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Cover image: *Zihan Zhou, 'Stones of the Grassland', 2023, Brooches. Silver, stainless-steel wire. Photo by Zihan Zhou.*

Editorial: Changes As Positive Contributions to The Establishment of Jewellery Research

Authors: *Roberta Bernabei, Jayne Wallace*



In our lives, we are surrounded by various changes: visible and invisible, gradual and sudden. Any kind of change has always characterised the historical moment in which we live. Global changes such as COVID-19 can suddenly revolutionise our existence, while climate change (initially known as global warming) has been a gradual transformation announced decades ago. This has developed from an invisible issue to a tangible pressing matter to most of us. Additionally, there is an urgent sense of collective responsibility related to these changes. A growing number of people are considering their ethical and moral positions, pondering how they can positively impact these changes (in society). These issues, which were once invisible or unimportant, are now a tangible worry that has been considered by researchers, but also by artists in their work. An interesting perspective on the future of art in the age of climate change is provided by Evan Moffitt (2017:13). When proposing to the audience to reflect on the notion of planning monumental outdoor sculptures, when our streets will be flooded. This challenges that the future existence of big and bold pieces of work are then replaced against smaller pieces. This is an interesting hypothesis that makes us think of what the future might bring for jewellery as a form of art.

If in the future there is a shift in the use of scale in artists practices, moving from open spaces to personal spaces, we would be entering a second wave of “new jewellery”, like in the 1970s. Our research is in perpetual continual evolution, which is its distinctive positive characteristic. During our lives we only directly experience a small part of the changes which occur within the debates of our subjects. We have a short and temporary role to

play as contributors - we acquire the necessary knowledge to understand and know the discipline in which we operate. This investigation is carried out through written texts and other forms of research, such as visual argumentation and artefacts. Our direct experience is limited by the duration of our life, but by contrast our legacy can have, hopefully, a long-term influence. Articles published in academic journals are fundamental and pivotal sources to understand our discipline and keep us updated on how it is transforming and evolving. This also includes the chance to provide an opportunity to scholars to contribute to share new discoveries and expand the boundaries of the disciplines. Each volume of JJR is a testimony to the changes that jewellery, as a discipline, is constantly facing.

The papers published to date in the journal have been used by authors to provide a stimulating platform for sharing new debates and consequently shaping the establishment of Jewellery Research as distinct form of research compared to other disciplines. Twelve years ago, in the paper ‘Tracing the Essence of Craft’ it was noted that there was a change in the discourses on craft, from defining the craft discipline by comparison to the other disciplines (concerning with the art-craft-design discussion) to the search for the essential nature of craft (Niederrerr, Townsend 2012:3). After this shift, craft is undergoing a new evolution.

Observing the changes in the debates provided by authors, editors and advisors who have contributed to the growth of the Journal throughout the last 7 years, (Jewellery Research being a ramification of the research in Craft) we can assert that a natural shift has

occurred, and two determining factors have positively contributed to it. One is the openness of the JJR platform to embrace diversity in thinking and fostering inclusivity. The JJR platform openly embraces diversity to foster widespread inclusive thinking. Consequently, we have seen a new theme emerging amongst the submissions in these years: Queer Identity, Space and Archive. This topic has been overlooked within Craft and Jewellery Research. The other factor is the growing interest in publishing articles on practice-based research in jewellery and related disciplines.

Overall, the transformational phase that Jewellery Research is going through is manifested by the new perspectives proposed by Sian Hindle, Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, Zihan Zhou R. Bernabei and Iona McCuaig in this volume.

In this volume Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral presents a critical text titled *Jewellery, An Archive of Queer Space*. The debate utilises the interview method to tackle the concepts of queer identity and queer space. The author proposes three forms of the queer archive: worldbuilding, materiality and the production of jewellery. This paper illustrates the researcher's approach to analyse the interviews based on various theories. This is based in conjunction with the use of a body of work to investigate the materialisation of the concepts of queer identity and queer space. The paper has managed to create a sense of intimacy offered to the reader through a clever balance between the original quotes of the interviews, the visual aids provided by the images and the author's critical intake. The intimate and tactile nature of the research has been defined as a methodological research approach. This is

an experiential method that involves the corporeal experience of the participants. The result of this investigation is not only a new body of work, but also an interesting proposition where the author/maker becomes an archivist, and each piece of jewellery is an archive of queer sites of production.

Zihan Zhou, Roberta Bernabei's paper focuses on an aspect of Zhou's doctoral research that investigates jewellery and symbolism in Mongolian nomadic culture in China. The paper is partly an effort to redress the lack of description of the cultural contribution Mongolian nomadic culture has made to jewellery. The authors document the evidence of animal motifs from Inner Mongolian rock art and share how they have revived these through making new pieces of contemporary jewellery. The paper weaves the context of Western contemporary jewellery with traditional and specific cultural contexts of Chinese jewellery to situate this research and brings a mix of geological, cultural and social ideas and understandings together. The research aims to embody some of the historic stories from nomadic culture within contemporary jewellery artefacts. This in itself raises valuable questions for our wider jewellery community about if and how the pieces we make can act as bridges between different narratives and/or how the artefacts can communicate complex contexts and stories.

Sian Hindle's paper focuses on the social processes and systems by which jewellery acts to connect people. Drawing on her doctoral research she examines the everyday, the mundane and the commonplace forms and practices of jewellery wearing and how these play out, using a study in the UK as her data. This paper

offers a valuable touchpoint in how jewellery serves as a key constitute to women's sense of identity and how it is a glue in familial and friend relationships over time. The continuity that jewellery can provide and represent for people is a profound characteristic in times of uncertainty and change and this paper serves as a rich reminder of what jewellers, no matter what kind of work they make, known to be true about the medium.

Iona McCuaig reviews that exhibition *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, which brings together work that has transformed knives into artistic objects. Inspired by issues and statistics related to knife crime the thirty-four jewellers present a range of interpretations and reimagining's of socio-political themes. Interesting are what Iona documents about the way in which exhibition curators handled the condemned knives, given to them by the police, and how they had to be treated before being given to jewellers and metal artists to transform. Equally it is valuable to read how the touring exhibition was coupled with outreach activities. The social context of jewellery coming to the fore once again in an exhibition that lies between political debate, social challenge, education and creative transformation.

Finally, the latest change that characterises the new structure of this volume is the inclusion of a new section dedicated to the affiliation with the Critical Writing Maria Cristina Bergesio Award. This international competition, supported by the Italian Association of Contemporary Jewellery (AGC) is curated by Chiara Scarpitti, Nichka Marobin and Roberta Bernabei. It has been named after Maria

Cristina Bergesio to keep the memory alive of one of the art jewellery scholars whose contribution is pivotal for the comprehension of the field, celebrating the establishment of literature specialised in critical texts on contemporary jewellery and instigate authors to continue their research in this field. This year the jury composed of international experts such as Liesbeth den Besten, Helen Britton and Rita Marcangelo, awarded the 2024 MC Bergesio Award to Kaia Ansip. Her short essay 'Relation to the Body' is a personal perspective on various case studies where the artists have considered the body as a medium to create the pieces. This critical text represents a fresh reflection on some changes, such as the general attitude to socially unaccepted bodies. The discourse is the result of the writer directly interacting with the makers. In response to Ansip's request the artists wrote a text of 100 words or a poem on 'the relation to the body'. As the question did not provide any other details or restrictions, the responses received are subsequently very varied and provoke interesting reflections on the topic.

The changes brought to light by the authors in Volume 7 contribute to the current debates on the Jewellery Research discipline as they expand the boundaries of its context. Therefore, the potentiality of the discourse instigated by the authors of this volume is the actualisation of the change.

The emergence of new prospectives that voice new cultural interests in the field of jewellery provide a platform for underexplored fields of study, such as the queer community in relation to jewellery research. This makes us proud of the work we have achieved so far. In addition to the ongoing and incredible support from our Advisory Board and regular team of

international Reviewers, we acknowledge the contribution of the authors, and the support of Meherunisa Baig, Digisin for graphic design and web management, and the much-appreciated support from our sponsors AGC (the International Association of Contemporary Jewellery Italy), Loughborough University School of Design and Creative Arts, and Northumbria University.

Please enjoy reading Volume 7 and thank you all for your support.

-Roberta Bernabei and Jayne Wallace.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Professor Jayne Wallace has announced that she will be stepping down as JJR Co-Editor after the publication of Volume 7. We are delighted to confirm that she will continue supporting the journal as an advisor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my dear friend and travel companion, Jayne, for all her hard work and contribution to the Journal over the years. Throughout the challenging journey of crafting and sustaining a scientific journal, we have created a rare and beautiful jewel: JJR.

Each and every person who has contributed to this journal has left behind their own mark, their own precious gemstone. Jayne's contribution has been brilliant like a diamond.

I thank her for her constant support, knowledge of the subject, her passion, patience and kind and thoughtful words. I also thank her for her generosity with the authors, readers and reviewers. It has been an absolute pleasure to work with her and a joy to see how well the journal has contributed to the field of jewellery research.

Senior Editor - Roberta Bernabei.

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Jewellery's Circular Economy: Materializing Connections Through Gifting and Wearing of Adornments

Author: *Sian Hindle*



ABSTRACT

It is something of a truism that jewellery connects people and brings them together, playing a role in marking life's rites of passage and changing relationships, but there is a less critical analysis of the mechanics by which this takes place. This paper addresses the question of jewellery's role in connecting networks of family and friends, by paying particular attention to its inherently social role. It will consider the gifted nature of much traditional precious jewellery, exploring a range of jewellery practices, including selection, commissioning, purchasing, gifting, wearing, re-gifting and bequeathing with and between groups of individuals. Investment in the artefacts themselves – in financial, social and emotional terms – and the relationships they speak of helps to bring people together and cement relationships through practices of exchange and reciprocity.

This draws on primary research (drawn from creative workshops, interviews) carried out as part of my doctoral project and specifically examines how jewellery worn with various degrees of regularity spans different modalities of embodied consciousness. These modalities might include unconscious wear, in the case of jewellery that is worn so often it is barely noticed, to jewellery that stubbornly refuses wear because it retains meanings that no longer resonate with the wearer. I argue that the practices around the gifting and reciprocal wearing of jewellery allow women to take on board the perspectives of others as they negotiate these different modalities, incorporating others' views of themselves into their own sense of self. In doing so, I

point to the key processes whereby connections between individuals are materialised through the gifting and wear of jewellery and articulate its highly social nature in coalescing and binding groups of invested individuals.

Keywords: jewellery; gifting; wearing; self; memory; dress.

INTRODUCTION

In this article, I consider the degree to which jewellery contributes to identity, allowing the wearer to articulate ideas about who she feels herself to be. I consider the degree to which identity is shaped by those around us, with the very social nature of jewellery becoming a key theme. I present some of the key findings from a qualitative research project, exploring the social nature of items of jewellery that are either worn regularly or retired from use by women based in the UK. Exploring the role of art jewellery was a key element of this research, but here I focus on the rather more ordinary, conventional jewellery that might be worn daily, often with little conscious thought. Little has been said about the role of jewellery in contributing to identity, or about the social nature of adornments of this nature – described, here, as traditional precious jewellery.

Through interviews and workshops, I built up a picture of how jewellery's gifted nature brings structure to women's sense of identity, by anchoring and connecting women to networks of friends and family that they have known over years. This allows them to stay connected, granting a sense of reassurance that they have an identity that endures over time. The key argument that I seek to make is that, by allowing us to acknowledge both change and continuity, jewellery offers support and succour to our network of familial and social connections. Here, I explore how jewellery serves as an important and highly particular instance of material culture: because it is small, durable and precious enough to be retained, it is able to evoke highly charged memories which serve to connect us to others. This gifted quality, responsible (in part) for charging items with memories and evoking stories, also

introduces tensions, as gifts call for reciprocity, which risks pulling the wearing of jewellery into the realm of transaction. Jewellery is under-researched, but here I seek to set out its significant role in identity formation and show how it can contribute to dress research alongside the study of garments and accessories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical frameworks that are pertinent to this enquiry can be found within the literature of identity, embodiment, and the material world, including jewellery and adornment. All have been leveraged extensively in the service of dress research, but perhaps less so in relation to the analysis of the wearing of jewellery. Of course, there is scholarship around the study of jewellery, but it is patchy and tends to cluster in key areas (the production of artefacts in the workshop or studio, for instance). There is little about jewellery (in any of its forms) on the body and in wear and use, and even less about traditional precious jewellery in this context. On the other hand, there is almost too much research and scholarship about identity, and knowing where to begin can be a problem. This review will firstly consider that explores the tensions at the heart of identity, and reflects on how our sense of a cohesive self is supported. I go on to look at identity through the lens of the material world (as well as broader ontologies that structure our understanding of relationships of human/non-human beings), and ask how the interactions of physical artefacts and our embodied forms can help us develop our analysis of jewellery in use before closing by considering how our material possessions – both worn and unworn – are rendered meaningful and potent.

Identity is borne out of two opposing pulls which are in tension: our inner sense of self and the view we present to the world. The divide between them is not clear cut; Rose describes it as a 'discontinuous surface, a kind of

infolding of exteriority' (Rose, 2007, p321), a process that begins when infants gradually learn to fold objects into their consciousness, retaining them mentally even when they are physically absent. Eventually, this leads to what Mead and Morris describe as the 'generalised other' (Mead and Morris, 1934, p154): a form of inner critic or internalised social control against which the individual can measure actions. Oscillating between her own perspective and that of the generalised other allows the child to assess a planned action and anticipate how others might respond to it, in order to make a judgement about its appropriateness. Internal and external concepts of self are seldom viewed separately: we overlay the two modes of being so that they are indistinguishable, and Merleau-Ponty (2012) uses the metaphor of the view through a pair of binoculars, observed as a singular image but actually constructed of two individual, overlaid pictures.

Bodies are subject to the same forces of push and pull that is outlined above, resulting in an experience of the body that shifts with our perspective: Blackman (2008) describes the body as an 'absent presence' (p6), capturing the sense that bodies fade from awareness when we are lost in a task, but intrude as a focus of attention when we are ill or in pain. Despite this, scholarship of the material world suggests that we are actually profoundly embedded within the material environment, and our boundaries are far from clear-cut (Shilling, 2001; Grosz, 1994; Kristeva, 1982). Situated at the boundary of our physical bodies, our jewellery operates as both an object that is external to us *and* as something that is part of us; as such, this can help us to mark or navigate the boundary and negotiate what it

means to have or to be a body in the world. Pushed further, the 'flat ontologies of Latour (1993) and Harman (2019) challenge the very existence of these boundaries by suggesting – as Harman does – that there are *only* objects, thereby flattening the hierarchy that, normatively, elevates humans over non-humans. This raises interesting questions about jewellery and the role it plays in shaping us. Within the field of dress studies, many writers have explored the relationship between clothing and embodied identity (Entwistle, 2001; Cavallaro and Warwick, 1998; Woodward, 2007; Young, 1990; Boulton and Jerrard, 2000). Here, the notion of social control is a pertinent one, and the complexity of decision-making around clothing and what it means to wear garments on the body is explored by a number of these writers, and Woodward (2007), in particular, explores how women negotiate the gaze of others – including the generalised other – in order to understand how their clothed bodies will be judged by society.

Extending our frame of reference further into the material world, others have considered the role that possessions more generally play. Gell (1998) and Attfield (2020) contribute analyses of how objects are bestowed with agency and the ability to influence the individuals who encounter them. Belk (1988) and Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) are significant contributors in exploring how the spatial distribution of these possessions within the domestic sphere contributes to one's sense of self. Turkle (2007) and Heersmink (2018) explore the evocative nature of objects and consider how they assist in the process of scaffolding memory, serving as a kind of external hard drive for memory and hence for the

narrative of our lives. This clearly has significant implications for jewellery – both worn and unworn – which often evokes memories from key stages of our lives. Finally, the gifted nature of traditional precious jewellery is also relevant to this discussion, and – again – here, the scholarship is patchy. Nevertheless, Mauss, in his seminal work *The Gift* (1980), points to the transactional nature of gift giving, which offers 'only a polite fiction, formalism, and social deceit [...] when really there is obligation and economic self-interest' (Mauss, 1980, p4). Unger (2019) reflects on how a broad range of jewellery types are exchanged and worn. The obligation that Mauss and Unger highlight requires that the receiver of gifted jewellery reciprocates, usually by wearing the piece that has been gifted, ensuring that the care taken in selecting and presenting the piece is mirrored and returned. Habermas's (2011) paper touches on the significance of gifted jewellery and its indexical nature, pointing to the gifter and standing in for them when they are absent.

Many of the sources pointed to above touch on jewellery only tangentially; there is little thorough-going research that explicitly foregrounds the role of worn jewellery in supporting memory and articulating aspects of identity. The situation is compounded by the complex nature of the jewellery field, across which the concept of wear is a contested and shifting notion. Traditional precious jewellery is usually intended for regular wear, whereas fine jewellery might be worn only at prestigious occasions, and art jewellery might be more frequently *seen* than worn, viewed instead within the context of an exhibition or through the medium of photography. This paper addresses this gap in the scholarship and seeks to

show that traditional precious jewellery is rich in association, significant in holding communities of people together, and that it – through these two elements – can play a significant role in maintaining a sense of who we are.

METHODOLOGY

There were two strands to this project: after gaining ethics approval and the informed consent of the participants, an initial strand involved me carrying out a series of creative workshops with groups of female participants (and hence, historically more strongly identified with and aware of their bodies than males) who were over the age of 30 (and hence likely to have a range of life experiences), inviting them to respond to a broad range of pieces of art jewellery. After this, the same participants were invited to meet with me individually to discuss the jewellery they wore (or had worn) regularly. It is this second strand of activity that this paper focuses on, as this (unlike the experimentation with art jewellery) facilitated a discussion of jewellery's role in structuring women's identity and social networks. Here, I asked participants to bring two pieces of jewellery – one 'live' and one 'retired' – to the interview, and we discussed the full arc of the jewellery's acquisition, wear and (in the case of the retired jewellery) its lapse from use; often reference was made to other pieces of jewellery (and occasionally clothing, too) beyond the items brought to the meeting, and discussion of these was included in my analysis too.

At the heart of the conversation was the question of what the jewellery meant to its female owners: the associations it carried and what it meant when worn. The interviews were semi-structured in that I had a list of questions and topics to be covered but was not prescriptive about the order in which they were

covered. Follow-up questions were asked to explore areas of interest, and the ebb and flow of the conversation was shaped by the points raised by the participant as much as by my list of questions. Each session recorded (usually video recorded, sometimes audio only) and following the interview itself a transcript was prepared. The analysis took place using NVivo qualitative data analysis software, the functionality of which allowed me to code key points (essentially colour-coding and labelling) and to create structured tree diagrams to show how the individual points (called nodes in NVivo) related to each other. Through a process of coding, reflecting on the nodes generated, and writing memos (documenting reflections, connections and relevant theoretical insights), analysis proceeded from initially grouping and describing common threads (particularly around what it felt like to wear jewellery, how jewellery-wearing decisions were made; as well as around the process of coming to terms with change) to analyse how the meanings ascribed to the jewellery were constructed and what this might tell us about its role in embodied identity.

FINDINGS

'LIVE' JEWELLERY

The participants (referred to using pseudonyms here) were keen to talk about their jewellery and to share the stories of its acquisition and wear: many of the stories revolved around how the jewellery came into their possession and this often-involved discussion of how it was gifted to participants by family members and close friends. Mel brought a skull necklace (see Fig 1c, below), gifted to her by her husband, which reminded her of Birmingham (and its rock music) throughout a four-month motorcycle tour of South America; Greta brought a cross pendant, purchased jointly by her mother and mother-in-law when on holiday; Tanya brought a pendant gifted by her parents to celebrate her doctoral graduation. Elsewhere, purchases were less weighty: Jo took delight in finding a glass bead necklace in a second-hand shop, and Leanne claimed that she had forgotten the origin of one of her constantly worn silver rings. Some things occupied the space in between gifts and purchases: Mani spoke about the purchase of 'gifts for me' (Mani), particularly when passing through airports, and elsewhere pieces that were notionally conceived as gifts were purchased jointly. Hannah's engagement ring occupied this category; similarly, Daksha's family purchased her Hindu mangalsutra marriage necklace (usually purchased by the husband), as this was a mixed marriage and her non-Hindu husband-to-be was entirely unfamiliar with the conventions involved. Much of the jewellery was entirely conventional – small, relatively discrete pieces, often made in precious metal (silver and gold) and sometimes with gemstones,

often designed and made within a Western tradition (although Daksha's mangalsutra was an obvious exception to this).

Patterns of wear were described, with most pieces worn regularly and some constantly: several participants proclaimed that they felt 'naked' without their jewellery, which was worn so habitually that it was barely noticed on the body, its occasional absence more conspicuous than its presence. Other items of jewellery were removed at night, and others were worn only periodically. This meant that decisions needed to be made about when and how they were worn, and occasionally this behaviour became ritualised. It is significant that the process of wearing jewellery gifted by significant others enabled connections to be made and affirmed, and a number of participants spoke about how wearing the jewellery prompted memories of when the piece was gifted or of previous occasions on which it had been worn.

'RETIRED' JEWELLERY

Jewellery that was no longer worn was, as before, accompanied by stories of its acquisition, but this time with a sense of ambivalence. As before, the jewellery discussed was frequently gifted, and these pieces almost always related to significant life events: key birthdays, celebrations of relationships, and the loss of loved ones. However, they were retired from use and this brought mixed feelings for many participants. Events had rendered the jewellery not only unworn but often *unwearable*: one participant brought a couple of silver bangles (see Fig 1b, below), part of a wider collection that had been purchased during her marriage. The ending of this relationship precipitated the

retirement of the pieces, and the pieces became instead a tool for reflection, seldom returned to but kept as a bitter-sweet reminder of the relationship and that time in her life. As such, some pieces pointed to particular social roles: wife, partner, daughter. The adoption, relinquishing or occasional refusal of aspects of these roles contributed to this sense of ambivalence. While the stories of the items' acquisition were rehearsed in order to revisit significant life events, the retired nature of the pieces meant that the participants' 6 reflections dwelt on the theme of change and how this was accommodated; in some instances, the emotional load of the jewellery was still considerable. Daksha spoke about a set of gold jewellery purchased in India by her mother as a form of dowry in preparation for an anticipated arranged marriage (see Fig 1a, above):

her shifting emotional response to the jewellery (from intense aversion to gradual acceptance) and its potential for wear reflected her changing relationship with her parents and, in turn, their relationship with their adopted country. She acknowledged that she had subverted my request to talk about a piece that was beyond wear and admitted that the previously retired set of dowry jewellery was now occasionally worn at family weddings. Other pieces were spoken about by participants in their absence: Leanne's charm bracelet was too sentimentally significant to be brought from its hiding place in her home; Amira reflected, tearfully at times, on a set of jewellery belonging to her daughter that had been stolen from her as she escaped from Syria as a refugee.

Fig 1: Range of jewellery brought and discussed at interviews (l-r) – (1a) Daksha's set of dowry jewellery in its presentation box; (1b) Jo's bangles purchased during her marriage; (1c) Mel's skull necklace to remember Birmingham's status as home of metal music during her trip in South America



DISCUSSION

Jewellery allows us to (metonymically) take people who are precious to us with us as we travel through the world: it reminds us of them (how much they mean to us; how much we are obligated to them), but beyond this it also allows us to incorporate them into our sense of self. Jewellery does this by allowing us to see ourselves as the gifter does. The two modalities of embodied consciousness (theorised by Mead and Morris (1934) and Merleau-Ponty (2012)) are helpful here: on the one hand, we are unaware of bodily boundaries when lost in a task or in a state of flow; on the other, we might see ourselves in focus as if from an external perspective; I prefer Merleau-Ponty's terms – self-as-subject and self-as-other – and will use them here. Hannah exemplifies this when reflecting on her wedding and engagement rings: relatively recently married, she was still getting used to the experience of wearing these items. Sometimes she wore them unconsciously, fiddling with them without really thinking about (adopting the perspective of self-as subject); at other times, she was jolted into action, texting her new husband when she caught sight of them and remembered her new role: 'oh, I am actually married, and, oh, we've actually done it (Hannah, here, in the guise of self-as other). At another level, this might be part of the reason why people engaging in extramarital affairs remove their wedding rings: the ring is a metonymical or indexical representation of their spouse, and they don't want their husband or wife looking on while they are being unfaithful.

Woodward (2007) highlights the role of mirrors in women's decision-making around dress. This allows them to access this external view and make adjustments to their clothing and presentation according to what they see of the self as other. Jo is clearly aware of the dangers when she expresses a fear of being seen as 'mutton dressed as lamb' (Jo) because of her clothing choices. However, she also makes the point that jewellery is different:

*it's something you can have a bit
of fun with; as I was saying
earlier, you can project sort of
sense of yourself as somebody
who's interested in style,
interested in colour, but you do
not have to try too hard with it.
(Jo)*

I suggest there is an additional reason for jewellery to be different from clothing, and that is that clothing doesn't tend to have the same investment of others: it is more frequently acquired by the individual, and not gifted by others to the same extent (although Attfield (2020) discusses some notable exceptions). Because of this, the perspective that is encountered in the mental mirror when *clothing* is reviewed is Mead's (1934) generalised other rather than the gaze of a singular and known individual. Mead's generalised other is a heady cocktail of different people, known and unknown,

sharing their opinions and views, wanted and unwanted, experienced as a form of generalised social control, reminding women of their shortcomings. For *jewellery* (often gifted), however, the voice in the ear is more focused. Rather than being a melange of generalised voices, it is the perspective of the gifter that is foregrounded: Hannah is prompted to text her husband when she catches sight of her wedding ring. Anna sees her grandmother looking back when she stumbles across the rings bequeathed to her. She attempts to put her feelings into words, saying:

*it's mine and my – part of me and
my nan, that nobody else gets a
look-in (Anna)*

and her language, here, points to a (metaphorical) exchange of looks, into which I'm wary of reading too much (the conflation of sight with understanding is part of our lexicon, after all), but the suggestion of an exchange that is active and reciprocal is pertinent: Anna looks at it, and it looks at her. I suggest that this exchange represents a kind of oscillation between the self-as-subject and self-as-object. This is a near-relation of the calibration you might make when checking your clothes in the mirror against the standards of the generalised other, but here, the question of 'How do I feel?' is held up against the parallel question of 'What would my grandmother think?' or 'What would my husband make of this?' 'The more

aligned these two perspectives are, the smaller the gap, and we will turn to the question of what this might mean for the wearer now.

There is always a gap between these two modalities of the self, and this points to the split at the heart of identity. Nevertheless, the ability of jewellery to facilitate an easy or comfortable oscillation between self-as-subject and self-as-other is variable and connected to the degree to which wear is habituated. It is possible to plot out the modalities of the self (see fig2, right) so that they overlap along a continuum which stretches from habitually worn jewellery on the one side to unworn jewellery on the other.

At the left-hand side of this continuum, we can see that only one modality of the self is engaged – that of the self-as-subject. This indicates that the jewellery is been worn so habitually that it has become embedded within the sensory limits of the body, and little attention is paid to it during wear. This is the jewellery that was being spoken of when the women in the study said, 'I feel naked without it' or that their jewellery was 'part of me'. As Daksha commented on her habitually worn wedding ring:

*if I didn't have it, I would really
notice it' (Daksha)*

Here, the perspective of the 'other' (frequently the gifter of the item) is aligned so closely with the perspective of the 'subject' that they are effectively indistinguishable.

In the middle of the continuum, the gap between the two modalities is beginning to make itself felt. As a consequence, the felt experience of wearing the jewellery is calibrated against what it must look like to others. Initially, the modulations are tight and barely perceptible (suggesting a high degree of coherence between modalities), and here, the wearer of the jewellery might frequently slip into the modality of self-as subject and think of her jewellery only seldom; when it does come into focus, it might be to reflect warmly on the giver of the gift. At the far end of this central zone, the modalities of the self-diverge and the gap becomes bigger and harder to bridge, implying a more limited degree of coherence; here, the wearer might feel more self-conscious when wearing the jewellery, and memories of the gifter might be more ambivalent. These feelings increase as the continuum advances to the right.

At the far end of the continuum, the gap between the modalities of the self is unbridgeable. Jewellery has lost its ability to engage the self-as subject and the wearer is unable to lose themselves in the experience of wearing the jewellery. Given that constantly watching oneself and feeling uncomfortable about one's appearance can be draining, the jewellery often lapses from wear at this point. The jewellery may still be potent, but it often says more about the gifter's reading of the individual rather than about the wearer's sense of identity. The wear, use and handling of the jewellery are often ritualised in order to render the sometimes highly potent artefacts safe: jewellery items may be stored in a particular way, worn (sparingly) for particular occasions and plans may be made for their disposal or bequeathal. In this zone, far more than the zones nearer

to the body of the wearer, jewellery is treated with reverence shrouded in secrecy.

The continuum provides a model for explaining how the social nature of jewellery – practices associated with its gifting and reciprocal wearing – allows women to incorporate others' views of themselves into their own sense of self. We considered Hannah's reflections on the process of getting used to wearing a wedding ring, earlier, and this is certainly an example of how an item of jewellery was located in one zone of our continuum when first worn – but then, through regular and then habitual use, was drawn into another zone as Hannah learned to accommodate her new identity of a married woman and the gap between self-as-subject and self-as-other was narrowed. Her more ostentatious engagement ring was often removed to play sport (and sometimes not replaced for a few days) and hence was worn more self-consciously, but her wedding ring was worn all the time. At the time of the interview (a year into her marriage), it was becoming part of her: she found herself fiddling absentmindedly with her wedding ring and only then noticing that 'unconsciously you're interacting with it' (Hannah). This points to the mechanism whereby individuals are bound together, and networks of family and friends coalesce, by bringing the people whose connections are manifested in gifts of jewellery into the heart of identity through habituating their perspective into our sense of self.

I would like to end by pulling back and taking a final glimpse of a broader conceptual map of the process whereby this networking takes place (Fig 3, below). This is a map of the dispersed field of jewellery wear and use of Daksha, who is represented by the large blue

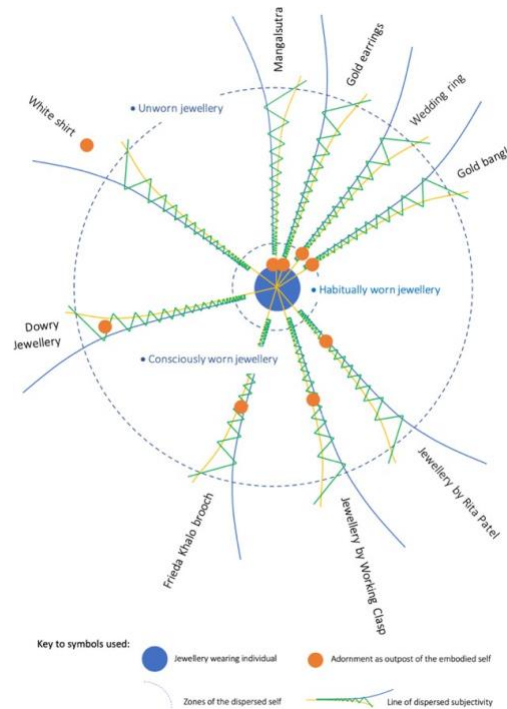


Fig. 3: Daksha and the dispersed field of jewellery wear and use

circle in the centre of the diagram. She is surrounded by nine radiating copies of the modalities continuum that I have just described, and on each is an orange dot indicating the position occupied by a single piece of Daksha's jewellery. Some pieces of jewellery are habitually worn directly on Daksha's torso (her mangalsutra and gold earrings), and some are worn *almost* at one remove on her hands and wrist (her wedding ring and her mother's gold bangle). These

pieces are worn all the time and are part of her, worn without conscious reflection.

Elsewhere, pieces are worn more occasionally: a decision is made to put them on and take them off, and here the work of negotiating the gap between self-as-subject and self-as-object must be undertaken as 'how do I feel?' is held up and calibrated against the question of 'what would the others say?' At the outer edge of the diagram, unworn jewellery is absent, but Daksha made reference to a garment (a lost white shirt that was stolen by customs officers who searched her suitcase as a child) that is beyond wear: just within the bounds of what is tolerably wearable is the dowry jewellery that her parents purchased in anticipation of matching her with a Hindu husband. The collection of gold jewellery was highly divisive, causing a significant tension within the family when Daksha was in her teens and early twenties.

Eventually, Daksha met and married a man of her own choice and gradually the family were reconciled, but the dowry jewellery remained a point of division and tension. It was kept in a bank vault for years, and it was only in her fifties that Daksha, at this point one of the elders of the extended family, began to wear the jewellery to complement traditional Indian clothing at family weddings.

The ability of the jewellery to shift from one zone to another of this conceptual map points to the fact that jewellery continues to have significant agency over its often-extended lifetime. Regularly worn jewellery gifted by loved ones is drawn into the process of identity construction, and the perspective of the giver is

activated each time the items are worn. If its use becomes habitual, it might receive less conscious attention, but this might be because the perspective of the gifter has become so closely aligned with that of the wearer that the two perspectives have effectively become one. Elsewhere, items can slip from use or be brought back into use and wear– but they remain potent pieces on either side of this divide; unworn pieces often continue to operate as a ‘scaffold for memory’ (Heersmink, 2018) even if they adorn the domestic space instead of the body of the wearer. The mandala-like appearance of this final model is apposite: it articulates the role that jewellery plays in connecting individuals with their networks of family and friends and needs to be seen in this context. One mandala-like conceptual map will connect with others to create an intricate matrix of interconnecting forms (see Fig 4 below).

As Attfield (2020) notes,

*the everyday is where life is lived
both vicariously and concretely
(Attfield, 2020, p264)*

and jewellery worn on the body demonstrates this to a significant degree. Its materialisation of identity has twin pulls – the identity we seek to articulate for ourselves, as well as the version of ourselves we see reflected in others – those results in tension, change, and sometimes, resolution. This, then, is a key social function of jewellery: to materialise the links between

loved ones and to help us to change with and accommodate new relationships as they evolve around us.

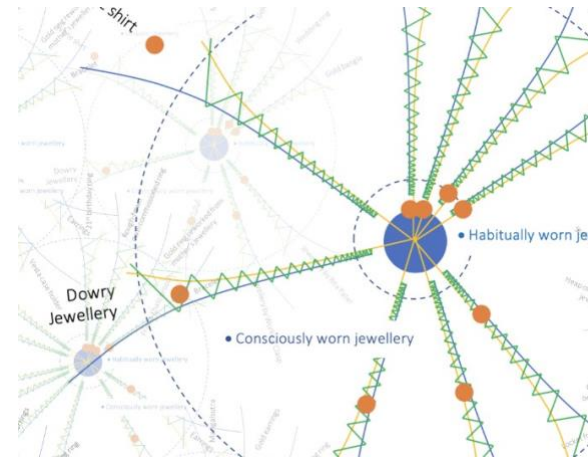


Fig. 4: Diagram imagining the interconnecting conceptual maps of a network of individuals, who have engaged in the reciprocal social exchanges of jewellery gifting, retention and wear.

CONCLUSION

The analysis above helps to shed light on jewellery's own system for connoting meanings and associations that are different from that of clothing because of its frequently gifted nature and the need for reciprocity that this entails. The paper has explored the intersecting fields of identity and memory and how – in particular – modalities of looking can foreground a range of different perspectives. Jewellery's capacity to facilitate a view through a loved one's eyes is a key element of its potency and, when seen in the context of women's collections of jewellery, illustrates jewellery's ability to bind and connect networks of family and friends in a powerful way. While I in no way wish to diminish the contribution of this paper or the insights of the women who participated so generously with this study, the conclusions drawn here are already known at an intuitive level by many working within the creative field of adornment, who are aware of the power of jewellery to provide a physical connection to loved ones, past and present. Nevertheless, this paper's contribution is to begin to set out empirical evidence and a theoretical framework underpinning the wearing of jewellery through the analysis of its gifted (and occasionally transactional) nature and the role that this plays in mediating and structuring the wearer's sense of their own embodied identity.

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Jewellery, An Archive of Queer Space

Author: *Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral*



ABSTRACT

This paper investigates jewellery through the concepts of queer identity and queer space to understand the relevance of the identity, materiality and scale of this object to the queer archive. Three forms of the queer archive are proposed, which consider the memory recall, materiality and production of jewellery. The research is driven by nine interviews to explore the queer experience of making and wearing jewellery, introduced with portraits of the participants. Concepts have been employed from texts that explore queer studies, queer space and archiving. I, as author and maker, have produced a series of jewellery objects to explore the materialisation of these concepts; the made objects are a product of the research and represent an addition to the queer archive. The intimate and tactile nature of the research has been demonstrated as a valuable approach that should be employed to broaden our understanding of the queer archive.

Keywords: *jewellery, making, phenomenology; queer archive; queer space.*

INTRODUCTION



Figure 1: Lemon's assortment of steel and silver earring hoops.

"For me jewellery was basically the free plastic toys that came with ice cream, but then it became more what I wear now, which is steel and silver. I had a big collection of jewellery pieces, but I stopped wearing most of it because, after my 27th birthday, I realised metal hoops were the best for me. I never lose them because of their hook, and I consider them very sexy and agender. I started wearing hoops when I went to queer techno parties because I wanted something sexy and functional that suited the environment. I don't wear my old pieces anymore, but I keep them as a memorable collection...I'm not sure if I'll wear the old pieces again." (Lemon)

Lemon's recounting of when they started wearing jewellery illustrates how notions of 'jewellery' and 'queer space' can be explored in this research and why they might be relevant to each other. While Lemon describes a space as 'queer techno parties', this appears to have a sense of liminality as the moment in time, not simply the physical space, is considered queer. In Betsky's text *Queer Space*, they describe New York's

gay nightclubs as spaces formed by ephemeral moments in time seen in ‘rhythm and light’, and elements that appear and disappear (1997, p.5). In a similar vein, jewellery is an object that allows people to recall specific moments in time and space in a talismanic manner. Lemon’s story refers to desire and gender, hinting at valuable insights that jewellery can provide into queer identities and space as archive. A description of the queer archive by Brouwer as extending beyond the physical ‘toward the symbolic, the immateriality of imagining, the forces of affect’ (2014) encourages us to consider the archival significance of Lemon’s story beyond the tangible physicality of the item (Figure 1), and additionally to investigate the broader forces in action relating to the jewellery object.

This paper investigates jewellery through the concepts of queer identity and queer space to understand the relevance of the identity, materiality and scale of this object to the queer archive. Three forms of the queer archive are proposed: worldbuilding, materiality and production of jewellery. First, jewellery is understood for its reconciling and worldbuilding capabilities as part of the queer archive of assorted objects. The wearing of jewellery in the context of a heteronormative culture is considered as self-reflexive and transgressive forms of queer worldbuilding. Secondly, jewellery’s materially transformative qualities are analysed in relation to its malleability, relationship to the body and its reproductive capabilities, which will be considered in the scaled-up application of jewellery to architecture and landscape. Finally, the physical space and the body of the maker are interpreted as sites of production that counter heterosexual notions of public and private. The liminality between wearing and making expands the

role of archivist through to the maker and maker-wearer. To explore the physical materialisation of each of these three readings of the queer archive I have made a series of jewellery objects. Through this process, as author and maker, I have experienced first-hand the theoretical implications of the research in a practical and tactile manner. The made objects are both a research method and a product of the research, representing an addition to the queer archive.

Central to the research are nine interviews with Akash, Andrew, Antony, Carole, Conor, Harpreet, Kyveli, Lemon and Laurence. These interviews seek to understand the queer experience of making and wearing jewellery, by considering its experiential, qualitative idiosyncratic nature. Five of the interviewees are makers, most of whom wear their own pieces and range from people who make jewellery just for themselves to small-scale professional jewellers. The remaining four interviewees do not make jewellery but wear it and are engaged in art and craft-based practices such as pottery. The interviews lasted approximately an hour each and were loosely structured, allowing for an informal conversation that did not explicitly question if and how jewellery is an archive of queer space, but rather explored these topics intuitively. A series of photographic portraits is presented to allow the reader to witness the intimate nature of the conversations and my personal approach to themes of jewellery and queer space.

As author, I interpreted the interviews by drawing on Charles Morris’ theory of the queer archive as debris-like (2012) and José Esteban Muñoz’s ‘minoritarian performance’ that allows for queer worldbuilding (1996) through concepts such as Lauren Berlant and

Michael Warner's *Queer Counterpublic* (1998). The body-object relationship is explored through Sara Ahmed's phenomenological notions of positioning and orientation (2006), and Lucas Crawford's 'Transgender Architectonics' (2020), within the context of a heteronormative society where sex and intimacy are regarded by Jack Halberstam as private and non-reproductive acts that can be celebrated as 'failed' (2011). As with the interviews, the texts do not discuss jewellery as an archive of queer space specifically, however they explore broader notions of queer space or of jewellery individually. The recent emergence of the *Journal of Jewellery Research* in 2018 is a development in this underexplored field of study where there is latent potential for research through the complementary nature of the queer archive and jewellery that is exemplified in Lemon's story. Thus, this research attempts to develop a new area of scholarship at the intersection of queer studies, phenomenology and architecture, emerging from the scale of the wearable jewellery object and expanding to capture its social implications.

INTIMATE INTERVIEW MOMENTS



Figure 2: Kyveli at home with their jewellery. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

“I love playing with fire and I love metals. I love how you can shape them, melt them down, make something, melt it again, they are so malleable. So, when I’m making, I’m also thinking, how am I making justice to this element? Is it pieces that can live through time or is it something that lasts a season and it’s chucked out? I hate making things that are for instant gratification.”

- Kyveli



Figure 3: Lemon showing their rings and bangles. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

“One of my favourite people in the world, Michalis, brought this ring for me in the Canary Islands. It’s not a mood ring but looks like it. He went there with another friend; they are together now, and they bought one for them and one for me. And I don’t know, I thought it was really cute, and I wasn’t expecting that. It’s like I was there with them as well and they thought not about buying me something they didn’t have but something the three of us would have.”

- Lemon



Figure 4: Andrew and a brass candlestick. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

“These are my perfect hoops which I spent ages looking for. I need pliers to remove them. The one time I took them off was in a medical exam because I was scared of being judged for being gay and taking them out was a real sign of how I had to assimilate, and something I had to confront with myself. Do I want to do that again? And I actually don’t.”

- Andrew



Figure 5: Antony and their custom-made beaded harness. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

“There has to be a better way of expressing skimpiness and masochism and that’s how I got to a bead chain. I thought I could make fetish wear that isn’t chunky. Now I think I know how to make things that look sexual, are constrictive but still look elegant. And I think that’s where the jewellery story for me evolved from...I want to make it seem that you are tied into your jewellery but not seem super masochistic.”

- Antony



Figure 6: Akash holding a cast aluminium piece I made. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

“What are your considerations when wearing jewellery?”

“I feel like I don’t think about it that much, aside from something like say exercise. But I’ve lost of earrings partying. 22 carat earrings! But everything I else I haven’t lost. Earrings are the worst because you don’t realise you’ve lost them till after the fact.”

“I know I’ve lost many too.”

- Akash



Figure 7: Carole showing me her necklaces. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

“Do you ever wear rings?”

“Well, I have a wedding ring, but I don’t wear it, even though technically I’m not divorced. My relationship wasn’t a very happy one.”

- Carole



*Figure 8: Harpreet holding gold jewellery inherited from her family.
Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.*

“In India gold is passed down through generations in marriage, sometimes it’s melted and re-used for wedding rings for example. We have a family jeweller in Southall who does all this for us. My grandma dished out her gold before she passed away...there’s a much less taboo attitude to death and inheritance in Indian culture which encourages people to pass on their precious valuables while they’re alive.”

- Harpreet

AN ARCHIVE OF ASSORTED MEMORIES AND LIMINAL IDENTITIES



Figure 9: An assortment of Andrew's objects cast in pewter. See Figures 12-16. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

When speaking with interviewees who are not jewellery makers, they presented a collection of assorted jewellery items. Andrew's possessions are presented in Figure 9 through a single cast piece of pewter capturing an assemblage of objects he described as 'talismanic'. He talked through their selection by recalling past moments in time when he acquired each item, elaborating on a mix of emotions this raised. The recall of memories spanned undefined timescales, ranging from recent life events, for example Andrew's purchase of a gold hoop earring as a gay man in Cairo, Egypt, where homosexual people are persecuted, to broader narratives of their relationship to jewellery, such as how Andrew negotiates his relationship to the family's jeweller in Cairo. The timespans relating to each jewellery item are idiosyncratic and when read together they represent an assortment of time periods that support Morris' understanding of a queer archive as 'copious and contradictory holdings and ostensible detritus' (2021, p.51). The debris-like composition that Morris describes and is exemplified by Andrew is fundamental in a reading of jewellery as an archive of queer space and an analysis of the context of each archival item allows for the queer qualities to be teased out, as further illustrated in my discussions with Lemon when presenting their plastic ring:

"I have a memory of this ring given by a stranger, at a café bar in Athens where many parties were held and it is frequented by a smoker's political party, a kind of satirical organisation, as well as where chess is played. It's one of the first places where I go for a drink in Athens for some reason, although not necessarily my favourite place. I remember going with my friend Julia and when we went to the bathroom, we found the ring under the sink. No one was looking for the ring, and we allowed time for the owner to find it but nothing....so we kept it! It was an uneventful day, but the ring made it eventful." (Lemon)



Figure 10: Lemon's ring they encountered on in a bathroom in Athens. Copyright: Lemon Gianniri, 2022.



Figure 11: Brass bangle gifted to Akash. Copyright: Akash Sharma, 2022.

The context that Lemon recalls is composed by a scattering of objects and actions that is realised by the encounter with the jewellery item, illustrated in Figure 1. Broadly, the spatial context is one that is familiar to Lemon and where queers meet. The waiting for the rightful owner indicates an undefined moment in the ownership of the ring that Lemon and their friend are caught in, as well as an intimate and possibly exciting

connection to an unknown person. Finally, under its new ownership, the ring will form part of a new assortment of objects, each with their specific spatial context that might relate to queer spaces and queer identities and as such Lemon acts both as wearer and as archivist.

Antony explained how in queer or straight spaces, such as nightclubs, jewellery allows him to express their presence as a queer person, representing an act of worldbuilding in the queer archive. This act of expression, explained Antony, was not merely a means to be attractive to others but an inward motion to feel satisfaction in the free expression of his identity in that context. Jewellery, as exemplified in this case, allows the wearer to negotiate with an outward image of himself, in sexual terms or otherwise, that goes beyond the conventionally heterosexual notions of sex as a reproductive act that Halberstam celebrates as 'failed' in 'Queer Art of Failure' (2011, p.73). George Simmel's writing acknowledges that adornment is an inward act that is ultimately driven by our perception of ourselves through the context in which we exist: 'One adorns oneself for oneself but can do so only by adornment for others' (Greater than or equal to, 2013). Whilst in Simmel's writing the 'other' is referent to other people, perhaps a queer reading of this through Halberstam's celebration of othered and failed queer forms of intimacy can consider the 'other' as queer identities and queer sideways relations. Therefore, we can understand jewellery as the wearer's means to negotiate their context by developing an identity through self-understanding and in relation to other queer people.

The context of queer bodies in space is referenced by Kyvely: “in queer spaces I have entire conversations about the pieces I’m wearing because there is an openness and curiosity but also because people are interrogating the same ideas...I’ve had conversations in the middle of a dance floor about the earrings I’ve made!”. The notion of context in assembling the queer archive is described by Muñoz as: ‘fleeting moments and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere’ (1996, p.6). The shared context of the wearer and viewer exemplified in Kyvely’s commentary of other queer people’s interest in their jewellery is key in establishing the object’s epistemological sphere and the significance of the relationship of object-subject-context. This relationship is discussed by Ahmed in her writing in ‘Queer Phenomenology’: ‘Bodies as well as objects take shape through being oriented toward each other, as an orientation that may be experienced as the cohabitation or sharing of space’ (2006, p.552). Within the wider context of a heteronormative society, the nature of a space in which jewellery is worn and the presence of queer people in it enables jewellery to be recognised as a queer archive of that very space, thus recognising and affirming ‘queer life worlds’, considered by Hailey Otis and Thomas Dunn as fundamental to the act of queer worldbuilding (2021, p.1).

In contrast to the acceptability of queerness experienced by Antony and Kyvely’s in nightclubs, Andrew elaborates on their experience of wearing earrings as a man in the context of Egypt: “It is a statement...you are saying something about yourself that is in contrast of the society that you live in.” The wearing of jewellery here represents a subversion of the

‘correct’ heterosexual positioning of desire that we are continuously reminded of. According to Ahmed (2006), the spatial positioning of cultural artefacts, such as family photos and love songs, is a constant visual and auditory reminder of the correct positioning of desire against which Andrew is transgressing, as a gay man in Cairo. Analysing the assortment of Andrew’s items in Figure 12 exemplifies how Ahmed’s reference to the heteronormative positioning of cultural artefacts is one that indeed does not have the flexibility to accommodate the debris-like nature of the queer archive. Both Andrew’s transgressive act and Antony’s notion of wearing jewellery as a means of self-understanding can be understood through Muñoz’s queer text *Disidentifications* (1999), in being everyday rituals and performative acts that form transformational politics. The wearing of jewellery, when considered in context, can be interpreted as a minoritarian performance where the elaboration of queer forms of desire is an act of queer worldbuilding (Muñoz, 1999), in doing so creating queer space by means of an object.

Interviews demonstrated the role of jewellery in queer worldbuilding through its ability to reconcile assorted identities that can be conflicting and illogical as they continuously change over time. As Kyvely elaborated: “Jewellery helps me make sense of different parts of my identity that often don’t make sense together.” Kyvely went on to explain how their upbringing across cultures and continents has led to them having many parts to their identity which can also be read as ‘copious and contradictory’ (Morris, 2012, p.51). The assorted identities and forms of intimacy that queer people enact are not centred around familial or financial forms of reproduction and can therefore be considered, albeit positively, a failed form of intimacy

that invest in 'sideways' relations according to Halberstam (2011, p.73). The reconciling of othered and failed identities in an object means jewellery items can subvert normative expectations of gender and sexual identities, as the wearer can make sense of conflicting aspects of their history: "having something so physical on you that is so universal brings together the whole version of yourself. It's a move away from occupying different identities" (Andrew). Whilst the multiplicity of different versions of oneself is an inherent part of queerness and the queer archive, a reading of jewellery for its reconciling capabilities seems an apologetic act of repair that is overly referent to heterosexual culture. Perhaps, then, we must foreground the idiosyncratic intentions of these cases and celebrate their debris-like nature, such as in the interviews carried out where it appears the participants are attempting to make sense of their identities for their own sense of self-understanding, not simply as an outward act of performance or repair.

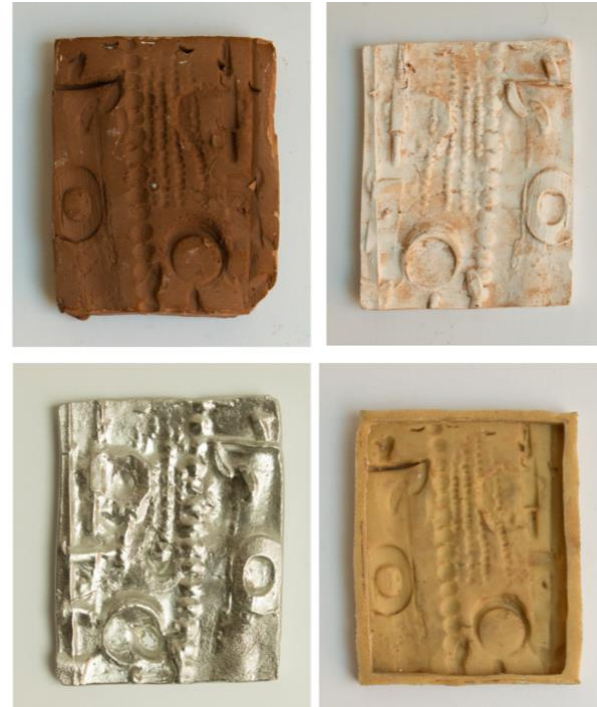
The final item Akash came to when recounting their acquisition of each piece of jewellery adorning their body was a textured brass bangle shown in Figure 11. This item, they explained, was given to them by a friend they met while working in a department store and who, on their second meeting, surprised them with a jewellery gift. The bangle continues to bring memories of the friendship and represents a moment of generosity: "We just got on really well, I met her husband and her extended family, and she met my mum and my brother! It was such a mutual and natural bond that just occurred, so this bangle obviously reminds me of her". Akash's friend is older, and the gifting of the bangle represents a form of cross-generational acquisition of jewellery, an act that Pointon identifies

as widely present in literature since the seventeenth century (1999). However, imperative to Akash's story is that the friend is just that, a friend, not a blood relation. The forms of cross-generational acquisition Pointon discusses are familial or in reference to notions of family as understood through heterosexual culture, exemplified in the engagement ring. However, the acquisition of Akash's bangle represents a subversion of the 'correct' forms of intimacy and desire that Ahmed argues we are constantly reminded of in heterosexual culture (2006).

More open-ended and talismanic possibilities of jewellery items exist in the act of reappropriating found objects. While a sense of ambiguity of the past exists in lost objects, the finding by the new owner can give the object a new, esoteric meaning by way of the object's unknown talismanic properties. Thinking again about Lemon's encounter with the lost ring in the Athens bar, we can wonder about the emotional reaction of the previous owner on realising their loss. Indeed, this consideration was made by Andrew when recounting their necklace left on the bus home: "I don't mind that I lost it, because it's circulating somewhere, and someone's found a piece of jewellery on the bus, and they can enjoy it and tell the story to someone." The liminal nature of the jewellery item's ownership, the identities of the wearer, and transgressive forms of relating, represent an interwoven and layered scattering of objects that Figures 12-16 attempt to describe through the process of casting. This assortment of objects in the queer archive is composed by the wearer as archivist.



Figure 12 (above): A scattering of Andrew's objects representative of the queer archive. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.



Figures 13-16 (right, clockwise starting top left). Figure 13: The casting of an assortment of objects is produced firstly by creating a negative impression through clay press-tile casting. Figure 14: Objects are pressed into wet clay, from a plaster positive is cast. Figure 15: A high temperature-resistant silicone negative mould is cast. Figure 16: Molten pewter is cast to create a replica of the assortment of objects. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

**AN ARCHIVE OF MATERIALLY
TRANSFORMATIVE AND REPRODUCTIVE
OBJECTS**



Figure 17: Three pewter rings made by casting pewter into hand formed clay. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.



Figure 18: A pewter bangle made by melting three rings (Figure 17) and casting these into hand formed clay. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

Metal is a materially ephemeral element that can be formed into an almost infinite range of forms and textures through a vast range of techniques including melting, casting, piercing (sawing into shapes) and hammering. Antony discusses metal's malleable and seemingly ambiguous composition by highlighting how a metal object can hold the same shape but have significantly different weights, for example a bangle made from pewter (a heavy lead-based alloy) versus sterling silver (a comparatively light material). In a similar logic, the material ephemerality of metal allows for the same weight to be articulated in different forms and textures, as demonstrated in Figures 17 and 18. The material ambiguity of jewellery items is discussed by Pointon where they elaborate on how the jewel 'both occludes and mirrors, hides and reveals: the light it gives off through refraction and reflection makes it appear the object of my look/eye, but its glittering impenetrability recalls the opacity of the gaze' (1999, p.5). While Pointon refers to the translucency of precious stones, the same sense or ambiguity can be interpreted in the malleability and composition of metal jewellery.

The malleability and extensive material possibilities of metal jewellery are celebrated by Kyvely in their combined role as maker-wearer. Kyvely explains how they make a unique outfit every time they go out to a party: "I will always change something about my outfit when I go out [...] and I sometimes at the last minute come up with an idea for a [jewellery] piece and quickly get out my tools to make it." Heidegger's 'characteristic of being' could be used as a means to interpret the identity of the jewellery object as it considers this identity to be formed by the function it

provides to the user rather than by a contextual value (Ahmed, 2006). Indeed, the jewellery item can be interpreted for its queer characteristics as materially ephemeral, rather than as a static, wearable, or possibly valuable object simply in monetary terms. The materially transformative capabilities of metal jewellery speak to Muñoz's description of the queer archive as not composed of visible evidence, but existing as 'innuendo...fleeting moments and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere' (1996, p.6). Muñoz's interpretation of a queer archive is one that is undefined and open-ended, characteristics it shares with the malleability and infinite form-finding qualities of metal.

The interplay between the permanence and impermanence of the body and of the object can allow us to interpret jewellery as an extension of bodily matter. As interviewee Kyvely recounts: "I find that in a queer space someone is more likely to be drawn to me [...] the object helps me build relationships as it is an extension of me." The interest by others in Kyvely's wearing of jewellery is driven by the intuitive recognition that the object is an extension of the body. This material relationship of jewellery to the body is contrasted by Holcomb, Benzel and Art who discuss: 'Jewellery's perceived durability allows it to stand as a permanent trace of the impermanent body, a material presence for the stubbornly immaterial.' (2018, p.23). Further, they consider this difference in permanence as jewellery's 'rebuke to corporeal decay' (2018, p.21). However, by interpreting the body together with jewellery as inherent spatial matter, we can preclude differences in permanence that are merely based on

tangible longevity and consider the identities of the body and the object together instead. Crawford's writing on '*Transgender Architectonics*' (2020) celebrates the trans*¹ body for its materially transformational capabilities, both in physical and identity terms, and when considered with the materially transformative qualities of metal jewellery, we can imagine the fusing of both into a single being. The nature of the trans* body allows for the materially transformative qualities of jewellery to extend the queer archive from the space through the object and to the body.

When discussing their making practices, Laurence commented: "Metal is a really unforgiving material to work with, but you can melt it and start from scratch if you need to, in that way it's its saving grace." Laurence's observation highlights the reproductive nature of metal jewellery which allows for the continued existence of the same matter, albeit in infinite possibilities of forms and textures. In the re-transformation of jewellery, such as through melting and recasting, the quantum of matter in jewellery is not being expanded or prolonged, rather it is metamorphosing to a new form in an act self-reproduction, as exemplified in Figures 17 and 18. The transformative and reproductive capabilities of metal jewellery present an ironic and queer response to Berlant and Warner's idea of heterosexual forms of intimacy, in their concept of the Queer Counterpublic, by allowing jewellery to adapt and morph into different objects whilst retaining the same quantum of matter (1998). The Queer Counterpublic is a queer worldmaking project of 'undefinable spaces and incommensurate geographies' that considers how non-

heteronormative forms of intimacy do not relate to capitalist narratives of domestic space, property and reproduction (Berlant and Warner, 1998, p.198).

Taking jewellery's reproductive qualities into account, a transgender reading of jewellery at the scale of the building and city could then consider how the same spatial matter can be reused. Modular design approaches, whereby standardised and reusable building components are employed in construction, present a clear and scaled-up translation of jewellery's qualities that can challenge the capitalist forms of reproduction based on financial expansion for more socially, economically and environmentally sensitive design solutions. Jewellery's materially transformative and reproductive qualities present the queer archive's boundless scalability, as Figures 17 and 18 attempt to convey through the simple translation of three rings into a bangle. Referring to Heidegger's characteristic of being at this larger scale whereby the identity of buildings and landscapes is established by their reproductive function, enabled by modular design approaches, we can consider a more dynamic reading of the static and uncritical identity of building materials and programming of spaces. Indeed, the reappropriation of spaces is a characteristic of queer space that evades the neoliberal forces of gentrification, exemplified in Campkin and Marshall's research of shifting of nightclubs through London's neighbourhoods to survive rapidly rising rents (2018). An understanding of the materially transformative and reproductive qualities beyond the jewellery object scale presents interesting applications beyond the material dimension.

1: Trans is a relatively new term that includes all gender identities, such as gender-fluid, gender non-binary and agender (amongst others), alongside the usually considered transgender and transexual identities (OED Online).*

AN ARCHIVE OF QUEER SITES OF PRODUCTION



Figure 19: Pewter rings cast by implanting a stick into ground in my back garden to create the mould. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

The combined making and wearing of jewellery items emerged as an undefined liminality in the interviews with makers. Conor asks clients to recall memories of items, moments, spaces and people so these can be captured as a snapshot in a personal item that is intimately tied to the wearer. Laurence explained how they have used materials based on their own memories, for example using coral and seashell from their native Western Australia. The capability to transfer memories from maker to wearer in a material yet implicit manner is unique to the maker-wearer. Indeed, when questioned about the implicit significance of the jewellery object, Laurence explained that, although they identify as queer, they do not explicitly design queer ideas into their work; rather their work is intuitively queer coded through layers of metaphors and personal histories such as the liminality of queer spaces and memories imbued by materials respectively. This transition between making and wearing can be experienced in a more beguiling manner, as discussed by Kyvely who transports themselves to environments of encounter that might be starkly distinct from the environment of making, exemplifying the talismanic properties of jewellery. In one particular example in my discussion with Kyvely, they described the making of a breastplate in the Greek island of Anafi:

“Everyone was just naked on the beach, a vision of beautiful bodies on the beach inspired the breastplate, and every time I wear it, I bring this vision back to life.”
(Kyveli)



Figure 20: Kyveli's breastplate worn in the site of production, Anafi, Greece. Copyright: Kyveli Vlahakis, 2022.

The experience of maker-wearers demonstrates how jewellery items build on the liminalities of time in the queer archive by allowing people to experience a liminality between making and wearing. Winther's 'Maker's Move' jewellery street project (Nygaard and Winther, 2018) exploits this unique liminality by connecting wearers to memories by making objects that resemble spaces and objects recounted by street participants. As Nygaard and Winther explain: 'Jewellery and objects have the power to combine the past with the present time, making lost moments apparent again... As such, objects have the ability to serve as living proof to the liminal spaces of time, culture, personal and social identities' (2018, p.78). The Makers Move project and experiences recounted by the interviewees, as maker-wearers, demonstrate how the talismanic and liminal qualities of jewellery are materialised in the overt and implicit acts of making and wearing. The rings I cast in my back garden (Figure 19) illustrate these liminal qualities as jewellery items with a form and texture specific to the context at that point in time. The moisture content in the soil evaporates upon contact with the molten pewter, resulting in a unique texture on the outside of the item (Figure 22). The stick available at the point in time to me as maker generates the inside form and texture (Figure 23). The act of casting the ring in my back garden establishes a connection to the site that is then recalled in the wearing of the ring. Therefore, the ring acts as a symbol of the sites of production; that of landscape conditions and the maker's body. The wearing of the ring speaks to Kyvely's experience of wearing their breastplate, as a talismanic item that brings the vision of production back to life (Figure 20).

The makers interviewed operate at a small scale and this is reflected in the site of production, such as Antony, Kyvely and Laurence who either share a studio with other queer makers or produce in their own home. The sites of manufacture, due to the small and intimate scale of production, are personal and/or private spaces, and the blurring of the public and private can allow the jewellery to be interpreted as a product of queer worldmaking. In Berlant and Warner's concept of the Queer Counterpublic, they argue there is no distinction between the outside and the home and that this is reflected in queer forms of intimacy where sex is not regarded as a purely private act (1998). Conor's recounting of an order for a custom-made silver cock ring demonstrates the blurring of private and public that the queer maker is able to experience:

"I've made a few cock rings for people so that's intimate I'd say, because it's private [...] there's a level of comfortability when they come to talk to me about something like that...I've had to send my dick pics to guys so that they can understand how it fits. Part of the customer service is sending pics of my cock! It was funny that he was like 'can I see it from the left, from below, can you lift it up'." (Conor)

The object in question, illustrated in Figure 21, hints to and carries what is proximate to the maker as a bodily site of production where sex is not merely relegated to private and domestic spheres. Ahmed argues that the object, in general terms, demonstrates what is proximate to the subject (2006, p.150) and considering the maker as subject can explain how a jewellery item carries a figment of the queer maker's blurred space of production; the jewellery item is an archive of queer sites of production with the maker as archivist.



Figure 21: Conor's cock ring. Copyright: Conor Joseph, 2022.

My exploration of the blurring of public and private space is materialised as a jewellery object, 'Tactile intimacies' (Figures 25-27), which attempts to gesture non-familial forms of intimacy. The piece is sand cast in aluminium, with a smooth pebble-shaped outer surface that contrasts the inlaid organic textures of my housemates Tsari and Michalis' knee and thigh respectively. The piece exists as inanimate sculptural object when not worn (Figure 27) but becomes a jewellery object when the wearers enact a gestural position that is queerly intimate (Figure 26), whereby sexual relations are not necessitated. To generate the skin texture specific to the intended wearers, the knee and thigh were cast with Modroc, a process that required moments of intimacy between me as maker and the wearers (Figure 25). The wearers' legs had to be exposed for the maker to lubricate them and apply layers of modroc bandage cast, leaving it to dry and then carefully removing it to minimise pain and hair removal. 'Tactile intimacies' materialises and immortalises queer forms of intimacy through gesture between Michalis, Tsari and me as maker and by extension establishes the maker as archivist. Bentur (2020) advocates for the designing of gestures as outcomes in jewellery and the blurring of public and private spaces allows for a gestural embodiment of queer sites of production in jewellery objects, as attempted in 'Tactile intimacies. The explicit nature the maker's blurring of public and private spaces is explicitly communicated in the case of Conor's cock ring, in terms of physicality and meaning. Where production does not allow for a direct and intimate dialogue between maker and wearer, this questions the degree to which jewellery can remain an archive of

queer space at a larger scale. In any case, the individual experiences of the maker and wearer with the object are highly unique and subjective. Conor's account serves as an anecdote from which the theoretical basis of the queer archive can be sited yet not extrapolated to understand the possible extent of queer experiences of archival objects. The idiosyncratic conditions of Conor's account and of my experience in producing 'Tactile intimacies' exemplifies how jewellery as a queer archive of sites of production is reliant on the intimate and personal relationship between the maker and wearer.



Figures 22-24 anticlockwise starting top left. Figure 22: A stick is implanted into the ground. Figure 23: Molten pewter is poured. Figure 24: The ring's outer and inner textures are formed by that of the ground and the stick respectively. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

The blurring of spaces characteristic of queer sites of production enriches the meaning of wearing jewellery. The binary forms of intimacy found public and private spaces that Berlant and Warner argue are emblematic to heterosexual culture (1998) can be paralleled with that of the sacred inner identity and the outward body, forms that have also been historically reflected in ancient Greece and in the Bible. This historical binary distinction has resulted in a pejorative view of adornment as a gratuitous materialisation of the outward appearance and its associated objects, such as jewellery (Holcomb, Benzel and Art, 2018). A bodily site of production that blurs the public and private can then also blur the binary of the inner identity and outward body so that the aesthetic quality of jewellery is not merely understood as superfluous. Indeed, Conor's cock ring is an object whose aesthetic expands beyond the tangible and visible characteristics of the item through to qualities of the body and of identity that are intimate and implicit. When considered with jewellery's reconciling, talismanic and transformative capabilities more broadly, the function of jewellery as adornment can be recognised as fundamental to the queer archive.



Figure 25: Modroc casting is an intimate process between the wearers, Michalis and Tsari, and the me as maker. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.



Figure 26: The jewellery object encourages a bodily gesture that expresses queer forms of intimacy. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

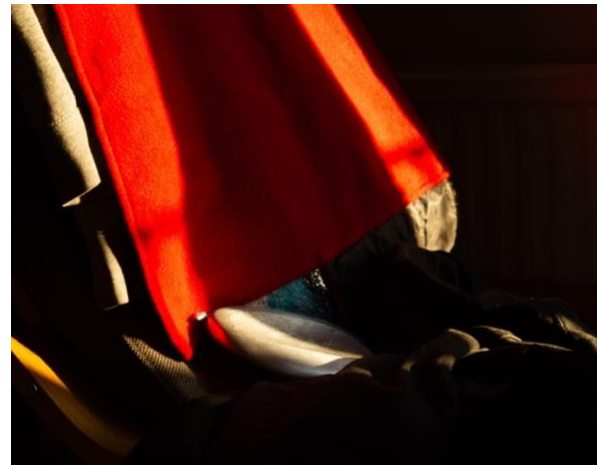


Figure 27: When not worn, the jewellery object exists as a sculptural object. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

CONCLUSION



Figure 28: Lemon's rings. Copyright: Xan Xacobo Goetzee-Barral, 2023.

The memory-recalling, worldbuilding, transformation and production of jewellery have been examined to understand how the jewellery object can be read as part of the archive of queer space. Interviews have been interrogated alongside theoretical concepts of queer space to promote an underdeveloped area of research that has potential for application at multiple scales. The act of making jewellery has allowed these notions to be explored in practice and communicated with a sense of texture. Therefore, the intimate and tactile nature of the research has been demonstrated as a valuable approach that should be employed to broaden our understanding of the queer archive.

As researcher, maker and wearer, the experience of interviewing and making has offered me a sense of intimacy with the subject matter that speaks to Brouwer's description of the queer archive as 'the forces of affect' (2014). A similar sentiment is expressed by Lemon at the end of our interview:

"I used to think jewellery can be anything I wear. I want jewellery to be part of my daily life, in any space I go."

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‘Stones of the Grassland’: Incorporate Inner Mongolian Cultural Heritage in Jewellery

Authors: *Zihan Zhou, Roberta Bernabei*



ABSTRACT

This paper is part of the first author’s PhD project ‘*Wearable Memories: Contemporary Jewellery Practice Based on the Study of Nomadic Culture in the North China*’. It is an investigation inspired by animal motifs of prehistoric rock art in Inner Mongolia, China.

Today, the nomadic lifestyle and traditions of Inner Mongolia are disappearing; however, their art and culture are unique and inspiring. While numerous studies exist on the cultural heritage of Inner Mongolia and its influence on contemporary art, it is scarcely evident in the field of contemporary jewellery. Based on the identification of a ‘core aesthetic’ of Inner Mongolian nomadic culture visible in the Yinshan Rock Art, this paper introduces practice-based research which investigates animal motifs from Inner Mongolian rock art and recuperates and revivifies them through contemporary jewellery practice.

This research aims to commemorate, recall and preserve the memories of Inner Mongolian nomadic culture by infusing its aesthetics into contemporary jewellery. The principal research question proposed for this project is: How can contemporary jewellery practice incorporate the traditional aesthetic values of Inner Mongolia?

The methodology employed in this practice-based research builds on the historical and theoretical study of Yinshan Rock Art and involves both ethnographic and auto-ethnographic methods.

This paper starts with a short overview of the contemporary jewellery movement highlighting the Chinese context, followed by the historical review of animal forms in Yinshan Rock Art as a key inspiration and research process for a body of contemporary jewellery. The creative process is elucidated with visual aids and the presentation of the final pieces.

Keywords: *contemporary jewellery, culture heritage, Inner Mongolian art, Yinshan Rock Art, practice-based research.*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary jewellery, which is also called ‘the new jewelry’ (Dormer, Turner, 1985), ‘contemporary studio jewellery’ (Game, Goring, 1998), or ‘contemporary art jewellery’ (Besten den, 2011) is an artistic movement originated in 1960s in Europe. By the late 1960s and during the early 1970s, avant-garde jewellers such as Gijs Bakker, Otto Kunzli, Robert Smit, Caroline Broadhead and Susanna Heron, had begun experimenting with non-precious materials and concepts in jewellery practice (Cunningham, 2008, p.12).

The 1970s sees a radical period of changes in contemporary jewellery in Europe and America, too. In the United States, a vibrant studio craft movement emerged in the years following the Second World War, which has had a profound impact on many fields, including contemporary jewellery (Cunningham, 2008, p.10; Skinner, 2013, p.187). In 1973, Ralph Turner stated in his introduction to the exhibition ‘*Aspects of Jewellery*’ at the Aberdeen Art Gallery: ‘This exhibition has been mounted in an effort to draw attention to the recent developments in contemporary jewellery’ (Turner 1973, p.1). This statement has a double meaning. Firstly, it positioned the term *contemporary jewellery* in its artistic context as an ism, opposite to the use of contemporary jewellery to indicate jewellery produced ‘today’. Secondly, it suggests that this artistic movement is experiencing new advancements confirming that *contemporary jewellery* is not a phenomenon from the 1970s but earlier.

This interest gained momentum and reached its peak with the seminal exhibition *Jewellery Redefined* at the British Craft Centre, 1982 (Cunningham, 2008, p.12). This cutting-edge exhibition announced that ‘A jewellery revolution has taken place in the last decade, and all the signs suggest that it is an international movement’ (Hughes 1982, p.7). In 1985, Dormer and Turner defined ‘the new jewelry’ as international, diverse and not restricted to a certain style (Besten den, 2011, p.8). In *Jewellery Moves* (1998), Game and Goring defined contemporary studio jewellery as ‘[...] jewellery produced by individuals, working in their own studios, who deliberately control every aspect of producing a piece from original idea to finished work’ (Game, Goring, 1998, p.5). The latter has fortunately been elaborated by more scholars at a later date. Nevertheless, the power of this new phenomenon influenced the field of jewellery in a few countries around the world, including China.

Contemporary jewellery in China began to rise at the end of 20th century. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the government mandated the establishment of jewellery design programmes within academic institutes and universities. Throughout the 1990s, a few academic programmes, led by artists like Sun Jiaying and Tang Xuxiang, laid the groundwork for China's contribution to contemporary jewellery. (Cao, 2020, pp.23-32). From 2000 to 2007, ‘new structures emerged for jewelry design programs’ (Cao, 2020, p.15). A group of artists and researchers, including Teng Fei, Guo Xin and Zhao Yi started to introduce contemporary jewellery practices from Europe and America and establish contemporary jewellery programmes and majors in China (Cao, 2020, pp.35-

51). The period following the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games saw increased international exchanges, which further propelled the development of Chinese contemporary jewellery and facilitated the integration of Chinese cultural elements with contemporary ideas (Cao, 2020, p.53). From 2013, international exhibitions hosted in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou have heightened public awareness of Chinese contemporary jewellery (Cao, 2020, p.15). The exhibition ‘*The Other Mountain*’ curated by Norman Cherry and Wang Kezhen toured China and the UK from 2016 to 2017, showcased works by a group of Chinese artists who have studied overseas. Some of the young artists clearly recognised the value of their cultural heritage and produced new interpretations through contemporary jewellery. From the group exhibitions ‘*Chinese Mythology*’ (2020), ‘*Intimate Relationship*’ (2021) curated by Felicia Li (Li Yingzhen) and the solo exhibitions of artists such as Wu Mian, Zhao Yi, and Wei Zixin in The Closer Gallery (Beijing). It is clear that with the expansion of contemporary jewellery practices, various voices have emerged, and young artists have begun to shape their own narratives. Within a contemporary context, cultural heritage is gaining more attention than ever in the field of jewellery. This was influenced by pioneers like Ramona Solberg, who initiated ‘the use of ethnic and found objects in order to reintroduce personal expression in the widest sense of the word’ (Kangas, 1995). Similarly, Ron Ho created his jewellery with found objects to express the cultural diversity within his Chinese American heritage. In some Chinese educational institutions, with the new curricula combined with the desire to explore contemporary jewellery with a ‘Chinese style’, many

Chinese artists ‘engaged in learning the culture and craft from different minorities in southwestern and northwestern China’, and since 2000 a number of works embodying traditional aesthetics were produced by some artists (Cao, 2020, p.15). Despite this new development, contemporary jewellery inspired by Inner Mongolian culture remains relatively understudied.

This paper is written from the dual perspective of both maker and researcher. The first author’s artistic journey began in 2013 at China University of Geoscience (Beijing). There she encountered the concept of contemporary jewellery, which sparked a deeper research interest that eventually led her to the School of Jewellery at BCU (Birmingham City University), UK. Through the exploration of contemporary jewellery practice, she continuously ponders how to develop a personal narrative language via the means of jewellery. Through the lens of a contemporary jeweller and researcher, she examined the culture and aesthetic of her native Inner Mongolia as the starting point for her PhD research. The researcher’s practice-based project includes both the creation of contemporary jewellery and theoretical investigation. It offers a contemporary interpretation of Inner Mongolian nomadic culture, as well as expanding the field of contemporary jewellery featuring Inner Mongolian cultural characteristics.

This paper provides a brief historical review of the archaeological discoveries of Yinshan Rock Art, with a particular focus on the narrative behind the animal petroglyphs, their messages and aesthetic. Certain animal images were selected for their aesthetic interest and their representativeness of the Inner Mongolia nomadic art style, and they became the inspiration and

visual reference for a new creative body of work - *'Stones of the Grassland'* (Figure 1), a series of stone-shaped brooches incorporating elements from Yinshan Rock Art. This body of work aims to act as a wearable conversation piece, to commemorate and trigger memories associated with Inner Mongolian nomadic culture in Yinshan Rock Art.



Figure 1: Zihan Zhou, *'Stones of the Grassland'*, 2023
Brooches. Silver, stainless-steel wire. Photo by Zihan Zhou.

HISTORICAL REVIEW: A STUDY OF ANIMAL SHAPES IN YINSHAN ROCK ART

Inner Mongolia, officially known as the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, is located in the North of China. On the Inner Mongolian Plateau, Donghu, Xiongnu¹, Rouran, Xianbei, Uighur, Khitan, Mongol and many other northern groups lived and thrived, creating their unique grassland culture (Hubei Provincial Museum, 2013, p.8). Their economic model at first was both hunting and nomadism, and gradually changed to nomad husbandry, contributing to the history of Chinese civilisation alongside the Zhongyuan (Central Plains) culture (Wuritaoketaohu, 2006, p.1).

The vast grasslands provided a stage for the rise and development of the northern nomadic cultures, which left behind a rich and distinctive material heritage that holds significance in human history (Hubei Provincial Museum, 2013, p.5), such as the Xiongnu Eagle Crown, Ordos-style bronze wares, the golden ornaments of the Xianbei people, and artifacts and murals in the tombs of the Liao Dynasty (AD 907-1125). To uncover the 'aesthetic essence' of Inner Mongolian culture, however, the focus has been on its primordial artistic expression: rock art, specifically Yinshan Rock Art. This ancient art form, originating from the land itself, offers insight into the instinctive artistic impulses of the ancient nomads through their



Figure 1: Map of the Yinshan Rock Art Distribution
Map made by Zihan Zhou, based on the view of Google Earth, April 2024.

Yinshan Mountains[阴山] (also called Yin Mountains, Yin Shan, or Yinshan) are located in the central part of Inner Mongolia, China (Figure 2). Since ancient times, the grasslands around the Yinshan Mountains have been where the northern people lived, cultivated, and grazed. Here, other ethnic groups and tribes migrated and came into contact with one another. Many nomadic groups used to live there, and the subjects of hunting, farming, herding and worship found in Yinshan Rock Art provide evidence of their existence. Yinshan Rock Art has a significant cultural and artistic value, because it embodies the history and social life of the prehistoric nomadic people in Inner Mongolia. It is known as a "Thousand Mile Gallery" (Ding, 2023).

¹ Xiongnu, also called Hsiung-nu.

- The Archaeological Discoveries of Yinshan Rock Art



Figure 3: Yinshan Rock Art
Photo by Monandongxie [漠南东邪].

Rock Art in China has been commented upon for more than 1,500 years in China (Tacon, 2018, p.178). The earliest record of Yinshan Rock Art (Figure 3) can be traced back in *Shui Jing Zhu* [水经注] by Li Daoyuan (Chen, 2007, p.75). The modern investigation of Yinshan Rock Art began in the 1920s. In 1927, the Sino-Swedish Expedition, a bilateral Chinese-Swedish expedition (1927-1935), found some petroglyphs in Dabagou [大坝沟], Urad Rear Banner (Maringer, 1950). The discovery of significant quantities of Chinese rock art occurred notably after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. From 1976 to 1980, Gai Shanlin spent five years investigating rock art in the Langshan Mountains. He found about 10,000 images and published 1296 illustrations of them in *Petroglyphs in the Yinshan Mountains* (Gai, 1986). From the 1980s to the 1990s,

Gai continued his exploration of Yinshan Rock Art and discovered 1421 images. These images were later published in *Petroglyphs in the Wulanchabu Grassland* (Gai, 1989) and *Cultural Interpretation of Inner Mongolia Rock Art* (Gai, Gai, 2002). The discovery of Yinshan Rock Art is ongoing. Until now, a large number of discoveries on the Yinshan Rock Art have been made offering a remarkable insight into nomadic life.

- A Study of Animal Motifs in Yinshan Rock Art from a Contemporary Jewellery Perspective

The subject matter of Yinshan Rock Art is mostly based upon the life and activities of the nomadic people in the Yinshan area. Animal petroglyphs comprise over 90% of the total (Gai, Gai, 2002, p.335). In Chapter 14 of Gai & Gai's *Cultural Interpretation of Inner Mongolia Rock Art*, typical styles and paradigms of Yinshan Rock Art are analysed. Among them, petroglyphs from 'Scythia-Xiongnu style', 'Turkic style', to 'Tubo style' are considered to be the most outstanding works of Inner Mongolian rock art (Gai, Gai, 2002, pp. 437). Building on the interpretation of styles and paradigms of Yinshan Rock Art by Gai & Gai, the following images have been selected (see Table 1) and have inspired a new artistic body of work.

The choices are focused on images related to the 'five livestock [五畜]' of Inner Mongolia, which refer to the five key animals that are crucial to the local nomads: cattle, horses, goats, sheep, and camels. The first author's impression of Inner Mongolian nomadic culture is drawn from the vast ancient grassland, portraying a 'pastoral' scene, where humans and

creatures coexist harmoniously, sustaining the nomadic culture of the Inner Mongolian grassland into the future.

 a. Riding (part)	 b. Camel	 c. Argali
 d. Bharal (part)	 e. Ibex (part)	 f. Ox
 g. Ibex	 h. Argali	 i. Lamb (part)

Table 1: Animal images in Yinshan Rock Art

Drawing by Zihan Zhou. a, b, c, d,e,h,i are reproduced from Ge, S. *Petroglyphs in the Yinshan Mountains*, 1986; g is reproduced from Ge, S. *Petroglyphs in the Wulanchabu Grassland*, 1989

The primary style of Yinshan Rock Art is realistic, with some elements of exaggeration and abstraction. The animals in the images *Riding* (Table 1, a), *Camel* (Table 1, b), and *Argali* (Table 1, c) are examples of the realistic style. This representative form is characterised by a 'linear structure' (Ning, 1990, p.20). Compared to the pictographs found in European caves, which depict the authenticity of the animals with light and shade contrast, Yinshan Rock Art tends to reflect the shape, volume and quality of the objects through variations of

the lines. The four legs of the horse (Table 1, a) are finely carved to form a strong contrast with the body, depicting a scene of the horse leisurely walking about the grassland. Both the figure and the horse show the same upward motion. The legs of the camel (Table 1, b) are depicted in a different style from *Riding*, showing the stability of the standing camel through changes in the lines' angle and thickness.

In parallel with the realistic style, there are also many petroglyphs that emphasise symbolic forms (Gai, Gai, 2002, p.397). *Bharal* (Table 1, d) and *Ibex* (part) (Table 1, e) present simplified profiles with two of the legs hidden, indicating their species by emphasising the shape of the horns. The curled horns of the bharal and the long, extended horns of the ibex are vividly depicted with rhythmic lines. The image *Ox* (Table 1, f) shows the movement of a running ox, blending realism and abstraction. Compared with the realistic depiction of the legs in *Riding* and *Camel*, the four legs of the ox are presented symmetrically, creating a dynamic feeling and a decorative aesthetic. The tail of the ox is raised, the body is summarised with simple lines, and the horns are once again symmetrical. From the numerous images of bison found in Yinshan Rock Art, it can be inferred that there were once numerous bison thriving in the Yinshan area, which has now disappeared. There are many images showing people with or holding the cattle, documenting the lives of local nomads and their domesticated cattle in ancient times.

Since the Bronze Age, vivid beast images have gradually disappeared, giving way to more symbolic images (Gai, Gai, 2002, p.396). Obvious examples can be seen in the Wulanqab Rock Arts, such as *Ibex* (Table

1, g), which depicts the body of a goat with rigid lines forming nearly right angles. Similar patterns have been found around this region. The horns of *Argali* (Table 1, h) are highlighted to emphasise their most important features, while the body is highly generalised.

The researcher An Li argued that Grassland Rock Art is a form of recording social life with pictures before the emergence of nomadic words (An, 2013, p.69). By selecting these ancient animal images, the first author aims not to view them as symbols of contemporary nomadic life but to use them as a reference to interpret the historical memories of Inner Mongolian nomadic culture through a modern lens. She perceives these ancient animal images as narrative 'words', incorporating them into wearable objects to imbue the aesthetic values of Inner Mongolian nomadic culture into modern life.

DISCUSSION OF THE EXPLORATIVE MAKING PROCESS

Building upon the historical review of the animal motifs in Yinshan Rock Art, this sub-section delves into the jewellery making exploration inspired by them. Five aspects of jewellery as an art form were considered during the jewellery making process: materials, techniques, visual languages, wearability, and sensory experiences. Through three preliminary stages of experimentation, early concepts were tested and refined. This iterative process culminated in the final body of work (Figure 1) and a public response in two exhibitions, leading to a reflective analysis guided by the above-mentioned five aspects of jewellery.

- Early Investigative Experiment I: *Lamb Seal Ring*

The initial experiments were inspired by the rock art and the material rock. Balin stone, a unique type of stone sourced from Bairin Right Banner, Chifeng, Inner Mongolia, was selected due to its connection and similarity to the Yinshan Rock in terms of material. It is a variety of pyrophyllite traditionally used in Chinese seal engraving. Integrating elements of seal engraving with the Balin stone and the wearability of jewellery, the initial idea revolved around crafting a seal ring. At the time, an image of a lamb within a circle (Table 1, i) caught the maker's attention as it evokes the connection between the image and nomadic life. The appearance of the lamb in Yinshan Rock Art indicates that people may have begun to domesticate sheep at that time, and the circle outside may symbolise a sheepfold. This depiction of a circled lamb intrigued the maker to

extract this motif and incorporate it into the design of the '*Lamb Seal Ring*' (Figure 4).



Figure 2: Zihan Zhou, '*Lamb Seal Ring*', 2023. Photo by Zihan Zhou.

Judging from the results of the work, the shape of the *Lamb Seal Ring* has a strong visual connection with European tradition as historically, this type of jewellery is rarely found in Inner Mongolia. The shape of the lamb could also easily be confused with the Christian symbology: as a result, the visual context of the work could be misunderstood. Therefore, the idea of the seal ring was rejected.

- Early Investigative Experiment II: *Mini Frame Brooch with Yinshan Rock Art Animal Motif*



Figure 3: Zihan Zhou, 'Mini Frame Brooch with Yinshan Rock Art Animal Motif', 2023. Photo by Zihan Zhou.

The work of Experiment II was inspired by the technique of rubbing, which used in the archaeological research of Yinshan Rock Art to copy petroglyphs. The elements of paper and ink are extracted from the visual language of rubbing and culminated in this mini frame brooch (Figure 5). The texture of the rock is another element which was incorporated into this piece through the maker's handmade paper, which includes a mix of recycled waste material from the studio. This created a rock-like texture, giving the piece a naturally crafted appearance, and imbuing it with an atmosphere of primitive art. One of the motivations for using these materials is to enhance the sustainability of the work, though the viability of these choices needs to be verified by the experiment outcomes. A bharal image was printed in the middle, which is originally found in

² Oboo, also known as ovoo, or in Chinese, aobao [敖包 wearability 包].

Jigonghailesitai [几公海勒斯泰], Urad Middle Banner (Gai, 1986, p.12). The brooch serves as a small-scale painting that could be viewed as a wearable memento of this petroglyph. The colour combination is designed to echo this rubbing element as well.

- Early Investigative Experiment III: *Paper Stone Brooch with Yinshan Rock Art Animal Motif*



Figure 4: Zihan Zhou, 'Paper Stone Brooch with Yinshan Rock Art Animal Motif', 2023. Photo by Zihan Zhou.

The design for the work of Experiment III was developed based on previous experiments by enlarging the visual element of the rock, which is now shaped like a stone that could be held in one hand (Figure 6). The mini frame form was transferred to a 3D stone shape embedding the association of the material of rock art and the elements of 'oboo'² (Figure 14). Stones, in Inner Mongolia, have special symbolic meanings. They

have a specific function in the vast grassland: to mark locations. The mark is called *oboo*, often simply made from a mound of stones, used as landmark. Oboo are also seen as stone cairns, which gives these stones a monumental and ritual meaning.



Figure 7: Oboo, in Siziwang Banner, Inner Mongolia. Photo by Zihan Zhou.

From the perspective of the maker, the stones hold a personal attachment: they connect with the memories of her childhood: of travelling along the grassland with her family as they used to collect pebbles from attractive shapes and bringing them home as mementoes. Collecting stones became a kind of 'treasure hunt', carrying the memories of childhood, and the pebbles became a symbol of the memory of home.

- Final Design and Making

During the three preliminary making experiments, the material was changed from stone to hand-made paper and recycled materials. Reconsidering the project's

theme of 'recuperating Inner Mongolian cultural heritage in jewellery', the most vital quality the maker was looking for a material with a strong sense of permanency and value. Gold, silver, and stone would be better choices.

For a stone-shape brooch with its pin hidden on the back, the visual character of the silver provides a clue for the audience to identify the work as a piece of jewellery. From a cultural perspective, unlike the jade that was worshipped in the Central Plains culture, nomadic people from the northern grassland have a greater affinity for metal. Silver, among these metals, is the most used material in Inner Mongolian jewellery (Beringen, Star, 2006, p.198). Technically, silver's hardness, combined with its malleability allows for the creation of 3D shapes mimicking stones and relief patterns using a thin sheet of metal. Therefore, silver was chosen as the material for the final work.

Through the making experiments, the shape of stones and animal motifs from the Yinshan Rock Art was confirmed as the two main visual elements of the final design. The final work was designed to be a series of brooches in the shapes of various stones, with engraved animal motifs on their surface (Figure 8). The 'stones' are hollow as in the Experiment III. Drawing from the concept of the 'five livestock' of Inner Mongolia, five pre-historic petroglyphs were selected and made into five brooches, to tell the story of Inner Mongolian nomadic life through a selection of some images of animals.

The design of each brooch's shape occurred after the selection of the animal images. Chosen from the

sketches, the designs of the brooches began to take shape, and was finalised with careful consideration of both balance and dynamics between the animals and the shape of the 'pebbles' (see Figure 8).

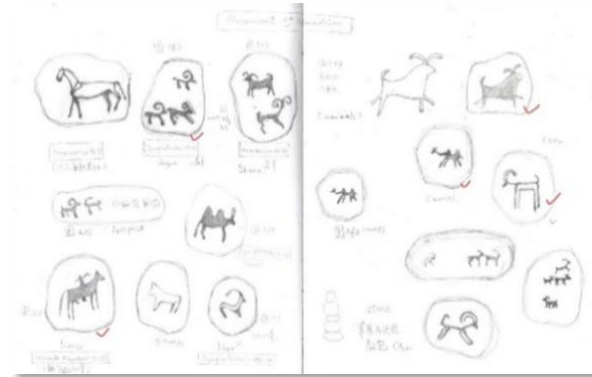


Figure 8: Sketches for 'Stones of the Grassland', 2023. Drawing by Zihan Zhou.

The image of Argali (Figure 8) was chosen to show a scene of the action of herding. The petroglyph was found in Yindeertu [音德尔图], Jigonghailesitai (Table 1, h). Three is the smallest number to represent a flock. The three sheep in this image are all facing to the right and seem poised to move, illustrating a typical pastoral herding scene for the Inner Mongolian nomads. The other four pieces all feature images of single animal (Figure 8). From the beginning of the creation, the maker had been considering the aesthetic balance of jewellery as both a singular object and an ornament for the body. Regarding the relationship between each brooch and the wearer, the primary consideration was whether it visually integrates coherently with the

wearer's body rather than its independent aesthetic properties as a small piece of art. Consequently, the chosen shapes of brooches have been conceived to connect the sinuous organic shape of the human body with the smooth and soft round forms of the pebbles. The measurement of the images on the brooches is also determined by a potential ideal relationship between the jewellery and the wearer. The idea behind it is to display a symbolic pattern visible from a social distance.

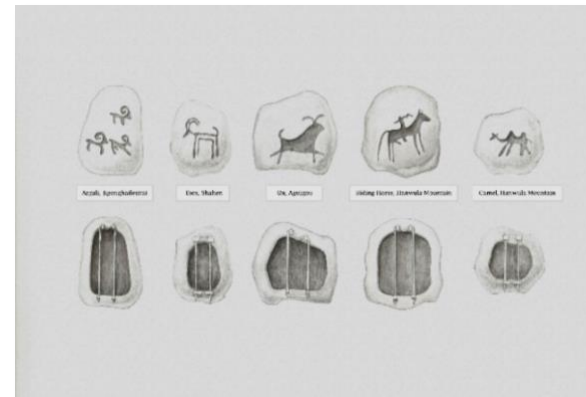


Figure 9: Sketches for 'Stones of the Grassland', 2023. Drawing by Zihan Zhou.

Final pieces



Figure 10: Zihan Zhou, Stones of the Grassland: Argali, Yindeertu, 2023. Photo by Zihan Zhou.



Figure 11: Zihan Zhou, Stones of the Grassland: Ox, Aguigou, 2023. Photo by Zihan Zhou.



Figure 12: Zihan Zhou, Stones of the Grassland: Riding horse, Hanwula Mountain, 2023. Photo by Zihan Zhou.



Figure 13: Zihan Zhou, Stones of the Grassland: Riding horse, Hanwula Mountain, 2023. Photo by Yajie Hu.

In October 2023, three pieces from *'Stones of the Grassland'* collection (initially titled *'Monument of Nomadism'*) were exhibited in the group exhibition *'Extreme Making: Expansive Methods and Critical Themes in Design Doctoral Research and Education'* at the European Academy of Design Conference 2023, Glasgow Hub, in Glasgow. Audiences' comments were gathered through conversations with the curator, other researchers and artists at the event. The was a general interest in discovering the understudied Yinshan Rock Art archaeological site and observing the creation of a body work as a creative response to this important cultural heritage place. The group exhibition was curated by the Exhibitions Director of Glasgow School of Art Jenny Brownrigg, whose choice of how to display the work reflects an outside perspective. The three pieces were displayed in Across Reid Corridor Gallery, Window on Heritage & Reid Gallery in Glasgow School of Art (Figure 13), which created a unique atmosphere with the glass show box and transparent blocks. The atmosphere of the room, filled with heritage collections, provided a visual context to the work with elements of history and archaeology.



Figure 14: Zihan Zhou, *'Stones of the Grassland'*, in *'Extreme Making: Expansive Methods and Critical Themes in Design Doctoral Research and Education'* exhibition, EAD 2023, Glasgow, 2023. Photo by Zihan Zhou.



Figure 15: Zihan Zhou, *'Stones of the Grassland'*, 2023, in *'Is Jewellery Making Research?'* group exhibition. Photo by Zihan Zhou.

From January 12th to 24th 2024, three pieces from ‘*Stones of the Grassland*’ body of work were exhibited at the group exhibition ‘*Is Jewellery-Making Research?*’ held in Martin Hall Exhibition Space, Loughborough University, in Loughborough (Figure 14). The exhibition was curated by the second author, revolving around the concept of ‘[...] making as research or, more specifically, making jewellery to make sense of things’ (Bernabei, 2024). During the exhibition, many attendees stopped to engage with these pieces and converse with the maker. The pieces in this exhibition were designed to be touched, allowing the audience to handle and wear the jewellery. Visitors were attracted to their material and texture, their stone shape, the tactile experience, and the animal motifs. Many conversations were sparked by the pieces including the rock art, Inner Mongolian culture, contemporary jewellery and research through jewellery making. An international student from Mongolia immediately recognised and appreciated the cultural information embedded in the pieces. During these exhibitions, the work successfully achieved its aim as a collection of wearable conversation pieces. These conversations created a connection between the audience and the story of Inner Mongolian cultural heritage site of Yinshan Rock Art.

- **Reflective Analysis of the Making Process (five themes)**

- **Materials**

In response to this study's theme, the focus of the materials is their symbolic meaning ‘recuperating Inner Mongolian cultural heritage’. Therefore, it became evident that paper and ink, as revealed by the result of

the preliminary making experiments, were not powerful enough for this purpose. The maker’s attention was then redirected towards materials with tough and durable qualities, such as metals or stones, which had a conceptual and visual strong connection with Inner Mongolian culture. For final design, silver was chosen as the main material because of its visual and technical character, and its symbolic meaning linked to the Inner Mongolian culture.

- **Techniques**

The techniques employed in ‘Experiment I’ include carving and engraving. The engraving process for the lamb motif recalls the original technique of the Yinshan Rock Art inspiration, however, there is a visual paradox shown in the result: the image printed by the seal ring will be mirrored, while the image from the rock art is to be viewed directly. For this research project, the overall investigation of various potential techniques and materials was vast. For example, the techniques employed in ‘Experiment II and III’, although rejected for the final work, included paper making and wood engraving.

- **Visual languages**

During these experiments, the first author realised the connection between the visual elements of the pieces and the imagery of stones, which are inspired by the original material of the Yinshan Rock Art and ‘oboo’. The shape of the pebbles was transformed into hand-size pieces and made wearable as brooches.

In the final design, the maker used a ‘pebble-shaped’ outline to give each animal image a ‘stage’ with blurred edges and a bulging shape, with the individual animals

and animal scenes 'suspended' on the surface. Attached to the wearer's clothes, the piece provides a 'portrait' sense of the five animals, integrating the images of the petroglyphs naturally with the shape of the 'pebble' and the wearer's body.

○ ***Wearability***

The work of 'Experiment I' is designed to be comfortably wearable like a ring to instigate a tactile and stronger sensorial connection with the wearer's body. Furthermore, rings are usually connected to symbols of identity. A ring could be more personal than a brooch as it typically touches the wearer's body closely and is easily seen by the wearer, rather than by other people. The choice of the design in 'Experiment I' was initially made based on those considerations but was ultimately rejected due to the strong association of the seal ring with Western culture, which could be misleading to the context of the piece.

Compared with the more intimate connection between rings or necklaces and the wearer, brooches tend to have a more 'external display' function. The brooch can be seen as a medium that connects the wearer and the viewer like a badge with a frontal direct message to the viewer who is in front of the wearer. The mini frame brooch in 'Experiment II' uses the visual language of the frame to highlight this function. To some extent, it is like a piece of art (like a framed canvas) that is hung on the wearer's body, which creates a certain separation between the piece and the wearer. Therefore, the element of the frame was removed in the final design.

This final body of work was conceived to be composed by several pebble brooches. As the pin on the back is

not visible from the front when the brooch is displayed on a surface, these small pebbles instigate the makers or curators to display them purely as a group of mini sculptures. To elucidate further, were these pieces made into rings, showcasing them together would draw immediate attention to the attribute of the rings rather than accentuating the individuality of the pebbles. This emphasis on presenting the visual identity of a pebble over the categorisation as jewellery aimed to create a collective effect resembling pebbles rather than highlighting their classification as brooches. This decision aligns with the fact that, when observed from the front, the pin—essential for wearability—is concealed on the back of a brooch, keeping the object's functionality hidden. Consequently, the front-facing impression leans towards a minimalist aesthetic, resembling a piece of sculpture or a small portion of petroglyph found in the Yinshan Rock Art.

From the maker's personal view, brooches are not a common choice as other typology of jewellery; they were often hidden in the jewellery box and waiting for some special occasion. The non-daily character gives the brooches a sense of ritual and solemnity, which echoes the intention of the work to be a memento of Inner Mongolian culture.

In the process of jewellery research, a "paradox" of the maker is to think about jewellery in an exhibition or on the body. Jewellery as an artistic expression cannot release all its potential in an art space; conversely, part of the context of the exhibition will also disappear when the piece is worn outside of the gallery. But in another way, this "paradox" is a unique characteristic

of jewellery as an art form: the function of wearability will always be part of the concept.

- ***Sensory experiences***

The sensory experiences of the work were altered by the changing of the material. In 'Experiment I', the use of stone gives the piece a heavy, solid touch with a slightly colder temperature compared to the human body. When worn on the finger, the inner side of the ring warms up from body heat. The pieces in 'Experiments II and III' possess the tactile characteristics of paper. 'Experiment III' was designed to be much lighter than it appears, due to its symbolic requirement to be viewed as a heavy object while functioning as a brooch that cannot be too heavy to wear. Therefore, the brooch was designed to be hollow.

The hollow shape was retained while the brooches a heavy and substantial appearance and ensuring they could be worn comfortably. The pieces were carefully shaped and sized so that the audience and wearer could hold them in one hand, experiencing the texture and temperature of the 'pebbles'.

CONCLUSION

This paper narrates practice-based research of recuperating Inner Mongolian culture heritage in contemporary jewellery. Based on the historical review of animal motifs found in Yinshan Rock Art, the relationship between the culture heritage inspiration and their transformation in contemporary jewellery was explored. Through an iterative making process considering factors described in the 'five themes', and critical judgment based on the connection between the visual inspiration and the concept to be conveyed the first author created the work '*Stones of the Grassland*'.

For the final work, the maker used silver to mimic the shape and texture of stones, with engraved animal shapes adapted from Yinshan Rock Art. The 'pebble' shape of the brooches responds to the visual aesthetic of the ancient petroglyphs and the 'oboo' inspiration. The images 'carved' on the brooches depict the most important animals in Inner Mongolian nomadic life throughout history to the present: sheep, goat, horses, cattle and camels. By 'reproducing' these pre-historic images on wearable objects, these brooches, metaphorically became a bridge between contemporary jewellery, Inner Mongolian Rock Art, and the value and aesthetic systems of the Inner Mongolian nomadic heritage.

Nowadays, how to preserve, examine and describe human culture and history is an important research area. In this study, ancient art heritage characterised with local culture and aesthetic has been incorporated into a narrative. Animal images from Yinshan Rock Art

are referenced as the "words" in the jewellery pieces. With these "words" from ancient times, this series of brooches tells a story of the Inner Mongolian nomads from a contemporary perspective, allowing traditional culture to be appreciated and incorporated into modern life. This recuperation of traditional cultural heritage is embodied in contemporary jewellery practice. In this practice-based study, contemporary jewellery acts as a wearable communication object that connects creators, wearers and viewers, infusing traditional culture with dynamic vitality.

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Exhibition Review- Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels

Author: *Iona McCuaig*

ABSTRACT

The ubiquitous knife: a household object, essential tool, barely noticeable until it is involved in crime. What happens when you give a knife sequestered by police to an artist, jeweller, metalsmith or maker?

Sword into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels presents answers to this question through the works of : Dauvit Alexander / Boris Bally / Petra Bishai / Stephen Bottomley / Tim Carson / Norman Cherry / Jens Clausen / Rachael Colley / Eimear Conyard / Robert Coogan / Rosie Deegan / Jeff Durber / Ndidi Ekubia / Cristina Filipe / Daniel Freyne / Anna Gordon / Herman Hermesen / Jorge Manilla / Patrick McMillan / Nanna Melland / Eliana Negroni / Rohan Nicol / Ted Noten / C  il  n O'Dubhghaill / Komelia Okim / Peter Parkinson / Annelisse Pfeifer / Jo Pond / Alex Pole / Elizabeth Shaw / Rebecca Skeels / Risto Tali / Taavi Teevet / Fred Truus.

This exhibition review presents a body of socially engaged artwork which addresses the issues of knife crime through transforming knives into symbolic artefacts. It outlines the fundamentals of the project co-curated by joint lead artists Dauvit Alexander and Norman Cherry and discusses the relationship between contemporary art practice and social political issues. It analyses the work through the lens of transformation, firstly within the context of art activism and secondly through the alchemy of the maker's process. It argues that the exhibition speaks to a wide range of audiences about their part in positive social transformation.



Fig.1: Cover image for Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels exhibition catalogue featuring the work of Boris Bailey.

Keywords: art, activism, knife-crime, transformation, socially engaged.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Walking through the doors of Birmingham City University, School of Jewellery this summer you will be confronted by a glistening four-inch stiletto knife incorporated into the work of Ted Norton. Hanging above this on a printed panel is an alarming police statistic stating that, offences involving possession of a blade or point:

Were 9% higher in the year ending June 2022 (25,287) than the year ending March 2020 (23,242). This was a 13% increase compared with the year ending June 2021 (22,340). (Office for National Statistics, 2022)

It is an arresting welcome to the foyer of a university, but that is exactly the intention of this exhibition:

*Fig. 2:
Birmingham,
School of
Jewellery
Vittoria Street
Gallery, July*



to use art activism to raise awareness of knife crime and its effects on communities.

Such a complex and challenging theme required a planned and considered approach by the project leads Dauvit Alexander and Norman Cherry and this is evidenced in the extensive catalogue produced to support the exhibition. While it took five challenging years to bring this exhibition to fruition, it is clear an uncompromising approach has been taken to make this a thought provoking, educational, and inclusive show. The starting point for this project was to develop a UK-based jewellery and objects exhibition which addressed knife violence by refashioning blades seized by police.



*Fig. 3: Ted Norton,
even a Stiletto Enjoys
Decoration*

As it transpired, obtaining knives from police authorities was far easier than acquiring funding for the project, meaning that all the work in the exhibition has been made by artists for no fee. Unpaid artist's work is, of course, nothing to be promoted but the participation of over thirty artists confirms that 'we are [still] in the crest of a global wave of artists and creative workers increasingly engaged in the social and political space' (Serafini, Holtaway, Cossu, 2017). Alexander and Cherry have utilised their extensive networks to bring together a diverse cohort of artists and there has been a deliberate effort to showcase artists from a variety of nationalities and at varying career points. This results in refreshing visual contrasts such as the William Morris inspired saw piercing of emerging British maker

Rosie Deegan and a triptych of ironic conceptual work by renowned Dutch maker, Herman Hermesen. The thought of the police handing over condemned knives to artists does raise alarm, but it is important to note the curators had to adhere to safety protocols such as the blunting of knife blades and removal of knife handles before issuing to the makers. For Alexander and Cherry, it was important to showcase the exhibition across the UK, thus illustrating that knife violence is a country wide issue and not restricted to a single location. Before arriving at its Birmingham venue, the show was first opened at Make Southwest in Newton Abbot. After Birmingham it will progress to 20-21 Visual Art Centre in Scunthorpe, Redcar Palace and finally Glasgow School of Art.

Fig. 4: Rosie Deegan, exquisitely handcrafted, but practically



Additionally, for the curators it was vital that the exhibition becomes a catalyst for positive social engagement. So, as the show moves to each venue, a relevant socially engaged intervention has been developed for members of the local community. For example, in Birmingham a collaborative partnership called 'Knives Out' was established to work with young people from a disadvantaged area in the city. It involved the delivery of a seven-week program which brought together specialist staff from CIC (Community Integrated Care), Round Midnight Theatre, Street Doctors, TAS Mentoring and Birmingham City University's School of Jewellery. The aim was to engage young people to think critically about 'road life', gang membership and, specifically, knife-crime. For Alexander and Cherry, it was vital that the workshops had a participant-led craftivist ideology which '[gave] young people the tools and opportunities to think deeply about their community and encourage them to make creative decisions and informed choices' (Swords into Ploughshares, 2022). The project is a fantastic example of an intersection built between political debate, social challenges, creativity and radical education. It deserves more acknowledgement in the exhibition itself but perhaps its absence speaks volumes about the challenges involved in socially engaged practice and reflects how the 'budget for arts and culture is being diminished' (Serafini, Holtaway, Cossu, 2017). The collective efforts of the artists, curators and venues should be commended for making this project the success it is. As the exhibition travels throughout the UK it can be seen as a protest, not the type that tells us what we should and shouldn't be doing but rather shows us that if we have more projects like this then lives can be improved.



Fig. 5: Knives Out - A bin of knives reclaimed from the streets of Birmingham by the West Midlands Police. These knives became the raw material for the pilot social intervention around Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels.



Fig. 6: Knives Out - Participants from Broadway Academy, Aston watched a play about the impact of knife crime and were presented with one of the reclaimed knives, which has been made safe by blunting and removing the handle. They considered what they might make out of the knives which represented their commitment to keeping their communities safe.



Fig. 7: Knives Out - The participants chose to make pendants which they could wear either publicly or beneath clothing and which represent something they felt they could lose if they became involved in knife crime, a personal talisman of their commitments.

ART AS ACTIVISM



Fig. 8: Stephen Bottomley, Metal-morphosis 'Peace Piece'

Looking at the work presented in this exhibition it confirms the instrumentalization of art activism and in particular the transformations that are at play whether that is with artist or the audience. As Jacques Rancière suggests:

critical art is an art that aims to produce a new perception of the world, and therefore to create a commitment to transformation. (Rancière 2015)

The rise-up-in-arms – or in this case without arms - nature of art activism is perhaps what compelled these artists to make work for this show: each resulting work is a human response to a human problem but also

speaks more broadly about the current social political climate. The work of Stephen Bottomley directly references historical themes of protest and activism such as Bernie Boston's 1967 'Flower Power' photograph. The enamel flowers applied to a knife have echoes of the flowers placed into the rifle pictured in the iconic image, making us reflect on the current global political situation and that of half a century ago.

It is interesting to consider the work more specifically within the context of 'Craftivism' and, in particular, the definition coined by Betsy Greer who sees craftivism as:

A way at looking at life where voicing opinions through creativity makes your voice stronger, your compassion deeper and your quest for justice more infinite. (Greer, cited in Corbett, 2017)

Working in this way Alexander and Cherry gave their selected artists a challenge: they asked makers who may have not had direct lived experience of knife violence to consider how their creative practice could respond to it. The artists' statements reveal their experience of working within this context and gives a sense that making work for this show pushed them to work outside of their comfort zone. This confirms what it means to work with a craftivist mindset: it forces makers to take a stance, to be angry or annoyed or

frustrated and to be brave enough to let their work voice these emotions. Rachael Colley's work took inspiration from a shocking report claiming that victims of domestic abuse were given blunt knives by police to try to prevent their abuser stabbing them. The resulting blackened multi-bladed form appears far more menacing than the brightly coloured and playful implements she is known for. For Jeff Durber it was a sense of duty which motivated his work, as he references his career as a knife maker and as an educator. He de-constructs a knife using the sliced handle to form a string of beads and the blade as a pendant displaying a pen-nib. The resulting necklace asks us to consider the notion that 'the pen is mightier than the sword' when it comes to tackling knife crime.

Fig. 9: Rachael Colley, Re-made in Sheffield, Melon-Colley (Poortrait) series



Fig. 10: Jeff Durber, Mightier Than





Fig.11: Patrick McMillan, Frame of Reference

For Craftivist, Sarah Corbett, empathy forms a vital part of her manifesto as she states the importance of trying to see everyone's perspective (Corbett, 2017). Perhaps this notion is translated through a number of artists utilising mirrored qualities in their work and in particular through the work of Patrick McMillan. Frame of Reference is a lens which aims to put the viewer into the centre of a dangerous situation. The piece rightly has an optimum location in the show,

having its own small lit display case, which is cleverly curated at eye level, so that as you look into the piece you see a distorted image of yourself surrounded by a menacing selection of serrated blades. The piece is a visual translation of seeing from the perspective of a knife crime victim and through this work McMillan communicates the importance of building empathy as it 'creates an avenue for action, engagement and change' (Alexander & Cherry 2023).

The visual and performing arts have long been associated with activism as Seranifi, Holtaway and Cossu state:

...creativity can be assimilated to a kind of ‘colourful magic hat’ out of which activists can draw innovative tactics for successful protests. (2017)

This show reveals what happens when skilled makers use their creativity within the context of activism. The result is a drastic contrast between frightening government statistics and moments of arresting beauty. These moments are sprinkled throughout the show, in Jo Pond’s jewelled rivets, or Cólín O’Dubhghaill’s spectrum of colour, or the lunar like surface created by Alex Pool. The exhibition is evidence that the touch of skilled hands has the power to transform harmful, dangerous and mass-produced objects into something visually captivating. For artists, these transformed knives provide a vehicle for their voice and for audiences they provide a glimmer of hope much required when dealing with such a challenging subject in challenging times.



Fig.12: Jo Pond, *In the Balance*

ALCHEMY

Perhaps it can be argued that the transformation process that the knives have been through is reminiscent of the practice of alchemy: the metallic transmutation of base metals to gold alongside the production of elixirs (Klossowski de Rosa, 1997). It is interesting to consider this as a collection of alluring talismanic objects bestowed with their own transformative powers.

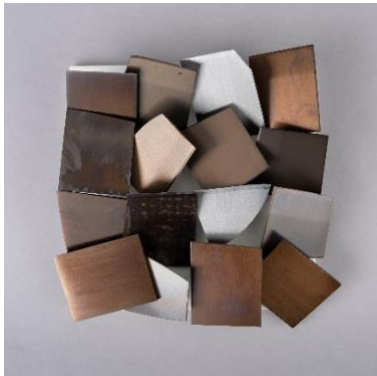


Fig. 13: Cólín O'Dubhghaill, Lann 6



Fig. 14: Alex Poole, Knife Plate

Just as alchemic processes remain shrouded in mystery, many of the artists in the show do not explicitly reveal the individual processes and techniques associated with their works, and for some the function, whether it be jewellery, object or tool, also remains unclear which adds to the intrigue of the curious collection. This prompts two questions; how do artists go about transforming knives and what are the outcomes of these transformations?

As each knife lands in the hands of its maker, its fate is at the mercy of the maker's toolkit. The toolkit itself might be the skills the maker has built up over time. Lignel talks about skill being 'part of the magic of craft; an affirmation of virtuosity and an appeal to myth' (Lignel, 2013). We see this reflected in the

Fig. 14: Eliana Negrone, Flower Power



exhibition through the work of makers who have achieved a high level of technical skill such as Eliana Negrone. Her work, entitled Flower Power, exemplifies years of learning from her master engraver father, whereby the aluminium encasement for a knife blade is stamped by a series of hand engraved punches from her family's workshop. The work exemplifies Lignel's term 'hypermaking' (Lignel 2013) and, through astute curation, is cleverly juxtaposed to the work of Annelisse Pfeifer who, in contrast, adopts an anti-skill approach to her knife's transformation. The knife and its dismembered handle are covered in non-resistant materials such as tape, glue and foil, encased, this time, onto a bed of wool. The use of skill in this exhibition ranges from the playful to the meticulous, and there is something here to inspire a broad audience of creatives.



Fig. 16: Annelisse Pfeifer, 8

For some works, the transformation is about taking a conventional, everyday object and imbuing it within the realms of the conceptual. This exemplifies Zilber's idea of 'the object in flux' by aiming 'to destabilise, engage, and activate the object in unconventional ways' (Zilber, 2015). Work such as Shape Shifter by Rohan Nicol gives a sense of the unnatural through the ease at which a knife becomes a pendant. Cherry's work has a similar sense of unsettling ambiguity as the viewer is led to question the functionality of Strillo, a whistle, a knife or a party horn? Knives which are transformed through conceptual practices challenge our preconceived ideas of the ubiquitous knife, provoking



Fig. 17: Rohan Nicol, Shape Shifter

thought in viewers and offering moments to contemplate these charged objects. The final lens through which to view this transformation is when the process becomes part of the product. This is best seen through the work of Alexander, his work *Berserking: Empty Vessel* is the by-product of a frenzied attack that he performs on a piece of silver using a knife. In the video recording the viewer is confronted by raw, authentic emotion: seeing fear, anger, frustration, and exhaustion played out. The silver remains relatively unscathed from the attack, and, for Alexander, this represents the futile nature of knife violence (Alexander & Cherry 2023).



Fig. 18: Norman Cherry, Strillo

Process is also explored through the work of Tim Carson, by producing a digital file allowing the iconic symbol of a solitaire diamond ring to be waterjet cut from any knife blade, giving his work a life beyond the confines of the exhibition. There is a feeling that works which consider how process can be utilised to engage audiences 'neutralises the distance between the object and viewer, allowing for the experience to be personal, ephemeral, associative and responsive much like conversation' (Owen, 2011). Looking at the works through the three lenses of skill, concept and process allows an insight into the alchemic process of transforming knives for the purpose of this exhibition.

Fig. 19: Dauvit Alexander, Berserking: Empty Vessel



In traditional alchemy, there was the requirement of an additional, essential ingredient called the philosopher's stone (Klossowski de Rosa 1997). Perhaps the philosopher's stone for these alchemists is that of narrative. Each artist has given their knife a different tale to tell, one of rehabilitation: from a life of violence to that of education. This idea is suggested by the famous words of Nelson Mandela when he states, 'education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world' (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2023). The work embodies this idea, enabling us to see how we are only one decision away from a totally different life.

Fig 20: Tim Carson, Engagement Rings – R.I.P.



CONCLUSION

This exhibition is a call to action. Speaking to a broad audience it questions individuals and organisation about what they can do in a challenging social political climate. To makers, it asks how they might translate their creative practice to work within the context of art activism. What stories are being told through their making and who are these stories speaking to? Making for makings sake is not enough, makers have a duty to respond to the here and now, to make work that makes a difference. They have the power to tackle difficult issues in a nuanced and considered way in contrast to what is experienced through media channels. This exhibition also speaks to parents, families, schools and community groups asking them to attend exhibitions like this; have difficult conversations and respond creatively. It speaks encouragingly to art venues asking them to show more work like this and to record its impact in order to provide the ammunition for more socially engaged exhibitions and community outreach programmes. It speaks pleadingly to funding bodies to support socially engaged projects, they are not politicians, but they have a huge influence in how communities are being served by way of creative initiatives which respond to real and challenging issues. It asks governments to look to artists as they are leading by example: by watching, listening and investing themselves within challenging social issues. It speaks reassuringly to the future saying that if there is activist art there is hope for positive social transformations.

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IMAGES

Fig. 1: Boris Bally, Burst: Dressed to the Knives, 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.1. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 2: Atrium Gallery, School of Jewellery: Birmingham City University. Image credit: I. McCuaig.

Fig. 3: Ted Noten, Even a Stiletto Enjoys Decoration, 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.60. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 4: Rosie Deegan, Exquisitely handcrafted but practically pointless, 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.36. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 5-7: Knives Out: Crafting a Safer Birmingham, accessed on 28 August 2023, <https://www.spacehive.com/knivesout#/gallery>. Image Credit: Dauvit Alexander.

Fig. 8: Stephen Bottomley, Metal-morphosis 'Peace Piece', 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.21. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 9: Jeff Durber, Mightier Than 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.38. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 10: Rachael Colley, Re-made in Sheffield, Melon-Colley (Poortrait) series, 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.30. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 11: Patrick McMillan, Frame of Reference, 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.52. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 12: Jo Pond, In the Balance, 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.70. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 13: Cólín O'Dubhghail, Lann 6, 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.62. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 14: Alex Pole, Knife Plate, 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.70. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 15: Eliana Negroni, Flower Power, 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.56. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 16: Annelisse Pfeifer, 8, 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.68. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 17: Rohan Nicol, Shape Shifter, 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.58. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 18: Norman Cherry, Strillo, 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.26. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 19: Dauvit Alexander, Empty Vessel, 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.26. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

Fig. 20: Tim Carson, Engagement Ring - R.I.P., 2023, in Alexander, D. Cherry, N. (2023) *Swords into Ploughshares: Knives into Jewels*, exhibition catalogue, p.24. Image credit: Luke Unsworth.

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Short Essay: 2024 Edition of Critical Writing ‘*Maria Cristina Bergesio International Award*’: Relation to the Body

Author: *Kaia Ansip*

INTRODUCTION

The Relation to the body appeared as a topic while going through the open calls on Klimt02 web page.³ Many of the open calls shared a similar thing. They gave artists an option to create works that are not jewellery, not wearable but must have a relation to the body. The openness of these invitations posed questions as to what the meaning of the relation to the body is and where are the limits of these open calls. Could any work from any medium be submitted? Doesn't any object have an innate relation to the body?

In the quest to find out, I approached the jewellery artists. I asked them to write one hundred words about the relation to the body, not more. No other parameters were given, all they had was the topic. One hundred words is often required to introduce yourself as an artist to the organisers of the open calls to possibly participate in their exhibition. With that short version a concise expression needs to be made. The brevity is not as easy as it seems, one hundred words. In this case the compressed format turned out to be surprisingly giving. Artists have varied answers and approaches. Artist Catarina Silva wrote a poem.

*One body.
One movement. Two times, three times, a thousand times. A temple. A rite.
An action that unfolds. A body language.
A jewel that is carried.
A conversation that begins.
A dance... for two? Two bodies, a relationship. Love.
Transpiration. Fluid.
A tear. A flow. A river.
A torrent.
Body is water, is nature, is universe.*

*Catarina Silva, head of Ar. Co jewellery department in Lisbon, Portugal, artist in the field of jewellery.
Courtesy of artist.⁴*

³ <https://klimt02.net/> accessed on 07.06.2023

⁴ Silva.C, 2023, "Relation to the Body", interview by author, email, 24. June

IDENTITY

Humans are beings who mostly identify with their body. The body comes with attributes such as gender, age, beauty, ugliness, health and sickness among countless others. At times the body dictates the social position. The socially unaccepted body can put a person into a vulnerable and unfortunate position where they themselves would not choose to be. The person being solely seen as the body has caused and still causes many problems. Thankfully things have started to slowly change for the better. Perception of bodies has become more fluid over time. One's body doesn't privilege or limit one as much as it used to, mostly. That can be heavily argued and thankfully artists from many fields do.

There are differences in cultures on how the body is perceived. According to anthropologist and philosopher Philippe Descola, some tribes in the Amazon rainforest regard bodies as clothing, as something disposable. Bodies can be changed in dreams as clothes can be changed, if needed one can put on a fox body to go and communicate with the foxes.⁵ Animals often appear in dreams, dressed as humans to communicate a message. The clothing is chosen according to whom one needs to communicate. With this the body becomes a subject of

a ritual, it dances painted or pierced in ceremonial dances and processions. Artists use and have used ritualistic bodies to communicate their message.

Tracey W. A. Jones shows in her book *The Artist's Body* different approaches to the body. For example: bodies in action of art, the painting bodies, the gesturing bodies, ritualistic and transgressive bodies, body boundaries, performing identity, absent bodies, extended and prosthetic bodies.

'The body is perhaps the primary metaphor for a society's perception of itself. The individual and spoken language are what make up the social body; the physical body is a kind of boundary between biology and society, between drives and discourse...'⁶

Body is used as a medium to create works, such as performance art, body painting, or body modification. Body can also be a subject to explore issues of identity, such as gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. Some artists use the body as a symbol to communicate ideas, such as beauty, violence, mortality, or spirituality.⁷

⁵ Descola, P. The Forms of the Visible lecture, Lisbon 25.05.2023

⁶ Jones, T. W. A. *The Artist's Body*. Phaidon Press. p 230. 2006

⁷ Moma's website, accessed on 07.06.2023
https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/investigating-identity/the-body-in-art/.

Many artists work with disabled or crippled bodies.
The online artist run magazine Crip is a good
example.

*“Crip Magazine is a self-published magazine project, released on an irregular basis. It draws from the history of the disability rights movement, with 80% of its contributors identifying as disabled. Drawing on the reclamation of the term crip (as in Crip Theory) that emerged within disability studies and activism in the 1970s, the magazine overturns the ableist and hyper-productive framing of bodies within capitalism. The project derived out of the motivation to create a common context.”*⁸

⁸ Crip magazine web page, accessed 22.06.2023
<https://cripmagazine.evaegermann.com/>

SENSES

Most of the human beings do not communicate with the world through their dreams but with their ears, eyes, nose, hands and mouth. Too often the eye is regarded as the king of all the senses. Triin Tünpuu, a recent MA graduate of Contemporary Art in the Estonian Academy of Arts argues in her thesis *Art is all around you. Remember you can touch, not look!* that all senses actually rely on the sense of the touch.⁹

She created a dark room, where visitors could touch, listen, and smell objects, but not see them, their eyes were tied. A whispering description of the works guided the visitors through her paintings in the dark. The images were seen in the eye of the mind. Her thesis was based on the search to understand the world of her child. Her child had lost vision as a five-month-old baby and regained it as a four-year-old through medical intervention. The understanding of the other can be done by shutting off some senses and the world becomes anew. The beginning of life can determine how one feels about the world for a long time, as Marta Costa Reis clearly writes.

⁹ Tünpuu, T., *Kunst on sinu ümber. Pea meeles – võid katsuda, mitte vaadata!* Tallinn. 2023
<https://tase23.artun.ee/wpcontent/uploads/2023/05/Kunst-on-sinu-umber.-Triin-Turnpuu-magistritoo-2023.pdf#page28>

I almost died at birth.

One can't but wonder what does it mean?

We are symbolic animals and need to make sense of things. My story is a complex situation of refusal of life in the moment it is starting. Should I stay? Should I go? Was that even a decision? This fine line between life and death has always interested me, probably because of what happened then.

The living body is the proof of my existence on earth. I am through it, in it, I am it. It is a gift. I am here and might as well enjoy!

Marta Costa Reis, head of PIN, Portuguese Association of Contemporary Jewellery, educator and artist in the jewellery field. Courtesy of artist¹⁰

st-on-sinu-umber.-Triin-Turnpuu-magistritoo-2023.pdf#page28

¹⁰ Reis, M.C, 2023, "Relation to the Body", interview by author, email, 30. June

EXTENSION

Liesbeth den Besten writes in *The Compendium of Jewellery* that: 'Just like fashion, jewellery forms an extra layer on the body but is very rarely about the body itself.'¹¹ Den Besten is interested in the body as a subject, meaning that: 'You just don't live in your body, you are your body...that body is full of meaning...it is not a tabula rasa.'¹² Jewellery in this case works as an intermediate between the individual and the world. It expresses that individuality and shows the inside to the outside.

In her book she referred to jewellers who used the body as their subject. These jewellery artists have used body as a topic of their research, created shields for the body, made prostheses like objects and dwelled into the connection between separate body parts and the relationship between people.

She also points to the jewellery artists who have in some way stepped on the borders of art jewellery and whose radicality has led them to dead ends.¹³ For example, the ones who regard every object having a relation to the body. There seem to be a hidden set of

rules in the field of jewellery. What are these rules? Do they apply on the jewellery open calls when one submits unwearable work that is related to the body? Or does that extra section give extra freedom?

Often, humans make objects with a relation to the body, but they are not necessarily pieces of jewellery. Many of these objects are used as extensions of bodies giving the bodies innumerable capabilities. My hands can crush nuts and fruits into miniscule particles when I hold a hand blender. My mobile phone makes me into a champion navigator in unfamiliar locations, it makes me into a mediocre translator in any language and into a communicator through thousands of kilometres. My phone is an extension of me, me the bodily being, thinking being, curious being. The jewellery tools are my extensions as well. Working the material is a bodily act, as Yufang Hu describes.

¹¹ den Besten, L., 2011, *On Jewellery: A Compendium of International Contemporary Art Jewellery*. Arnoldsche Art Publishers, p128.

¹² den Besten, L., 2011, *On Jewellery: A Compendium of International Contemporary Art Jewellery*. Arnoldsche Art Publishers, pp 125,126. 2011

¹³ den Besten, L., 2011, *On Jewellery: A Compendium of International Contemporary Art Jewellery*. Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2011, pp.131-132

*I can only raise/hold things under a certain weight,
within certain power, in relation to my body
(strength).
When the tools sit still,
I move the rock, slowly and smoothly between palm
and fingers flaws, cracks, curves, texture.
When tools are the one to be held
in hand, the distance between the rock and me grows
larger,*

*like seeing a mountain from afar, form, shades,
colors, its surroundings,
versus strolling into the top through winding paths
with bugs at your ears If the rock is too light (but too
big to hold)
to stand against machine power It needs to be
clasped tight Otherwise it would fly
& we're all in danger.*

*Yufang Hu, Taiwanese artist in the field of jewellery.
Courtesy of artist¹⁴*

¹⁴ Hu. Y, 2023, "Relation to the Body", interview by author, email, 20. June

RELATION

Everything can be made into jewellery by putting a string or a needle on it, but it often does not have any relation to the body. The relation exists only through the string or the needle. The body is a canvas, an exhibition space, nothing else. Being on the body allows direct contact with the body while not necessarily having much to do with the body. Object of art which is not jewellery but has a connection to the body must do so much more. The body needs to be present in that work. Whenever one thing relates to the other something happens - a communication, a miscommunication, a reaction, a response, an oppression, utilisation and so on.

It often happens that the relation between human body and non-human body is one directional. One is doing something to the other or for the other. The non-human serving the human in some way. One's will be ruling over the other. It seems that the agency is in the hands of humans.

Artist Urmas Lüüs shows with his work that humans are actually formed and owned by the things they own. 'Each thing needs to be taken care of. It shows the two sides of ownership - it is not only me who owns things, but things own me as well.'¹⁵ In his artistic practice Lüüs creates spaces where 'things' bring out strong feelings in visitors, as the works relate to the body

¹⁵ Urmas Lüüs, Määrileht. 2023
<https://www.muurileht.ee/me-ei-oma-ainult-asju-vaid-asjad-omavad-ka-meid-intervju-u-urmas-luusiga/>

making it feel uncomfortable. His installation spaces show how the surroundings with different things in it become a part of a human being. Human body is in constant correspondence with other bodies, beings and surroundings. By contrast, a Greek jewellery artist Ismini Pachi offers the opposite of Lüüs' works such a sense of comfort and feelings of safety.

In the series 'PLEASE DO TOUCH' (2021) that was crafted during the COVID-19 outbreak, the need for intimacy and comfort led me to craft body objects that need to be touched.

I chose porcelain as the material-executor of my idea as porcelain is a body. A malleable material that comes from the earth, it adjusts to the body temperature and has memory. Spending time together, me and the porcelain were shaping each other. Like lover's bodies that need time to understand each other, we were in search of our common language. The touch of our "bodies" produced new life through a fermentation, giving shape to our intimate interaction. The posture of the lonely body in isolation and the need for comfort gave birth to new shapes and then solidified into porcelain.

*Ismini Pachi, Greek artist in the field of jewellery based in Tallinn, Estonia.
Courtesy of artist¹⁶*

¹⁶ Pachi.I, 2023, "Relation to the Body", interview by author, email, 29. June

Artists have become more focused on the topic of touch and lack of touch, after the Covid outbreak. The possibly infected surfaces brought forward the acceptance that in everyday life millions of objects and surfaces are touched. If humans are touch based creatures, then it makes sense that the mental health came crumbling down with the Covid outbreak. The touch became limited and even dangerous.

The necessity of touch could explain why it is so hard to keep away from touch screens. The interaction through the fingertips is familiar. Covid brought new ways of distant greetings, the bodily beings became more of abstract beings. The only safe thing to touch outside home seemed to be a touchscreen and it had to be kept safe from infection just like the body.

CONCLUSION

Asking artists to write about the body with a text of one hundred words and receiving their work has shown the potentiality of the topic. That one section in the open calls inviting unwearable works having a relation to the body to participate creates welcoming openness. It might also give those works headway for they are not in danger to treat the body merely as a canvas.

The discussed examples it has been shown how artists have used the body to create. They have addressed the body through topics of identity, ableism, gender, notions of beauty and the senses. Touch and tactile focus are a response to our contemporary concerns. One could argue that the topic of body and relation to the body offers a wide playground. These open calls could as well be published on platforms other than jewellery. Being conclusive would allow the field of jewellery to merge with the wider field of contemporary art.

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