



**Crafts Council / Education**

## **Craft Journey**

Jazmine Miles-Long / Taxidermist



Jazmine Miles-Long. Photo © Thomas Farnetti.

### **What I do**

I am a taxidermist, artist and educator. Taxidermists preserve animals' bodies for display or study. I work with museums creating new displays within historical collections and preserving rare species used for scientific research. I also renovate existing natural history collections within museums. I produce private commissions for homes and work with artists fabricating their own sculptures that incorporate my taxidermy. I also create my own artwork that I hope respects the animal and focuses on the beauty of living things, giving the viewer the chance to explore nature up close. Creating taxidermy for both the gallery and museum context has led my own work to sit between the realms of art and education. I explore the role of the 'museum' and the hidden intricacies of the craft of taxidermy itself.

I only create taxidermy using birds and mammals that have died from natural causes or as the result of a road collision. I run taxidermy workshops and lectures in museums, schools and galleries. I aim to give an insight into the processes of taxidermy and to inspire and promote a good ethical practice.

## Jobs in taxidermy

As a taxidermist you can find work in many different areas: in science and education creating pieces for study or inspiration within museums, schools and universities; in Tv, film, advertising, theatre and photography producing props; in fashion, designing wearable objects; in interior design working within spaces to create bespoke work; in fine art fabricating works with artists or simply creating artwork yourself, and for private collections creating taxidermy for homes and collectors.



Parakeet, Jazmine Miles-Long. Photo © Sheffield Museum.

## Why craft?

I have always enjoyed making things with my hands so growing up I planned to become an artist. Museum and gallery spaces felt like safe, exciting and inspiring places for me as a child and they still do. After graduation I planned to become a conservationist so I could work with collections whilst funding my life as an artist. It wasn't until volunteering at the Booth Museum of Natural History in Brighton after graduating from university that I fell in love with the craft of taxidermy.

The curator at the time showed me how to skin an egret and prepare a mole skull and I was hooked. My fascination with nature and my love of making found a perfect marriage in taxidermy and I have been doing it ever since.

## What I studied at school

AS Levels - Art, Photography and Drama, Art Foundation

When studying my GCSEs I was conflicted between art and science. Science for me was definitely more challenging where as art came naturally. In the end, I followed my heart and decided to focus on the arts.

## What I studied after school

I only completed my first year of A levels before jumping straight into an Art Foundation course at Greater Brighton Metropolitan College as I already knew I wanted to study Fine Art at university. This was the right decision for me and I had the support of my family, but it did come with its challenges as I was the youngest student on the course. Foundation is a place for discovery, trying out many different techniques in fashion, design, craft and fine art. In the end I chose Fine Art Sculpture as my specialism and went on to study a degree in Sculpture at Brighton University. At university I was on the path of a fine artist rather than a craft maker. Most of my education was focused on the conceptual side of creating work rather than an exploration of materials and processes. Although this felt right at the time, in hindsight I think a craft-based degree would have suited me better. When finishing my degree I then had the challenge of teaching myself all of the craft skills needed for taxidermy such as model making, carving, casting and sculpting. As well as the specific skills involved in preparing a skin for mounting into taxidermy such as skinning, tanning, cleaning bones, building 'bind-ups' and carved forms to go underneath the skin and mounting up and modeling the skin itself.



Fox, Jazmine Miles-Long. Photo © National Museum of Ireland.

## My career path

When I realised I wanted to become a taxidermist I said yes to every job and opportunity that was offered to me. Each new work I created informed my practise and taught me more about what I wanted to achieve within my work. Regardless of whether a project was successful or if the final outcome had not lived up to my expectations it taught me how I could do things differently when the next job came around. Working with clients from the art world and museum backgrounds brought a diversity of work and made me realise I enjoyed this variation in my practise.



Magpie Pica Pica, Jazmine Miles-Long.

## Important decisions

When I started making taxidermy I was adamant that I did not want to use any animal that had been killed. Taxidermy historically is part of a culture of hunting and collecting. I struggled with this association and it felt very far removed from my own motives. To combat this I called myself an 'ethical' taxidermist to encourage a conversation about the necessity of taxidermy and to differentiate myself from the controversial history of the craft. Branding myself in this way has led me to work closely with museums in education teaching about the importance of conservation and our effect upon our environment. Though there is a sadness associated with the 'trophy' taxidermy of the past, it has a great cultural and historical value which we should not forget and can hopefully help us to remember and engage better with the natural world today.

## Challenges

Financial instability was certainly the biggest burden when trying to start out as a freelance maker. In the early days of my career I worked an array of part-time jobs whilst developing my skills. It was also a challenge to find confidence in my ability as a maker and to believe in and appreciate my own work rather than just seeing what I could improve on. Public speaking was quite daunting at first though I have found giving talks to the public over the years has really helped me to appreciate my work and instill confidence in my abilities.

## My advice to you

Becoming a successful taxidermist takes a lot of practice and patience. Being self employed also comes with its own challenges. They did not teach me about running my own business and the instability of self-employed life at university. Take every opportunity you are given and try and realise the direction you want to take. Stay focussed and positive, there are highs and lows as a solo-maker but there is no other job that I would rather do. Being surrounded by like-minded makers is important to me, to discuss ideas and problems. Find others who share your interests.

To be a maker you must be willing to work hard, stay motivated and love making!

# Craft Careers

Craft generates £3.4 billion for the UK economy each year, with the contribution of the wider creative industries now growing at twice the rate of the UK economy. British craft has never been so sought-after and craft skills are revolutionising industries from aerospace to architecture.

To learn more about craft careers visit:  
[www.craftscouncil.org.uk/learning/craft-careers](http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/learning/craft-careers)



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