



Meet The Artist: Seeun Kim

During Artweeks, Wantage resident Seeun Kim is exhibiting her Oxford collection, a series of 100 brooches inspired by time spent in Oxford as an art educator trainee, and visits to the Pitt Rivers Museum, the Oxford University of Natural History, the Ashmolean and the Bodleian Libraries.

“I really appreciate that the museums here are free, and open to everyone,” she says. “It isn’t the case in most places.”

Seeun grew up in South Korea, learnt jewellery making in Japan before moving to the UK in her late twenties to first learn English in Oxford. “My grandparents travelled all over world for their business, she continues, but of all the places hey had been, Oxford was their favourite. I remember seeing a picture of them when I was small that dates back fifty years: it had Christchurch in the background. They used to talk about the talented people here and the beauty of the city and the university.

In Korea, after the war in the 1950s everything was rebuilt so there was very little traditional architecture. I thought they were joking when they told me how old the buildings were here – I couldn’t believe anything was even 100 years old and I really wanted to come and see for myself!”

Seeun describes how different the UK was when she first arrived in 2016, compared to anything she had experienced in South Korea or Japan. “It was wonderfully multicultural – I’d never seen such variety of people – and it was amazing to see the



history in the street. I was always interested in social matters and different people’s perspectives and there was so much to learn!”

Seeun next pursued a Master of Arts at the Royal College of Art in London. Move recently she has studied Education/Art Teacher Practice at Oxford Brookes and credits her tutors Rachel Payne and Dionne Freeman with encouraging her to make the most of Oxford’s treasures.

“I particularly love all the natural gemstones in the University of Oxford Natural History Museum,” she smiles. “They’re amazing – it is no wonder they have been valued by our ancestors, and cultures throughout time. I also loved the Alfred jewel in the Ashmolean of course – it’s a wonder that people could make such incredible jewellery so long ago and that it still survives today – and the Victorian mourning jewellery in the Pitt Rivers,” she says. During the Victorian era it was common for close relatives of the deceased to wear special jewellery alongside their dark or black mourning clothes or widows’ weeds. These brooches, rings and bracelets often incorporated dark stones like jet and were also made using hair taken from their dead relative’s head. ▶





In Seeun's art practice, she researches cultures, other countries, and their traditional ornamentation. She then uses her creations to communicate her many ideas, balancing the traditional with the modern, a balance she appreciates finding in the UK perhaps more than in her home country of South Korea or in Japan, where she lived before moving to Oxford. Concerned that the younger generations are setting aside traditional values to embrace the new, Seeun is interested in social art that draws on the different social agendas and challenges of different countries and global societies. As a craftswoman, she highly values hand-crafted artefacts and the human hand as a gift from human evolution which can create a unique complexity that a machine cannot imitate.

Her Oxford Collection, building on her previous collections inspired by traditional ornaments of the Silla dynasty in Korea (57 BCE – 935CE), by Victorian heritage in the West, combines gemstones – both natural and manmade using resin, mother-of-pearl, and handmade papers - with brass worked into the shapes of object in the Oxford Museums. "I use brass because I want to break the old prejudice

that only materials like gold and rubies have value. I want to show that other things can be beautiful, highly prized, and yet accessible to all. Like William Morris, I believe art should be for everyone."

Each brooch is delicate, imaginatively textured, and then painted to match the colour of brass or a green patina so that they will not tarnish. With the patterning drawn from flowers, insects, ferns and other foliage, each might have been plucked from ancient history or a Tolkienesque fantasy story – and yet, crafted in the twenty-first century, reminds us what is important today.

During Artweeks, Seeun Kim is exhibiting the Oxford 100 collection, which are not for sale, along with other jewellery for everyday wear in her jewellery school/cosy art gallery on Mill Street in the heart of Wantage (Artweeks venue 491) where bright and fun gemstone-inspired paintings line the walls.

For more information on Seeun's venue and several more within walking distance, visit artweeks.org

"I use brass because I want to break the old prejudice that only materials like gold and rubies have value"

