



Ohr Trees of Life: Installation at Ohr Shalom Synagogue. Photo by Mark Tanner

Think Big: A new vision for Lisa Slovis Mandel

By Janet F. Williams

For much of her career, WJA member Lisa Slovis Mandel, metalsmith and teacher, has focused on wearable and smaller household adornments, using metal as the main component. She has worked in gold, silver, pewter, steel, copper, brass, wood, and other materials including enamel and gemstones. Lately, her work has grown—literally—to include larger pieces, so large they've expanded beyond the interior confines of her studio and moved into the great outdoors. At one time, her large pieces would have been about the size of a bread box. Now they reach 15 feet tall!

Her interest in outdoor sculptural pieces partly explains why she has begun to shy away from smaller trade shows. As a mother of two school-aged boys, it is hard for her to prepare and travel out-of-town, finding it more practical to limit herself to certain high-end shows. Most of Lisa's work is available on a retail basis, though she does offer some wholesale.

Many artists do not confine themselves to one style for their entire career. Interests change. Materials change. Costs change. And perhaps most importantly, an artist's vision can change. After almost twenty years in the business, I was not surprised to learn that Lisa's interests continue to evolve. I asked her what she found appealing about working in both small and large formats.

"When I create a small piece," she said, "people pick it up. They hold it in their hand, turn it around and look at it up close. When I make a large piece, they look at it from a distance and it's as if they see it from the periphery."

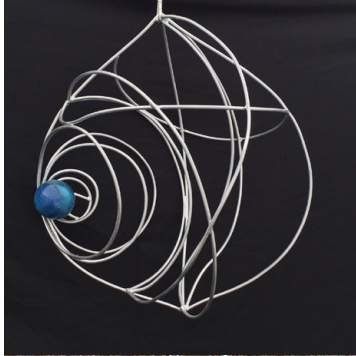
The excitement in her voice told me more than the details she laid out about how others perceive her work. When fashioning smaller items, she has greater control with the details and the personal elements inclusive in working on a size that is meant to be seen up close. Small work, such as jewelry or a menorah, provides intimacy with the item, both for her and the person who buys it.

It is apparent Lisa loves her work. She loves the tactical qualities of the metal as she handles the material, the process of creation, and the textures she utilizes. These elements vary depending on size. Small pieces may showcase fine textures, whereas large work has texture appropriate for its scale, which provides her with different challenges.

A large sculptural piece becomes part of the environment in which it resides and people respond differently to it. They may experience the piece from a distance to take in its grandness or to appreciate how the shapes silhouette against the sky. Or they may choose to examine it more closely to pick out textures and detail that one cannot see from afar. Lisa and her husband David work on larger works together. They call these pieces "Jewelry for the Neighborhood," celebrating how their artwork relates to the environment for which it was created.

A good example of a large scale item would be the installation commissioned by Ohr Shalom Synagogue in San Diego for Lisa and David to create two metal trees that reach 21 feet across and 15 feet in height. There is a bench in between the trees where people can sit. The art also acts as a centerpiece for donations with plaques that ring the base and are scattered about the trees. Here, mood plays an important part. An artful area within a temple gives its patrons a focal point in which to reflect upon memory, philanthropy, spirituality, and beauty, among other thoughts and feelings.

I spoke to Lisa during the La Jolla Art and Wine Festival where she showed off her latest designs, "pods," as she called them. Each pod-like shape is made of welded silver wire, sometimes with argentineum, a purer 935 silver with different alloys than 925 silver. Through skillful use



Top left: Large pod of welded steel with blue orb. Left: Pendant-sized pod with pearl. Photo by Lisa Slovis Mandel

The La Jolla show allowed passers-by to view her larger work and even take one home. This event has been an important venue for her to find commission work for private residences and having the pods on display was a sure way to catch the eye of discriminating art patrons who value individuality and innovation.

Fortunately, the public can view Lisa's outdoor sculptures locally at Thibodo Park in Vista and in front of the Belching Beaver Brewery Tavern and Grill on East Broadway in downtown Vista. To learn more about Lisa and her work, please visit: <http://www.lisaslovis.com>.

of positive and negative space, Lisa curls, shapes, and solders the wire into fanciful airy forms, yet there is enough material to define the shape. The smaller, 3 inch high pods became pendants on a chain—a unique idea, for sure! Also on display were a few bracelets, and equally fanciful rings, including one that looked like a lily pad.

Lisa has long used whimsical elements in her work and each pod held its own intrigue. Keeping to her vision of creating larger items, she also has giant pods up to 30 inches in height made from welded steel. The clean, crisp lines are reminiscent of Scandinavian design. They are meant to hang indoors where they will not rust.

Pods and pod-like shapes are found in nature, and it is their elemental structure that Lisa finds intriguing. "They are intricate, sometimes delicate, but always strong," she states. "Pod skeletal armor can be organic, transparent, and very tactile. On a jewelry scale, they are intimate elegant cages to hold something special, even as a temporal vessel. Some have pearls, some marbles, and some need nothing within except for personal thoughts or ideas. On a larger scale, pods are floating worlds with galactic references within."

The larger pods are a collaborative effort with David, who for his part used enamel paint to finish the look. Lisa and her husband often combine their talents, a smart move when the end result is this impressive. Lisa's goal was to make these orbs marble-like in their appearance and to insinuate movement.



Top: Zane Barrier Fence and Zane Barrier Interior: This steel fence created for a private residence is 72 feet long and includes 3 gates and a mailbox. Photos by Mark Tanner