



## Our contemporary jewellery artists shine at Schmuck

*What has New Zealand jewellery got going for it? Pretty much everything, Philip Clarke explains in this survey of some of our jewellery Olympians and their exploits overseas.*

**S**chmuck', the German word, rhymes with book and means jewellery. 'Schmuck' the Yiddish word rhymes with yuck and means obnoxious person. But Schmuck is a jewellery exhibition, the centrepiece of and shorthand name for the annual Munich Jewellery Week (MJW), described by Damian Skinner as "the Olympics of ornament, the Venice Biennale of cerebral bling".

The global contemporary jewellery calendar is coordinated around Schmuck, and about 5000 curators, collectors, dealers, fans, makers and teachers attend. It's a marathon: tribal, fun, important, trivial – and shameless. In 2014 I was approached at a metro station after midnight by an attractive young curator who advised, staring intently at my Caroline Thomas brooch, that her museum acquired "contemporary jewellery by donation". Irish jeweller Pierce Healy (@piercehealystudio) reflected the intensity of the event when he Instagrammed during MJW in March 2017

about "the stages of schmuck; denial, anger, acceptance".

In 2017, work by four New Zealand jewellers was selected for Schmuck – five if you include Flora Sekanova, who is now Munich-based. From 700 applications, 66 were accepted – and the New Zealand works, by Jane Dodd, Karl Fritsch, Kelly McDonald, Shelley Norton and Sekanova, represent a stronger showing than the United States. Fritsch and Norton have had their work selected on multiple occasions and New Zealander Moniek Schrijer won a 2016 Schmuck best-in-show, a coveted Herbert Hofmann Prize, as Fritsch has previously. Yet again, it seems, New Zealand is 'punching above its weight' – this time in contemporary jewellery.

Auckland jeweller Raewyn Walsh has been to MJW a few times and thinks the "hum from New Zealand" is getting louder and louder. There has been an exponential increase in the visibility of New Zealand contemporary

Opposite: Shelley Norton, *Box Brooch* series, 2016, reconstructed plastic. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Caryline Boreham

Right: Karl Fritsch, ring, 2016, silver, sapphire. Courtesy of the artist

jewellery, which Munich veteran Renee Bevan confirms. “In 2009 there were only a small number of New Zealand artists exhibiting during MJW. Come 2017, there are roughly 40 New Zealand works by around 23 New Zealand makers being exhibited across MJW and it’s become near-impossible to miss New Zealand somewhere on the MJW circuit.” While Schmuck is certainly turning up the dial for New Zealand jewellery internationally, a whole lot of other factors are contributing to the noise.

*We’ve got the jewels.* For an iconoclast, Karl Fritsch is deeply embedded in the upper echelons of international contemporary jewellery, with dealers in Australia, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, the United States and New Zealand. He’s also a jewellery professor in Australia and Germany.

Fritsch is famous for his rings – and for only making rings. He says he likes to manipulate the icon that the ring is, using the traditional skills he was trained in, so as to redefine and rework history. ‘Manipulating’ tradition is what he says; ‘bashing’ tradition is what some viewers might see. Fritsch is constantly testing expectations of what a ring is and could be.

Bavarian-born and Munich-trained, Fritsch lived in Germany until 2009 when he and his New Zealand-born partner, Lisa Walker (also well known in jewellery circles), moved to Wellington. Since arriving he has collaborated with a number of leading visual artists, including Gavin Hipkins and Francis Upritchard, which he attributes to showing his rings at the Hamish McKay Gallery and getting to know other artists who show with the dealer. He acknowledges this wouldn’t have happened without the move to Wellington: “It is great living here, like an open playground, with lots of opportunities I didn’t expect.”

Charming in person, Fritsch is also accomplished at presenting his work in playful installations, as recently seen at the *Solo 2016: Six Wellington Artists* show at The Dowse. He’s so good that he was asked to curate an exhibition from the world’s most significant public collection of contemporary jewellery – that owned by the Die Neue Sammlung, the oldest design museum in the world – for the Danner Rotunda in Munich’s Pinakothek der Moderne. And in 2014, with Warwick Freeman, he curated *Wunderrūma*, the extensive view of the local contemporary jewellery scene first presented at MJW, where it was received as ‘exotic’, and later at The Dowse and Auckland Art Gallery. His works are also in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Auckland-based jeweller Shelley Norton has been to Munich many times and, impressively, has had works selected for Schmuck three times. A committed and respected jeweller, she’s unusual for a practitioner regularly exhibiting at an international level in that she maintains a full-time career in another field. For her, being at MJW is a chance to “abandon herself to jewellery”; she is known among New Zealand jewellers for getting to almost every show. Being in Munich is also an opportunity to renew relationships, talk and receive feedback about her work (“a gift”) from collectors, academics and gallerists. Such responses, she says, are “what you do the work for”. Unshackled from the expectation to earn a living from her practice, she is free to make primarily conceptually driven work. Responses of another kind are clearly welcome, though, as her works are held in the personal collections of some of international contemporary jewellery’s most influential figures.

Norton’s work is exclusively made from plastic shopping bags, a humble and omnipotent material. In the case of her 2017 Schmuck works, the bags were first dismembered and melted. Transforming the discarded into the desired is clearly a fertile area for Norton, who concurs with Roland Barthes’ view on plastic as “abolishing the hierarchy of substances. A single one replaces them all, the whole world can be plasticized...”

But Norton also notes that the root of the word jewellery – the French word *jouer* – means to play. She says her practice plays “with our culturally constructed stories about what jewellery should be – small, wearable, precious,



From left: Jane Dodd, *Polpogeist*, 2016, cow bone, sterling silver, stainless steel; *Wing*, 2016, ebony, sterling silver; *Tongue*, 2016, cow bone, sterling silver, dye. All courtesy of the artist. Photos: Haru Sameshima

decorative. I want to create pieces that engage the viewer and collapse barriers... to draw attention to established knowledge, whilst at the same time looking at new ways of seeing and comprehending.”

After a 17-year break due to motherhood and teaching, Australian-born Kelly McDonald revisited Munich in 2016. A tutor in the Whitireia New Zealand jewellery programme, McDonald had first exhibited at MJW in 1999 in *Talente*, the global showcase for emerging makers. In 2016 she returned in *Specials*, an exhibition of alumni of the New Zealand-originated professional development programme *HandShake*; and in 2017 her work was exhibited in *Schmuck*. For *Schmuck* she submitted two brooches, a group of pendants, and a group comprising pendants and brooches. Remarkably, all 10 works were included exactly as laid out in her submission – an acknowledgment that layout is central to the presentation of her work.

For her the thrill of MJW is “talking jewellery for ten days non-stop and no one closes their eyes with boredom”, as well as being part of an international community and forming relationships. “Having so many people in one place dedicated to one thing, the potential for new opportunities is phenomenal.” McDonald notes the huge growth of MJW in the interval between her first two visits and thinks the “New Zealand presence in Munich is essential”.

McDonald was questioned at MJW about whether her work was ‘jewellery’ or ‘object’, but says that this dichotomy isn’t something that concerns her. More important is that the works fit her own conception of contemporary jewellery: the work needs to have a relationship with the body, but this may be actual or implied. McDonald attributes the sense of the mechanical, and the wear and tear of time in her work, to growing up among power stations and open-cast mines. Her current enquiry revolves around how “these ideas translate into wearable objects”.

Dunedin-based Jane Dodd established her arts profile as a bassist for Dunedin groups *The Chills*, *The Verlaines* and later the *Able Tasmans*. Her migration from music to jewellery happened after travelling in Mexico, where she became “excited by that culture’s ubiquitous interaction with craft and aesthetics”. After training at Unitec, Dodd joined the well-known Auckland jewellery collective *Workshop 6*, establishing a practice that was largely metal based, often narrative and technically superb. She returned to Dunedin in 2009 and shares a studio there with leading jeweller *Octavia Cook*.

Dodd’s recent work, shown at *Schmuck* and inspired by an earlier visit to Germany, explores a territory of historic decorative tradition, animal forms and the duel of culture and nature, while using natural materials such as bone, stone, shell and wood. “It illustrates my discomfort with the way we Hoover up wildlife for our own frivolous ends,” she says.

Unlike *Fritsch*, *Norton* and *McDonald*, 2017 was Dodd’s first *Schmuck* selection and visit to MJW. Both were long-held aspirations, and Dodd was pleased with how she measured up: “I thought the work looked good and that it occupied a space that was unique.” Her highlights included *Otto Künzli*’s show, and a selected invitation show by heavyweights *Gerd Rothmann*, *Karl Fritsch* and *Robert Baines* that had an intimate staging in *Rothmann*’s apartment.

As a first-timer, Dodd set herself an ambitious programme of getting to events and meeting gallerists and curators. She found that her experience of MJW was different to that of friends who’d visited previously, and questions how effective any individual newcomer can be, in terms of establishing new networks, without the support and knowledge of a New Zealand scout or mentor. This role, useful in the past, was not reprised in 2017.

*We've got the good people.* If MJW is the Venice Biennale of contemporary jewellery, then the Françoise van den Bosch Prize is its Nobel Prize. Awarded fewer than 20 times, incredibly three New Zealanders are recipients: Warwick Freeman, Karl Fritsch and Lisa Walker. Two of the key events of MJW are the Moderne Classic exhibition, linked to the Schmuck show, and the lecture hosted by the Museum of Applied Art & Design, which concludes the week. New Zealander Warwick Freeman has been accorded the honour of both: in 2013 he exhibited as a Moderne Classic master and lectured about his practice at the Pinakothek der Moderne. Jewellers internationally are still talking about him. I was at MJW in 2014, walking down the street wearing an 'old' Warwick Freeman brooch, when a young curator mistook me for the master and said, "Warwick, I've always wanted to meet you!" Not much older than the brooch I was wearing, the curator had a thorough knowledge of Warwick's practice – evidence of his colossal stature in contemporary jewellery. As is widely known, Freeman is the New Zealand contemporary artist most represented in international art museum collections.

New Zealand scored another king hit in 2016 when senior jewellers Alan Preston and Areta Wilkinson were invited to provide the 2016 lecture at the Pinakothek der

Moderne. Their costume and jewellery changes during the lecture were brilliantly Instagrammable, but as one of the sector's most influential commentators, Norwegian Jorunn Veiteberg, reported to me, the lecture was also very moving.

International jewellery power couple Karl Fritsch and Lisa Walker were for many years resident at jewellery HQ, Munich. Their relocation to Wellington sent a signal that, yes, it was possible to live on the other side of the world and continue their high-powered careers. Damian Skinner is one of contemporary jewellery's most prodigious and respected scholars. The fact that he's a New Zealander has turned many heads our way to be introduced to contemporary New Zealand practice and practitioners.

*We've got the know-how.* Staged alongside Schmuck, Talente is the world's highest-profile showcase for young designers. From 600 applications, 102 makers including five from New Zealand were selected to exhibit in 2016. In 2014 New Zealand made its biggest Talente splash, comprising almost 10 percent of the exhibitors. From 2009 to 2016 Creative New Zealand supported a local jeweller to be the Talente (and latterly Talente/Schmuck) co-ordinator, scout and mentor. This scout-mentor led the delegation of exhibitors, making sure they knew what to do, where to go and whom to connect with to ensure a rich experience.



From left: Kelly McDonald, *Slot*, 2015, pendant, greywacke stone; *Big Bolter*, 2015, pendant, steel, brass; *Facey Lock Plate*, 2015, pendant, steel, 24-carat gold; *I*, 2016, pendant, steel; *Mask*, 2016, steel, sterling silver, 9-carat rose gold; *Nailed*, 2016, brooch, steel, sterling silver, 9-carat rose gold. All courtesy of the artist



The installation of *Specials*, an exhibition of HandShake alumni, at the Einsäulensaal in the Munich Residenz Palace, Germany, during Schmuck in 2016. Photo: Kelly McDonald

The knowledge and experience the scout-mentors accumulated enabled some significant opportunities. For example, the advocacy of Fran Allison, the first mentor, led to the commission for Freeman and Fritsch to curate the *Wunderrūma* show. Jeweller Renee Bevan followed Allison and both developed a close relationship with Galerie Marzee, the largest, and possibly the most respected, contemporary jewellery gallery in the world. For some years they've been advising them on the work of younger New Zealand jewellers – not just those with work at MJW – suitable for their prestigious international graduate show. Her work has resulted in seven New Zealanders being included in recent shows. The fact that 'our' very part-time mentors have been advising the largest gallery in the world, and that they're listening, speaks volumes. On multiple occasions the Germans have put our scout-mentors to work at MJW as Talente judges, a rarely accorded honour.

*We've got the friends.* Jeweller Peter Deckers is a former Schmuck exhibitor but it is as an educator that he's made a splash at Munich and across the scene. He and partner Hilda Gascard have developed HandShake, a professional development programme that involves established jewellers from all over the world mentoring New Zealand jewellers. Jeweller Tanel Veenre of Estonia (another country emerging as an exciting site for contemporary jewellery) came to New Zealand earlier in 2017 for the latest HandShake 'boot-camp' and says, "HandShake is a smart project, it really connects people and creates intimate links. So there are now passionate ambassadors of New Zealand jewellery in every corner of the world."

New Zealand jewellery has collected an impressive array of well-placed international allies and advocates. Warwick Freeman is a long-time friend of both Munich-based Otto Kunzli, contemporary jewellery's reigning emperor, and highly respected Dutch writer and educator Liesbeth den Besten, both of whom have visited New Zealand a number of times. Visits by gallerist Mike Holmes (of the United States) and writer Benjamin Lignel (of France) have also been critical, in terms of influential figures experiencing first-hand the context in which our jewellery is created. Understand the context and you better understand the creation.

*We've got the attitude.* Much of the Munich to-ing and fro-ing of makers, exhibitions, curators, partnerships and organisers has been well supported by Creative New Zealand. But dollars alone don't guarantee any success and "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). Ben Lignel sees the presence of a "long-term vision at both individual and institutional level" collectively realised by the active engagement of institutions, funders and the jewellery sector. Eight years of joined-up effort at MJW have resulted in our jewellery now having high-performing and confident practitioners across generations; experienced and effective leaders; strong international networks and some well-placed friends; a high profile; and an enviable reputation. It's a terrific outcome, but it's important not to drop the ball now.

Given that we've got the jewels, the people, the right friends and a good attitude, maybe it's time to bring more of the world here.