

Brief

handshake 3 : reflect

The provocation

reflect:

The Dowse invited HS3 to contemplate the following texts to help present this exhibition with a strong conceptual and critical grounding, revolving around the verb *reflect*.

Paradoxically, *reflect* can mean both to mimic and to cast back or respond, a useful metaphor when considering the collaborative mantra that has sat alongside the Handshake journey thus far. For The Dowse exhibition, we invite you to draw connections between the term *reflect* and the self-reflexive nature of contemporary jewellery, which both embraces and counteracts with its traditional and commercial counterparts.

Some synonyms of reflect:

echo, mirror, reverse, emulate, imitate, rebound, repercussive, reply, resonate, resound, return, reverberate, shine, give forth, take after, throw back

Traditional and commercial jewellery trajectory points:

cultural, religious or political identification, lineage or whakapapa, wealth, status, class, preciousness, intimate, occasion, inheritance, ritual, belonging and/or connectedness, memory, token, taste, talisman, symbol, timeless, trend, illusion, accessory, fashion, connection.

Excerpts

I found these stuck with me when I was thinking about this theme and how it might relate to your approach to developing your work and the installation of it:

Damian Skinner:

“Contemporary jewellery is a self-reflexive practice, which means that it’s concerned with reflecting on itself and the conditions in which it takes place. In general, contemporary jewellers work in a critical or conscious relationship to the history of the practice and to the wider field of jewellery and adornment. This is what makes contemporary jewellery different from other forms of body adornment, and it isn’t found just in the way contemporary jewellery objects and practices engage with the history of jewellery, or the relationship to the body and wearing. Contemporary jewellery is shaped by a distinct awareness of the situation in which it exists, meaning that jeweller’s engaging directly with the spaces in which their work circulates - the gallery of museum, for example, or books and catalogues.”¹

Susan Cummins:

“This is a group that could only be happy with major bling. Jewelry is only one thing to the average high-end art collector – traditional in design with big karats, a gold wedding ring, or maybe for the more discrete a nice, small, gold necklace with a cross, a charm bracelet or other long-established wearable objects of adornment. I could try to explain it to them but art jewelry simply isn’t a part of their status-conscious world. It is actually pretty frustrating to try to describe what art jewelry is...

Even in a sympathetic context like this one, when I try to define art or contemporary jewelry I run into a certain amount of contradiction. I have begun to define it in my own mind as an object informed by the scale and historical demands of traditional jewelry, but clearly pushing the limitations imposed by them. Most of the work comes from an academic background where the jewelry and metalworking departments are part of a fine arts or design program. Which is odd because in this country contemporary jewelry lives in the craft world. Which is also odd since this kind of jewelry is more than anything a luxury item and craft was originally associated with the idea of democratic sympathy between makers and buyers.

What does the viewer bring to the object? Most obviously they bring their personal associations. (Sometimes not what the artist intended.) Jewelry is particularly loaded, much more than most objects since it carries traditionally accepted associations – like the sentimental symbol, the gift, the status statement, organizational recognition and so forth. A wedding ring is not only a ring, it holds a meaning beyond the materials from which it was made.”²

Suzanne Ramljak:

“The divergent stances between art and commercial jewellery can be most clearly seen with regard to its luxury status and the value of precious materials. While all jewelry falls into the market category of hedonic versus utilitarian consumptions, its cultural value and social function exceeds its materials and price tag. The commercial industry’s fixation on intrinsic worth and monetary value does not define the art jeweller’s practice, which often tests conventional definitions of value. Where commercial jewellery is made for money, much contemporary jewellery is instead made about money and mainstream values...In our pluralist era without clear hierarchies, there’s no dominant or driving sector of cultural influence. High art, fashion, street life and pop culture all draw energy and inspiration from each other.”³

Kelly Riggs:

“Why not offer artists a space to outline how they might have rationalized their respective material choice and how their choice may have added to the concept of their work?”

“Conceptual development is fundamental to the field, in which jewellery pieces are physical manifestations of long personal investigations. For makers with similar conceptual interest, concept-based shows are a means to showcase the research elements that supports their—and any true—artistic practice. They provide an opportunity to share such thinking processes with the public with statements made stronger when a number of artists gather to articulate their messages... To do this well through exhibition, an apt contextual framework is required. It can be visual or verbal, or more interestingly, a combination of the two.”⁴

Benjamin Lignel and Susan Cummins:

For all their ingenious presentation set ups, the ambition of most exhibitions was simply to show objects rather than to provide the means to reflect on these objects or weave a curatorial narrative that went beyond “I did this, and I am showing it to you”. Encouraged to emancipate themselves from the old and the tired, organizers seemed quite happy to let work creep up on the wall, hang off wires and show up in old suitcases, under glass domes, or on flip-down bus trays. However, “impactful” does not always translate into “meaningful”, and we often wondered how much control and understanding curators had over the environments they set up and whether those environments actually did the work a favour. When a series of necklaces is shown side by side as they would be in a high-street window, is this an intentional, tongue-in-cheek reference to lowbrow merchandising or simply the expression of hand-me-down thinking habits? Is display something that is added to the object in order to satisfy a logistical problem (such as showing small objects in a large room) or to give meaning to the “intermediate” space in which jewellery finds itself after it has left the workshop and before it is claimed by its future owner?”⁵

Liesbeth den Besten:

“In Jewellery, notions such as event and installation are loan words, words that have lost their actual meaning in favour of a rather one-dimensional one. In most cases, the installation or event in jewellery is not meant to substitute jewellery but to present it. In that sense, it is far remote from installation art, which is not about presenting or replacing: an installation is an artwork. Yet, there is a connection in the fact that both try to enhance the viewing and try to establish another profounder relationship with the viewer by making an appeal to the viewer’s knowledge, sensibility and imagination. However, whereas installation art and events are self-contained and self-fulfilling, jewellery installations and events are in general instrumental and didactic”⁶

Timeline:

In October 2016 I will send through a more detailed Timeline, but in the meantime here are some of the main points to consider

- Nov – March 2017: Studio visits
- April 2017: Please send through an outline of your work with the following headings.

Consider all these things in the outline you send though of your work as a starting point for this conversation about installation.

1. **Artist statement:** up to 500 words drawing connections between your concept, materials and construction with the theme reflect as described in the provocation.
2. **Working images:** photos and drawings including indicative dimensions of works.
3. **Display:** describe how you think the display of your work could help with the interpretation of it and the overall theme of the exhibition. Please include technical issues you foresee and thoughts on lighting. Images/ drawings can be included if needed.

4. **Safety:** consider how your work could be kept safe, particularly if you want it to be viewed up close or there is an interactive component to it.
- April – June: 2017: I will consider your ideas from the brief under the umbrella of the exhibition theme and create a floor plan so that works can interact with each other both intellectually and physically. This will include work- shopping practical components with the exhibitions team. We will also be in touch to work through installation with you and come up with alternative solutions if need be. We have two technicians, and each technician will be assigned 6 jewellers.
 - May 2017 I will send out Artist Agreements outlining all our responsibilities to each other.
 - May - July 2017: I will write an introduction and interpretation labels based on our studio visits and your artist statement (anything written about you and/or your work will be sent to you for sign off) and our team will also work with you on design, publicity etc.
 - July – August: works will be freighted and installed.

Working with me (Sian van Dyk, curator):

Please consider this another form of collaboration in the Handshake journey, where you work with me and The Dowse team to come up with your the final presentation.

Peter has referred to me as a mentor. This will be a different role to your maker mentor and is more about the process of exhibition making and the role a curator can play you career. As a curator I'm essentially about unpacking ideas: the person who can help bridge gaps between artist, museum and audience. My kaupapa is about finding ways for the audience to connect to the 'things' they come across in our spaces.

In other group shows I have curated, I often take the role of an ideas collaborator or crit partner and I will be organising studio visits with you all to touch base with where you are at. This will give you a chance to talk about your work and think about how it is developing in response to the themes of the exhibition. I will continue to read your blogs too, and you are welcome to contact me at any time if you feel like chewing over an idea, or, if you have questions about displaying or presenting your work in the Blumhardt Gallery.

Installation and presentation:

For Handshake 3 : Reflect we are opting out of using a third party designer to make a generic display system that all of your work needs to fit into (a regular approach by museums and galleries I would like to challenge us all to move beyond). Instead we would like to have a dialogue with each of you to decide how best to install your work in a way that enhances its conceptual component. This process will set up a situation that allows each of you to present work that contributes to the wider conversation the exhibition is holding.

We will work with you to figure out the most suitable presentation of your work possible through the outline you send and the discussion that follows. Some of you may require more time with the technicians: for example, if there is something we are able to build or alter for you, or if there is technical troubleshooting. Some of you may already have some found furniture or objects sourced that might be freighted here, and for some it will be a very easy solution where something is hung or placed. We have a budget to help you with freight/ exhibition furniture and / or installation support that we will need to be balanced when considering the overall layout and needs of the exhibition.

While we are working on this exhibition, please remember that there are 12 of you. The end outcome will rely on balancing all of your needs as best we can while working with the resources we have, as well as considering the overall look and feel of the exhibition and how this supports the theme of the show.

¹ Damian Skinner, "What is contemporary jewellery" in *Contemporary Jewellery in Perspective* ed Damian Skinner. Published by Art Jewelry Forum Mill Valley California, 2013. pg. 11

² Susan Cummins, *And viewers like you*, Art Jewellery Forum 11/25/2010 <https://artjewelryforum.org/and-viewers-like-you> accessed 20 July 2015

³ Suzanne Ramljak, "A Touchy Affair: On contemporary and commercial jewelry" in *Contemporary Jewellery in Perspective*. ed. Damian Skinner. Published by Art Jewelry Forum Mill Valley California, 2013. pg. 215

⁴ Kellie Riggs, "What is it that you do exactly? Categorizing contemporary jewelry through exhibitions" in *Shows and Tales, on Jewelry Exhibition-Making*. ed. Benjamin Lignel. Published by Art Jewelry Forum Mill Valley California, 2015. pg. 113 -114.

⁵ Benjamin Lignel and Susan Cummins, "On Display" in *Shows and Tales, on Jewelry Exhibition-Making*. ed. Benjamin Lignel. Published by Art Jewelry Forum Mill Valley California, 2015. Pg. 177

⁶ Liesbeth den Besten, *On Jewellery: A Compendium of international contemporary jewellery*. Published by Arnoldsche Art Publishers, Stuttgart, 2012. pg. 48