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Proposed Question for Independent Inquiry: How can designers address if there is still a role for language and communication within jewellery design, and how can language be incorporated into the design and making of sustainable jewellery heirlooms for our future generations?

Research in Practice – Practices in Context

For my Independent Inquiry, the focus will be on taking an in-depth look into jewellery design and making, with research into the history, philosophy, and future surrounding jewellery and designers.

Much of my inspiration comes from natural sources, with strong interests in preserving nature by being environmentally sustainable in my work. This will lead to taking a closer look at how to maintain sustainable practices within jewellery-making, however, it is not easy to achieve this due to some of the chemical processes and materials often used within the industry. This also links into heirlooms as they are pieces that are kept and cherished rather than cheaply, mass-produced items that are not made to last.

In my own work, I will explore and research jewellery that is more tactile, with hidden messages and languages. My research will also explore the many ways to communicate in different languages, such as braille and hieroglyphs with how the messages conveyed make us feel, and how branding can influence this.

Keywords:

Heirlooms, Sustainability, Language.

Heirlooms

An heirloom is an item passed down from generation to generation. It is something precious, that has personal value, although it doesn't have to be expensive. An heirloom can

be any kind of object, such as jewellery, furniture, antiques, seeds, tradition, culture, treasured possessions with a story, or history behind them. What is significant as an heirloom? It could have a high monetary value, such as a diamond ring, although it may be the objects emotional value that is treasured, along with the family history or story associated with it. It could also complicate the system of inheritance. (Crowther, 2019).

Heirlooms are viewed as a lost tradition. In the novels of George Eliot, written between 1856 and 1876, there are many items that are important to the characters, shaping their experiences. (Osbourne, 2010) The heirlooms in Eliot's novels almost move into the realm of human consciousness. Objects today seem to have less relevance and importance than they once did. I am interested in researching the value of heirlooms in society today with society's changing priorities. The current pandemic is a key example of how we have been forced to put things into perspective and re-evaluate what is important. As a result, many people are returning to traditional values such as growing vegetables at home as a way to become more self-sufficient. Family has become way more important for most people as many are isolated away from relatives due to lockdown to stay safe. With many people temporarily home-schooling their children, it is an opportunity to pass on life skills, family traditions and values. These can be seen as intangible heirlooms.

When it comes to heirlooms and jewellery, I am interested in how jewellery has changed over time, from an important, valuable piece to be treasured for generations, to an item that can be thrown away. Today, some jewellery can be manufactured very cheaply and can be made to a lesser standard of quality than more traditional forms of jewellery making.

We are now in a throwaway society where people don't feel a need to treasure these items.

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Jewellery heirlooms are important for preserving traditional, precious jewellery and in my own work, I believe in sustainability rather than throw-away items.

I have identified several texts that will be useful for the Independent Inquiry in relation to heirlooms:

- *George Eliot and the Politics of Heirlooms*, by Katherine Dunagan Osborne
- *World in 100 Objects* The British Museum
- *Language of Objects* by Rob Walker (The Significant Objects Project)
- *Sculpture in The Expanded Field* by Rosalind Krauss
- *Hare with The Amber Eyes* by Edmund De Waal
- *Watchmakers and Clockmakers of the World* by B. Loomes

Sustainability

The dictionary definition of sustainability is "The quality of causing little or no damage to the environment and therefore able to continue for a long time" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020).

When it comes to jewellery, this means items that can be kept, it also refers to how it is made. Ideally, jewellery would be made with limited harmful chemicals and carbon offsetting to reduce the carbon footprint from jewellery making. The aim of sustainable jewellery is to reduce harmful effects and try to use as many biodegradable or reusable products as possible in the making stage and to obtain materials from sources that are conflict free.

Much of my design inspiration is taken from nature. Living by the coast, the ocean is an enormous influence on my work. This can include the weather, affecting the sea-state, creating in turn the ever-changing colours of the water, skies, and even the local wildlife

such as the resident seals. I see at close-hand the environmental damage caused by rubbish and plastics washed up and also left behind by visitors on the local beaches. I am very passionate about the environment and want to try and incorporate ways in which my business can find solutions to achieve environmental sustainability, now and for the future.

In the book *How designers think* (2006) by Brian Lawson, there is a section that talks about throwaway design: “the third response to uncertainty is to design for the present only. Thus obsolescence is built in and the designed object is intended to be thrown away and replaced with a more up-to-date design” (Lawson, 1997, p.117). This idea is in opposition to my interest in jewellery-making as I am currently interested in sustainable objects that are built to last.

I have identified the following texts that will help in my research into sustainability, jewellery design and making:

- *How Designers Think* by Bryan Lawson
- *Printing Things – Visions and Essentials for 3d Printing* by Claire Warnier
- *Sustainable Jewellery: Principles and Processes for Creating an Ethical Brand* by Jose Luis Fettolini

Language

Language is a form of communication. The word communication is a noun, to describe something that we do. It refers to the various methods of sending information between people and places, especially phones, computers, radio, etc. (Cambridge Dictionary).

Language is a specific type of communication that uses sounds, and usually (but not always) words and grammar (Cambridge Dictionary).

Hieroglyphs have been used as a form of communication in ancient Egypt since around 3200 BC. Egyptologists have discovered that there were three different types of hieroglyphics, but some could belong to more than one type. The first type are phonograms, which are signs that represent a particular sound. The second type are ideograms. These represent ideas rather than sounds and are usually seen as images of gods or animals. The final type are known as determinatives. These are hieroglyphs that were not spoken or translated but are included to help make the meaning of words clearer and to indicate the end of words instead of using spaces. The hieroglyphic signs also indicate if the hieroglyphs should be read vertically, horizontally, from left-to-right or from right-to-left (Ancient Egypt Online, 2020).



Fig. 1: Aleksandar Cocek, *Hieroglyphs at Karnak* (Date unknown)

Today, emojis are seen as the modern-day hieroglyphs. The first set of emojis were released in 1997 and are now the fastest growing form of communication (Alshenqeeti, 2016).

Jewellery is often used as a form of communication and language. Jewellery made from shells and bones has been worn since prehistoric times as a form of protection, or to show status or rank (V&A, 2020). This shows that jewellery had a language of its own, communicating a specific message. Later jewellery came to be used to protect against specific threats and illnesses, or to encourage attractive characteristics such as bravery.

In ancient Egypt, jewellery utilised language and acted as a form of communication. Men had signet rings bearing the family emblem to convey their identity, which was a legal requirement for authentication. Instead of using a signature, official documents were sealed by using the ring. These rings were ornately engraved so that each ring was unique. Wealthy individuals also had stones adorning their rings, but poor men had simple rings made of copper or bronze (Ancient Egypt Online, 2020).



Fig. 2: Tim Evanson, *Signet Ring of Amenhotep II* (200-100BC)(200-100BC)Signet Ring of Amenhotep II

Another important piece of jewellery was the scorpion ring. Etchings of scorpions date back to 200 –100BC, they have been reused in a medieval ring (Fig.3) as a protection amulet, which were highly valued in the middle ages. It was believed that the scorpion ring could heal patients from poisoning. As the symbol of the Scorpio zodiac sign, it was associated with water and as such, it was said to have a cooling effect on a fever. Scorpions were infused with oils and herbs as a remedy for poison, stings and bites. This shows how an important symbol of protection was embedded into jewellery.



Fig.3: (Maker unknown) *Museum no. 724-1871*, Setting (15th century BC), centre (2nd century BC-1st century BC) Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Jewels during the Renaissance were covered with highly decorative and colourful enamels, and new cutting techniques made the stones appear to glitter. This was a way to communicate a passion for elaborate splendour, which was popular at that time.

Renaissance jewellery also communicated religious beliefs, such as highly decorative crosses worn around the neck. The design reflected the interest in the classical world.

Jewellery was also worn as a display of political strength, using powerful mythical creatures and figures from the classical world.

The above examples show how language can be embedded into jewellery, and how jewellery can be a form of communication. Part of my interest in language in relation to jewellery comes from the idea of developing jewellery for visually impaired people or jewellery as a form of art therapy. For this, I will research into problem solving through

jewellery-making. This is particularly relevant at this time because more and more people are turning to art to cope with the stress of the coronavirus pandemic, bringing communities together using art projects, and to create memories of this unprecedented time through photographs, stories, paintings and other creative mediums. One example of a popular lockdown project is Kate Middleton's 'Hold Still' photography project launched at the National Portrait Gallery which encourages people to photograph images that reflect "our times in lockdown, capturing the spirit as well as the hopes, fears and feelings of the U.K" (Carter, 2020). The project is grouped into three categories; *Helpers and Heroes*, *Your New Normal*, and *Acts of Kindness*.

Art can be used to solve problems by encouraging people to consider the parameters used to define and assess problems. For many people, there is a tension that comes from thinking about the problems of the future, at global, national and local levels. Art plays a big role in transitioning into the future. Art not only has aesthetic importance, but it is a tool to raise awareness of political and social issues, to reveal marginalised histories and provide an environment where we can imagine other ways the future can turn out (Kameelah Janan Rasheed, 2016).

I have identified the following texts that might be useful in researching language and problem solving in art:

- 'Positive Obsession' from *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (1995) by Octavia Butler
- 'Vision & Justice' (2016) by Sarah Lewis
- 'The Secret Language of the Renaissance' (2018) by Richard Stemp

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Kate Ritchie explores the connection between language and meaning. This video introduces two ways in which philosophers have answered the question 'what makes a sound or some marks meaningful?' (Ritchie, 2014)

I have identified the following artists to research as part of my Inquiry:

Amy Lax uses porcelain in her work to symbolise purity and strength. Her work focuses on embracing scientific progress and hope, showing us that nature can be threatening and beautiful at the same time. Her work relates to the effects of nuclear power, food crisis, energy crisis and climate change. Her style influences me due to the environmental aspects of her work. I am interested in the way she uses art to raise awareness of how scientific advancement can harm the natural environment.



Fig. 4: Amy Lax, (2020), *Digitalis GuargantuaGuargantua*

Andy Goldsworthy is a British artist who works with the natural environment. He is famous for his ephemeral and permanent art installations. He works with natural materials such as, ice, sand, stone, leaves, which are mostly sourced on the original sites of his artwork. I am drawn to his work, as he makes use of natural materials, and it intrigues me how he comes up with the ideas, and works out the concepts of how his ephemeral work and how it will be worn away by nature. Goldsworthy's approach to sustainability and art is:

It is perfectly possible for contemporary art to be sustainable without having a direct political or environmental message, as long as it meets the requirements of not damaging the environment and not being exploitative. (Mel Jordan, 2008, p.103)

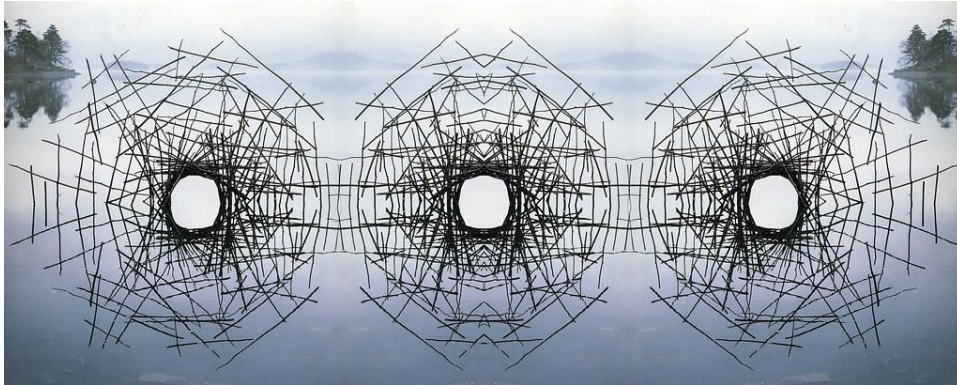


Fig. 5: Andy Goldsworthy (2003) *Sticks Framing a Lake*

Andrea Cagnetti is a goldsmith, designer and sculptor who makes and designs jewellery under the name Akelo. He produces unique jewels and other highly decorative precious objects using symbols from mythology. Cagnetti developed a personal cryptic language based on ancient texts and his knowledge of alchemy. This ties in with my interest in jewellery and language. Using traditional goldsmithing techniques and tools, his work style embodies that of the renaissance style.

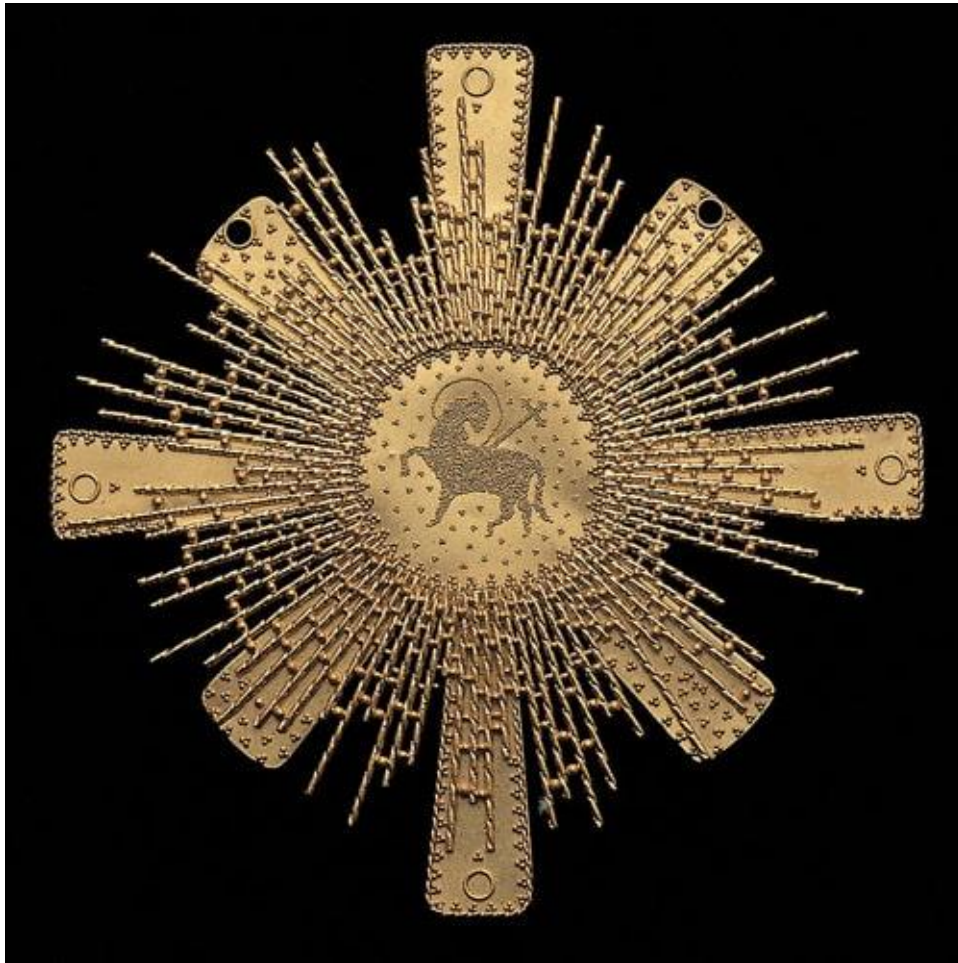


Fig. 6: CHORT (2002) *Gold Pendant*

During the initial research stages for this project, I came across a designer called Wing Yau, who specializes in making artistic jewellery pieces formed and folded by hand from recycled silver (CLOSER BY WWAKE, 2020). Her work interests me because her pieces are made in a sustainable way, with the intention to be kept and cherished. Another reason for taking an interest in her work is that she encourages her jewellery be explored through touch. This links in with my idea of designing jewellery that uses language. Her 'Letter' necklace (below) reminds me of braille.



Fig. 7: Wing Yau, (2020) *Letter Necklace*Yau

My independent inquiry question will focus on jewellery making, with research into exploring the role of language and communication within jewellery. I will research into heirlooms, their history and their future in society and research into how achievable sustainability is when making and owning jewellery pieces.

The jewellery worn by Ancient Egyptians with their family emblem is one example of how jewellery has been used as a form of communication. A modern example of how jewellery is used as a form of communication is the medical bracelet. These are used to convey important information to emergency services in the event that the wearer has a medical emergency.

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I am interested in looking into language and questioning if a universal language can unite different cultures and how it makes us feel. This could be a visual language worn as jewellery, or the way it is worn representing a certain message that others can understand.

I have identified the following potential questions for my independent inquiry:

How can the concept of language be incorporated within the jewellery industry?

How does language within jewellery bring cultures and society together?

Do heirlooms continue to have a role within modern jewellery making, and are they still relevant in today's society?

From these questions, I have narrowed down the following working title:

How can designers address if there is still a role for language and communication within jewellery design, and how can language be incorporated into the design and making of sustainable jewellery heirlooms for our future generations?

From researching my three keywords, I have now identified further keywords that are pertinent for my research:

Communication, 2020 covid 19, disruption, love, anger, hope, fear, future, family, meaningful, precious, keepsakes, society, protests, human rights, community, faith, vision, future, acceptance, lifechanging, death, braille, sign language, hieroglyphics, symbolism, mythology, history, stories, books, language, vision, interpretation.

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Figure 3: Maker unknown, Ring, setting 15th century, centre 2nd century BC-1st century BC. Museum no. 724-1871. Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Accessed: June 18 2020).

Figure 4: Lax, A. *Digitalis Guargantua*, The Mission Gallery, Swansea. Taken from: https://www.aimeelax.co.uk/gallery_760564.html (Accessed: June 18 2020)

Figure.5 - Andy Goldsworthy *Sticks Framing a Lake* Taken from: https://live.staticflickr.com/1245/847399896_cc8cbf5bfe_b.jpg (Accessed June 19 2020)

Figure 6 CHORT (2002) Pendant, Gold, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. (Accessed: 18 June 2020)

Figure. 7 Wing Yau, Necklace, *Letter Necklace* (Accessed: June 18 2020).

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0aNeYZL8jY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rkWLTqgXIo>

Other artists I looked into:

John Foreman, a sculptor and Land Artist, based in Pembrokeshire, Wales UK.

Robert Smithson is an American artist who works with the land to create sculptures and photographs.