

Isomorphs – New Mutations

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Isomorphs – New Mutations

Isomorphs are generally defined as objects which display similar qualities of form or characteristic.¹ This is particularly so in the biological sciences, but the term is also recognised in mathematics and gemmology, to name just two other disciplines where external similarities are shared by otherwise quite different entities. The genesis of the Isomorphs in this particular exhibition can be traced back to a residency I undertook at Oregon College of Art and Craft in 2006, when a new body of work grew out of experiments in deconstructing forms which I had previously created for other purposes. These deconstructions, and later reconstructions, bore some resemblances to each other in that certain forms which previously might have been complete entities in themselves now became component parts of something more complex. Certain of these featured more often than others and, as the new forms evolved further, some tangential similarities remained even although gradually the pieces became more architectonic in form. Indeed it would be true to say that the deconstructed parts became units in a series of three dimensional puzzles which were “solved” through a largely tectonic process.

The most recent jewellery created for this exhibition – the New Mutations - not only continues the process as certain easily recognisable motifs migrate from one piece to another, but it has also become noticeable that a more narrative and metaphorical vein is beginning to

emerge. I believe that almost all jewellery tells a story in its own way. Jewellery is probably the most compact and portable form of personal art. It can tell a story about the wearer or bearer, about that person's family or background, about personality. But there is usually some sort of underlying story, often untold, about its own creation, about the influences on the artist who generated the idea, developed it, and finally made it what it is.

There has always been a story, a set of influences, behind what I create but it is only now that I am finding the narrative becoming more important and a more intrinsic part of the end result. The incorporation of some "readymades" which have had their own previously unrelated histories has been, to some extent, the result of an element of self-examination and reviewing taking place at a point in my life when I look forward and back at the same time.

Unlike the production of a manufactured line of jewellery - ie. Jewellery as Product - which is a response to a standard design-and-make problem, the creation of a body of work such as this is a continuous engagement with an intuitive process which results from an accumulation of visual, theoretical, technical, personal, and other factors - intuition based on tacit knowledge: research-in-action, reflective practice. This is a process recognised and described by several writers and commentators on creativity in the visual arts and sciences. Chris O'Toole, an Oxford

University entomologist, has described making creative decisions, based on a virtually unconscious assimilation of great swathes of information, over very short periods of time.² He describes this as “the Jizz – the moment when a sort of realisation dawns and the accumulation of years of study and observation, knowledge, and experience enables you to recognise it instantly”, not dissimilar to Krome Barrat³ talking about “knowingness”: the insight which results in something new and original.

A thorough knowledge of theory as well as practice is necessary for the accumulation of the skills essential for a contemporary creative jewellery artist. As Richard Sennett shows in his book *The Craftsman*,⁴ skill is about an interrelationship of thinking and doing practised over several years. He talks about “material consciousness”⁵ and “how it feels”⁶. He talks about intuition and the “intuitive leap”. It is what he calls “a special form of induction”⁷. Donald Schön describes what he calls “knowing in action”⁸ as almost indefinable, intuitive processes such as “thinking on your feet”, “finding the groove”, “feel for the music”, and “feel for the ball”, using sportsmen and jazz musicians as useful examples of professionals who, like artists and designers, as a result of many years of the melding of theory and practice, are reflective practitioners *par excellence*.

In creating the work for this exhibition, decision-making was often based on processes which cannot be easily explained, in much the way that a musician or sportsman would make minor changes to phrasing, fingering,

stance, or grip almost without thinking - actions which are not a result of specific prior planning or thinking. When a specific adjustment is made to the proportion, or the surface pattern, or a decorative element of a piece of jewellery, the decision is not merely capricious or felicitous. It is a result of that “know-how” which is “in the action”⁹.

This, however, is activity which lends itself far better to *post hoc* rationalisation. Creativity at the point of action is much more visceral and explosive, altogether more passionate than it can ever be described. That act of passion is ultimately what makes it so essential and worthwhile for the practitioner.

Professor Norman Cherry
Lincoln, 2009

- 1 Pearsall, J. ed. (1998) “The New Oxford Dictionary of English”. Oxford: Clarendon Press. P968.
- 2 O’Toole, C. (1998) “Feed the Fury”. Conference at Oxford University Museum of Natural History.
- 3 Barratt, K. (1989) “Logic in Design”. New York: Design Press. P302.
- 4 Sennett, R. (2008) “The Craftsman”. London: Allen Lane. P38
- 5 Ibid. P123
- 6 Ibid. P288.
- 7 Ibid. P212.
- 8 Schön, D. (1991) “The Reflective Practitioner, How Professionals Think in Action”. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing. P54.
- 9 Ibid. P50.



Wash and Wear. Brooch: Standard silver; steel, shibuichi – patinated



Amator Aleyonaceus 1976. Brooch: Standard silver; black coral, enamel, gold grains, brass brush – lightly oxidised



The Tales of Para Handy. Brooch: Standard silver, enamel, gold grains – lightly oxidised



Drawing a Bead. Brooch: Standard silver; rosewood, black onyx – lightly oxidised



Marquis de Trois Journées. Brooch: Standard silver; black coral, gold, enamel – lightly oxidised



Steam Punk Printer. Brooch: Standard silver, brass, plastic cog, enamel – lightly oxidised



Seven Elements in Search of a Whole. Brooch: Standard silver, gold grain, enamel – lightly oxidised

BIOGRAPHY

- 1966-70 Glasgow School of Art
- 1970-71 Assistant to Louis Osman, goldsmith, Canons Ashby, Northants
- 1971- Designer / goldsmith / jeweller, Kelso
- 1974-86 Proprietor, Woodmarket Gallery, Kelso
- 1978-84 Part-time Lecturer, Scottish College of Textiles, Galashiels
- 1983 Temporary Part-time Lecturer, Edinburgh College of Art
- 1984-85 Associate Lecturer, University of Northumbria, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
- 1985-96 Principal Lecturer, Head of Division of Three Dimensional and Environmental Design, University of Northumbria, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
- 1996 -08 Professor and Head of School of Jewellery, Birmingham City University
- 2008 - Dean of Faculty of Art, Architecture and Design, University of Lincoln
- 2009 - Visiting Professor, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

AWARDS

- 1971 Crafts Consultative Committee setting up grant
- 1972 Saltire Society John Noble Craft Award
- 1983 Sir Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship
- 1983 Grand Prize, Society of North American Goldsmiths Platinum Design Competition
- 1984 1st Prize, Jewellery, Incorporation of Goldsmiths of the City of Edinburgh Design Competition
- 1993 Betty Davies Award for Jewellery, Scottish Artists and Artist Craftsmen
- 2003 Applied Arts Award, Visual Arts Scotland

COLLECTIONS

- 1971 King's Own Scottish Borderers
- 1984 Dundee Museum and Art Gallery
- 1987 Borders Regional Council
- 1984 Dundee Museum and Art Gallery
- 1992 Scottish Crafts Collection, National Museums of Scotland
- 1992 Tennessee Technological University
- 2000 Contemporary Jewellery Collection, National Museums of Scotland
- 2002 Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
- 2008 British Museum

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1990 Courtyard Gallery, Cheltenham
- 1992 Open Eye Gallery, Edinburgh
- 1994 Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh
- 1998 Roger Billcliffe Fine Art, Glasgow
- 2000 "Beyond the Wire", Hipotesi, Barcelona
- 2005 "The Space Within", Hipotesi, Barcelona
- 2007 "Deconstruction - Reconstruction", Shibuichi, Oporto
- 2008 "Isomorphs", Hipotesi, Barcelona
- 2009 "Isomorphs – New Mutations", Alternatives Gallery for Contemporary Art, Rome

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1971 “Scottish Crafts”, Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh Festival
- 1973 “Eight Scottish Jewellers”, Scottish Crafts Centre, Edinburgh
- 1977 “Important Scottish Silver 1953-1977”, Huntly House Museum, Edinburgh
- 1976/80 “Loot”, Goldsmiths’ Hall, London
- 1983-84 Goldsmiths’ Fair, Goldsmiths’ Hall, London
- 1984 Society of North American Goldsmiths’ Conference, New York
- 1985-88 “Dazzle”, Manchester, Edinburgh, Bath, London
- 1987 “Jewellery in Precious Metals”, Design Council, London
- 1989 “Los Británicos”, Espai Positura, Barcelona
- 1991 “Timepieces”, Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh
- 1993-9 Scottish Artists and Artist Craftsmen Annual Exhibition, Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh
- 1998 Best of the British, Facère Gallery, Seattle, USA, in conjunction with Lesley Craze Gallery, London
- 1999 “Making Connections”, Sammas Galerii, Tallinn, Estonia
- 1999 “Making Connections”, Shanghai Library, Shanghai, China
- 1999 “From the Centre to the Edge”, Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland, Maine, USA
- 2000 “Diverse Routes”, Electrum Gallery, London
- 2001 “Beyond Materials”, Silkaporn University, Bangkok, Thailand
- 2002 “BI 3PA”, Metallum Galleri, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2004 “exempli gratia”, Facère Gallery, Seattle
- 2005 “Praxis”, Appalachian Craft Center, Smithville, Tennessee

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5th – 25th November 2009

ALTERNATIVES
gallery for contemporary jewellery

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