

Original Research Article

“A Bird’s Eye View” in Jewellery Design

Xinyu Peng¹

University for the Creative Arts, UK

Abstract: The article focuses on exploring “bird’s eye view” theme in jewellery design. Writer describes the progress of how to get inspiration from the works of temari ball artist Tatiana Vigdorova and Korean contemporary jewellery artist Mi-sook Hur, and using those ideas to create personal jewellery series with “bird’s eye view” theme.

Keywords: Contemporary Jewellery; Bird Eye View; Enamel; Temari ball; Tatiana Vigdorova; Mi-sook Hur

“People look up to observe the sky, looks down to find the law of the earth, and see the patterns that are created by bird and beast.” (Yinda, 1998: 86) This sentence is from Chinese books called *Xici Zhuan*, and it shows how the ancient Chinese established their relationship with nature through observation. It also shows that people have been exploring sky through the “bird” medium from a long time ago.

Through the exploratory practice, this time I want to explore the idea of a “bird view” in terms of human observation of nature. First, I will explain my past work, and describe the relationship between my past works and new developments. Additionally, I will introduce two related artists, Tatiana Vigdorova and Mi-sook Hur, and explore how those artists’ work related to my own exploratory practices’ samples.



Fig.1.Under the Sky (2019)

Figure 1. Xinyu Peng. (2019) Under the Sky [Photograph] In possession of: Xinyu Peng: Huangshi.

My past works include a series of jewellery called “Under the sky” (2019). The material of these works are fine silver and the technique that I used is enamelling. I was inspired by the patterns of the rose window which often found in a cathedral or church. However, I am an Atheist, so I removed the religious elements from the flower window, and focussed on the original structure of the rose window. In my opinion, the name “Under the sky” not only represents the fact we all live under the same sky, but also like birds, it symbolized the medium that guides people to look up at the sky.

From this starting point, I began to focus on birds and the relationship between birds, the sky and birdcages. I wanted to keep the idea that I got from *Under the sky* and find a new way to show the combination of the sky and birdcage. The symbolic meaning of the rose window is found in geometry and the feeling of many parts forming a whole together. In my opinion, this structure, while representing the sky, also represents a cage for captive birds. This research led me to the geometric patterns on traditional

¹ About the author: Xinyu Peng (1997-), female, Han nationality, born in Huangshi, Hubei Province, graduated in 2020 with Master degree on Jewellery major from University for the Creative Arts, UK. Research direction: Bird’s eye view theme in contemporary jewellery industry.

Japanese *temari* balls.

“For centuries, *temari* balls have been a folk-art favourite in Japan. These exquisitely embroidered orbs are renowned for their eye-catching patterns and bright colour palettes” (Kelly, 2018).

Although the earliest concept of *temari* came from China, and was later introduced to Japan, it is clear that Japan has adopted the technique and created its own history of *temari* balls by incorporating complex designs so that it has become an art form. The original patterns on *temari* ball are inspired by traditional art of paper folding (*origami*).

Temari balls are decorated uses embroidery technique to display a composite geometry design. It’s solid as a whole, and put fillers such as cotton in the ball to make it more like a ball. With the same idea as the fortune cookies that are popular in American Chinese restaurants, Japanese put objects that carry blessings and good luck in the ball, such as hand-written blessings paper stripes when making the *temari* balls. This means that each *temari* ball holds a unique meaning.

These design elements that appeared in traditional Japanese handicrafts inspired artist Tatiana Vigdorova. Tatiana is a Moscow-based artist. She used embroidery and silk threads to present repeating web-like designs, and patterns that resemble spiralling mandalas found in “sacred geometry”. She also depicts the popular subject of *hanami*, cherry blossom in Japanese art. (Kelly, 2018)



Fig.2. Temari Ball (S.D)

Figure 2. Tatiana Vigdorova. (S.D) Temari Balls [Photograph] At: <https://mymodernmet.com/tatiana-vigdorova-temari-embroidery/> (Accessed 21/01/2020).

Tatiana needs to spend considerable time and energy to create these handmade *temari* balls (**Figure 2**). She enjoys the process despite the tedious nature. Tatiana Vigdorova said art at first time was just a hobby for her. However, she mentioned if an art form is artist’s true passion, there is no way to ignore it, and the process itself is a pure joy. She talked about that the progress of making *temari* need to be calm down, lasting, and keep concentrate (Kelly, 2018). This is similar to how I feel when making jewellery.



Fig.3. Bird and Sky (2020)

Figure 3. Xinyu Peng. (2020) Bird and Sky [Photograph] In possession of: Xinyu Peng: Farnham.



Fig.4. Bird and Sky (2020)

Figure 4. Xinyu Peng. (2020) Bird and Sky [Photograph] In possession of: Xinyu Peng; Farnham.

The idea of repeating geometric patterns can also be applied to the rose window designs, and I started to think about whether I could use metals and mixed media to express the geometry design more effectively. This sample I made using acrylic sheets, copper and brass (**Figure 3**). First of all, I used a geometric guide (see **Figure 3**) to create kaleidoscope pattern to make layer upon layer to help me create patterns. Then I pierced out several metal frames to protect my acrylic sheets, so when I slid each part in, it would not break easily. Although my topic is showing the relationship between the bird and sky, this time I don't want to follow the rule of "the sky is blue colour". So I created different patterns on different coloured acrylic sheets, and experimented with the changing colours created when they were superimposed on the different layers (**Figure 4**). The light showed through the acrylic, so that I could easily see the design lines. This effect presents my thoughts about birds, sky and bird cages effectively.

The main technique I want to develop is enamelling. The word enamel comes from the advanced German word "smelzan", which later became "esmail" in Old French (The Vitreous Enamellers' Society, S.D). It is defined as a glassy coating fused to a metal substrate. Historically, enamel was first applied to gold, then to silver, copper, bronze, and then to steel. The term is also used to apply decorative fusible glass to glass objects. The earliest examples of enamel arts were made in Cyprus during the Mycenaean period around the 1840-1792 BC (Belli, 1969: 27). In the early period, people used glass to decorate metal work; however, most of them are not enamelled. People used a cold-connection to either set up the glass piece, or glue to put glass with metal together, until an unknown craftsman in Cyprus found a way of fusing glass and metal together, when the technique of enamel was born.

"Vitreous enamel is a clear or coloured glass that is bounded by fusion with heat to a metal surface. The process of fusing the glass to the metal called enamelling." (Bovey, 2015:24) Enamelling is a progress that makes glass surface hold on metal forever. It is different from using a cold connection to put stainless glass with metal together. Through the development of technology, artists have refined enamelling techniques to make new style of jewellery. For example, sgraffito and stencilling are two modern enamelling techniques. Sgraffito is using pencil or sharp tools to create drawn lines on enamel designs. Stencilling is creating a cut-out model of the desired pattern, which can be reused for several enamelling pieces. These techniques have been developed relatively recently. However, without those new techniques, there are four traditional enamelling techniques that were used in ancient period—basse-taille, champlévé, plique-a-jour, and grisaille.



Fig.5. Dragonfly Woman (1897-98)

Figure 5. Rene Lalique. (1897-98) Dragonfly Woman [Jewellery] In: Yvonne, B.Italy: Skira Editore S.p.A.

The core enamel techniques that I used and will continue exploring are basse-taille and plique-a-jour. “Plique-a-jour means ‘light of day’ or ‘window enamel’. This is where the enamel is applied in cells, similar to champlevé, but with no backing.” (Bovey, 2015: 25) Plique-a-jour is different with stainless glass in size. Although the progress of enamelling and stained glass are quite similar, plique-a-jour is specifically used for making jewellery, while stained glass is for window decoration. One of the most famous jewellery artists who was renowned for his plique-a-jour technique was the French Art Nouveau designer Rene Lalique. While he created many glass artworks, he also designed many pieces of enamel jewellery. Perhaps his most well-known piece is his dragonfly brooch (**Figure 5**). He skilfully used plique-a-jour enamel to represent the delicate transparency of real dragonfly wings.

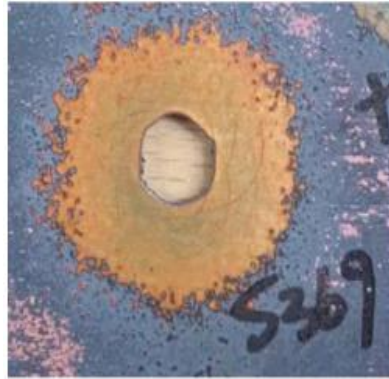


Fig.6. Enamel Sample (2020)

Figure 6. Xinyu Peng. (2020) Enamel Samples [Photograph] In possession of: Xinyu Peng: Farnham.

“Basse-taille means ‘low cut’” (Bovey, 2015: 24), this technique is similar to the other traditional enamelling technique called “champlevé”. They both include an engraving technique, but basse-taille needs to use a surface completely covered with enamelling, while champlevé only uses enamelling powder to cover the engraving line. I made single basse-taille sample to test the enamel of transparent colour (**Figure 6**). Within the development of enamelling technique, we not only can use hand engraving to create the pattern for basse-taille, but also we can use etching technique to easily design the pattern that we want.



Fig.7. Bird and Sky (2020)

Figure 7. Xinyu Peng. (2020) Bird and Sky [Photograph] In possession of: Xinyu Peng: Farnham.

An important point is while I chose to use acrylic sheets; I also want to use the skills of enamelling. In my opinion, bird cages and sky are two choices of bird. One uses freedom to exchange alive, the other uses whole life to survive, the only thing they have is freedom. Within this thought, through the exploration progress around the topic “bird”, I gradually found this core is more worthwhile for me to create jewellery than making jewellery with “bird” itself. I more want to use “bird view” as main idea or topic to design and make my jewellery. Therefore, using acrylic sheet with design line on it can represent sky, and using metal with enamel technique symbolized bird-cages.

Through the progress of making combination sample, I found out plique-a-jour technique is difficult to achieve. Within plique-a-jour technique, I need to use 18gauge pure silver to make sample. The material is expensive, and I don’t want to waste it. Therefore, I just pierced the design structure out of copper sheet, and used it to represent the idea of birdcage (Figure 7). This time I also tried stencil enamel technique. However, the outcome of putting the stencil enamel behind the bird cut out is not well. Next time I will use transparent materials to instead of fully opaque enamel piece.



Fig.8. Myna Bird(2017)

Figure 8. Xinyu Peng. (2017) Myna Bird [Photograph] In possession of: Xinyu Peng: Huangshi.

After the description of how I explored to use different way symbolizing the sky idea, I want to explain about the most important and also it is the core of my whole exploration process at the beginning—bird. Choosing the bird as a subject is not only because I didn't have the opportunity to use it as the subject to tell the close relationship between me and bird, but also because I remembered my childhood love of birds from a young age. I watched the birds flying overhead, the birds staying on the wires and on the sculpture. Then I watched and observed the world through the birds. Within all different kinds of birds, Crested Myna is the most special one. Since my sixth grade, my father has been feeding myna birds (**Figure 8**). However, in China, people are more familiar to feed bird in the birdcage, so I always look at my myna bird through the birdcage. The other reason why my dad chose to feed myna bird is this bird is very intelligent. It can learn human intonation and language and speak. My myna bird can speak "Hello" and "Good Morning". Based on this story, I hope to do my jewellery exploration with the theme of birds and especially myna bird.

Within the thought of finding a jewellery artist who uses birds or feathers as the main body and uses enamel technology to make jewellery, after browsing the works of many artists, I found an artist who made jewellery in similar theme with me—Mi-sook Hur.

Mi-sook Hur was born in South Korea in 1965. When she was young, she liked to collect gifts from nature, such as feathers, beans, pebbles and etc (The enamellist society newsletter, 2017: 2). This experience gave Mi-sook Hur primary idea of making jewellery. Since 1999, she learned at East Carolina University in Greenville. Within this educated experience, she touched and explored deeper in enamelling. In 2003, she assisted her teacher Linda Darty to write a chapter about enamelling technique for Darty's book (2012). After this, about 10 years, she focused on enamelling and used it as main technique for making her jewellery.

Mi-sook Hur's most popular jewellery piece will be "Feather Trace" (**Figure 9**). Although Mi-sook Hur used bird element as body part of her jewellery, she actually want to create a story between two brooches. The background of this piece, Mi-sook Hur talked about a story related to her grandma. She wanted to use three eggs and crow to show the complex relationship between her and her sister. A white feather is near the crow represent eggs are not belonging to crow. However, the reason why Mi-sook Hur wanted to make separate piece to show this background relationship is because she leaves home for long time, her feeling of family relationship changed. That is also a reason why she used crow and egg to represent relationship.



Fig. 9. Feather Trace (2015)

Figure 9. Mi-sook Hur (2015) Feather Trace [Photograph; Jewellery] At: <https://www.misookhur.com/feather> (Accessed 21/01/2020).

Although through the exploring progress, I didn't stick on to exactly want to use enamelling technique for explaining bird

idea, I still thought Mi-sook Hur’s enamel feather jewellery inspired me. To her, feathers represent the unknown, but to me, birds represent people. We both thought to use bird talking about the story. In the ideas I elaborated, I think that the sky is both free for the birds and a cage for the birds. This idea is also realized in people. While people enjoy freedom, they are also bound by rules. In my opinion, when I observe the world through birds, I also reflect on the fact that birds may also feel the world by observing humans. The sample I made that combined different colour of acrylic sheets together, so when each colour sheets layer upon layer, it created a new colour (Fig.10). Through the progress of I made this sample, I thought more about to use different colour acrylic sheets to also represent colourful life and sky. Birds are enjoying the joy of life while feeling the pain of freedom.



Fig.10. Bird Brooch (2020)

Figure 10. Xinyu Peng. (2020) Bird Brooch [Photograph] In possession of: Xinyu Peng: Farnham.

“The animal kingdom has been a rich source of inspiration for jewellery designers throughout history, to the extent that some creatures have transcended their status as mere motifs to become icons that are inextricably linked with a jewellery house.” (Åse Anderson, 2015). Although there has been a lot of jewellery about nature, especially about animals, I still think this theme has the potential to continue exploring. For example, the theme that I chose—“bird view”. For me, in the process of exploration, I browsed the works of many artists, not only Tatiana Vigdorova who is the artist of *temari* ball, but also the enamelling jewellery that is made by Mi-sook Hur with feathers representing unknown things. At first, I focused on discovering inspiration from the birds themselves and transforming to explore the world from the perspective of birds. This change is huge. However, this change did not make me lose my motivation to continue exploring this direction, but provided me with a whole new idea.” Bird View” is a challenging and novel theme for me, and I will continue to explore in the future to find the best way to express this idea with jewellery.

References

- 1 Åse Anderson. (2015) Animal kingdom: the best-loved creatures in jewellery. At: <http://www.thejewelleryeditor.com/jewellery/article/animal-kingdom-famous-animals-creatures-jewellery-design/> (Accessed 21/01/2020)
- 2 Belli Barsali, I. (1969) European Enamels. London: Hamlyn.
- 3 Bovey Tracey. (2008) Playing with fire: Contemporary UK enamel. The Devon Guild of Craftsmen.
- 4 Darty, L. (2012) The art of enamelling: techniques, projects, inspiration. New York: Lark ; Lewes.
- 5 Kelly, R. (2018) Hand-Embroidered Temari Balls Feature Strikingly Intricate Patterns. At: <https://mymodernmet.com/tatiana-vigdorova-temari-embroidery/>
- 6 The Vitreous Enamellers’ Society. (S.D) A Concise History of Enamel. At: <https://www.iom3.org/vitreous-enamellers-society/concise-history-enamel> (Accessed 13/01/2020)
- 7 The Enamel Arts Foundation. (S.D) Mi-sook Hur. http://www.enamelarts.org/index.php?collection&action=view_artist&artist_id=115 (Accessed 13/01/2020)
- 8 Yinda Kong. (1998) Zhouyizhengyi·Yici. [Translated by Xinyu Peng] Hangzhou: Zhejiang Ancient Books Publishing House.