



// Material Value

Curated by

Janet Hinchliffe McCutcheon

The exhibition 'Material Value' considers ideas and perceptions around materials used in the making of jewellery and invites inquiry about value – of materials and symbolic worth. Jewellery can be made from any material such as paper, plastics, textile, natural and man-made materials, wood, stone, glass and metals of all kind. Without the constraints of high value precious materials there is the freedom to challenge common perceptions about jewellery.

Must the type of material used always need to be instantly recognisable?

Norman Cherry produces patinated and textured layers upon the silver surfaces to create pieces evocative of ancient buried artefacts.

Jane Adam makes anodised and dyed aluminium jewellery with subtle colours and textile qualities.

We cannot see the material upon which ***Jessica Turrell*** applies her enamels and so too is it apparent that the surface is enamel?

Frances Julie Whitelaw's designs are in silver although pieces with a black finish mask the silver surface.

Yoko Izawa creates a sense of the precious with jewel like objects placed within her 'veiled' pieces in knitted textile filament.

I apply equal status to the materials in a piece, selecting them for contrasting and tactile qualities.

We are often questioned about the durability of materials with expectations that a piece of jewellery should last forever. Most materials alter with time, and given the correct conditions, even paper and feathers will last long enough. The jewellery in this exhibition is created from the artists' chosen materials and techniques to produce work that conveys their values and identity. The viewer may appreciate values beyond the material. The wearer feels it all.

The jewellery artists selected for this exhibition have international recognition for their work. They contribute to the wider jewellery community through exhibitions, dialogue and symposia and have work in major public collections. Their practice and research includes leadership and teaching in higher education; running specialist workshops for museums and galleries; curating UK and international jewellery exhibitions and publishing articles and reviews.

Janet Hinchliffe McCutcheon

*"remember that day you lost two years ago
at the rockpool where you sat and played the jeweller
with all the stones you'd stolen from the shore?
Most of them were dark and nothing more,
but sometimes one would blink the secret colour
it had locked up somewhere in its stony sleep.
This is how you knew the ones to keep."*

from "Why Do You Stay Up So Late" by Don Paterson

The relationship between jewellery and storage may not be the most articulated concept within the theory of jewellery design, yet it seems to get to a point. In its most prosaic form it is one of the ways in which many of us play jeweller on a daily basis: how many of us might admit to having sat at our desks, distracting ourselves from a telephone conversation or during a dull meeting, a paperclip becomes the victim of restless hands, first straightened to a wire, then wrapped around the finger to become an impromptu ring. Or else a bundle of letters (bills, marketing, reminders) is handed to us held with a cheery coloured rubber band, between bundle and bin the band enjoys a few moments around our wrist in its life as a most unprecious, but curiously satisfying, bangle. The grey suited businessman might award himself his own administrative medals, in blue, black and red, with biros clipped on the pocket of his jacket or shirt. And for those who do not wear jackets to work: the ear's helix transforms pencils and cigarettes into adornment without the need for piercing.

The figure being addressed in Paterson's poem is also playing the jeweller in an everyday sense, but comes closer to our traditional understanding of what a jeweller does. Sitting on a beach and swilling pebbles in a pool, the dull rock is transformed into a kaleidoscope of colour. For that moment they imitate preciousness. The jeweller's craft here would be to set the stones in a band or chain so that the gatherer's hoard can be carried around with them on the body. A jewel conveys status, certainly, personality, perhaps and even office and title, but at its heart is it not also serving our magpie instinct simply by making that which we deem precious more portable?

"So I collect the dull things of the day in which I see some possibility but which are dead and which have the surprise I don't know, and I've no pool to help me tell" (ibid)

Let us return for a moment though to that rubber band before it is thrown in the bin. The casual observer might be surprised to learn of the lives its brethren have led in service of the jeweller. Let us take one work in mima's collection, a bracelet by Eric Spiller. Two arcs of anodised aluminium are joined together at both tips to create a shape that resembles a segment of an orange or apple in outline. Though elegant in form and beautifully constructed, when worn around the wrist it flaps helplessly before falling off. There is nothing to attach it to the body. What solution does Spiller contrive to turn this pure form into a jewel? He simply stretches a rubber band between the two points of the metal. The band is held in tension by the arc, allowing it to clasp the wrist and hold the bracelet in place.

From the perspective of design, the decisions that Spiller has made here set up a tension between materials: between highly worked metal and mass produced rubber. One is subtle in colour and patina, the other unashamedly gaudy. One is clearly of value and one is throw away and indeed will need to be replaced many times during the life of the bracelet. What Spiller also does though with this work is learn from the everyday, finding artistic solutions from the way you and I might play at being jeweller.

Whilst the magpie responds to the glint of the gem, it is often these "dull things of the day" that can prove such rich material for the modern jeweller. They are fertile precisely because they are everyday and can bring with them all the associations of their use and life.

Histories of jewellery design of the post war era will often stress the move away from rare gems and metals as an egalitarian gesture, striving to make good design more affordable, more available, but if it ever was this it was certainly about more than democratisation. Even today, a generation after Peter Dormer theorised what he saw as the New Jewellery, those in the field are still in search of an allusive new audience and ask how we can open up modern jewellery to more than the connoisseur. It remains a struggle perhaps because jewellery today is of the everyday, rather necessarily than for the everyday. In being freed from the conservative nature of much traditional design, jewellery today can demand confidence in its wearer, sometimes knowingness as well. Modern jewellery has something to say for itself and the wearer should be prepared to listen and respond. Our response to this work though can be guided by the material itself. Beyond any concerns about preciousness and non-preciousness, the jeweller will often question how the material can act as storage for ideas. The ideas might well be those vested in gold and silver (and the associations of these metals can be as rich as their material worth), but they might also be vested in the things that surround us daily.

If we stop for a moment and ask ourselves what quality might the jeweller be exploring in this material, and also what might this thing mean to me, then we are allowing the jewel to connect, not only with the body (like Spiller's rubber band), but with the mind as well.

Preciousness and Play: the Value of the Everyday

James R. Beighton

Senior Curator – mima
Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art

In the late 1980s, the design and craft communities were alerted to a prospective 'dematerialised product landscape'.

The future which we were about to encounter, theorists said, would consist of virtuality, of miniaturized and less physical artefacts and experiences. Within this world of the digital, the mimetic and the hyper-real, would come alternatives and potentially un-envisioned scenarios for interacting with our world. Screens and computers would come to replace face-to-face human interactions. Technologies would become more competent and powerful in their tasks. What were once mechanical and physical experiences and actions by people, would become 'invisible' or 'immaterial', mediated by new tools for communication and application. The heavy and the form-laden would become the light and formless. There would be sensorial loss of the familiar and new ways of understanding the objects we would encounter. In this new world designers and makers would need to become ever more inventive about the ways in which their creations would engage audiences.

Simultaneously, as encounters with real 'things' were expected to recede from our daily lives, there would be notable shifts in the hierarchies which society formed around material artefacts. The art of branding successfully would create a whole array of new hierarchical values around symbols and logos: the Nike Swoosh, the Louis Vuitton bag. The defining traits of possessions would no longer be simply the sum-total of the materials used, but instead would become a concoction of, who-made-it, who-wears-it, what's-it-made-of and so on. Object possessions would become the short-hand which would define our rank and standing in our life-style groups and tribes.

The announcement in the 1980s of sensorial loss and the new hierarchies described above, were, to some extent, a cross-roads for designers and makers. In the intervening years since, a generation of creatives has attempted to address the impasse of the loss of the real with a number of approaches to design and making. Among them, craft practitioners have been at the fore-front in suggesting alternative modes of creating objects for daily use and contemplation.

The jewellery in this exhibition reflects the tendency in the crafts to articulate less mainstream versions of the daily object. In particular, the theme of Material Value suggests that part of the armoury to be used in defence of the real, needs to be a fundamental re-evaluation of how materials can be alternatively considered. The works on show challenge us to think about, preciousness, prestige, symbolism and narrative. We are prompted to think again about gold and silver, the role of stones, the use of found artefacts, about functionality and wearability. As such, the exhibits serve as provocations to reconsider value. If a piece of jewellery is not 'precious' in the traditional sense, then what is that draws us to it? Does it remind us of something or does it tell us something about the maker? If the material is not conventional how does it create value in the eyes of the owner or user?

Such provocations remind us that this exhibition is about two things: on the one hand it is about material values, materialism and the relationship between the user and the 'thing', on the other it is about the value of materials and our perception of worth. Like all locations for contemplation, such as the cathedral or museum, the space opened up by the 'jewels' on show provides us with a moment to consider our relationships with those thoughts which we might otherwise not give time to.

Material Value

Paul Denison

Principal Lecturer in Design
Teesside University

Janet Hinchliffe McCutcheon

I enjoy jewellery as both wearable pieces and as an object for contemplation. The challenge presented is to combine these functions in each piece of work and evoke an intuitive response in the wearer. Materials are chosen for their contrasting and tactile qualities. Combining perceived durable and perishable materials satisfies my curiosity to solve practical problems. The solutions are the visual and functional details which invite the wearer to touch and in some instances rearrange. It is the physical presence and connection that moves the jewellery from maker to wearer bringing a new sense of value.



*photography
by Cathal Carey*

Frances Julie Whitelaw

The physical properties of jewellery are important to the wearer and go beyond the obvious needs of comfort and practicality to reflect individuality and style. Whatever medium I work in, I try to exploit the potential of that material to realize my design ideas but also find forms and textures that are pleasing to the eye and hand.

For this exhibition I have selected jewellery that is constructed in wire, bringing its own technical restrictions and opportunities. In many pieces I have included pearls for their tactile qualities and sensual lustre.



photography by Frances Julie Whitelaw

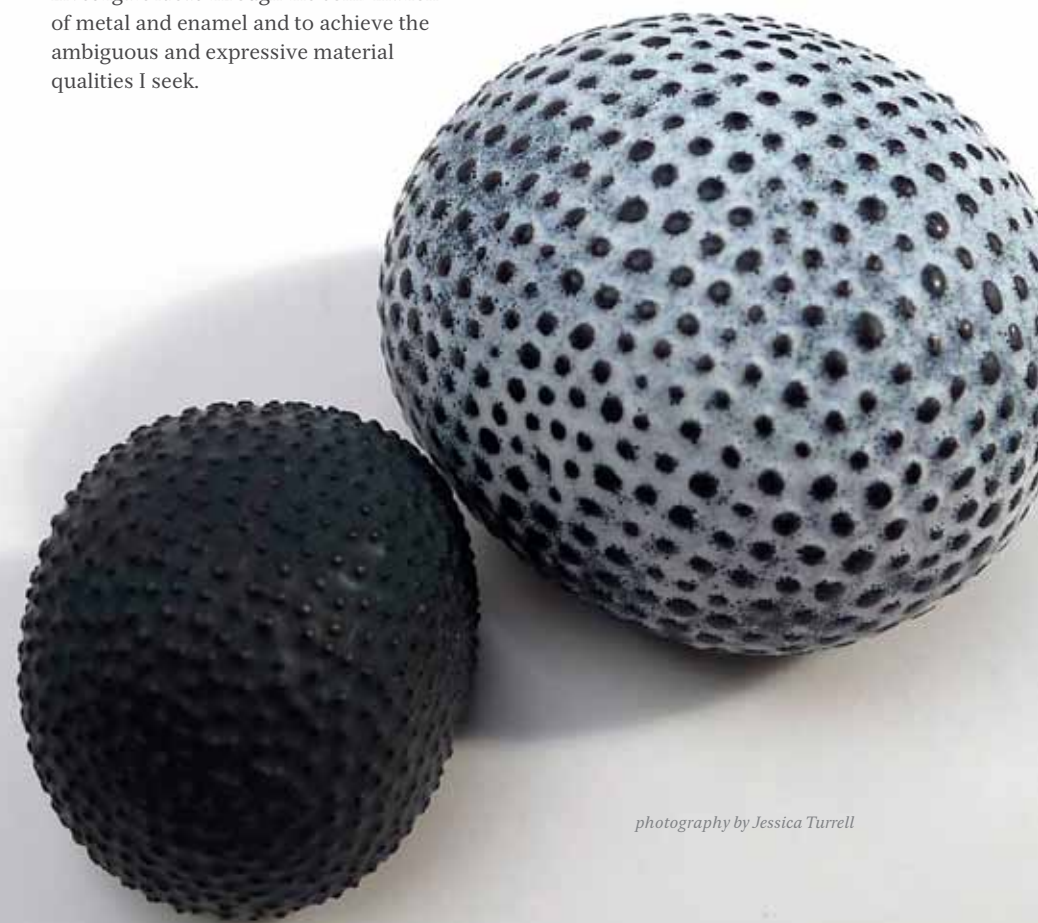


photography by Joel Degen

Jessica Turell

The miniaturized format of the jewellery form allows me to explore my ideas on an intimate scale. I seek to create evocative objects that might stir an emotional connection and thus give pleasure. As I make I enter into a dialogue with my materials, trying to discover and explore their unique characteristics. My skill with enamel does not constrain me but serves to liberate; my knowledge of the materials gives me a fluency that allows me the freedom to investigate ideas through the combination of metal and enamel and to achieve the ambiguous and expressive material qualities I seek.

I strive to attain a tactile delicacy and a weightiness that positively encourages touch. It is important to me that the pieces I create should reward the wearers close attention with an intricate and detailed surface.



photography by Jessica Turell

Jane Adam

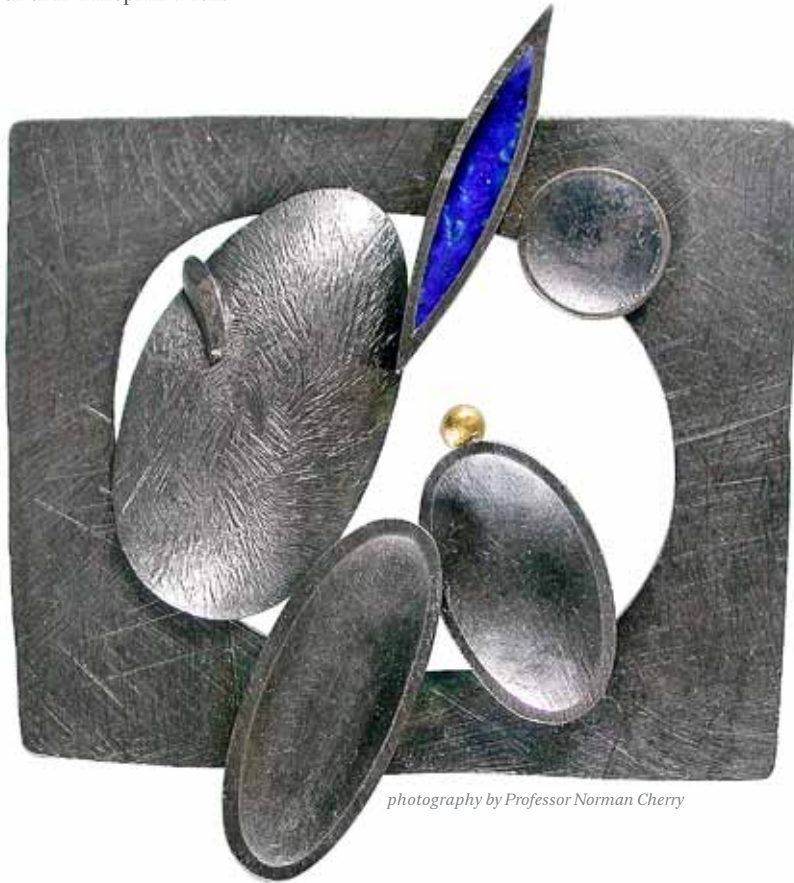
I am passionate about the individual's experience of my work, caring as much about how a piece feels to wear as about how it looks: 'In one sense, jewellery is not functional. However, it fulfils a profound need for self expression and as such is one of the most ancient forms of art.

There is a magical moment when the right piece finds the right wearer. When jewellery is not being worn, it may appear as an interesting object but its potential is unfulfilled.'

Professor Norman Cherry

For many years my main research interest was the application of textile techniques to jewellery and artifacts. Subsequent interests have included morphism, the unseen internal spaces of three-dimensional objects, and predictive research into extreme body modification. My most recent jewellery has investigated narrative and metaphor, most notably through "Transplantation" – an exhibition of jewellery by six UK and six Australian jewellers on the theme of personal and cultural transplantation.

The jewellery in this exhibition is in similar vein, exploring parts of my personal and professional history, my sense of individual cultural place, and contemporary society; all at a time in my career when, Janus-like, I look forwards and backwards simultaneously.



photography by Professor Norman Cherry



*photography
by Yoko Izawa*

Yoko Izawa

I feel that the sense of beauty and value within my culture influences and shapes my work. For my means of expression, I feel more comfortable when the work has a quality of ambiguity or transience. My interest has been for some time in containing, covering, or wrapping things. The search has been for something elusive.

As objects become obscured by being covered, our perception such as social preoccupation or monetary value for the object also becomes uncertain. On the other hand, essential elements that the object naturally possesses; form, texture, colour, weight, and tension become aspects to appreciate. In my work,

those fundamental elements of both inside and outside materials visually mix in one's eyes and create a harmonious form. Also the structure allows my objects to have an ambiguous quality in which one can perceive opposing features simultaneously; inside and outside, rigid and flexible, as well as hidden and visible.



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