

COCKPIT ARTS 30

Shona Marsh

- *Silversmith*



Shona Marsh is an award-winning silversmith who hand crafts breathtakingly beautiful silverware using specialist techniques including raising, forging, fabrication and silver inlay. Working to bespoke commission, major projects have included a Papal Cross for Pope Benedict XVI, as well as replica work for the Staffordshire Hoard. Her exceptional attention to detail has won Shona critical acclaim through several prestigious industry awards.

Shona originally completed a fine art degree at Edinburgh College of Art before specialising in silversmithing at Birmingham's School of Jewellery. She set up her workshop in 2006, eventually moving back to a shared studio space in Birmingham's jewellery quarter in 2009. She began exhibiting her work more widely, as well as taking on prestigious commissions and teaching at the Birmingham School of Jewellery. Shona already knew about Cockpit Arts from fellow makers. She had visited Open Studios and says she loved the vibe. As her work gained in reputation, it therefore seemed the obvious place to move to. "Although I loved the [Birmingham] jewellery quarter, I felt it lacked a support network for designer makers," she explains. "I wanted to move somewhere where there was more going on, more happening, especially as most of my customers were down in London." She arrived at Cockpit Arts' Deptford incubator in 2012.

During her first year, Shona admits she felt a bit overwhelmed. "Everything was much more expensive, so I was having to freelance a lot," she says. A breakthrough came in her second year when the Business Development Team helped Shona apply for the Walpole Crafted mentoring programme, which she was awarded in 2013. "It was a real light bulb moment for me," says Shona. "I suddenly realised the importance of getting outside help for the business from people with real expertise."

From that moment on, she started to really utilise the business support on offer at Cockpit. "David [Crump, Head of Business Development] and Madeleine [Furness, Business Development Manager] really helped me consolidate everything I learned during that year on the Walpole programme," she explains. "Together we wrote my business plan and once I had that in place, I knew where I needed to go and what money I would need to make it happen." As a result, Shona decided to apply for the Cockpit Arts/Ingenious Growth Loan Fund, which she was awarded in 2014.

Shona used the loan to redevelop her website and have her work professionally photographed. With the help of a Government Growth Voucher, which she found out about through a fellow studio holder, she was able to further develop her marketing plans. She has embarked on a wholesale rebrand of the business with Felt branding, who are in the process of creating a new logo, suggesting further improvements to her website and reinvigorating the whole look and feel of the business.



Shona says David and Madeleine have been essential throughout the rebranding process, helping to keep her on track and understand the direction in which she wants to take her work. "Maddie is very good at getting out what's in your head. As makers you have all this stuff flying around. She helped me to pull it into an orderly form, working in a very visual way using mind maps and mood boards," says Shona, pointing out a large section of her studio wall now covered with these beautiful, visual maps. David, meanwhile, was on hand to help with budgets, time frames and number crunching.

Of course, even the most organised of business plans can get sent off course. In the summer of 2015, Shona suddenly landed her biggest commission to date: making a series of gold plated bronze ornamental branches for 300 bookends for a corporate client in the Middle East. Although it was incredibly exciting, the enormity of the project and the money involved was on a completely different scale to anything she'd worked on before. "I'd never handled anything in the Middle East and they have a very different way of dealing with things," Shona explains. She immediately called David who checked all her pricing strategies and profit margins and assessed the cash risk. "The practicalities of the actual making wasn't an issue, it's what I'm good at," says Shona. "But the pricing - if I'd got that wrong it could have been a disaster." In the end, the project was delivered smoothly and on time and was a huge success.

David and Madeleine have since encouraged Shona to apply the processes she learnt during the bookends project in the day-to-day running of her business. "I know how to do all these things, like creating Gantt charts for scheduling a project, but sometimes you can't see the wood for the trees," says Shona. "David and Maddie are really good at coming in with fresh eyes and a very objective view."

"In the last year or two I've used the Business Development Team more and more," she continues. "I now see Maddie and David on alternate weeks and it's been absolutely brilliant. Having two people with such different backgrounds: Maddie from a craft background and David from a manufacturing background, you get much more rounded business development advice. I come into work now and know what needs to be done each day," she smiles.



www.shonamarsch.com

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