PAUL MCCLURE

BY BARBARA ISHERWOOD



IN THE WORLD OF PAUL MCCLURE, small is beautiful. In his compact studio in Toronto, the Bronfman Award—winning artist creates jewelry inspired by the human body as seen through the microscope.

"It's like the jewelry cave," says the artist of his home-based workspace. Originally sited in the basement of the central Toronto home he shares with husband, design director Tom Keogh, the studio moved up to the front room of the main floor about five years ago. "It's a little bit separate from the living quarters," says McClure. "It's nice because clients can come right into the studio without having to go into the home."

The well-organized space has the full range of equipment McClure needs to produce his eye-catching work. A bright-red workbench for fabrication is situated beside a frosted window that provides light and privacy at the same time. On the wall above the bench is a place to pin concept sketches, but the

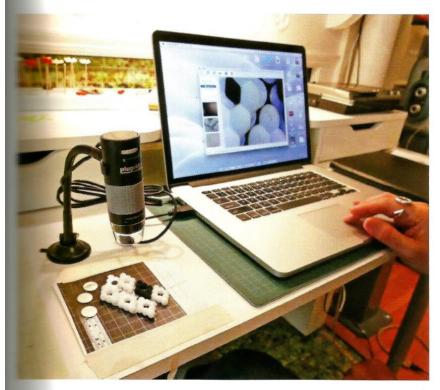
real designing comes through making. Gesturing towards the loosely assembled elements of a work in progress, McClure says, "I'm not one of those designers who does everything on paper, then goes to bench and makes it. I think through my hands. Things evolve at the workbench."

The opposite side of the studio accommodates "messier" work. "I have a ventilation system which can be applied to both fumes and particles, so I can do hand polishing at this bench," says McClure. In addition to the polishing lathe there's a rolling mill, hydraulic press, belt sander, soldering station with oxypropylene and acetylene tanks, and of course a wide assortment of hand tools. And let's not forget the "trusty old tree stump for forming. I've lugged that around for about 25 years," he says.

On the wall that once featured a fireplace is McClure's desk, and his library of books, arranged on shelves that surround the original mantelpiece. Not surprisingly, volumes on human biology, ranging from the standard *Gray's Anatomy* to the *Pop-Up Book* of the *Human Body*, figure prominently. The artist also has a comprehensive collection of books on the history of jewelry, references for a course that he developed for George Brown College, where he is professor and program coordinator of jewelry studies.

The desk houses McClure's laptop and a small microscope used primarily for fine measurements. A larger, high-powered digital microscope resides in a dust-free area. He views specimens through the LCD screen, and can take images and videos with the built-in digital camera. "Microscopy has always been





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Imposite: Paul McClure at fabrication bench in his fabrication.

a big part of my work, in terms of microbiology as inspiration," says the artist, who uses both primary sources and pre-existing imagery as starting points for designs.

McClure's interest in human anatomy dates back to his days as a graduate student at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. "It's been my anchor for 20-plus years," he says. "One of the fundamental ideas about my work is that it's about the body, and jewelry is for the body." Themes he has explored include biomolecules, cellular structures, and stem cell research and pathology—prompted in part by the AIDS crisis.

But while biology is the starting point, McClure's jewelry never descends into schematic pedantry. "If they look too much like a scientific model, they lose the emotion," he notes. In *Orthomyxovirus*, a brooch from his 2012 "Mutation" series, gleaming silver and brilliant red corundums are fashioned into a fantastic

three-part form, in which pattern and geometry are balanced by delightful asymmetry. Who knew the common flu could inspire such unexpected loveliness? Rings in the "Antibodies" series, in 3D printed steel and silver, are simple and striking, functioning as both pure design and as a symbol of the incredible powers the body has to heal itself. Morula, 2009, a hollow-form brooch, is fashioned in the shape of an embryonic stem cell. Slicing away part of the surface reveals internal patterns, while also suggesting the laboratory procedures entailed in the controversial practice of stem cell research. Brooches in the "Flora" series combine botanical and biological references, highlighting the universality of pattern in all forms of life.

McClure's current project, "Membranes," is a series taking him into even more miniscule realms, namely the nanoscale. At his fabrication bench McClure points to a diamond-shaped cluster of small nylon balls, which will be grouped together and surrounded by a silver frame. The balls represent the receptors on cell membranes, which McClure explains can be harnessed to treat cancer, by "delivering drugs directly to cells that need it, as opposed to chemotherapy, where you are delivering it through the entire body."

"Membranes" combines metal fabrication with nylon forms made using 3D printing, a technology McClure first began investigating in his role as a jewelry professor. "I'll go through the process of using [a new technology] to make sure I can then teach it, and relate to what the students are doing," he says. "I like that, because it makes me stay current. Sometimes you get some really nice surprises."

Of his current interest in the digital realm, McClure says, "One of the great things about computer modeling and 3D printing is scale, and scale has always been a big part of my work, zooming in and zooming out of the human body." Pointing to the repeating elements in the "Membranes" series, he says, "I like the idea of pattern as the metaphor for multiplication and replication. As they move up in scale, they divide and become these other shapes, ornamental or decorative. These have a gemmy quality."

In the hall opposite McClure's studio door are three showcases filled with jewelry: pieces acquired through trades with other artists; purchases made on his travels; work by admired jewelers (including many fellow Canadians); and pieces by graduates of George Brown College. "I wear a brooch every day," says the artist, who for the past decade has focused his collecting on brooches or rings. There's a case containing his own work, which he describes as handy when clients come by. Characterized by punchy design and streamlined elegance, the collection provides a wonderful visual history of McClure's two-plus decades of delving deep into the human body.

embrane 3, 2017
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to: Digital by Design