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**Third Year, BA Hons Jewellery Design and Silversmithing
International Exchange, Kookmin University, Seoul (South Korea)
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With a great opportunity came an everlasting and unforgettable experience. The chance to embark on an exchange programme to South Korea had been a reoccurring thought and a desire of mine since I became aware of it in my first year of studies at Edinburgh College of Art. Hammermen of Edinburgh provided me with the most generous support I could have hoped for, and I thank them with much gratitude for helping me discover a wonderful country, develop as an artist and make memories of a lifetime. Upon returning to the UK from this remarkable experience, I have learnt copious amounts of life lessons about both myself and also a great deal about the trust and respect internationally exchanging universities have with one another.

Kookmin University's College of Design is a very well respected School, with graduates who have exceptional flair and talent in both jewellery and silversmithing fields. Their hard working ethic is what led me to believe that I needed to experience what it was like to work and adapt under different surroundings to what I was accustomed to. In Edinburgh, due to health and safety policies, the university studios must shut at 11pm at the very latest. On the other hand however, Kookmin's Metalcraft students are permitted to work twenty- four hours on a 7 day weekly basis, with all access to the studios at weekends and even holiday periods. With such a golden opportunity, I felt the need to really truly be an artist and designer that embraces her work as her life. I had been to Seoul in 2003 as a tourist visit with my family, but the chance to return as a full time student and to be able to push my own boundaries and travel alone was something I had been long awaiting.



(The main entrance to the College of Design)

Many thanks to Mari Ebbitt as well, the previous exchange student to travel to Kookmin University from our department, she managed to contact her classmates that she became very close with during her exchange to arrange to collect me from the Incheon Airport and take me back to the dormitory on campus. The Korean student's generosity and hospitality have left an imprint on me, as I will never take for granted the great lengths they went to in assisting my work, the language barrier and welcoming me into their close-knit metalcraft family. Their willingness to share; whether it was the food, skills, knowledge and even a helping hand is something that conclusively reflects the country's approach. They treat the unfamiliar with embrace and compassion. From the very day I appeared in studio for my first class in Metalcraft, strong friendships were established throughout my stay and even now I still keep in contact with many of them.

Classes and modules were very different to what I had become used to in Edinburgh. Process and methods of working also differ and although I was really hoping for the refreshing new approach, I must admit, I found it incredibly difficult at the start to adjust to the organised and constructive way of working set by the professors. Unlike the heavy workload of my classmates, I was only assigned to 3 modules out of the 8. All three were major subjects, including Art Jewellery, Lapidary and Gemstone-cutting and Metalcraft Design; each major a necessity in teaching me very valuable skills that I may not have had the opportunity to learn at ECA.

The greatest obstacle I encountered within these months was the very one directional method and approach to each project, and although I found it very stressful at the time, I also understood the benefits to this taught approach towards the end and outcome of the term.

At any one time, all three majors would have ongoing projects therefore within the first month and a half we were assigned certain tasks each week resulting in a finished piece towards the end of 6 weeks.

Lapidary and Gemstone class provided me with the most enjoyment and freedom to create jewellery based upon my own interests; however Art jewellery and Metalcraft highlighted the ways in which our degree could be used to achieve greater and more practical or conceptual objects. In this



exchange, I had also repetitively said to myself that I wanted to create work that I wouldn't have normally done so back home, or even more so approach the topics with a greater understanding of appropriate materials. Therefore I set out to do just that. Our first project in Art Jewellery proved challenging due to the requirements of modelling, and not so much time given to test pieces and trial and error. A perfect model or sample prototype was to be achieved, and then without much procrastination work on the final piece would commence, giving little to no space for unexpected errors. I dealt with this a little negatively at the time, however had this pressure not been applied; I wouldn't have learnt to deal with such time constraints and the need for concise planning in the future.

Layered 2D (left) and 3D drawings (below) for Art jewellery)

My work carried many reoccurring themes, and although I always see ways to improve my pieces and each piece appears to be slightly unfinished to me; I remembered the importance of this learning curve. Each project had its flawed areas, but yet it also educated me in self realisation and areas in which I evidently strived in. The first piece required was a bracelet for art jewellery, on a topic of our choice. Relatively inspired by the contrast created between plant formation and weeds within abandoned buildings and industrial sites; this interest flourished as I got to know the ins and outs of Seoul. South Korea is a very creatively inspired country, paying admiration and respect to its traditions and natural forms. Everywhere I looked, the city had a great sense of symbiotic balance between human, structure, nature and its predecessors. In front of every department store and business building, by law, a sculpture by an upcoming artist must be in place. This great harmony amongst all things living and inanimate triggered the concept for my piece, whereby it is within us and the small spaces that we find beauty in all its forms. Moss, succulents and weeds were great resources in my research and with the help of weekly tutorials with my professor, Kang Yoon Mi and my classmates I was allocated plant markets and areas to seek out.

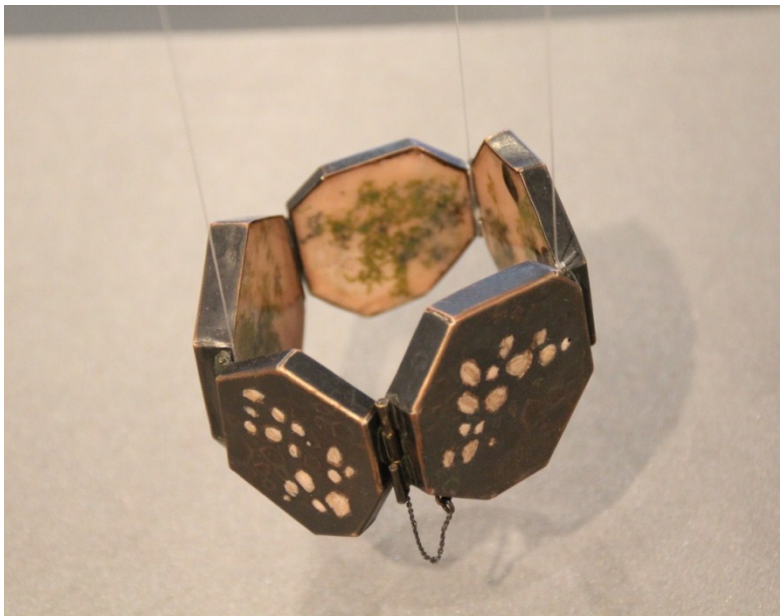


Seoul never failed to surprise and inspire me, and very soon I found my bearings. Being one of the most travel friendly cities of Asia, I felt right at home regardless of the language barrier. I had previously learnt a couple of essential phrases, and with the aid of my classmates I soon became familiar with a lot of terms necessary to get by. Plus admittedly I had downloaded several applications on my phone as well as firmly holding onto my Lonely Planet phrasebook. But besides all these methods of communication, there were occasionally points in which I got lost or couldn't quite ask what I was looking for and it was in these moments of loss that I experienced the true hospitality of Seoul. Middle aged women, University students and Taxi drivers alike, would all willingly either guide me in the right direction or go to the extent of taking me where I needed to be. In many cases, their patience with my terrible knowledge of the language was what I found most heart-warming, their level of English in the country was impeccable and yet even if I managed to say two words, their faces would light up as if I had just made their day. Buying goods off locals wasn't difficult either, and so I set off to Dongdaemun; one of Seoul's Crafts, Fabric, Materials and Shopping districts in hope to come across something I could use in this project. In places like this, it wasn't long before I aimlessly came across a plant market that stretched right down one of their streets. The exotic foliage and buzzing of locals was all too fascinating and overwhelming to take in all at once, but it was this exact feeling that I thrived in.



The bracelets design reflected largely from the concept that the attractive qualities were hidden from public view. Only the wearer of the piece knew of the plant forms inside of the bracelet. Made with resin and copper, with real plants extracted from my purchases at Dongdaemun, these materials were not something I was familiar in working with. In particular resin was a material I had in many ways consciously avoided before as I grew uncomfortable with it. However, although the piece itself isn't something I was entirely happy with, I enjoyed the many challenges I had with producing the piece. Many techniques such as hinges and resin-work were relatively new to me, therefore I feel as though I had accomplished something at least after this bracelet came to completion.

(left:-dongdaemun plant market)
(below:- final piece for art jewellery)



Many stories could be told of my time in Korea, but there are actually so many notably great moments and I don't even know where to start. Many highlights however included the accompaniment of my friends and exhibitions; including the ones I saw of other artists and also the ones I had the honour to participate in and help curate. Some gallery spaces were harder to locate than others, but most were collectively found in a beautifully traditional, yet modern district of Insa-dong. Even professors of Kookmin

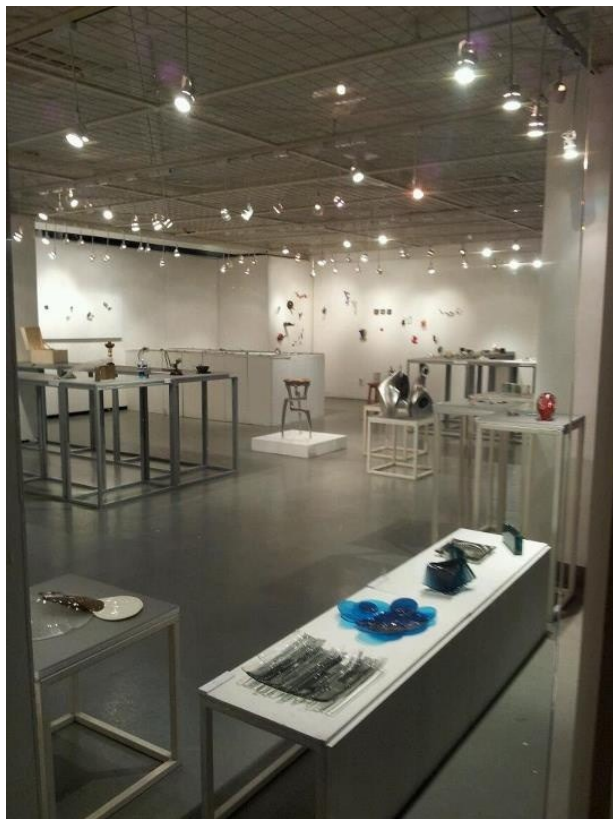
University and graduate students would often have exhibitions, if not a small pop up shop in this area, therefore throughout the 4 months I wasn't missing out on the chance to see these. Unfortunately many of these were private and small functions in tiny rooms, and although this

created the secretive appeal to the artist's work, it also meant a lot of them forbid the use of cameras.

Timing couldn't have been more perfect though, as I joined my friends to visit the Seoul Design and Art Fair where a couple of our seniors also were showcasing their work. This was very enriching, as not only did I see some great silversmithing and jewellery work, but also a greatly diverse range of clever and well thought out design produced by Seoul's finest upcoming artists. It was at that moment really, that I truly understood that this exchange was one of the most worthwhile decisions I had made in my life. I can't possibly imagine where else I would have rather been. The artists showcasing their work were young and fresh, as well as mature and experienced. Therefore display, material choice and purpose all varied greatly within the massive convention hall providing everyone with a breathtaking vision.



Absorbing all that I had seen in Seoul's exhibitions, we all made use of this in our own end of year show within the Design Building. It took a week of sleepless nights, taking turns to sleep on the single fold out bed and what seemed like a decade of organizing, but our pride and joy came together at the end attracting many other degree students to department's hard work and efforts. I had anticipated this exhibition from the beginning of term, as the opening night landed coincidentally on the same day as my birthday. I saw it almost as a birthday present given to myself, for what had been achieved by both myself and my fellow peers. One thing that is evident and true in Kookmin, is that the students work with great passion and ethic but also they create a great support structure for one other. On many occasions, my classmates would offer me help in the practical aspects of studio practice and additionally the theory and design of the pieces. Even at 4am when we all decided to do an overnight stay in studio, we tested each other on our Korean and English respectively. I learnt the value of giving and sharing to collaboratively create better and greater things together.



The photographs above were taken the night before the show on the 14th of June; the one on the left of the full show and the right is a picture of the light I made for Metalcraft class. I will remember this intensely long 48 hour day that we all contributed towards in order to put on such a professional show. As difficult and challenging as it seemed at the time, the satisfaction gained at the end of my trip wasn't something I could have gained elsewhere. However I am incredibly glad to be home, in Edinburgh College of Art there were many things I took advantage of. Sheet metal and silver resources were never far, whilst In Seoul I had taken many buses, confused many taxi drivers and dragged many of my classmates to places just in search for a particular material. Gathering everything that I have gained from this, bringing it into my work in the following year; I can only hope to achieve a better understanding of my personal work. The incredibly extensive history, traditions still remaining and a creatively blooming city, South Korea is always worth the visit. And Kookmin is most definitely worth the experience.

