

Non+Precious

By

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Non+Precious

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Abstract

Non+Precious, a Master of Fine Arts thesis exhibition, consists of five tables with assorted sets of jewelry arranged on the top and a suspended necklace centered above each. The sets of jewelry contain rings, bracelets, and brooches. My work can be classified as wearable art and an expression of fashion using a wide range of materials including paper, felt, acrylic, and composition gold leaf. My goal was to create an intriguing balance of precious and non-precious materials as well as formal and casual elegance. Everyday materials become anonymous and lose their identities in my work. I break down perceived ideas of what is precious and non-precious jewelry, suggesting to viewers that established hierarchies no longer exist.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1-2
Inspiration, Materials, Processes, and Techniques	2-7
Exhibition.....	8-10
Conclusion	11-12
Works Cited	13

When people write the word “non-precious” they normally include a dash in between “non” and “precious”. To me, it looks like a minus mark. I place a “+” mark instead to symbolize the harmony of two opposing elements. I use non-precious materials such as paper, acrylic, and felt that are not traditionally associated with jewelry and treat them as if they were precious materials like a gemstone.

When I was in Korea, I would design first, and then purchase a piece of silver and gems to create jewelry. It was very easy to acquire any kind of materials that I wanted, especially precious stones, metals, and tools. I could look at, touch and feel them. For years, I have followed that system, and it is important to me to feel the materials in my hands before I create work. This allows me to validate the feasibility of my imagined design with the physical traits of the material.

After I started graduate school in Kansas, my perspective changed regarding materials. Materials and the stores selling them are not as abundant or readily available as they were in Korea. It was a completely different environment; therefore, I had to trust my instincts from prior experience and order materials online. Typically, I was not satisfied with the appearance, color, and texture as compared to the online pictures or descriptions. My practice of experiencing materials in my hands reinforces the pivotal role of tactility in my art.

I started to think about alternate ways of using materials such as paper to make a piece of jewelry, whereas in the past, I used paper only for drawing and model creation. Paper as a jewelry medium is more accessible, lightweight, colorful, and easier to work with compared to precious metal. Paper allows me a greater flexibility in the exploration stage of designing. I can be more playful and spontaneous because it can be easily manipulated and quickly transformed without weight restrictions. It allows me to work faster and to branch out from my formal ideas.

I specifically chose construction paper from a variety of types because it was easily acquired and has a thickness suitable for the winding process. While I was experimenting with construction paper, I discovered an interesting organic shape from winding 11”x ¼” paper strips. I glued the edges of these paper pieces together to make one long strip. Because the paper is wrapped so meticulously tight, it is able to hold its shape while twisted to create a new and more complicated form.

As previously mentioned, the sensory aspect is an important key in my work when it comes to materials. I sought to provide another visual sense by incorporating non-paper components as well. I chose acrylic and felt which are rigid and soft. Acrylic has a reflective surface when seen under the light whereas felt has a matte appearance. I used thick felt pieces in the acrylic bracelets to provide viewers a visual tactility compared to the slick acrylic.

All of my work requires precise measurements to assemble, and cutting is crucial when working with acrylic and felt. I use a laser cutter as a tool because it offers the critical precision I require. It is also a great tool for speed and efficiency when making multiple pieces. However, it is important when my jewelry work is viewed, that it does not appear to be entirely cut by a laser. I spend many hours exploring ways to design with multiples to capture subtle repetitive details that go beyond predictable laser cut forms.

In *Levitating Shadows*, layers were created and materials trapped to capture a deep richness to simple concentric circular shapes. Composition “gold” leaf was then applied between each layer of paper and acrylic. The visible gold is reflected through clear acrylics, creating a sense of illusion. The viewers are invited to observe the piece in different directions to experience the floating paper and reflections of gold leaf throughout the design. The black paper

presents not only the form and texture effectively, but also enhances the light reception allowing it to glow calmly within. (Figure 1 and 2)



(Figure 1)



(Figure 2)

In addition, the non-precious becomes the precious when I use discarded laser cut “remnants” to create work. These remnants become unexpected discoveries and potentials for new jewelry. I see all these wonderful pieces that were meant to be “waste” as important and interesting as the initially designed elements. Cohn states “Through regenerating objects and salvaging materials, jewelers inventively create a new kind of preciousness by giving a second life to what would otherwise be discarded as debris.”¹

¹ Cohn, Susan. *Unexpected Pleasures: The Art and Design of Contemporary Jewellery*. New York: Rizzoli International Pub., 2012. 174. Print

For example, I used the cut out centerpieces from *Levitating Shadows* bracelets to create *Endless Growth*. First, I hand-carved texture in these clear acrylic oval shapes. The texture was laminated with black acrylic pieces to produce a high contrast in colors and a depth to the forms. I then used an electroforming technique to build up a copper granular surface; which was then silver-plated. This culmination of techniques appears as trapped bubbles inside with growing ice on the surface. (Figure 3 and 4)



(Figure 3)



(Figure 4)

The large necklaces in the exhibition inspired designs for bracelets, rings, and brooches. Designs were repeated using different colors to express a broader sense of beauty to a wider audience. Chosen colors are based on a strong contrast such as black and gold, red and gold, blue and silver, etc. (Figure 5 and 6) For example, *Flare* shows a strong contrast between red paper, black acrylic, and gold leaf. The combination of colors express a feeling of royalty and lushness even though materials themselves may not be highly valuable. (Figure 7)



(Figure 5)



(Figure 6)

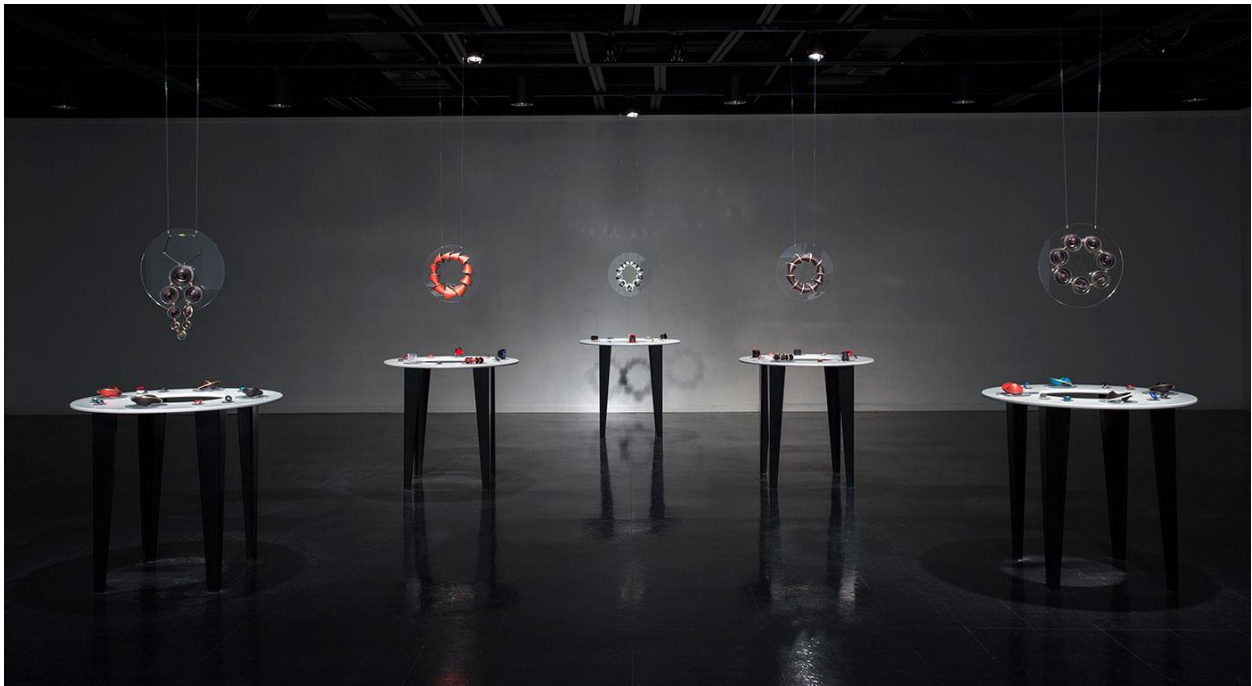


(Figure 7)

During the exhibition, people walked around the tables to examine my jewelry. Skinner states “Certainly, conventional displays of jewelry provide mediated experiences that look for meaning in qualities other than use: the form or composition, technical aspects, materials, narrative elements, and so on.”² I placed the tables in an open arrow leading towards the

² Skinner, Damian. "Plinth." *Contemporary Jewelry in Perspective*. New York: Lark Jewelry & Beading, 2013. 40. Print.

centerpiece, therefore each table had its own space that invited viewers to closely observe and become surrounded by the work. The circular shape of the tables and acrylic supports are derived from the circular unit found in my jewelry. The tables are cut out in the middle similar to a donut shape, and the empty space is repeated by the suspended, clear, acrylic necklace support. I wanted the necklaces to appear as if they are levitating and commanding the viewers' attention before the other works on the tables. These clear, acrylic circles allow the viewers to see the side and back of each necklace. Viewers are invited to look and experience the works in the circular direction of the tables and in a 360-degree viewing radius. (Figure 8,9, and 10)



(Figure 8)



(Figure 9)



(Figure 10)

In my exhibition, I created an intriguing balance of not only the precious and non-precious materials, but also between formal and casual elegance. For instance, viewers have a direct relationship to my work because it is displayed on a table, without a formal vitrine cover. I also made acrylic discs for each work to rest on and to produce a sense of their own space upon the tabletop. I positioned each piece on the tables in a typical arrangement for jewelry. My work can be classified as wearable art and an expression of fashion with materials ranging from paper to gold.

The non-precious materials resemble precious materials as a result of the meticulous attention to design and details I make. It is more than just a combination of using opposing materials. As stated in *Contemporary Jewelry Art- Innovative Materials* by Cypi, “Actually, the status of jewelry has nothing to do with the value of the materials but the meanings embedded in the design concepts.”³ The non-precious materials become valuable in the end owing to the time spent, method of formation, and chosen colors in the creation to be unrecognizable and appearing precious. According to Cohn, “Materiality is an essential aspect of much jewelry; paper, silver and wood all have their own special allure. Each brings emotional associations, and the maker works to bring out the essence of the substance.”⁴

At first sight, these everyday materials become anonymous and lose their identities in my work. I break down perceived ideas of what is precious and non-precious jewelry. Established hierarchies no longer exist. Quoted from *Contemporary Jewelry Art- Innovative Materials* by Cypi, “When people have started to attach more and more importance to the interest,

³ Design-Ma-Ma, *Contemporary Jewelry Art: Innovative Materials*. Harrow Middlese: CYPI, 2011. 1. Print.

⁴ Cohn, Susan. *Unexpected Pleasures: The Art and Design of Contemporary Jewellery*. New York: Rizzoli International Pub., 2012. 164. Print

individuality, and tactility of the materials, the notion of “cheap materials” will turn out to be less and less convincing, while choices for materials used will become more diversified and dynamic.”⁵ My wearable forms are meant to be experienced through optical and tactile senses. The formal characteristics that are inherent within each material are allowed to create a distinctive and boundless synergy.

I continually experiment with different materials, techniques, and forms. Moreover, I attempt to discover logical constructions and forms inspired by rhythms, motions, accumulations, and structures that naturally exist in my surroundings and personal memories.

⁵ Design-Ma-Ma, *Contemporary Jewelry Art: Innovative Materials*. Harrow Middlese: CYPI, 2011. 1. Print.

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