



The brightly colored, interlocking, laminate shapes that form the perplexingly composed necklaces and brooches in Rebecca Hannon's recent exhibition *Contemporary Camouflage* are the result of investigations into the effects color has on form, and the complex configurations made possible through laser cutting and 3-D printing technologies. In this interview, Hannon shares details about her inquisitive approach to nonprecious materials, and illustrates the value of research opportunities that allow mid-career artists to thrive.

**Adriane:** Tell us about your background, where you are from, and where you live currently.

Rebecca Hannon: I am from suburban Washington, D.C., the "planned community" of Reston, Virginia. It was actually a pretty good plan, as low-income housing was built next to mansions; everyone grew up together and went to public school together. Our community was diverse and inclusive and we certainly all benefited from this richness. Since then I have moved cities or countries every five years, but I am currently at the seven-year mark in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

**When did you become interested in jewelry, and what sustains your interest as your career progresses?**

Rebecca Hannon: My high school art teacher invited me to be his metalsmithing assistant at Interlochen Center for the Arts. Although I wasn't much older than some campers, my world was blown open by the possibilities of making art jewelry. I remember he had a book of Hermann Jünger's jewelry. I thought I would never see anything so fantastic again and proceeded to redraw all of Jünger's pieces in my journal. I continue to work in this field because I usually have a research question I am pursuing, as well as exploring the strengths and limitations of new materials. Making adornment is the best way for me to answer these questions. I have also had a number of great opportunities in my career, and helping find opportunities or enabling the dreams of others also drives me.



**Between the time of your undergraduate studies at RISD and your Fulbright Scholarship to study in Munich, you worked as a goldsmith. What compelled you to pursue studio jewelry? Does your experience as a goldsmith retain any bearing on your practice?**

Rebecca Hannon: It is interesting to me that you see that as a divide—studio jewelry and goldsmithing. A goldsmith's training is definitely how I approach all aspects of my studio practice (and probably life!). For a bit of background—when I did my undergraduate degree at RISD, it was not yet the moment for “alternative materials.” Even use of stones was a bit frowned upon. We used mostly metals, and I received a solid technical education. Working as a goldsmith for five years in NYC taught me to work fast, and taught me about the responsibility of being entrusted with/setting a client's stone. I gleaned these new skills as well as having the luxurious opportunity to work with gold.

When I went to the Künste Akademie in Munich, it was a different moment in time. Dryer lint was being glue-gunned together, and it definitely took some time for me to forget some aspects of a traditional background and open up to

new possibilities in the field. I approach my work today with quotidian materials, as if they were precious. I am a stickler for craftsmanship when I teach foundation-year classes; students can always seek elsewhere for advocates of “sloppy craft.”

**Much of your work is made from nonprecious materials such as horsehair, eggshells, compact discs, Tyvek™, and, recently, plastic laminate. What draws you to a material, and how do you know when you’ve come across one that you want to work with?**

Rebecca Hannon: The root of my reason for turning toward alternate materials was color. When I made the switch, I found that all of these new materials held their own embedded stories. A used thimble speaks of women’s work, the lost art of repair, protection... These embedded stories continue to delight me, and often provide a rich foundation for a new work, but I am just back from three months in India, and I must say I am feeling a bit nostalgic for gold.



**How do you develop your work? Describe your process and what a day in your studio is like.**

Rebecca Hannon: Days in the studio are fleeting during the academic year, and intense and directed in summer. In recent years I have participated in residency programs, often as a way to divide the time between academia and studio immersion, as well as offering contact with new people and cultures, which feeds my work. I am always reading and writing to develop a structural framework I can build upon when I get in my studio. My studio days could be making new renderings on a computer, sitting in front of a laser cutter and trying to ignore the char smell, or doing fabrication and assembly in my studio in a shared artist’s collective.



**You are one of the 2015 recipients of a SNAG Mid-Career Award, which provides funding for professional development. What opportunity did you pursue, and what impact has this had on your practice?**

Rebecca Hannon: First, I am so thankful that SNAG created a Mid-Career Award, and now Susan Beech has also recently created a Mid-Career Grant. The years are long between “emerging artist” and “lifetime achievement,” and any encouragement or support helps us to thrive. My award allowed me to participate in a residency at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. I stepped away from jewelry and did an investigation of how 2-D surface pattern affects our perception of 3-D form. My line of inquiry was based on theories of protective coloration in nature, as well as dazzle camouflage used in WWI. I created a library of 3-D shapes, applied pattern to their surface, and printed monotype “backdrops.” The shapes were photographed in their new environments, and the 3-D world was made flat again. This series is still evolving and may eventually lead to a series of adornment.



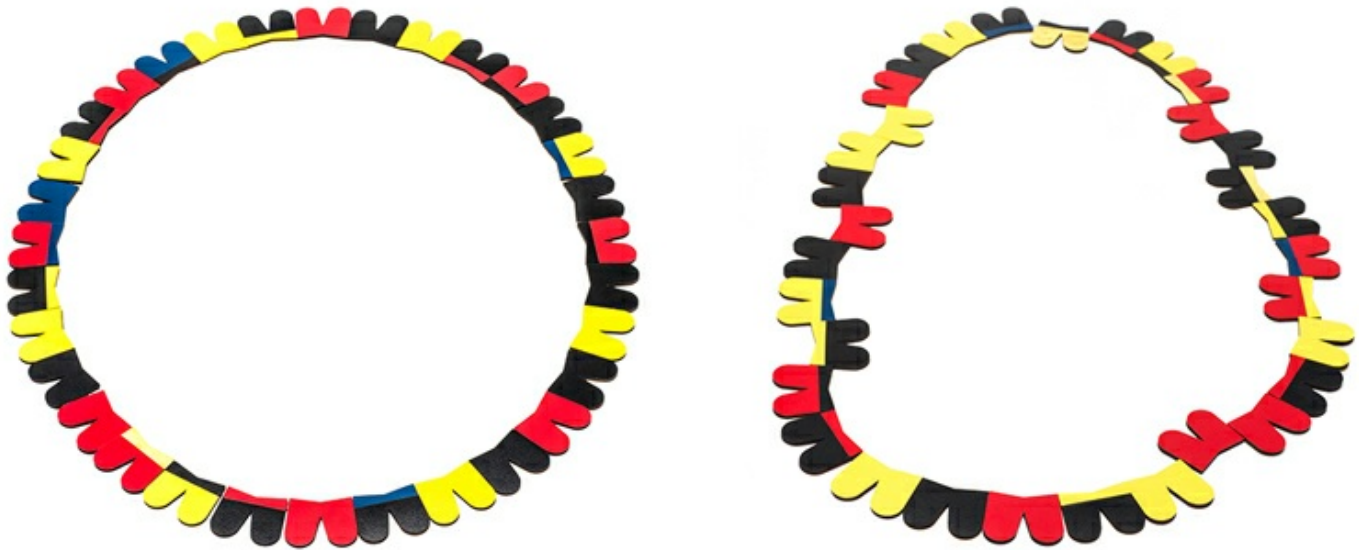
**What role does research play in your studio practice?**

Rebecca Hannon: Reading, thinking through craft, travel, finding ways to connect with people and their unique cultural histories all form the research vital to my studio practice.

**The works displayed in *Contemporary Camouflage* are made from colorful, interlocking laminate shapes. Can you elaborate on the research that led you to these forms and the significance of your material, shapes, and colors?**

Rebecca Hannon: Investigation into the relationship of color/pattern on form, and form as it relates to the human

body, has been my interest for many years. *Contemporary Camouflage* was an extension of the research I had begun at Banff in tandem with the colorful laser-cut laminate compositions I have made for a number of years. I explored notions of conceal/reveal found in the natural world, and the dazzling world of personal adornment. A favorite from this exhibition is the *Bloomers* neckpiece, which employs colorways on alternate sides of the piece that are found on both the coral snake and kingsnake. The coral snake is acutely poisonous and ringed in red, yellow, and black. The kingsnake is benign, but mimics his poisonous brethren with stripes of red ringed with black. So a traditional saying goes, “red touches yellow, kills a fellow, red next to black, venom lack.”



**The laminate necklaces, entitled *Crown of Thorns*, reference an American folk art (or tramp art) object, which is a puzzle-like configuration made by hand using wood from cigar boxes. The title also has religious connotations. Does religion factor into your interpretation of these forms?**

Rebecca Hannon: I love folk art and outsider art and really any works that are made by people who are passionate and intuitive about what they are creating. I stumbled upon a “Crown of Thorns” picture frame a few years ago, and after taking it apart to understand its construction and linking system, found a pattern that was endlessly variable. This discovery has led to an evolving series of neckpieces whose complexity I continually try to intensify. The traditional religious title is not a factor for me, and, amazingly, when I recently showed these works in Amsterdam, someone approached me and asked if the neckpieces were based on a Swedish beer brewer’s yeast ring. A quick Google search revealed this is also the same form.

**Your website contains many descriptive texts, not only about the conception of bodies of work but on**

**individual works as well. Is writing a crucial component of your practice?**

Rebecca Hannon: I may write a text or a proposal, but I usually approach new projects in an intuitive way. When complete, writing helps me stitch together various thoughts and encounters and it is often revelatory. Analyzing particular pieces when they are complete helps me recognize intention and connective threads.



**What have you read lately?**

[No One Belongs Here More Than You](#), by Miranda July, whose tales of an oddball 40-something woman are not hitting close to home. An article in *The Atlantic* turned me on to the work of Tristan Harris, and his “call to minimize distraction & respect users’ attention” in relation to our mobile devices. He encourages “ethical software design” and sheds light on forces competing to hijack our attention span. I had never considered this, but it affects my studio practice and life, so I am trying to be more mindful.

**Who are some artists whose works you admire?**

West Coast jeweler Karin Jones is making compelling work that makes me think, and Aurélie Guillaume is making delightful brooches that bring me joy.

**What is next for you? Exhibitions? Research?**

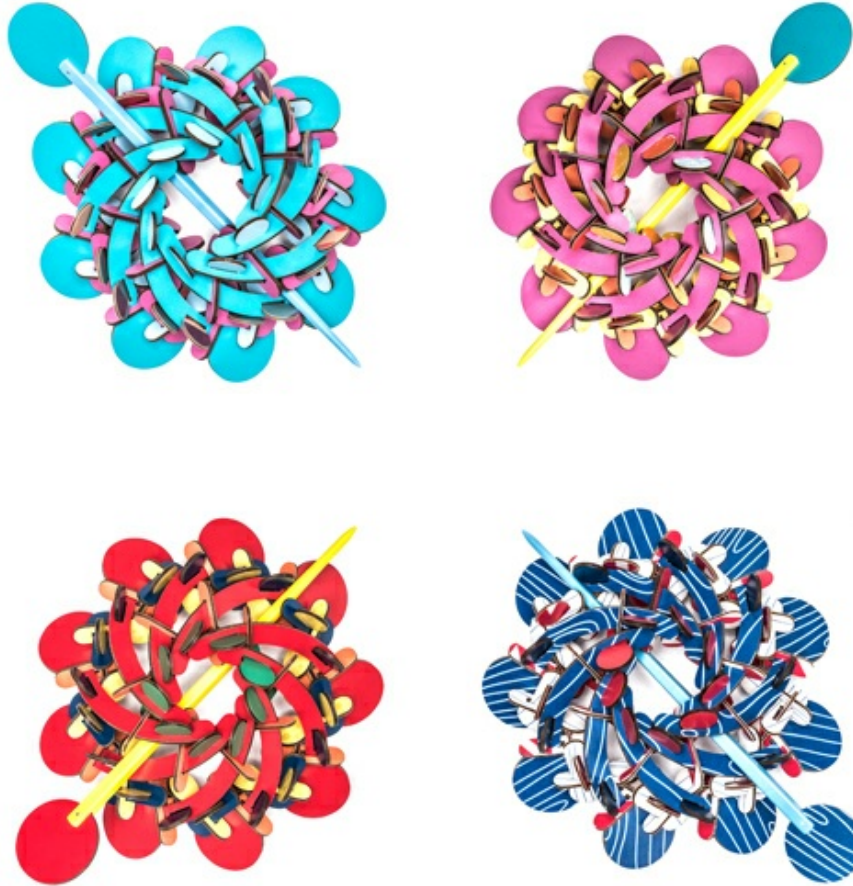
Rebecca Hannon: Yes, always! My current dream is to acquire my own laser cutter so I could be much more nimble



in my making.

**Thank you.**

*The works in the show range in price from \$180 to \$3,500.*



**INDEX IMAGE:** *Rebecca Hannon, Doxie Brooches, 2016, laminate, sterling silver, steel, 85 x 85 x 30 mm, photo: Katherine Nakaska*