

## **MAKERS MOVE - JEWELLERY AS A MEDIUM OF EXCHANGE**

### **AUTHORS**

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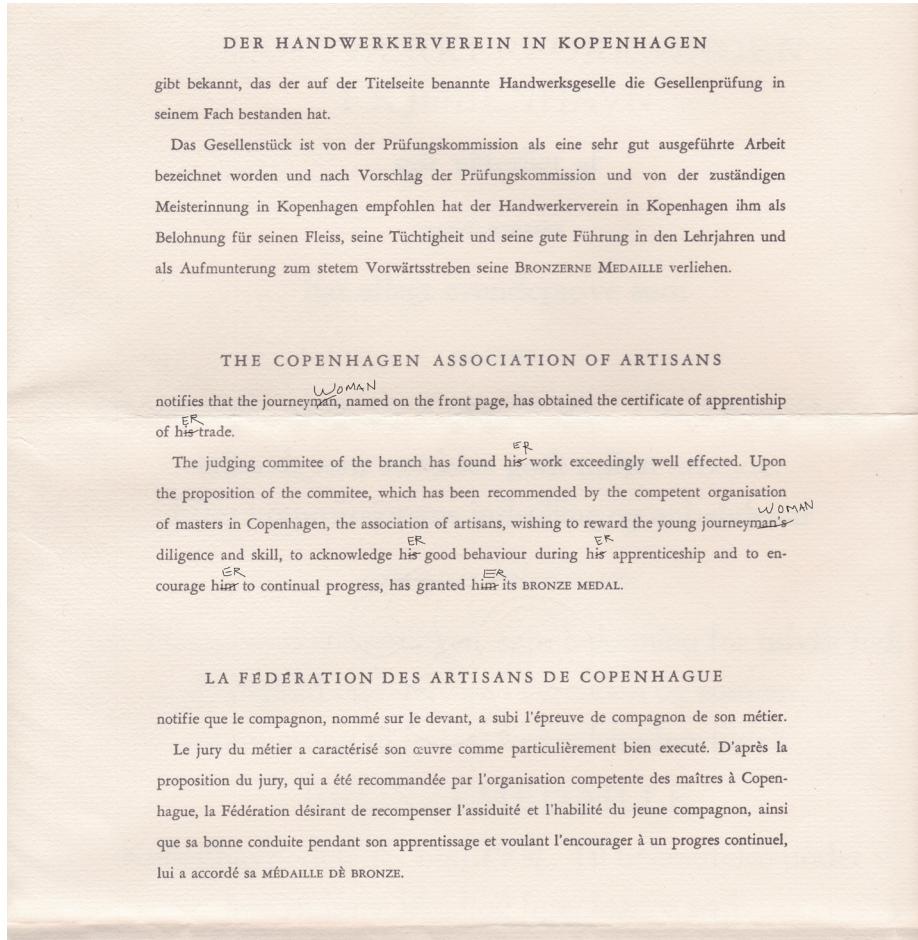
Figure 1. Makers Move setting up the mobile workshop at Place Collette, Paris, 2013.  
Photo credit: Jair Straschnow

## ABSTRACT

Jewellery is in a sense ‘a tangible memory’, sometimes passed on to others and always a personal storage for memories to the person who wears it. Makers Move exemplifies a wish to explore where jewellery goes, how it changes and becomes a bricolage of memories. Jewellery and objects can be traces of life and permeate value-based criteria, because they reflect our own history. They can be mediators for emotions, strength, and faith and accentuate an affinity between people, families and cultures. In order to examine some of these aspects and the dialogue between work and people, we decided to move the jewellery bench out into the public space and started the jewellery street project called Makers Move – ‘a medium of exchange’. Makers Move aims to show aspects of how jewellery is made, to explore the stories and significance attached to jewellery and small objects and to examine how jewellery and other objects can tell us about who we are.

## INTRODUCTION

The journey we have embarked upon with our jewellery street project Makers Move, was launched in Copenhagen, 2012. Since then we have had the opportunity to visit different cities around the world - Paris, Cape Town, Dongyang, Gothenburg, Sydney and Copenhagen, where the project originally and literally hit the road. For a long time, we had a wish to create a way in which we could travel with our profession together – not just as jewellers but also making interactive projects in public spaces. The core of the Makers Move project is to revisit the memories and stories that connect people and places through their jewellery and small portable objects. By telling the stories, people in the street reconnect to past or present loved ones and places through their objects/jewellery.



We started Makers Move out of a mutual wish to explore the fields of jewellery and objects in a different context from the one we had known for years – the maker behind the scenes. Our collaboration started out of a need to get away from the jewellery bench’s solitude and share ideas and thoughts. One of the great qualities of our jewellery discipline is that we can be flexible and work in very small

Figure 2. Letter received from 'The Copenhagen Association of Artisans', 1991.  
Photo credit: Gitte Nygaard



Figure 3. Logo from the 'The Copenhagen Association of Artisans'.  
Photo credit: Gitte Nygaard

and improvised places – and practically we can put our workshop in a suitcase. The idea of mobility has appealed to us for a long time, and at some point after an inspiration trip to Istanbul, we decided to make a workshop on wheels – a place which could serve as a ‘base’ to interact with people on the street. The mobile unit is our base where we work and have conversations with people on the street about objects or pieces of jewellery that they are carrying.

On the street, we surrender ourselves to the serendipity and work with what the moment brings. Taking to the streets, talking to ordinary people with the city as our backdrop, away from our confined workshop, we embrace the concept of the art of getting lost, and the art of noticing what has been disregarded. Our wish is to build a bridge between maker and audience. Operating on the street provides a ground for us as makers to show and talk about what we do, and give the audience the opportunity to understand why we still make



Figure 4. Josephine stamping a cast amulet, front of the Louvre, Paris.  
Photo credit: Gitte Nygaard

things to define ourselves, and shed light on jewellery’s relational qualities. There are no money transactions at the workshop. We offer our time, lend an ear and skills in return for insights into someone’s private life, that normally are invisible.

## **LEARNING A CRAFT**

In the book ‘The Craftsman’ the American Sociologist Richard Sennett writes about thinking with our hands, the kind of wordless thinking we unfold when we have mastered a technique and as a matter of course utilise it. He views the satisfactions of physical making as a necessary part of being human. We need craft to keep ourselves rooted in material reality, providing a steady balance in a world which assigns too much value to mental facility. Today, we have become more and more alienated from a physical



Figure 5. Renovation of a cast amulet.  
Photo credit: Anders Møller

understanding of the world. But for millennia we as humans have understood the world through things, through touch and connection to other people through what they were making.

The history of the intelligent hand takes us back more than 1.75 million years, to the time when ‘man’ created the first primitive tool, the hand axe. However, seventy thousand years ago something remarkable happened in our history, we created our first artistic objects in the form of ocher stones with beautifully engraved patterns. With this step the items we made became something more than functional tools, rather they became artistic objects carrying a sign and a message from the maker (Havemose, 2013).

Sennett finds his ideal of craftsmanship in the Medieval Workshops where craft was a communal endeavour. A specific hierarchical structure was built into these workshops with a master and an apprentice. However, during the Renaissance, Sennett states, instead of craft developing



Figure 6. Casting pewter in oasis.  
Photo credit: Anders Møller

through a shared understanding and will to improve one’s skill, a separation between art and craft manifested itself. Hereafter, craft was valued as something lower than art, and belonging to the craftsman of the lower classes.

We share the same technical background as the tradition of the Medieval Workshops, including 4 years of training with a master, learning skills through the deliberate repeated practicing of different jewellery techniques. The years of intensive practice of complex skills and the craft of making has become deeply engrained, now they are effortlessly available, almost without being conscious of it dependent on tried and innate ways of using tools. It’s through organizing body movements, understanding the idiosyncratic raw materials with a depth of involvement so comprehensive the process of making becomes almost automatic.



Figure 7. Gitte at the workbench, Paris.  
Photo credit: Josephine Winther

In later Medieval Europe it was both tradition and mandatory that in order to become a Master in Crafts you spent time as a journeyman which meant moving from one town to another to gain experience of different workshops. Only a person who had completed the traditional apprenticeship could be considered a journeyman. The concept still exists and is still based on the tradition of

gathering skills after an apprenticeship in different countries. We draw inspiration from the concept of being on the road combined with practicing skills, hence the name Makers Move. We are looking at the concept from a new perspective and we see ourselves as contemporary journeywomen occupied with material culture in connection to jewellery.

### **OBJECTS AND ALIENATION**

In an interview with the Danish newspaper Weekendavisen the British author, artist, and ceramist Edmund de Waal expressed a similar critique as that of Richard Sennett, when he stated how people have become alienated from one of the most fundamental human abilities: creating things using our hands, and thereby shaping and changing the world. In De Waal's mind, this alienation of the material has led to an abuse of the world's resources, on the relationship between people, and an abuse of human desire through capitalism. In this process, we as humans have lost something essential and exchanged it with an easier and more convenient way of interacting with the world through smartphones and social media.

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In this perspective, craft and work has become an instrument to achieve some exterior goal, but De Waal and Sennett's point is that work is never something finished, it is always in process, always moving in an endless interaction



Figure 8. Karen's ring.  
The hand on the ring  
is 'The Red Hand of  
Ulster'.  
Photo credit: Karen  
Grøn

between maker and material. Work is an intrinsic good, and mastering a craft means interacting with the world on a deeper level, but the general point is that work is universal, everyone can do it.

Makers Move tried to rediscover the connection between the person and the object. It is important to bear in mind that objects are never neutral or empty. Objects determine our behaviour and way of thinking to a large degree. This point is largely championed by the anthropologist Daniel Miller. He calls this the humility of things: "The surprising conclusion is that objects are important, not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable, but often precisely because we do not 'see' them" (Miller, 2005). This insight has wide ranging consequences. It means that human beings are not as free willed and undetermined as we might think. And it is not only our biology or consciousness that determines our lives, but

also the material culture surrounding us: "Such a perspective seems properly described as 'material culture' since it implies that much of what we are, exists not through our consciousness or body, but as an exterior environment that habituates and prompts us" (Miller, 2005).

Considering Miller's idea of objects, entering a dialogue with a person's jewellery is a gateway into this person's mode of thinking, sensibilities, and life story. Engaging with a person through a shared interest in the jewellery they are wearing is a way of making conscious or manifest the baggage of life which we all carry around with us without noticing or thinking about it. Makers Move is therefore an attempt to re-enchant the world, and to uncover the hidden stories of a person's life.

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The way we (people) often meet things, is homogenized and diluted down to something familiar. But how can we be surprised of the world anew is a big challenge, how to bring the experience of things back to us in our lives. Things exist as stories, we can either read and immerse in them – or refuse to do so.

### **JEWELLERY AS STORYTELLING**

We want to share and take part in a dialogue about the values inherent in the hand-made, the everyday relations and the story-telling qualities that craft represents. Objects can be honest traces of life, they can be passed on through generations and go against aesthetic and value-based

criteria, because they reflect our own story. They can cause us to share the past and the present with other generations and thereby help us become closer to each other. We have focused on an aspect of jewellery that we often neglect – the personal and relational aspect, and the meanings that emerge in the exchange between object and wearer over time, and which often have profound symbolic layers. Here the layers reach far beyond the actual value of the jewellery and beyond what we see when jewellery is worn or exhibited (Mazanti, 2016). Jewellery has a physical existence, but the reason why we wear it is far more mysterious and invisible. Its mobile aspect gives jewellery potential as a constant, if quiet, intervention into everyday life.

A piece of jewellery is carried close to the body and can therefore be an extension of the body itself, a part of that person's identity. Things and jewellery, and their materiality

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as objects connect subjects and sometimes almost become subjects themselves (Sjørslev, 2013). This relates to Daniel Millers point. Objects are not neutral, but rather a social phenomenon that is loaded with feelings. Objects are social, because people are social beings. Jewellery and objects have the power to combine the past with the present time, making lost moments apparent again. Memory is a practice through which we engage with the material world. It is within this space that we restore the traces of ourselves and of the past. As such, objects have the ability to serve as living proof to the liminal spaces of time, culture, personal and social identities.



Figure 8. Pouring pewter in oasis.  
Photo credit: Anders Møller

We call Makers Move – ‘a medium of exchange’, and we trade the stories about objects and jewellery, with pieces of cast imprints in pewter of the jewellery and objects that people carry. We make them into pendants – and we always make two copies - one copy is for the person with whom we have the dialogue, and the other is for our archive. The mobile workshop becomes ‘a medium of exchange’, and



Figure 10. Different amulets from participants.  
Photo credit:  
Josephine Winther

the amulet becomes a symbolic representation of the story as it was shared. This moment is crucial. In the moment of exchange, the story of the original object becomes alive. People have a very rare opportunity to reflect on the meaning that the object holds for them, and share it with someone else. Space is created for the most intimate, sensitive, emotional, personal meanings to emerge, that almost always speaks of memories of times past and bonds with a loved one (Mazanti, 2016). Jewellery can be cultivated into portable knowledge – a tool for big and complex stories to be passed on.

What is passed on in the moment of making an imprint, is how a new piece comes to life, containing a fragment which is mounted in a new piece, and opens up for a new interpretation, and a new story, weaving the memory into the present day. Things, experiences are re-membered and can be passed on anew. New jewellery relations and stories have been created. A new sensibility to the material world and the

richness of meanings has been established. Untold stories have been made visible (Mazanti 2016).

## CONCLUSION

As Makers Move we examine how jewellery and other objects can tell us about who we are.

Jewellery is a dynamic medium for contacting our memories. Any object can carry a story. Whenever an object is given time and reflection both in the making and in the encounter with it, what it contains of memories is passed on to another person – the object becomes an anchor for that story and reflection. By remembering we try to bring the experience of things back to us in our lives.

Thinking with the hands, the joy of making, being creative is an essential aspect of life. That joy can be embedded in the things and acknowledged through the senses when given time. When we stand on the street with our mobile workshop and share/show the making it is a way of mediating the relationship both between the maker and the wearer, and the wearer and the object. The making is an aspect of every piece of jewellery which can vary in interest, but we argue that being aware of the existence of the process will always add to the object.

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Gitte works across disciplines to expand conversations and inspire awareness of the relationship between ourselves and the objects we live with. Her work moves beyond the gallery, connects the seemingly unexpected and explores the often overlooked. She creates artworks, functional objects, collections, commissioned pieces and project based collaborations.

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Josephine Winther, born 1964 in Denmark. Trained as a goldsmith, has a MA from Royal College of Art in London. Co-founder of Makers Move, a jewellery project together with Gitte Nygaard. Works as Head of Accessory Department Kolding Design and in her own studio in Holbæk.



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