

People, Objects and Making: Redefining Practice

This paper explores my relationship with jewellery and how I have sought to use the discipline as a research-led practitioner to both extend my audience and expand on notions of what an audience can be. Though increasing numbers of students graduate each year, contemporary jewellery is a notoriously inward facing sub-discipline which is facing an aging and declining collector base. Along with an ever-decreasing number of specialist galleries, this has created an unsustainable trend. So how can we, as individual practitioners, find a way to create new audiences and a renewed social relevance?

The last fifteen years have seen the development of the use of specific social interactions, be it participatory, interactive or relational approaches, within or as Contemporary Art – seeing a shift from the creation of objects to the creation of social interactions. How could such practices work within jewellery, a discipline that designs specifically for the body and speaks “to and for people”? (Cohn, 2012:35) Are audiences passive observers or can/should they have more active roles within the realisation, even production of art? And how might this go some way towards creating a sustainable practice in this period of profound change? By examining interdisciplinary methods within my practice, this paper explores the use of a variety of methods for social interaction within contemporary jewellery and their potential role in developing new types of audiences to in turn maintain a more sustainable practice. While there are multitudes of ways in which to engage an audience, it is not enough to simply “mine” people of their experiences for personal gain. It provides us with limited room for growth and lacks in social ethics. Instead, by finding ways for audiences to share authority, if not authorship of a project, we can ethically enhance and extend the research, concepts and finished results, bringing ourselves one step closer to a truly sustainable practice.

Keywords:

Interaction, interdisciplinary, contemporary jewellery, sustainable, audience, participant.