

Diary of a Craftworker



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After a year of sharing her creative life with us, this is Janine's final Diary in craft&design. We wish her well for the future and hope you've enjoyed reading her Diary as much as we all have at craft&design.

In our next issue we'll be introducing our new Diary writer for 2012, who is.... ah, but you'll have to wait until and see!

The fact that I am writing this article two weeks after the original copy deadline (thank you Angie) is indicative of how busy the last quarter of each year is. There are fairs, exhibitions, re-stocking shops as well as all those family things to organise in the run up to Christmas. Yes, I am very busy, and yes I am very tired and probably not that nice to be around all the time. I shouldn't complain though - I've done two fairs so far this autumn - Origin in London in September and the Great Northern Contemporary Craft Fair in Manchester in October. Both these events were very good for me financially and I met lots of really interesting and interested people. I sometimes struggle with customer interaction, and can feel like I've forgotten how to start a conversation, but when I'm on a roll I'm fine and luckily most of the days at these fairs were busy.

I think I was one of the few that had an almost completely satisfactory experience in 2010 when Origin relocated from Somerset House to Spitalfields Market - there were lots of complaints and we experienced an amazing cold snap, but I was busy, sold well and enjoyed the new location. This year there were still niggles for some, and this time we had a bit of a heatwave (weather is never predictable), but as with the Contemporary Craft Fair in Bovey Tracey earlier in the year my sales were healthy and an improvement on 2010.

The Great Northern Contemporary Craft Fair moved its location this year from a marquee to the first floor of an office building. It was a strange venue and I don't think a very successful one in terms of access for families and flow through the stands, but I was fine. I always like staying in Manchester because it's the only place where the hotel I stay in has room service - yes, I know that shouldn't be the reason for enjoying a fair, but it's the little things....

In between the fairs there have

been all the exhibitions to make work for, and this year even more than in the past I have seriously struggled and have had to negotiate late deadlines quite a lot (as with this article). I've also been doing other things though.

In June I was approached by a greetings card company via an agent with a view to having some of my images printed up into cards. I didn't have to do anything except supply the images (which already existed). I didn't ask for the work or look for it, so it was really easy money. When I heard what they were going to do with my designs I wasn't sure that I would like them, but they used coloured foils on the cards and when I received samples I was very pleasantly surprised by their quality.

However, since then I have been asked to design a small Christmas range - this was hard work. I've never designed something for a third party before - well, I have, but it's generally been up to me how I made the design. It was only a few cards, but it took quite a bit of time. I did enjoy it though - always do like working to a theme - makes me feel a bit like I imagine it is to be a student in art college.

I also did some teaching - only two days - but they were with a great group of women, a craft collective called Shelanu based in Birmingham and facilitated by Craftspace.

I was very nervous - I rarely teach - but I thought I needed to take the bull by the horns so to speak. It was very different from the other bits of teaching I'd done in the past. Whilst the idea behind the collective is to eventually create a craft product to make and sell and a business that will one day provide careers for the individuals involved, a large part of being part of the group seems to be the social aspect. These women have done a lot of work with makers such as Kathryn Partington (no relation) to learn jewellery, ceramic and other skills, and have put on a few exhibitions - they had a non-selling stand at the Contemporary Craft Fair at Bovey this year. I was approached because it was felt that enamelling might be a way of adding decoration to the copper jewellery they had previously



A bit of whimsy - my first figurative piece



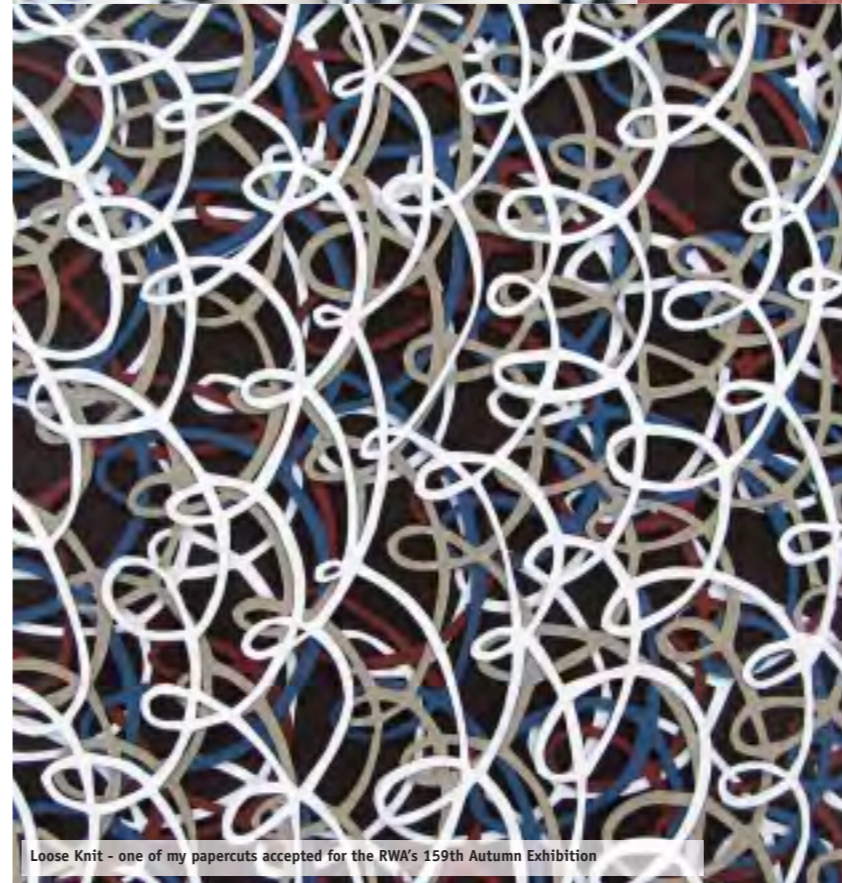
My workshop with the women from Shelanu at Craftspace



New shaped brooches



A new design



Loose Knit - one of my papercuts accepted for the RWA's 159th Autumn Exhibition

created. The problem I have always had with regard to teaching enamelling was solved by the fee that covered the cost of the purchase of a small enamel kiln that I now have for any future projects such as this. I taught them basic stencilling techniques and they mainly used the imagery they had created for the jewellery they had already made for their

designs. Teaching them was challenging as though the session nominally ran between about 10.30am and 4pm, the seven women arrived over the course of a couple of hours, so health and safety talks were repeated numerous times and there never was time for the proper demonstration

you would normally do when teaching a new skill. However, they did seem to get stuck in, not taking lunch and seeming to genuinely enjoy learning. During both sessions the room we worked in at the Custard Factory also became a photographer's studio as they participated in individual and group shots for an exhibition they were going to have of their work at Bilston Museum in late 2011. As I said it was a challenging

environment to work in, but it was a rewarding experience to work with the women who were very enthusiastic about the results they achieved.

What will 2012 bring for me - I really don't know - I've had many new experiences in 2011 and I think creatively it has been quite rich for me especially with my work with paper (nearly forgot - I am really proud that I had three abstract papercuts accepted into the Royal West of England Academy's 159th Autumn exhibition). In 2012 I am promising myself that I will relax more, be more sociable and enjoy life and making and I hope that interesting and exciting projects that stretch me in many ways will come to me over the next few years. I'd love to work in different media and just play....watch this space.

I've really enjoyed writing my articles for craft&design and look forward to reading the next maker's diary.... Happy New Year!

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

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