

Elizabeth Campbell – 3rd year Jewellery & Silversmithing

Exchange to Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, Halifax Nova Scotia, Canada

January 2012 to April 2012

I will be forever grateful for the opportunity to study in Canada and I struggle to find the words to explain just how life changing my exchange was. The support from Hammersmith was invaluable – your support was so appreciated, and it allowed me to take part in a once in a life time experience.

The chance to study in Canada was especially significant to me, as I had never left the UK and this was my first experience of going abroad. Furthermore, my journey to Nova Scotia involved my first experience on an aeroplane. My nerves were uncontrollable the morning I left Edinburgh – possibly intensified by the time of year, as I was flying to Canada on New Year's Eve. I would be starting 2012 in a new country!

To my (pleasant) surprise the flights went with remarkable ease, and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of flying; seeing the clouds out of the window; the sheer joy of being on my way to Canada; and the overwhelming excitement of what was to come.

I was very fortunate to be staying with a girl, Katie, whom I had met when she came to Edinburgh College of Art on exchange from Nova Scotia. We had met during her exchange as she lived with one of my close friends and we got on very well, so when I was accepted to take part in the exchange I contacted her for some general advice on weather, NSCAD and accommodation. Fortunately, she had a spare room in her flat which I sublet and which gave me a group of wonderful friends and flatmates whose support and encouragement was priceless.

Not only did I have friends through Katie and my new flatmates, but I was exceptionally lucky to have another friend in Sarah – an exchange student from NSCAD who had come to Edinburgh College of Art the previous semester and was one of my classmates. As she had just gone through the exact same experience I was about to embark on, she went out of her way to help and guide me through my time in Nova Scotia. Her kindness was mirrored in all of my classmates at NSCAD who are some of the most welcoming and kind-hearted people I have had the fortune to meet. The incredible support I had from my friends in Nova Scotia meant I settled into my new life in Halifax quickly and this allowed me to really immerse myself in the experience and enjoy every aspect of the exchange.

Halifax is a relatively small city, slightly smaller than Edinburgh, as is the neighbouring city of Dartmouth which is connected to Halifax with a large bridge, similar to the Forth Road Bridge which connects Edinburgh and Fife. Being a smaller scale city meant travelling around the city was very easy – buses were affordable, as were taxis for late night travel, and the daily ferries across the water to Dartmouth ran regularly throughout the day.

NSCAD University has several campuses around the city centre – the main campus being the Granville campus on Duke Street, where the jewellery department is located and thus where I spent most of my time! The main campus is situated above a small shopping mall, which houses the college art supplies store and a local pub – everything an art student needs in one place!



The Granville campus is next door to the university gallery – the Anna Leonwens Gallery – named after the founder of NSCAD University who was famously written about in books such as ‘Anna and the King of Siam’. The gallery has 3 large gallery spaces and hosts weekly openings of students and tutors work – these openings are a great weekly treat as food and drink are provided by the exhibiting artists, and many of the NSCAD students attended – making them a weekly social event and much needed break from working in the studio above.

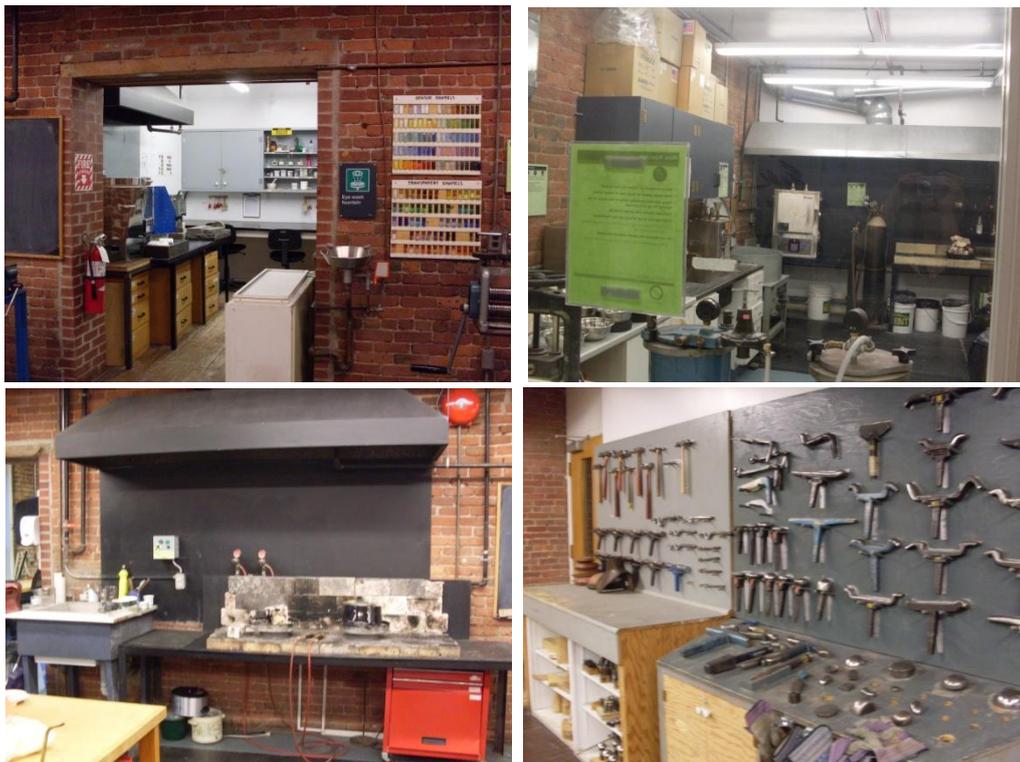


Left: Exterior of Anna Leonwens Gallery; Right: Interior of gallery 1 (during weekly opening)

What became very obvious to me was the incredible work ethic that the jewellery and silversmithing department fosters at NSCAD. The student’s dedication to their work is mind blowing, and something that was very daunting to me as a new student. Not only do the classes produce a high quantity of work each semester, but the quality is outstanding.

The department has wealth of knowledge from the experienced and acclaimed tutors, and technical staff – including the head of the department, Kye-Yeon Son; deputy head of the department, Pamela Ritchie; enamelling and technical tutor, Lillian Yuen; and CAD/CAM tutor Greg Sims.

As well as the world acclaimed tutors, the department has endless equipment and tools - all of which are available to the students - from casting to electroforming; enamelling to rapid prototyping and chemical equipment to CNC milling machines, the students at NSCAD are taught how to use all the equipment and given a thorough education of the techniques that are possible with such equipment.



From top left: Enamelling room; casting room; forging torches; silversmithing room tools

With 24 hour access, 7 days a week, the studio was always busy with students – I really admired their work ethic and I was despite to keep up with the standard and volume of work produce in my classes.

Perhaps my biggest challenge at NSCAD was my Open Studio class, which was taught by Pamela Ritchie. The Open Studio class is a similar to the final year at ECA where students develop their own body of work and plan their next steps after graduating. Coming from ECA, I was used to being handed a brief which set out a clear path for me to research and develop ideas, before creating a final resolved piece. However, the Open Studio class has no brief – students are to develop their own, very unique, themes or concepts to translate into a small collection of jewellery. This freedom was very daunting to me and I found the first couple of weeks troublesome as I struggled to find a concept for my work - one of the main

reasons I wanted to study on exchange was to help find my own voice in jewellery design, as I had always struggled with a lack of personal identity in my work and I was keen to push myself out of my comfort zone to help me discover what my identity is.

With the guidance of Pamela I discovered a range of conceptual themes and ideas that I developed over the weeks, as well as introducing new techniques and materials into my work. My Open Studio class became the most rewarding of my classes, as I could see my own personality in my work and I was discovering the design identity that I had been searching for.

For my Open studio collection I used the 'exchange experience' as a starting point – I wanted to use this huge, once in a lifetime experience to shape my work and translate some of my feelings from the exchange into wearable pieces. From this initial idea, Pamela directed me towards several books on visual literacy which explained concepts of how we see the world around us and how we 'read' certain visual elements. What I found most interesting from the readings were the ideas surrounding visual stress and visual repose – the slight differences in shape, direction, composition and pattern that cause us to react differently to what we are seeing. This concept appealed to me on a personal level as I have always been something of a stressed individual and I constantly worry and fret.

I had fun with combing the exchange experience with my new interest in visual literacy - I used my time spent exploring my new surrounds to collect small objects that would represent Nova Scotia, such as drift wood, bark, shells, stones etc. These objects would serve as the inspiration for my colour palette as well as some of them being physically introduced into the work. My classmates and tutors joined in with the 'scavenger hunt' for materials, and would bring me huge logs of drift wood and even wood from their gardens that had been chewed by beavers!



Above: Mid-session crit display

Gradually, the different elements started to come together as I explored different possibilities for my collection, and with weekly group crits, class discussions and friendly exchanging of ideas I feel I started to develop a unique and personal collect. Our mid-session review served as an invaluable feedback session for me, and from there my

jewellery developed much quicker and I had such fun with what I was making. The introduction of colour became an important theme, and I explored different ways of using colour such as with colour threads/textiles, powder-coating and resins coloured with oil paints. But the most significant development that came from mid-session was to take inspiration from one of my other classes which was enamelling, taught by Lillian Yuen.



“Red Stress Brooch” (Resin coloured with oil paint; found bark; gold plated copper; steel pin)

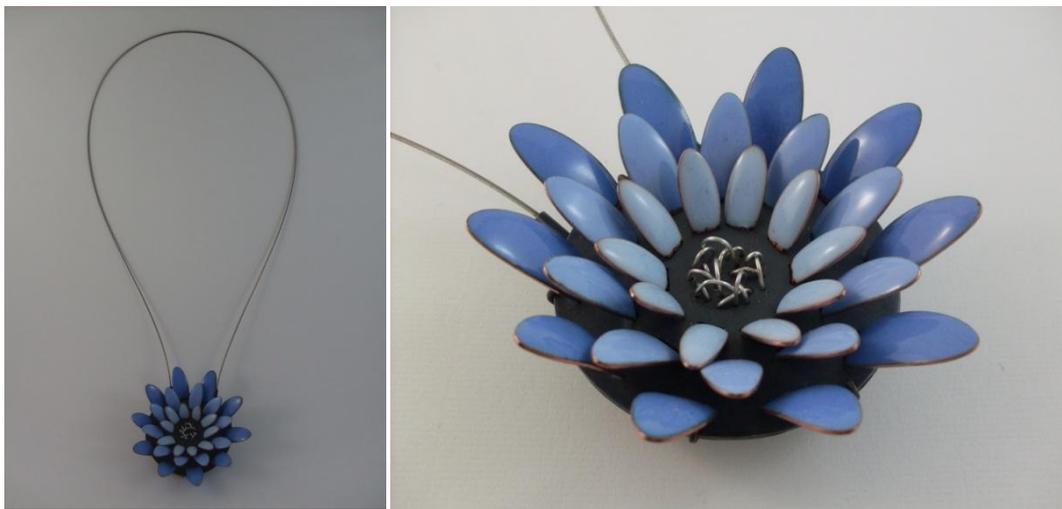
The introduction of enamelled pieces became so important to me, and further inspired the visually literacy concepts as I could combine soft, papery drift wood with bold, smooth enamels – creating striking visual contrast.



Left: “Drift wood brooch [round]” (Drift wood; oxidised copper; enamel; silver wire); Right: “Drift wood brooch [square]” (Drift wood; oxidised copper; enamel; silver & cloisonné wire)

Not only did my enamelling class become an important influence for my Open Studio work, as I used the techniques we were taught to influence my pieces, but the enamelling class also developed my basic making and problem solving skills as we were forced to carefully

consider methods of connection and incorporating enamel into our designs. Our second project in enamelling was to test these connection skills, as we had to design and make a piece of jewellery which had a minimum of 5 enamelled components that were connected, without the use of enamelling solder. This became one of my favourite projects, as I challenged myself to make a large scale pendant with 30 individual enamelled petals. To connect the petals I created a domed back which would be faced with a flat front onto which the 30 petals would be tabbed into a gradient of size and colour. Once the petals were securely tabbed the front face was set onto the domed back with a large claw setting. After very positive feedback from my tutors and peers the piece was entered and accepted into the juried Enamelist Society online student exhibition – a great personal achievement as I had only been studying enamel for a couple of months.



Above: “Flower of Scotland” (Copper; enamel; silver wire; steel cable)
(<http://www.enamelistsociety.org/Activities/OnLineStudentShow.html>)

After 4 months in Nova Scotia I feel I have developed greatly as a designer – learning new techniques, developing new ideas and being introduced to a whole new way of designing and making jewellery. As well as what I learnt at NSCAD, I learnt so much outside the studio as I was able to see and experience a new culture and new way of living in Canada.

The friends and tutors I met on exchange have continued to be a great support now I have returned to Edinburgh and it is lovely to have made such wonderful connections with them. I am looking forward to showing my Canadian tutors how my work develops during my final year at ECA.

So much happened during my 4 months in Nova Scotia that it is impossible to write about it all in just one report, but what I will take away from the experience is a new confidence in both my work and myself. The experience of travelling to a new country on my own, living in a new and amazing city and studying at one of the top art & design schools in Canada has made me a stronger and more self-assured individual. I am so thankful for the chance to

take part in the exchange – it is no exaggeration to say the experience has been life changing.



Above: My flatmate and myself at Peggy's Cove, Halifax, Nova Scotia