

Re-Route

Saturday 14 March – Sunday 26 April 2009

The Contemporary Craft Fellowship Scheme (CCFS) was developed to help meet the needs of mid-career designer makers in the South West. A professional development bursary providing a structured reflective environment, with room for individual practice and peer group support, was seen to be a practical way of helping mid-career makers take stock of their position and move forwards. The strategic objectives of supporting makers in this way include encouraging entrepreneurial activity, supporting growth of the contemporary craft sector in this region and increasing sustainability of individual businesses. The selected Fellows all had to meet the qualifying criteria which took account of their track record, their originality and quality of making and their business ideas and innovation. Additionally, part of the 'support' structure of the award was that each Fellow chose a mentor with whom they could discuss their ideas and work in progress.

The idea for the Re-Route exhibition grew from the CCFS and the knowledge that makers, once they have set up their practice and embarked on their careers, are often caught up in the complex demands of being a one-person business. Being a designer, a maker, a marketing manager, an administrator, an IT and maintenance person all at once is an enveloping work load which impacts on the more abstract activities of reflection, research and development. To have a 'mid-career' window to consider past, present and future directions allows for a considered appraisal of the key strands of managing a creative practice.

The scheme has been supported by ArtsMatrix, Crafts Council, Arts Council England South West, The Devon Guild of Craftsmen and The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

The Fellows are Jenny Beavan, Fionna Hesketh, Fabrizia Bazzo, Janet Stoyel and, as a partnership, Katie Bunnell and Jessie Higginson. Janet's project has been unavoidably delayed and she is unable to take part in this exhibition. There will be an opportunity to see Janet's Fellowship work in the Members Showcase space at The Devon Guild from 15 May – 15 June 2010.

Jenny Beavan, ceramicist, applied for the Fellowship as she wanted to explore possibilities for making work which was suitable for the realm of public commissions. Jenny has a long term interest in the Cornish china clay industry and has been recording the decommissioning process of a site which will possibly be re-developed as an 'Eco Town' in the future. The physical and economic landscape of Cornwall is shaped by the clay industry and Jenny's record of the decommissioning of the Buell Driers at Par Docks has given her ideas for site-specific art works to be presented to architects and developers should the Par Docks development be given the go-ahead.

Jenny's experience of the bursary year is unequivocally positive. Concept and research have always been fundamental to her work and the bursary has offered the opportunity to have a sustained period of concentration and information gathering with the added bonus of a mentor to discuss her ideas with. Jenny's mentor is an architect, Amanda Wanner RIBA, from Studio Three, Liverpool, and the time they have spent together has included visits to venues with architectural and site specific installations. Amanda, in her ongoing evaluation of Jenny's progress, comments that, 'The resulting work is a body of wholly unique and site specific pieces that trace the memory of a space that is slowly eroding, and washing away down the very drains that Jenny is mapping'. This exhibition documents Jenny's process of

research and discovery and will be followed by more showings of Jenny's work at the headquarters of Imerys Minerals Ltd. in their canteen, the reception area and the Board Room.

Fionna Hesketh has been making and selling her jewellery for over twenty years. She applied for the Fellowship as she felt her work, although beautifully made, lacked a cohesive thread and her designs jumped from one technique to another. Fionna realised she needed to spend time finding ways to generate new ideas which would inform her practice. With that in mind she named her Fellowship application *New Ideas, No End Product* as she knew she wanted to devote the time entirely to the inception of ideas rather than new products.

Fionna chose her mentors, Matthew Harris (textiles) and Helen Carnac (metalsmith) because their work has experimental and playful qualities that Fionna responded to. Early on, Matthew suggested that using familiar tools and materials in a new way might produce interesting results so Fionna began to work with materials, clematis fibres being one example, which determined new ways of working. She then transferred this newness of approach back to more familiar materials.

Fionna's knowledge of her surroundings has also been used to generate ideas. Pin making was once a cottage industry in Gloucestershire, Fionna's locality, and pins have been used as a starting point for a collaboration with two other makers, Corinne Hockley and Bettina Bunce. Joining things together and achieving strength with delicacy are both concepts which Fionna has been exploring and introducing into her experimental work. Reflecting on the impact of the Fellowship, Fionna describes being completely absorbed by her new directions and, thanks to the input of mentors and advisors, is now able to take risks and follow ideas with new confidence.

Fabrizia Bazzo applied for the Fellowship as she too is interested in public commissions and wanted to be able to make large-scale architectural glass panels. In order to do this she needed to know about commercial techniques and commercial facilities so she could apply them to her craft discipline. She had already started to research this before embarking on the Fellowship but, as she says in her statement, 'the Fellowship has given strength to my intent, as well as the financial help, confidence and credibility to allow me to achieve my objectives'. Fabrizia sees the Fellowship as a commitment, with a deadline, which has given her the opportunity to work with other people on the realisation of her ideas.

Lamination is a process which bonds one or more layers of glass together. It is the same technique that is used for commercial applications such as car windscreens. In Fabrizia's case a two-part silicone gel is used which allows the surface of the art glass, usually 'antique' (mouth-blown) flashed glass, to be decorated using traditional methods of acid-etching, painting and staining and then fixed to a 'carrier' substrate in order to realise the overall design. This substrate can be toughened, providing additional strength and security, which allows large glass pieces to be fabricated without using lead or other supporting materials. In order to learn about this process, Fabrizia had to go to a studio in Germany as she couldn't find anywhere in the UK with the right facilities or supportive interest.

Fabrizia's initial visit to Derix Glasstudios in Germany was to understand some of the practicalities of the process as well as to experience working as part of a team in a large studio. Her original plan was to make some examples which could be shown to potential clients but, as she had just been awarded a commission that would lend itself well to lamination, she decided to use her time to make the piece on display here which is a small part of the commission design.

Fabrizia spent several weeks at the Glasstudios working in an entirely new way as the studio has designated technicians for various stages of production. After working as a 'sole

operator', Fabrizia had to learn to work in a more 'hands-off' way, as part of a team, an experience that has been positive as she now knows that anything is possible. For future work, Fabrizia has learned enough to undertake smaller projects in her own studio, but she will return to Derix Glasstudios as they have the facilities and expertise for larger, more complex pieces. Fabrizia's commission is due to be installed in the Plymouth Dental School in April.

Fabrizia chose her mentor, George Papadopolous, for his reputation as a glass artist, his knowledge of lamination techniques and his unusual and exciting approach to the material. She describes the experience of being a 'mentee' as a bit daunting at first but then realised it was a rare opportunity to communicate with someone who knew a great deal and was generous with his artistic knowledge as well as valuable business skills related to marketing, presentation and contracts.

Jessie Higginson and Katie Bunnell, working as Higg + Bunn, have combined their experience and areas of interest to work on product designs which utilise their joint enthusiasm for surface pattern. Their initial proposal hoped to find a ceramic manufacturer with whom they could work to make a small range of forms. However, Stoke-on-Trent, long-established centre of ceramic manufacturing, is facing its own challenges and, for a variety of reasons, their research led them to conclude that this was not the best route on which to take their work at this point. Jessie and Katie decided to concentrate on exploring working collaboratively with surface pattern, and are keeping an open mind about the possibilities of working with other materials such as fabric and paper.

On working as a partnership Jessie and Katie have made the following observations: It takes time to learn to work together, two individuals working together can generate confidence and a blend of skills can produce good results. Jessie and Katie are positive about their partnership and envisage it continuing in some form as the time has flown by and they both feel there is still much ground to cover. Their work uses a mix of traditional and new technologies including drawing, photography, in-glaze, on-glaze digital, laser and raised-paste transfers (for texture) and a computer numerically controlled (CNC) router to create their large-scale digital drawings. Their mentor, Tavs Jorgensen, has given them much positive input from his own experience as a product designer who has worked with manufacturers in the UK, US and China.

Most artists and designer/makers would probably agree that the making process is a synthesis of many things. These things might include traditional and/or cutting edge skills, process and knowledge of materials as well as knowledge of other makers and their works (historical and contemporary) and, underpinning all the above, ideas or reasons for making the work. Our exhibitors have all used some of their Fellowship time on new ideas and experimentation as they all know, being mid-career makers, that ideas are central to a thriving practice. Acquiring new skills has been another activity central to the experience. Technological advances in computer applications have changed the way that artists and makers can work both in the design and production stages. Keeping abreast of innovation, although a matter of choice, is just as relevant as understanding tradition. The Fellowships have allowed these makers a chance to properly consider their practice, process and product and it is clear from the exhibition that their future work will be enriched by the opportunity.

P. de Burlet, March 2009