

RECYCLING AND SHOUTING

Zie Smith

Studying the MA Multidisciplinary Printmaking course made a significant impact on my practice and understanding of myself as an artist.

My work can be neatly summarised using two words: shouting and recycling (Figs. 1-2). Protest is an essential component of my practice and I use it to communicate around social issues using found and recycled materials. Being heavily inspired by the DIY punk movement, concerned about my impact upon the environment, and having a low-income background have meant that high-quality art materials often aren't available to me unless they are gifted or scavenged. This forced me to take an experimental, non-traditional approach to making work, which became a cornerstone of my practice.

The MA enabled me to explore new processes within these parameters, but also to incorporate other skills, materials, and processes, such as textiles and embroidery. Additionally, I used my time on the course to build a stronger brand for myself as a freelance artist.

Since completing the course, my printmaking practice has somewhat dwindled. I have instead been focussing on exploring textile processes in greater depth.

BEFORE THE MA

Before studying the course, I had graduated from a degree in Visual Communication, specialising in Illustration, and was teaching at the University of Wolverhampton. I was primarily making posters and zines concerning social issues; from environmental protection, to government corruption (see Figures 2-3)

DURING THE MA: CARDS

At the start of the course, I developed a set of playing cards based around my experience of living with chronic pain and being asked to rate my pain on a scale of one to ten. I often found this frustrating as it is difficult to quantify something that is relative to personal tolerance and lived experience.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Figure titles and information:

Figure 1: Eat a Landlord. Screenprint. 2022.
 Figure 2: Waste Not. Multimedia installation at Wolverhampton School of Art. 2019.
 Figure 3: Corruption, Bab. Risograph. 2021

I devised a scale that compared the numbers to a series of tongue-in-cheek phrases such as “mismatched skeleton” and “deflated balloon” in an attempt to contextualise the numbers. The aim of the cards was to have a physical item that could be used to communicate and contextualise pain to others, without having to acknowledge specific symptoms and thus avoid acknowledging the pain to the point where it becomes overwhelming. The cards were accompanied by a short zine, entitled “Rules of Play”, explaining each term, as shown in Fig. 4.



Figure 4

I chose to print the cards using stone lithography (Fig. 5). This was a complex, lengthy and unfamiliar process, especially as I tended to favour “faster” methods of printmaking, such as screenprint and risograph. I wanted to significantly slow the printmaking process down to make a set of cards which felt careful and considered. I was used to making work which responded to current events which come and go quickly. Pain has been a constant for much of my life, and it felt right to make work about it that granted the time and space to reflect upon my experience with it and its impact upon my life.



Figure 5

I wanted to accompany the paper sets of cards with wearable objects that would subtly communicate a pain level to those close to the wearer to make them aware of their capabilities and limitations. I made a set of enamelled copper pin badges by screenprinting a resist onto the copper, etching it in acid, and sifting enamel powder over the top. After firing, I wore down the enamel with a stone to reveal the copper linework underneath (Fig. 6). Like the lithographs, this was a time-consuming and physically challenging process. In the process of creating something to communicate pain to others, I was becoming increasingly aware of my own physical limitations.



Figure 6

DURING THE MA: TEXTILES

I then began experimenting with printed garments. I did a workshop at the Centre for Print Research during the State of Print’s residency. I created a series of garments from discarded hospital gowns (Fig. 8) to wear to the IMPACT12 conference opening ceremony (Fig. 9). The focal piece was a battle jacket adorned with screen-printed patches and laser-engraved acrylic buttons. A battle jacket is a jacket customised with pins and patches, popular in punk and heavy metal scenes, generally aiming to communicate the wearer’s musical interests, political views, and identity. This led me to begin reflecting upon the battle jacket as a concept, and my relationship to them, having created several since my teens.



Figure 7

Since moving from Wolverhampton to Bristol, I had been reflecting more and more upon my experience as a working-class person from a deprived area of the UK. I was finding it difficult to communicate my experience accurately, and getting increasingly frustrated with rising living costs, stagnating wages, and the ever-widening class divide. I decided my final MA project would be to create a pair of battle jackets expressing the feelings I had around the topic (Fig. 10). I was given an old, moth-eaten coat and jacket that were destined for the bin. I then created digitally embroidered patches which I sewed onto the jacket, screenprinted on the sleeves, and created embroidered buttons. I

Figure 4: Chronic Pain Playing Cards with packaging and zine. Stone lithograph. 2021 - 2022.

Figure 5: Stone lithograph process. 2022.

Figure 6: Etched and then enamelled brooches, 2022

Figure 7: Enamel brooches in design of Chronic Pain Playing Cards, 2022

used laser engraving to add imagery to the coat (Fig. 11). The choice to use embroidery was more than a purely aesthetic one, it served as a love letter to my working-class identity and the skills I had learned from the women in my family, who used these skills to fix, mend, and create clothing in times where they couldn't afford to, and equipped me to do the same.

After the MA

Since completing my masters, I have focussed on discovering new ways of engaging with textiles and fibre arts. I joined the Avon Guild of Spinners, Weavers, and Dyers and have been learning to spin and dye yarn (Fig. 12). I work the yarn I spin into knitted garments. I use my illustration skills to draft patterns to create unique, wearable artworks, and am constantly learning new methods of making. These crafts have rich and complex histories, from different parts of the globe, and this is a deeply fascinating rabbit-hole to have fallen into. Whilst I don't currently have the financial means to access proper printmaking facilities, I am hoping to return to printing soon so I can continue to merge these parts of my practice.

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Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

Figure 8: Hospital gown before being used to make the State of Print garments.
 Figure 9: State of Print outfit
 Figure 10: Bread and Fucking Roses, eh. 2022-2023. Mixed media jacket.

AUTHOR

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Zie is a queer, disabled artist, writer, and educator. They graduated from their MA in Multidisciplinary Printmaking in January 2023, and work as a freelance artist, university support worker, and private tutor. They graduated in 2019 from a degree in Visual Communication (Illustration) at the University of Wolverhampton, before going on to teach at the same University for several years before moving to Bristol to complete their MA. They have sold their work in a variety of shops around Bristol, the West Midlands, and the South West. Their work has been published in journals such as Inspire FE, and The Blue Notebook.

Zie’s practice uses artwork as a form of communication and protest around social issues. Their work incorporates textiles, posters, prints and wearable items. Zie is interested in exploring the relationship between the printed image and textiles, and how textiles can be used to communicate. They predominantly make work with a DIY punk aesthetic, using natural fibres and recycled materials.

Zie has a research interest in queer identity and communication. Previously, Zie’s research has included the issues with and impact of the printed image within the animal rights movement, and the significance of zines and self-publishing within the LGBTQ+ community, with a focus on lesbian and sapphic identity.

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Figure 11



Figure 12

Figure 11: Class. Engraved coat. 2022 - 2023.

Figure 12: Handspun merino yarn. 2023.

IMAGE GALLERY



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Figure 9: State of Print outfit

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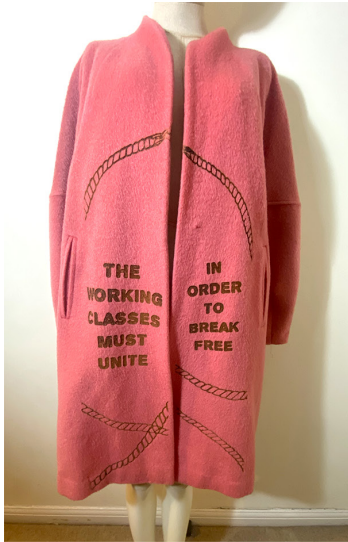


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