

Can you really tell the difference?

Yvonne Kuagowski

Today studio jewellery is judged by the techniques used, understanding of material and how this is developed and exploited. Unless you handle the piece, or know for sure what the material is – can you really tell the difference – glass or plastic?

Yvonne Coffey believes strongly in technical excellence and an awareness of form. Breast Piece is concerned with body piercing, in particular nipple piercing this work forces the viewer to consider aspects of the material in relation to the intimate part(s) of the body it is intended to be worn on, and through. Because the glass could break it is perceived as a very restricting material, a breakage would be painful and possibly fatal.



Yvonne Coffey – Male Necklace Series – glass, haematite beads, silver.
Photography: ©Joel Degen

The newer work has come a full circle in terms of glass playing a role alongside other materials and pairing down imagery. Stark pieces depict male/female clichés and our preoccupation with outward appearance. No judgments either way are intended, this is more about our expectations of today's male and female roles. Coffey uses her materials thoughtfully to provoke and draw our attention to this age-old divide.

Coffey polishes the surface to give the glass its skin back. This is echoed in Adam Paxon's work using pre-coloured Perspex sheet, where a highly polished wet-look finish is crucial – thus enabling light to flood in and give life to the colour and translucency of the piece.



Adam Paxon – Squirming Brooches – Perspex
Photography ©Graham Lees

This work plays on the traditions of preciousness. The materials themselves are worthless, this transformation of a low value material into an attractive product moves it away from being labelled a throwaway object. Paxon also concerns himself with the aspect of wearability, he likes to think, to perceive a piece 'working its way through the fabric it is attached to, rather than merely being pinned to it.

What makes one artist chose glass and another? Paxon chooses not to use glass; he is interested in the 'bad' side of plastics. Glass is good, we re-cycle it and by a heat/melting process it becomes as good a material again as it was in its original state. Plastic is the opposite, it can have frightening durability – some plastics have been manufactured to be non-biodegradable...to last forever!

As with all Evert Nijland's work the thinking and research informs, inspires and ultimately decides what materials will best expresses this in the piece. Nijland likes to be provocative; too often jewellers are married to their material and never really consider alternatives.



Evert Nijland – Choker – glass, gold, linen, elastic, silk
Photography ©Eddo Hartmann

In this choker from the Tribute to Cranach series, colour is painted onto the surface of the glass, allowed to dry and then removed, almost...thus leaving a memory of the colour that was once there. Could he have achieved this piece with another material? I think not, the success lies in the use of glass for the pod elements. Their weight, how they feel when touched and the sounds they emit as they rub gently together when worn. But does this choker live up to my expectations because my perceptions were correct?

Alex Ramsay is interested in raising the status of glass to that of 'semi-precious stone' set into a piece of jewellery. She plans to develop this, to consider setting silver into the glass and thereby challenging the viewer's perceptions about preciousness and value in terms of material and/or the way it is presented. In doing this she manages to draw together glass making in terms of creating a piece of desirability and to place it in another context.



Alex Ramsay – Brooches – glass, silver
Photography ©Alex Ramsay

For Kathie Murphy it is the material itself that is the inspiration. Polyester resin allows her to control not only the design and creation of the piece, but the material too. While a clear liquid in its raw state, once the catalyst is added a solid thermosetting plastic is created. She adds colour as required and casts her material into moulds. Dyed nylon threads are embedded into specific areas to convey texture and draw the viewer's attention to a particular part of the piece.



Kathie Murphy – Brooch – polyester resin, nylon threads
Photography ©Norman Hollands

While having always been fascinated by the process of glass making Murphy has never considered it a direct influence on her work, it has been more of a subliminal one. Taking a practical stance she reasons she can achieve a less fragile piece of jewellery in resin than she could in glass.

Katy Hackney chooses to work with cellulose acetate, bought pre-coloured and pre-patterned. It is light and gives her the freedom to create large yet wearable rings, brooches and necklaces. This branch necklace pokes gentle fun at the wood effect cellulose acetate matching



Katy Hackney – Necklace – cellulose acetate with silver
Photography ©Graham Lees

as a means to hang these trophies on the wall – here this is mimicked by the silver backing plate, which houses the brooch fitting, the wearer becomes the display foil.



Moa Andersson – Grandpa – glass, silver
Photography ©Norman Hollands

In many ways the needs of the purchasing public have shifted, we no longer desire our wealth and status to be recognised by the precious jewellery we adorn ourselves with. Today jewellery is used to express many more aspects of ourselves: eccentricity, original thinking, good/bad taste, favourite colours and of course unusual materials.

Wearing Glass has achieved such a lot in a relatively short space of time; the studio jewellery buying public are beginning to accept glass as a viable material for earrings, brooches and necklaces. Why should one be any more cautious of wearing a ring containing a glass part, or indeed totally constructed in glass. Yes, if it is dropped onto a hard surface it will crack and maybe shatter, but then, so would an emerald!

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subject matter to end product, challenging the viewer to accept it for what it appears to be! We are left wondering if she is serious or having a joke – and is the joke on us?

Humorous animals, poised as if captured in the middle of a fairy tale, are created by Moa Andersson to trigger childhood memories. Rich, opaque 'toy' colours are chosen to draw attention and to highlight the object's shape. Grandpa imitates the moose hunter's tradition of mounting animal heads onto wood