

## Tania Clarke Hall

- *Leather jewellery designer*



Tania Clarke Hall is an award-winning jeweller working in leather. Influenced by her background in chemistry and a love of Japanese design, Tania's bold and dramatic pieces are designed with a deceptively simple economy of line. She uses experimental and innovative techniques that continually push the boundaries of her medium and, as a result, has garnered much critical acclaim. Her work has been showcased internationally at leading art fairs and galleries, as well as being sold in the V&A, Tate Britain, Tate Modern, The Museum of Arts & Design, New York and Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

Tania's relationship with Cockpit Arts goes back to her student days at Middlesex University where she was studying for a BA in jewellery. In 2007 she did her placement year at Cockpit, which included three months with renowned leather designer Paul Seville. "That's where I learnt my basic leatherworking techniques," she explains. "From Paul I learnt how to cut and edge dye leather, where to find the best suppliers and what made a quality leather item. During the same year I was also able to connect with jewellers Jane Adam and Kelvin Birk," she continues. "Kelvin was an absolute star and was very supportive in the early days. It was really through him that I became comfortable with the idea that, outside the bubble of university, jewellery could be both conceptual and playful. I think it's fair to say that if it hadn't been for Cockpit Arts and my year's placement, I probably wouldn't be doing what I am today."

Tania graduated from Middlesex in 2008 with a 1st class BA Hons in Jewellery, and initially started working from her kitchen table. "It was good. I could continue where I left off at Middlesex without having the financial restraints of paying for a studio," she says. "Creatively it was freeing, but it did mean I had to tidy up at the end of every day because I had two young children!"

In the summer of 2009 Tania took a stand at Treasure in Covent Garden Flower Market. The show was a real success, and she secured orders from both the V&A and Tate Modern. It was at this point that she realised she had a viable business, and began to consider getting a dedicated studio space. "I knew if I could get myself into Cockpit, then I'd made it," she smiles. She applied at the end of summer and moved into a shared studio at Cockpit's Holborn incubator just before the Christmas Open Studios in 2009. "The Open Studios event went really well," she says. "It confirmed to me that I was in the right place and in front of the right audience."

Towards the end of Tania's first year, Cockpit put a call out for studio holders to design an exclusive collection for the Southbank Centre Shop. It proved to be a fruitful collaboration early on in Tania's career, and lead to a range of Festival necklaces that she still sells as part of her core collections today. "At the time, I was still in the early days of understanding how to work with retail clients," she says. "Abigail [Branagan, then Business Development Manager at Cockpit] was a really good sounding board in terms of helping me put the collections together."



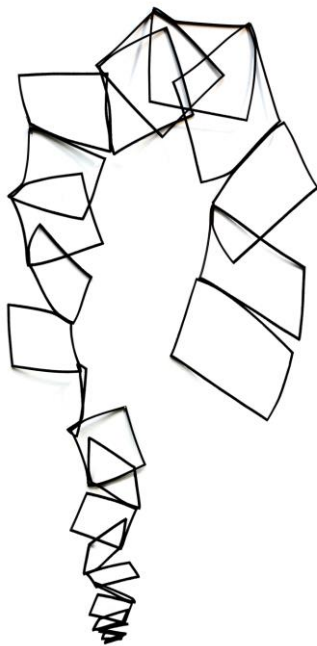
Over the years support has also come from her fellow studio holders. When preparing for big shows like the NYNow Gift Fair, for example, there are often Cockpit designers who have already attended and can share their experiences. "There's a support network here at Cockpit," Tania confirms. "With NYNow it would have been much trickier for me if there hadn't been people who'd done it before."

Similarly, when Tania wanted her logo and postcards redesigned in time for Christmas last year, she was able to call in the skills of graphic designer Craig Yamey, who has a studio on the second floor. "Being part of Cockpit Craig was already familiar with my work and he was able to generate something absolutely spot on for me," she says.

Tania recently relocated to the East Wing of Holborn; a move that she feels has had a profound effect on her practice. She now works alongside fine jewellers Stepan Terteryan and Sarah Warsop and says that it's good being around like-minded designers. "It's definitely reaffirmed my design aesthetic and has helped me reformulate some of my ideas," she says. "It's also great being able to share techniques. I had to think about a new type of clasp for a piece that I'd designed and with Stepan's help I got a really good solution. What's nice is that I can very easily ask questions of, and be stimulated by, my fellow studio holders."

Since moving, Tania has also been in the process of reassessing her business. Earlier this year she spent time with Madeleine Furness, Cockpit's Business Incubation Programme Manager, revisiting her prices and reworking her costings. "With Cockpit's help, there has been a complete mind shift in how I perceive my work," she explains. "Now it's a piece of design *before* it's a piece of leather." This mind shift has enabled her to increase the price point of her core collections and as a result she's seen her sales through galleries increase.

This has had a significant knock-on effect for Tania's working practice. "It's given me the confidence to take a step back and start experimenting again," she explains. "It's partly to do with the timing of where I am in my making life, but it's also down to the fact that I now feel much more confident that my pieces are priced correctly and are increasingly with the right galleries. Two years ago I would never have been able to do that. Next year is going to be the time when I revisit how I use leather. I'm really looking forward to going back into experimental mode!"



[www.taniacларkehall.com](http://www.taniacларkehall.com)

Portrait photo: Jamie Trounce