

COCKPIT ARTS 30 YEARS

Jane Adam
- *Jeweller*



Jane Adam holds the honour of being Cockpit Art's longest-serving studio holder. A doyenne of the jewellery industry, Jane pioneered the use of anodised aluminium as a jewellery artist's material in the 1980s. Her work is held in major museum and public collections, including the V&A, Crafts Council, Goldsmiths' Company, National Museums of Scotland, Cooper Hewitt Museum, New York and the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, USA. She was a maker trustee and then co-vice chair of the Crafts Council, and a founder, vice-chair and chairman of the Association for Contemporary Jewellery. She has taught and lectured in Portugal, India and the USA and throughout the UK, and was Research Fellow at the School of Jewellery in Birmingham from 1997 to 2001.

Jane graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1985, and immediately set herself up in a studio in London. By the time she arrived at Cockpit Arts, Holborn in 1994 she had been running a successful jewellery business for 10 years. "The primary reason I came to Cockpit was that it was warm, dry and secure," she says. "I'd been working in tatty industrial buildings on the South Bank, with gaps in the brickwork wide enough to fit your hand in. One February, I'd done nothing but shiver all month, so I leapt at the chance to have a studio at Cockpit Arts," she laughs. "Plus it's in a lovely part of London."

Back in 1994, Cockpit Arts was a very different set up, established primarily to support start-ups. The only real business support on offer was Seed Bed funding, which helped towards initial studio costs. As a fully-fledged business, Jane did not qualify. "Things were very basic in those days," she recalls. "There was no business support - apart from the support you got from your fellow studio holders. Things gradually developed, with an increasing awareness of the needs of craft practices at all stages, and after Vanessa [Swann, CEO of Cockpit Arts] arrived in 2002, things really started to change."

The other major attraction of Cockpit Arts for Jane was the bi-annual Open Studio events. Jane says she had held similar events in her previous work spaces, but she couldn't offer the draw of 170+ craft businesses, all selling direct from their studios on the same day. "I realised it would be a great retail opportunity for my business, in a great location in central London," Jane explains. "I'd be able to offer my clients something more interesting than just coming to see my work. And that proved to be the case. Each year, Open Studios just got better and better."

Before studying jewellery, Jane's early career had been in retail management at Heal's and Liberty's. This background was instrumental in helping her set up and run a thriving jewellery business in the 80s and 90s. It wasn't until she reached a crossroads in her career that she realised she needed advice. "It took me a long time to realise I shouldn't be embarrassed about asking for help," she admits. "I was quite 'businessy' to start with and I'd always been looked to as someone with a professional background. Realising I needed help was difficult but things had changed so much. Take computers, for instance. There weren't any when I started out in 1985! It was all paper and pen invoicing."



Cockpit's Business Development Team suggested she embarked on a couple of funded mentoring programmes. The first of these was the Future in the Making project, which Jane credits with helping her make the transition from aluminium jewellery into precious metals. "I used the project to develop my body of work," she explains.

However, the transition was not an easy one. "I went from being the best aluminium jeweller to being just another precious metal jeweller," she says. "It was a really difficult time." Again, the Business Development Team encouraged Jane to apply for the first ever Walpole Crafted programme. "At the time my business model and my admin processes were pretty basic," Jane recalls. "When I started to deal with precious metals, I really had to nail down where the money was going. My business processes needed a complete overhaul. In this way, the Crafted programme was really helpful."

The result was a new body of work in gold and precious materials, which she went on to exhibit in a major solo exhibition in 2013 at The Scottish Gallery. Jane redesigned her website, and now sells her work online as well as through major craft galleries throughout the world.

After 21 years, Jane moved out of her Cockpit studio early in 2015. "It seemed the right time to move on. I didn't want to leave but I was fed up with commuting from my home in west London," she explains. She now works in a purpose-built studio in her back yard. "The dust is still settling, and I'm still working out what that means for my work," she says. "I won't stop making jewellery, I'm full of ideas for the jewellery, but it would be nice to do some other things as well."

Jane may have moved her studio, but her ties to Cockpit Arts are still strong. "I used to think of myself as the Granny of Cockpit Arts," she smiles. "I'd come to my studio each day, shut the door and get on with my work. But since I've left I've realised how much I valued chatting with other makers. I've always liked and respected Cockpit and what they do. Vanessa's wonderful and I think it's a fantastic organisation. It's why I've become a trustee."

Jane is clearly passionate about her role as a trustee. She sees the work that Cockpit Arts does as even more important in today's environment. "In the end, if you don't have people making material things, what is it all for?" she emphasises. "London is a creatively vibrant city, and craft is a vital part of that. It's really important to have a craft presence in this area, for craftspeople to be making and working here, otherwise the danger is the only thing you could do in central London would be to buy a cup of coffee."



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Photographs: Alun Callender.