



# SOUL FOR NOW & S

JEWELRY ARTIST  
**ADINA MILLS** FUSES  
CRYSTALS WITH  
URBAN EDGE TO  
CREATE ONE-OF-A-KIND  
PIECES OF  
WEARABLE ART.

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I'm honest, I make a few assumptions about Adina Mills on the way to our first interview. I figure she's eccentric, for one, and most likely decked out in gemstones. I also prepare for what I estimate to be a high probability that she asks me to participate in a drum circle, like those held at the popular New Age women's retreat, Spirit Weavers Gathering, where her jewelry can be seen on many "sisters" who attend. Each of her pieces is an organic take on urban funk:

Obelisk-shaped rings mount large chunks of white apophyllite and purple amethyst in hand-sculpted clay, while giant pendants made of quartzite or geode drip from chunky ropes and gold chokers.

In short, I expect Mills to be a reflection of her artistry, or at least how I perceive it to be.

So when the jewelry artist opens the door of her Landers home in a simple white dress and a single gold necklace, I couldn't be more surprised. With her hair piled high in two pigtail buns, she greets me with a warm hug and a soft hello.

We make our way through her living room to the kitchen table, three anxious dogs nipping at our heels offering stark contrast to her down-to-earth demeanor. A blue and green floral couch anchors the room and sits opposite one in faded Victorian yellow. On the far wall, a mirror covered in blue and yellow graffiti hangs next to a pencil sketch framed in gold. It's only after I drive away that I'll realize this space is a manifestation of the dichotomy that is Adina Mills: a woman walking the line between folk and high fashion, eclipsing avant-garde in her own understated way.

For the past three years, the artist has operated out of her Landers property; previously, she fulfilled wholesale orders for Free People, Urban Outfitters and Anthropologie from a motor home on a four-and-a-half-year, cross-country road trip. Her pieces have been worn by the likes of Lena Dunham and recent winner of NBC's "The Voice," Alisan Porter, to name a few, but these days she's slowed down the pace. Currently, she attends trade shows and continuously uploads batches of new jewelry for direct sale on her website. "I stay true to just creating," she says of why she doesn't prescribe to the notion of "collections" or being "on-season." "It really depends on the stones that I'm finding at the time, or the paint colors that I want to use."

Others have characterized her as a nomad, but Mills is strikingly centered to me. She keeps her favorite piece – a quartzite necklace anchoring a brazen amount of peachy-pink vintage chains – on a mannequin to the right of her work desk in a small studio off her bedroom. To the left is another worn by Lily Tomlin on Netflix's "Grace and Frankie." Throughout the room, shelves and drawers burst with the jewelry that makes up her own personal collection. If you look out the window, you can see scattered splatters of spray paint on old tires throughout the front yard.

"I've always been super into urban art, like graffiti, that whole underground culture," she explains. "I was a hip-hop head. I've



just loved spray painting and graffiti, so it naturally incorporated into my art work and into the jewelry."

She started utilizing the technique on wire-wrapped and beaded pieces after majoring in art history at UC Santa Barbara, but it wasn't until she decided to earn her teaching credential at Cal State Northridge that her pieces took on the look that they have today. Having never taken an art studio

class, she enrolled in sculpture in 2004.

"I was older than all the other kids and super into it," she recalls. "The professor took me under his wing and introduced me to this particular [clay] that I now use for my jewelry. He was introducing it to me for my sculptures, but I saw what it could do on the side."

She'd always used gemstones and crystals, but the material transformed the pieces into sculptural works of art. Ever since, her settings have continued to evolve – though the large-scale approach has stayed the same.

"Maybe it's a way to express something that I feel inside but can't get out any other way," she says of the sizing. "Inside, I feel loud and bold, but I don't really come across that way. This is the way for me to express what I'm feeling inside."

Truth be told, she doesn't know much about crystal culture. Lost on Mills are the powers believed to be held by each gem. But there's plenty else to talk about – her time spent hustling in Manhattan to get her business off the ground, the stubbornness that keeps her from hiring any help. She's the kind of woman you want to sip whiskey beside on a porch at twilight, ask how she handpicks her stones each winter in Quartzsite, Ariz., so you can quietly observe a person with the audacity to be so unabashedly herself. Even those we deem "out of the box" can become conventionalized if we allow ourselves to assume, and Mills is anything if not vibrantly complex.

When I suggest that her work seems to have evolved in recent months – the ropes chunkier and pendants bigger, bolder – she agrees. Having previously outsourced the crafting of her ropes, Mills now hand-dyes each one herself. "I think because now the whole package is straight from me, it completes the whole picture," she says. "... I've experienced many changes in the past year. Because of these changes, I've been taking lots of new steps. Weights have been lifted, and now I feel like I am truly soaring."

I wonder if she knows that her favorite crystal to work with – quartzite – is an anchoring gem, thought to perpetuate positive change. Or that her second favorite, apophyllite, provides spiritual direction. Ask any New Age believer and they might attribute her recent artistic ascent to good energies. Ask Adina Mills, and she'll tell you it came from "somewhere deep within." 🌱

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