



Conference report

Beyond Silver: 25 years of the ACJ

1st - 3rd July 2022

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*This is an edited version of the full
report which has been prepared for
public interest and information.*

*The full report was submitted to the
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Introduction

Every five years or so, the ACJ organises an International conference that offers its members and the Jewellery Industry an opportunity for discussion, debate and engagement across a range of themes around Contemporary Jewellery.

Beyond Silver: 25 years of the ACJ is the seventh conference organised by ACJ and formed part of the celebrations that marked 25 years of the organisation.

This report describes the aims and intentions and the impact and output of the conference; and analysis.

The Conference Themes

The recently published thesis of *Marjan Unger, Jewellery in Context: A multidisciplinary framework for the study of jewellery*. The book was chosen by the ACJ Board as the starting point for the conference and its translator and publisher Professor Theo Smeets was invited to give the key note lecture. This parameter was beneficial in providing a focus for the conference themes.

We were hoping for a conference that was expansive in themes and approaches, so we posed a number of questions pertinent to the current global situation which explore the discipline through different and specific contextual lenses. A short piece of additional text was written to supplement the topics and act as a guide for submissions.

The call for papers specifically included a section to attract submissions from the early stage researcher and new graduates,

Speakers were invited to take part in the conference, **Beyond Silver: 25 Years of the ACJ**, which coincides with the ACJ touring exhibition, **Meanings and Messages**.

Together both conference and exhibition celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Association for Contemporary Jewellery. In 2017 the ACJ celebrated its 20th Anniversary by marking the past and the present through the exhibition *20:20 Visions* and exploring the future through the conference of the same name. Now, five years on, the focus has shifted to the position of contemporary jewellery in a changed society.

To focus our reflections on where contemporary jewellery has brought us over the last 25 years, we sought inspiration from the translation of Marjan Unger's doctoral dissertation, *Jewellery in Context: A Multi-disciplinary frame-work for the study of jewellery*. After her passing, Theo Smeets and a number of jewellery institutions, scholars and interested individuals

came together to publish Unger's work in her spirit, making it available in English over a decade after it was defended in 2010.

When we wear jewellery, we are communicating something about who we are and what is important to us.

Contemporary jewellery doesn't just engage with the history of jewellery and the body but also expands upon an array of associations and *Jewellery in Context* seemed like an excellent place to help frame the conference topics.

Over the course of three days the conference offered an opportunity for discussion, debate and engagement across a range of concerns that affect the discipline of jewellery provided a framework for discussion on and around British Contemporary Jewellery by posing a number of questions pertinent to the current global situation and exploring the discipline through some specific contextual lens Creative education is changing and there is a skills gap on the horizon, but there is everything to play for: we live in a digital culture that supports the creative entrepreneur, what does the future of the British Jewellery look like in this post-Brexit and global pandemic landscape? While contemporary jewellery in Britain has evolved much over the last 25 years, how will jewellery evolve over the next 25?

Proposal submissions were sought (but are not limited to) the following themes:

Jewellery as a social connector

Jewellery has always served to emphasise identity and status, but it also plays a role in relationships between people. How do we connect with other people through jewellery? Have there been positive outcomes to this global pandemic? How do people view jewellery worn by others and what conversations are had?

Jewellery: meanings and messages

Jewellery contains within it a vast diversity of meanings. What does the jewellery we wear reveal about who we are? What are the meanings and messages contained within a piece: are they subtle or explicit?

Democratising the field

Once the preserve of the initiated few, contemporary jewellery is now reaching a broader audience through the opening of online platforms. How are customers accessing contemporary jewellery today? Has the independent jeweller benefitted from the global reach of social media in the form of an increase of interest and sales from new clients? How has this affected the galleries?

Jewellery as art

Jewellery historically, is made to be worn: what is it without the body, is it still jewellery? As such a universal phenomenon and art form, definitions of jewellery would seem superfluous to requirement but how it is viewed

is constantly changing. With more and more contemporary jewellery now acquired by museums and collectors beyond ethnological imperatives and with traditional art categories no longer applicable we explore artistic practices rooted at the intersections of craft, applied and visual arts, design and fashion.

New voices

Are you new to research or studying on an MA or PhD in jewellery and looking for a platform to discuss your ideas and work so far? Then we would like to hear from you too. Please submit your proposal indicating where you are currently studying or from where you have just graduated.

Venue and programme

Historically the ACJ conferences have been located at various venues across the UK in an attempt to remove the barriers created by travel expenses for its members. The 2017 conference took place in Sheffield and the 2022 conference was booked to take place at Exeter University

To create a cohesive programme the papers were grouped into their themes and in an attempt to break down hierarchies, the artist talks and new voice submissions were interspersed with the academic papers.

It was agreed to use the Saturday afternoon as a time for the parallel activities. For the delegates it would provide time to network, engage with the practical workshops, visit the vendors and see the exhibitions. Alongside this, Linda Lambert had proposed an access programme as a means of introducing the subject to the non jewellery enthusiast with the hope of broadening our audience.

Live streaming

As part of our strategy to remove some of the economic barriers incurred through the cost of attending the conference, such as travel, accommodation and time away from the studio, we decided to live stream the conference proceedings.

Online Conference content

Friday Afternoon

3.00 Welcome & Introduction Terry Hunt (ACJ Chair) joined by Charlotte Dew (The Goldsmiths' Centre)

3.20 Professor Jivan Astfalck - Where do we go from Here?

4.10 break

4.40 Charlotte Dew (The Goldsmiths' Centre) - What potential do NFTs (non-fungible tokens) and the metaverse hold for jewellery, beyond silver?

5.10 Meng He - Application of Additive Manufacturing in Jewellery

5.30 M.Kala - From African Symbols to Jewellery: how I became a jeweller

5.50 break

6.00 Stina Wen - Serendipity in Contemporary Jewelry

6.20 Bridie Lander (Birmingham School of Jewellery) - b1_3pa

6.30 Close

Saturday Morning

9.30 Dr Sian Hindle (Birmingham School of Jewellery) - Jewellery's Circular Economy: materialising connections through the gifting and wearing of adornments

10.10 Anthony Wong - The Blue Funnel Line and a Ring in his Pocket

10.40 Seeun Kim - The Heritage Collection 100 Project

11.00 break

11.20 Anna Börcök - The Fields of the Hungarian Narrative Jewellery

11.50 Jo McAllister - *Jewel Narratives: Past, Present and Intertwined*

12.10 Mark Cutler (Pressman Mastermelt) - Workshop Reclamation Seminar

12.45 Break

Saturday Afternoon - Access Programme for the Jewellery Enthusiast

2.00 Linda Lambert - welcome

2.20 Kelvin Birk - Thinking, Making, Wearing

3.20 break

3.45 Terry Hunt (ACJ Chair) discusses the ACJ touring exhibition Meanings and Messages

4.15 break

4.45 Linda Lambert and Anthony Wong in conversation discussing commissioning that special piece

5.10 Emma Paragreen (Sheffield Assay Office) - Hallmarking: one of the earliest forms of consumer protection

5.40 Linda Lambert - Questions

6.00 Close

Sunday Morning

9.30 Associate Professor Dr Supavee Sirinkraporn & Dr Khajornsak Nakpan (Silpakorn University) - Innovative synthesised bio melanin fibre from pre-historic soil to design ethnic contemporary body ornaments which reflect civilization and respect cultural diversity in Pang Ma Pa District, Mae Hong Sorn Province Thailand

10.10 Break

10.20 Bic Tieu (School of Art & Design - UNSW Sydney) - Connecting Intercultural Values and Making

10.50 Yinglong Li - Sustainability of Traditional Craft: rethinking the knowledge and value of making with the enamelling technique of plique-à-jour

11.10 break

11.30 Professor Theo Smeets (Hochschule Trier) - "Let There Be Rock!"

12.20 Professor Theo Smeets and Professor Jivan Astfalck - Plenary

12.40 Conference finishes

Conference Attendance

The conference was advertised through the ACJ platforms, the monthly e-bulletin and its social media platforms, and the conference committee networks.

In an effort to remove economic barriers, a number of booking options were provided to potential delegates.

We were hoping for eighty in person delegates in total. A total of fifty seven attended in person plus five international speakers that joined us via live streaming.

Conference Outputs

The digital recordings and promotional video

Conference Impact

As a direct result of attending the conference, both Professor Jivan Astfalck and Jo McAllister have been offered artist residencies by Professor Theo Smeets at Hochschule Trier in Idar-Oberstein in Germany.

The conference organiser personally knows that, as a result of her emails: one person became a member of the ACJ intending to book to go to the conference One became a member and attended the conference A speaker subsequently became a member of the organisation.

One of the delegates, Sofie Boons, on behalf of the British Academy of Jewellery, has produced two podcasts themed on the conference. Inevitably, in extending the topics of the conference, these form extremely valuable publicity not only for the ACJ, but for the discipline itself:

<https://baj.ac.uk/baj-podcast-beyond-silver-part-1/>

<https://baj.ac.uk/baj-podcast-beyond-silver-part-2/>

Feedback

Feedback forms were sent out by the ACJ's new Administrator through a platform that provides anonymity to encourage honest answers. On the whole the feedback was very positive. Below is a section from the comments received.

Delegate feedback

What did you think about the range of papers and topics discussed?

- A really broad range of fascinating topics. I was very engaged throughout.

- Wide ranging and all fascinating
- Very interesting, and thought provoking ...
- Wide ranging and thought provoking
- A wider range than I would have expected - some topics more interesting than others.
- Interesting, but more cerebral than I expected (This was my first conference) I had hoped for more technical information I think

In your opinion, was the venue appropriate for this event?

- Yes, the venue was good ... however the loop system in the lecture theatre suffered from massive interference for lengthy periods, making it impossible for me to follow what was being said ... at times, I just had to sit back and enjoy the imagery, which was frustrating!
- Yes, I thought it was perfect all round. The accommodation was very good and a lovely location with stunning views.
- Yes it was great, apart from the evening meals

Was information about the conference and your booking communicated in a clear and concise manner?

- All was well sorted out in advance, and also at the venue ...
- Yes
- Good enough, though it could be slicker.
- I would have liked more information, earlier and I'd have liked some information about the speakers in advance so I could have done some research to be prepared for the topics
- Yes

What, in your opinion, do you think we could change to improve any future ACJ conferences?

- No sure if any improvement needed just keep the quality achieved at this one.
- It was my first and I loved it!
- Revue the academic focus to make it more engaging. Some of the academic speakers clearly loved the sound of their own voice.
- Some of the zoom connections were poor, and often some of the questions from the audience were unkind. I think it would be helpful to give each of the presenter's time to prepare to use the microphones and projection equipment
- It was very well planned but I would have liked a delegate list. Also, I have enjoyed local visits out of the conference venue in past experience. Its nice to visit an art / museum collection or place of local interest together - to break any formality.
- I feel more could be done to address the interests of the average ACJ member – who I take to be a studio jeweller

Analysis *by the conference organizer, Rachel Darbourne*

These are the reflections and opinions of the conference organiser Rachel Darbourne

With the passing of the Executive Director the ACJ lost a key long serving employee with years of knowledge and decision making experience and the impact of this on the conference organisation (and the ACJ) was significant.

The loss of a colleague had a major impact on my job role. Organising events such as this, in my opinion, needs a second member of staff; there is less likely hood of oversights and cover in case of illness. As happened when I caught COVID early in June and was ill for just over a week right at the point of finalising the last points.

I had the support of the conference committee who found themselves with a much larger role than anticipated but they were total essential for the decision making process. I was working on a short term contract with little knowledge of the ACJ, its decision making process, ethics procedures and so forth so their input to shape the conference so it fitted the ACJ ethos was essential. I cannot thank them enough for their input and support; I could not have done the job without them.

As discussed in the report the funding process was delayed by about a year, with funds being secured just before Easter in 2022. Most of the planning had been completed by this stage but we were not able to fully commit to the project until this point making it very tight on time and stressful as it pushed a significant amount of administration into the remaining two months. This in itself would not have been a problem if I had been able to give all of my time to the project (I am a 0.6 lecturer at Arts University Plymouth) or there had been another member of staff picking up Tamizian's conference work load.

We took some risks during the project with the live streaming and the Access Programme.

The live streaming generated some income and has resulted in videos that can be used by the ACJ to populate its YouTube channel and provide content on its website. It allowed remote participation in the conference, my only regret here is that I neglected to capture locations data to establish reach. Overall I think live streaming was a success and something that the ACJ can look to build upon.

The Access Programme failed to recruit a new audience as we had hoped. On reflection I think this needed a different approach, running one advert and hoping local galleries would help spread the word was insufficient. In addition, joining a specialist conference is quite possibly a daunting activity for a non specialist and there was a fee which may have created a second barrier. Perhaps running some free workshops to gauge interested, though

the local gallery contacts may have been a useful introduction? Ultimately I think that the intention was sound and the content of the Access Programme appropriate for a new audience but we were arguably over ambitious considering the limited time, staff and funds. We took the risks and on this occasion we did not achieve what we hoped, but there is valuable learning here that can be carried forward by the organisation.

Running the parallel activities also had the affect of splitting our audience, which was initially a little awkward when no one left the lecture theatre to join the workshops in the side rooms. Thankfully this situation resolved itself after the first paper concluded. Had the audience numbers been significantly larger this may not have been an issue. I am also not sure if having activities competing with each other was necessary.

Overall, all things considered, I think the conference was a success in that those that attended enjoyed the content; some new opportunities have arisen for some of the speakers; there was some very profitable networking; the proposed budget was not widely inaccurate; and we exceeded our expectations with the sponsorship letter.

In addition, I have asked that questions be added to the ACJ membership form so the organisation can track impact of its advertising and/or where its new members are coming from. I put in place methods to track the impact of the advertising campaigns for the conference and it has been interesting to see the impact of the Klimt adverts and also how powerful networking and word of mouth are as advertising tools.

Personally, in terms of my own CPD this was an enormous piece of work, I am very proud of what I have achieved here. There are things that I would do differently in the future but I have learnt this through doing the work.

In response to the feedback received, there are some interesting points made.

The comment about the loop system is noted. We were made aware of the issue and did what we could to resolve it by contacting the Exeter staff on duty at the time. They did what they could to resolve the issue.

The delegate list is a great idea.

Providing information about the speakers in advance is also a great idea. In the future, with greater capacity, we could look to address this through an email to delegates.

The comment about the zoom connections has been noted. When Lynne and I visited we were assured that the Wifi was very strong and could manage what we were requesting. In the future I would take a member of the live

stream team with me on the initial site visit to in an effort to prevent such issues.

Getting speakers acclimatised to the equipment is something that was accommodated by meeting before the programme was due to start. There was one exception with a speaker who was not willing to use the venue computer and their laptop was not compatible with the live stream setup. Our live stream provider did the best they could with the time that they had to solve the problem. This is an interesting issue, I did not anticipate it, I had assumed that presentations would be built in PowerPoint or Google slides, and with one exception they were.

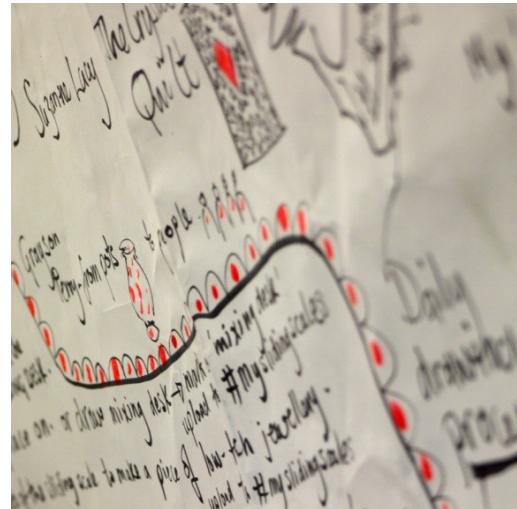
A trip is an interesting idea, we could have potentially gone to the Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery in Exeter, or perhaps this could have been organised for the Friday morning before the programme started. There is always more that can happen.

The comment about addressing the needs of the average ACJ member, the studio jeweller, may be a request for technical demonstrations and/or business information. I am not completely sure, however the ACJ could survey its membership to review the appetite for such activities and could perhaps schedule smaller master classes via its regional groups.

Please see below for a selection of images taken at the conference by Anastasia Young.



Katie Owen participating in Sliding Scales Workshop run by Sophie Lowe



Sliding Scales Workshop



Sliding Scales Workshop



Sliding Scales Workshop



Sliding Scales Workshop, Hannah Almond Sophie Lowe and Melanie Eddie



Sliding Scales Workshop, Dauvit Alexander



Bridie Lander and Rachel Darbourne,
Photography & social media project



Conference delegates



Professors Jivan Astfalck and Theo
Smeets during the plenary



M Kala presenting



Associate Professor Dr Supavee
Sirinkraporn and Dr Khajornsak Nakpan presenting



Charlotte Dew presenting