

## **THE ADORNED AFTERLIFE RESEARCH NETWORK**

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Figure 01. Lightning  
talks Ben Russel.  
Network Meeting 310316  
Photos Diego Zamora  
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## ABSTRACT

The Adorned Afterlife network' is a positional report following the formation (2015) of a multi and inter-disciplinary research network. The shared aims and objectives of this emerging network are to re-examine the less familiar or recognisable objects of adornment in our national collections through the lens of each others disciplines and practices in order to gain new insights and understandings.

This report documents through text and image the formation of the group up until its first full meeting in Edinburgh 31st March 2016. The report sets the context for further collaborative projects between its existing members as well as the potential for future work with practitioners, researchers and museums.

## INTRODUCTION

Museums around the world contain many hidden or out of reach treasures from our past that relate directly, or indirectly, to the body as adornment. These objects may be unfamiliar, unwearable, intangible or simply unknown to contemporary eyes.

Artefacts may potentially include physical objects in plain view, non-corporeal ones represented in paintings and carvings, or items excavated from tombs and burials or remaining undisturbed beneath the layers of ancient funereal wrappings. These items placed long ago, out of sight and reach, but now made visible by non-invasive technological advances within research and analysis. These fascinating objects can have a deep symbolic significance, relating to life and death or an afterlife.

The Adorned Afterlife network (est. 2015) was supported by the University of Edinburgh's Challenge Investment Award and brought together researchers from across Design, Archaeology, Forensic Anthropology, History,



Figure 2. Symposium Poster (Graphic Design Daniel Lester)

Philosophy and Museology to examine objects of adornment revealed or captured with digital technologies. An original aim of the network was to explore existing precedents and new technologies for the non-invasive examining of artefacts and paintings in museums by computerised tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanning. It proposed to apply these practices to the harder to reach, less tangible objects in museum collections that might be considered 'Otherwise unobtainable' (Harrod).

Sharing our insights and knowledge we agreed to collectively question:

- Their purpose (why were they made)
- Their significance (both then and now)
- How they were made (and by whom)



*The network's aims are to encourage high quality speculative multidisciplinary research, involving archaeological anthropological issues and engagement between disciplines that may not otherwise have an opportunity to share discourse and analysis.*

### **THE RHIND MUMMY- A PILOT PROJECT**

The inspirational genesis of the network came from an earlier 2012 research project by the National Museums Scotland (NMS) (J. Tate and S. Kirk) and University of Edinburgh (UoE) anthropology departments (E. Kranioti, B. Osipov, J. Ouranos) for which Professor van Beek, the chair of Radiology at the University's Clinical Imaging Research Centre, scanned a 1st C Roman / Egyptian mummy. The Rhind Mummy, as it was known, had been brought to Scotland by the archaeologist Alexander Rhind in the 1850s. Dr Kranioti, UoE Forensic Anthropology, was able to create biomedical imaging of the skeletal remains beneath the bandages from these scans.

The scans were primarily used to determine the mummy's age, sex, stature, health and ethnicity. Outcomes were published in tandem with the 2012 NMS Exhibition, 'Fascinating Mummies' curated by the then head of conservation and analytical research Jim Tate. A by-product of these medical scans were the images of talismans and amulets not only on the surface of the mummy's wrappings,



Figure 5. Jenny Gray, Susan Cross, Ben Russel, Diego Zamora, Stephen Bottomley

but also beneath the surface attached to the mummy's skull. It was the descriptions of the amulets and talismans in the press that were so intriguing and the catalyst for this further research and the 2015 network being established between academics at the UoE (Bottomley & Kranioti) the NMS (Maitland) with a jewellery focus. Our pilot project

re-examined the 2012 MRI scans, printed 3D models for handling and discussion in order to reach beyond the identification and medical examination of the body and explore the amulets and talismans attached to the embalmed mummy. Bottomley + Zamora presented these as a first case study at our first full network meeting and in an exhibition in the Edinburgh College of Art / UoE 31st March 2016.

Dr Margaret Maitland, NMS Curator Ancient Mediterranean collections organised a visit to view the Rhind mummy at the Granton archive. The Rhind Mummy's bandages are black due to the use of a dark tree resin that was applied to seal them. Amulets were embedded into this surface, Dr Siobhan McLaughlin, with her anatomical knowledge, noted that the locations of some of these tallied with where organs may have been removed as part of the embalming process. A mummy case was intended to encase the body within for an eternity enabling the spirit to travel on to the afterlife beyond.

*The singular item of adornment on the Rhind Mummy, hidden from reach and sight, was a piece of metalwork detected beneath the bandages by the 2012 CT scans.*

The singular item of adornment on the Rhind Mummy, hidden from reach and sight, was a piece of metalwork detected beneath the bandages by the 2012 CT scans.

Analysis suggest it to be a thin sheet on the forefront of the skull. The scans and subsequent graphic renderings suggest a winged scarab of a similar design to the one attached to the outside of the mummy's wrapping.



Figure 6, 7. Details of mixed media amulets embedded on the Rhind Mummy

Figure 8. (left to right)  
Elena Kranioti, Giovanni  
Corvaja, Jack Ogden

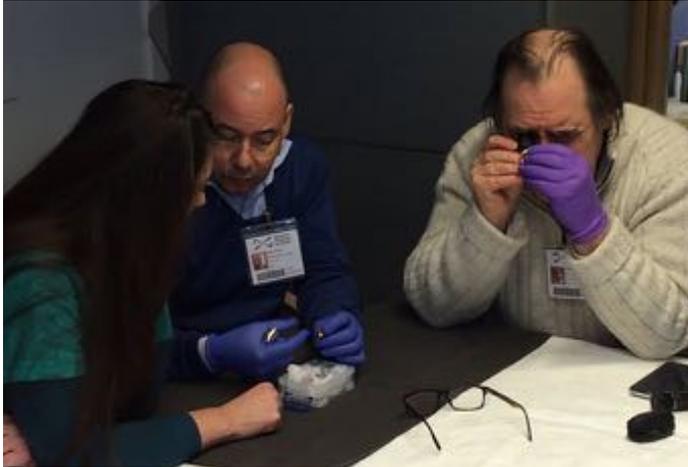
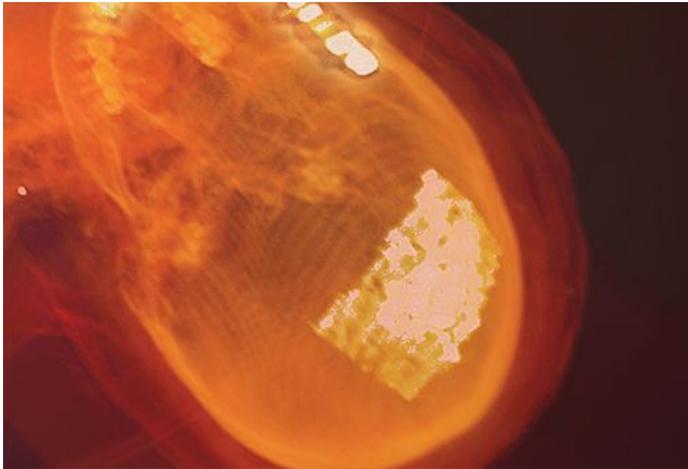


Figure 9. Image by  
Daniel Lester from  
Scans by the Clinical  
Research Imaging  
Centre (CRIC),  
Edinburgh



There have been several printed reproductions of this winged scarab beetle made from the non-invasive MRI scans. These simulacrum have been created in plastics, resins and sintered metals, unknown at the time of original creation, that in their new reality are all speculative representations of the ‘real’ object which lies beneath.

Speculation on methods of making and possible material were based on the material knowledge and subject expertise of the network and added depth and detail to then earlier speculation by museum curators. Dr Jack Ogden suggested a future project for the group may involve making tools with the technologies available from these times for other makers to work with to examine the results in a qualitative study.

The thin metal sheet would most likely be made of Gold, like the external piece attached to the bandages of the mummy’s head. The texture and patterns on its surface suggested a chased or hammered surface. What appeared to be linear horizontal and vertical patterns, and suggested a textile backing, were actually created by the scanner and had to be ignored.

Similarly, the low resolution of the CT scan and the quality of the additive manufacture printed prototypes had to be taken into consideration as three dimensional ‘noise’ and not necessarily directly attributable to the actual object. These ‘phantom marks’ created their own fake narrative for the original piece sited on the skull of this unknown young woman.

The mummy, since its discovery, has been posthumously known as the ‘Rhind Mummy’, named after the archaeologist who found it, rather the unknown woman within. In this ancient culture names have power and the Egyptians wrote theirs on many items and texts in the belief that their names being spoken gave them power and energy in the next life. From the original scans and the forensic anthropology work of Dr Elena Kraniota. It is known the

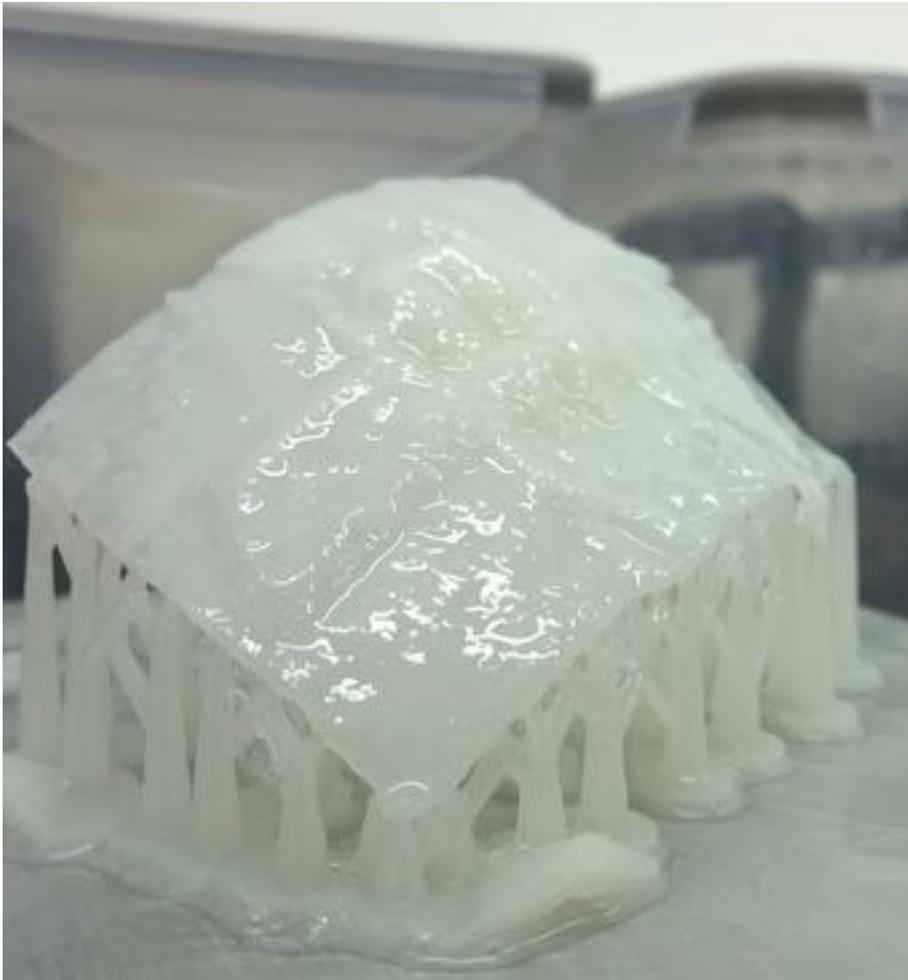


Figure 10, 11. 3D prints of the winged scarab by D. Zamora

body within the Rhind Mummy is that of a woman 158cm in height and between 25-29 years of age. A rolled piece of parchment, most likely papyrus, was also identified sitting directly below her right thigh with the right hand placed alongside it as if holding it. This scroll would be the so-called Book of Breathing. A late funerary composition found on



mummies from Thebes between the 2nd Century and 1st Century AD. On this papyrus would be written her name, like a death certificate and future technology will enable this text to be read from this rolled scroll by 3D carbon scanning technology and reconstruction.



Figure 12. Main Sculpture Court for symposium exhibits 31.03.16



Figure 13. Headpiece/ Badged Beanie, 2016, S Bottomley Knitted Cotton (S. Nolden) and electro-formed silver print (G. Grobler)



Figure 14. Toe and Finger Stalls + Sandals. Gold. Metropolitan Museum. Photo credits: S Bottomley Nov 2015

## ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Early background research involved archival research to range of Egyptian museum collections in Edinburgh, Bristol, Cambridge, Brighton, Manchester and New York. Some of the most common, yet striking, jewellery found are collars of hammered or stamped or chased gold.

In the ancient Egyptian mythological hierarchy, the Gods and Goddesses, Kings and Queens had a special association with gold. The sun god Re was called “Gold of Stars”, Horus was the “Child of Gold”, or “Falcon of Gold” and the king, as the personification of Horus on Earth, was called “Mountain of Gold”. It can be surmised Goldsmiths would have been highly respected for their knowledge of such an important and sacred metal.

Salima Ikram in her book ‘Death and Burial in Ancient Egypt’ (2015) reminds us that it is easy to look back on the



Figure 15. Manchester Museum, 2015. Photo credits: S Bottomley

Egyptians as a culture obsessed by death, when in reality they celebrated life and saw the stage beyond their short physical life as a transitional one to the next.

*“Death and birth are the two events universally experienced, and it is their very commonality that helps to link cultures, regardless of any separation in time or place.” Ikram, 2015*

We know some pieces of jewellery were buried as grave goods, but others were made specifically for the grave. Burial jewellery is often made of thinner or more flimsy materials. The gold sheet may be far thinner than that used for jewellery worn by the living, as in the example above from the Metropolitan museum. Who would not want a pair of golden sandals for the afterlife after-party?

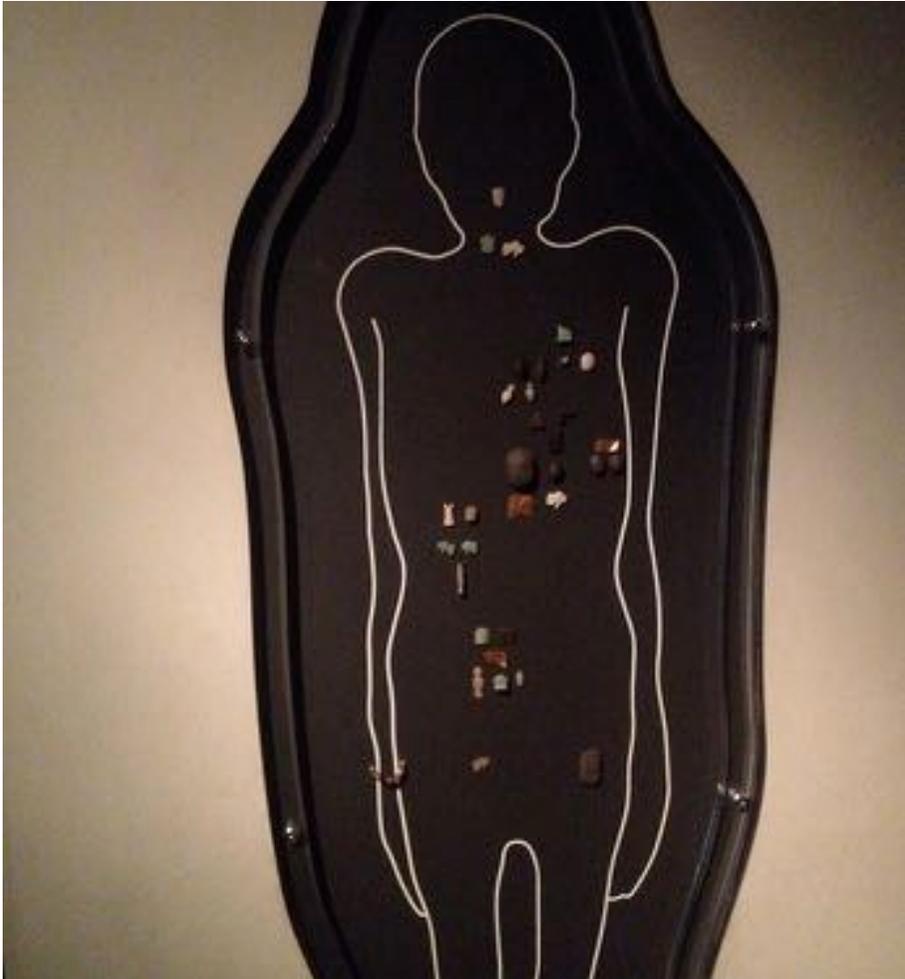


Figure 16. Location of amulets recovered from an Egyptian burial. Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, 2015

Jewellery, objects and tools valued in life have a long association with being applied after death to represent a person. These objects can become embodied in the burial rites that celebrate a passing life and the anticipated spiritual journey ahead to the next. The inter-relationship between maker and material when working with the mortal remains

of our own existence has an equally long and fascinating history.

Our first research network meeting involved each member giving a short presentation or ‘lightning talk’ about their practice and area of specific or general interest and expertise.

These talks allowed the group then to reflect and speculate on each member’s potential contribution to future work and exploration.

Short interview films were also made and later uploaded to our website. One debate developed around if the objects embedded into the exterior of the Rhind Mummy could or should be classified as jewellery. Dr Margaret Maitland stated that museums would interpret these objects as religious amulets for spells and charms, not jewellery.

*Our different experience, knowledge and perception of jewellery added new dimensions to how we imagined past work in museums and collections, as well the power of jewellery to be re-interpreted for future works.*

A contemporary maker might argue the fact that these handmade items were made for and pinned and placed to specific locations around a body, clearly identifying them ‘wearable objects’ and therefore included them in a contemporary vernacular of jewellery. The concept of objects being placed on static bodies after death for the purposes of a religious ceremony was more widely discussed by the



Figure 17. Lightning talks (left to right) Elizabeth Moignard, Margaret Maitland. Photo credits: Diego Zamora 2016



Figure 18. Lightning talks Giovanni Corvaja. Photo credits: Diego Zamora 2016



Figure 19. Symposium (left to right) Giovanni Corvaja, Margaret Maitland, Stephen Bottomley, Jack Ogden, Elena Kranjota and Jessamy Kelly photos Diego Zamora 2016

network and became a focus for research afterwards. This classification, meanings and significances has evolved and been extended from Ancient to Modern times. The rationale for the classification for making, wearing and owning jewellery as presented by authors and historians (Untracht 1982), (Phillips 1996) and in wider anthropological studies (Fisher 1984) over several past decades and have been re-evaluated by Schmidt (2016) in her book “Contemporary Jewellery - Innovation or Mimesis?”.

What Schmidt proposes is a classification of how jewellery was seen and understood in the past compared to the present, representing this in two lists, as illustrated on the next page. Within the column ‘Traditional Values of Personal Objects’ -the older value system are drawn from the works of Fisher, Mauss and Vanhaeren. In relation to Rhind Mummy and according to Schmidt’s table, there are three categories that the head’s scarab might fall into to be

**Traditional values of personal objects**

- Aesthetic expression of beauty
- Gift of courtship and seduction
- Symbol for self-affirmation
- Symbol for group membership
- ethnic marker
- Sign of social facts social marker
- Sign for individuality
- Object for rituals and ceremonies
- Object for offerings
- Amulet and Talisman
- Healing object
- Means of exchange
- Inalienable possession
- Means of communication
- Counting device

**Additional values in jewellery today**

- Means for reward
- Object for memory and comfort
- Object for humour and play
- Object for desire and envy
- Object for sensual sensation
- Underline physical attractiveness
- Object for body modification
- Sign for social status and demarcation
- Weapon
- Object of Investment
- Exploitation

- Karl Bollmann, 2015
- Daniel Miller , 2008
- Martina Dempf, 2002
- René Girard , 2012
- Wulf Schiefenhoewel, 2014
- Pravu Mazumdar, 2014
- Christa Sütterlin, 2014
- Oppi Untracht, 1982

classified as jewellery: Object for rituals and ceremonies, Object for Offerings and Amulet & Talisman. However, our experience with members of the network from museum backgrounds proved that this was not the case and none of these was accepted for the Rhind objects. Possibly others on the list may also be museum questioned, such as ‘counting devices’. Is it our contemporary perspective of jewellery coupled with a desire for it to encompass a far broader range of ideas widening the field retrospectively too early or simply too generally?

**CONCLUSION**

Our research network demonstrated the clear advantages of the inter-disciplinary group. There were many insights to be gained from shared discursive, ranging analysis and discussion Our different experience, knowledge and

Figure 20. Slide from presentation at the School of Jewellery listing authors from Schmidts (2016) classification research as cited by the author 13th June 2017

perception of jewellery added new dimensions to how we imagined past work in museums and collections, as well the power of jewellery to be re-interpreted for future works..

Differences of classification and the interpretation of meaning and significance of jewellery by both past and future generations of makers and historians may never be completely resolved or aligned. These two groups, makers and historians, examine the subject from different perspectives and starting points of reference. The maker begins from the point of creation and the technicalities of 'how' and from 'what' it was it made, as well as the aesthetic language. An historian considers the scientific and recorded evidence of where it was found, how often it appears and if there is a systematic pattern to this occurring as proof. The value of the discussions between McLaughlin, who works with X-Rays in the NHS and her contemporary medical expertise reading data and her own shared insights into how contemporary images capture jewellery embedded in living bodies, were fascinating to hear alongside the curators and archaeologists such as Ogden and Russel who are able to recognise fakes and imitations from the narrative of an artefacts construction, rather than their age or provenance. The expertise and skill of the network was not always a measurable thing itself but was far more wonderful and ephemeral to witness.

After the initial 'case study' of the Rhind Mummy, future plans are to engage a range of makers with a wider network of museums to explore a greater diversity of these hidden, invisible or overlooked jewellery treasures that may lie within their walls. A great deal of data gathered from the network meeting and the conference was recorded and is yet to be fully analysed for a more detailed study. This may form part of future work by some group members or future researchers. More than a year on from the first meeting and symposia and a recent personal relocation to work at Birmingham City University places me within a new and

exciting network of museums with their existing links with the School of Jewellery's Industry Innovation Centre and its digital scanning and manufacture expertise. The flexibility of the 'net' in our network needs to be tested.

Following the 2016 symposium and first networking event of 'Adorned Afterlife' the National Museums Scotland have held a new exhibition that opened 31st March 2017 'The Tomb: Ancient Egyptian Burial' an exhibition curated by Dr Margaret Maitland in which she has incorporated sample of Egyptian paste made by network member Elizabeth Turrell, who was recently appointed as a visiting Professor at the School of Jewellery. Barbara Schmidt joins the school also a visiting Industry fellow and so the opportunity is ripe to expand research on her published jewellery taxonomy.

So why do the classifications of Contemporary Jewellery or Art Jewellery, as it is also known in the United States, vary in understanding so greatly between museums, historians, curators and contemporary designer-makers? It may simply be the fact that as a genre Art Jewellery is still relatively new in the landscape of the arts and crafts.

The Art Jewellery movement in Europe arose from the influence of Scandinavian design of the 1940's / 50's and in the US from the work of giants like Alexander Calder, making wearable art pieces over a slightly longer period. Britain, Germany and Holland have all been leading areas for its development and growth over the past seventy years.

Since the 1960s the boundaries of jewellery have been continually redefined. Conventions have been challenged by successive generations of independent jewellers, often educated at art college and immersed in more radical ideas. New technologies and non-precious materials, including plastics, paper and textiles, have played a part in attempting to overturn notions of status traditionally implicit in jewellery. The Bronze and Early Iron age with worked and smelted copper and bronze runs in parallel with the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom periods of Egypt up to

approximately 3000 BC. Put another way, if a film consisting only of images of jewellery from the last 3000 BC to today, some 5016 years, was to be condensed into a one hour and forty-minute film, the section on contemporary jewellery would be contained in the last one and a half minutes of credits.

If this timeline was extended to the oldest recognized pieces of adornment, the small dyed, pierced and strung mollusc shells found in eastern Morocco in 2007 and dated at 82,000 years old it would change the timeframe of contemporary jewellery to be in the last 1/2 second of the film.

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Professor Stephen Bottomley is Head of the School of Jewellery at Birmingham City University (2017) having previously led the Jewellery and Silversmithing department at Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh (2008-17). Trained at the Royal College of Art (MPhil 2001), University of Brighton (MA 1998), West Surrey College of Art (BA Hons 1989) he chaired the UK Association for Contemporary Jewellery (2005-07). Jewellery in mixed media including enamel, silver, gold, rubber and steel is in the collections at the National Museums Scotland, British Museum and Royal College of Art and are exhibited internationally.



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