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Academy of Fine Arts
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REPORT MENDED?

DESIGN OF
CONTEMPORARY
JEWELLERY IN CERAMIC
INSPIRED BY KINTSUGI

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Topic

This project aims to design a series of contemporary jewellery in ceramics inspired by Kintsugi, a traditional Asian ceramics-mending technique. In my project I use the technique decoratively and as means of constructing with elements. The fragile character of the objects themselves becomes part of their expression and thus the risk of breakage is always present and determines our relationship with them.

Concept

The overall concept of my project is highlighting or emphasizing imperfections, visualizing mends and seams as additive or an area to celebrate. I think anything suffering damage has potential to become more beautiful through mending and recreation – giving it new life. I wish the project to point to personal emotional perspectives of daily life, and thus engage with an audience through the act of mending – recreating one's joy and pleasure at regaining a cherished object.

The relative lack of definition of contemporary jewellery is helpful for creative thinking – here in my project, artistic jewellery means non-pragmatic jewellery. The pieces are individual one-offs, not to be manufactured in series. With regards to a target group, I consider both jewellery collectors and other artists and persons who want to show their aesthetic taste through their use of jewellery.

Background

Ceramic aspect

From the 1990s onwards, materials have been widely used in the jewellery field, including both straightforward functional products and jewellery with a more experimental approach, also questioning the role of jewellery nowadays. Ceramics in its fired state, unlike gold or silver, has no plasticity and is more fragile. This quality in itself poses many limitations in relation to jewellery design, so looking at the mending techniques could become a potential for making new forms of jewellery using ceramics. The tradition of regarding the mending as decorative detail, that in some cases even adds to the value of the object, to me offers new possibilities in relation to the way we use and regard jewellery in our contemporary lives.

Jewellery aspect

As I see it, two kinds of jewellery in particular are outstanding in my research. I have labelled them “conceptual jewellery”(image 1-1) and “formalist jewellery”(image 1-2) Manon van Kouswijk and Peter Hoozeboom are two leading artists (I will explained and given examples in the next chapter). From my perspective, I see a great deal of technical knowledge, tradition, imagination, freedom and discipline, and above all dedication and passion as absolute necessities to achieve an end result that is based on values about aesthetical and functional requirements.

Traditional mending technique - Kintsugi aspect

Kintsugi, as a kind of repair skill, to large extent, is a kind of choice of necessity (image 1-3). Although every repair program has approximately the similar process, for each project, every mending work is unique. This makes it an artistic playground for the individual maker. There are a few major styles or types of kintsugi: **Cracking** (the use of gold dust and resin or lacquer to attach broken pieces with minimal overlap or fill-in from missing pieces). **Piece Method** (where replacing a lost ceramic fragment is undertaken and the entirety of the addition is a gold or gold/lacquer compound). **Joint Call** (where a similarly shaped but non-matching fragment is used to replace a missing piece from the original vessel, thus creating a patchwork effect).

(More case images of background can be found in the Appendix I, Figure 1 - figure 6)



Image 1-1 By Manon van Kouswijk, inspired by holes on the earth

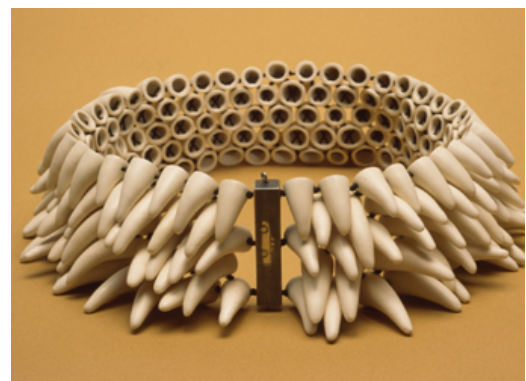


Image 1-2 By Peter Hoozeboom, 'Show your Teeth', Ceramic, silver and silk. This is a flamboyant necklace made by irregular-shaped vessels.



Image 1-3 A example of Japanese Kintsugi

problem formulation

- How can I create contemporary jewellery concepts, which express values about preciousness, using humble and cheap materials?

Reviewing the standards and conventions about jewellery aesthetics:

- How can I show the uniqueness and beauty of the ceramic material – or the broken and mended ceramics - in new jewellery objects through the use of this material as bearer of different cultural values?

- How can I transform ceramics to a comfortable wearable piece of jewellery?

Comments and changes to program

In the program, I said I would like to present a contemporary application of the traditional Asian ceramics-mending technique, Kintsugi. But during the tests process, more possibilities which related to the mending are discovered, for example, red clay is a possible "glue" for mending bone china. So, Kintsugi becomes an inspiration in a broader sense and I use the technique decoratively and as means of constructing with elements. Additionally, I got more interested in the fragile qualities of the ceramics because this property is closely related to my concept.

Research and inspiration

Preliminary studies

In my program, I have chosen two jewellery artists whose work bear typical features of both categories - conceptual jewellery and formalist jewellery and another jeweller whose work refer to the mending area. They represent particular art forms, great cultural diversity and large variety in concepts and materials. I will introduce them shortly and briefly here.

Manon van Kouswijk

Manon van Kouswijk is a leading figure of conceptual jewellery. She is interested in the universal qualities of jewelry and other personal objects, the value and meaning they represent and the different roles they have. She is inspired by all sorts of images of circles that has appeared in current affairs from newspapers or magazines, like parties, dance shows, images of DNA, explosions, war, etc.. Her working methods are quite elaborate and obsessive, take "Perles d'Artiste pearl no.5 (image 1-4)" as an example. It was quite difficult to be understood by me at first sight because the necklace consisted of the simplest porcelain pearls. Actually, the form of each bean of the Perles d'Artiste, pearl no.5 represent a post-hole. Manon got the idea from a historical picture, where archeologists uncover these huge circles of post-holes from habitations - all that remains of a Caddo house after 800 years. By excavating sites where prehistoric peoples lived, archeologists learn about houses and villages of the past. By the necklace, she wants to show the concept of "wearing the world". Her necklace becomes understandable together with the historic picture.

Peter Hoogeboom

Dutch jeweller, Peter Hoogeboom, is a typical maker of “formalist jewellery”. Hoogeboom describe his idea like that “the great thing about being a jewellery is that size matters. Since jewelry is small it doesn’t take a great investment to use materials like it would if the work were monumental in scale. A great deal of control can be exercised by a jewellery, at a smaller scale, with materials in smaller quantities, giving the freedom of exploration to the jewelry.” Clearly, Hoogeboom considers himself a “material fetishist”. How to utilize the special material character is Hoogeboom’s focus point.

He chose to use ceramic quite late in his career after having used traditional materials. Every piece of ceramic jewellery for Hoogeboom is a new one, should have a unique form, but they share a common feature - that they all consist of ceramic vessels or special vessels. Peter Hoogeboom’s most recent show “Sieraarden (image 1-5)” is a poetic and functional achievement, beautifully presented by Galerie RA, a cornerstone of contemporary jewelry in Amsterdam since the 1980s.

Isabella Liu

This designer comes from China and lives in London now. She is also interested in the Japanese mending technique of Kintsugi. In the ‘Mending II’ collection, she has chosen to focus on broken and fragile objects, utilizing the narrative of breakage as an approach and designs a set of ‘broken’ ceramic tableware. She highlights the fragility itself, the breakage as form, by turning the ‘cracks’ into a independent wearable jewellery of a sculptural form and thus giving them a whole new life. The golden crack is intended to be appreciated both on the body as a piece of jewelry and as a sculptural art-piece in its own right, which has the potential to engage an audience by the transformation of the piece (image 1-6).

I think that Isabella’s design and creation can be regarded as a form of meditation and process of cultivation. She explores the spiritual belief by celebrating the fractures of broken objects and the fragility of life.

(More case images of preliminary studies can be found in the Appendix I, figure 7- figure 9)

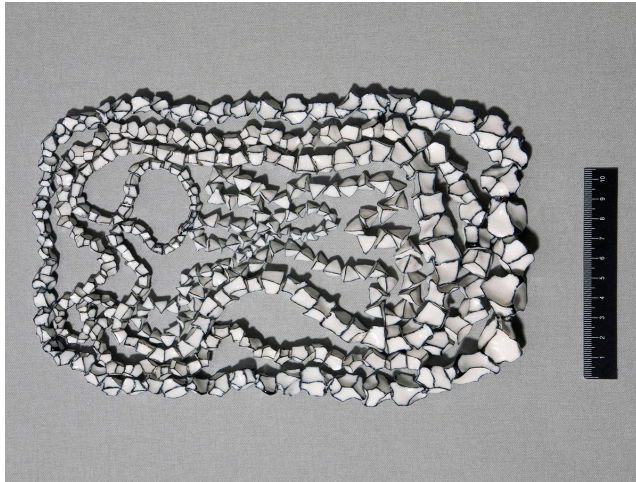


Image 1-4 By Manon van Kouswijk, one of "Perles d'Artiste", 2011, porcelain, glaze.



Image 1-5 By Peter Hooijboom, One of "Sieraarden". Tiny sealed vessels were closely connected to each other.



Image 1-6 By Isebella Liu, one of "mending II"

Further research

Start point

The concept has an extremely close relationship with people and their emotion, so it is important to see the attitudes of various people towards mending. I made a questionnaire which includes five questions (Appendix I, part 2) and I have posted it on the social media. From all the feedbacks, I heard a lot of moving, meaningful, regretful stories about "broken" and "life occurrence".

The result of the questionnaire helped me to find the interesting inspirations for my project and the start point. There is a divorced woman who has a broken white coral necklace - a gift from her dead husband, she usually feels exhaust because of not only the pressure from daily life, but the loss of love and the love token - coral necklace.

Inspirations: The broken jewellery which is made by white coral from Brazil has a very attractive feature as it is an ocean creature with the organic shape. Making a coralline ceramic would be interesting and challenging. The broken place is very hairlike. The color is a pretty special white because the coral was found from the sea, it has light blue and black dots inside by the influence of marine algae and mineral.



Image 2-1 The coral

Materials and mending

Also, British artist Bridget Harvey's "mended bowl 3" gave me a good example of mixing and matching two materials. Fabric and ceramic (warm and cold, hard and soft), have been matched very well in this work. I wish my final jewellery would retain the specific characteristics of different materials, as well as find a good way to create a relation between each other.



Image 2-2 Bridget Harvey, "Mended bowl 3"

Attaching elements

Connecting or attaching becomes an essential issue after making the elements. I have searched a variety of connecting ways. As the image 2-3 on the right, the first one, the necklace consisted by a lot of spoonlike elements which were connected by two strings. The two strings became an inevitable element of the necklace. The second was connected by glue and small metal rings. This is a normal connecting way but looked very exquisite and delicate.

I wish the The concept is that the connecting of elements should not just connect, but become integrated visual elements of the jewellery.

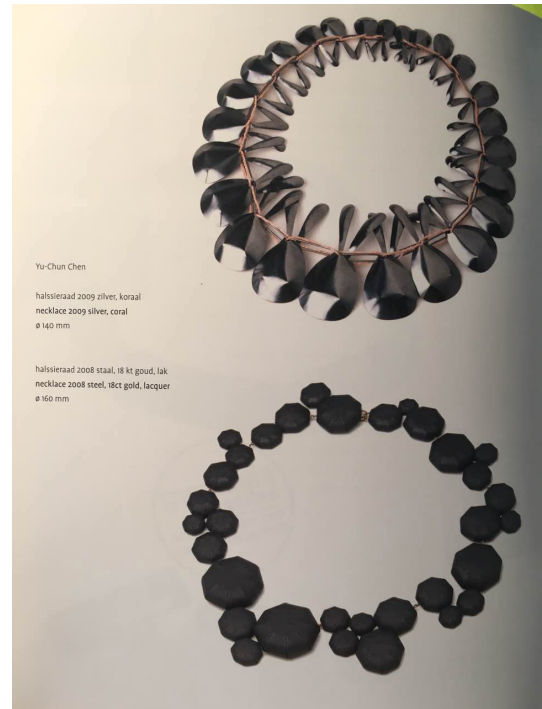


Image 2-3 Yu-Chun Chen, necklace 2008 steel, 18ct gold, lacquer

Wearable

The picture tells about how important the approach of wearing the jewellery is. I wish my my final jewellery to be designed for other artists or jewellery collectors when they attend special events or occasions. They should appear together with the clothes and other accessories. The image is showing clearly that how to present best to the full effect is another vital element.



Image 2-4 John Moore, paper Contemporary Jewellery

Partial conclusion

Now, I have a start point and found some possible materials with formal inspiration from Queen Elizabeth 1 to the modern era ... I see here that experimenting with the placing of the jewellery on the body is a central aspect of the example. New methods for attaching elements are essential in my project.

(More images of further researches can be found in the Appendix I, figure 10 - figure 14)

Experiments and reflections

This I will introduce my experiments based on my problem formulation and preliminary studies. Experiments are based on, firstly basic tests of material and repair methods; secondly, the concept of jewellery, thirdly about the construction and relationship with jewellery and body.

Material tests

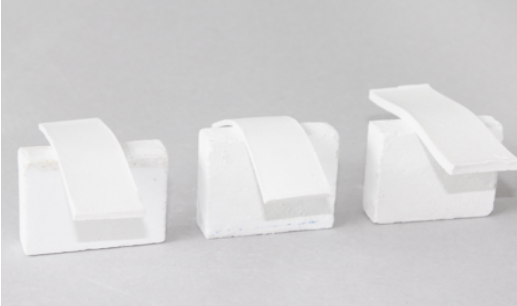


Image 3-1 From the left to right are no.1, no.3 and no.4

Bone china

Firstly, I tested the materials, I interested in bone china because it is known for its high levels of whiteness and translucency, and very high mechanical strength and chip resistance. Its high strength allows it to be produced in thinner cross-sections (this property is helpful for lacquer mending) than other types of porcelain.

The material test is the fundamental test of the next detailed tests. I have chosen three kinds of bone china which are more exquisite and the cross-section are fine and smooth. For testing the mechanical strength of bone china, three kinds of clay have been putting on the “shelf” when fired. From the picture, the shape of bone china no.1 and no.4 changed a little and no.3 changed a lot. The levels of whiteness and translucency has few differences.



Image 3-2 From the left to right, the frit mok2 are 25%, 35%, 45% and 55% added

Bone china with frit mok2 added

Inspired by the organic appearance of the broken piece of jewellery, I added frit mok 2 to the four bone china recipes to see if there are any effects on the texture. The results are unimaginable - the bone china expanded a lot making it look like a sponge. The bone china no.3 and no.4 show no difference in appearance when they are fired with mok2 inside and but rate of expansion depends much on the amount of frit mok2 added.

Comparing the cross-sections of bone china, it is easily to find that more frit mok2 I added, the less density it has (the air bubbles are bigger) and more fragile it is.



Image 3-3 The cross-section

Bone china with perlite added

Meanwhile, I attempted the other element “perlite” because element perlite is comparably bigger balls instead of powder and won’t melt when fired to 1280 degree. So, I guess the the bone china would look like a hedgehog.

Firstly, I added the perlite into the bone china clay no.1, no.3 no.4. there are no clear different between them and perlite created some holes on the surface rather than thorns. Secondly, the perlite has been put into the slip of bone china no.1, no.3 and no.4. The more perlite I added, the shape is more organic. Then, I tried to added frit mok2 into the bone china with 80% perlite. The result was in my prediction -- they extended and flowed (image 3-4).

Adding 80% perlite into the bone china no.4 has the best effect, I think. The material looked more stereoscopic on the skin than bone china with mok2. The test piece will much more like organic coral when I was adding 110% perlite but it will become too fragile to touch and has less shine (the character could be seen more clear when you look at the real object).



Image 3-4 From top to bottom, the amount of perlite is 80% and frit mok2 are from 0% to 30%

Comparing methods of "repair"

Connected by red clay

Lacquer is a traditional medium to repair the broken ceramic, but I would like to test if clay could be used to repair clay. I chose red clay because it will flow (the property is like glue to some extent) when I fired over 1100 degree. Choosing bone china with mok2 is because it will not only flow but also expand and I found the surface is interesting from the former material tests.

Red clay, bone china with frit mok2 and bone china with perlite were connected together and compared (image 3-5). In the test, red clay just flowed a little bit but the the color became darker; bone china with mok2 extended and flowed as expected; the bone china with perlite shrank a lot that lead to the separation with red clay. However, it is better that firing bone china with perlite added and bone china added with mok2 first, then repairing the gap by red clay and fired again. After having tried to use "filling the gap" to match these materials, next, I would like to try "enwrapping" and "stacking", "separating" (images 3-6 to image 3-11 are on the next page).

The image3-8 with red spot below is my favorite one as the red and white can be matched very well and there is a little bit red color infiltrates small crack. Besides, it is also good to see the effect of the bone china with perlite wrapped the red clay (image 3-9, green spot) because it has strong contrast and look like a flower. Bone china with perlite wrap bone china woth mok2 would be better (image 3-9, yellow spot) if changing the color of bone china with mok2 added.



Image 3-5



Image 3-6 Comparing the red clay and bone china with mok 2 and bone china with perlite when setting them closely



Image 3-7 Comparing the red clay and bone china with mok 2 and bone china with perlite when setting them closely



Image 3-8 Filling, Firing bone china with perlite first and filling the gap by red clay and then fired again



Image 3-9 Enwrapping



Image 3-10 stacking



Image 3-11 separating

A new discovery of Kintsugi

As a traditional mending approach, Kintsugi has more potential waiting for exploitation. The first two images are the traditional mending way by lacquer and gold (image 3-12, 3-13). The repaired pieces can be use again but are not as strong as before.

Next step was creating mending tracks on the bone china, not really break them. I have attempted to creating different mending lines – some are extremely simple, some are complicate and looked like waves (image 3-14).

I prefer the simplest lines – less is more. Meanwhile, I found that if the lines are slimmer, the lines would like real broken tracks much more, on the contrary, if the gold lines are bigger or wider, they would have had more decoration feeling.



Image 3-12 Traditonal mending technique



Image 3-13 Traditonal mending technique



Image 3-14 Creating mending tracks on the bone china with frit mok2 added

The contrast of white and gold is very attractive but it is still the traditional mending technique I used. I think the most interesting effect is the contrast of the two materials and colors, so I plan to make bolder experiments. I dipped the bone china with perlite into the lacquer and then brush a layer of golden for creating a stronger contrast. I made 4 different test pieces in order to comparing the appearance of bone china and lacquer. Then, I dipped bone china with perlite into the lacquer and brush a layer of gold (image 3-15, 3-16).



Image 3-15 Dipping bone china with perlite into the lacquer

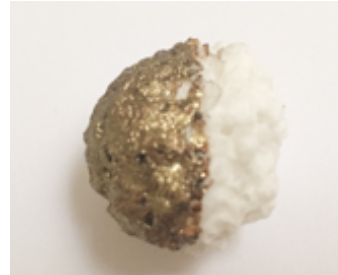


Image 3-16 Dipping bone china with perlite into the lacquer and brush a layer of gold

Elements' tests

Elements on the skin

Jewellery, as a body decoration, must to match the skin very well. The list of test aimed to find out which elements looked nice on people's skin.

I have chosen three elements (flat, round and strip) which were interested me a lot, firstly.

Here, I must to talk that from the former tests, I most interested in both the element of bone china with perlite added and the glue effect created by red clay. But the former pieces were so small that not attractive, thus, I made bigger elements (Image 3-17). It looked more wild and artistic same as my imagine.

Then, I tried to made every elements regularly like circle, ball, triangle... I found bone china with perlite and gold looked nice on the skin, they looked like Kandisiky's abstract paintings and have strong contrast (image 3-18 to image 3-20). The elements of ball and triangle are more dimentional but they lost the feeling of mending totally (image 3-21, 3-22). Meanwhile, if I made a lot of holes in the flat elements (image 3-23), the elements became a little bit fragile but very nice on the skin, so I need to think more about how to achieve a balance between nice appearance and fragile.



Image 3-17 Bone china with perlite added repaired by red clay



Image 3-18 Round bone china with perlite added repaired by red clay



Image 3-19 Round bone china with perlite added decorated by lacquer and gold



Image 3-20 Ball bone china with perlite added decorated by lacquer and gold



Image 3-21 Ball bone china with perlite added decorated by lacquer and gold, different consisting forms



Image 3-22 Triangle bone china with perlite added decorated by lacquer and gold, different consisting forms



Image 3-23 Bone china with big and a lot of holes and decorated by gold.

Elements and other materials

I selected wood, marble, glass, metal for matching with the element of bone china with perlite added (image 3-24).

Glass 1. Stacking glass and perlite elements layer by layer, 2. putting thin glass in the middle of two perlite elements, 3. setting thin glass in the middle of round perlite elements, 4. arranging triangle glass and round element one by one.

Wood I have put a square wood in the middle of elements.

Marble I stacked marble and elements and set them one by one to test if the marble is a suitable object for elements or not.

Metal I selected metal cubes of different size to match flat perlite elements and ball perlite elements.

Silver. I chose one 50mm diameter silver line and 10mm diameter silver line to connect elements.

Stacking a lot perlite elements together is another test. (Here, I just pick out some good images)

I think round perlite elements and triangle glass is a good match, and the color of marble is very peaceful and comfortable, but the glass is dangerous and marble is so heavy. They are not the good choice for jewellery. Regarding to the metal, it is not match well because metal looked industrialization but bone china is elegant and pure. However, silver is better, as it's light color and wonderful texture. Putting a lot of elements together is also very nice, the language of perlite elements is strong.

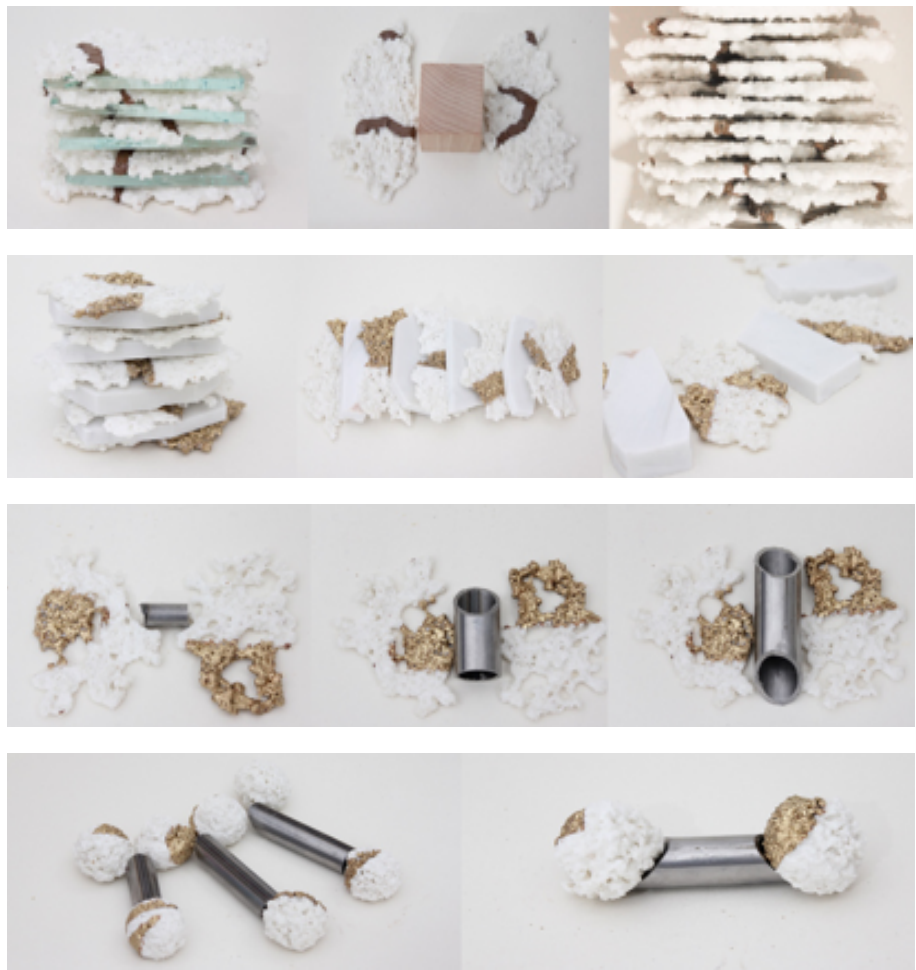


Image 3-24 Elements connect with mental, glass, wood and marble

Tests of construction methods

As I have said in the chapter of further research, Connecting would become a big issue after testing the perlite elements. I have searched a variety of connecting methods, for example, glue, welding, fabric string, metal strings, magnet.... I concluded them into two aspects - chemical connecting and physical connecting.

Chemical connecting means using glue (chemical substance) to stick elements as the first picture below (image 3-25). Physical connecting is creating a structure strongly (Image 3-26). It is definitely a complicated field where I was quite unfamiliar, but certainly, challenge comes with excitement. I am interested in physical connecting because it has larger space to play with than the chemical method (glue).



Image 3-25 Chemical attaching methods



Image 3-26 Physical attaching method

Structures

After researching a series of references. For example, the Elizabethan fashion (Appendix I, figure 11), the collar is really crazy and has strong language. I want my jewellery to be more wild and surprising. So I tried some structures and found that regular shapes like hexagons are easier to construct, then I chose hexagons because they looked like flowers and were very stable when I connected five hexagons and one pentagon together. Next, attempting to connect the elements freely, I have chosen three figures (image 3-27, 3-28, 3-29) which are my favorites on the right, they are strong and clear because I think the jewellery extending out of the body is quite interesting.

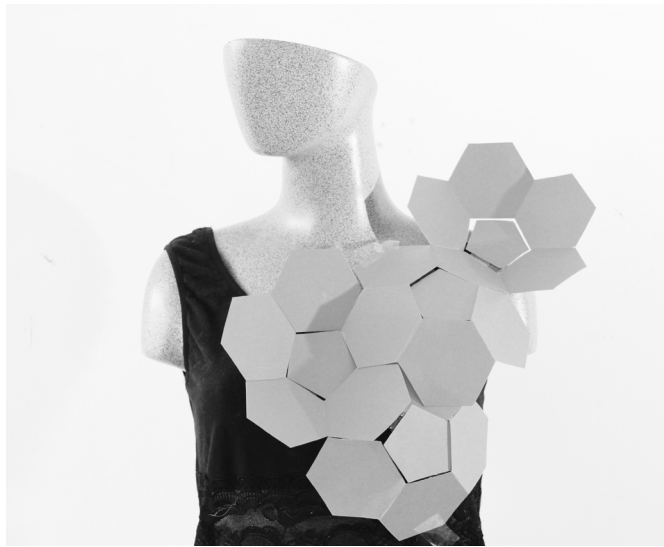


Image 3-27 An elements consist of five hexagon and one Pentagon and then five elements build up a "brooch".

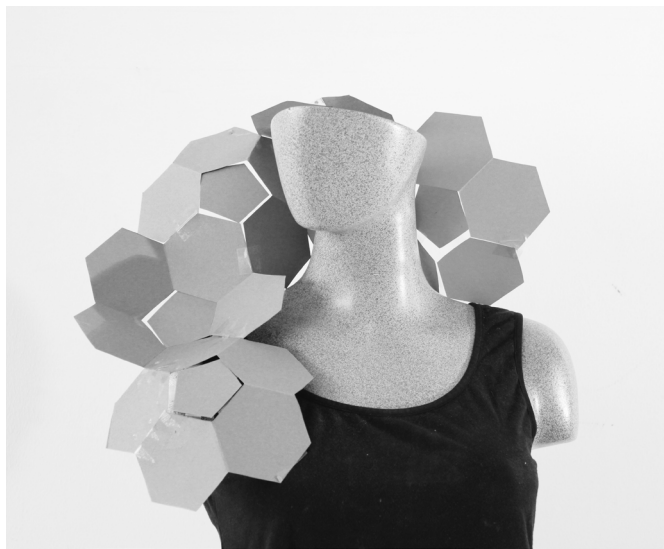


Image 3-28 An element consists of five hexagon and one Pentagon and then five elements build up a "necklace".



Image 3-29 An element consists of five hexagon and one Pentagon and then a lot of elements build up a "shawl".

After testing in paper, I tried to clay to test. I still use the element of bone china with perlite added but I shaped them into hexagon. I used the red wire twinning ten pivots to keep stable, then the constructing points can be decorations. Thus, I made some attempts in the photoshop like the pictures below. I chose red because the strong contrast is my favorite effect. The wire twinning to triangle or square or Pentagon, so the work would look like an abstract painting (image 3-30).

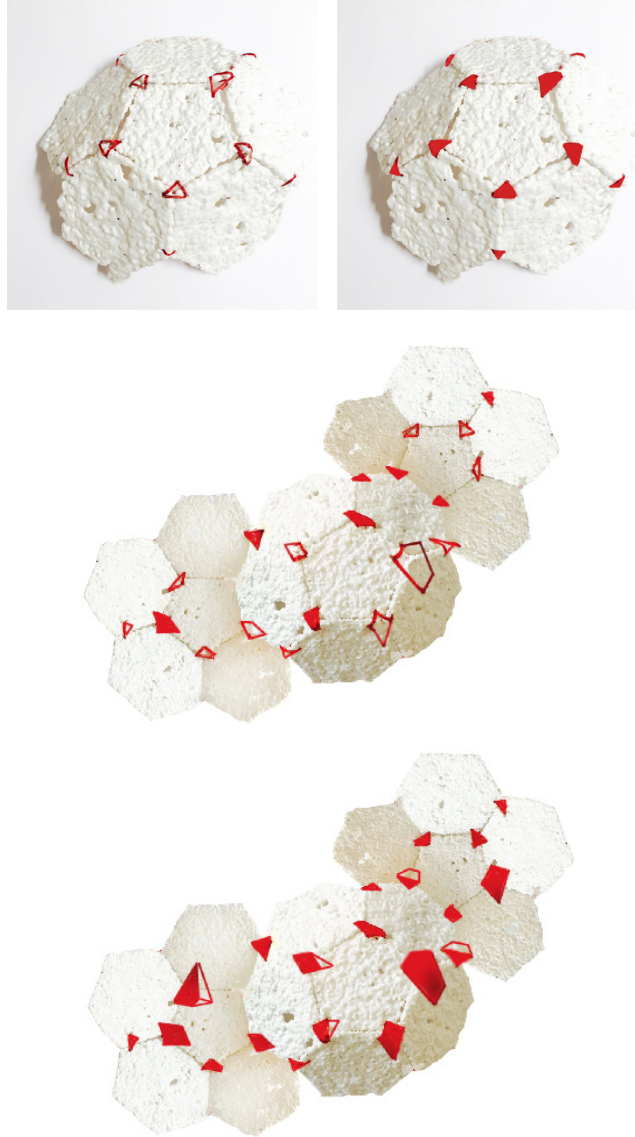


Image 3-30

More possibilities

From all the elements I have made, it is quite easy to find a lot of interesting contrast. At the same time, I got some inspirations from the fashion design and the show of jewellery (Appendix I, figure 11 - figure 14). So, I made a list of form tests, I put a metal circle though thousands of elements and made them together closely. Firstly, I used regular and small elements, then I tried irregular larger piece (image 3-31,3-32). The irregular surface is pretty interesting but they are too heavy to wear. I also tried to put two two together and gather all of them (image 3-33). Next idea is that I twinned one side of two or three elements together and hung them on the circle or square (image 3-34, 3-35, 3-36). I think setting three layers is much more beautiful.



Image 3-31 Regular few elements hanging on a circle



Image 3-34 Two layers of elements hanging on a circle



Image 3-32 Setting irregular elements all together closely



Image 3-35 Three layers of elements hanging on two circles



Image 3-33 Putting two two elements together and gather all of them



Image 3-36 A lot of layers of elements hanging on some squares

Partial conclusion

In my experimentation up till now, constructing with hexagons and hanging elements in layers are the most interesting direction for form. But the fixation and ways of hanging still need to be considered more.

Reflection and argumentation

Throughout the whole process I focused on the concept - finding ways of highlighting or emphasizing imperfections of the elements, visualizing mends and seams as additive or an area to celebrate, firstly. But then, I became more interested in the form and construction. This led to experimenting with the actual overall form of the jewellery and its construction.

In my project I use the mending technique decoratively and as means of constructing with elements - the inspiration coming from the traditional technique where the mending marks are being transferred into a decoration. In the experimentation process I focused sometimes on the material itself, getting removed from the aesthetics of the overall form, and at other times concentrated on the methods of connecting and attaching. Bringing these aspects together was essential and, looking back, this posed the biggest challenge - sticking to the main concept.

The first question of my problem formulation has been addressed by studying new attitudes towards. More and more jewellers choose less precious materials, such as paper, ceramic, fabric, etc. as their main material and some avant-garde artists even combine shoes, gloves and many other daily items into 'still lives' forming special kinds of jewellery. As to second question, I have made detailed tests of bone china and discovered new "repairing" approaches inspired by the traditional Asian mending technique. Thus, the final object would have a new ceramic look and be unique. Regarding the last question, the practical issue of wearing on the body is most significant. I have looked at more conventional ways and tried to challenge this.

Mending methods in combination with sculptural form provided new challenges and opportunities, and I plan to reinvest these mending techniques and constructure in my future work with both artworks and designs. I am very pleased with the process of my invented method of repairing ceramics, both in terms of physical function and visual effect.

Attaching methods was the most important and difficult part in my project. I am very interested in the physical constructing methods. I wanted the project to have the qualities of an art work rather than a hobby or craft, so I had to think a new or special attaching methods and making the attaching place became a detail in the project. However, I still could not think out some unique methods, and didn't make the details perfect. There are still has some knowledge need to be discovered.

Maintaining that vision throughout the course of the project was challenging; often I worried that practical concerns would overshadow aesthetics, or conversely that venturing too far into experimental forms might undermine the functionality of the jewellery. Ensuring that my own aesthetic views got a broader appeal has been the challenge and the goal, which I sincerely hope to have met.

Conclusion

I have become interested in the ceramics mending technique in relation to jewellery making because it has multiple functions. My aim was to work freely inspired by the fact that most people wish to hold on to cherished objects. Most people still hope to continue being able to use a broken but beautiful ceramic bowl or their personally valuable piece of jewellery.

In the whole project, I made an effort to follow a clear and directed development throughout this project: moving from research inspiration to developing the concept; from concept to experimentation, experimentation to prototyping. As a result, I feel that I successfully have produced jewellery that manifest the conceptual intentions of the project and thus providing new perspectives for the use in daily life or on special occasions.

Literature

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