

The Conscience Mirror by Roberta Bernabei

'Like A Rolling Stone' was a collaborative exchange undertaken during the Scottish Government's 2016 Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design. The jewelled project was instigated by the Italian Cultural Institute (ICI) in Edinburgh and Stephen Bottomley, the then Head of Jewellery and Silversmithing at Edinburgh College of Art (ECA). The dynamic week-long making workshop unfurled in coastal landscapes and was supported by lectures by geologists from the Scottish Gemmological Institute and the symposium *Three Italian Goldsmiths*.

The event witnessed collaborative exchange between Italian and UK Studio Jewellery artists through the themes of **'Relocation, Transplantation, Camouflage, Identity and Materiality'**. Participants naturally came from both countries with UK artists including; Stephen Bottomley, Susan Cross, Jessamy Kelly, Rhona McCallum, Jo Pudelko and Jessica Turrell. The Italian jewellery artists were; Maria Rosa Franzin, Gigi Mariani, Gabi Veit and Cristina Zani. This coming together of peoples from different countries helped condition dialogue and fostered an opportunity to challenge jewellery practitioners to respond to current debates of population displacement. A desire to address this challenge wholeheartedly, along with discussions in the geologists' lectures, prompted the idea of seeking inspiration from the amazing Scottish seascape. Consequently, the artists visited the shores of North Berwick, East Lothian. This cathartic journey further coalesced the participants' attention on the idea of identity and homeland; two intrinsic characteristics of living. Immersion in the Scottish coastal landscape fostered reflections on the topics, whilst providing the opportunity to gather materials from the sea such as basalt, driftwood, shells and seaweed. These coastal found objects were displayed during the workshop to provide a starting point for initiating theoretical and visual discussions.

Events merged several techniques and research methods such as the photo documentation by Shannon Tofts, along with interviews by researcher Rebecca Crowther; who also provided a study sheet for the participants for the visit to North Berwick.

The practitioners' responses explore how one might perceive origin, place and geographical space. For example, the title of Cross' *'Settlement 1 and 2'* suggests reflection on 'place and space', a concept represented by two discs of basalt that are hugged by silver bezels. Place and space are two elements that can help define our identity or how we begin reconstructing our self when settling in another country. In this work, it seems that space and place are congruent; they belong to the same plane. With a pair of strong arms protecting the fragility of the stone, much like our lives when forced to leave one's homeland.

The power of the Scottish seascape can quickly change form and colour over time due to the variability of the weather. This can be seen in parallel with the rapid changes that may occur in our lives. The current flotilla of barely seaworthy migrant boats arriving on Italian shores must traverse the perils of the Mediterranean before safety and a new life ensues. Each vessel brings migrants looking for new possibilities. Tragically, their hope is

sometimes dashed and transformed into catastrophe and death. These sombre and spontaneously changing realities coagulate in Mariani's brooch entitled *'Tombstone'*. The jewellery artist laid seaweed on a sandstone slab to commemorate those who did not survive the treacherous crossing. The sea's floral reminiscence of what it might have been; a metaphor washed up on the shore like a migrant body lapping at the promised land. Zani shares related concerns, using sea rock to symbolise a safe place and the potential stability of a new life.

The extraordinary Scottish seascape, with its strong winds awoke and sharpened the artists' feelings. These winds affect tidal movements and might therefore be considered a barometer of immigrant hope. Veit was inspired by this movement that brings objects towards the viewer. In *'Found in translation 1, 2 and 3'* she uses objects given by the sea: driftwood, shells and seaweed, to conceptually 'find' herself. Her composition seeks familiarity with this unfamiliar landscape; the opposite of her mountain homeland.

Along the seashore the artists took inspiration from the rock formations and found objects to reflect on Relocation and Transplantation. In Bottomley's *'No Direction home-Exodus'*, the term 'Allochthonous' or 'a deposit or formation that originated at a distance from its present position'¹ was analogous to the sense of direction when building a new space far away from one's origins. His work resembles a mysterious tool in the form of a silver pendant, repoussed and chased to help find your way in the landscape. Franzin expands the incorporation of natural elements to seagulls and seaweeds to visualise her feelings for a new country, language and space in *'Flying'* and *'Branches in the Sea'*.

Other artists shifted their attention from the natural world to societal constructs. Pudelko demonstrates her disbelief for social attitudes to the migrant crisis. In *Weight* and *Float* she refers to idioms 'like a millstone around your neck' and 'to sink like a stone'. The metaphorical image of migrant bodies sinking at sea is inferred by the juxtaposition of little forms like pebbles, massed into geometric pendants. This mirrors the subject's heaviness, with the composition contrasted by the relative lightness of nylon, power coated brass and resin. Hints of the unbearable tragedy of the migrant crisis are materialised by the pendants.

Identity and the human condition are central to McCallum's work, which explores relationships to the land. As with Turrell's approach, she is interested in eroded headstones and point of fractures. In *'Im/permanence'*, enamelling explores these characteristics and transforms them into wearable forms. For all the artists above, as well as Kelly, irrespective of the use of traditional or digital jewellery making techniques, emotions are key to manipulating materials and how population displacement may be given material existence through jewellery.

Every participant in *'Like A Rolling Stone'* sought to create jewellery as a form of art, seeking its usage as a communicative tool to examine issues of conscience. One might

¹ [Viewed 22 .11.17] Available from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/allochthonous>

imagine this was a nigh on impossible task. However, as Christine Macel, director of the 2017 Venice Biennale and chief curator at the Centre Pompidou stated during the Biennale's opening statement:

“Today, in a world full of conflicts and shocks, art bears witness to the most precious part of what makes us human. Art is the ultimate ground for reflection, individual expression, freedom, and for fundamental questions. [...] It stands as an unequivocal alternative to individualism and indifference.”²

In this context, jewellery also has the potential to contribute by proposing a different setting for discussion. Jewellery has many possible lives; for example, it can be seen in a display case or worn on the body. Upon the body it extends its ability to communicate a message. The actual piece of jewellery fosters a relationship with our body space when worn. It occupies the wearer's personal space, yet often moves towards other people like news floating on the breeze. Or perhaps a news ambush, where the seemingly innocuous jewel unexpectedly announces headlines of a tragic event: much like a migrant boat or body washed ashore.

The piece of jewellery, instead of being fixed and trapped in a glass vitrine becomes like a message in a bottle that could wash up anywhere. It is a living message that moves with the wearer. It travels in search of an audience, like those people seeking the opportunities of a new life elsewhere.

Jewellery of this kind operates on two levels. Firstly, the worn jewel may trigger further reflections without verbal interaction between the wearer and viewer. When immediate comments are lacking the jewel primarily communicates its aesthetic and materiality. Thereafter, the wearer is potentially empowered to externalise their position on the debate. In this way, jewellery redefines its participative role in society by becoming an important vehicle for re-constructing our self-identity. One where it develops the human consciousness of 'being something as well as being in something' (2004, p. 57)³. Its power derives from its camouflaged appearance as an innocuous ornament, peacefully inhabiting the human body; and may therefore be considered a powerful means of creating dialogue. One that cannot be easily avoided; if you look into it, it talks to you – becoming the mirror of your conscience.

The body of work created by these artists does not wish to provide answers, but instead seeks to incentivise observers and viewers to consider the debates. The final outcome should not be perceived only as the pieces of jewellery made in response to the selected themes; but also the associated research through photo documentation, interviews with participants and the group discussions.

² [Viewed 6.11.17] available from <http://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2017/57th-international-art-exhibition>

³ Hirsh S., Zobel O., 2004. *Ohne Schmuck keine Heimat!?*, [Catalogue of an exhibition held at Maierhof des Klosters Benediktbeuern from 8 March to May 2004]. Freising: Sellier.

The force of nature, in this case the Scottish seascape, challenged participants' human condition. They felt impotent in the face of raging nature; much as one might feel helpless in confronting the migrant crisis. Like seawater reflects deep and intimate thoughts, so the artists found the strength to raise their voices through jewellery that mirrors our conscience.