebecoise](#) from April 10-13 and [Wearable*Art Expo-Vente at McClure Gallery](#) on Victoria Ave. from May 16-17.

For more info: www.vanessayanow.com

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