

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

The last few months have, as usual, been mainly about juggling – home, work, sleep. April in particular was difficult with the children only in school for eight days due to Easter and the many, many bank holidays. However, everything went out on time and I managed to get around quite a bit in the sunny weather with the children as well as on my own.

In March I attended two very interesting and fun workshops. One was called 'Thrive and Survive' and was hosted in Gloucester by Arts Matrix, the second was 'An Alternative Approach to Business Planning' hosted in Bristol by the Crafts Council. Both were very different but creative approaches to planning one's business, marking down priorities and creating strategies for the growth and survival of one's creative business. As always, they were both good opportunities to meet people from across the creative community.

In the middle of March I attended the British Society of Enamellers (BSOE) AGM in London. This society has, in contrast with the Guild of Enamellers, been in somewhat of a crisis in recent years, but it is still holding itself together and has great plans for the future. The AGM is always enlightening to attend because discussions can get very heated as there are quite a few founding members who are very protective of the society. Whilst in London I took the opportunity to visit the 'Fused' enamel exhibition at the Flow Gallery. I had never visited the gallery before and the space was wonderful. I had seen work by quite a few of the enamellers before, but it was interesting to see them all in one place. More enamel exhibitions in the pipeline for 2011 and 2012 highlight the interest and activity of those practising in the medium.

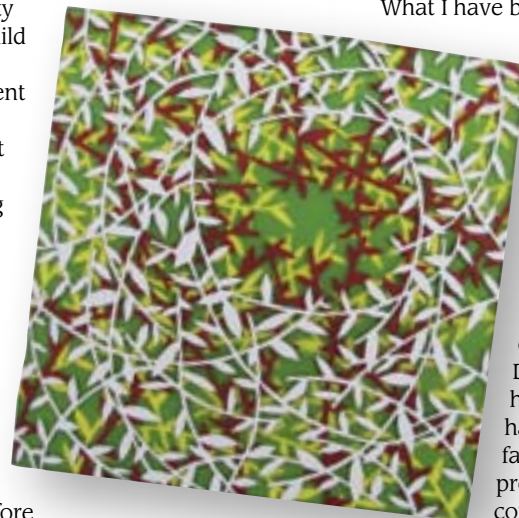
I attended the Guild of Enameller's Conference in Canterbury in April. I'd never been to their conference before, and was a bit nervous, but it was a great experience. The feeling of this association is very different and more all encompassing than that

of the BSOE but then they have very different agendas. There were interesting and beautifully illustrated talks by award-winning enamellers Fred Rich, Phil Barnes and Rachel Gogerly, a day of play with different enamelling techniques and the chance to spend too much money with the suppliers who attended with displays overflowing with tempting stock. On top of that there was good food and company which meant it was a very welcoming and sociable weekend. The whole thing was extremely well organised and thought through. As I'm not the person who feels particularly comfortable in purely social occasions, in the few down times that occurred throughout the weekend I found a comfy sofa on which to sit and watch the world (and a lot of enamellers) go by. I wasn't idle though as I crocheted a number of linen rings. It was really lovely just sitting there with not many thoughts in my head, and not juggling family, work and sleep – I also went to bed before midnight both nights I was away – bliss!!

What I have been spending more time doing recently is playing, particularly with paper cuts. Following a photo shoot of my studio in 2010 for BBC Homes & Antiques magazine, I studied images of my stencils piled high on my desk and found that I was fascinated by the layering, the shadows created in the piles. I have since decided that this is something I want to explore in its own right. Designing the stencils and hand-cutting them with a scalpel has always been one of my favourite parts of my creative process. My paper cuts are concerned with line and layering, with colour used as an accent. I'm

Papercut

interested in the revealing and obscuring aspects created in the layering of the paper cuts. Being me, I have to have a reason to play and so I have decided that I will submit my, mainly abstract, paper cuts to themed and open exhibitions. So far, I have been lucky enough to be selected for the Contemporary Craft Open exhibition at Black Swan Arts, Frome and to take part in a 'Paper' themed window display in Edinburgh. It's only a few pieces, but it's nice to have something different out there. I'll also be including



Detail of 'Into the Woods' sculpture made for Devon Guild metalwork showcase at Plymouth Art Gallery



A pile of stencils



Threads - crocheted linen ring



Work by members of the Guild of Enamellers at their AGM

paper cuts (with designs reflecting more natural forms) in my showcase 'Fired By Nature' at the Rostra Gallery in Bath during August.

At the beginning of May I set off for Sir Harold Hillier Gardens in Hampshire to taste my first experience of installing a site-specific art work. Earlier in the year I had applied to take part in their 'Art in the Garden' summer exhibition. After submitting an untried, untested idea – an enamelled copper daisy chain envisaged as circling the trunks of trees, acceptance into the exhibition meant that I had to actually make it work. My first obstacle was getting the links and daisies cut. I usually use the wonderful Dan at CIRIC at the University of Swansea, but he was on paternity leave, so I had to find an alternative water jet cutter. I shopped around and got one crazy quote before using the Metropolitan Works in London. I missed Dan and his super-efficiency and skill, but they did a pretty good job and I got the pieces back in time to enamel them and take them to the gardens to install, which was a relief.

As I've never installed anything in my life, it was an interesting experience. The co-ordinator was very accommodating, but I hadn't fully appreciated all the factors involved. I wanted the chains to go around the lower trunks of some trees, but the first tree we decided on, and that I encircled with my daisy chain, turned out to be a memorial tree. This meant I had to move the installation to another spot and put my chains around five silver birches of various girths. In fact, this is how I had initially imagined the piece, and I was fairly pleased with the result.

Through all this activity my enamelling for exhibitions and shops and galleries has continued apace and I continue to enjoy making my panels and jewellery. I also created a series of new sculptures for a Devon Guild of Craftsmen metalwork showcase at Plymouth Art Gallery. However, the diversions I am making into paper and textiles are becoming increasingly important (and addictive) as they inject a much-needed enthusiasm and freshness into my creative life.

Looking to the Autumn, the silly season that is September to December always comes round quicker than I think it will, and I must start planning and making soon, though I do have to get through the summer first!!!

For stockist and forthcoming exhibition details visit www.janinepartington.co.uk. Contemporary Craft Open – Black Swan Arts, Frome, Somerset, until 26 June www.blackswan.org.uk Fired by Nature – Rostra & Rooksmoor Galleries, Bath, 3 – 31 August www.rostragallery.com Devon Guild of Craftsmen metalwork showcase – Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, until 18 July www.plymouth.gov.uk/museumpcmag

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