



The
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HOTHOUSE: *The Goldsmiths' Institute*

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Hothouse: The Goldsmiths' Institute*

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Sarah Palmer, a facilitator, in discussion with Hanna Neilson (left) and Mahtab Hanna, two of the *Hothouse* participants. Courtesy of the Goldsmiths' Institute

Recalling the apprehension and excitement of establishing my own jewellery practice after college, I accepted with interest the role as coordinator of a new creative and professional development programme last May. *Hothouse: The Goldsmiths' Institute* was a Crafts Council programme, delivered in partnership with the Institute, for emerging makers which was especially tailored for recent recipients of support

from the Goldsmiths' Company. I was excited by its potential benefit to makers at a crucial stage in their career development.

Makers within two years of setting up a practice or from graduation were provided with a programme of focussed, intensive business skills and creative development, complemented with one-to-one support over a six-month period. Eight very individual makers were brought onto

the programme; Kevin Brook, Hannah Dennis, Mahtab Hanna, Zehava Hashai-Spellman, Elizabeth Auriol Peers, Helen Smith, Victoria Walker and Janice Zethraeus, all with different approaches and outlooks.

The core programme was shaped throughout for the group with members of the industry brought in as speakers, panel members and mentors. This included gallery owners, retailers,

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creative directors, established designer/makers, and representatives of the BJA and British Silver Week. Makers were approached to provide peer support, sharing their recent experience of setting up a practice for the first time. Many of those who took part in supporting the programme are part of larger organisations such as the Association for Contemporary Jewellery and Contemporary British Silversmiths. Individuals from other sectors joined to advise, support and engage the participants in areas such as PR and marketing, writing, and business and financial planning. Links were made with retailers and galleries in London to assist the group in conducting research into the market and audience for their work, with a day spent visiting key retailers and gallerists in London.

The transformation in the group from the interview process through the training sessions has been remarkable. They are more assured of their position, more confident and proactive, and more articulate in speaking and writing about their practice. As they gained more insight into the running of their business they have been making informed choices regarding their creative development. They now understand that their creativity and design prowess can be put to work to map out the future that they want for their creative practice, and that there is no one right way of doing this. Working with

this group has given the Institute a more intimate connection to makers at this stage in their careers. It has allowed a glimpse behind the protective veneer of 'putting up a good front' and to understand better their concerns, fears and challenges.

During the programme, subjects ranging from bookkeeping and design development to raising one's profile through social networking have been covered. Writing workshops were undertaken, elevator pitches were fine-tuned, and furious discussions ensued on the appropriate catch for a new piece or how to incorporate gemstones into an existing collection. Since starting *Hothouse*, some participants have made their first forays into working in 18ct gold, others are considering tackling platinum by entering the Lonmin Design Innovation Award, the annual platinum jewellery competition for jewellery designers based in the UK. Four of the eight participants showed work in the exhibition of the Goldsmiths' Craft and Design Council Awards, all receiving awards or commendations. A commission for plate for a City livery company is being undertaken as I type.

The 2011/2012 programme had three cohorts: the jewellery and silversmithing cohort, a textile based cohort in the South West and a mixed discipline cohort in the North. Each cohort was run in partnership with specialist

organisations to devise and deliver unique training programmes and all three groups met at points throughout the programme for networking, peer support and reflection. One of the highlights was a peer networking event at the craft organisation Designed & Made in Newcastle. The whole group underwent 'Pecha Kucha' style slide presentations in which they had a few minutes each to talk through three images representing something from their past, something which represents where they are right now and an image to represent where they would like to be in five years' time. The day included the group splitting off to view local exhibitions including the Turner Prize at the Baltic and a permanent glass installation at the Sage Gateshead. Of course the final session was greeted with increased excitement by the Goldsmiths' Institute cohort

who welcomed the other groups to the new Goldsmiths' Centre for the Reflection day, which also happened to be the first event hosted in the new exhibition room at the Centre.

Hothouse has brought together emerging makers, from around the country and from different disciplines, for a focussed programme of creative and professional development and it has engaged these makers in critical discussions surrounding their practices and their businesses. Although this is a challenging time for new businesses, it has been very inspiring to see individuals meeting those challenges head on. It has shown me that the British jewellery and silversmithing industry, although a very established tradition, has new talent coming through which is transforming the way that precious metals are being crafted, worn, viewed and adored.



Hothouse: The Goldsmiths' Institute group showing at the Goldsmiths' Centre opening exhibition Melanie Eddy