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AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHELLE MCKINNEY

Michelle McKinney is based in rural Leicestershire, she works with ultra-fine woven metal, using delicate firing techniques to create elegant sculptures that mirror the natural cycles of life. Here, Michelle shares the craftsmanship behind her intricate process, what inspires her compositions, and her notable collaborations.

CG How have your studies in jewellery design and silversmithing influenced your artistic practice, and what made you pursue fine art?

MM A lot of the skills I learnt as a jeweller I still use in my practice today in the way that I manipulate and colour the metal. I enjoyed jewellery making but I wanted to work on a larger scale and in a way that would allow me to tell stories with my art.

CG What are your primary sources of inspiration for your compositions? Are there any recurring themes you explore?

MM Nature in all its forms is my primary source of inspiration I come back to it time and time again. I like to explore themes of strength and fragility and the constant cycle of life and more recently the human form and its connection with the natural world.

CG Could you describe your process of creating compositions, particularly your technique of firing ultra-fine woven metals?

MM The woven metal itself is translucent and it is this attribute I like to emphasise to give my work its ethereal qualities. The metal is coloured just by the application of heat.



CG Can you elaborate on how you achieve the variations in colour of your materials, as seen in 'Floating Forest'?

MM To colour my work I have found, over the years a number of techniques some using a constant application of heat and others almost like painting but with the flame of a blowtorch.

CG What initially drew you to this medium and, how do these materials engage viewers?

MM I was drawn to the translucent quality of the metal mesh as it allowed me to build up layers so that the viewer is looking at the surface but also inside the artwork.

CG What ongoing challenge do you face with your materials or approach?

MM The metal mesh is very fragile so I am often trying to find ways to sculpt with the very fine meshes so that they can also be self-supporting, sometimes adding wire supports or textures and folds add extra strength without losing the delicacy of the material.

CG Your work often explores the tension between opposites, such as fragility and strength, movement and stillness.



How do you balance these themes in your compositions and, what contrasts are you aiming to highlight?

MM I like to create works that are incredibly delicate in their form but that are made of a material like stainless steel which is known for its strength. I like the contrast between subject matter and materials. I am often trying to create a sense of natural movement within my compositions with the negative space being as important as the sculptural elements within the frame.

CG What do you hope to evoke in viewers when they interact with your pieces?

MM I like my work to engage the viewer so that they are drawn into the small details. I hope viewing my work creates a pause in a busy world – a moment to contemplate the joy of the natural world around us.

CG Can you discuss the inspiration behind your Elemental series, and how you choose each element to incorporate, such as your piece 'Fade'?

MM For the Elemental series of works I was exploring textures – finding new ways to manipulate the metal mesh and distort its surface. I was also interested in layering



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different forms together to create new organic shapes. For the pieces 'Fade' I wanted to show the passage of time in a circular composition with the colours fading from rich and vibrant to pale and transparent echoing the beginning and the end of life.

CG What is the effect you hope to achieve through suspending each element in your artworks?

MM I enjoy experimenting with suspending my sculptural artworks as I like the idea of them floating in suspended animation – capturing a moment.

CG Can you share more about your experience with commissions, including notable projects and collaborations like those with British Council and Issey Miyake?

MM I have been lucky enough to collaborate with a number of interesting designers most recently I created a collection of copper roses for the windows of Christian Dior in Paris. I have also created the ingredients for a Tiffany perfume in woven metal. I completed two large hanging ceiling installations for two Michelin star restaurants in central London and was also asked to create an artwork inspired by the flowers of Hyde Park that now hangs in the restaurant of the Dorchester Hotel.



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