

Monday 13 January 2025 online talk Jo Mabbutt – Gilded Glories

Jo began with a brief history of gilded decoration – gold leaf can be attached to virtually anything to give the “illusion of opulence” – from buildings to paintings, glass to food, even people! There’s an illustration of creating gold leaf in an Egyptian tomb, and the process is much the same today – with a little added mechanisation.

Jo then told us about her unconventional route to her present work. After City & Guilds training, she taught in Further Education for 8 years, before being made redundant. She blew her redundancy money on a series of disparate courses at the suggestion of an inspirational tutor at Central St Martins. Lacking a university degree and unable to qualify as a primary school teacher due to the lack of an O-level, by trial and error she built her own career by creating unique pieces, combining the techniques suggested by her tutor.



She works only with vintage and antique lace, tatting and crochet, but gets great use from the tiniest scraps, sourcing them from textile fairs and online. She prints with them first, creating pictures and cards, before covering them in metal leaf and applying different levels of heat to produce a varied palette of colours.

The finished pieces are made into jewellery, Christmas decorations, small framed pictures – or applied to luxurious fabrics to make bags and hats (with the help of a skilled seamstress or milliner).



Jo talked us through the methods she uses to create the varied effects, discussing the results of different heat levels and the balance between changing colours and burning things to a crisp! She also uses a laser cutter to trace the shape of lace pieces,

cutting them in other materials to layer into brooches with gilded lace. Another method she uses is to print the gilded lace pattern on wood veneer which is laser-cut into simple shapes to form necklaces and earrings.

More recently, she's moved into gilding natural objects – dried flowers, seedheads, leaves and fir cones – and teaches workshops in these techniques as well as her gilded lace, as well as giving talks.

Initially selling her smaller pieces via craft fairs, she found it challenging to balance the needs of producing sufficient stock in advance without being left with too much unsold. As a result, she reduced the number of fairs she went to and began to seek out other outlets for her work.



Her membership of the London Livery company, the [Painter-Stainers Company](#), has led to excursions into high fashion – large collars, cuffs and gloves – or table settings for formal livery dinners. Much of the development of her business has

occurred through chance encounters – the latest hopefully leading to an introduction to fashion designer Zandra Rhodes. Watch this space!

Find more beautiful things on Jo's website:
<https://jomabbutt.co.uk/>