

# LOCALSGUIDE

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## magazine

### Ashland, Oregon - LocalsGuide

## Karina Mendoza-Wittke – “Alma-Mia Jewelry”

Karina Mendoza-Wittke is an artisan who has been making jewelry most of her life. She grew up in both Mexico and Germany, spending roughly equal time in both countries as a child. She recently became a U.S. citizen but retains strong connections to Mexico and Europe. A gypsy lifestyle and creative mind led Karina down the road of the artisan, and she has taken that worldview with her wherever she makes her home. Karina took a break from the market for most of last year, but she is back to selling regularly at Lithia Artisans Market and her pieces are better than ever. Her business is called [Alma-Mia Jewelry](#), translating to Soul of Mine Jewelry.



**How long have you been making jewelry?**

I started when I was 9 years old, during a fabulous summer vacation traveling through Europe along the coast of Spain and Portugal, with my

mom. Our small family of 3 women was short of money, so we decided to invest all we had left in beads, make necklaces, and sell them on the beach. We taught ourselves, and were quite successful. We continued traveling like this for the rest of the summer, through France and all the way home to Germany. This unique experience stayed with me forever, and was the beginning of my path as an artist.

Jewelry making became an integral part of my life. It has gone with me to all the places I have lived, the stages of my life as a girl, a woman, a mother... It has been an anchor and a pillar throughout my life.

### **How does your multi-cultural background influence you as an artisan?**

Being multi-cultural, and not being “burdened” by only one cultural identity, has given me a certain “lightness” about things. I am able to draw inspiration from anywhere. I have found more stability in my art than in my surroundings. My art is also a very “portable” means of income and security; therefore, it is more a part of me, and I give to it, as much as it gives to me.

### **Who would you consider a mentor in shaping your creative self?**

My mother, my grandmother, and my father... all for different reasons.

My grandmother lived through the German post war depression as a single mother of two girls by working and creating with her hands. She sewed, knitted, crocheted, and looped rugs and wall hangings to make a living. She had a sense of excellence about her work, and her art became her means of being a provider, and her refuge. It became second nature to her.

In turn, my mother also became an artist. She is a painter and gallery owner in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Growing up in Germany, we traveled a great deal throughout Europe, visited a lot of museums, spent a lot of time

in Gaudi's world, and places full of history and beauty. I believe that helped shape my "eye" and sensitivity to form, feel, and aesthetics.

My father is an inventor in Mexico with an incredible mind. I feel his influence when I come up with new designs and want to make sure they are not just beautiful, but functional and durable. He shines through the "workmanship" side of my art. I also inherited his business sense when I stepped in for him and managed the family business as a teenager.

### **Did you learn your trade or are you self taught?**

I am completely self taught in my craft. I learn by thinking, imagining, and so doing it. I have played within, explored, and worked in many mediums like fine bead-work, leather, feathers, weaving, etc. Every technique I learn adds to the way I see and make my art.

Many ideas for new designs, or issues related to the function of a design, have come in dream form. I dream that I am making or designing jewelry, and see the finished product. In the dreams I become aware that I am dreaming, and I pay very close attention to what I am doing within the dream. The next day I will have a very inspired and productive jewelry-making day, sometimes unable to keep up with the flow of new ideas.

### **You make very unique dragonfly mobiles. Tell us about those...**

I do have to say I love my dragonflies! Each and every one of them is different, and has their own personality. They are a pain in the butt to make, because the process is so incredibly tedious. This is when my entire house gets taken over by "swarms" of dragonflies, in different stages of creation. I only make them once a year, during the winter months, after the Christmas season. I don't always have them, but they are great company!

### **What do you like most about being part of Lithia Artisans Market?**

It really feels like a great big family. During some challenging times in my recent past, where finding inspiration and space were not as readily available, I took some time off from being an artisan. I really missed the community the market offers.

I love the market as it allows me a venue to let my spirit shine through the work that I do. When I see the affect my work has on others, and the joy it brings them... well... it makes my heart smile.

### **How long have you been a member of Lithia Artisans Market?**

I have been a member since 1994 — about 17 years now. I have been involved at different levels throughout that time. I have served on various committees. It is a non-profit volunteer organization that benefits the entire community, so it is important to give back as much as you can, and I looooooove the people!



### **Tell us something about yourself that has nothing to do with being a jewelry artisan.**

I love traveling, and I love dancing!

### **What is your favorite place to visit and favorite travel memory?**

I have a deep connection to movement; therefore, I have to say, I love going to the ocean. It feels like an extension of my soul. However, I'm not attached to a favorite place. It is more about the feeling I have when I travel. The sense of freedom, feeling an inner direction, and the limitless possibilities, instead of experiencing a destination.

My favorite travel memory is during a night dive in the Bay Islands of Honduras. I reached neutral buoyancy, turned the light off, and in complete

darkness felt the water. As I moved my hand in front of me, the phosphorescence in the water traced the movement of the water between my fingers, and manifested in what seemed a moment of creation of stars.

**You are also a court room interpreter. What languages to you speak and how did you come to realize your gift with languages?**

I speak German, Spanish, English, and technically French, though I don't get to practice it much here.

When I moved back to Mexico, with German as my main language, I was put into an all-English school. I was around 10, and it just never occurred to me that languages were hard.

**How does your artisan life merge with your interpreter life?**

I believe they create balance in my life. Sort of a left-brain/right-brain thing. I am self employed as both, so the scheduling keeps me flexible and on my toes, while also providing me the freedom to just be gone, once in a while.

Website for Karinas work... [www.AlmaMiaJewelry.com](http://www.AlmaMiaJewelry.com)

Karina can also be found most weekend at the [Lithia Artisans Market](#), along Ashland Creek in downtown Ashland, Oregon.