

Diary of a Craftworker



Poppy Porter

Poppy Porter is craft&design's Diary writer throughout 2008. Previously working in the world of law, she has recently made a major career change into craft and the creative industries.

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These past couple of months have been somewhat of a baptism of fire and if they are anything to go by I will be a very busy craftsperson for the rest of the year!

This month saw me fully occupied with preparations for my first show under my own steam. Desire Jewellery and Silversmithing show in Richmond 1-2 March. All my others have been with a group or college support and doing it on my own was quite a daunting prospect if I thought about it too hard for too long.

My first concern was my work, I knew I probably had enough to fill a stand already but was very aware much of it was college work that had been out and about quite a bit before. I decided it was time for me to make some of the new designs that I had been mulling over for some time.

That decision meant a couple of months of frenetic making because being an all or nothing kind of person I wanted all my new designs on my stand. In retrospect this may have been over-ambitious. However, I did manage to pull it off somehow and produced almost as much work for this show as I did for my final degree! Luckily I had taken the decision to sell by sample and take orders at the show so at least I was only making one of each piece.

I was very pleased with the outcome. Many of the pieces were very different in look to the lacy/mechanical look I usually work with. They surprised me by turning out rather Art Nouveau even though they were based on the shape of some air vents on an F1 car. I finally had a chance to experiment with making accessories rather than just jewellery and designed some hair pieces which came out well, however, my love of the dramatic and large scale says they need to go bigger and become more like the fabulous hairpieces Geisha wear. This also presents a bit of a practical problem. I wear my own work partly because I love it but it is also a great way of promoting it. I have short hair and it is a bit tricky to wear large hairpieces unless you have long hair or the hairpiece is built on to a band. So I have decided to grow my hair a bit so I can wear what I make.

There was also the stand to design, promotion to do and all those little fiddly jobs like finding stands for the jewellery, pricelists, paperwork, photography of new work, mounting images and



being organised enough to get it all in the back of my elderly estate car in one go. Not forgetting me, I wanted to look smart and individual while presenting my work. I had to make sure I had something nice to wear. Luckily for the craftsperson of limited means EBay provided a couple of nice extras for my wardrobe very cheaply.

I decided to go as simple as I could for the stand design. The thought of transporting anything with glass in it filled me with dread so glass cabinets were out unless I hired them, which was too expensive. In any case I decided my work would look better on plinths. Originally I was going to make them myself, just classic white plinths with perhaps a bit of storage in the bottom.

As time went on I was just too busy to make any thing other than my work so I had to have a bit of a rethink on the stand design. Luckily a well-known Swedish flat pack superstore had just what I was looking for at a very reasonable price. I decided in the end to use coffee tables, bear with me here it will make sense in a moment. A low coffee table and two sets of three nesting tables



Racing wings earrings



Desire before set up



Racing wings necklace



Racing lace lariat necklace

made excellent stacking stands/shelves, the only problem was how to fix them to each other to be safe. After some experimentation permanent sticky Velcro proved to be the answer. Stacked up they looked good and with some white boxes given to me as plinths it looked really smart. I also bought a folding barstool so I could sit down but still be at a polite level if customers arrived and a set of drawers for paperwork and other bits and pieces (order book, stapler, mailing list book, emergency chocolate biscuits etc.). Lighting is also key and carefully directed halogens seemed to work very well in highlighting pieces.

I decided my aims for the show before I went as I am well aware my work is very new and unlike traditional jewellery both in materials, design and technique so was not expecting to make vast numbers of sales. I decided if people were not buying but seemed sufficiently interested I would try and get them on my mailing list. I am glad I took this decision because it gave me something to focus on other than sales. As it was I did make some sales, I can't retire to Monaco yet but I made more than I thought I would. I also made some useful contacts, discussed the possibility of a photo shoot and got to know those on the stands around me. Regina Aradessian on one side, Lucy Jade Sylvester and Laura Bradshaw-Heap from Stitch & Silver in front and Niko Pilarinos on the other side. Watching the more experienced exhibitors in their sales technique was very enlightening. I always keep in mind the advice from my business plan course last year about the importance of networking. You really cannot predict whom you will meet in any situation.

I was glad that my friend and mentor Donna Collinson was also at Desire, I did work experience with Donna in the summer of 2006 and learnt so much from her about working for yourself and knowing your market. Her car was being mended so I gave her a lift home from the private view, it was so good to discuss the show and get the benefit of her experience. Rob Chapman, the show organiser (who I believe has been a diarist before me) was also very helpful and couldn't do enough for me to help my show run smoothly.

I was surprised at the number of people I did know at the show, there were several from the Maltings Jewellers and Silversmiths Network (with whom I am exhibiting at the New Ashgate Gallery in May) and some who I had met at other shows.

My work was well received and I had plenty to talk about with most of the people who came past my stand. The most often made comment was "I have never seen anything like this before" which was fantastic as that is precisely the reaction I intended to create. I was also very gratified at the response to this diary article. I had the issue of *craft&design* it appeared in on my stand and it was a real talking point with many people who had either read it already or after reading it on my stand.

I have to say it did take me a good week to recover from this experience both to wind down and to keep working steadily on orders received and preparation for BCTF in Harrogate at the beginning of April. I learnt so much from this show, while it was tiring it was very positive and taught me the essentials of preparation. Once the stand is up and the show opens it is almost as if you are on stage so having everything to hand is a huge help.