

Barbara Christie: Light Seeping Through Windows & Nora Fok: Cloud Nylon

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Contemporary Applied Arts' exhibition space was wonderfully serene this early Saturday morning as the sun tried to break through the clouds and light flooded through the skylights.



This was a perfect setting for Barbara Christie's retrospective, a show that brought together an amazing number of her pieces, many from private collections and her family archive. Her work needs no introduction as, in her decades in London as an artist and educator, she had become a pillar of the jewellery community. For those less familiar, she is known for the narratives of her pieces, the bold use of precious and semi-precious stones and, above all, the intensity of her making practices.



Her work is madly captivating and commands a second, third, fourth look to keep discovering a lonely rivet or a tiny figure, or to appreciate and bask in the intricate glory of a clasp that at first sight appeared to be the epitome of pared-down simplicity.

My favourite pieces were the ones with a story to be unravelled: little nuns and monks peering out of cathedral-like constructions, tiny men inhabiting miniature caves... These pieces are full of humour and joy and could have you sitting in front of the glass cabinets for hours, constructing imaginary life-stories for the characters.



Reading the visitors' book was itself an incredibly moving experience, filled as it was with so many personal messages to a fantastic jeweller and friend, an inspirational person and educator sorely missed by all that were lucky enough to be touched by her life and art.* The body of work left behind by Barbara constitutes a legendary legacy that will undoubtedly inspire countless generations of jewellers and artists alike.

*(N.b. Barbara Christie sadly passed away at the beginning of the year just before this exhibition opened)

By the time I reached the Lesley Craze Gallery just after lunch, the sun was gracing London with its full presence. Could I have been any luckier than to be able to experience Nora Fok's incredible creations in all their shimmering splendour?



Nora does not need precious metals for her work to shine. Her humble material (nylon microfilament) is an extension of her gentle and understated self which she has maintained despite the fame that has catapulted her wildly into the international world of contemporary jewellery. Her work does not need diamonds and pearls because it is so imbued with an exuberance and a *joie de vivre* that draws its inspirations from the simplest things in life. In a wonderful [short film](#), commissioned in 2007 by the Craft Council to showcase the six artists selected for the Jerwood Applied Artist Awards, Nora explains how she finds beauty in the natural world and everyday objects. She finds happiness in the thought that her work could inspire others to rediscover all the exciting small details of their immediate surroundings, too often lost to an increasingly busy and blinkered lifestyle.



This is made clear by pieces like 'Mathemagic', with a title that should spark a moment of reflection in many of us contemporary jewellers who, in striving to be innovative and break out of the mould, search for far-flung, and sometimes far-fetched, narratives while forgetting to look at the perfect little story that was in front of our eyes all along.



Gallery Assistant Rebecca Morrison was on hand to talk to us about the pieces and to let us handle a couple. It was incredible how a material so strong could be manipulated in such a way as to convey such ethereal fragility. Rebecca was also very proud to point out the 'Twenty Fifth' neckpiece, clear knotted nylon with 25 pearls, "a symbol of continuity with inner strength and beauty", created by Nora to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Lesley Craze Gallery.*

* (Quoted from the exhibition catalogue with the kind permission of the gallery)

What a lovely day spent in some of London's first sunshine of the year! Leaving Lesley Craze and walking back to the station, I reflected on how similar Barbara Christie and Nora Fok are as artists. There is always a magical sense of discovery in their pieces. It is art that sustains itself as it draws you back for more, as it calls for repeated observation. And in that, it has a meditative quality.

Both shows were put together with a humble simplicity that let the work shine. No gimmicks, no glitz: just a curatorial hand that, like that of a great designer has achieved seamless transparency. At the end of my visits, I was filled with a strangely tingling inner calm, a sense of excited well-being that comes from having experienced something truly, intrinsically, beautiful.

Article and photos by [Lieta Marziali](#) YBJ.