

EXHIBITION REVIEW

FERROcity

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research

FERROCity, Stephen Bottomley &
Turrell, 2019, Iron, enamel, paint.
Photo: Stephen Bottomley

The following text is a written review by the San Francisco based curator Mike Holmes, a Director of Velvet Da Vinci Gallery, USA. It was published in a small run of printed catalogues in occasion of the FERROCity exhibition at the Academy of International Visual Arts in Shanghai, 31st October 2019. The exhibition FERROCity was invited to Beijing for the 4th Beijing International Jewellery Art Exhibition at the Beijing Institute of Fashion, 18-28 October 2019.

FERROcity

21 Febraury- 17 March,
Museum Reich der Kristalle,
Munich, Germany

Participating Artists:

Dauvit Alexander, Marianne Anderson, Jivan Astfalck, Stephen Bottomley, Tim Carson, Rachael Colley, Bettina Dittlmann, Christine Graf, Joohee Han, Kirsten Haydon, Jeremy Hobbins, Michael Jank, Bridie Lander, Anna Lorenz, Drew Markou, Toni Mayner, Simone Nolden, Sarah O'Hana, Jo Pond, Jo Pudelko, Rebecca Steiner, Elizabeth Turrell.

Co-curated by Professor Stephen Bottomley and visiting Professor Elizabeth Turrell, the School of Jewellery Birmingham City University.

In February and March of this year, the Museum Reich Der Kristalle (Kingdom of Crystals), the public part of the Mineralogical state collection Munich hosted FERROcity an exhibition of jewelry and objects inspired by the theme of Iron. Iron is considered as mineral, chemical element, building material, a part of every human body. Iron as idea. As part of the 2019 Munich Jewelry Week network of exhibitions the venue proved to be an inspired environment for the objects on display. The jewelry and sculptural pieces were constructed with a variety of materials in addition to iron and steel and their showing alongside mineralogical specimens from the Museum's permanent collection strengthened the theme of the exhibition. Even for the many metalsmithing artists attending the exhibition it was a good reminder of natural occurring examples of metal. In showing the FERROcity pieces at this venue the objects become fellow specimens or artifacts with the minerals of the Museum inviting close observation. Following the Munich display FERROcity will move to the Vittoria Street Gallery, the School of Jewellery, Birmingham City University UK where the objects will be displayed alongside microscopic images capturing the transformative effect iron has on the coloration of gemstones.

Bettina Dittlmann and Michael Jank explore iron in its most raw and pure state with their brutally forged 'FOREVERRINGS'. German blacksmiths call this metal "Butter-Iron" for its ease of use but it is clear that these rings were formed with some strong deliberate force. The hammer marks have forged forms inspired by shapes of uncut raw pyrite and garnet.



*Bettina Dittlmann Magnet, Black Flower, 2018,
Magnet, Iron-Firescale, Iron, 8 x8 x4 cm,
Photo: B. Dittlmann*

Dittlmann's 'Black Ephemeral Flower' brooch uses recycled iron particles from a bell foundry reacting to a magnet inside the brooch to form the pattern of the "bloom". The loose iron pieces would fall off the brooch without the magnet... the "petals" reforming in reaction to the magnetic field.

Timothy Information Limited uses the power of magnets with his half-cheery 'The technicolor flies will eat us all' badge. Brightly painted magnetic flies move about a steel box reminding us that no matter how we color it

the flies will get us all in the end. His 'Nostalgia for an even sunnier past' badge looks back at a carefully crafted but now encrusted-in-rust steel circle form that reads "Turned Out Nice Again"... Well, maybe... maybe not.

The idea that steel and iron are permanent and unchanging is challenged by many of the pieces in the FERROcity exhibition. Rust and disintegration is the end for all steel and iron. How long that process can take depends on how much care and maintenance one is willing to give.



Jo Pond, *Glaxo Set*, 2018,
Repurposed steel tin,
steel, iron, silver, gemstone,
Photo: J. Pond

Recycling and repurposing of steel is shown by several of the participants in the exhibition. Jo Pond's poetic printed steel tins reflect Time's passing and an object's history of use or discard. The carefully fabricated brooch groups are formed from domestic bake ware, biscuit and medicine tins that serve as visual references for the feminine domestic role of the wartime wife and mother.

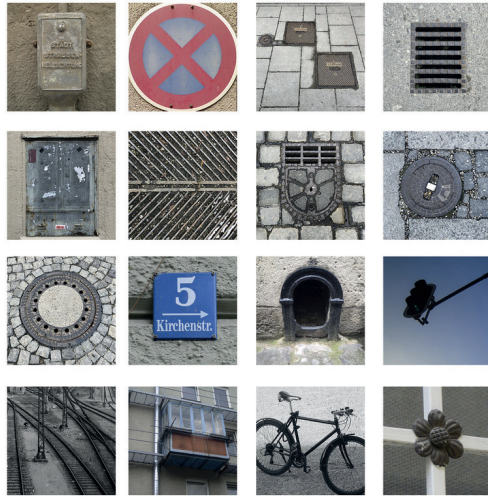
Dauvit Alexander "repairs" broken found steel bolts with cast-in-place sterling silver replacements are studded with gemstones. Elizabeth Turrell's 'Widget' brooches are made from rusty pieces found in scrap yards in Germany



Anna Lorenz, *Stages*, 2019, Steel,
Photo: A. Lorenz

and the United States. Turrell's enamelled reclaimed industrial forms convey a sense of exuberance and movement. Sarah O'Hana's 'Obra VI' building site series transform iron and wood scrap from the reconstruction of an old villa into a reliquary of one life gone. The renovation of the home leads to new life to come.

The processes of construction and decay are the subject of Anna Lorenz 'Stages' objects. The cube crystal structure of iron is fabricated in mild steel and reflects the building blocks of industrialized society. The once perfect cubes become oxidized and corroded.



Christine Graf,
Iron marks, 2019, silver,
paper, ink, stainless steel.
Photo: C. Graf

The ubiquity of steel and iron in our daily lives is shown in Christine Graf's set of 16 small square brooches. Each piece with an identical frame showcase photographs of urban life. Images of drain covers, railway tracks, street lamps, cars and bicycles preserve the urban jewelry of everyday life.

Drew Markou's steel and concrete '3 Towers' remember the grand gasometers of the industrial revolution. Now an anachronism these urban relics now stand functionless except for many as decorative adornments left on the landscape.

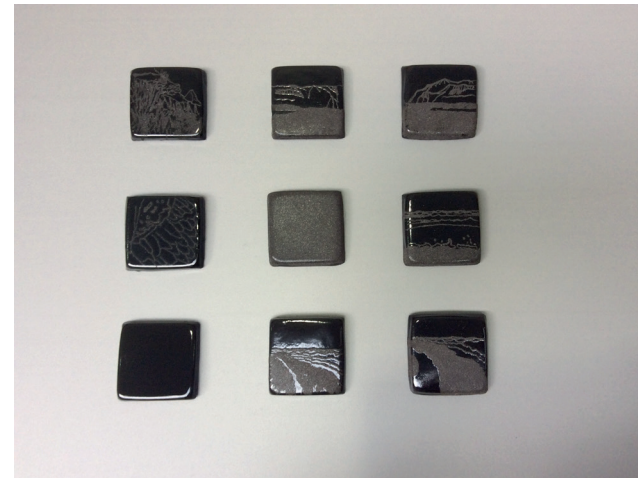
Just as iron is vital to the construction of modern life so is iron in the human body. Bridie Lander uses an illustrated diagram of the haemoglobin molecule in her brooches that are a visual link to the body. The iron containing



Rachel Colley, Tongues,
2019, (Necklace) mango
stones, hematite (iron oxide)
pigmented leather, hematite
cabochon, iron, bamboo
(Ovoid spoon) stainless steel.
Photo: R. Colley

protein is responsible for carrying oxygen throughout the body and gives blood its red color when mixed with oxygen.

Rachel Colley finds non-mineral sources of iron in the food we eat. The mango stones in her 'Tongues' necklace are encased with pigmented leather seeking to "re-connect with our internal organ's processes of consuming food... essentially, 'wearing' metals from within." While iron is a necessary mineral for many of the body's functions, including sight, too much iron can be toxic. Stephen Bottomley's 'Watcher' badges illustrate potential loss of vision his Father battles and reflects the crucial part iron has in our blood for sight. The recycled steel watch cases are enamel badges depicting the human eye. The eye's symbolism in art is "a ward from evil, a symbol of surveillance or simply a symbol of a shared humanity".



Kirsten Haydon, Iron scapes, 2019, Mild steel, enamel, stainless steel, Kariotahi iron sand. Photo: K. Haydon

Jivan Astfalck's 'Of Iron Will and Roses' group of objects looks at the dual nature of iron and ideas of gender. The image of Jeanne D'Arc on the hallmark of a set of knives shows the ultimate warrior wrapped in steel armour. She is strong AND feminine. A brooch featuring a found 1940's photo of an actress playing Jeanne and a plastic rose bring a counter-balance to the iron, both symbolically and also aesthetically to the assemblage.

Kirsten Haydon's 'Studies of Sand : Iron scapes' series of brooches incorporate black iron sand from the Taranaki region of New Zealand. The iron sand formed by volcanic activity 2.5 million years ago creates the black on black enamelled images of beach landscapes.



Jivan Astfalck, Of Iron Will and Roses. Assemblage Six knives: iron & horn, 2019, (Brooch) sterling silver & resin (Rose) silk, silicon & white metal (knives) iron & horn. Photo: J. Astfalck

Jo Pudelko's pieces comment on the dangerous sea crossings undertaken by many desperate refugees. The rusted forms recall life-preservers or unseaworthy rafts.

Iron can be strong and unmoving or strong and flexible as in Joohee Han's wire brooches. Inspired by cloud forms or groups of soap bubbles the delicacy of the steel wire pieces belies its strength and lightness. Marianne Anderson intricate iron and gold brooches celebrate traditions of decorative ironwork. As Anderson states "Ornament is not a crime" her pieces referencing wrought iron gates and also the delicacy of Berlin cast iron jewelry of early 19th century Germany.

The FERROcity exhibition is a good reminder and thoughtful exploration of the importance of iron in our lives. Thematic shows like FERROcity are valuable for the variety of ideas artists find in the subject and the wonderful objects born out of it.

Mike Holmes, San Francisco, April 2019



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