

Case Study 4 - Jessica Turrell

Over recent years I have developed an experimental approach to enamel by which I seek to create work that moves away from traditional jewellery enamel practice in order to achieve a more ambiguous and expressive surface quality.
Jessica Turrell

Jessica Turrell's interest in contemporary jewellery dates back to visiting some of the influential exhibitions of European jewellery that took place at Bristol's Arnolfini gallery in the late 1970s and early 1980s. She studied Jewellery at Central School of Art, graduating in 1988. While at Central Turrell was introduced to traditional enamelling techniques by Jane Short and Fred Rich, and found in the material a way to bring colour and pattern to her work. On graduation she returned to Bristol where she established a jewellery and enamel studio.

For a number of years Turrell created jewellery that concentrated on the use of traditional enamelling techniques such as cloisonné and champlevé on precious materials. Over time she grew increasingly frustrated with the lack of immediacy and spontaneity these techniques offered and began to explore the non-traditional processes more readily associated with larger scale and panel enamelling.

A period of research into mark-making techniques using more experimental techniques followed and more recent work has seen a move away from precious metals and she now enamels mainly on copper. Her work often incorporates etching, and she has developed a technique that involves

building up layers of enamel over an underlying etched surface and then abrading the layers back in a process that reveals what has been concealed. She describes the surface quality she is able to achieve in this way as being 'ambiguous and expressive'.

In 2007 Turrell undertook an MA in Multi-disciplinary printmaking, at UWE, Bristol, where she specialised in enamel. During this time she produced a body of larger scale work that used text and photographs to investigate issues around memory and forgetting using etched copper and enamel to create delicate and barely legible veils of words that 'serve as a metaphor for the fragility of memory'.

Over time Turrell has become increasingly interested in the conceptual aspects of contemporary jewellery, seeking out work that she describes as being 'concerned with more than beauty and tradition, work that addresses contemporary issues and that is expressive in its choice of materials'. It is also her stated opinion that whilst enamel clearly has huge potential as an expressive and innovative material within the contemporary jewellers community there is little recognition of the innovative potential of enamel.



Winter series vitreous enamel, copper and silver, 2007

Between 2007-2010 Jessica Turrell held the post of Research Fellow in Enamel, based at the University of the West of England and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project allowed her to develop a number of innovative techniques that would allow her to explore the application of enamel to three-dimensional forms.