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MIXED MEDIA STONE SETTING WITH PAINT AND FABRIC

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in the Art, Studio

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All requirements for graduation with Honors in the
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Stone setting is a jewellery technique that emerged contemporaneously with casting and other heat-based technologies, resulting in a long held relationship to heated processes in the formation of the metal armature for the stone. As the 2020 COVID-19 shutdown caused me to set aside my previous research on enamel painting and work within the constraints of having no access to a metal shop, I decided to explore a prior interest in stone setting through non-heat based mixed media.

My aim was to find a way to house stones in a secure alternative medium without requiring a torch or the metal shop environment. While it is possible to set stones within a small studio, the safety requirements for my apartment sent me in an exploratory direction. Lack of extensive ventilation or space to work outside determined that wood, cement, resin, silicon, and plastic were not viable options for me to complete the stone setting. During preliminary designs, I found the bezel wire on hand was too short and could not form an effective setting without solder. Through a series of tests on materials in my flat, I discovered that acrylic hard body paint was strong enough to encase stones without losing them within the paint itself. I experimented with a series of setting designs, and attempted to address several concerns. The first question was how deep did the stone need to be set into the paint. On one attempt the stone was secured quite firmly into the paint, however, this obscured the stone and it lost the sense of a setting. In my second attempt, I wrapped copper wire in a tab setting around a fragment of layered powder coat, embedding the wire and piece within a thick layer of acrylic paint. This resulted in a successful attachment, but the weight difference between stones and the powder coat was significant. The wire proved un-necessary, both structurally and design-wise. It didn't offer additional stability, and created an uneven base. The final tests involved directly setting stones into paint on both a silicon mat and fabric. They could then be peeled off or left with the stone in-situ. I poured the acrylic colours directly, evening out and marbling the paint with a scraper. A subsequent concern was how to control the flow of the paint. During the drying stage, the acrylic paint could be molded into a shape, but the tests left to dry undisturbed fared better in the long run. While possible to trim the edges of the paint panels after the drying process, I preferred the fluid forms created by the palette knife. I shaped copper strips to form a barrier that could be set down into the paint and removed in order to form a bezel appearance. To facilitate the connection to other fabric, I set mesh strips under the paint for better adherence and experimented with sewing them to the backing fabric both before and after paint application. After creating the paint-bezel, I applied additional layers of paint directly to the mesh. Multiple paint-bezelled stones were then placed into the paint and left to dry.

Though the situation was born out of necessity, I found that incorporating a fluid medium into stone setting offered me a spontaneity not usually found in traditional settings. The natural flexibility of the acrylic paint suited pieces relying on underlying structures, yet could also be adapted to create three-dimensionality. Utilizing the paint-bezel style allowed me to extend the setting process beyond small stones and incorporate an enameled piece in my final designs. I found the process quite satisfying and would like to continue to explore its application with both my enameled works and stones on a larger scale.