

Diary of a Craftworker



craft&design are delighted to welcome Janine Partington as our Diary Writer for 2011.

Janine is a designer maker based in Bristol, who combines the traditional craft of enamelling with fresh, clean, contemporary design.

Janine's work is well known and frequently seen at major contemporary craft events. Her distinctive panels, jewellery and flat back sculptures are also shown in galleries throughout the UK. See her website for details: www.janinepartington.co.uk

November 2010 marked the beginning of my fifth year as a full time enameller. Although I never set out to make a living from something creative, I suppose there were early signs.

I grew up in a household filled with the smell of oil paint and clay. My father was a painter and a fine art lecturer, my mother had studied ceramics. My family lived in a rambling Victorian semi with an enormous garden and rooms over three floors. We lived on the middle and top floors of the house whilst my father's studio took up the entire ground floor.

I studied History of Art, Design and Film at Sheffield City Polytechnic and then a Masters in Museum Studies at Leicester University before starting my working life in a small local history museum on the South coast. Moving to live with my then boyfriend, now husband, meant that I drifted away from the museum world and ended up working in administration. A move to Bristol necessitated by my husband's new job at University of the West of England (UWE) meant that I worked as an office temp, but before anything else more permanent came my way along came my first child Louis, followed a few years later by my daughter Breesha.

In September 2002, shortly after my daughter's birth I decided I needed to get out of the house for a few hours a week and so decided to enrol in evening classes. My husband had been working for several months with world-renowned enamel artist Elizabeth Turrell at UWE and had experimented with the medium. He suggested that I try it too. My local Filton College had an excellent range of adult education classes taught in the wonderful old Bristol School of Art.

With wonderful support from my tutor Matt Benton I soon began to explore the medium and then went my own way. I am a lazy enameller – I do not clean my copper (a shock to many who do), I like firescale (the oxidation that occurs on the bare copper when you fire a piece) and I use stencils extensively.

Before the end of my first year of evening classes I became involved with a new local arts trail – they were popping up everywhere at the time and have become a particularly strong presence on the creative calendar of Bristol. I was already going to show my hand embroidered bags and hand-made hand cut and dyed cards and decided to add enamel panels to my display. These panels were mainly abstract test pieces, but they sold well (probably because they weren't expensive!). Over the next few years I continued to

take part in the arts trail and also started selling work through local craft fairs. All my work was unrealistically priced, particularly the textile pieces – I think I was working for about 10p an hour!!! Pricing remains my biggest challenge to this day.

Eventually I applied to the Rostra Gallery in Bath and was accepted to include my work in one of their shows. This led to other galleries and today I am lucky to supply a large number throughout the country including the wonderful Devon Guild of Craftsmen of which I am a member.

2010 was a good year for me. I had a spread in BBC Homes and Antiques magazine, which involved my first ever photo shoot. I also got my first large commission at the end of the year involving the making of three large thin panels for a private house. My own kiln was too small, so I finally used the large kiln at UWE. There, Elizabeth Turrell made sure that I had a great day and it all went like clockwork. However, due to cuts, the whole enamel research area at UWE will cease to exist after April 2011. I wish now that I had used the space earlier. It's the only large kiln in an educational facility and one of only a few available in the UK for artists to work with, so its loss is a significant one.

Whilst I exhibited at many contemporary craft fairs in 2010 including Origin in London, the Contemporary Craft Fair in Bovey Tracey, and also had work in the Affordable Art Fairs in London and Bristol courtesy of the Rostra Gallery, my highlights of 2010 were two very small things memorable for very different reasons. The first was the making of two very simple text-only memorial plaques for two members of staff from my local Southville Community Centre who died in 2010. Though only a small thing, they were the most worthwhile pieces of enamelling I did all year. The second memorable piece of enamelling was very small and also text-based. It was a tiny green and white badge with the words 'No 1 Doctor' on it. In July I received an enquiry from the props department for the BBC's Casualty programme who had been unable to source a badge they needed for the following week's shoot. I made the badge and this Christmas I saw it on the small screen when it was shown in close up as part of a pivotal moment in the plot involving a main character. It did make me smile and it will probably be the only time I see any of my work on the TV!

Turning to 2011, I want to challenge myself more instead of coasting along. Of course, I need to try to



Busy in my workshop My stand at Origin 2010



Firing a commission in the large kiln at UWE

maintain a certain level of income, but as this will inevitably be lower due to a restricted market, VAT increases (though I have decided to maintain my 2010 retail prices and absorb any losses), and a reduction in output, now is the time to do something new. Firstly I want to facilitate workshops that introduce enamelling to a wider public. I am hoping that this will also make me more sociable and allow me to meet more people, something that I have found increasingly difficult in recent years. Secondly, I want to explore my medium through more interesting projects – I'd love to do something in a public space. But most of all I'd like to spend more of 2011 simply playing.

For stockist and forthcoming exhibition details visit www.janinepartington.co.uk.

Work also being shown on the Rostra Gallery stand at Affordable Art Fair, London 10-13 March www.affordableartfair.com.

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Memorial plaques for community centre



Panels from my Copper Series



First firing - just out of the kiln