Isomorphs – New Mutations

Jewellery by Norman Cherry
Isomorphs – New Mutations

Isomorphs are generally defined as objects which display similar qualities of form or characteristic. This is particularly so in the biological sciences, but the term is also recognised in mathematics and gemmology, to name just two other disciplines where external similarities are shared by otherwise quite different entities. The genesis of the Isomorphs in this particular exhibition can be traced back to a residency I undertook at Oregon College of Art and Craft in 2006, when a new body of work grew out of experiments in deconstructing forms which I had previously created for other purposes. These deconstructions, and later reconstructions, bore some resemblances to each other in that certain forms which previously might have been complete entities in themselves now became component parts of something more complex. Certain of these featured more often than others and, as the new forms evolved further, some tangential similarities remained even although gradually the pieces became more architectonic in form. Indeed it would be true to say that the deconstructed parts became units in a series of three dimensional puzzles which were “solved” through a largely tectonic process.

The most recent jewellery created for this exhibition – the New Mutations - not only continues the process as certain easily recognisable motifs migrate from one piece to another, but it has also become noticeable that a more narrative and metaphorical vein is beginning to
emerge. I believe that almost all jewellery tells a story in its own way. Jewellery is probably the most compact and portable form of personal art. It can tell a story about the wearer or bearer, about that person’s family or background, about personality. But there is usually some sort of underlying story, often untold, about its own creation, about the influences on the artist who generated the idea, developed it, and finally made it what it is.

There has always been a story, a set of influences, behind what I create but it is only now that I am finding the narrative becoming more important and a more intrinsic part of the end result. The incorporation of some “readymades” which have had their own previously unrelated histories has been, to some extent, the result of an element of self-examination and reviewing taking place at a point in my life when I look forward and back at the same time.

Unlike the production of a manufactured line of jewellery - ie. Jewellery as Product - which is a response to a standard design-and-make problem, the creation of a body of work such as this is a continuous engagement with an intuitive process which results from an accumulation of visual, theoretical, technical, personal, and other factors - intuition based on tacit knowledge: research-in-action, reflective practice. This is a process recognised and described by several writers and commentators on creativity in the visual arts and sciences. Chris O’Toole, an Oxford
University entomologist, has described making creative decisions, based on a virtually unconscious assimilation of great swathes of information, over very short periods of time.² He describes this as “the Jizz – the moment when a sort of realisation dawns … and the accumulation of years of study and observation, knowledge, and experience enables you to recognise it instantly”, not dissimilar to Krome Barrat³ talking about “knowingness”: the insight which results in something new and original.

A thorough knowledge of theory as well as practice is necessary for the accumulation of the skills essential for a contemporary creative jewellery artist. As Richard Sennett shows in his book The Craftsman,⁴ skill is about an interrelationship of thinking and doing practised over several years. He talks about “material consciousness”⁵ and “how it feels”⁶. He talks about intuition and the “intuitive leap”. It is what he calls “a special form of induction”⁷. Donald Schön describes what he calls “knowing in action”⁸ as almost indefinable, intuitive processes such as “thinking on your feet”, “finding the groove”, “feel for the music”, and “feel for the ball”, using sportsmen and jazz musicians as useful examples of professionals who, like artists and designers, as a result of many years of the melding of theory and practice, are reflective practitioners par excellence.

In creating the work for this exhibition, decision-making was often based on processes which cannot be easily explained, in much the way that a musician or sportsman would make minor changes to phrasing, fingering,
stance, or grip almost without thinking - actions which are not a result of specific prior planning or thinking. When a specific adjustment is made to the proportion, or the surface pattern, or a decorative element of a piece of jewellery, the decision is not merely capricious or felicitous. It is a result of that “know-how” which is “in the action”.

This, however, is activity which lends itself far better to post hoc rationalisation. Creativity at the point of action is much more visceral and explosive, altogether more passionate than it can ever be described. That act of passion is ultimately what makes it so essential and worthwhile for the practitioner.

Professor Norman Cherry
Lincoln, 2009

5 Ibid. P123
6 Ibid. P288.
7 Ibid. P212.
9 Ibid. P50.
Wash and Wear. Brooch: Standard silver, steel, shibuichi – patinated
The Tales of Para Handy. Brooch: Standard silver, enamel, gold grains – lightly oxidised
Drawing a Bead. Brooch: Standard silver, rosewood, black onyx – lightly oxidised
Marquis de Trois Journées. Brooch: Standard silver; black coral, gold, enamel – lightly oxidised
Steam Punk Printer. Brooch: Standard silver, brass, plastic cog, enamel – lightly oxidised
Seven Elements in Search of a Whole. Brooch: Standard silver, gold grain, enamel – lightly oxidised
**BIOGRAPHY**

1966-70  Glasgow School of Art  
1970-71  Assistant to Louis Osman, goldsmith, Canons Ashby, Northants  
1971-    Designer / goldsmith / jeweller, Kelso  
1974-86  Proprietor, Woodmarket Gallery, Kelso  
1978-84  Part-time Lecturer, Scottish College of Textiles, Galashiels  
1983     Temporary Part-time Lecturer, Edinburgh College of Art  
1984-85  Associate Lecturer, University of Northumbria, Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
1985-96  Principal Lecturer, Head of Division of Three Dimensional and Environmental Design, University of Northumbria, Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
1996-08  Professor and Head of School of Jewellery, Birmingham City University  
2008-    Dean of Faculty of Art, Architecture and Design, University of Lincoln  
2009-    Visiting Professor, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia  

**AWARDS**

1971     Crafts Consultative Committee setting up grant  
1972     Saltire Society John Noble Craft Award  
1983     Sir Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship  
1983     Grand Prize, Society of North American Goldsmiths Platinum Design Competition  
1984     1st Prize, Jewellery, Incorporation of Goldsmiths of the City of Edinburgh Design Competition  
1993     Betty Davies Award for Jewellery, Scottish Artists and Artist Craftsmen  
2003     Applied Arts Award, Visual Arts Scotland
COLLECTIONS
1971  King’s Own Scottish Borderers
1984  Dundee Museum and Art Gallery
1987  Borders Regional Council
1984  Dundee Museum and Art Gallery
1992  Scottish Crafts Collection, National Museums of Scotland
1992  Tennessee Technological University
2000  Contemporary Jewellery Collection, National Museums of Scotland
2002  Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
2008  British Museum

SOLO EXHIBITIONS
1990  Courtyard Gallery, Cheltenham
1992  Open Eye Gallery, Edinburgh
1994  Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh
1998  Roger Billcliffe Fine Art, Glasgow
2000  “Beyond the Wire”, Hipotesi, Barcelona
2005  “The Space Within”, Hipotesi, Barcelona
2007  “Deconstruction - Reconstruction”, Shibuichi, Oporto
2008  “Isomorphs”, Hipotesi, Barcelona
2009  “Isomorphs – New Mutations”, Alternatives Gallery for Contemporary Art, Rome
SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1971  “Scottish Crafts”, Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh Festival
1973  “Eight Scottish Jewellers”, Scottish Crafts Centre, Edinburgh
1983-84 Goldsmiths’ Fair, Goldsmiths’ Hall, London
1989  “Los Britanicos”, Espai Positura, Barcelona
1991  “Timepieces”, Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh
1993-9 Scottish Artists and Artist Craftsmen Annual Exhibition, Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh
1998  Best of the British, Facère Gallery, Seattle, USA, in conjunction with Lesley Craze Gallery, London
1999  “Making Connections”, Shanghai Library, Shanghai, China
1999  “From the Centre to the Edge”, Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland, Maine, USA
2001  “Beyond Materials”, Silkaporn University, Bangkok, Thailand
2002  “B1 3PA”, Metallum Galleri, Stockholm, Sweden
2004  “exempli gratia”, Facère Gallery, Seattle
2005  “Praxis”, Appalachian Craft Center, Smithville, Tennessee
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Via D’Ascanio 19
00186 Rome
Italy
www.alternatives.it
info@alternatives.it

University of Lincoln
Brayford Pool
Lincoln
LN6 7TS
www.lincoln.ac.uk

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