The Luxury Gap

Simon Forrester reports from Fair Luxury's Making Impact Symposium at Edinburgh University

Edinburgh University's classical sculpture-filled West Court Lecture Theatre is an imposing venue. However, the artefacts' age belied the tenor of the discussion at Fair Luxury's event which looked firmly to the future, and was packed with thought-provoking content delivered to an eager audience of makers, manufacturers, and even the odd retailer.

Fair Luxury was formed six years ago to understand Fairtrade/Fairmined and exchange knowledge. Once established, it wanted to share its discoveries... as now. We were welcomed by Mary Michel from the Incorporation of Goldsmiths (IoG), who introduced the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals; the framework for government, business and individuals designed to move everyone out of poverty, lifting the most deprived first.

The day centred around this framework, and in particular quality education and responsible consumption/production. A piece of jewellery will pass through many hands and many countries, and the day really made you consider the global perspective of what we do; the positive and negative impacts of our actions.

Emily Auckland, chair of UK SSD, presented a summary of the UK's progress against the goals, and the targets underpinning them. Sadly we're currently on track to achieve just a quarter of the 169 targets, so she asked us to consider our impact on the wider world, and change how we work and live in order to make a difference. Perhaps encourage our suppliers to adopt more sustainable business practices. As individuals (and SMEs) our impact may be small, but through working with others we can maximise positive benefits.

IoG's Ebba Goring explained the detailed resources available via its website www.ethicalmaking.org and encouraged delegates to pledge to make five positive changes. As Scotland's oldest consumer protection group, the Incorporation led the push to incorporate ethical making into every Scottish art college education programme, the first country worldwide to do this. The initiative involves the sole use of Fairtrade/Fairmined metals, supported by the IoG and the Pearson Silver Foundation, changing how students view this topic, how they work, and so changing the commercial sphere when they leave.

Stuart Pool from Nineteen48 presented initiatives to support artisanal miners and local economies in developing countries. The PACT/GIA 'Mines to Markets' programme helps artisanal and small-scale miners understand the true value of what they are extracting. A pilot programme in Tanzania had great success through developing a free hard-wearing gem guide for miners, coupled with a simple tray to help sort gemstones, which previously had been sold relatively unsorted, resulting in lost income for the community. www.SustainableGemstones.org

Designer Hannah Bedford confirmed that customers do ask about the source of jewellery. They look to our industry for reassurance – it's our job to provide it. Customers love to see how their jewellery is made or repaired – they want to buy into the story. If possible, feature a bench in plain view, or maybe show videos of jewellery you sell being made, or stone cutting and polishing. Don't be afraid to offer some fairtrade/fairmined products; the rest of your stock won't be judged – you're simply offering a choice.

I spoke about the NAJ's latest Better Business initiative (see p47 for full details), and how the Association supports start-ups through our new Foundation membership category. https://www.naj.co.uk/member-area/better-business The audience was very receptive to the idea of a framework against which to measure businesses, and to track progress in achieving sustainability goals.



Dr Sandra Wilson Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design said the next gold rush will be in landfill. Over the last 6,000 years of mining gold, we've extracted just over 171,000 metric tonnes, but half this extraction has been in the last 15 years to meet increasing demand from the electronics sector; for the first time in human history we're starting to consume gold. With only around 52,000 tonnes yet to mine on an economically viable level, we'll need to go back to waste electronics to source gold.

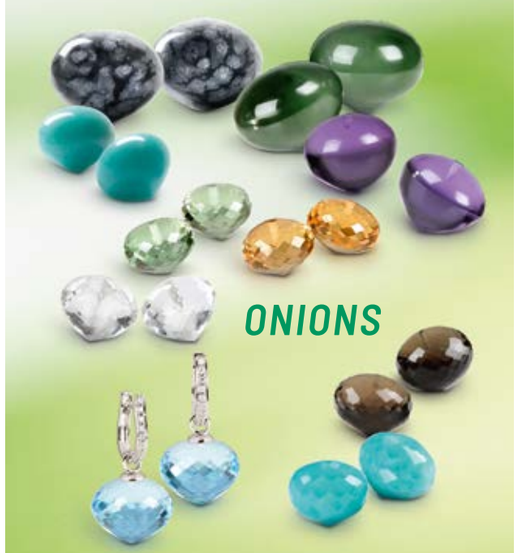
Only 11-15 per cent of metals are currently recovered from e-waste. While 30g of gold is recoverable from a tonne of ore, we can obtain 300g from a tonne of e-waste. Dr Wilson outlined the three current methods of metal recovery:

- Pyrometallurgy – industrial smelting of e-waste. Few centres can do this globally. There's a big CO_2 issue, but it's cheaper than the conventional mining process
- Hydrometallurgy – using aqueous acidic solutions to recover waste –good on smaller, local scale and no transportation issues.
- Biometallurgy – using bacteria and yeasts to recover precious metals. Molecular gold panning using acids.

Dr Wilson suggested a new chain of custody mark for jewellery made from e-waste, believing there's lots of scope to scale this up. Japan's Olympic Organising Committee has commitmed to produce all medals from e-waste.



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The Luxury Gap

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Chris Sangster from Scotgold www.scotgoldresources.com explained the small high-grade deposit of gold and silver near Cononish, on a 4,200 km2 estate where it's possible to pan gold from the burns. The chain of custody is handled via Edinburgh Assay Office. Leftover rock is carried away in water, and allowed to settle out in dams. Water is removed and damp 'sand' placed into natural looking glacial forms around 10m high. Longer term, the mine will have a life span of 8-15 years; and a Heritage centre is planned to provide local employment. The intention is to make the gold available to a range of makers longer term. Currently Sheila Fleet and Hamilton & Inches are the sole recipients.

We heard a presentation from Fashion Revolution, who asked the question "who made your jewellery?" If you don't know, how can you tell if it's ethically sourced, and what will you tell your customers? This initiative started after a clothing factory in Bangladesh collapsed, killing over 1,000 people. The people who make our goods are invisible to us. Perhaps your business should show its customers how their purchasing decisions are having a positive impact. www.fashionrevolution.org

Estelle Levin-Nally from Levin Sources summarised. Scotland leads the jewellery ethical discussion. There are significant challenges for the mineral extraction sector, and by working with refiners and manufacturers, makers and retailers, we can help motivate the value chain to use their business as a positive force for change. She felt it was great to see the focus on experimentation, and the questioning side of making ethical products. Delegates should start small and grow tall – don't be shy or intimidated. Ask "where do my 'ingredients' come from", inspire consumers to ask and be ready with a clear answer.

Gold Production

50% of gold goes into jewellery

65% is new-mined production, the balance is recycled

THE WORLD'S BIGGEST gold mine is actually a copper mine in Indonesia!

80% of the world's gold is produced using cyanide

Estelle's five tips:

- Finding the beauty in an act of sustainability
- Design out waste wherever you can
- Don't be complacent or accept the status quo. Don't accept no for an answer
- Make sustainability at the heart of all you do – it's your own process, own it
- Create a business manifesto and promote that to your value chain and customer base