

American Silver in the Philadelphia Museum of Art

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Steve Ford

Lafayette, Indiana, born 1964

David Forlano

Charleston, South Carolina, born 1964
Partnership, 1988–

Steve Ford (fig. 90) was born in 1964 in Lafayette, Indiana, and studied painting at Washington University in St. Louis. David Forlano (fig. 91) was born in 1964 in Charleston, South Carolina, and was a student at Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia.¹ They met in 1985 while studying for a semester in Italy through Tyler School of Art in Rome. While abroad these two artists began a series of discussions about methods and approaches to painting. Finding their conversations artistically stimulating, they decided to work as a team and began trading half-finished drawings and paintings in order to learn from each other and to fuse their individual ideas. Ford subsequently transferred to Tyler for his senior year, and both artists graduated with BFA's in painting in 1988. "Swapping" became an essential element in their work,² and their collaboration remains vibrant today. Ford and Forlano began making jewelry together in 1988, choosing polymer clay, at that time a new material just being explored, and introducing metal around 2000.³ Maryanne Petrus-Gilbert (born 1970), a Philadelphia-based metalsmith, fabricates the metalwork for their jewelry.⁴

The two men worked side by side in their North Philadelphia studio until 2006, when Forlano moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. They continue their partnership by shipping work back and forth between the two cities. Forlano's strength lies in his ability to "push color, pattern and surface in new directions," while Ford experiments with "three-dimensional structures and how things fit together mechanically."⁵ Having exhibited for many years in the Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show, Smithsonian Craft Show, and American Craft Show Baltimore, their work can be found adorning many admiring collectors. The best of their work is found in several important public collections, including the Museum of Fine



Figs. 90, 91. Steve Ford (top) and David Forlano (bottom). Photos: Jared Castaldi

Arts, Boston; the Museum of Arts and Design, New York; the Newark Museum, New Jersey; and DesignMUSEO, Helsinki.⁶ **EAA**

1. Marjorie Simon, "Ford + Forlano: Serendipitous Structures," *Mosaic*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Winter 2000), p. 30.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

4. Artists' statement, curatorial files, AA, PMA. Maryanne Petrus-Gilbert graduated from Tyler School of Art with a BFA in jewelry and metals; Petrus-Gilbert, telephone conversation with the author, July 1, 2014.

5. Artists' statement, undated, curatorial files, AA, PMA.

6. Curriculum vitae, www.fordforlano.com (accessed April 7, 2014).

Cat. 260

Steve Ford and David Forlano Pillow Collar Necklace

2009

Sterling silver, 22-karat gold, polymer clay (PVC),

rosewood

MARKS: Ford / forlano (in rectangle); 2009; 22K; 925;
yarn (all incuse, on disk soldered to reverse of one bead);
cat. 260-11

Length: 20½ inches (52.1 cm); width: 1½ inches (3.8 cm);
depth: ½ inch (1.3 cm)

Weight: silver 36 oz.

Purchased with funds contributed by The Women's Committee and the Craft Show Committee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in memory of Anne d'Harnoncourt, 2008-121-1

EXHIBITED: Wrought and Crofted: Jewelry and Metalwork, 1900 to the Present, Philadelphia Museum of Art, May 8–2009–February 2, 2010; First Look: Collecting for the Philadelphia Museum of Art, July 13–September 8, 2013.

PUBLISHED: "Chance Meeting in Rome Evolves into Ford/Forlano Jewelry," via Tyler School of Art (blog), <http://tyler.temple.edu/blog> (accessed May 20, 2015); "Changes, Honors, Farewells," American Craft Magazine, posted July 7, 2009, <http://craftcouncil.org/magazine> (accessed May 20, 2015); "Ford/Forlano Weigh In," Polymer Clay Daily, <http://polymerclaydaily.com> (accessed May 20, 2015).

Pillow Collar Necklace is made up of one hundred beads—the face of each is polymer clay mounted on a silver "button"—with fifty-one on the neutral-colored side and forty-nine on the colorful side,⁷ and clasped by a series of hook-and-eye catches.⁸ The idea of a commission by the Museum for a tour-de-force necklace was first broached during a



Cat. 260-1





Fig. 92. Ford/Forlano. Drawing of Pillow Color Necklace. 2008. Opaque watercolor and sooty highlights and graphite, with inkjet-printed collage elements, on cream wove paper, sheet: 22 1/2 x 22 1/2 inches (56.8 x 57.5 cm). Purchased with funds contributed by The Women's Committee and the Craft Show Committee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in memory of Anne d'Harmoncourt, 2008-121-2.

curatorial studio visit with Steve Ford and David Forlano in 2007. A year later they presented a concept for this necklace. The presentation in June 2008 coincided with the untimely death of Anne d'Harmoncourt, the director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which proposed that the necklace be commissioned in her memory.² The drawing (fig. 92) presented with the artist's final proposal was accompanied by this statement: "The red area represents one whole side of the necklace which will be colorful but unified, probably with one dominant color, but a wide range of clay and printed metal patterns. The other side of the necklace will be more neutral; that is, all black and white with subtle color bits. We think of it as a combination of something classical, restrained, and dignified on the one side and something rich, exuberant, adventurous on the other—like Anne herself."³

Using nature as an inspiration, Ford and Forlano look to seed clusters, shell formations, and flower buds as well as their carefully composed, organized parts.⁴ Seeds, shells, and plant forms are made up of numerous, seemingly identical but unique units. Whereas it is evident that *Pillow Color Necklace* is composed of singular beads of varied textures and colors, it is the structure of the necklace—also informed by nature—that provides the foundation for this masterful object. A collection of unique elements, the necklace is composed of what the artists call "conceptual fragments." However, it is their arrangement as a whole composition that allows the narrative to come into focus and be complete. Having visited the Museum's 2008 exhibition *Calder Jewelry*, Ford and Forlano infused the necklace with the movement and spirit of Calder's wearable sculptures.⁵ The realized work is a powerful statement of the artists' skill and their devotion to d'Harmoncourt. Ford and Forlano consider *Pillow Color Necklace* the most complex object that they have made to

date and comment that "the commission remains our greatest honor." It is a seminal work of art and illustrates their creativity and skill in polymer clay and metal.⁶ (RA)

1. Maryanne Petrus-Gibert (born 1970), a Philadelphia-based metalsmith, executed the silver work for this necklace.
2. Steve Ford and David Forlano, email message to the author, February 23, 2009, curatorial files, AA, PMA.
3. Anne d'Harmoncourt was an ardent supporter of Ford/Forlano and owned five of their necklaces and several brooches. Inspired by her support of their work, the Museum saw fit to commission jewelry from them in her memory. Two weeks later, the Philadelphia Museum of Art's Women's Committee expressed interest in having its funds be directed toward a specific purchase from the 2008 Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show to honor her memory. When informed about the impending commission, the committee underwrote the purchase of the necklace. Curatorial files, AA, PMA.
4. Ford and Forlano, email message to the author, September 23, 2008.
5. Artists' statement, undated, curatorial files, AA, PMA.
6. *Calder Jewelry* was on exhibit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, July–October 2008.
7. Ford and Forlano, email messages to the author, February 23, 2009, and July 1, 2014.
8. It should also be noted that this necklace was designed in the twentieth year of their collaboration.