



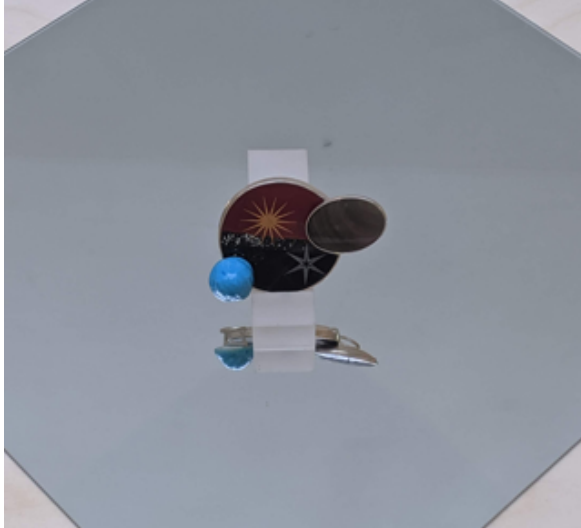
## Exhibition Review: Space/Craft: An eye into Stephen Bottomley's praxis

**18 Nov 2019**

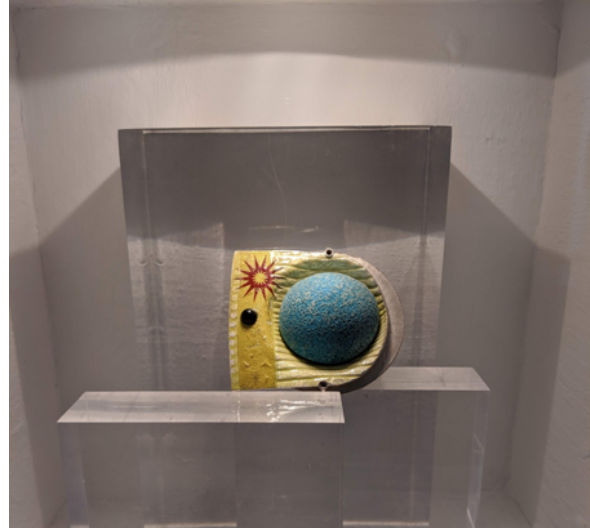
**by Nantia Koulidou**

In the contemporary world many of us leave our homelands to temporary or permanently live elsewhere. Many of us live and work between places constantly probing our identity. We are not sure what to do about it. We don't know indeed whether to enjoy or be afraid of, to put everything in order or to revel in rebellion, or maybe to escape into the outer space.

The Space/Craft exhibition is the journey of Stephen Bottomley's praxis presented as a timeline of his experiences with different places, materials, techniques and textures. Traces of his craft practice offer numerous answers on how he copes with changes in space and time by questioning the connection between what is familiar and rather traditional and what is unknown or rather new.



Space (2018)



Pulp (2018)

Bottomley is known for his hand-made precious metal vitreous enamel jewellery. From the early works including the Tech-Tile collection, he experimented with small architectural forms. The material and geometrical structures of Brooches such as Black Traces (2014) create new spaces within and shows his longstanding fascination with patterns and textures on metal.

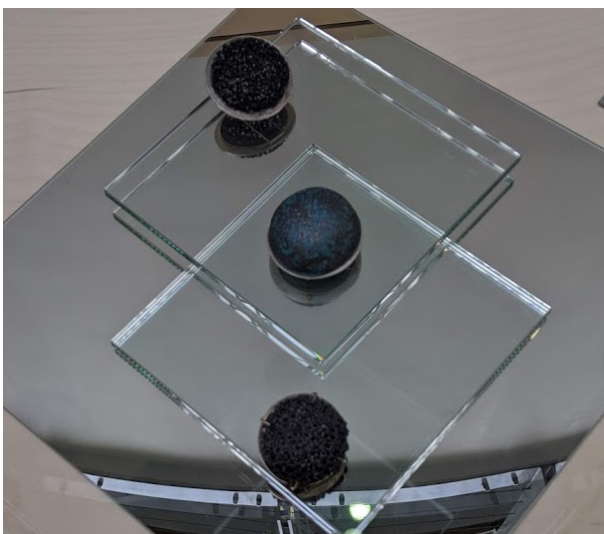
Two pieces that particularly stand out are Space (2018) and Pulp (2018) that present at glance two sets of matching pieces. Both brooches exhibit unique charm. The pieces successfully give us a sense of movement or continuous rotation. They combine Bottomley's vitreous enamel jewellery in an intriguing combination of forms, colours and materials. Bottomley's work reminds us that some stars don't stand alone in the dark sky, but are actually suns that can be paired with each other and can have different colours. The pieces seems to be the result of a perfect balance between the forward motion of a planet in space and the gravitational pull on it from another body in space, such as a large planet or star.

### **What holds the stars together? What is the gravitational force in Bottomley's work?**

Our gravity is what makes us connected to things. I am thinking how the binary stars have these connections. Maybe in Stephens work we can think about the gravity that connects Dark Moon (2015) Extra Solar (2019) or Penumbra (2017) together. Some of the stars that we are observing are lights that have already gone out. The star even though we can see its light, it might actually already be destroyed/ burnt out? It takes a long time for the light to travel to reach our eyes and in fact when we look at the stars, we are looking at history.



Stella 2014



(top to bottom)  
Dark Moon (2015), Extra Solar (2019), Penumbra (2017)



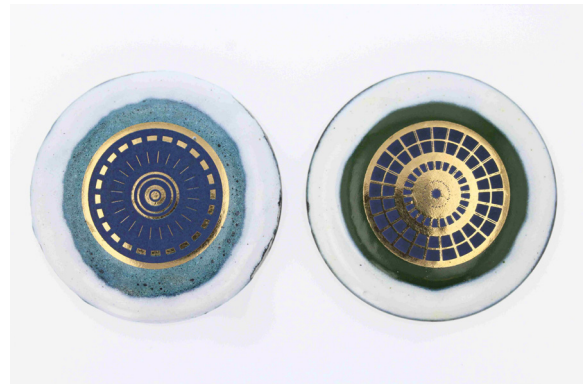
Black Diamond 2012



Allochtonous Brooch (2016)



Space/Craft Exhibition, 2019



S Bottomley, Watchers (2018)

Yet the exhibition does not overlook the immeasurable distances that make space so out of reach: the connectedness explored in Bottomley's work also offer a sense of escapism. The exhibition 'Like a rolling stone' (2018), co-curated with Susan Cross in Edinburgh, explores the themes of relocation, transplantation, camouflage, identity and material. Stones form, move, wear out. In the work *Allochthonous* (2016), Bottomley draws inspiration from materials found at the Scottish seashore to make a brooch that found a new place. The word *allochthonous* derives from the *allo* - "other" and the greek word *khthon* - "earth" + *ous*. The stone is smooth, like a pebble; it is weathered by time and washed from the sea. It is not a coincidence that the peddle is not polished and enclosed in a cage-like brooch; as a single entity in the blue ocean.

Among the many attempts to make us think about space + craft, we looked at the outer space, the oceanic escape, the architectural space. There is one approach to follow that links the studio space and the materials' experimentation. This road was taken by Bottomley in this collection *Various Studio Samples* (2017-19) *Watcher(s)* (2018) and *Spiral eye* (2017). These objects enter an incessant dialogue with tradition and technique, which gives us various perspectives on how to look at them. I have chosen to look at them as ways as making pathways in embellishing metal by enamelling, material-led experiments and Egyptian symbolism. These pieces can be seen simply as excavations of Stephen's studio practice.



## SPACE/CRAFT

was exhibited at Vittoria Street Gallery,  
Birmingham School of Jewellery.

Monday 14th Oct – Friday 1st Nov 2019.

**Stephen Bottomley** is a Head of School and Professor of Jewellery Cultures and Innovation at Birmingham City University (BCU) and is currently co-chair of 'Craft Cultures' research cluster. He was previously Head of Department at the University of Edinburgh / Edinburgh College of Art (2008-17), Chair of the UK Association for Contemporary Jewellery (2005-07). Trained at the Royal College of Art (MPhil 1999-2001), the University of Brighton (MA 1996-98)-with an influential exchange to Rhode Island School of Design (1998) his first degree was at West Surrey College of Art and Design (BA Hons 1986-89). Bottomley's jewellery is in collections at the National Museums Scotland, British Museum, South East Arts Collection and Royal College of Art.

**Nantia Koulidou** is a design researcher with a focus on connecting technology to peoples' lives in meaningful ways. She is currently a Senior Research Associate in the Enabling Ongoingness project at the University of Northumbria. She completed her doctoral studies in digital jewellery from Northumbria University (2015-2018), a MSc degree in IT Product Design from the University of Southern Denmark (2012-2014), a training in silversmithing (2011-2012) and a Diploma in Architecture from Aristotle University in Greece (2014-2011). Koulidou's research practice explores and reconsiders the role of digital jewellery as objects that combines contemporary jewellery practices and digital technology. She actively presents and exhibits her work nationally and internationally.