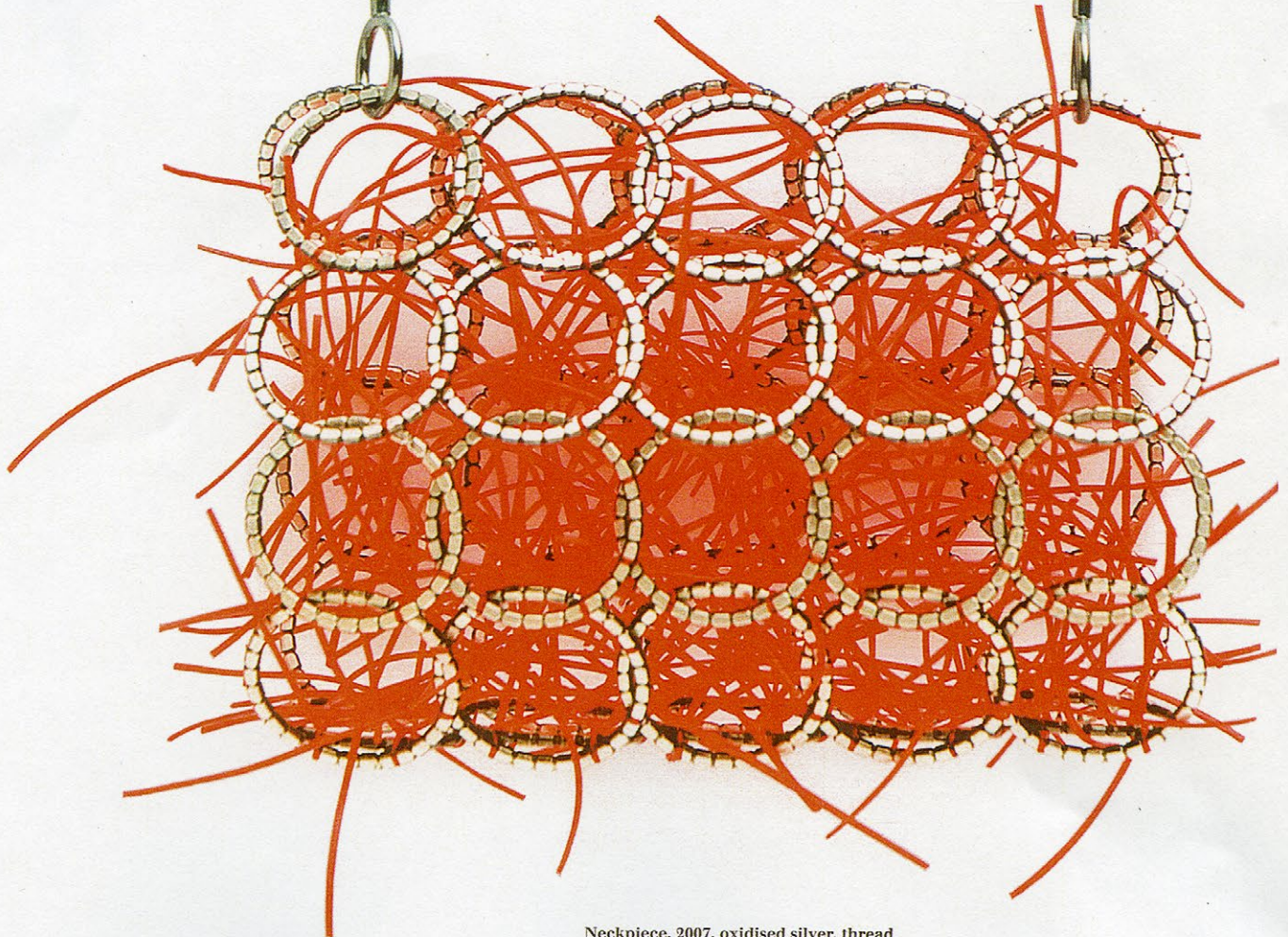


*Jerwood*  
**JEWELLERY**  
**Prizewin**  
Susan Cross



Neckpiece, 2007, oxidised silver, thread  
JOHN MCGREGOR

Focus and determination,  
combined with talent and hard  
work, have brought Susan Cross the  
recognition she so richly deserves

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I have always considered it vital to be aware of the approaches to design that take place outside one's own particular bubble. It was with this in mind, in my capacity as Head of the Jewellery Department at the Edinburgh College of Art, that I made annual visits to degree exhibitions in various parts of the country.

In 1986 I saw the degree exhibition of the Middlesex Polytechnic Jewellery department at the Royal Festival Hall. It was a remarkable cohort of students, and Susan Cross was one of the outstanding contributors. I was very impressed by the range of work she tackled; her direction seemed to be guided by an interest in techniques usually associated with women's craft. She brought a fresh vision to textile techniques with her crochet and binding of various metals. I was so impressed that I kept in touch with her and a couple of years later commissioned her to make a pair of earrings for me. Susan offered to run a project with the students at Edinburgh College of Art, and the success of this venture convinced me to invite her to take up a part-time post. Her teaching commitment developed from one day a week to four days following the retirement of my colleague, the silversmith William Kirk, in 1999. Susan and I had an excellent working relationship and were often burning the midnight oil in our own workshops at the

weekends, working for the same exhibition deadlines with our own work at the same time as putting in a huge commitment to the course and students at Edinburgh.

I have watched Susan's work develop from her graduation exhibition to the recent culmination of her achievements in 2007 when she became joint winner of the Jerwood Applied Arts prize for Jewellery. This accolade is richly deserved as she has demonstrated a consistent and honest sense of direction which is entirely her own.

Susan was born in Ledbury in Herefordshire in 1964 and studied at Herefordshire College of Art and Design (1980-1982) passing with distinction. Although our childhoods are separated by almost two decades we seem to have had similar experiences of being guided to make things of thread and wool by interested relatives. Her light and airy constructions may also be influenced by the childhood experience of looping the loop with her father, an engineer and amateur pilot.

Whilst at Middlesex, her interest in costume was developed during



Armkipiece, 1990, oxidised silver, 9ct red gold

JOEL DEGEN

a year of work experience with a costume and prop-maker in London. This placement gave her the confidence to work in many materials. As part of the presentation for her degree, Susan showed a wonderfully imaginative collection of crocheted and constructed shoes and hats at the same time as showing an immaculately made collection of rings and brooches of mild steel joined with brazing rod. Her chance to work in platinum and gold came with the 1987 Ayrton Metals Platinum competition and, in 1988, she won a second prize. By this time she had set up a workshop in London and was teaching part-time at two colleges. When she moved to Edinburgh, she settled into a good working routine balancing her workshop activity with her teaching commitment.

In 1993 an opportunity for a teaching exchange to Lahti in Finland in winter became available and she jumped at the chance. This experience kindled her love of travelling which she states is a crucial inspiration to her work. When she talks about her travelling experiences she describes artefacts that interest her and often it is

baskets, brushes or the textiles of a culture, rather than jewellery, which are drawn in her sketchbook. Combining holidays with teaching experience in India and New Zealand, her 'reservoir' of inspiration was

replenished with visits to an Indian textiles museum and observations on the construction of Polynesian baskets, all duly noted. In 1999 some members of Edinburgh's Applied Arts staff were invited to show work in an exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto and Susan applied for a Scottish Arts Council travel grant to visit Japan. Initially, she assisted with setting up the exhibition but her proposal was to study traditional costume and contemporary art textiles. So, in 2005, when invited by Amanda Game of the Scottish Gallery to curate an exhibition of textiles, she was able to draw on her research in the selection of exhibitors. Her experience in Japan was probably the most visually influential of all her travels and what was assimilated there is expressed in the recent work shown in the Jerwood exhibition.

However, the core of her focus has been in developing her own work, which has flowered through many interlinked stages. The techniques of wrapping, tying and looping are the consistent threads throughout. Sometimes the work is uncompromisingly repetitive with

She brought a fresh vision  
to textile techniques

## FEATURE

small units building into forms of 18ct gold and sometimes a more playful approach is adopted as with a neckpiece of pulled out coils of silver wire reminding me of her own hair in crimped formation. Her study of the Victoria and Albert Museum's collection of hair jewellery led to the construction of a wonderful oxidised silver armpiece with 18ct gold rings shown in 1991 at the Scottish Gallery. This piece exemplifies Susan's dedication to immaculate craftsmanship combined with an imaginative interpretation of traditional skills. The earrings in platinum and gold for the V&A's collection illustrate her ability to construct complex structures. A commission in 1996 from the Goldsmiths' Company for a piece for the collection that may be worn by invited guests at important functions led to a fluid neckpiece of gold discs inspired by the sequin embroidery seen in Barcelona.

By complete contrast Susan developed a new series of paper brooches possibly springing from the crocheted shoes in her degree exhibition. This collection of crocheted and coiled paper brooches allowed her to use her sense of colour and a liberating non-precious approach. She seems to understand her creativity and nudges herself from a safe place by introducing fresh ways of thinking. Taking part in a summer workshop in 2001 led by the Dutch jeweller Birgit Laken in the Swiss Alps was important as it allowed her to explore a more experimental way of working.

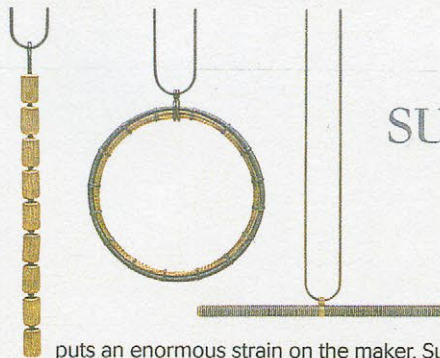
I always describe Susan as a 'wireaholic' as she is obsessed with the potential of wire and how it can be handled beautifully. She enjoys all the processes involved in drawing wire to very specific sizes and the careful coiling and cutting open of links, the minute paillons of solder required to solder them perfectly to minimise the later removal of excess. All these techniques demand great concentration and focus, the activity is uncompromising like so many aspects of our craft, all parts have to be prepared correctly and executed with no margin for error.

The recent body of work shown in the Jerwood exhibition demonstrated her consummate skill and elegant resolution of form. She showed pieces from 2001 made for a solo show in the Scottish Gallery. They are simple in their completeness but complex in the structure of their manufacture. The essence of the group is that the process of making is revealed through the wrapping and soldering of very fine wires, resulting in strong wearable pieces of classical proportion. Being short-listed in the Jerwood Competition is not for the faint-hearted as it

Earrings, 1998, platinum, 18ct gold



JOËL DEGEN



## SUSAN CROSS

Series of neckpieces, 2001,  
oxidised silver, 18ct gold

JOËL DEGEN

puts an enormous strain on the maker. Susan worked her way through the lead-up to the exhibition calmly and consistently. The demands of producing one's best work can sometimes make people express themselves in a more constricted way but Susan responded to the challenge by exploring new pieces that were tied and joined by a flexible rubber cord so in this way she brought in colour and flexibility to offset the oxidised silver structure.

Susan is now at an interesting point in her life with an excellent track record of exhibitions behind her and an established reputation.

She recently spoke at a Symposium I organised with the Crafts Council in Edinburgh and as I listened to her analysing her inspiration and influences I saw clearly the almost logical progression of her work.

Her focus and determination combined with talent and hard work has brought her the recognition she so richly deserves. It will be interesting to see where travel and inspiration take Susan's work in the next decade. I am sure she will continue to develop fresh avenues which will be irrevocably connected to her fascination with all things textile. ■

She is obsessed with  
the potential of wire

## DOROTHY HOGG MBE

*Professor Emeritus, Edinburgh College of Art*

Neckpiece, 1996, 18ct gold. The Goldsmiths' Company Collection



IAN ATKINSON