

Diary of a Craftworker



Poppy Porter has been craft&design's Diary writer throughout 2008. Previously working in the world of law, she has made a major career change into craft and the creative industries. Poppy's diary concludes in our next issue, as she moves on to the next stage of her new creative life.

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This past couple of months have been ones that have lead me to devote this diary entry to distractions. As a self-employed designer-maker it seems to be really quite hard to find the time to get your head down to do the all-important designing and making. There seem to be a multitude of things out there to steal time away from the essential activities of creating work and running my business.

I can only run my business part time, as I have to work three days a week to pay the bills. I know many other craftspeople starting out and even those well established do this too. This does tend to mean that I just end up working at the weekend as well. For most people the weekend is downtime and, while I need to work the extra time, it is definitely necessary to make time for my own relaxation as well. Having come out of the world of office work not having the structure of the working day is more of a logistical challenge than I originally thought. In an office it is easy you turn up at the allotted time in the morning and leave in the late afternoon. Well, unless it turns into a nightmare of arriving early and working late! The point is there is a structure there created for you that is entirely lacking in self-employment unless you create it yourself. This problem is possibly also compounded by the fact I still work at home rather than having to travel to separate studio.

Whether it is something we give much thought to or not, some kind of structure to the working day is necessary, even if it is not the same one every day. I am finding my diary to be the most essential piece of kit to keep me in line. This may sound obvious, but it has taken me a long time to discover the perfect diary. It is a really handy one, a week on one side and a blank page for notes and drawings on the other. It also has a year planner in the front for all my deadlines. It has become almost an extension of my brain. The important thing is it is a very physical thing. I have tried electronic organisers in the past but there is nothing to beat actually writing or sketching something down. I have also found that a habit of doing things on the way is useful. For example using a train journey for thinking, planning or doodle time or changing to taking my bike to work instead of the car so that I exercise on the way. Otherwise exercise just turns into something else I have not done.

Here is a good example of a distraction. I have just been thoroughly distracted from writing this article by the Belgian Grand Prix. I was supposed to be doing some editing and one of my passions elbowed out the project in hand. Now because one of the inspirations behind my work is Formula 1 part of me says, "Actually this counts as work". Which of course it does not! Photographing, drawing and researching shapes, colours and forms of an F1 car does count as work, but shouting at the TV when a McLaren and a Ferrari are doing battle for the chequered flag really does not count. However, if I plan it into my day, the race is relaxation and does me a whole lot of good.



What started out as purely a fascinating research topic is now a fully-fledged obsession. That is not only one that engages me enough to use the shapes, forms and colours in my work, but that entertains me as well in following the racing season. As this diary entry is partly devoted to my thoughts on distractions, I think it is also fair to not only include the everyday distractions like part-time jobs, children and family, paperwork, being kept on hold for hours by utility companies, the laundry or plumbing emergencies, but also the self-induced distractions of self-indulgence and lack of focus in your creative work.

I find the form of an F1 car to be utterly fascinating, but the hard part is trying to make those forms into wearable and attractive pieces for those who could not care less about motor racing. This might seem like stating the obvious, but this is a tension that is growing in my work. There is a fine line in any art between what fascinates the creator and their audience and what is pure self-indulgence. The tension of that which draws me in being translated into something that draws my customers in is a problem that faces all professional craftspeople. So the first potential distraction is self-indulgence, my love of the sport of F1 as opposed to those parts of an F1 car that inform my work.

I went to the Festival of Speed again this year for my yearly opportunity to lust after F1 cars up close, sorry I meant visual research trip! I concentrated on photography and sound recording this time. I have found that the photographs I use as the jewel in my work are often extremely specific and not just any photo will

work well. A mixture of shape reflection, light and shadow and colour means that it is often not the conventionally "good" photo is the one that works best. I am still on a learning curve for this, as it is mainly trial and error experimentation to find out what works. Taking photos in a public place is also a lesson in keeping your wits about you as at one point I very nearly got run over by a car as it came back to its garage.

I was also using my trusty iPod to record engine sounds in the F1 paddock and this was easier than I thought. I had feared that the microphone I have would just be too pathetic to pick up the extraordinary noise of an F1 engine being revved. Through gauging how loud the engine noise was and standing a bit of a distance away I did get some good recordings, particularly as they were passing by up the track. These sounds are what I listen to while I am making my photo-paintings the sounds suggesting the shapes that occur in the pictures.

I am finding that ideas are the easy bit. I have lots of those. The difficult bit is the follow through, the technicalities of making it work, the ability to change things midway through and above all not getting distracted from finally reaching a conclusion. The concept of focus became part of an email exchange I had with a friend recently. I have lately had a tattoo completed on my back, I have wanted one since I was about fifteen, but never knew what I wanted. The inspirations for my work provided the design. In this email exchange I was discussing the meaning of my tattoo and I rather pompously referred to the design as my muse. The question came back "...is she a construct of your psyche, or does she appear to you?" My friend was gently mocking me I think, however, the question made me consider a little more deeply why I had drawn and tattooed a design that refers to my inspirations on to my back. So I replied that she represents my inspirations and creativity and is a reminder of what I truly want to do with my life. The design is a distillation and a focus. Having the ideas is one thing but picking and running with a good one is harder. The process of designing a tattoo, an irreversible mark, required a focus on getting it right that I can now transfer to my work. My second potential distraction is the overabundance of ideas themselves.

I am looking forward to the next couple of months, as they will be busy ones. I have two commissions to finish and preparation for the Society of Designer Craftsmen's Designer Crafts at Chelsea, my first retail show in a little while. It runs from 16-19 October at Chelsea Old Town Hall, so I am hoping people will be warming up for Christmas and looking for something a little different, preferably in titanium.



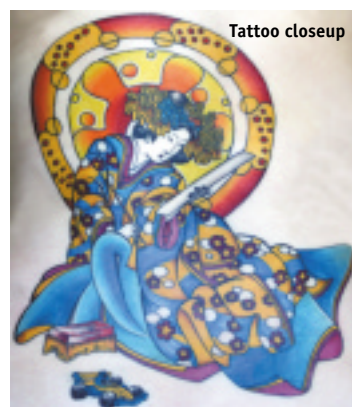
Podium gold neckwreath



Podium blue neckwreath



Toyota Festival of Speed



Tattoo closeup