

COCKPIT ARTS 3 YEARS

Ndidi Ekubia

- *Silversmith*



Ndidi Ekubia is a contemporary silversmith who uses traditional hand-raising techniques to create visually stimulating yet functional silverware, recognised for its distinctive 'rhythmic' style. In 2011 she was made a Freeman of the Goldsmiths' Company and is a Senior Fellow and Trustee of the Bishopsland Educational Trust. Her work has been auctioned at Sotheby's and is in the permanent collections of the V&A, The Ashmolean Museum and The Goldsmiths' Company, as well as a number of private collections in the UK, USA, Spain, Germany and Hong Kong.

Ndidi graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1998 with an MA in Goldsmithing, Silversmithing, Metalwork and Jewellery. She worked full time at Cooksonsgold in Hatton Garden, teaching part time and making her functional silverware to commission, as well as speculatively to sell. "I was already making money from commissions," she says. "I also had a few outlets and exhibitions, in places like the Scottish Gallery, The Roger Billcliffe Gallery in Scotland and Adrian Sassoon, London." She first heard about Cockpit Arts when she visited a graduate design show at the Business Design Centre in Islington in 2001. Cockpit had taken a stand at the show to promote its new premises in Deptford, and space was available. "I arrived at Cockpit 14 years ago, the year the Deptford studios opened," says Ndidi. "The place was empty, so I could choose which studio I wanted. And they didn't mind about all the noise I make, hammering metal!"

Ndidi says it was the studio space and community that initially attracted her to Cockpit Arts. "I like being around artists. Cockpit is a great place, with people doing all sorts of different stuff. My previous studio was in old stables in East Dulwich; it was a damp, cold place to work. Cockpit Arts studios provide heating, lighting and 24-hour security at an affordable rate. And it was a good location for me, near my home."

In those early years, Ndidi didn't have time to take advantage of the business support on offer at Cockpit. "I was still working a lot to make ends meet, going into the workshop at nights and weekends," she explains. "There wasn't much time to tap into business support."



As her reputation grew and her work was increasingly in demand, Ndidi realised she needed to improve the profitability and sustainability of her business model. She started to tap into one-to-one coaching with Ellen O'Hara, then Head of Business Development, who helped her to identify a different strategy and reposition her work for the collector's market. This involved accessing Cockpit Arts growth loans in 2010 and again in 2013, which contributed towards creating a new body of large-scale work and enabled her to attend Goldsmiths' Fair. The Business Development Team also matched Ndidi with a mentor from a luxury brand company and helped her develop her management skills in order to take on studio apprentices. "The one-to-one sessions I had with Ellen were amazing," she enthuses. "The coaching I've had throughout the years at Cockpit has taught me to continually review the business, re-evaluate my work, focus on the finances and plan what's next," she explains. "The one-to-one sessions were a great sounding board for ideas and gave me the confidence to go forth and get on with things." By 2012 the business was profitable enough to allow Ndidi to give up her job at Cooksonsgold and concentrate solely on her silversmithing.

Apart from the awards, fellowships and prestigious exhibitions, Ndidi says she is most proud of "the fact that I have stayed in the business, and sustained my business, over the last 14 years. I count that as a big success. A lot of people I knew in the trade had to stop."

Ndidi recently had her first child, a lifestyle change that has once again prompted her to re-evaluate the business. She has moved out of London, and now has a workshop in Camberley, Surrey, near her new home. "I'm very excited about it," she smiles. "There are a lot of changes going on at the moment. I'm in the process of reassessing what I'm going to do. Ideally I'd like to design products for companies, as well as still making one-offs to commission."

"I'll miss Cockpit and working with all the great people there," she concludes. "I feel very lucky to have been part of Cockpit for so long - but it's a good time to move on and work elsewhere. I can see trees from my studio now!"



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Photographs: Alun Callender.