

*Susan Cross, joint winner of the Jerwood Applied Arts Prize 2007.
Moving from the Centre. Neckpiece, 2001. Oxidised silver,
18ct and thread. Photo: Joël Degèn .*

Jerwood Applied Arts Prize 2007

*Melanie Eddy meets with the winners
Susan Cross and Adam Paxon to
discuss their work, the experience
of being shortlisted and winning the
acclaimed prize*

The Jerwood Applied Arts Prize is run annually by the Crafts Council and Jerwood Charitable Foundation to celebrate innovation, commitment and excellence within the applied arts. The prize runs in a six-year cycle, each year representing a different applied arts discipline: jewellery, textiles, ceramics, glass, furniture and metal. The shortlisted artists for the 2007 prize were Susan Cross, Nora Fok, Yoko Izawa, Grainne Morton, Adam Paxon and Mah Rana. An exhibition of these was hosted at the Jerwood Space in Southwark, London, 6 June to 22 July and will tour to museums and galleries throughout the UK. Previous winners include Peter Chang, Charlotte de Syllas and Jacqueline Mina.

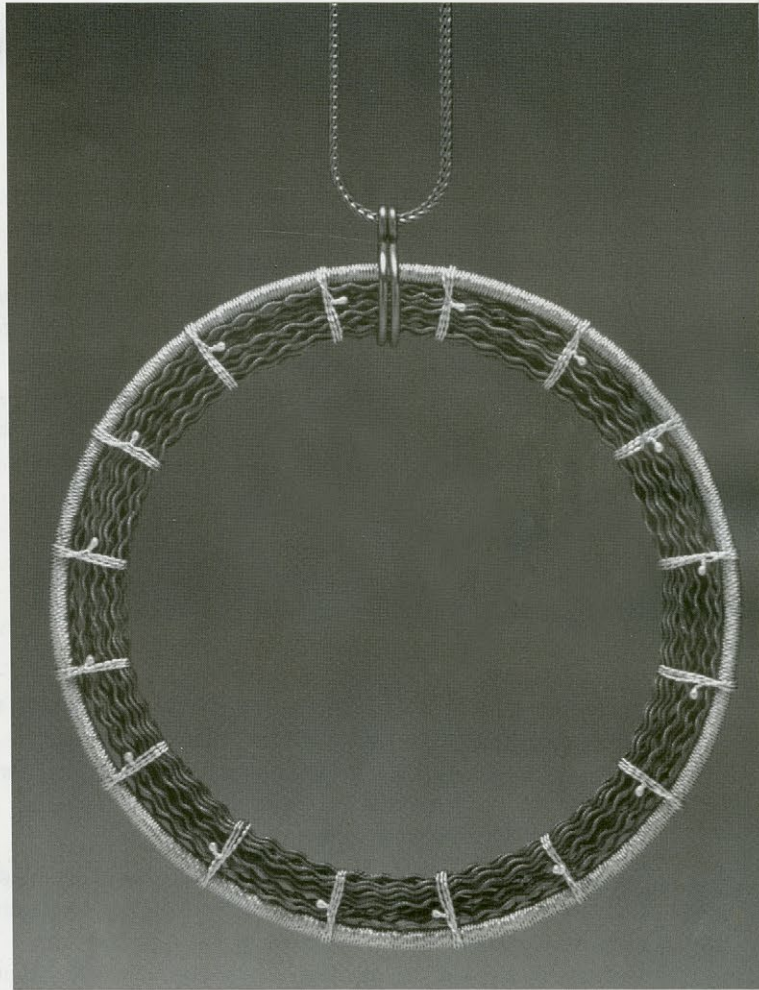
Susan Cross has a love of metal. It is this love that allowed her to “naturally find a voice with metal”. Drawing is of immense importance in her creative process and influences her choice of material. ‘I use a lot of oxidized silver because I like having that drawn line quality, that graphite quality’.

Born in Herefordshire but based in Edinburgh since 1989 when she was lured, following her degree show at Middlesex Polytechnic, with a teaching post at Edinburgh College of Art. In Edinburgh she continues to balance studio work with teaching.

She had an incredibly positive experience at Herefordshire College of Art, where she did her Foundation studies, and at Middlesex and credits this with encouraging her in fostering that positive experience for her students.

It was her broad interest in making that led her to find an unlikely placement in her third year at Middlesex. She sought out a prop maker to work with for her year-long placement. It was the first time someone had done this on the course, most placements being trade/field specific. She is thankful that the college supported her in this decision and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. “I just loved it because it was exciting. It was different.” In fact, she enjoyed it so much that she considered it as a career. However, the prolonged stress levels and frequent long hauls and all-nighters convinced her otherwise. “Crazy deadlines that would suddenly be put back weeks and they would still want it yesterday”

Susan is known for her intricate, immaculately constructed work in precious metal or incorporating precious metals and textiles. They are rich in textural qualities and with a strong emphasis on the line often incorporating techniques such as wrapping, binding, coiling and crochet. It was immediately apparent after our meeting at the exhibition Process Works, just how heavily drawing informs her jewellery practice. In fact she was so reluctant to release her drawings (mostly in sketchbooks) for the exhibition, that books were pulled apart and drawings redone to facilitate her involvement. She reminisces about a trip to Japan in 1999 where her camera broke and how the initial annoyance led to a beneficial discovery. “What was good about it was that it actually made me draw. I had no other way of recording information. I actually sat and drew these wonderful bamboo fences...woven fencing...”



Adam Paxon: *Spondylitis Necklace*, 2003.

Acrylic laminated, thermoformed and carved. Photo: Graham Lees.



In addition to records of textures or images she can relate to, her drawing books become “dictionaries of techniques or mark making or qualities”. It is from this strong underpinning that three-dimensional model making and experimenting with materials continues before the construction of the final piece.

Although she has never studied textiles it has always interested her. Her grandmother and mother provided the foundation with skills in crocheting, knitting and sewing. She did a lot when younger, as she found it accessible when she knew little about jewellery or of it as an option for study. This interest in textiles culminated in her curating *Interface* a textiles exhibition at the Scottish Gallery two years ago.

Travel, being in another country, experiencing other cultures, is a constant source of inspiration. She feels lucky to have been invited to teach in other countries, most recently India and New Zealand, “which has been absolutely wonderful, fantastic”, but would like to have “time to connect with my own work in another country” and she would like to pursue this in a residency after letting “the dust settle a bit”.

The experience of being shortlisted for the Jerwood Prize has been predominantly one of reflection. In selecting work for the exhibition she states: “I wanted it to tell a story of development. Looking back over the last six years and selecting key pieces or pieces that would open up ways of thinking.” This reflective process has allowed her to follow the development of her work and understand better where it is going, in addition to providing a focus for new work. Two directional areas stand out: concepts of encasement and containment, as in the layering of structures and transparency, and the development of the thread elements in her work. Ties which were originally ‘just added on’ have become ‘integral to the structure’ and in some cases form a distinct contained structure from their ends. She is fascinated by the contrast of the ‘structured construction’ of the metal elements and the ‘looseness of the thread’. “In jewellery you want to control everything, but this whole thread business just does its own thing. I’m quite interested in this.” The fact that the exhibition is being held in the Jerwood Space excites her. “The exhibition is seen in a different arena, in a different context. It will be interesting to see what comes out of that.”

Adam Paxon seeks to challenge our perceptions of plastic. “Plastic is a word which almost stands for mass production, for the throwaway, for waste culture. Yet take that material away from that way of thinking and actually its desperately attractive as a material to work with.” While he admits he has a love/hate relationship with the material, his misgivings relating mostly to its toxic nature, where others see negatives he sees positives. “The fact that it is man made I just find fabulous, just fantastic. To think we have developed this material; it speaks about us. It’s a designed material before we even start to work creatively with it.”

Born and based predominantly in Cumbria, it was here that his education in making first began. With a jeweller as a mother and a silversmith as a father, living in a house that was a long-term building project, he was constantly surrounded by making. At eight he decided he wanted to make a knife, figuring that as he wasn’t allowed one until nine the least he could do was start making one. He recalls his father’s response: “He gives me a great big iron bar and starts me forging it”. He soon lost interest. Later his father, perceiving this, enquired if he still wanted to make a knife. “No, maybe we need to make something smaller.” His father sat down and spent time instructing Adam how to make a few things. He initially fought this heritage of making and felt that design and graphics were more his strength until he accepted that he was a maker. “It’s about hands, about materials. It’s about working intuitively with materials.” Now he is reluctant to have work leave his hand.

A placement with a prop maker whilst at Middlesex University opened up to him the possibilities of plastic as a material. He holds great respect for the creativity and breadth of knowledge. “If you actually speak to a prop maker, they know stuff. They know things that it doesn’t tell you on the package. They actually know chemically how these things are set up.” His understanding and knowledge of plastics as a material and concept have only grown since this first introduction.

Adam is known for his bold and colourful acrylic pieces. While there is a distinct element of fun, their slickness suggests a more sensual or even erotic context. Pieces are animated through their ability to reflect and refract light or their creature-like forms. Of the erotic, sensual qualities he states: “A lot of that is to do with that whole notion of attraction. What we are attracted to and why; to what level we are conscious of that attraction, to what level we are moved by that attraction”. For him “colour is essentially the starting point for working with acrylic”. The stock colours available were limiting, however. His craving for “something that had delicacy and subtlety” led him to laminate layers of acrylic together. Most of the processes he has developed “have come from control of colour. I have to add more than I need because that material comes in certain thicknesses and then I control colour by removing.”

Plastic is an ideal material for his work because “it responds well to our body, to our body heat.” “It reacts to us in a way which surprises us” He finds an affinity with the French use of the word plastic. “It’s the scientific use of the word. It’s plastic as a state.” “When I talk about things being caught in motion its very much referring to plastique as literally something which is continually developing.