



Contemporary Art & Jewellery

London Alternative Photography Collective online talk as part of The Sustainable Darkroom Residency, 2020.

This talk is part of the London Alternative Photography Collective The Sustainable Darkroom programme now taking residency at Guest Projects and funded by London Community Response Fund. From the 6th - 31st July 2020 we will bring a series of talks, workshops and events on sustainability. In this talk, we address and consider opportunities for recycling and reusing studio and darkroom waste with artists Charlotte E Padgham, Michaela Davidova & Katrina Stamatopoulos. This talk was chaired by Hannah Fletcher.

TRANSCRIPT of Charlotte E Padgham's presentation starting at 4:22 and ending at 25:15.

IMAGE

1. Logo

Thank you hannah for inviting me to take part in this evening's talk. I'm really pleased to be joining Michaela and Katrina.

I'm Charlotte Padgham, I'm an artist and jewellery designer maker based in south east London.

I'm going to talk to you a little bit about some of my work and processes, then about my participation in the LAPC Sustainable Darkroom Residency back in April and then finish up with a few ideas and projects I have as a result of that.

I actually found this talk really difficult to plan as my work and process isn't quite as linear as Powerpoint wants it to be, so I'm hoping this doesn't come across as too fragmented. So apologies in advance.

So, my work is essentially rooted in what's discarded, in degradation, the textures and traces we leave behind and in the potential of preservation, renewal and re-contextualisation.

The starting points for my work lie in found objects, waste materials and organic matter, including myself

I'm interested in

Reactions, manipulation and intervention between found materials and traditional materials and techniques

2. A range of jewellery made using a stash of carrier bags that couldn't be recycled back in the day, manipulating the plastic into a material that could be textured and shaped

3. This is some melted aluminium I salvaged from the ground from a burnt-out car and turned into jewellery – amazing textures

4. Another piece of jewellery from an ill-fated car. The glass from the smashed window was all that was left of it as it had been broken into and stolen

I very often use my own body as a tool and material in my work

5. Some images from a project called 'We are all around us' using Hoover dust – 'What's the matter?'

6. Photographed through a microscope

7. And strands of my fallen hair dipped in wax and latex, presented as an installation and also as a piece of jewellery / readornment

8. My hair encapsulated in resin – to be reworn

9. My hair made into paint brushes, which I actually use quite a lot

Harnessing Order & chaos (as well as being a unique personality trait of mine) I'm interested in the control and spontaneity of the combinations of materials and processes I use to create work that has the potential to, or the feeling of being able to, continue transforming and evolving over time.

I focus on reusing, reworking, repurposing and recycling as many materials as possible within and across my art and jewellery practices by incorporating remnants, waste or certain elements or ideas from one piece of work to develop and construct a new one.

IMAGE [at 8:14]

Hand print

As an example, acetate digital negatives from photographic prints, such as these, then become resists for etching texture into metals to make jewellery or printmaking plates, and then that acetate is turned into stencils or plates for monotype printing.

As standard practice, I recycle all waste paper from my studio into surfaces for printmaking, drawing and painting or as elements for creating and packaging my jewellery.

All silver and wax offcuts and filings are melted down and reused...

I try to extend the life of a material, to give it multiple uses

So just to give you a small, illustrated idea of how this works and how my artwork and jewellery feed each other...

These digital photographs of my skin led to ...

IMAGE

Skin prints

A series of contact prints of myself onto found glass and mirror – so I physically laid on the glass (this might be one of those don't try this at home moments) & the residue left from my skin was revealed using fingerprint dusting powder (3 like microscope slides).

IMAGE

Skin prints #2

Being unprotected, the nature of the prints meant that they were very easily damaged and erased. Preserved only on camera (badly unfortunately). However, the glass was then able to be reused for further similar prints and also for printmaking, as inking surfaces or for monotypes. They can be reused in many different ways.

IMAGE

Liquid emulsion prints

Both the first digital photos and the glass prints were used as negatives for a series of experiments in the darkroom using liquid photographic emulsion on recycled papers, an old Tyvek overall and a few other discarded objects.

IMAGE

Skins jewellery

These are a few examples of my 'Skins' jewellery collection again incorporating the physical transference of the imprint of my skin as they are formed

IMAGE

Etched copper

The digital negatives of my skin and hair were also used as a resist to etch copper which have then become pieces of jewellery and plates for printmaking

IMAGE

Remnant series

Here's a recent example of how I used a couple of these copper plates for printmaking. This series, named Remnant, I made in the early part of lockdown. It started as a straight print run from 2 of my copper plates onto some remnants of paper in my studio, whilst making them I started to intervene by varying the consistency of ink, dampness of paper and reworking any imperfections with whatever materials I had at hand. Every single print made, each variation is part of this series. A few are currently being shown in 'The Art of Isolation' exhibition in South East London.

IMAGE

Relic series

The copper plates have also become artworks in their own right, forming part of my Relic series.

This cyclical process or circular economy means that I am continually using the resources I have – making sure that materials and equipment multitask across disciplines – I love seeing how far I can push and extend the life of what I have around me. But, it also helps me think ahead and take responsibility for addressing any consequential waste, and incorporate it as part of the design process. This means that if I make something, any waste stays in my studio until I reuse or recycle it. It's actually a really good deterrent. If I can't incorporate it or recycle it I either rethink how to make it more efficiently next time around, or not at all.

Recycle, reduce, repurpose and rework is really becoming the heart of my process

IMAGE [at 12:05]

Residency

LAPC's Sustainable Darkroom residency was a 4 week project in April this year, with each week looking at a different aspect: Recycle, Remove, Repurpose and Rework. I took part in week 1 Recycle which launched at the very beginning of lockdown. We found ourselves suddenly isolated in our homes and needing to think outside the box in terms of collaboration and undertaking the projects remotely. It was actually a fitting start to the residency – we had to be ultra resourceful and look at objects/waste in our immediate surroundings from a different perspective – that's when you really start to see the possibilities and appreciate the materiality and properties of what you have lying around.

IMAGE

Chemigrams using expired darkroom solutions and resin coated paper

The first thing we looked into was Resin Coated photographic paper

- Cannot be recycled due to the plastic coating
- The group was tasked to try making it into a Paper pulp clay and experiment with it in that form
- I also wanted to think of ways I could reuse and extend the life of the paper within my own practice, and I'd recently been trying drypoint etching using tetra-pak packaging which has a plastic coating (intaglio printing method trad. Made by scratching into the surface copper plate/plastic to ink up and print from), so figured that it might be worth a try
- So I had a stash of very expired photo chemicals and RC paper from over 10 years ago, use that to make some chemigrams (in the picture)

IMAGE

Drypoint prints

- One of the least successful chemigrams had just some very faint traces which I traced using a sharp point, inked up and printed. I made several to see how long the plate lasted – the resin got a bit sticky but if I didn't do too many in one go it held up. Worth pursuing.
- Now with a tray full of used fixer I moved on to what I was actually invited on to the residency to investigate which was

Recovery of silver (Ag) from spent Ammonium Thiosulphate fix bath

I use 100% recycled sterling silver in all of my jewellery, it is of the exact same high quality but reuses material that's already in circulation, recovered from industrial use (ie. electric parts, plating), scrap jewellery and dentistry. Interestingly my usual supplier said that silver from the photographic industry and xrays wasn't incorporated in their recycled silver – so I'm going to look into that in more detail at some point.

I wanted to test whether it was possible to reclaim any of the silver in my fix bath on a very DIY 'domestic' lockdown scale to reuse directly within my jewellery practice, or at the very least be able to send to a refiner to recycle along with my other silver scrap

IMAGE

Electrolysis

The set-up is based on a method I found on a dutch radio hobbyists website, Rob Kalmeijer – a very simple electrolysis set-up - for silver plating radio parts and he happened to suggest using photographic fix as the source of silver. With sustainability in mind I replaced his suggested 6V torch battery with a 6V lead-acid battery that can be recharged using a solar panel and is 100% recyclable.

I also wanted to use as much as I could that I already had to hand in my studio:

In the picture – multimeter (borrowed from a neighbour) / anode - graphite stick from drawing supplies / cathode - stock copper / single core cable from a stash I had that I was going to recover the copper from / bulldog clips from my studio / and a beaker made from a drinks bottle

IMAGE

Brush plating trial – settled for tank plating (immersed in the solution)

IMAGE

First trial was fairly successful very low ampage – easy to remove when polished in places

IMAGE

Tried a much higher ampage and the plating was much more even and thicker. HOWEVER...

IMAGE

It very quickly tarnished from the sulfates in the fixer. Despite cleaning it kept coming back. One of the reasons jewellery tarnishes is because of sulphur in the air. Sulphur is also used in the jewellery industry to patinate metals to give a grey or black finish, normally using Liver of Sulphur (potassium sulfide) or putting the jewellery in a bag of boiled eggs.

So the next stage of my experimentation will be to figure that out find a happy medium. I'd welcome any input from any chemists out there!

IMAGE

Turned the first piece into a simple cuff bracelet – I love the texture of the uneven plate. So far it's remained stable, so I've started to get quite a lot of ideas on how to use the plating in this way, with this aesthetic.

Silver plating, particularly in jewellery and silverware, is an extremely fine science, there's a reason why there are specialists out there, involving a lot of carefully considered, and measured factors – PH, temperature, current, voltage, the materials used for and the current density of anodes and cathodes, the quality and stability of solutions, the ability of accurately measuring silver saturation in the solutions, pre and post treatments, etc etc.

It was of no surprise that the process of plating with very basic equipment, uncontrolled conditions and unrefined solutions was going to give inconsistent results. However, some plating was definitely achieved. So its reassuring that even if I ultimately can't reuse the silver directly, I can still recover as much as possible to then send off to my refiner for recycling and reusing that way. I am going to continue experimenting, but very much within my parameters of 'domestic'/small studio scale. I think there's a great deal of potential.

Next

Same process of recovering silver from caffenol developer and salt water fix – then see if it's possible to reuse the salt water for electro-etching metal – then recover the metal again from that – to hopefully be able to continue reusing the salt bath in that way

IMAGE

Paper pulp

I want to finally get round to making the resin coated paper pulp clay to make jewellery elements or use as a material to create moulds from. And also see whether any silver can be recovered from the water drained from it.

I also want to experiment plating onto conductive paint, by making my own graphite paint from what I have in the studio, to try silver plating paintings, drawings, photographs and those small sculptures/jewellery elements made from RC paper pulp clay, using recovered silver.

Ultimately want to create systems use across my photography, jewellery, artwork with minimal equipment – particularly with metal recovery and filtration in mind so that solutions can also be potentially reused. If any chemists out there want to give me a hand with any of this please get in touch!!

Conclude:

IMAGE [at 22:57]

Ethical making quote

As a multi-multi disciplinary artist I have become increasingly aware over recent years that it's essential to become more mindful and economical, for one there's of course the financial expense of working in many disciplines but also the sheer amount of stuff you accumulate to make all this work, the materials, the equipment and paraphernalia, the packaging.

I'm incredibly aware that everything I do and everything I use has a consequence. This has really reinforced and enforced my process, helped me focus my practice with this cyclical way of working. In a world where you can do anything, it doesn't necessarily mean you should! I personally feel that restriction fuels imagination, in fact we've probably all discovered that during the last few months, that's when we become our most inventive, resourceful, open minded and most importantly considerate and I think collaboration is key.

IMAGE

End slide

I'd just like to finish up by saying that if anyone is interested in reading more details on some of the steps I'm taking to become a more sustainable artist and maker head to my website – I'm by no means expert, it's definitely a work in progress - I'm also collating a page on there of actionable resources, particularly for artists. So I'd be really interested in any feedback and suggestions to include or if you have any questions please do drop me a line.

Also, a huge thank you to Hannah and LAPC for opening up and enabling a dialogue between artists (across disciplines) to share resources and collaborate towards more sustainable (and ethical) practices.

Thank you.

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