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Frozen moment

University of Gothenburg

HDK (Högskolan för design och konsthantverk)

MFA Program in Crafts

Jewellery Art and Design

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2015

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Introduction

I've always been fascinated by the ambiance that you can sense in any space that is entered. Similarly to shinto – the indigenous religion of Japan, where many objects have their own spiritual essence. One can call it a ghost.

In my work I am aiming to create pieces that would express solitude and moments of happiness. These qualities are something that intrigue me.

Stone is the material I chose to represent this impression in my works. I have been using materials such as granite and marble for two projects during my Bachelor studies. Both of these materials stimulate and inspire me.

I used as a starting point idea of a silent moment. What is silence? Is it an ambiance in itself? For me it is incarnated in stone, landscapes, winter and blur. I use a polymer material and cover it with crushed marble; similar to snow covering the land. Silence is light and transparent like the polymer material I use. The combination of these two components creates an illusion of a hard stone. The sparkling marble gives it a depth, whilst transparency allows it to be perceived on a different level.

If you use Google search to see typical images associated with a word silence, you will find that most of them are in black and white scale and has a provocative or melancholic meaning, but silence is more than that to me. At the start of my project I made a mind map and worked with various inspirational images. I made created a personal definition of silence and realized that silence is in essence a muting of some perceptions in order to focus on others. To test this I took some photos and muted the black ink when printing them. I think the achieved effect in colours is an example of a visualization of silence. One of my aims is to achieve in my work the same effect and expression that the images I created conveyed. This is also the biggest challenge and acted as a starting point for the crafting process.

During the development of the theme "Silence", I realized, that silence does not have to be represented as soundless and empty. In silence there is a lot of emotional tension that can be reflected in the material as colour, complicated textures and form. In this way, pieces in themselves, became a representation of a moment. Frozen Moment.



Page from a scetchbook. Image printed without black ink

Personal reasoning

I was born in Latvia and raised in a little city named Jelgava. I lived for the first three years of my life in the Soviet Union. Because both my parents are native Russian-speakers I did not have any citizenship (alien passport) until I passed naturalization exam at the age of 23. It seems like not belonging to anywhere gave me a, somehow, "rootless" feeling. I enjoyed living in Latvia as I experienced it as a border between east and west. As a minority Russian-speaker in patriotic Latvia it made me observe and experience two separate cultures struggle for coexistence. I believe that this and other similar experiences significantly impacted my decision in choosing Silence as my starting theme.

My first step towards art was when I decided to enrol in an art school. Almost all of the art school teachers had studied at the Art Academy of Latvia. The Art Academy has an enormously strong academic approach in classical visual arts. So my art school program consisted of mostly basic principles in painting, drawing, sculpturing, composition and art history. I do not remember ever talking with teachers about anything connected to contemporary jewellery or crafts. The department of metal design, where I studied later on, consists of two programs and one of them is jewellery design. We worked a lot with metals and I always felt strongly dependant on the opinion of my teachers. At the same time I knew that the reason I decided to study arts was because it made me feel like I could express myself, my thoughts and build a dialogue with people through my works. But unfortunately, all jewellery the program seemed to ask from you was nothing more than applied art. I almost all the time felt that investing any meaning or philosophical idea to my work might be ridiculed. It negatively placed limitations on my work.

During my studies I partook in an exchange program with a school in Hildesheim in Germany (HAWK) where I, for the first time, experienced contemporary jewellery and actually started to appreciate my chosen craft.

The very same year after graduation I went to study to Sweden. I believe that Western European society is much more developed in the arts compared to Latvia because it readily accepts and cultivates innovation. This tendency seems to be present in all of Western Europe.

I started my personal project last year. Finally having full responsibility and being at the same time being totally free in expression was exciting but also a big obstacle. I didn't know

where to start. How? With what? I looked at what my colleagues were doing. Mostly they built stories around their own lives: their childhood experiences, politics and social and cultural issues. Most of them are very personal and somehow result in a narrator's perspective or give you at least a hint of it. This is when it struck me that I do not feel neither sure nor comfortable to work with any of these subjects. Still willing to tell something and "having one foot" in the past, where serious topics were not welcome, I decided to explore meaning of a *silence* which seemed to be a very logical conclusion.

When you are silent you give yourself a position of an observer or listener. This is the mental state that I try to set myself in when I am working with the material.

The working process

Experimenting with material

I started with an associative array approach and mind mapping. In the beginning I invested all of my time in trying different techniques that I was always interested in trying out and connecting all of the methods with my topic and position.

In result, I came up with combination of two materials: quite opposite in their morphology - plastic and carbonate mineral stone. When experimenting, I was aiming to achieve an unexpected physical effect from material, like flexible or very lightweight stone.

I then made a few ready pieces. I attempted to assert more control over the material; I put it in metal frames and used shades of black and white. This was an interesting and useful experiment but the works seemed to be limited and did not show all the good qualities of the materials. It was also was a limitation on my imagination and I felt that this material had that much more potential. So I began my second experimentation process.

I once again commenced with mind mapping and thought through what is "silence". As a result of that process I came to the conclusion that the pieces do not have to be black and white or have any frame.

It is very important to find correct shapes and forms that I feel confident in. In order to do so I made a sketch book where I collected my ideas on creating the ambient concept that I tried to convey on my work.

At the same time I experimented more with the material. One technique when working with shapes is to make a negative mould and cast hot melted glue into it.

I tried different moulds and heating methods. Hot glue in contact with other surfaces, of course resulted in it sticking to it, in order to avoid that I tried several options.

For example:

- Heating up the mould made out of metal. I used brass, thin copper plates and foils.

Result: the surface was not suited for my needs and later heating and covering with crushed marble still betrayed the plastic qualities of the material.

- Lubricating metal mould.

Result: the lubricant seemed to mix with the glue making its surface sticky and giving it an unpleasant dirty look.

- Covering metal mould with marble powder.

Result: As stone particles are relatively heavy, they have been moved downwards in the piece and ending up partly stuck to the metal surface.

As I worked with my material I understood, that in order to maintain the surprise effect I desired I had to avoid giving hints or clues of the qualities that are characteristic to plastic as it eliminates the otherwise instinctive feeling of curiosity. I found it very important to maintain the feeling of surprise as I believe that every time you see something unexpected or original, it pushes you to make a little step and learn. So, I had to avoid having the material stick to the mould surface, moulding polished surfaces and having to reheat the hot melted adhesive a second time. Thus the quality of the mould is crucial.

Any hard or soft mould would not stick to the adhesive plastic if it consisted out of small particles, for example a plaster mould. I assume that those kinds of moulds might be a good option for thought through and more controlled approaches. Perhaps, covering surface with watered marble powder and drying it could be an option. I might return to this idea later on. This time, indeed, I felt like letting the material be affected by natural factors (like liquidity when it is hot) was a fair option. So instead of a mould I used a thin latex/rubber covered with marble powder and other similar crystalline powders like talk.

For colouring glue I use SDN dye that impregnates plastic surface when heated. In this way the melted glue has more a saturated shade afterwards. I also use ready-made coloured adhesives. I then melt and form it.

The second important ingredient is marble or other crystal-like powder (talk, crushed fossil sand) that I partly shower on top whilst it is hot and melted.

I also should mention that the direct object crafting process I separated into three steps - planning or prediction of the future, present and the memory stage. During the "future" stage I plan and imagine how my piece should look like. I regulate how much of a colouring there will be, what shape it is going to have and plan the texturing. During the "present" stage I have a few short moments to give it a shape, I control it partially. After a short while I am able to separate rubber from a crafted piece and the result or actual object I see as a "memory" that is left over.

Thus, I time and time again created experimental pieces, models and layouts in the material. All the experimental pieces construct a peculiar library that consists out of more than a hundred different objects in different sizes and colours. All of them are made from the same

material - dyed plastic polymer and natural white or pink marble. Using a variety of pieces will help me work more comfortably in the crafting process. Each of them is unique and do not look like any of the others. This aspect creates a challenge but also gives opportunity to make a selection of pieces that express feeling of silence and happiness.



Experimental pieces

Selection process

Emotions, memory and feeling of nostalgia I associate with landscapes. Similarly, I feel this impression most in the pieces that remind me of a birds eye perspective of minute landscapes. So I made a selection of pieces that expresses this feeling of landscapes the most. To do that I looked at the shape, surface, texture, transparency and proportion of the pieces.

Here I would like to mention that for me, silence is also closely related to momentum. It is a memory. Perhaps, there is a reason why memories and landscapes are so often associated with each other. There are published several research books on this topic, for instance "Landscape and Memory" by Simon Schama. He investigates landscapes: "Even the landscapes that we suppose to be the most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product"¹. In the book landscape refers to a historical events, connections to his personal family stories and the culture associated with it. Another example is "Emotional Geographies" edited by Joyce Davidson, Mick Smith where is considered how emotions are portrayed in different situations and imagery².



Selected piece

¹ Schama, Simon, *Landscape and memory*, Fontana, London, 1996[1995]

² Davidson, Joyce, Bondi, Liz & Smith, Mick (red.), *Emotional geographies*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007[2005]

Elaboration

Experiencing materials affect you physically. Traditional materials have a heavy historical baggage. One of the reasons of the prevalence and usage of precious metals in traditional jewellery is a highlighting the value of expensive stones. In my work I question traditional approaches and instead of valuable jewels I celebrate the idea behind the material. For the rear of the pieces and other supporting details of the jewellery I use valuable metals like gold, gold plated silver and titanium (both coloured and uncoloured). I made most of the metal details almost invisible. I hope that crafting the metal details as thin constructions will bring a sense of order to the free shaped objects as well as result in a visual contrast.

I do not aim to imitate stone and I am aware of the fundamental differences between natural mineral rocks and these pieces are instead made to represent an idea. For this reason whilst crafting the metal parts I did not want to place them in a traditional stone setting but to instead harness the abilities of the material, like its adhesiveness and low melting temperature. For example, I can heat a hot wire through it or melt the material in construction. I also do not see any motivation for adding more materials then I already use.

As metallic details of the construction are very thin and minute I made them as strong as possible by hardening the metal. I hardened metal by utilizing physical pressure like hammering, gold-plating, rolling etc... This process gave the metal both firmness and elasticity.



Example of the construction. Details are melted in the material. Gold-plated silver, titanium



Example of the construction. Details are melted in the material. Gold 14K gold plated with 24K gold, titanium, quartz crystal, polymer material.



Example of the construction. Details are melted in the material. Gold-plated silver, titanium



Example of the construction. Details are melted in the material. Gold 14K, polymer material

Inspiration

It is impossible for me to say what exactly served as inspiration for my project. I shall say it is a summation of my environment, decisions and general interests, experience and personal perceptions. Often I feel fascinated by most of the works of artists from other disciplines. In Douglas Ljungqvist work "Ocean Beach" he shows photograph of a unique terrain in the U.S. a holiday paradise that was popular in 50ies but now stands half-empty. The pictures were taken in the aftermath of hurricane "Sandy". He says: "In my opinion, mood and atmosphere are the most important aspects of the work, because they carry the spirit of the time." Paul Murphy's work "Sentinels" depicts landscapes of the Isle of the Skye, an island in Scotland. "Sentinels" is an example of landscapes, silent and stately in photography. Landscape plays a major role and draws you into its majestic atmosphere and illusionary memories. Another great photographic masterpiece I will mention is Emma Phillips work — Salt. Her work is abstract and simple at the same time demonstrates to you something quite contemporary and realistic.

Summary

In general, I can separate my work into two major parts - research and working with the material. Research includes collecting materials, ideas, references, sketching, mind mapping etc. Working with the material is another big part that is done in several major steps - experimentation, creating a collection of objects, selecting the most suitable pieces, working on each piece individually and crafting metal a construction for each of them. The crafting of the metal parts was done in two steps. First sketching in brass and titanium and then replacing brass and titanium with more suitable finished details in gold, gold plated silver and titanium.

I believe that each step I took followed the last one logically and if I would be able to redo this project again I believe I would come up with very similar results.

In future, I plan work more on the material, perhaps, changing its ingredients.



Overall view on collection

List of sources and literature

Schama, Simon, *Landscape and memory*, Fontana, London, 1996[1995]

Davidson, Joyce, Bondi, Liz & Smith, Mick (red.), *Emotional geographies*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007[2005]

Photos from exam exhibition





Photos from final exhibition





