

Interview with Junko Mori

What is it about metal that first attracted you to it and what was the route that you took to become a metal smith?

I did my first BA in Japan, in 3D design; I had to go through all the different materials and metal was the most difficult one for me; I couldn't even raise a ball! - I hated it to be honest! It was like a relationship between a boyfriend and a girlfriend, if there is a very difficult man - you get more attracted! Then I got more and more into blacksmithing because of the immediate response from the material; you heat it up, bend it quickly and if it's not red or hot enough you can't bend or work it. I graduated with a BA in Japan but I wasn't confident enough to say I'm a professional artist; I wanted to learn more skills. I found a job in a welding company and spent a year in the company of a 70 year-old boss and learned most of my welding skills there. Then I decided to study more – just blacksmithing and I found Britain very interesting. About 7-8 years ago, I came to London and went to see the New Designers show- it was fascinating.. so fascinating. So I decided to study at Camberwell for two years. When I graduated, I got onto the Next Move Scheme and I spent two years in Liverpool as an artist in residence. That was the starting point of my professional career.

Can you describe your production processes from the initial idea, to how you choose the materials and technologies right through to the end product.

When I was in Japan I was unconsciously searching a group of lots and lots of small components – it was unconscious – I couldn't explain why. As soon as I started at Camberwell, all the tutors asked me 'why, why, why' – non-stop, so I had to explain, I realised why; when I was a kid, I had a microscope and I collected lots of dirty pond water to see it through the microscope, it was beautiful. One day I found some little creatures dividing themselves and growing. I really liked that infinite possibility of the growing form; it was non-stop, you can't stop them! That is what I realised was at the very core of my concept 'Growing form'; my metal is like that. I normally make about 100 components by hand because if you look at a tree, it's like a group of leaves, but if you look carefully, each leaf has a different shape, so that was my catalyst for getting into forging, because if you hand-forge each component, each one is slightly different and when it is assembled into one shape it creates something that is more and more organic. I actually tried before with ready-made nails and bolts nuts, but it didn't look like what I wanted. The key element for the process is when to stop, it could be forever; I could - like - cover this planet to be honest with you with my component! Something like that really fascinates me and I never draw a final shape, just straight on working into the material and weld the growing shape and then once I am satisfied at a certain level, I say 'That's it, I've got to stop now'.

What role does functionality play in your work?

Very simple answer to that; it doesn't at all. Lots of people believe that craft equals functionality or craft equals domestic objects, but for me, craft is a skill; craftspeople have a skill to make objects. For me fine art is a philosophy about aesthetic form, but craft is a making skill and an obsession with a material as well.

What do you want to communicate about contemporary metalwork through the work that you've selected for the exhibition?

I don't want to use my work as a vehicle to send a message from me to the audience. I think that there are many answers – everyone could communicate with my work – not with me, just directly with my work.

What are your hopes for the future of metalwork and what impact do you hope your work will have on that?

I decided to show a blacksmithing piece because I think blacksmithing in this country is absolutely amazing but it has never been an academic subject and actually I'm quite unhappy about that. When I was in my country, I thought there was lots and lots of education about blacksmithing and that it was more popular, in a way – it is popular at the domestic level - but no one really examines what blacksmithing is about and what is the absolute beauty about it – why is silver smithing and jewellery always top, at the high end of academic subjects – why not blacksmithing? It's a beautiful material. I hope, through this exhibition, people can find the possibilities of using steel and can appreciate more hand-forged steel – not the manufactured fence or gate.

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