

Diary of a Craftworker



Poppy Porter

We welcome Poppy Porter as our 2008 Diary writer and look forward to following her journey into crafts in each issue this year.

I am delighted to be able to introduce myself as your Craftsman *craft&design* diarist for 2008. This is a real pleasure for me as this is my first year in business as a craftsperson and it is also the Magazine's 25th anniversary year. Momentous times indeed! I hope you enjoy following me throughout the highs and lows of this year. If you are in the same position, I hope this gives you support in knowing you are not the only one and, if you are a seasoned craftsperson, perhaps it will bring back a wry smile at how far you have come.

So, who am I? The thorny issue of identity in the crafts world is a tricky one and perhaps one I will leave for the moment and describe what I do.

I should explain, I was not always part of the creative world – I am, in truth, an escapee from the world of law. I used to be a construction litigator and spent my time knocking builders' heads together for a living. This was a really tedious way to spend my days and frankly did not involve enough of my creative skills to keep me sustained for life so I made the jump in to being a creative in 2004. I have not looked back since.

I graduated from the University College for the Creative Arts, Farnham in May 2007 and currently describe myself as a "Jewellery and Accessory Designer", at least that is what is on my business card. However, I do not work in the traditional jewellery metals, I have invented a technique that creates what I consider to be a really unique look. I work in anodised titanium, resin and my own photographs. The technique I developed is method of inlay or lacquer that means I can insert my own photographs into sheet titanium.

My inspirations are what I can only describe as eclectic – Formula 1, Tudor and Stuart lace collars and cuffs and Japanese Kimono. How on earth do those go together? I often ask myself the same question.

Initially it was entirely an instinctive feeling – I am sure those of you who are makers yourselves have that little visual image in the back of your head, an emerging idea, one you hardly dare look at just in case it disappears. Just an idea, you could not describe it if you tried. Only time and development will make it real.

I went to the festival of speed in 2006 and had somewhat of an epiphany. I am going to have to make Jensen Button (driver for Honda F1) take some of the blame. There I was innocently doing

some research – the loudest sketching session I have ever experienced – I was in the F1 paddock and they just kept revving those engines (luckily I had bought earplugs!), then the cars began to go off for their parade up the Goodwood hill climb. I went to watch. I was enjoying watching these raw, graceful machines when Jensen Button stopped his in front of the ivy clad, domed Goodwood House and did the loudest most stupendous burnout about 10 metres from me! I was totally blown away by the noise, power and the smell (and I wasn't wearing my earplugs so I was a bit deaf for a about a day afterwards). The noise must have had some effect on my brain as from then on there was an indelible connection in my mind between the intimacy and layering between F1 car and driver and the intimacy and layering between wearer and kimono.

The Kimono and the F1 car account for some of the form, colour and decoration of my work but my initial ideas lacked friendliness and although colourful were over formal and over mechanical. I was also sketching performance motorbike brake discs and was reading a book on Tudor and Stuart costume at the time, so another unlikely combination arose; that between the perforations on a brake disk and the exquisite and delicate lace collars, ruffs and cuffs in paintings of the Tudor, Elizabethan and Stuart periods.

My work is all about colour, layering and complexity. All three of my influences are complex and layered in their own way. Kimono, F1 engineering and lace all have their hidden aspects and surprising forms. I use both the forms in F1 and its processes as the anchor for my work, the kimono is harder to see but the influence of the aesthetic is there, and the lace is both foil to mechanical F1 forms and informs how I place my works on the body if they are to be worn.

I have not only been being working on my creative work, I have also had to learn how to start up a business, which has taken up as much time as the designing and making itself. I took advantage of a course run by The University College for the Creative Arts, which was subsidised by European funding, Enterprise Training for Creatives. The course was invaluable to me as the purpose of it was to have a finished business plan by the end to present to the course group.

I am discovering the complexities of being self employed mean you have to be designer, financial controller, research and development, PR, marketing and make the tea! So far so good and I am learning all the systems I need to develop to make my business run smoothly (or at least I hope they will!).

My goals are so much clearer now and I realised I also had a second line of creative work that would also be saleable; my photography and the digital art I was using in my jewellery. I am still working on this aspect of my work, but have already had it exhibited in the offices of Red Hat, a software company which seemed very appropriate for digital art. I was gratified at how well it was received.

My jewellery has also been exhibited this year at my college degree show in Farnham, Surrey, New Designers in London and 'Gift' at the Farnham Maltings with the Maltings Jewellers and Silversmiths Network. This is group I joined recently which has helped me get to know makers in the area other than those I met at college. I have found this group to be very helpful and supportive as one of the down sides of self-employment is you mostly work alone. I also made my first two sales, a large neckpiece Podium Neck Wreath Gold (2007) and a pair of earrings.

My projects for the new year are going to be keeping me busy, I am working on a competition entry at the moment and I will be purchasing my own grit blaster, air compressor and anodiser so I can develop my work further by experimenting with scale and designing a new collection for applications to shows, galleries, funding and of course to sell!

I will be exhibiting at Desire in Richmond upon Thames 1-2 March and the British Craft Trade Fair, Harrogate 6, 7 & 8 April in the Newcomers Gallery (stand 55), so do feel free to drop by and say hello if you are at either of these.

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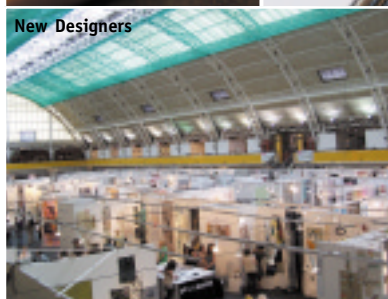
Racing Lace bracelet



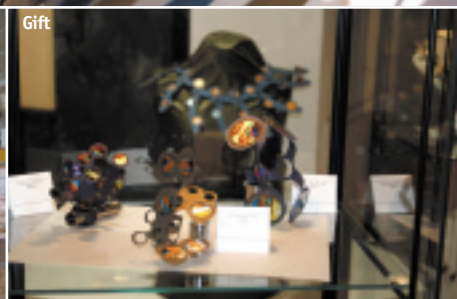
Racing Lace ring



Chequered Flag bracelet



New Designers



Gift



Renault sketch