

COCKPIT ARTS 3 YEARS

Ejing Zhang

- *Fashion accessories and jewellery*

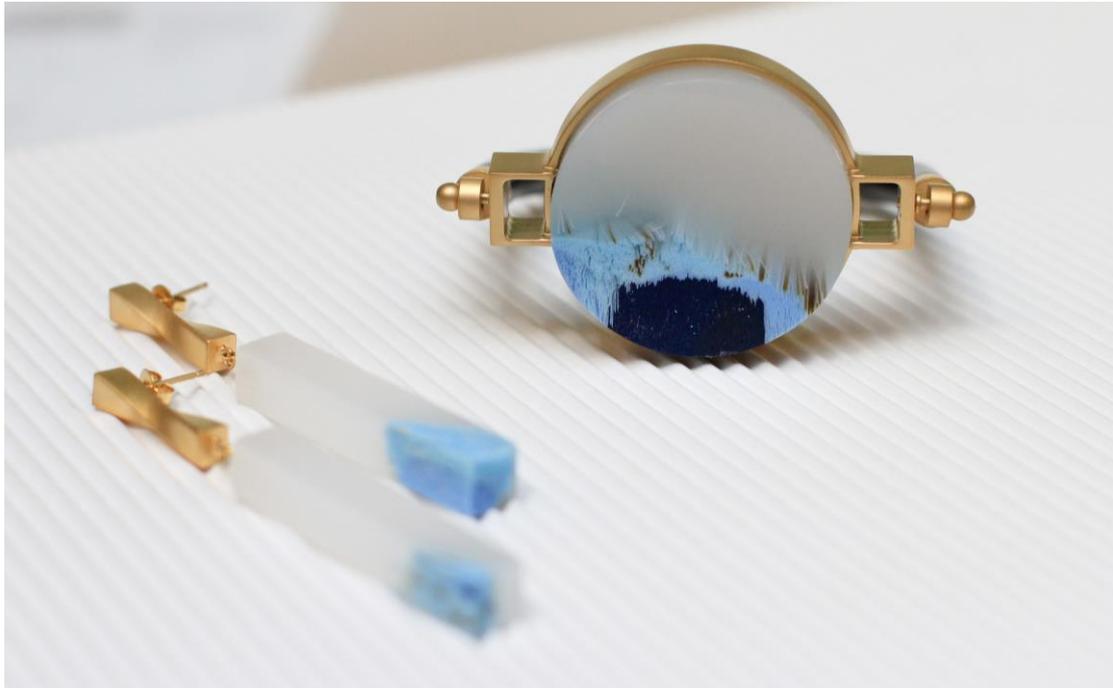


It's not hard to see why Ejing Zhang's strikingly beautiful jewellery has become such an overnight success. Trained in textile design, Ejing has perfected a technique whereby layers of threads are cast into resin and then sliced into discs, creating rich seams of colour and pattern that look like miniature landscape paintings. This unusual process was spotted by WGSN (World Global Style Network) in 2013 when Ejing was commissioned to create the trophies for the Global Fashion Awards held at the Victoria & Albert Museum. A relative newcomer to Cockpit, Ejing arrived at the Holborn incubator in June 2015 shortly before launching her eponymous brand. One year later and orders are flooding in. She now stocks boutiques in New York, London and China and has taken on a full-time assistant to help meet demand.

Born in China, Ejing pursued her design education in the UK, graduating from the Royal College of Art in 2013 with an MA in textiles design specialising in mixed media. At her graduation show, she was approached by Mercedes-Benz to intern in their Advanced Design Studio in Como, Italy. "I learnt a lot in the eight months I spent in Como: how to do things to a premium standard, source materials and work in a team," she says, "but I wanted to do something much more creative and probably not so restricted by regulations."

So in the summer of 2014 she went home to China to register her own business. She applied for a UK visa and returned to London in early 2015. Around the same time, she happened to visit a former colleague from the RCA who was based at Cockpit's Holborn incubator. So it seemed a natural step to apply for a studio. "I'd heard about Cockpit Arts when I was studying at the RCA. In fact, my tutor and her husband both met at Cockpit!" she smiles. She was accepted and moved in with her fellow RCA alumna in June 2015. She now shares a large, light and airy space on the second floor of Holborn. "The location is very convenient," she says. "It's so central and really close to Hatton Garden [London's jewellery quarter where Ejing has her prototypes made]."

"But it's not just the location and space," she continues. "It's also about Cockpit's business support. Nowhere else would provide the coaching as well." At the time of her arrival, Ejing was in the process of what she calls "starting my real business". During initial one-to-one sessions, Madeleine Furness, Cockpit's Business Incubation Programme Manager, advised her on pricing, product offering and how to find her target market and approach potential buyers.



Ejing officially launched her business in September 2015. Since then, her brand has grown rapidly and she has just taken on her second full-time assistant, who helps with production, design and research. "Before I even considered employing an assistant I went to some Cockpit workshops on how to employ people," Ejing says. "We looked at how we were as managers and how to give feedback. It was definitely the most useful workshop I attended."

Having a studio at Cockpit Arts has benefitted her design practice in other ways. "I've become good friends with Rita [Parniczky, an artist weaver with a studio on the same corridor]," Ejing says. "She'd seen my work in my degree show and had taken my card to use as a bookmark! She immediately recognised my work when I arrived at Cockpit. One day when I was visiting her studio I spotted a shade card for Lurex threads on her work bench," Ejing continues. "She showed me some of the pieces she'd made with Lurex yarns and I knew then that I had to get my fingers into that!" Ejing's latest collection for Spring/Summer 2017 features this Lurex yarn, set in jewel-coloured resin to evoke a fabulous 80s disco aesthetic.

"Cockpit is a great community for sharing ideas and materials," Ejing enthuses. "If I have a basic question, I know I can use the makers' Google Group to ask. Everyone's really helpful. It's also really nice to do the occasional work swap. I have a piece from Rita, which I've framed and hung up at home, and she has a pair of my earrings. I'm really happy about that."

Building on her success, Ejing is already looking at ways to grow the business. "I need to generate more direct sales in the future," she says. "I would like to run some pop-up shops and market my online shop." With this in mind, she is planning to take on an apprentice in the New Year thanks to Cockpit's Creative Employment Programme. "I have been in discussion with Imogen [Lawry, Business Incubation Project Manager] about how to start the process of looking for someone to help me with my PR and online marketing," she explains.

Ejing hopes that this extra support will help her with the increasing administrative demands of running a business, freeing her up to design and create new work. "Now that I have Gemma [her assistant] to help with the production side of things, I can do more commission work," she explains. This recently included designing a bespoke clutch bag made from her signature cast resin, set into a redwood frame and lined with vegetable-tanned leather. She also plans to continue with her design consultancy work, which in the past included clients like Givenchy, Nissan and Mercedes-Benz.



At the time of writing, Ejing was busy getting ready for Cockpit's Christmas Open Studios, where she was planning to test-launch her new Spring/Summer 2017 collections. "Open Studios is really good for me," she enthuses. "The first one I did was last Christmas and it was a really good selling point. I also got quite a few contacts, some of whom commissioned work from me after the event." One year on, Ejing Zhang Design is definitely a brand to watch for in the future.