

Love What You Love Podcast

Episode 58: Making Jewelry with Meenoo Mishra

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Welcome to *Love What You Love*; I'm Julie Rose. I'm insatiably curious about people and the world around us, and absolutely in love with passion and unselfconscious enthusiasm. Every other week I geek out with someone about the thing that they love, and then I share it with you.

Welcome back! Or, Welcome! The world is being pretty... worldish, lately, isn't it? Let's just spend a little time focusing on love, shall we?

Meenoo Mishra was in need of a hobby; something to do with her hands. And the result is something absolutely beautiful. She creates handmade jewelry, inspired by Indian and global myths, legends, folklore, and nature. I loved chatting with Meenoo about her passion. We talked moonstone, fairy tales, Roman glass, Art Nouveau, broken jewelry, red carpet designs, and so much more. So find out why Meenoo loves making jewelry - and why you might learn to love it, too!

Julie: Hello, Meenoo! Thank you so much for joining me today.

Meenoo: Thank you for having me!

Julie: I'm so excited to talk with you. I love your shop on Etsy. It's MinouBazaar. And you make the most beautiful jewelry. So I just want to understand, like, how long have you been making jewelry and what got you started?

Meenoo: Yeah, I guess it's been... Let's see, what is the year? [laughs] I started making jewelry, I think, around 2009. I love jewelry. I wear jewelry almost every day. And at that time, around 2009, I had moved... There was a cross-country move. I had been living in Tucson, and my husband and I left Tucson and we moved back to the East Coast because that's where our families are from. And I was sort of in the middle of, you know, looking for jobs and trying to get settled, and I needed a hobby. I needed something to do.

I had never really worked with my hands much but realized that's exactly the kind of thing I needed to do. It really started off... I have two sisters and my mother, and between us, we have a lot of jewelry. And you know, no one throws anything away, so all this old jewelry had been piling up and she wanted my help organizing it. That's how it started. I started organizing the jewelry and then decided I could fix a lot of the jewelry that was broken, or missing pieces, earrings missing their other earring. That started me in my passion for just working with jewelry. I learned some techniques and decided to then open up an Etsy shop.

Julie: Did you go through some other things to say, "Oh, I need a hobby?" Or did you know right away it was going to be jewelry?

Meenoo: Well, it had been a while since I really fell in love with something. You know, just being able to create something with your hands, being able to envision something and then see how you can actually create it and make it a reality, all of that was very exciting to me. As I mentioned before, I hadn't really worked that much with my hands. I think people who work with their hands really understand this, it's not new to them at all,

but for me it was new. And I really loved that so much, and I thought that, you know, jewelry's also something that you can just, kind of, make it... How do I say this?

Okay, I should back up a little bit. One is that it felt like something that I could do without much help. I have a disability, so a lot of the hobbies, or crafts, or art, I felt like it was not as available to me growing up. But this, I felt like it's something that I could do everything on my own. So that, I realize thinking now, was very attractive to me.

Julie: So, knowing that that was something that you could do without anybody else getting involved... I'm just interested too, is it a different kind of mindset from other hobbies you've had or the work that you've done? You said people who work with their hands understand, so maybe you can talk a little bit about that.

Meenoo: I'm a huge reader, so a lot of it is like living in your head. I think that's what I was trying to get at. A lot of it is living in your head, whereas making jewelry is definitely in your head but you can actually see it take shape. I think that's what I was trying to get at.

Julie: Yeah. I noticed when I wrote for a long time, it's such a head thing, and I started doing watercolors. It just, like, bypasses all that stuff and goes right into your hands.

Meenoo: Yes, exactly. And your books are wonderful! I've read them.

Julie: Oh, Meenoo! [laughs]

Meenoo: I admire that so much, being able to, you know, create a world on page. Of course, as readers, that's like the best thing ever. So, there's that, but then I think just actually seeing... I mean, obviously, books are objects too, but jewelry's different. You wear it.

Julie: Yeah. So maybe you could talk about what kind of jewelry you make, what kind of materials you use, and kind of the thought, the ethos behind what you make?

Meenoo: Sure, so I started off really wanting to use a lot of the pieces that weren't being used anymore. So, a lot of the pieces, I took a lot of vintage pieces from jewelry that my family had; mostly my mom, some from my sisters. It was a lot of Indian jewelry. We just had so much costume jewelry from India that we would, you know, get from our trips or as gifts. Part of it was just wanting to give these, you know, broken pieces some new life. And by broken I don't mean super badly broken. It's more like maybe an earring was missing its friend or a necklace was missing a few beads, things like that. Everyone has tons of broken jewelry in their dresser or whatever. It was like that.

And also, I really wanted to play and explore ideas, like, behind Indian jewelry and wanting to make them... Indian jewelry can be very ornate. It's known for being very ornate, and I wanted to be able to simplify it more so you could wear it... Nothing wrong with wearing super ornate jewelry, but I, at that time especially, wanted to make more simple pieces that I could wear with my American clothes. So, that was kind of the impetus. And you know, once you start making stuff you get inspired by so many things, so I was very much inspired by seasons, nature, Indian gods and goddesses. I loved creating pieces inspired by those different elements.

Julie: How do you bring those elements into your jewelry?

Meenoo: Well, I would do some research on, like, colors. Like for goddesses, for instance, Lakshmi is an important goddess; she's the goddess of prosperity and beauty. She's mostly shown in reds or pinks, so using those colors to portray her. Lotuses are very important, so I would use lotus charms or pendants. Another one, Durga, she's also a

very important goddess. There's a lot of reds, fiery colors, reds, oranges, yellows, so I would use those colors to create something bold with more gold. Things like that.

Julie: So you do necklaces, you do earrings...

Meenoo: I do mostly earrings and necklaces, and every now and then I do make bracelets. I'm trying to really get into making more bracelets. Especially, I think, with the pandemic... I mean, everyone has changed the way they dress, I suppose, and with mask-wearing it's harder to... At least I find it a little harder to wear earrings with masks.

So yeah, I have made a few bracelets and I need to make more. But I love making earrings. I love wearing earrings; I love making them. Necklaces as well, but I think earrings is really where my heart lies.

Julie: Why is that?

Meenoo: I don't know. I think they're just... I like things that frame the face, I guess? Earrings bring attention to your face. The one good thing about bracelets... That's something that the wearer can see right away on their wrist. If you're wearing earrings you can't really see them unless you look at yourself in the mirror. But yeah, I don't know. I've always... That's my own personal... I love wearing earrings. I could wear a different pair of earrings like every day.

Julie: I love it. That's awesome. Now, what are your favorite materials to use when you're creating jewelry?

Meenoo: Yeah, I love lots of different materials. I do use some gemstones. I love moonstones and labradorite. Those are really my favorite. Garnets as well. Pearls, although I haven't used pearls as much recently. I do love pearls. I love Swarovski crystals. I use quite a bit of those. And I love Czech glass. It comes in so many different shapes, and colors, and finishes, and they're also light. I do try to keep, especially my earrings, light. A lot of people don't like wearing heavy jewelry, earrings especially. So, using those materials helps keep them light.

I also like vintage Lucite. That's actually a plastic but it's a very hard plastic they use to make really pretty beads, ornate a lot of times. They're kind of etched with gold designs and things like that. So, when I find beads that, to me, look Indian, whatever that is, I will use that. Actually, that's one of the first things I used in my jewelry when I started making jewelry, is vintage Lucite. I do love using vintage materials when I can, so I do search for those as well. And also vintage Indian pieces.

Julie: So you would take a vintage Indian piece and, kind of, work it into an original design?

Meenoo: Yeah.

Julie: How does that process work?

Meenoo: Well, to me, one of the most Indian, very recognizable, designs is a jhumka. Those are the bell-shaped pendants. They usually get made into earrings, and on the bottom they usually have quite a few holes that you can dangle things. So, one of my designs that I'm actually quite proud of... I wanted a pair of... I love celestial jewelry as well. So, I thought it'd be really beautiful to have... Most of the time for jhumkas, they have little colored beads, or little bells; that's also very popular. But I decided to dangle stars interspersed with, like, sapphire blue vintage rhinestones. I thought those were really pretty.

So, they look kind of like a cascade of stars. I have them in the gold-plated as well as silver-plated. So, just whatever... Again, with any design, you live very much in your head. But I do love using jhumkas. And to me, when I use those, that just feels very, like, I'm making Indian jewelry.

I look for components with Indian jewelry, so any peacock motifs, of course, that's very Indian to me. If I find peacock motifs, I will use that. I'm sure there are others... Oh, another big one is enamel. That's called Minakari; that is this technique of enameling that's also used in Indian jewelry. They usually are in, like, really saturated colors. So if I find vintage pieces of those, or new as well, then I will use that. So, I have a couple of pairs of earrings that use those as the main focal point. But then I use, you know, pearls, or Swarovski crystals... I just like to combine things together. Whatever works, works.

Julie: [laughs] I love it. So, you mentioned looking for different materials. How do you source your materials? Where do you go to get this stuff?

Meenoo: Oh, yeah. That's actually one of the most fun parts of it. Just really online. Before the pandemic, I would also go to gem shows. But a lot... I mean, you can find, as I'm sure you're aware, anything online. So I'll just search for things online and see what I find.

Julie: You know, sometimes you're just looking for, like, Indian pieces or inspiration. Maybe walk me through, like, how you get your inspiration? Is it that you're just hanging out and you're like, "I'd love to make a..."? Or maybe you see something in a magazine? Where do you get that spark that says, "Oh, I've got to make a piece of jewelry like that"?

Meenoo: That's a good question. I should also say that I have some Indian pieces in my shop, but for a long time I haven't made that many Indian pieces. I make a lot of... I mean, I'm Indian American, so I make a lot of pieces that aren't as Indian. So, a lot of stuff, I really like thinking about the seasons, and what inspires me about each season, and trying to make jewelry according to that as well. And with jewelry or any of, like... You're always thinking a season ahead. I'm not as quick as other people. I do take more of my time. But for instance, right now I'm thinking of spring and summer jewelry, any collections I want to put together.

Also, in terms of inspiration, I also really love Art Nouveau, so I try to make a lot of... It's just that naturally I'm very inspired by those organic shapes, very nature-oriented, very much inspired by nature, flowy. I love making Art Nouveau-inspired jewelry as well. So for spring, you know, I love working with leaf-shaped beads and greens, and I think... I love gardening as well; I love botanical-style jewelry. I think my shop has veered more into that direction the past few years. But I am trying to, kind of, go back a little bit more and bring more Indian style stuff, but also in the larger, kind of, botanical-themed jewelry. That's kind of the next thing I'm sort of obsessed with and wanting to work out.

I do work; I have a full-time job. But you know, I work from home. Even before the pandemic, I worked from home. I'm lucky because I don't have a commute, so I generally do work in the evenings, kind of after dinner and some family time. Then, not every night but frequently, especially if I'm really taken with an idea, I will work in the evenings. And yeah, I have my own office/studio space, so I'll just sit down and put, like... I'm kind of obsessed with ambiances that you can put on your computer, so I'll put on an ambiance thing, or not, depending. And I just play around and see, you

know, if it's coming together, if I feel like I'm missing something, if I can find something that I'm missing, or if I can use what I have.

And of course, I also think about what's been popular in my shop, what's sold, and try to put it together that way. And then the weekends, the weekend mornings are also inspiring for me when I feel quite rested, so that's a good time for me to work on things. Just the creative part of it. So yeah, I do try to... Even if I'm not feeling inspired, I do try to... You know, a lot of times if you just sit in the space and play around with things, something will come up. But I'm not as fast of a designer, to be honest, as I'd like to be. I'm kind of slow. But it is what it is.

Julie: Do you sketch it out first?

Meenoo: Yes, sometimes I sketch out the design that I have in my mind, or just write down, like, words that I'm associating with the design or the concept. And then I'll just, kind of, go from there, with colors or mood. People wear jewelry because it makes them feel beautiful, or significant, or it means something to them, or they want to feel like a mood. At least that's how I wear jewelry and look at jewelry. Or what kind of character do you want to play? So, I think of that too. What kind of character would wear these earrings?

Julie: I love that. That's so cool. What's your favorite piece of jewelry? Maybe something you've made or something you got from someone else?

Meenoo: Yeah, I have... Of course, I won't have just one.

Julie: Of course! [laughs]

Meenoo: You know, the stuff that I've gotten as gifts from people who really know me. I have this one... And this is going to make me want to wear all the jewelry all at once after we're done recording. [laughs] I have a beautiful Roman glass set, necklace especially. I don't know if you know what Roman glass is. It is glass that was found in archaeological sites from the Roman era.

Julie: [gasps]

Meenoo: Yeah, and they're usually... I mean, you can just google Roman glass. You can get beads or pendants... People sell them. They're not, like... A lot of them, they've turned like a pale turquoise color. I don't know how; just with the passage of time or however the glass was made. I don't even know what color the glass was when it was originally made and what the glass came from.

But anyway, people find these. I have a necklace with a big piece of Roman glass that I really love. I have some Indian real gold necklaces, earrings. But most of my stuff is not real. [laughs] I have a beautiful ring that I love that has a garnet in it. When I saw it at first, it looked like branches, kind of, just curled around your finger. But it's actually a mandrake, which is an herb, a mandrake root. It's very cool. I really love that ring.

Julie: That is cool.

Meenoo: Yeah, I have a lot... And then I have a few vintage pieces that I bought myself. One is... I love anything that, kind of, has an iridescence, so anything with opalite. That's why I love labradorite or moonstones because they have that iridescent sheen where the colors shift. Anything that has that, I'm very much drawn to those. So, I have a vintage piece that is connected with that kind of... I think it's glass. It's not even a moonstone; it's just glass. But it's so pretty and I feel like a fairy queen when I wear it.

Julie: I love that. And speaking of fairy queens, another part of where you get your inspiration, you're inspired by folklore and fairytales. Maybe tell me a little bit what that's about.

Meenoo: Well, I think that's related very much to... Well, first, I love fairytales and folklore. I always have. And I think that's also, like I said earlier about making jewelry inspired by goddesses, that to me is also part of folklore fairytale world as well as mythological. So, that I think also goes back to what I said earlier about feeling like you're part of a story. What do you want to wear? If you want to feel like you're in a fairytale, what kind of jewelry would you want to wear?

That's the kind of, I guess, vibe that I like to be in when I start to create and think of collections or think of pieces. So, any stories or, kind of, looking at larger themes, symbols, and motifs. For instance, rose and thorn, that's very fairytale to me. Keys, doorways, ivy, flowers; to me that speaks of fairytale. I have made pieces that have been specifically, like, characters from fairytales. I have Briar Rose and I've made, like, Snow White and Rose Red, wicked queen jewelry, also a favorite. I have a good friend who's a writer, so she's written quite a few fairytales.

Like with folklore, I love Indian folklore of course. So creatures, beings in Indian folklore, I like to make jewelry that maybe they would like to wear. Like yakshinis, they're kind of like spirits or beings that live in forests. I wouldn't call them dryads necessarily, but they're close to, I think, a dryad. So what would they wear? Thinking of it that way. Or apsaras, they are celestial dancers who live up in the sky in a celestial court, so what kind of jewelry would they wear? They would be very different. The colors would be different, the feel of them would be different. Things like that.

Julie: Yeah... [sighs] I'm like, "Just keep talking because that sounds amazing." [laughs] It sounds like you don't have any problem with inspiration. But is there a kind of jewelry that's harder to make than other kinds?

Meenoo: Well, yes of course. I should say that I mostly work with beads and wire wrapping, so that is, you know... depending on the kind of gemstone and the wire wrapping, that can be a little more difficult. But I like to focus a lot more on, like, the colors, and design, and proportion. So, if I have issues, I think that's... like trying to figure out the puzzle of the design, that's where I will probably struggle the most. [laughs]

And I think that just depends on... like with anyone trying to create something, how you make what's in your head into a reality, I think it's pretty similar. But I would love to learn how to work with polymer clay. That's one of my art goals. I should really... Hopefully this year, I should learn techniques. I worked a little bit with polymer clay before, but mostly in a class, so wanting to really play with it, and make it my own, and see what components I could make using that, I think would be very challenging but also very rewarding, I hope. That might be my next journey in jewelry making.

Julie: Let's say that you got into a TARDIS or another time travel machine. You could go anywhere, anytime. Where would you go just based on the jewelry?

Meenoo: Oh, wow. I think a lot of the very beautiful stuff was created for royalty and people with money, so of course I would love to go... Well, okay. One thing that I found that was actually very moving for me. Back when I was going to museums, if they had, like, a jewelry section or exhibit, I would always go to see that. This was when I started making jewelry, and I went to see... And I wish I remembered the museum, but I remember it was ancient jewelry. I noticed the way that they made the jewelry... I'm not talking

about the metal art, but the way they wire-wrapped a bead to dangle from, say, the metal, it's exactly the same. It is *exactly* the same way that I do it, and that's how I learned.

And it is just so cool to think that someone thousands of years ago was using the same technique. Using high gold content wire, or silver, or what have you, but it's the same thing. It looked exactly the same. That was very thrilling for me. Even just... I'm not a metalsmith so I'm not, you know, making metal components for my jewelry, but the fact that it's the same and you can see that over time was very cool. So, I would love... I'm someone that would love to be a time traveler, so I would love to go in the past to see all kinds of ways that people made pretty things and jewelry to adorn themselves, or make as gifts, or adorn royalty.

Ancient times, I would love to see Ancient Indian jewelry. I would love to see where that Roman glass might have originated from. And you know, I would love to see a medieval era... Especially like, I'm thinking, Florence, Renaissance jewelry. And I would love to go not too back in time and just see places where they made the Art Nouveau jewelry with the lilies and all those gorgeous designs that they used to make jewelry back in, I guess, early 1900s. I would love to go back in time to see parts of the Mughal Empire. But it's all about going to people's workshops. [laughs] That would be fun.

Julie: Yeah. And speaking of adorning oneself, how early... I guess we don't know exactly when, but how early do we have a record of humans adorning themselves with jewelry?

Meenoo: I wish I knew, but I know it's old. I really feel like people just... I really feel like ancient humans walked around and looked at rocks, you know? They looked at rocks and they were like, "This is a good rock for doing all these other things." Making arrows, or making mortar and pestles, and grinding things, right? You need rocks for that. But then I bet they also found rocks that looked special, rocks that sparkled, or looked pretty, or had different colors. I really think that it's just a thing that we just have. We like to adorn ourselves. So, I can't say when. I don't have those facts or anything, but it's been a long time.

Julie: Yeah, I believe it. So, obviously you love making jewelry, it's something that's very exciting for you. What kind of parts of it do you not like? What are the challenges or the parts that you're like, "This is a drag"?

Meenoo: Well, like I said, it can be frustrating. Even though it seems right now like I have a ton of ideas, a lot of times I feel like I have no ideas, or I feel like it's the same thing I've done before. Sometimes I struggle with feeling like I don't have anything new. So, that part's hard. The other part that's difficult is just having a business. This is a side business, but it's a business of my heart. It has its ups and downs just like anything. I think that's the hard part. But also, you know, marketing, that's hard for me.

Julie: It's hard!

Meenoo: Yeah, it's hard. But you know, that's all skills that I can learn and everything. It does feel amazing when someone actually wears a thing that you've made. That feeling is very special to me.

Julie: That's got to be a thrill. So, this is kind of a silly question, but if you were invited to an awards show, Oscars or whatever, which of your pieces would you wear? And if you

could do jewelry for somebody going to an award show, who would you want to do jewelry for and what would you give them?

Meenoo: Oh my goodness, these are very good questions. Well, if it was an awards show, I feel like I would need to, maybe, make something a lot more... You know, I would probably wear my celestial jhumkas, now that I think about it. Just having a fringe of stars dangling from the jhumkas bells, that would be very cool, so I'd probably make that. Or I would just make something new, depending on the dress I would wear.

And oh my goodness, I don't know... I'd really have to think about who I would want to dress or to provide jewelry for. That's such a great question. To be honest, it would probably be an author or someone. That would be super fun. But I can't think off the top of my head. But again, I would probably see what they were wearing, and ask about what colors, and what designs they liked, and I would probably focus on the necklace depending on the neckline of what they were wearing, and then do earrings. It would probably be a little different than what I would normally... Because I normally focus on earrings first, but I think I would probably do it the opposite way.

Julie: So, just to wrap up, if someone was listening to this chat and they're like, "Oh, that sounds like so much fun. I totally want to get into making jewelry," how would you suggest they get started?

Meenoo: I mean, first of course it would just be, you know, what skills they would like to learn. And I think, you know, it's okay and encouraged to just play around and see what you like to do. I have taken classes in jewelry making. I did one, I think, that was wax casting, where you can make your own pendant but you use wax first to sculpt the actual piece, and then it gets cast into metal. And that was really cool but I couldn't... While I enjoyed it, I just couldn't see that I would do that as part of my business. I think that would be something I would do very occasionally, but I couldn't imagine creating my whole business around that. For me, it probably wouldn't have worked, but someone else might love it.

So, I would definitely encourage them to play. And of course metalsmithing, some people make incredible art that you can wear, which is how I see jewelry. It's art that you wear. Or like me, I think I love colors too much. Not that you can love it too much, but I love colors. So that, unless you are ready and have access to lots and lots of gemstones (which, how amazing if that were the case) I think I'd want to stick more with beads, different kinds of beads. So, I would just encourage them... There's so many classes that you can find if people wanted to learn that way. Or of course, YouTube videos, right? And then just trying to figure out what sets you apart, I think, would be good to just think through.

Julie: Awesome. Well, Meenoo, thank you so much for taking so much time to chat with me about this. This has been an absolute delight.

Meenoo: Thank you so much! I haven't had the opportunity to talk about my jewelry for this long, so thank you for asking such awesome questions and making me think about this!

You can find Meenoo on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) @MinouBazaar and at her website, [MinouBazaar.com](#). I'll include links of course in the show notes, as well as links to Meenoo's favorite nonprofits and mine too. Huge thanks to Meenoo for sharing her passion with us today.

Just a reminder that you can find this podcast on Instagram [@LoveWhatYouLovePod](#), on Twitter, [@WhatYouLovePod](#), and the website is [LoveWhatYouLovePod.com](#).

All of the transcripts for *Love What You Love* are available for everyone on the website. Thanks to Emily White, transcription magician and proprietress of The Wordary. If you need transcripts, reach out to her at Emily@TheWordary.com. The music for *Love What You Love* is called "Inspiring Hope" by Pink-Sounds. A link to that artist is included in the show notes.

As always, thank you so, so much for listening. Let's hang out again soon.

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Resources:

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Meenoo's favorite nonprofits:

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