Most people put away their paints, crayons and coloring books when they're eight or nine years old. In time, they forget the thrill of bringing bright, primary colors to life on a white page.

Betty Finley was no exception — that is, until she took a class from Elemore Morgan Jr., a nationally known USL art professor and photographer. He told her to find an object she was familiar with and start drawing. Finley explained. "Those instructions led her to drawing teddy bears. "My poodle had a teddy bear and his bear was the first one I drew, then there was another — in all these bright colors," she said. "It was great fun."

"They say that with art we wake up the child that's still there," Finley explained. A native of Crowley and a graduate of Crowley High School, Finley studied art education at USL and completed her degree at Newcomb.

But when she returned home to teach art in the classroom, she found that her art education degree had not given her the kind of intensive art training she wanted. Finley decided to continue her role as student and began experimenting with weaving and dyeing fibers. She traveled to Arrowmont, Tenn., to study under the direction of master craftsmen. She also attended workshops in Penland, North Carolina.

Eventually, she enrolled in art classes at USL. "I discovered that a teacher and friend from my former days at USL, Dickie Wagner, was teaching metalsmithing so I began to attend classes in jewelry making," Finley said. "She really helped me. I wound up getting a fine arts degree in metalsmithing and jewelry."

Much of Finley's metalsmithing involves working with niobium which is a silvery, soft, metallic element used in steel alloys and welding. By running an electrical charge through niobium, a process called anodizing, Finley produces bright colors that defy the usual colors of metal. "Betty brings light-hearted combinations of texture and color, often with direct humor to mature, profound, aesthetic forms. Whether the pieces are displayed on the body or worn as a sculpture stand becomes irrelevant," Wagner said. "When a piece of jewelry is taken off, it needs to continue as an art form. In Betty's case, her work is extremely strong because she added humor to the art form and even combined high tech with more traditional materials."

Finley's senior thesis show consisted of pastel drawings of cakes and bears, pen and ink drawings of bones, and sterling silver cakes and bones. The work was a contrast between the high-tech quality of the materials and the organic quality of drawings of bones.

The bone imagery developed after she took a drawing class from Morgan. "Mr. Morgan dragged out a skeleton for the class to draw. And I continued to draw it long past skeleton time," she said. "Then the bones turned up in my metal work and some silver vertebrae found their way into my senior thesis show."

One of the most unusual pieces is a necklace of corian and vertebrae which is worn down the back. In the last year and a half, Finley has exhibited in four states including seven shows in Louisiana. Most of these were juried competitions. She won two prestigious Alpha awards from Fashion Group International Inc. of New Orleans for Jewelry Design, Collection of Jewelry plus a bronze for Fashion Objet d'Art.

Finley also continues to draw and has scheduled a show of cake drawings and metalsmithing at Anjou's Bakery in October. The local artist has produced a wedding cake slice on a silver plate and a perfume bottle cake, which was exhibited at the National Ornamental Metal Museum in Memphis.

Finley, along with 311 other contemporary craftsmen, is planning to attend the Louisiana Na...
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tive Crafts Festival, Festivals Acadiens, at the Lafayette Natural History Museum, Sept. 21-22.

She will exhibit her sterling silver and corian cakes and a few drawings.

What will Betty Finley be demonstrating at the festival? “I will probably do some hand-loom beading” – Something else that woke up the child that’s still there.