

Reclamation of Monotony

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Abstract

In a culture shaped by instant gratification and overstimulation, where attention spans are increasingly fragmented, the act of making becomes a form of resistance.

Reclamation of Monotony is a body of metalwork that explores the meditative potential of repetition through the use of Russian filigree, wire wrapping, and enameling techniques. These practices are slow, methodical, and often monotonous. The process of coiling wires, wrapping and binding forms, filling cells with enamel, firing, and finishing requires sustained concentration and presence. Rather than viewing monotony as a creative limitation, this work embraces it as a site of depth, ritual, and focus.

This thesis frames my studio process as an embodied rebellion against the pace and pressure of contemporary digital life. Through intentional slowness and attention to

detail, each piece asserts the value of patience, presence, and the handmade. The resulting work becomes both a record of time spent and a counterpoint to the disembodied immediacy of modern consumption. By foregrounding the tactile, the repetitive, and the unhurried, this project seeks to reclaim monotony not as boredom, but as devotion.

The Reclamation of Monotony

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Introduction

This thesis begins with a simple act: wrapping a wire around another. Over and over again, this action forms the foundation of my studio practice. What may appear tedious or ornamental to an outside viewer becomes, through repetition, a form of presence.

The work in *Reclamation of Monotony* explores the space where technique and attention meet. I use traditional methods of Russian filigree, wire wrapping, and enameling to investigate how the body and mind engage with the repetitive technique, and what that repetition means in a contemporary cultural context defined by distraction.

I am drawn to processes that demand my full attention. Coiling tiny wires, fusing them with precision, and layering enamel into recessed forms all require time, stillness, and care. These techniques are not quick. They resist efficiency. In the studio, I am required to be fully present, and this presence becomes a form of meditation. I believe that this sustained focus carries through into the finished object, making the work not just a display of labor but a record of a state of mind.

The title *Reclamation of Monotony* refers to my desire to reclaim repetitive labor as something valuable, grounding, and restorative. In the age of algorithmic entertainment, infinite scrolling, and dopamine-driven media, our cultural tolerance for stillness has eroded. Attention spans shrink as the pace of life accelerates. In this environment, choosing to engage in slow, monotonous practices becomes an act of rebellion. It is a refusal to participate in the kind of overstimulation that leaves little room for reflection or depth.

This paper explores how these values emerge through my making. It places my work in conversation with cultural trends around distraction, examines the history and significance of my chosen techniques, and reflects on how repetition in the studio creates space for mental clarity. Through this body of work, I seek not only to produce beautiful objects, but also to investigate how the act of making can shape the way we pay attention, and what we pay attention to.

Cultural Context

Overstimulation and Attention Span

We live in a time defined by distraction. Notifications, content feeds, and algorithmic entertainment are engineered to capture and fragment our attention. Our contemporary environment is saturated with digital stimuli such as notifications, scrolling feeds, and autoplay videos that fragment attention and contribute to what some researchers have identified as continuous partial attention. This state, marked by chronic task-switching and cognitive overload, has been shown to reduce working memory and impair sustained focus (Stone). The problem is compounded by the widespread adoption of short-form media that conditions users to seek rapid novelty, discouraging slow or reflective engagement (Williams).

The impact of these changes can be seen in rising diagnoses of attention-related disorders. According to a 2024 report by the CDC, approximately 11.4 percent of children aged 3 to 17 in the United States had been diagnosed with ADHD at some point in their lives, which is an increase of nearly one million children since 2016 (Black et al. 1). Among adults, ADHD diagnosis has also increased sharply. As of 2023, more than 15.5 million U.S. adults - about 6 percent of the adult population - had received a diagnosis, with over half of those individuals first diagnosed during adulthood ("ADHD in Adults").

While the rise in diagnoses may be due in part to increased awareness and better screening, many researchers suggest that overstimulating environments, digital multitasking, and constant media consumption contribute significantly to the erosion of focus and attention (Stone). Studies show that individuals who regularly engage in media multitasking perform worse on memory and cognitive control tasks compared to those who don't (Ophir et al.).

There is growing awareness that our digital environment encourages short bursts of engagement rather than sustained focus. In this setting, the ability to concentrate deeply on a single task begins to feel both rare and radical. Fast consumption of media, trends, and even ideas has become the norm. Cultural emphasis is placed on novelty and speed, often at the expense of patience, nuance, and depth. These conditions shape not only how we process information but also how we make and view art. Work that is immediate, bold, or easily graspable often garners more attention than work that asks something slower of the viewer or the maker. Within this context, my metalsmithing practice feels like an opposition.

Meditation, Repetition, and the Handmade

In contrast to the fractured pace of digital life, repetitive craft processes offer the possibility of entering a different mental space. The coiling wire, wrapping, twisting filigree, fusing, filing, and enameling, create a rhythm that slows me down. Repetition quiets the external noise. Over time, the body takes over, and the act of making becomes meditative. This is not a meditative state in the romantic sense, but one rooted in discipline and engagement. It is focus through doing.

Wire wrapping and Russian filigree, while visually intricate, are not fast or improvisational processes. They require planning, dexterity, and sustained attention. Enameling, with its layers of grinding, sifting, and firing, adds another cycle of repetition and refinement. Each of these methods requires patience and presence, and each builds meaning through accumulation. The more time I spend with the work, the more the work becomes a record of that time.



Figure 1: Filigree Pendant

In this way, repetition is not only a technical requirement but a philosophical one. It becomes a way to resist the demand for constant novelty. It holds space for stillness, for slowness, and for concentration. These qualities are not always visible in the finished object, but they are embedded in its making.

Material Practice

Russian Filigree

My approach to Russian filigree begins by twisting two strands of 28-gauge fine silver wire, then flattening the twisted length through a rolling mill. This process produces a textured ribbon that catches the light and highlights the underlying spiral structure. The flattened, twisted wire is then coiled in a tightly ordered pattern. I begin with a small central loop and coil the wire outward in a spiral. At regular intervals—every 180 degrees—I introduce small gaps into the pattern, allowing for lightness and breathability within the composition. The result is a rhythmic, open spiral that maintains visual complexity without appearing overcrowded.

Each filigree element is set flush inside a rigid leaf-shaped frame constructed from 22-gauge square sterling silver wire. These outer frames define the shape and boundary of each spiral, giving the components structure and a crisp architectural containment. While the filigree is coiled and fit into place without solder during the forming process, powdered solder is later used to secure the twisted wire inside the frame. The use of powdered solder allows solder to flow across contact points without overwhelming the visual intricacy of the coils. The final effect is one of baroque scrollwork or stylized wave forms—aesthetic references that shift the filigree away from traditional floral motifs and toward something more ornamental and dynamic.

Wire Wrapping

In addition to Russian filigree, I employ wire wrapping techniques that rely on coiling and weaving thin silver wire without the use of solder. These components are constructed through cold connection methods, making the process distinct from traditional filigree, which requires a torch, powdered solder, and a rolling mill. The wire used for wrapping is typically of similar gauge to the filigree, delicate enough to achieve intricate detail, yet sturdy enough to hold its form without tension loss.



Plate 1: *Lidded Vessel*

The wrapping process often begins with a base wire that acts as a spine or structural guide. A thin wire is then coiled or woven around this base in repetitive, ordered patterns that emphasize rhythm, density, and movement. These motifs are not structural supports but ornamental constructions that reference textile traditions, basketry, or armor

create strength through repetition and interconnection.

This repetition is also fundamental to my studio practice in a conceptual sense. The act of wire wrapping becomes a meditative gesture, a rebellion against a culture of overstimulation and short attention spans. In the repetitive motion of wrapping and weaving, I find clarity, an extended focus that pushes against the distractions of a fast-moving, screen-centered world. The slowness of the process demands presence and rewards patience. Each wrap is both a mark of time and a form of resistance.

While these wrapped elements are assembled without heat, they are sometimes soldered into the final composition after the fact, affixing them to the main structure while preserving the cold-worked quality of the forms themselves. A key distinction between wire wrapping and filigree lies in their construction logic. Where filigree depends on soldered touchpoints and is confined within shaped frames, wire wrapping builds upon itself—growing outward or interlocking laterally, often without the constraint of a rigid border. This difference in technique and structure allows me to work across a broader range of textures and densities while remaining within the aesthetic universe of wirework, and opens the door for aesthetic possibilities that wouldn't be achievable with just one of these techniques.



Figure 3: *Rippling*

For a large part of her career Biba Schutz worked primarily with wire, creating large-scale and small-scale forms that emphasize gesture, rhythm, and movement.



Figure 2: *One of a Kind Brooch*

Her approach to wire as a material - bending, coiling, layering - transforms it from line into structure.

Although her work is looser and more expressive than mine, I admire the way she uses repetition and density to define space. Schutz's work blurs the boundary between drawing and object, and her emphasis on touch and variation reminds me that wire is

not a passive material, but an active participant in form-making. Her ability to create presence through structure and accumulation speaks to the same values of slowness and attention that shape my own practice.

Enameling and Surface

The enamel components of my work are created using a hemispherical champlévé technique. To construct these forms, I first cut two sterling silver shapes and dome each one equally using a dapping block. A circular hole is then cut into the smaller dome, which I solder atop the larger dome, forming a hollow chamber with a clean-edged circular viewport. After removing the internal negative space, the result is a windowed shell that acts as both a structural and visual frame.

Inside this shell, the filigree elements are suspended or nested in a way that allows them to remain visually centered beneath the enamel opening, yet physically separate. There is no contact between enamel and filigree, the separation is intentional and contributes to the depth and layered quality of the final piece. The enamel itself is typically rendered in soft, cool shades of blue. This choice not only complements the silver but also offers a calming counterbalance to the complexity housed beneath. Each enamel layer is applied through a process called “wet packing”, where enamel is mixed with distilled water and applied to the surface using a fine-tipped paintbrush. Each layer is fired individually, requiring anywhere from six to ten firings to build the depth and surface quality I seek. The formal qualities of my work emerge from the tension between visual intricacy and spatial

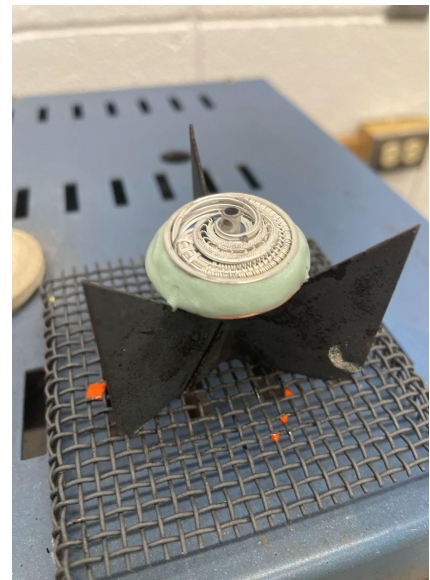


Figure 4: Wet packing

restraint. The internal wirework establishes a dense, rhythmic structure that draws the eye inward. These elements are carefully composed to spiral and flow, often arranged in scroll-like patterns that suggest movement and continuity within a confined frame.

Ruth Ball, a contemporary enamellist based in the UK, offers a rich example of how traditional techniques can be reimagined through a contemporary lens. Her work often combines champlevé and other enameling methods with subtle, controlled color palettes and modern compositions. Ball's surfaces are thoughtful and intentional, with



Figure 5: *Keepsake Boxes*

each layer contributing to a broader sense of quiet precision. Her practice affirms that enamel is not just a decorative surface but a conceptual layer, capable of holding tone, emotion, and narrative. I look to her work for guidance in how surface can both veil and emphasize what lies beneath

Setting and Integration

The final stage of construction involves bringing together the filigree, wire-wrapped elements, and champlevé enamel forms into a cohesive structure. While each component is individually crafted using distinct techniques, the act of setting them in place is what transforms them from isolated fragments into a unified object. This part of the process demands both structural precision and visual intuition - aligning curves, balancing depth, and ensuring that no element overpowers the others.

The filigree and wire-wrapped components are secured behind the enameled dome, typically by building an internal seat or using soldered tabs that hold them in place without making contact with the enamel itself. Because the enamel form is constructed from two domed silver disks, the interior naturally provides a cavity that can house and protect more delicate work. The circular viewport cut into the enamel allows a controlled reveal of the interior - a small, intentional opening that invites the viewer to peer into a space that feels protected, layered, and deliberate.

This recessed setting creates a sense of distance between viewer and object. The filigree and wrapped elements are not meant to be touched or accessed directly; they are housed within the piece, visible but slightly removed. This separation mirrors the conceptual distance between the outer world and the internal space of reflection where the work originates. The enamel becomes a threshold or veil - something that both conceals and reveals.

Technically, the challenge lies in maintaining this layered depth while ensuring durability and alignment. Filigree elements must be anchored securely without disrupting their delicate spiral structures. The wrapped wire forms must be positioned in ways that enhance the directional flow of the piece without overcrowding the composition. Final soldering is minimal and highly controlled, using only enough to secure the interior components to the outer frame, allowing the intricate wirework to appear suspended or floating inside the enamel shell.

The result is a composition that emphasizes contrast: solid versus delicate, smooth versus textured, exterior versus interior. Each finished object becomes a kind of micro-architecture - a chamber of focus, intricacy, and stillness.

Sondra Sherman explores jewelry as a site of narrative, memory, and psychological space. Her work often pairs meticulous craftsmanship with subtle formal gestures, inviting reflection rather than spectacle. I am particularly drawn to the way her pieces carry emotional weight through intimate scale and restrained visual language. She treats jewelry not just as ornament but as a vehicle for introspection, an approach that resonates with how I position my own work as an inward-looking practice. Her use of containment through closed forms, book-like objects, and layered interiors parallels my own interest in framing internal complexity.



Figure 6: *Rhodiola Rosea*

Conceptual Framing

Repetition and Ritual

Repetition is central to my process, not only in terms of technique but as a means of engaging with the deeper psychological space of making. The slow, deliberate motions required for filigree, wire wrapping, and enamel work are inherently repetitive. Each spiral is coiled, each wire is woven, and each layer of enamel is sifted and fired as part of a rhythmic system that accumulates over time. These motions are small, exacting, and often invisible in the final form, but they define the structure and integrity of each piece.

This repetition becomes ritualistic. In the act of returning again and again to the same motion and the same form, I find a state of attention that quiets the surrounding noise. There is comfort in the predictability of the steps, in the way my body learns the motions through muscle memory and patience. What might appear externally as monotony becomes, internally, a space of clarity. This studio routine functions like an intimate deliberation, grounding and sustaining, and structured not around productivity but presence.

The work resists the quick satisfaction of immediacy. It demands that time be spent, and in doing so, creates intimacy between the maker and the object. That time is embedded in the material. The wire remembers every twist and every coil. The final object carries the physical memory of the process, and the process itself becomes a devotional act.

The Culture of Overstimulation

The materials and processes I use exist in direct contrast to the speed, efficiency, and distraction that define much of contemporary life. We live in a culture that prioritizes instant gratification. Every interaction is designed to deliver quick feedback, to hold our attention just long enough before moving on to the next stimulus. Digital platforms capitalize on fractured focus, rewarding the most reactive parts of the brain and discouraging sustained concentration.

This environment has shaped not only how we interact with information, but how we relate to time, labor, and value. Moments of slowness or repetition are often dismissed as wasteful, inefficient, or unproductive. Within this framework, the kind of work I do - hours spent coiling wires, layering enamel over multiple firings, weaving tiny connections by hand - can feel out of place. But this is exactly why I return to it.

The act of working slowly, without the promise of immediate results, becomes a form of resistance. It asks for patience and presence from both the maker and the viewer. By embracing materials and methods that require care and time, I am reclaiming a space for focus and quiet attention. My work is not meant to compete with the speed of the digital world. Instead, it offers an alternative pace - one that encourages stillness and rewards sustained looking.

Formal Qualities



Plate 2: *Pendant #1*

The formal qualities of my work emerge from the tension between visual intricacy and spatial restraint. The internal wirework establishes a dense, rhythmic structure that draws the eye inward. These elements are carefully composed to spiral and flow, often arranged in scroll-like patterns that suggest movement and continuity within a confined frame.

Surface contrast plays an important role. The fine, textural detail of the wire stands in opposition to the smoothness of the surrounding metal forms. This contrast heightens the viewer's sensitivity to material and process, making the small-scale labor more visible. While the forms are compact, they do

not compromise in their extravagance. Instead, their intricacy encourages close inspection and creates a sense of intimacy.



Plate 3: *Brooch #1*

Depth is created not just by layering physical components, but by controlling the space between them. Interior structures are recessed, partially revealed, and held within a larger form. This spatial separation emphasizes the idea of containment and elevates the internal detail as something that requires time and focus to fully see.



Plate 4: *Pendant #2*

Color is used sparingly but with intention. The blue enamel surfaces offer a calm and steady backdrop, allowing the silver to remain visually dominant. The palette reinforces the calm tone of the work and helps soften the precision of the wire, creating a balance between stillness and intensity.



Plate 5: *Ring #1*

The overall scale of the work demands slowness from the viewer. These are not objects to be consumed quickly. Their small size, layered structure, and subtle detail encourage sustained looking and reward those who are willing to pause.

Conclusion

The work presented in this thesis is the result of a deliberate commitment to slowness, repetition, and care. Each piece represents not only the time spent in its making, but a state of focused attention that pushes back against the fractured pace of contemporary life.

The meditative nature of the process is inseparable from the form of the finished work, where the spirals, coils, and woven structures are visual records of mindful presence. The work holds time and requires time in return. Viewers are invited to slow down, to look closely, and to recognize the value of what is held inside. The preciousness of the interior is not about material rarity, but about the intensity of focus it contains.

In a culture driven by overstimulation and speed, choosing to work this way is an act of resistance. These objects do not demand attention through scale or spectacle, instead they assert their value through repetition, patience, and intimacy. They offer an alternative to distraction - a space where time moves differently, where attention is held and honored.

This body of work reflects not only the techniques I've learned, but a way of being in the world. It is a practice of looking inward, of building carefully, and of giving form to the clarity that repetition makes possible.

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