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Biojewellery exhibition showcases modern symbol of love

Diamonds may be a girl's best friend, but commitment rings grown from bone cells donated by couples are the focus of the Biojewellery exhibition due to go on display at Guy's Hospital on December 7th 2006. The small collection of unique rings is borne out of a design project which aimed to explore bio-technical engineering.

Tobie Kerridge and Nikki Stott started the project in 2003 as postgraduates at the Royal College of Art. They wanted to see how the technique for growing bone tissue used in reconstructive surgery might be applied to create bones for jewellery. The project was then funded with a £67,000 grant from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, as a part of the Partnership for Public Engagement programme. Working with Dr Ian Thompson, a bioengineer at King's College London, they have cultivated bone from four couples to create truly individualised bone jewellery which can be offered up as a symbol of their love for one another.

Dr Thompson agreed to get involved with the venture to investigate how small discs of bone can be used to build up stacks that replicate larger bone structures. These Polo mint-like scaffolds may replace complex bone grafts with fewer cases of rejection by the body and better chances of tissue regeneration around the new bone. Small-scale rings for jewellery are the first step in this promising process.

He said: "This project will help us develop the skills that create small and often complex bone shapes which can be used in reconstructive injury – for example re-building a damaged eye socket after an accident or surgery."

Adverts were placed in magazines to find people who needed their wisdom teeth taking out to take part in the project. The team were inundated with responses, but eventually four couples were chosen who had agreed that small samples of bone removed as part of necessary dental treatment could be used for the project. It took three months to culture and grow the bone needed for Biojewellery.

Industrial designer Matthew Harrison and his partner Harriet Harriss, an architect, took part in

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the Biojewellery project. Matthew said: "We were attracted to Biojewellery because it provides us with something which is unique. The final rings will be precious to us, but not in a financial way; they are full of meaning and symbolism but not in a traditional way."

The participants have been closely involved in designing the final pieces of jewellery which will be part of the exhibition funded by Guy's and St Thomas' Charity.

Karen Sarkissian, Director of Art and Heritage at Guy's and St Thomas' Charity said: "The Charity supports both clinical innovation and art projects that involve patients, staff and visitors to the hospitals. It's fantastic to be able to combine these two aspects and highlight the many different applications for this cutting edge technology."

The process of donation, growth and design is documented and displayed along with rings for two couples at the exhibition in Guy's Atrium 1, Guy's Hospital, from December 7th until February 14th 2007.

To find out more, visit: <http://www.biojewellery.com/>

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Notes to News Editors

1. For more information, interviews with participants and images, contact Kate Dawson, Head of Communications on Tel: (020) 7188 1218 or 077 22 119157 or email: kate.dawson@gsttcharity.org.uk or Laura Mason, Communications Assistant on Tel: (020) 7188 9083. Guy's and St Thomas' Charity is the largest NHS-related charity in the UK. It provides funding to support Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, Lambeth and Southwark Primary Care Trusts and South London and Maudsley NHS Trust. The Charity awards grants through its new services and innovations programme to promote clinical and service innovation, enhance buildings and the environment and support staff benefits and development. Funding also supports health related research by institutions in partnership with the beneficiary Trusts. Further information is also available on the Charity's website at www.gsttcharity.org.uk

2. King's College London is the fourth oldest university in England with more than 13,700 undergraduates and nearly 5,600 graduate students in nine schools of study based at five London campuses. It is a member of the Russell Group: a coalition of the UK's major research-based universities. The College has had 24 of its subject-areas awarded the highest rating of 5* and 5 for research quality, demonstrating excellence at an international level, and it has recently received an excellent result in its audit by the Quality Assurance Agency.

King's has a particularly distinguished reputation in the humanities, law, international relations, medicine and dentistry, nursing and the sciences, and has played a major role in many of the advances that have shaped modern life, such as the discovery of the structure of DNA. It is the largest centre for the education of healthcare professionals in Europe and is home to four Medical Research Council Centres – more than any other university.

King's is in the top group of UK universities for research earnings, with income from grants and contracts of more than £100 million, and has an annual turnover of more than £363 million. Please visit the website for more information: www.kcl.ac.uk

3. The Royal College of Art is the world's only wholly postgraduate university of art and design, specialising in teaching and research and offering the degrees of MA, MPhil and PhD across the disciplines of fine art, applied art, design, communications and humanities. There are over 900 masters and doctoral students and more than a hundred professionals interacting with them – including scholars, leading art and design practitioners, along with specialists, advisors and distinguished visitors. Website: www.rca.ac.uk

4. The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) is the UK's main agency for funding research in engineering and the physical sciences. The EPSRC is investing £650 million this year in research and postgraduate training, to help the nation handle the next generation of technological change. The areas covered range from information technology to structural engineering, and mathematics to materials science. This research forms the basis for future economic development in the UK and improvements for everyone's health, lifestyle and culture. EPSRC also actively promotes public awareness of science and engineering. EPSRC works alongside other Research Councils with responsibility for other areas of research. The Research Councils work collectively on issues of common concern via Research Councils UK. Website address for more information on EPSRC: www.epsrc.ac.uk/