

Mari Ebbitt
Fourth Year, BA Hons Jewellery and Silversmithing
Study Exchange, Kookmin University
February 2011 – June 2011

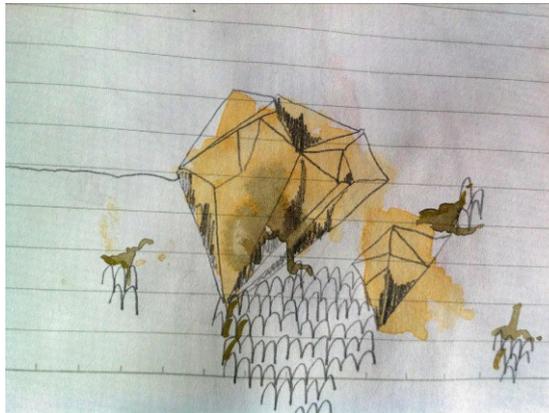
I have been back from my exchange at Kookmin University for almost 5 months now, and still it feels very surreal. The opportunity I was given, with huge support from Hammersmith was a once in a lifetime experience, which I am so thankful for. It was an exchange I could have never been able to fulfil without your support and I am very grateful to you.

An exchange programme is more than an opportunity to develop my studies. It is an opportunity to experience a new culture, push myself out of my comfort zone and learn more about life. Learn about how other people live, how they think, what they do and how they work. I was desperate to learn how different important aspects of our lives are to each other and what values different cultures have. Everyday, I witnessed something new and unexpected and was pushed further out of my comfort zone than ever imagined. Good or bad times, I have appreciated every minute.

A cultural difference that needed most preparation for was the work ethic. I was aware before going to Korea that not only the quantity but the quality of work was exceptional. Out of anything, this was the part of the exchange I was most nervous about.

Our project began very differently as to back home. It was as simple as the teacher telling us to design a bracelet. A huge contrast to what I was used to. I have become familiar with briefing; discussion, advice and inspiration is given even before we have began the project. However, here, the only start we were given was this two-second introduction. With a project this vague, I found it very difficult to begin. A negative at the time, I started to become aware of how useful it is in preparation for my open project in my degree year.

The class I had most excitement and enthusiasm for was the art jewellery class, something that becomes clear after exploring my research and drawings. After visiting a gemstone and rock shop in Seoul, this obsession grew larger. Not only did I study the names, characters and aesthetics of stones but I began to create a large collection of drawings. All of which contributed towards my bangle project. The stone of which I held most interest for was "Scheelite". A stone of which has a more unusual structure. It gives me the impression that it is made up of different materials and to me, there seems to be a contrast of structure and texture.



My Research Drawing



Image of Scheelite Stone

The subtle yet deep, rich colours of these gemstones encouraged my interest, something that's important in my drawings, lost its contribution in my actual designs. In order to portray the significance of texture in my design, I also brought in some collage to my drawings. This seemed to come across very unusual and unexpected when I presented it to my professor and my class, a reaction of which was a catalyst for me to continue my exploration and development with my designs.

The structure of the bangle never worried me. It was the collaboration of materials that I was concerned about. They had to connect well together or else the piece could really suffer. I felt no stress as I began building up the sections; it almost felt as if it was a jigsaw. Models are a necessity at Kookmin. No one even begins to think about the jewellery until they have made a successful model. When making it, I did feel resentful, however I was proven wrong as the model helped me work of the angles, exact shapes and size, without wasting time and precious materials. Buying metal here is much more of an effort than popping into the Jewellery and Silversmithing storage room and recording the weight you have purchased. Here, it feels like a maze just to find the shop that sells it, let alone request what you need. It entails you to take a trip to the jewellery quarter, many independent businesses, offering casting, plating, micro welding, the list continues. However, without a Korean friend with you, there is no chance in finding what you are looking for. I found the support from my Korean friends amazing; they went out of their way on a daily basis to make everything and anything much easier. They are friends, which I hope to keep forever.



There are no pictures on shop fronts describing what it is they offer and the best places tend to be the places inside warehouse style buildings up a couple of flights of stairs, behind a run down door. All very fascinating! I was very certain that until the structure was finished, I would not be able to find the material in which to accompany the metal. I had now finished my bangle; the search was on for the material.

During a discussion in my art jewellery class, my professor talked about an artist whose work she felt related to a piece I was currently designing. I was exploring different materials and she was very keen I explore different Korean fabrics and paper. She told me about the material that traditional Korean flooring was made from. Flooring in Korea is very different to the western culture flooring. In houses, restaurants, work places and some shops, the room is heated from under the floor so in many places as you enter; you remove your shoes and would tend to sit on the floor rather than chairs. As a result, places stay very warm and comfortable. Sometimes for me, however, it would be too warm. At night, in our dorm, even in the coldest months, reaching to temperatures below that in Scotland, we would sleep with the windows wide open, trying to drop the heat of the room to that we are used to. When staying a friend's house, beds are drenched with blankets, electric blankets, duvets, and throws, whilst having heating on during the night. In March especially, the drastic changes of temperatures was hard, you would leave a tropical level of heat from inside and enter the freezing cold snow of outside. As a student, living in Scotland, where we would go to any measure not to spend money on heating, it was hard to adapt! The most common flooring in Korea nowadays is laminate wood, very thin in order to let as much heat as possible. Not the most desirable or eye-catching material but it is very trendy with the younger generation. As my professor told me about the old material that was used, I got a sense of sadness that it was fading away. This material is called Hanji paper, also known as Mulberry paper. It was a material not only used for flooring but walls, books, windows, even coffins. The paper was made from the part of the mulberry tree called the "chomok". It is known to last for as much as a thousand years, due to

its durability. It is only the Korean mulberry tree that would produce such strong fibres that can produce such a reliable material. The reason it is starting to become extinct is down to fashion and popularity. Nowadays, the material is used in crafts and there is a small market for it in the Insa-Dong area in Seoul, an area with many galleries, markets and local crafts and artists. This is the area where a local artist was holding an exhibition of whom my lecturer recommended to me. Her name was Jung-Hoo Kim, a jewellery designer who was making jewellery from this traditional Korean flooring, where she explored the different textures and patterns that can be produced from it. To be more precise, that her dog explored for her! My professor carried on to tell me about how the artists dog continuously scratched into the floor, something many people would be disgusted by, but Kim was inspired by. I embarked on my search for this place. I was becoming used to travelling about Seoul, without much problem. However when it was a specific place, with only the name in Korean, I found it pretty difficult. After asking, mainly pointing into my translation book, and after approaching many wrong galleries, I came upon it. At first I wasn't convinced I was in the right place, it was a lovely space, no bigger than the downstairs of a small house, it felt very homely, with a sofa set up beside a coffee table and people drinking tea and eating beautiful looking cookies. As with everywhere I visit, I was continuously stared at, but in here it was in a warm, friendly way. I approached the woman sitting at the desk and pointed to the name of the gallery that my professor had written down, with pleasure, she informed me I was in the right place. I carried on to point to the name of the artist whose exhibition I was looking for, with even more delight she not only took me into the small, bathroom like space that the exhibition was being held but brought over the artist to me. She was a small, soft character, who I warmed to immediately. I automatically admired her, and felt pride to have met her. I was overcome with excitement as I informed her of who I was and why I came and she seemed to return this excitement as I talked about everything I had learned about her and the fascination I held for her work. The response I received from her, I can only describe as the reaction on a grandmother after her grandchild presents her with interest of her past. Her English was perfect; she has not only studied in America but has had shows all over the world including Australia, Canada, and Japan and currently has work showing in The National Museum of Scotland, in Edinburgh. The first place I will be visiting on my return home. In particular, I was amazed as she informed me that she studied at The State University of New York, a place I dream of studying at one day. As I walked around this small room, that perfectly complimented her delicate, dainty, intricate work, the respect I had for this woman only grew. The pieces were small works of art, items that the body would only lessen its beauty.



Work from the exhibition *The Part...*, by Jung-Hoo Kim

The paper had deteriorated over time, so it was only small pieces that had been used, the colour that was produced from this deterioration created a marble like effect ending up looking organic, almost as if it is an artefact. As I spent time studying her jewellery she wandered away and soon returned with a book of the exhibition that she presented to me. It was such a kind, warm gesture that summed up the Korean manner perfectly. The grandmother like figure that she was, not only made me day but also will always bring me amicable memories of Korea.

The quality of her work, worn away, almost antique like quality was exactly what I wanted to achieve with the material in would incorporate in my design. In order to find a material that would provide me with this, I had to explore many a place in Seoul. The Insa-Dong area seemed the perfect place to start. I rummaged around many stalls and boutique craft shops to find different papers and fabrics. This did not appear to be very successful as everything offered was the modern equivalent. I managed to gather some traditional hand made paper but was not completely satisfied by the effect it created. So I embarked on my first trip to a fabric market in Dongdaemun, a much-anticipated place I was longing to visit, I had been terrified at the prospect of ordering and enquiring about fabric in Korean.



As I arrived onto the fabric floor, the atmosphere was buzzing and overwhelming. Automatically, I was drawn in and was spoilt for choice at the selection that was offered. Time flew by and after gathering more sample than I could carry, I headed to the studio to make samples in which I was eager to present to my professor. I began to cluster the fabric and paper together, in a manner that I had been inspired from the gemstone “Scheelite”. The quality that the stone holds is exactly that I wanted my bangle to have. A contrast of a strong, static structure, with a more delicate decoration to accompany it. Although, it was very important to me not to replicate but just take inspiration from the artists of whose work I have studied, I was keen to capture the same quality that they had achieved. Something, which I feel, I was beginning to reach.



My First Critique

I never feel satisfied with any of the jewellery I make. There is always something I would like to re-visit, develop and change. A trait I believe makes you an artist. The mind should always be thinking of the next thing. After my first critique here, of which is very similar to back home. The possibilities of where I could take my bangle were endless. The main point of the project for me, however, was that I learned something from it. I didn't have to be happy with the outcome, or even like what I made. But I had to feel as if, I had somehow developed as an artist. In the project, I had explored new materials for me to use when making jewellery. I had approached my making very differently to how I had done at home. I had pushed myself out of my comfort zone. And for the first time, I felt successful with my piece. That does not mean I am happy with. But I feel satisfied and proud of what I managed to achieve.



My Final Piece

I am carrying on the research and journey I began in Korea. The inspiration I found there, is still a huge factor in my work just now. Most importantly though, the amount of pressure and workload I learned to deal with is my biggest achievement. It has helped prepare me for my final year at Edinburgh College of Art, more than I could ever imagine. I love passing on my stories from Korea, snippets that pop back into my head and I am so lucky to have these precious memories. I would recommend it to everyone.

My Final Piece