

COCKPIT ARTS 3 YEARS

Ruth Tomlinson
- *Fine jeweller*



Ruth Tomlinson is an internationally renowned fine jeweller whose distinctive collections, rich with gemstones, look like treasures unearthed from another age. Considered by industry experts as one of the leading influences on the current generation of UK jewellery designers, Ruth was recently shortlisted for Jewellery Designer of the Year in the UK Jewellery Awards 2016. Her collections sell in high-end galleries and jewellery boutiques in the UK and abroad.

Ruth shot to prominence after winning the Theo Fennel Prize for best jewellery at her graduation show at the Royal College of Art in 2005. With orders and commissions coming in, she needed to find a suitable studio space in London. "I was really lucky to get into Cockpit," says Ruth. "I was getting a lot of orders off the back of the success of my MA show and I desperately needed somewhere to create them. I looked at studios elsewhere, but straight away I realised what a great organisation Cockpit was. It has an amazing feeling as soon as you walk in the building. It felt like the right place to be. It's in an amazing location as well; there are not many opportunities to have an artist's studio in central London. Cockpit is very unique in that way."

Ruth was accepted on one of Cockpit's Seed Bed funds, which provided subsidised studio space for start-up businesses during their first few years of trading. "They managed to squeeze me in to a tiny space," Ruth says. "It gave me the support, both financially and with the business mentoring, to live as a crafts person and work in central London - there aren't many other places like it in the country that are run by a team that are so passionate about individual craft businesses."

Initially Ruth shared a studio space with three other businesses. "We had such a nice studio," she recalls. "Everyone was very welcoming. It was almost like a not-too-crazy transition from college. I wasn't stuck in a little room trying to fend for myself; I had fellow crafts people around me. You make friends for life at Cockpit."

Ruth has always made a living from her jewellery, straight from graduating from Manchester University. Her jewellery supported her through an MA at the Royal College of Art, and she says that her business has developed very organically. Over the years, she's felt her way by instinct, and through customer and stockist feedback. More recently, the focus has been on developing Ruth Tomlinson as a luxury jewellery brand aimed at the wedding market, with Ruth as its Creative Director. She has taken on staff and now employs three people, including a sales and marketing manager with an admin assistant and a production co-ordinator.



"I've needed more support as the business has got bigger," says Ruth. She cites David Crump, Head of Business Development at Cockpit Arts, as a particular mentor. "David helps with business development and helping me understand what is needed for the business to grow," she says. "So if we have a question about number crunching, employing or just dealing with a tricky situation we can run it by him. It's sometimes just great to get an outside view."

In 2012, Ruth moved into a sole-occupancy studio in the West Wing of Cockpit's Holborn incubator. This not only gave her more workshop space for her and her staff, it also provided a small area to meet clients. "As I took on more bespoke commissions, I wanted to create an environment for wedding couples to come, to experience an important purchase and moment in their lives," explains Ruth.

Four years on and the business has already outgrown the space. "At Christmas, we got so busy that at times we needed five of us; there just wasn't enough room [in the current studio]," she smiles. Ruth has been lucky enough to secure a studio just down the corridor that is twice the size of her current space. Here, she plans to create a luxury showroom for clients to come and discuss commissions and try on jewellery, with a workshop and office area at the back.

As Creative Director, Ruth sees herself as the face of the brand and still likes to be the one who meets her clients face to face. "I enjoy meeting our customers. A lot are regulars who have bought from us for a long time," she enthuses. "Cockpit itself has a lot of regular fans who come to Open Studios, which is a really special thing. It's a really nice opportunity to catch up with them."

Ruth has been based at Cockpit's Holborn incubator for 11 years, during which time her business has flourished and grown rapidly into the award-winning international brand it is today. Although it's clear the business will continue to expand, she is in no hurry to move on from her Holborn base. "I use so much of the business support here, and it's in a great location," she says. "Cockpit is hard to beat because it's such an amazing place to be."



www.ruthtomlinson.com

Photos: Alun Callender