

## Between art, jewellery and fashion

Jane Phillips examines the boundary crossing work of Anna Lewis



Memories of past lives and objects influence the work of Anna Lewis, her appreciation of all that has been touched by hand through construction or through love is important. Inspiration is gained through research into memory, sparked by family history, photograph albums, children's shoes and fabrics that all give a meaning to human existence, small pieces of history that have always been precious, much more so for having survived in an age of throw away materials.

After developing an interest in jewellery design at Swansea Institute of Higher Education, Anna chose the conceptual and ideas based jewellery degree at Middlesex University, a very experimental course, and spent her first two years experimenting with bright coloured plastics. In her year out she chose wisely, undertaking work placements with Dai Rees, Natasha Kerr, Helen Carnac, Diana Greenwood and Caroline Quartermaine. *"I chose to go with Dai Rees because I was interested in working with the materials he was using. On our course, we didn't look at jewellery in the narrow way, but as anything to do with the body, be it body adornment, unusual photography, things projected on to the body, or hats and clothes. When I came to work with him, he was only making hats and decided to launch his own fashion collection, so the body pieces I made for him worked alongside his hats, each being equally important, to the overall effect, as the other."*

During her year out Anna researched her dissertation - the theme of memory. On her return to college, images of her family, precious objects, handwriting, all chosen because of the memories they invoke, were printed onto different materials. Her working processes were experimental, as she played with materials in preference to drawing.

Finally she chose the feather - a symbolic material, (a feather is said to be the measure of your soul). *"The sensitivity and the lightness of the feather is juxtaposed with the idea of memory being heavy with meaning, commenting on the ambiguous nature of memory as it fades into a mythical vision. Some feathers have been printed with traces of memory and are either layered or stand alone"*.

Since graduating with a first class degree in jewellery from Middlesex University in 2000, Anna has returned home to Wales and set up a studio with the assistance of a setting up grant award from the Arts Council of Wales and financial support from the Prince's Trust. With a fully equipped studio and many contacts in London, Anna has worked consistently, *"every day and a lot of weekends."* Her maturity, research and the confidence to experiment, led quickly

to the development of an impressive body of work, particularly for someone so recently graduated.

The influence of the past and the importance of personal identity is not just used as decoration but has led to the creation of unique objects that cross the boundaries between art, jewellery and fashion - bodywear or art object. Using feathers, a very delicate material with a ghost-like quality, Anna has created body pieces which wrap around and embrace the neck and shoulders like a security blanket evoking the transient nature of memory.

Alongside her commissioned one-off pieces, Anna also produces a collection of more saleable jewellery which reflects her generation, it conveys a youthful, fragile and delicate nature, and is exquisitely made. The theme of personal identity gives an underlying depth through the decoration of simple images, - tiny pink flowers, family photographs, images of keepsakes, postcards or handwriting, - ghostly memories.

Equipped with a CV that reads like a young maker's dream, when questioned, Anna admits, *"it has been full on hard work"* :- *One Year On* at New Designers, *Craft Focus* Mission Gallery 2001, *Schmuck* in Munich 2001, *Destination Unknown* Ruthin Craft Centre 2001, *Chelsea Craft Fair* 2002, *Dazzle*, 30/30 Crafts Council Touring Show, *New Wave Wales/ Scotland II* Ruthin Craft Centre and Scottish Gallery Touring Exhibition, Membership of Contemporary Applied Arts July 2003, *Chelsea Craft Fair* 2003.

At present Anna is developing a new body of work to be launched at this year's Chelsea Crafts Fair. Experimenting with the technique of printing on leather, delicate printed fragments are combined with rolled silver. The feather jewellery has been developed and extended, necklaces that reflect and repeat the influence of the past, old fashioned jewellery, strings of pearls and family heirlooms are given a new thought provoking and fashionable life. Again, large one-off pieces will be balanced by a more saleable range of jewellery.

Always searching, Anna photographs everything, spurred on by the fear of forgetting. Whilst on holiday in Italy she photographed peeling painted surfaces and graveyards, referencing the past and the ageing process. Although her work never refers directly to religion, in Thailand shrines and sacred objects are documented - the precious possessions of another culture.

*"Memory is very ghost like. You can only live in the moment and it's only our possessions that can remind us that things have been real ."*

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