



Crafts Council / Education

Craft Journey

Theresa Nguyen / Silversmith



Theresa Nguyen at work in her studio. All images courtesy of the artist.

What I do

As an Artist Silversmith, I specialise in designing and hand-making the finest pieces, from objets d'art and tableware to luxury gifts and bespoke lighting that will both delight and enable the clients that I collaborate with to mark special moments in their lives, give precious gifts to their loved ones and enrich spaces that they live or work in.

My hope as I set out on a journey with a client is that I will be able design and make a piece that will go beyond what they had hoped for. I believe this can only be achieved by fully listening to my clients and putting my heart into every piece that I design and make.

Jobs in Jewellery

Alongside running my business, I set up a social enterprise in 2016 called Arts 4 All (England) CIC through which I deliver creative metalsmithing workshops to children and young people to help them discover and develop their creativity and give them access to arts and crafts. I'm also delivering workshops to teachers to enable them to develop their own creative metalsmithing projects.



Eastern Journeys, 2011.

Job opportunities in jewellery include:

Freelance designer maker, product designer, CAD designer, retail jeweller, marketing and selling jewellery online, gallery owner, exhibition curator, stone-setter, metal engraver, chaser, enameller, model maker and public art worker.

Within the silversmithing industry there are opportunities to teach, lecture and deliver talks within higher education institutes as well as decorative and fine arts societies.

Why craft?

At the age of seventeen, I took up an apprenticeship at Gallery 37 (a youth arts programme based in

Birmingham) and it was there that I was introduced to metal jewellery-making techniques. This five week summer placement allowed me to learn a breadth of different techniques that could be applied to metals to achieve form, different colours and surface patterns. From this experience, I knew that I was fascinated by metal and the possibilities it presented for developing my creative instincts.



Con brio, 2010.

What I studied at school

Ever since I was a young girl, I knew I wanted to pursue a career in the creative field and so choosing Art at school was an obvious choice. I was also excited by learning about the natural and human world and so Geography was a must. My choice of studying Chemistry and Physics was part of my plan B, since I was unsure at the time whether I would be able to have a successful career in the creative field.

At GCSE I studied: Art, Textiles, Science, Mathematics, French, Geography, R.E, English Language, English Literature, I.T.

At A Level I studied: Art and Design, Geography, Chemistry, Physics and General Studies



Everlasting peace, 2014.

What I studied after school

At the age of 18, I spent a year at Art College, studying on a Foundation art course. I went on to study a three-year BA (Hons) Jewellery and Silversmithing course at the Birmingham City University School of Jewellery. My training at university encouraged me to experiment with materials and fostered a sense of play and discovery in an open and creative environment, which is necessary for developing free thinking, fresh concepts and new techniques.

I was then accepted on a one-year postgraduate training programme at Bishopsland Education Trust. I gained so many invaluable skills through hands on practical experience and hard grafting at the work bench. Bishopsland created the ideal environment for learning and growth.

I had time to develop my own unique style and creative voice through my work. Knowledgeable tutors encouraged me to develop new ideas through to complete pieces of work, while also developing my craft skills. I also learnt about the market place, took part in prestigious exhibitions at the V&A and met with prospective clients.



The artist in her studio.

My career path

I gained my first commission during my first year at university, when I entered the Goldsmiths' Company's Young Designer Silversmith Award. The award enabled me to have the privilege of making a cocktail shaker set I had designed in Grant MacDonald's workshop and it was a truly significant step in launching me into a career as a Silversmith. Standing out from your peer group and getting noticed early on in your career by industry professionals can really help in your success.

I work from a shared workshop in the Birmingham Jewellery Quarter with a close knit community of craftspeople who specialise in different areas of the silver and jewellery industry. I love the process of learning both from the challenges of making a new design as well as learning from my colleagues Andy MacGowan and Jim Butler, who have decades of experience working with silver and who are so generous with sharing their knowledge with me. Without their supportive input, I would not be where I am today.



Lotus Candlesticks, 2015.

Important decisions

Early on in my career, my tutor Derek Birch came alongside me as a mentor. His passion for silversmithing was infectious and he really inspired me to believe in my potential. It was through his encouragement that I gained the last place on the Bishopsland postgraduate course. A few months after starting my business, I attended seminars organised by an organisation called Business Link and through that I was put in touch with a business advisor, who I continue to receive incredible support and advice from.

In 2015, I was selected for the Crafted Walpole programme. The programme provides mentoring and business advice from expert mentors from the craft and luxury sectors. The two amazing mentors that I was connected to really helped me to clarify which direction I want to go in with my business. I gained a much clearer sense of what I should be doing and just how important it is to be wise and maintain the highest levels of integrity in my work.

Challenges

Paving a way into a career as an artist silversmith has had its many challenges. It is incredibly time intensive designing and making bespoke objects by hand, and in the early days I found it challenging to make a living primarily because of not having the knowledge and confidence to price my work accurately.

It has only been through the experience of working on different projects that I have learnt to price my work more accurately. To make a success of working for yourself requires passion, tenacity, hard work and so many more skill sets. I had one incident when my work was accidentally whipped round a polishing motor by a professional polisher two weeks before it was due to be shown at a major exhibition and I had to spend over 100 hours hammering this piece back to life again. Today the piece is housed in a London collection. I learnt to be resilient and focussed and this continues to help me today.

My advice to you

Following your passion and dreams takes courage especially if you don't see the results as quickly as you would like, but it also takes commitment and having the right attitude.

Having the willingness to practice and work hard will help you to achieve extraordinary things.

Be proactive and enthusiastic. Knock on doors and make contact with people you would like to learn from. Seek as much work experience as you can in the area that you would like to explore.

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



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