

# Diary of a Craftworker



Janine Partington, *craft&design's* Diary Writer this year, 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](http://www.janinepartington.co.uk)

It's the end of the Winter, hopefully the beginning of spring, and new ideas are kicking around in my head. There are so many things I want to try, but there never seems to be enough time. I have managed to create a lot of new panel and jewellery designs, but I also want to make clocks, design new sculptures, do more graphic work, but the first few months of this year have been busy. After generally good pre-Christmas sales, galleries want to re-stock in time for Valentine's Day, school half term and then Easter. The autumn is always frantic and always about catch up. The first few weeks of January are usually the time when I am finally on top of things and can relax, but it's never good to get too relaxed because before I know it the orders start piling up again. For example, making work for the London Affordable Art Fair (AAF) in March – every year I mean to start earlier, but smaller, more manageable orders with earlier deadlines just keep coming in.

It's been interesting this Spring looking at the year ahead and the work I may or may not be doing. I have quite a few exhibitions already lined up and will be exhibiting at the Contemporary Craft Fair at Bovey Tracey in June, but now is the time to decide which Autumn shows to apply to. I tend to stick to selected contemporary craft fairs because from past experience for me these seem to be a safer bet. If I'm going to take 3-7 days out of my making time I want that time to be at events where I know there is a going to be a receptive audience and a good footfall to make it worth my while. So far I've been lucky and always made a profit, but I'm fully aware that these fairs are not just about on-the-day sales, but about keeping my profile raised so that I continue to have a steady stream of orders through my website throughout the year. I am lucky that my work seems to have a general appeal and that I get a lot of repeat custom.

Deciding which fairs to apply to is always difficult, and I know from past experience that if I do too many, I become very stressed. Sometimes I wonder why I do this, because what I really want to do is play all day in different media, but still I love the excitement of creating a new design, firing it for the first time and seeing if my vision has worked. The instant thrill I used to get when I sold a piece has lessened over the years, but I still love the feeling that someone liked my work enough to put their hands into their pockets to exchange money for it. It's a

form of reassurance. This need goes very deep – there's a wish for everyone to like me and what I do.

As part of my need to get out of my workshop and meet people, I often go on day workshops run by organisations such as Artsmatrix, the Crafts Council and local art groups. These days give me the opportunity to meet other artists and makers and hear their stories. I get to contribute to a group, and I gain a lot of confidence from doing so. At the beginning of February I attended my first workshop of the year - 'Take me to the Market'. It was run by the recently re-launched Artsmatrix. Now owned by Plymouth College of Art, Artsmatrix was originally set up in 2004 to help people working within the



creative industries. In the past I used its one-to-one creative business mentoring scheme and it had been very helpful early on in my artistic journey. The group attending this course was very mixed, including artists who had an idea of where they wanted to go but no real idea of how to get there and mid-career artists. There were fine artists, photographers, ceramicists, product designers, illustrators, printmakers and me. The mix of disciplines in these workshops is part of their appeal. The focus of the day was about selling oneself and we all came away with the message that we need to give ourselves permission to take charge of the journey we are on and gain confidence in our ability not just to create but to value that creativity in a commercial world.

The day after this workshop I sat on a panel for a



Ceramic sculpture by Hans Borgonjon in New Territories exhibition at Devon Guild

Critical Review Day at the Devon Guild of Craftsmen. As part of their Spring exhibition programme, the Devon Guild had put on two related shows – 'Get Fresh' showcasing the work of emerging designer makers in the South West (I took part in this exhibition in 2007) and 'New Territories' which showed the work of new associate members of the Guild. Both exhibitions aimed to show the exciting avenues that new craftspeople in the south west are taking today. Much of the work was very interesting, showing great craftsmanship but also innovative ideas. The Critical Review Day was aimed at the associate members of the Guild and other early career makers with a view to talking through their existing ideas and future paths. My fellow panel members, Peet Leather (textile artist) and Jenny Southam (ceramic sculptor) were both very articulate and knowledgeable makers and I learnt a lot from them as well as the participants in the day.

Craft and Design Month is looming and I've been asked to take part in a group show with some ceramicists at The Willow Gallery in Oswestry. I've also been asked to give a gallery talk at Cambridge Contemporary Crafts on 28th May. This will be a good new experience, but also fills me with dread as I'm not much of a public speaker. With more workshops to attend on the horizon and attendance at the Guild of Enameller's Conference to come, as well as lots of re-stocking of galleries and shops, I think I'll be nice and busy for the next few months at least.

As for playing, well I've not done as much as I would like, but have managed a little bit of cutting and layering...so it's a start!

For stockist and forthcoming exhibition details visit [www.janinepartington.co.uk](http://www.janinepartington.co.uk). Spring Exhibition at The Willow Gallery, Oswestry, 2 April – 31 May [www.willowartgallery.co.uk](http://www.willowartgallery.co.uk) Informal talk at Cambridge Contemporary Crafts, 2-4pm Sat 28 May [www.cambridgecrafts.co.uk](http://www.cambridgecrafts.co.uk) Visit Janine's stand at The Contemporary Craft Fair in Bovey Tracey, 10-12 June [www.craftsatboveytracey.co.uk](http://www.craftsatboveytracey.co.uk).

Janine Partington - Vitreous Enameller  
3 Agate Street, Bedminster, Bristol BS3 3AQ  
M: 07742 740642  
E: [mail@janinepartington.co.uk](mailto:mail@janinepartington.co.uk)  
[www.janinepartington.co.uk](http://www.janinepartington.co.uk)

