



## THE BPA JEWELRY EXHIBIT

**MATTE ERICKSON**

*The Body Piercing Archive*  
(All photos by the author)



In June of 2016 I was tasked with a project. That project was to curate an exhibit of vintage body jewelry companies and designs. I was both excited and terrified at the same time. This was to be the first project that was solely on my shoulders, but I had the confidence, drive, and belief in this project and myself to know I could do a good job. I also knew I would have to rely on people, which is something I am not very good at.

I decided that the APP Conference in 2016 was the best time to put the word out and try to get people interested. In the following months, there seemed to be little interest, but I pressed on. The Point staff was kind enough to run the advertisement in every issue. At this point I was raiding my own archives; documenting, photographing, and inventorying as much as possible.

In September, I got a message from Paul King about reaching out to Josh Warner from Good Art HLYWD. I emailed Josh and he wanted to gift us with old Good Art items, however, he was moving to a new shop and was going to be unavailable for a few months. This allowed me to start reaching out to anyone I could think of that was involved in manufacturing. In December I got a message from Anne Ott about the Anti-Bling eyelets; seriously one of the “Holy Grail” pieces from Custom Steel.

As January approached, I had booked a flight to Los Angeles and secured an appointment with Josh Warner. While in LA, I was meeting Anne to pick up the Anti-Bling eyelets before heading over to Good Art HLYWD. Upon arrival I was met by a grizzly, bearded man with a cheerful disposition. This is Josh. We jump

right into old stories and a quick tour of his new shop. Thankfully, I had my GoPro with me and caught it all on video. After about an hour of him telling stories of how it all evolved and who the key players were, he presents a large folder full of vintage Good Art memorabilia and said, “take what you want”. I was like a kid in a candy store. I managed to fill my carry-on bag and still had to send 2 packages to my shop with all the items.

As I was heading to one of my favorite food destinations (Jerry’s Deli in Studio City), I got a call from John Kittell from NeoMetal. He was sending out some items with my next order for the exhibit. At this point, I felt the momentum growing. I also felt my hunger growing and Jerry’s was getting closer. When I got there I ordered 8 deconstructed Reuben sandwiches. I ate one (minus the cheese and Russian dressing) on the way to LAX. The other seven were packed in my bag. You know something? TSA looks at you really strangely when you are delivering sandwiches from LA to Sacramento.

That next week, I received the packages I sent from Good Art and the first Neometal shipment. The next few weeks were filled with photographing, cataloging, organizing, and making museum cards for each piece. During this time, I had sent the Anti-Bling eyelets back to Pat Pruitt for repair and restoration, and kept reaching out to other companies. I had also started teaching myself video editing and how to create intro and outro graphics. Just as I was finishing up with my deliveries, I received another box from Neometal and I got word that I had a box on the way from Body Circle Design. By the time I had receive these next items, I had my process streamlined fairly well. Good thing, because Dallas Suscon was right around the corner. Upon returning from Dallas I started wrapping up all the pieces.

May was filled with building display items and totally stressing out. I also managed to secure (thank you Sean Dowdell) a meeting/interview with Erik Dakota, so off to Santa Cruz I went. During my visit he also presented me with a stack of old catalogs and a few great stories. When I returned to my shop, I spent several days editing video and putting together the graphics. I actually had to redo this four

times! The last time it was all rendered properly and I found a typo. UGH! This project was starting to take its toll on me, but upward I pushed.

June came, there was light at the end of the tunnel. I had reserved a trailer and maintenance on the truck was done. Finally I got word from Becky Dill that the Charles Gatewood exhibit boxes were ready to pick up. I headed down to Concord, CA. It was now a few days before Conference, and during all this I was still receiving little packages here and there. The Friday before Conference I finally heard from Pat Pruitt about the eyelets. He was shipping them directly to Las Vegas!

Saturday, the day before I had to leave for Las Vegas, I had the bright idea to go photograph the Sonoma County Hot Air Balloon Classic. It was being held about an hour away, and I had to be there by 5 a.m. I went and shot the balloons then headed home, picked up the trailer, and was off to work. Most of the day was spent loading the trailer and finishing up details. I finished up at 7:30 p.m. (we close at 8:00 p.m.). My stress levels were at their peak. Did I have enough stuff? Did I do it justice? I ended up getting to bed around midnight.

I was back up at 3:30 a.m. and ready for the road. The trip was as uneventful as usual. A little slower maybe, since I was pulling a trailer, but still uneventful. I finally arrived in Las Vegas at around 3:00 p.m. Unloading was expedient, which was good because I was exhausted. You know, there is something strange that happens at Conference. I was exhausted and road weary, but once I saw the first few people, I felt a second wind come





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over me and I was ready to press on into the night.

With Monday came setup and all was going well. The stress was draining away with every piece I put out. At least until I set the TV up. I had purchased it about a month prior and I told the guy at Best Buy that I needed to stream video off a flash drive. He assured me that it would. Well, when I set it up, it would run pictures off a flash drive but not video. Back to stress mode. After a quick run to Walmart for an HDMI cable, I hooked up my trusty laptop to the TV and it worked. Crisis averted.

Tuesday was the first day of the Expo. I picked up my last package from the business center on the way and the first visitors came by to see what we had for sale. They quickly learned we weren't selling, just displaying. As the week went on, more and more people came by to see the relics. The enthusiasm was intoxicating! So many people had questions and stories. It was educational on both sides.

The highlight of Conference this year, however, came by text. I was having dinner and Becky texted me and said I had won the "Best Multiple Booth" award. I was blown away. I thought I had done a pretty good job, but obviously I wasn't the only one. I am so thankful to all those that voted for my exhibit, loaned items for display, and supported me while I put this all together. I would also like to give special thanks to Josh Warner (Good Art HLYWD), John Kittell (NeoMetal), Gale Shub (Body Circle Design), Pat Pruitt (Custom Steel/Pat Pruitt Metalsmith), and Erik Dakota for taking the time and effort to gather and donate items. I would also like to thank my family for putting up with me being stressed and cranky for so long. Hard work always pays off!