



UOA D32

ART AND DESIGN:
HISTORY, THEORY AND PRACTICE



RESEARCHER

Susan Cross

OUTPUT TITLE

Tracing time – Tracing threads

OUTPUT TYPE

Artefact

DATE

March 2014 – November 2018

FIG. 1

Winter Furrow I & II, brooches.
Enamel, steel, oxidised silver 2017.
65mm x 90mm, 45mm x 50mm.
Photo Shannon Tofts.



01 / STATEMENT

Tracing time – Tracing threads is a collection of enamelled jewellery, comprised of three neckpieces and eight brooches. The output was inspired by Elizabethan blackwork, a 16th–17th century embroidery technique that used a black thread made from an iron-based dye.

This work was produced for an exhibition, *Heat Exchange II – Artists Exchanging Energy* (September 2015 – July 2016) which toured four international venues in the UK and Germany. The output was subsequently exhibited at *Schmuck – Munich Jewellery Week 2017*, the annual International Trade Fair for the Skilled Trades at the International Handwerksmesse, Munich, Germany (8 – 14 March 2017). It was also exhibited in an internationally selected group exhibition, *Nexus: Meetings at the Edge* (September – November 2018), which toured in Wales.

02 / RESEARCH DIMENSIONS



FIG. 2
Wild Rose: necklace (reversible)
2015. Enamel, steel, oxidised silver
125mm x 75mm. Photo Michael
Wolchover.



FIG. 3
Crimson Trace I & II: brooches 2015.
Enamel, steel, oxidised silver
60mm x 60 mm. Photo Michael
Wolchover.

Tracing time – Tracing threads is a collection of enamelled jewellery, comprised of three neckpieces and eight brooches. It was inspired by an obscure genre of 16th–17th century embroidery: Elizabethan blackwork, a type of embroidery that used a black thread made from an iron-based dye.

The research builds on Cross' longstanding interest in revitalising historical craft techniques. She investigates archival material within museums to develop processes that are unorthodox within contemporary jewellery making and which bring historical craft traditions to new audiences.

A jeweller with a longstanding interest in textiles, Cross was inspired by the integration, within historical portraiture, of clothing, blackwork embroidery and jewellery, and wanted to recreate this synthesis in contemporary form.

Blackwork embroidery is notable for its use of iron as a mordant to fix the black dye of the thread. As such, the dye is naturally corrosive and the embroidery self-destructs over time, leaving only traces of the original stitching within the white linen fabric base.

Cross's research plays on the sense of loss, recovery and material trace invoked by this singular technique. She reinvents blackwork, translating the material presence of iron into a body of contemporary enamelled steel jewellery for 21st century audiences.

The fading traces of the blackwork are imagined through an experimental use of industrial enamelling. Cross invests enamelling as a material that translates the original two dimensional lines into three dimensional material objects, imparting the fragility of embroidery onto solid surfaces.



FIG. 4
Thorn Berries I & II, brooches.
Enamel, steel, oxidised silver, 2015.
100mm x 45mm. Photo Michael
Wolchover.



FIG. 5
Thorn Berries III, brooch. Enamel,
steel, oxidised silver, 2015. 80mm
x 52mm. Photo Michael Wolchover.



FIG. 6
Fold, necklace. Enamel, steel,
Korean textile, oxidised silver,
2015. 120mm x 95mm. Photo
Michael Wolchover.

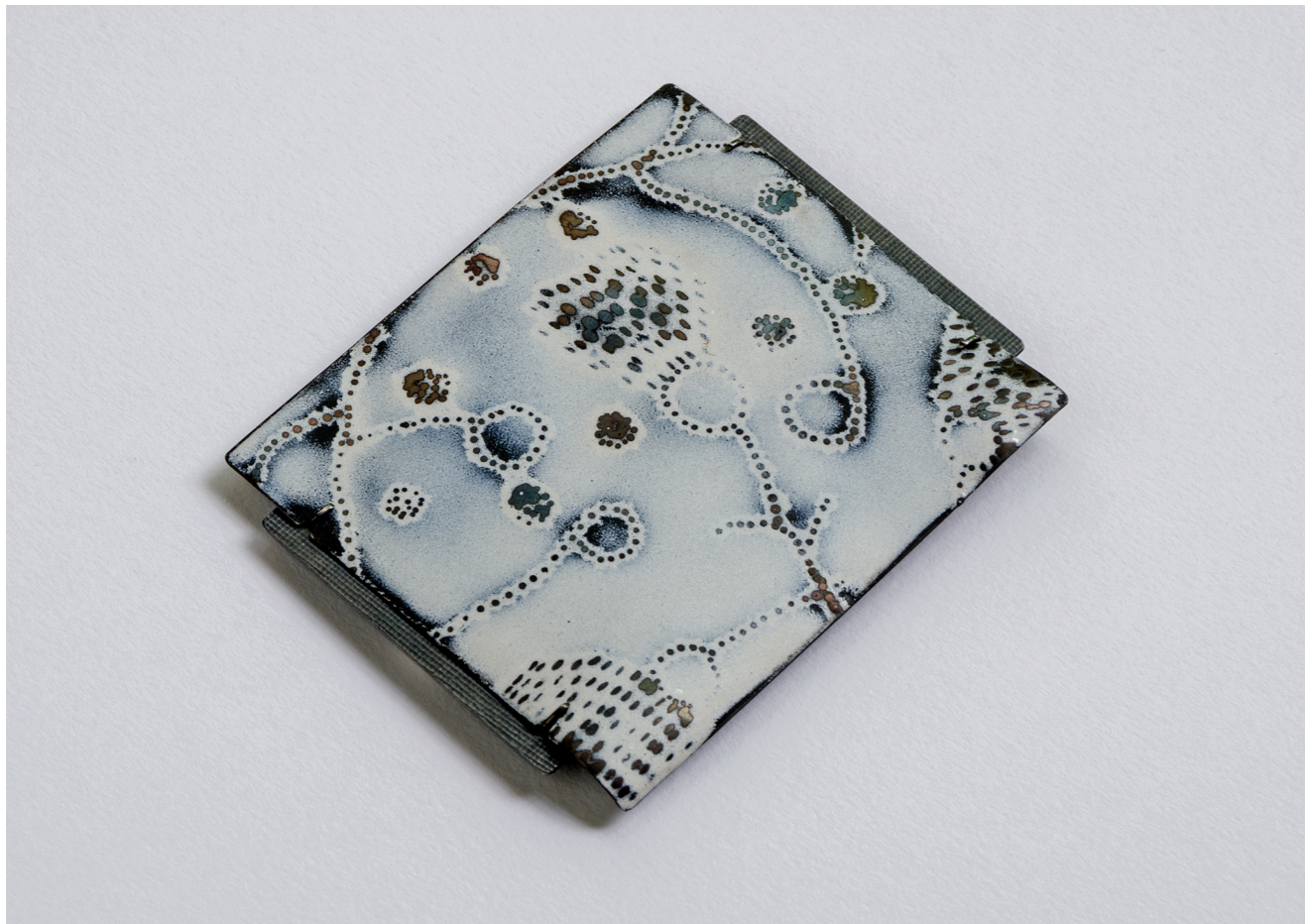
FIG. 7
Wild Rose (reverse view) necklace.
Enamel, steel, oxidised silver
125mm x 75mm, 2015. Photo
Michael Wolchover.



FIG. 8
Research study #1, 2015, mixed
media, steel, enamel. Photo
Michael Wolchover.



FIG. 9
Scatter, brooch. Enamel, steel,
oxidised silver 60 x 60mm, 2015.
Photo Michael Wolchover.



03 / ORIGINALITY

Cross' research shines a light on an obscure and specific historical technique, and in turn expands the material and visual tropes of contemporary jewellery.

The innovative translation of embroidery into enamel is prompted by reflection on the interrelation of craft techniques and the new visual effects that can be produced through their combination.

Cross combines techniques and materials in novel ways. For instance, the steel sheet has been worked by hand, sensitively chased, to evoke the visual qualities of the black wool or silk thread that self-destructs over time to leave a surface pitted by small holes. This is combined with multiple layers of subtly shaded wet process (liquid) vitreous enamel, traditionally used for industrial application (public signage; domestic ware such as baths, kitchenware etc). This type of enamel is rarely used within contemporary jewellery. Particularly innovative is the way that Cross fired onto steel sheet on a relatively small scale.

Industrial enamelling is typically used in mass market products, but here its creative potential is exploited within the production of individual, handmade jewellery.

This is an innovative expansion of the possibilities of contemporary jewellery that brings new knowledge of its technical range and links to historical crafts. Due to its rare, fragile and vulnerable nature, Elizabethan blackwork is rarely displayed, and therefore has been somewhat overlooked by practitioners. Cross' research aimed to bring to light this overlooked craft and bring it to visibility in the public domain.

FIG. 10
Research investigation, Blythe House, V&A, London, June 2015.
Photo Susan Cross.



FIG. 11
Tooling/punching the steel sheet prior to enamelling.
Photo Gary Grobler.



FIG. 12
Kiln firing the vitreous liquid enamel onto the tooled steel sheet at 800°C. This process involves multiple applications of liquid enamel, with each layer individually fired to make the surface permanent.
Photo Gary Grobler.



FIG. 13
The process of carefully rubbing back with an abrasive tool to expose and uncover the tooled/punched steel surface, exposes the subtle coloured layers of fired vitreous enamel.
Photo Gary Grobler.

04 / RIGOUR

Cross's research combines cultural history with experimental, practice-based research. The innovation of her technique lies in the way she translates embroidery into enamel jewellery.

Her research for *Tracing Lines* began with a lecture she delivered to The Friends of the National Galleries, Edinburgh, titled *Jewellery in Historical Portraiture 16th & 17th Century – status, significance & symbolism* (2014). This study of historical jewellery led Cross to investigate the richly embellished costume of this period, in particular Elizabethan blackwork embroidery.

Cross researched examples of this craft in public UK museum archival collections, obtaining special access to collections and archives at institutions including the V&A Museum, London, National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, The Burrell Collection, Glasgow, Bath Costume Museum and Bristol Museum.

Material was gathered from primary sources, through detailed recording of samples in the form of drawings. Cross paid particular attention to the visual language and symbolism of the embroidery, alongside material and technical testing and extensive use of photography.

Studying the blackwork closely, Cross noticed the random disappearance of the black silk. Due to the high thread count of the woven linen, the embroiderer's needle and thread punctured the cloth. Further investigation revealed that iron was used as a mordant to fix the black dye. The naturally corrosive properties of iron have meant that over time the black silk self-destructs, leaving behind perforated cloth and a trace of a past age.

Cross foregrounded these research findings in her own techniques. She developed techniques to process steel that corresponded to and resonated across jewellery and textiles methods – such as chasing and physical punching needles. The perforation of the steel sheet recreated the movement of a needle through cloth. In this way, Cross emulated the qualities of the old, rare, precious samples of embroidery: process became the means of bringing new life to the past.

The primary materials used for testing were steel and vitreous enamel with supporting materials of oxidised silver & Korean textile braid. Cross embarked on the industrial enamelling work at the invitation to work with the Elizabeth Turrell Studio, Bristol. She retraced embroidery patterns into the enamel, using the industrial process. This allowed a spontaneity and immediacy not possible with jewellery enamelling, which is highly labour intensive. Layered on top of this mark making, Cross carried out tooling, punching, deforming and rubbing back. She invested the enamel as a 3D drawing surface, working with aesthetic and material subtleties and moving between the enamelling process and the antique historical cloth. Backed onto silver sheet in order to make wearable, the pieces were claw set, giving to them the impression of precious stones.

05 / SIGNIFICANCE



FIG. 14
Heat Exchange II – Artists Exchanging Energy, Crafts in the Bay, Cardiff, Wales, 2015.
Photo Toril Brancher.



FIG. 15
Heat Exchange II – Artists Exchanging Energy, Crafts in the Bay, Cardiff, Wales, 2015.
Photo Toril Brancher.

Cross' reinvention of a historical technique demonstrates how black-work, firmly sited within the realm of traditional textiles, can be used to inform, translate and contribute to contemporary jewellery practise.

This body of work also demonstrates a practice methodology for other researchers into how a type of enamelling primarily used for large scale industrial application has the potential to be used for unique, small contemporary jewellery pieces.

Tracing time – Tracing threads has been exhibited internationally, resulting in the broad dissemination of Cross' research.

The output was created in response to an invitation by curators Elizabeth Turrell & Beate Gegenwart, for the group exhibition *Heat Exchange II – Artists Exchanging Energy*, at the Makers Guild, Craft in the Bay, Cardiff. The exhibition included 22 UK and international artists working in jewellery and the applied arts from Germany, Denmark, Japan; Australia, New Zealand, Spain and South Korea. The exhibition toured the following international venues between September 2015 and July 2016:

12 August – 8 November 2015
Craft in the Bay, Cardiff, Wales.

12 December 2015 – 28 February 2016
Fife Contemporary Art & Craft,
St. Andrews Museum, Scotland.

20 March – 1 May 2016
Gallery Waidspeicher, Erfurt, Germany.

20 May – 2 July 2016
Bayerischer Kunstgewerbe-Verein,
Munich, Germany.

A colour catalogue accompanied the *Heat Exchange II – Artists Exchanging Energy* exhibition, published by The Makers Guild, Wales, with a commissioned essay 'Makers, Myths & Gods'

by Amanda Game, Independent Curator and Producer.

Tracing time – Tracing threads was subsequently competitively selected for *Schmuck – Munich Jewellery Week 2017*, the annual international trade fair for the skilled trades held at the International Handwerksmesse, Munich, Germany from 8 – 14 March 2017. Cross was selected as the only UK jeweller from 67 artists representing 31 countries, out of 704 applications from 50 countries. The exhibition was attended by over 10,000 visitors and was accompanied by a colour catalogue published by Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Wirtschaft und Medien, Energie und Technologie.

Following this, Cross was invited by curator Dr Elizabeth Goring to exhibit *Tracing time – Tracing threads* within *Nexus: Meetings at the Edge*, a group show featuring 20 international artists from UK, China, Israel and Brazil. The exhibition toured the following venues, with audience attendance in excess of 13,000 visitors:

31 March – 10 June 2018
Kirkcaldy Galleries, Fife Contemporary
Art & Craft.

29 September – 18 November 2018
Ruthin Craft Centre, Wales UK.

This exhibition was accompanied by an online catalogue.

Cross was invited to give a lecture about the work at the Enamel Symposium hosted by Fife Contemporary Arts, St. Andrews, Scotland on 19 February 2016.



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

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