

## IN THE STUDIO

### Boris Bally

BY MICHAEL MCMILLAN

AS AN ARTIST personally invested in urban renewal and the fostering of community relationships, Boris Bally has a Rhode Island studio tailor-made for his practice and personal aspirations. His studio in West Providence's Olneyville neighborhood, where he works alongside metalsmith and apprentice Rob Boyd, is a professional yet unpretentious environment that mirrors the spirit of his creative endeavors. Bally is renowned for the manipulation of public signage, and his repurposing of "urban enamels" is accomplished in the studio equivalent of a New York City deli, an egalitarian space where those in suits and sweatpants can talk, learn, and feel comfortable side by side. Bally's accomplishments over the last 30 years illustrate a passion for tapping into the resources and collective enthusiasm of his surroundings; the community is always welcome to step through his door.

Bally's sheetrock, granite, and brick studio rests in the soil of a New England city rich in both jewelry and metalsmithing history. While 19th-century companies such as Gorham Manufacturing were producing flatware and repoussé chalices in Providence, nearly 200 years later Bally is continuing the craft tradition through his

ingenious "humanufacturing" of furniture and other objects of utility. As a formally trained goldsmith—and dealmaker of the highest caliber—the artist negotiates with public and private sources to purchase

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ever-changing inventories of used traffic signage for his imaginative creations. This self-described "civic material" adorns Bally's Atwells Avenue workspace, as well as his family's former residence on the second floor, now an artist residence. These thematically accessible, industrial commodities have won over a diversity of audiences through their artful repurposing. "One thing I adore about this medium is that it appeals to anybody, any cross-section," Bally states. His works are displayed in settings such as museums, restaurants, art galleries, outdoor public venues, and hospitals.

Long before crafting these works in his dream studio, Bally built a foundation in metalsmithing. He grew up in the industrial city of Pittsburgh, then graduated from Carnegie Mellon University with a degree in art. His studies led him to Switzerland, as well as to Philadelphia's Tyler School of Art. While repurposing municipal metals has long been a staple of his practice, much of Bally's work in the '80s and '90s focused on cups, brooches, silver and brass vessels, menorahs, candlesticks, and utensils. Furthermore, the artist's politically charged narratives have included the use of guns and gun triggers (as in his recent *Loaded Menorah*). Today, Bally's partnership with the Rhode Island Coalition Against Violence reflects his long-held desire to address the brutality seen in communities across this country.

Bally's move to Providence in the late 1990s with his wife Lynn Taylor, a primary care physician and noted expert in HIV and viral hepatitis, was a difficult yet fitting opportunity to immerse himself in social realities. After driving past the decades-vacant Ryan Post American Legion building in 1998, Bally purchased the lot for \$30,000 and fought his way through an arduous battle with contractors, DIY renovation, and building codes. These tiresome efforts eventually led to the formal ribbon-cutting ceremony in April of the following year.



Boris Bally in his Providence, Rhode Island, studio

Corner view of Bally's studio with suspended Transit Chairs

"My idea of craft encompasses the community," Bally notes, as his studio is part classroom, part entertainment venue, and a full measure of workshop wonder. As he opens the studio for tours, benefit auctions, and educational opportunities (such as visits from Rhode Island School of Design students), Bally has a workplace that functions as a lively meeting hall.

"Boris and I have a great symbiosis," says apprentice Rob Boyd. "I get to work every day with a friend who respects and appreciates my ideas and creativity." Boyd first met Bally as a metalsmithing student at Rhode Island College, an experience that eventually led to their six-year partnership. The two have a "finish-each-other's-sentences" dynamic. Whether it is measuring angles on the brake press, discussing inventory, or evaluating construction alignments, they work together seamlessly. In instructing students and new apprentices, both Bally and Boyd promote a strong work ethic, patience for the handmade, and a rich appreciation of craft tradition. Bally is especially cognizant of the last of these, as he reflects: "Sometimes the new generation forgets that certain skills have brought us to this point, and I worry that the culture will be devoid of actually knowing how to make things."

Bally's recent *Ransom* project is a collage of 100 brooches inspired by the late Australian collage artist Rosalie Gascoigne and infamous Sex Pistols graphic designer Jamie Reid. Each of the brooches was sold to a body of artists, collectors, curators, dealers, and professors. Recipients were required to take "selfies" while donning the pieces, images that were later compiled and presented as a formal composition. As Bally notes, these brooches act in effect as the "glue" to bring together the enthusiasm of the craft and metal communities. While the joy of a Bally studio visit can only be appreciated in person, collaborative efforts such as this are a fitting substitute to capture the passion of the artist's workplace.

Bally's studio practice has expanded both conceptually and geographically. Last year, Bally and Boyd worked with a Maryland gallery on *Fission 999*, a 40-foot-high installation for the parking garage of real estate firm Danac, LLC in Gaithersburg, Maryland. On a recent trip to



the Derry region of Northern Ireland, a combination of residency efforts, lectures, and master classes inspired Bally to create the *Derry Stool*, conceived in conjunction with CultureCraft, an ongoing project that cultivates craft practice in the city. A percentage of sales from Bally's *Ransom* brooches and the resulting *Derry Stools* have been donated to SNAG and CultureCraft, respectively. Everything comes full circle.

"I lived in a three-story apartment building, walked up to the third floor with my torch tanks, and swore that someday I would have whatever I wanted, whatever I needed in my studio, and not have to hide what I did," Bally recalls of his early career in Boston. While the life of a contemporary metalsmith or jeweler may be viewed as a romantic privilege to the uninitiated, Bally's labor-intensive work is embraced as a vocation, and one that is communicated best in the studio. "One thing I like about opening my space to the community is that one way or another, everybody will leave here with something of value," he expresses. Bally's passionate and innovative spirit will aid him in the studio and the community for years to come.

Michael McMillan is associate curator at Fuller Craft Museum in Brockton, Massachusetts.

*Derry Stools*, 2014  
recycled aluminum traffic signs,  
stainless steel hardware  
height 30 1/2"  
PHOTO: AARON USHER III

*Ransom Project* (100 brooches), 2015  
recycled aluminum traffic signs  
each 2 3/4 x 2 3/4 x 1/2"  
PHOTO: STEVE MASON



Furthermore:  
[www.borisbally.com](http://www.borisbally.com)

# SNAG // Society News

## Opportunities:

Check out our Springboard Opportunities Page on our website for more details and other opportunities.

### Gold Conference

The Sixth Annual Initiatives in Art and Culture (IAC) Gold Conference is April 28-29, 2016 in New York, NY.

IAC takes a wide-ranging look at gold in its sixth conference devoted to this extraordinary metal. Jewelry is the lens through which they will focus their examination.

Learn more at [www.artinitiatives.com](http://www.artinitiatives.com) and see your Riveting News for a special SNAG member discount.

### Appalachian Center for Craft-Metals Studio Residency

Part-Time Artist in Residence-Metals position at Appalachian Center for Craft at Tennessee Tech University. Complete position summary including qualifications, essential functions, and application procedures available at <https://jobs.tntech.edu>. Screening of applications begins April 3, 2016; open until filled.

### 2016 MJSA Vision Awards

Since its first winners debuted at the 1992 Expo New York, MJSA's annual Vision Awards competition has showcased outstanding jewelry design. The deadline for submissions is April 1.

For more information visit:

[http://www.mjasa.org/eventsprograms/mjasa\\_vision\\_awards/2016\\_entry\\_guidelines](http://www.mjasa.org/eventsprograms/mjasa_vision_awards/2016_entry_guidelines)

### Metals Studio Summer Assistantship Peters Valley

Studio assistants help studio managers, visiting instructors and students during workshops. They are responsible for workshop set-up prep and clean-up, under the direction of the Studio Manager. Assistants are present and provide support in the studio throughout the workshop and during some evening hours.

For more information visit:

[http://www.petersvalley.org/html/summer\\_assistants.cfm](http://www.petersvalley.org/html/summer_assistants.cfm)

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## SNAG 2016 Volunteer Recognition Award



Photo by John Burke

Started in 2015 by the SNAG Board of Directors, the Volunteer Recognition Award (VRA) recognizes and publicly acknowledges a volunteer's contribution to SNAG. As determined by the Board of Directors, the VRA shall be bestowed on a deserving volunteer to honor his/her length of service, exemplary initiative, and impact on the SNAG community.

### The SNAG Board has awarded the 2016 VRA to Boris Bally.

Boris has been an enthusiastic and generous SNAG volunteer for many years. He has served on the organization's Board of Directors and the Editorial Advisory Committee. Boris has participated in many SNAG community-led projects, most recently his "Ransom" project where he sold 100 of his brooches and asked the purchasers to take selfies wearing the piece they bought. Boris then donated a portion of the sales to SNAG as his personal way of giving back!

Bally is a Swiss-trained metalsmith/designer working in Providence, RI where he maintains his small studio business, Bally Humanufactured, LLC. Recently, Bally was interviewed for the Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art: Oral History project, part of the Nanette Laitman Grant. Bally's work has earned him the 2015 Rhode Island Council on the Arts Fellowship in Craft as well as two RISCA Design Fellowships. He also received a Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Crafts Fellowship. Bally won First Prize from the International Green Dot Awards for his Broadway ArmChair design in 2012.

In 2013 he was a finalist in both Eco Arts Awards and the 2009 International Spark Design Awards. In 2006 Bally received an Individual Achievement Award for Visual Arts presented by the Arts & Business Council of Rhode Island. His work has been featured in numerous international exhibitions and publications. Public collections include London's V&A Museum, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Museum of Art & Design New York, Carnegie Museum of Art Pittsburgh, Brooklyn Museum, Luce Foundation Center, Renwick Gallery and Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum.

Boris will receive the Volunteer Recognition Award at this year's Membership Meeting at the 2016 SNAG<sup>neXt</sup> conference.