

# Hand Made

## Pratt Alumnae:



by Bob Howe

Pratt Institute is the largest school of art and design in the country, with 4,200 students enrolled as of September 2001. The Institute produces alumni at a comparatively sedate, if consistent, rate; 503 undergraduate and 464 graduate students received degrees in the Class of 2001. Our graduates, then, are hand-made, with all the potential for creative expression the phrase implies.

Mary Fugle, MLS '77, is the director of Library and Trade Relations for Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, a medical journal publisher. She doesn't so much converse as detonate sentences. Her office on the West side of Manhattan is a study in corporate minimalism, and after ten minutes with her, you begin to think the knickknacks have been evacuated for their own safety. Everything about Fugle is big—her laugh, her gestures, her voice, especially her voice. She is, as the kids say, sort of intense.

Her job at Lippincott Williams & Wilkins is twofold: she negotiates site licenses (permission to consult the corporate website) for consortia for 200 online and print journals aimed at physicians and nurses; in her trade relations role, Fugle deals with 900 subscription agents representing \$66 million in sales (there are a "big four" that make up the bulk of the business).

In 1984, Fugle left the research librarian business to work for Springer-Verlag as a sales manager. Since then she has held sales, trade relations and marketing posts at some of the world's largest journal publishers.

"I miss the reference part of the job," she said. "I research stuff to death-for work, for friends, and I monitor list servers." A casual question sends her diving into her files for a clipping of a magazine article, which she produces with a gleeful flourish. "In my reference librarian jobs, I best liked coming up the one bit of relevant information. The thing that is going to make that patient upstairs have a better outcome."

She ended up at her current job by answering a blind ad in the librarian section of the *New York Times*. "It was just a total fluke. I was at Lutheran [Medical Center], I had no intention of going into publishing," she said. "I could be doing that still if I hadn't answered the *Times* ad

"There is very much a public relations aspect to this job, too. In 1987 the dollar crashed. Our prices went up one month after we sent out our price sheet. I went to fourteen American Library Association meetings to explain our price increase. This is in a small professional circle anyway; I have very high visibility now."

Fugle is originally from Buffalo, New York (2000 annual snowfall: twelve feet). While attending ILS at Pratt, she commuted to the Brooklyn Campus from the upper west side of Manhattan. She graduated from the one-year program in 1977. "The program was intense; people were close to one-another and the professors were very available," she said. As a student she worked part-time and carried a 4.0 academic index.

In her off hours, Fugle is a practitioner, and instructor, of spinning—a highly structured stationary bicycle exercise. "[Spinning] pulls you out of yourself. I've been a gym person, a gym goer, since 1980. I started spinning six years ago, and I've been teaching for six months."

She is an instructor at Eastern Athletics clubs in several brownstone Brooklyn locations. "Everybody I meet, I meet at the gym," she said. "It's hard to meet people in New York, just like they say. You know, the odds are better that a New York woman of a certain age will be killed in a terrorist attack than get married," she said with a grim nod downtown, at the still-smoking remains of the World Trade Center.

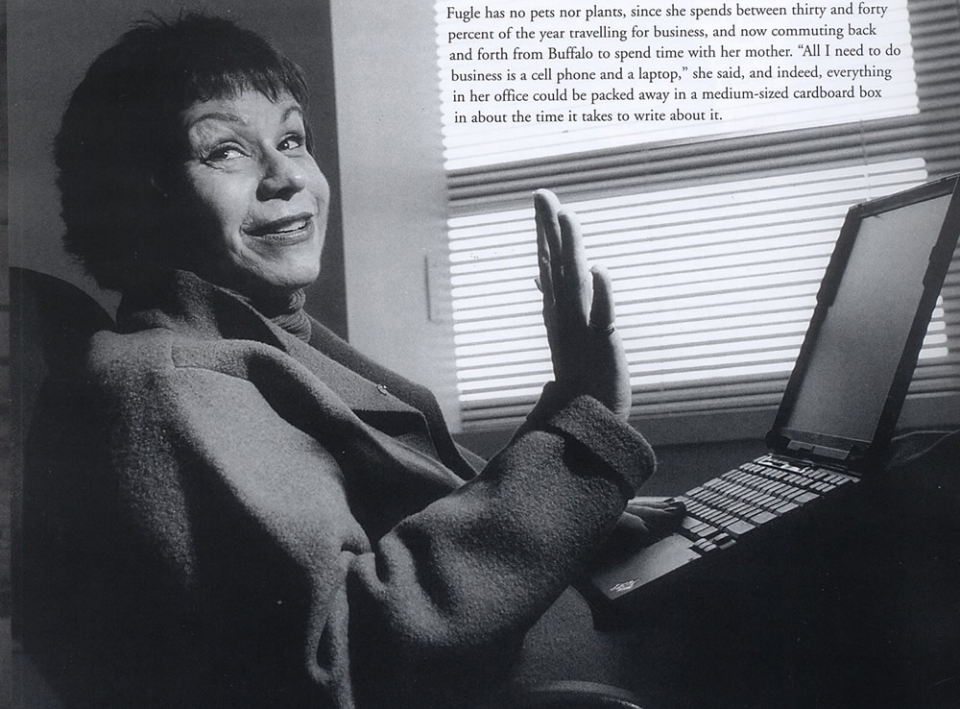
Her offices are only a mile from Ground Zero. Fugle was in Philadelphia when the attacks took place. As with many offices in the immediate area, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins were closed for a full week after the attacks, and had no e-mail and spotty phone service for at least two weeks after the offices reopened.

Her brother, John Fugle, is an architect two years Fugle's junior. He lives in Syracuse, New York. He received his MA from UCLA. Her parents are George, 81, and Marcella, 74. They live in Hamburg, New York. Both are retired: George was a fish and poultry wholesaler; Marcella was a teacher and director-at-large for the New York state Union of Teachers.

Fugle's father is a prostate cancer survivor, and her mother was diagnosed with colon cancer last year. "Tell people not to wait until they're seventy-four to get a colonoscopy!" Fugle said. "When I found out about my mother's cancer, I went right out to the stacks. We publish the textbook on cancer. I ripped out the relevant chapter and I carry it around.

"For me," she said, "I would go crazy without knowing, even though by reading the book you find out just how bad it can get."

Fugle has no pets nor plants, since she spends between thirty and forty percent of the year travelling for business, and now commuting back and forth from Buffalo to spend time with her mother. "All I need to do business is a cell phone and a laptop," she said, and indeed, everything in her office could be packed away in a medium-sized cardboard box in about the time it takes to write about it.



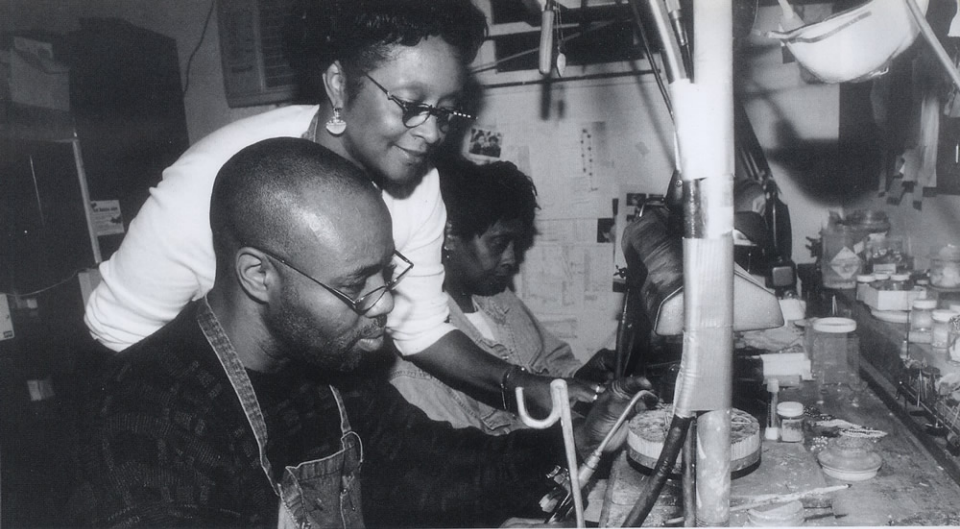


If Mary Fugle's path departed from her original career aims, one could say Donna Chambers' ambitions blazed a new trail altogether. The Fashion Design graduate is now an award-winning jewelry designer and the proprietor of an African-American gift and curio shop.

Chambers, BFA '72, is restrained in voice and gesture, and her store and basement workshop is as cluttered as Mary Fugle's office is spare. Chambers' store, That Old Black Magic, is brightly lit and stocked as well as a respectably-sized museum shop. The shop stocks books, including a respectable selection of African-American romance novels, curios, games, posters, greeting cards and jewelry, all aimed at an African-American audience. Even in the middle of a blustery weekday, a constant stream of patrons came and went.

Chambers' jewelry workshop, in the store's basement, has a rather different feel. On the sheetrock wall next to the phone are dozens of telephone numbers in different hands and colors of ink. On the hot water heater is a magnetic replica of the 15-cent Martin Luther King Black Heritage postage stamp. A magnetic tumbler whirs on a countertop, putting the first polish on a new piece of jewelry. The water in the tumbler is brown with gold dust. Boxes with handwritten labels are stored under counters and in corners, and Christmas decorations spill out of one particularly big carton at the foot of the stairs.





Donna Chambers, BFA '72

On the wall are newspaper clippings from *USA Today* about women's basketball, including a picture of Chamber's daughter, sixteen-year-old Cori—an aspiring pro—number 50 in a blue uniform, running hard downcourt.

Chambers' talent in art design was recognized at an early age by Vera Linens and Oleg Cassini. Vera hired Chambers as a teenager to create textile designs for her multi-million dollar design operation in Ossining, New York, where Chambers was born and raised.

Vera established a scholarship fund in honor of her late husband, and Chambers became the first recipient of the George Neuman Scholarship. In the fall of 1968, Chambers came to study at

Pratt. She began her career in the garment center, after graduating from Pratt in 1972 with a BFA in Fashion Design.

"I worked in the garment center for a few years," she said. "It was boring and the people were mean." Chambers found her interest in jewelry design when she began doing repair work in her husband's shop.

She was married to jeweler Irving Williams in 1976. When her husband died in 1978, Chambers, disillusioned with the garment business, took over the jewelry repair business. The shop serviced fifteen neighborhood jewelry concerns in the downtown Brooklyn area, as well as A&S Department Store.

Three years after taking over the business, she created the Donna Chambers Collection of 14 karat gold and pearl earrings and pins.

In 1986, Chambers, a Brooklyn resident for eighteen years, moved herself and her daughter to Westchester, where her jewelry workshop has been ever since.

"In 1990, my lifelong goldsmithing career and passion, and my love for collecting beautiful things and black memorabilia, led me to the opening of That Old Black Magic, a store in downtown White Plains," she said. "The store is an African-American book and gift gallery. Our mission is to promote black culture, lifestyle and diversity in the community and those communities that surround us. I was determined to be a bridge that connects the gap between the artist, author, and the consumer. So I began filling the store with art, gifts, books, jewelry, games, home accents, and everything relating to the Black Experience. I also held readings: some really big names, including Nikki Giovanni, who packed the house, Iyanla Vanzant, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, Susan Taylor, Arthur Ashe and others. We've also helped to premier and promote many first book authors."

Chambers' sister, Gail Chambers Redd, is a longtime jeweler in the shop. Gilberto McFarlane has worked for Chambers since 1979; he is the son of a jeweler Chambers worked with in downtown Brooklyn. Gilberto sits at the corner of the L-shaped workbench, working with blunt fingers





on intricate gold jewelry that will later hold mother-of-pearl panels. He has close-cut dark hair and wears glasses with a magnifier attached. The three sit within arm's reach of one another around an L-shaped bench, each working a pool of light.

Chambers' jewelry is an unusual tactile experience. The antique mother of pearl isn't exactly warm to the touch, but it seems warmer than room temperature, and has a surface texture like skin. Much of Chambers' work is created from 18th century Chinese gambling markers. She cuts and shapes the mother of pearl into various designs, then mates it with custom-made gold framing. On the day we visited her workshop, she was wearing a set of fan-shaped mother of pearl and gold earrings of her own design.

"I know some girls who call themselves jewelry designers, but someone else makes their stuff," Chambers said. "My major at Pratt was Fashion Design—if I couldn't sew, I wouldn't know how things go together. When I'd go to someplace on Seventh Avenue, and they'd say, 'That's not makable,' I could say, 'Give me a machine and I'll show you.'"

"I don't want to be known as a good African-American designer—most of my jewelry customers are white, as a matter of fact," she said. "I want to be known as a good designer."

Chambers' work does have broad appeal. Some of her largest orders come from retailers in Hawaii and from the Museum Company, which markets

Chambers' jewelry through a national network of retail stores, on the Internet and via catalogs. Her fine jewelry collection has been carried by Bloomingdale's, Fortunoff's, Saks Fifth Avenue, and The Museum Company, as well as at jewelry chains from coast to coast. Pieces of Chamber's jewelry have been shown at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC, and The Boston Museum of Art.

She is an award-winning designer, a winner of the International Pearl Design Contest; the 1992 Women's Jewelry Association's Annual Award for Excellence in Manufacturing; the 1995 Blenheim Award for Design Excellence; and the 1998 YWCA Entrepreneur of the Year Award. Chambers is also a member of the Contemporary Jewelry Design Group and the International Jewelry Design Council.

"I want people to know it's my jewelry," she said. "I would like to have a solo exhibition at some point. It's fine art. I don't want it just because I'm an African-American woman, but I would like my work to go down in history, somehow."

In the end, lives and careers of these two alumnae could be an advertisement for Pratt's "hand made" philosophy. "Pratt didn't make me what I am," Mary Fugle said, "but in some sense I didn't know what I could do until I went to Pratt."



Mary Fugle, MLS '77