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Plastic Jewelry

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Present-day consumers have increasingly realized and become eager about environmental issues. Westerners and younger generations, in particular, choose to buy environmental-friendly products. Consequently, almost every industry including gem and jewelry industry have to adopt environmental friendly approach in manufacturing process such as recycling leftover materials, selling second-hand products, reusing materials without transformation, or sharing or renting out jewelry to reduce environmental impacts. As markets grow for green products nowadays, consumers have given precedence to environmental-friendly products. They are willing to pay more for them. According to a study of Global Web Index on online consumers around the world, it was found that 60% of the Internet users in the US and UK are happy to pay for environmental-oriented goods. Almost half of the consumers want brands to engage in going green [1].

The Institute of Jewelry, Fashion and Textiles in Birmingham (UK) celebrated its 125th anniversary in an unusual way in 2015. To commemorate the occasion, several jewelry professors organized a project called 'JUNK: Rubbish to Gold'. The curators of the project interviewed the owners of the charity stores and found out, that a great number of goods, received by the charity stores, have been stored for many years, haven't been sold and, most likely, won't be sold. These items from various stores in the city, totaling 650 kilograms, were collected and placed in a separate room at the institute.

The curators of the project invited 10 jewelers of completely different styles and 20 students, who worked for a week to create jewelry from items they had collected from stores.

The artists worked in the open hallway of the Institute, where they had their own workstations to ensure maximum publicity and attention for the project. Five days a week with no time constraints and creative carte blanche, the jewelers created new pieces right in public. At the same time, the organizers streamed the process live on YouTube. It was undoubtedly a way out of the comfort zone for the jewelers: they had to work with unusual raw materials, literally digging out unexpected pieces from the general pile of old things, and also doing it not in a chamber workshop, but in front of everyone, talking to visitors and answering their questions. To have complete freedom, but to be limited mostly by cheap materials, to work as if in a workshop, but in full view of everyone, was a real challenge for the craftsmen [1].

The project explores marine man-made trash as a potential material for jewelry design, but with a slight bias toward craft. The jewelry designer and artist Pennie Jagiello defines anthropogenic debris as ‘...human-made materials that has been discarded causing serious negative environmental impacts’. She points to jewelry designers within the broader community of practice that has found materials and objects central to their jewelry design practice. These include among others David Bielander, Helen Britton, and Lisa Walker, just to mention a few. According to Jagiello, these have been central in raising debate about what may be considered precious or non-precious, and about the role of contemporary jewelry as an expanded discursive design arena [2].

Marine plastic pollution is now on the agenda politically and is a problem that needs to be solved on a global scale now. Initially, we only used to found material. However, in

transforming waste to jewelry, we found the need to introduce custom silver parts. We strive for increasing the reuse of silver, as well as the use of fair mined metals. However, we do believe that an exploration of a ‘new’ jewelry design material as part of a discursive design project might provide other insights into marine plastic pollution. Pollution, unfortunately, crosses national boundaries, and affects complex marine eco-systems brutally. And, the actions of those who consume the most affect those who have the least. It is estimated that every year, the staggering amount of eight million tons of plastic is thrown into the ocean. The marine litter that does not sink to the bottom of the sea moves across vast distances with ocean streams. The purpose of this project is to formulate further thoughts on these issues as the project progresses [2].

The research design is characterized by a fairly organic development of the project. This allows it to move along paths that can branch out as it progresses. The project is formulated as a reflective journey in conversation with marine plastic debris as a material for jewelry. It is positioned as a practice-oriented mixed-methods study. However, the project emerged from years of theoretically oriented academic research within humanities approaches to communication design, visual communication, and a close study of contemporary fashion media. Not being jewelers by training, the problems and issues surrounding design mediation in contemporary media contexts served as an important backdrop for the project. This also extends to the teaching of communication design and fashion mediation at University College. One of the goals of the project is to generate interest in the problem of ocean pollution by addressing it through visual articulations different from those expected. Setting in motion a different aesthetic, viewers are invited to scrutinize each piece of plastic.

A group of people collect most of the plastic pieces during beach cleanups, with the plastic they bring in and leave

behind being only a fraction of the waste that is recycled or discarded. The other bits they get from Nordic Ocean Watch (NOW), a non-governmental organization that promotes beach cleanup as a collective effort to raise awareness about plastic pollution in the ocean and promote the idea of caring for the ocean in a collective way. The organization was founded by a group of surfers who have been cleaning the beach in Hoddevik from which they surf for years.

Recycled plastic has a multitude of benefits over traditional materials. From the virtually endless color and pattern combinations possible, to the ease of production and infinite shapes, to the novelty of wearing a handmade recycled jewel. And maybe finally each and every jewelry piece made from Precious Plastic is absolutely unique, helping to establish a deeper personal connection (which hopefully helps people keep them longer).

An additional benefit (and most important to us) is that you will be reclaiming waste and helping fight this global crisis. To mine for gold, silver and diamonds costs a lot of energy, resources and lives [3].

References:

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