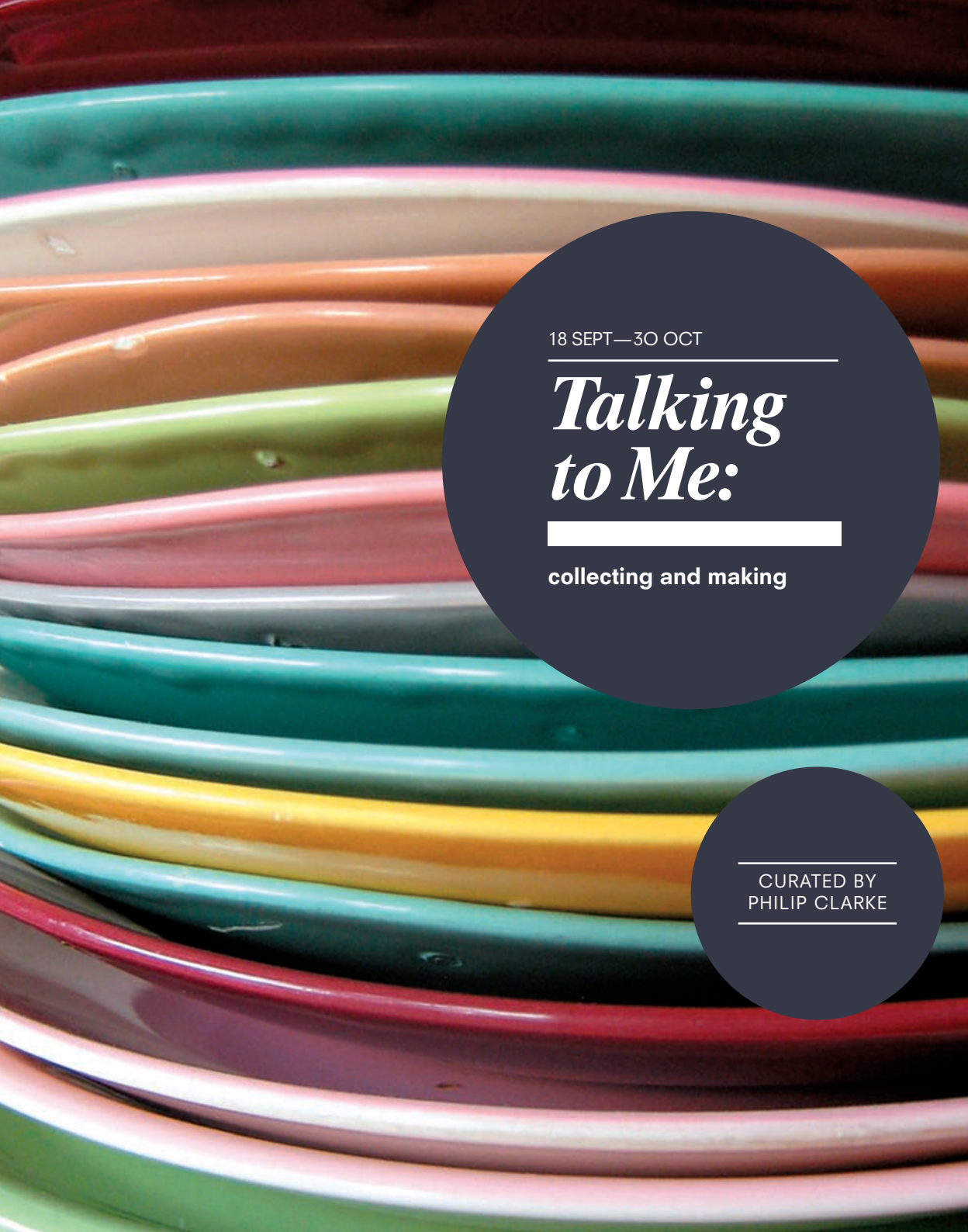

18 SEPT—30 OCT

Talking to Me:

collecting and making

CURATED BY
PHILIP CLARKE

Talking to Me

PHILIP CLARKE

What this enquiry has discovered is that makers' collecting and collections are closely inter-related to their making practice and provide a new and revealing lens for better understanding that practice and, in some cases, the conception and development of individual works.

PRACTICE AND PRACTISE

Accumulations of diverse artworks and objects are commonly encountered in the world of the applied and visual arts. These are usually found at sites of distribution (stockrooms) and presentation (galleries and museums) rather than at sites of production (studios), which are usually filled with the work of the resident artist or maker. Talking to Me tells another story.

The domains of the seven featured designers and makers are the locations of diverse accumulations of objects in addition to the works of their own production. The collections of objects found in their homes and studios are in some cases diverse, but despite the expansiveness of some of these collections, there is a focus to them. All of these collections in some way inform, resource, or in some cases, literally shape the production of their owners. The enquiry of Talking to Me was to understand how the collections of these designers and makers stand in relation to their making practice. What this enquiry has discovered is that makers' collecting and collections are closely inter-related to their making practice and provide a new and revealing lens for better understanding that practice and, in some cases, the conception and development of individual works. Not all makers and designers are collectors, although many might acquire a few reference works for a particular project or body of work in development. The exhibitors in Talking to Me are practitioners whose collections are ongoing. Their interest in the objects they collect is not bounded by their current work; these are collections that are being actively managed and expanded.

For some makers the process of searching for future collection acquisitions constitutes practising their main area of practice, as it can generate new ideas, new materials and new technical information for them. Simon Gamble is an example of how a collector, whilst searching for possible acquisitions, discovered the raw material for a new design. When Emily Siddell remarks that "I can't resist assembling objects" she was talking about her collection but equally could have been describing her own making. Some of the essential skills required of the collector such as composition, management and construction are also essential requirements of the maker. The process of assessing objects for acquisition requires makers to look intently and in so doing helps them to hone their visual intelligences. To Have & To Hold[1] contended that collecting was a form of cultural production, rather than consumption, as it results in accumulations of expertise and objects that frequently are able to enlarge public life. The accounts of the makers in Talking to Me confirm that their collecting practice is so interrelated to their making practice that it is an aspect of practising their making.

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THE QUOTIDIAN AND THE EXTRAORDINARY

In Quotidian: Finding inspiration in everyday design curator Matt Blomeley wrote "The proliferation of objects produced for the modern world suggest that we should sit back and more frequently reflect upon the relevance and value of existing objects".[2] The makers featured in Talking to Me do this, and more, on a regular basis, as reference to existing works is part of the rhythm and texture of their practices.

The collecting of these makers connects the quotidian with the extraordinary. As collected objects their passage is often that of the discarded to the valued. In the case of Richard Stratton the valued object might literally reproduce itself into something new and extraordinary. Vita Cochran says of some of her favourite objects "These are objects I really respect". The objects that these makers collect sustain them creatively and emotionally and stand in a continuum with the objects that these makers create. Ephemerality, history, humility and obsolescence (perceived or real) are some of the elements of the pedigree of many of the singular contemporary works made by these exhibitors.

THE CHATTER IS CONSTANT

During the interviews with exhibitors a number of them employed similar metaphors to describe their relationship with the themes of their collections. Their engagement with the focus of their collection was likened to being a radio: the dial was set to the station of their preference and the chatter or noise of that frequency was constant and engaging. Tuning in to their preferred channel was not a matter choice: the dial is permanently set and the radio is always on. Andrea Daly talks about how deeply ingrained is the aesthetic experience of her childhood that those same aesthetics continue to inform her own work. The 'radio' is always 'talking to me'. The effect of being tuned to one, or possibly two, channels means that other frequencies are permanently blocked. Emily Siddell reports that on entering op shops, stuffed to the ceiling with literally thousands of items, she simply does not notice anything except for those objects that are her constant quarry.

This level of identification, which may take years to develop, is biographical in its proportion as it helps describe the person and, more importantly, their practice. Genevieve Packer reports how her unconscious absorption of the colour palette of her collected crockery entered her professional practice and provided a new palette for her designs, a development that she has consciously built on in Heads and Tails. Warwick Freeman reports how very specific star form images he collects informed the development of specific works, the Soft Star and Hard Star, which themselves, helped him to create new star works. In his case the chatter or noise on the 'star channel' is so compelling that his collecting of star form images has survived the cessation of star brooches making.

CRAFT THEORY

A huge body of objects serves as an enormous reference library for craftspeople

Craft is defined by tradition, after all.... craft proposes a seamless continuity

Craft objects reinforce personal identity.

The familiarity of craft forms complements the uniqueness of hand production.

In a secular world, craft can serve others by offering a medium for personal meaning – a receptive screen upon which to project significance.

The meaning of craft operates in humble places, but it's as site specific as a Richard Serra sculpture. The code language of craft speaks from the body, with jewellery and clothing – and the home – with furniture, pottery, fabric, lighting and decoration.

The choice to devote one's life to a craft is a conscious rejection of the way this society has devalued physical labour.

The choice of craft is not anachronistic. It is a statement that we still live in a body rich in potential.

Given that craft has traded in decoration for thousands of years, it is peculiar that this central purpose is currently called into question.

What craft has always done is its strength

All of these quotes – they could be maxims – are from Bruce Metcalf's Replacing the Myth of Modernism.[3] This is a recent and important essay that advocates for and offers specific suggestions for a re-theorising of craft. This series of quotations is offered in the context of Talking to Me because Metcalf's individual comments are highly congruent with many of the sentiments expressed by the exhibitors and the observations offered above. Given this congruence it is suggested that the connections between the collecting and making practices that these notable designer/makers describe, highlight something fundamental about the character of craft practice itself. These fundamental characteristics include; an awareness, respect and sometimes usage of tradition; the biographical aspect of craft; the physical dimension of craft; and the fascination for surface decoration.

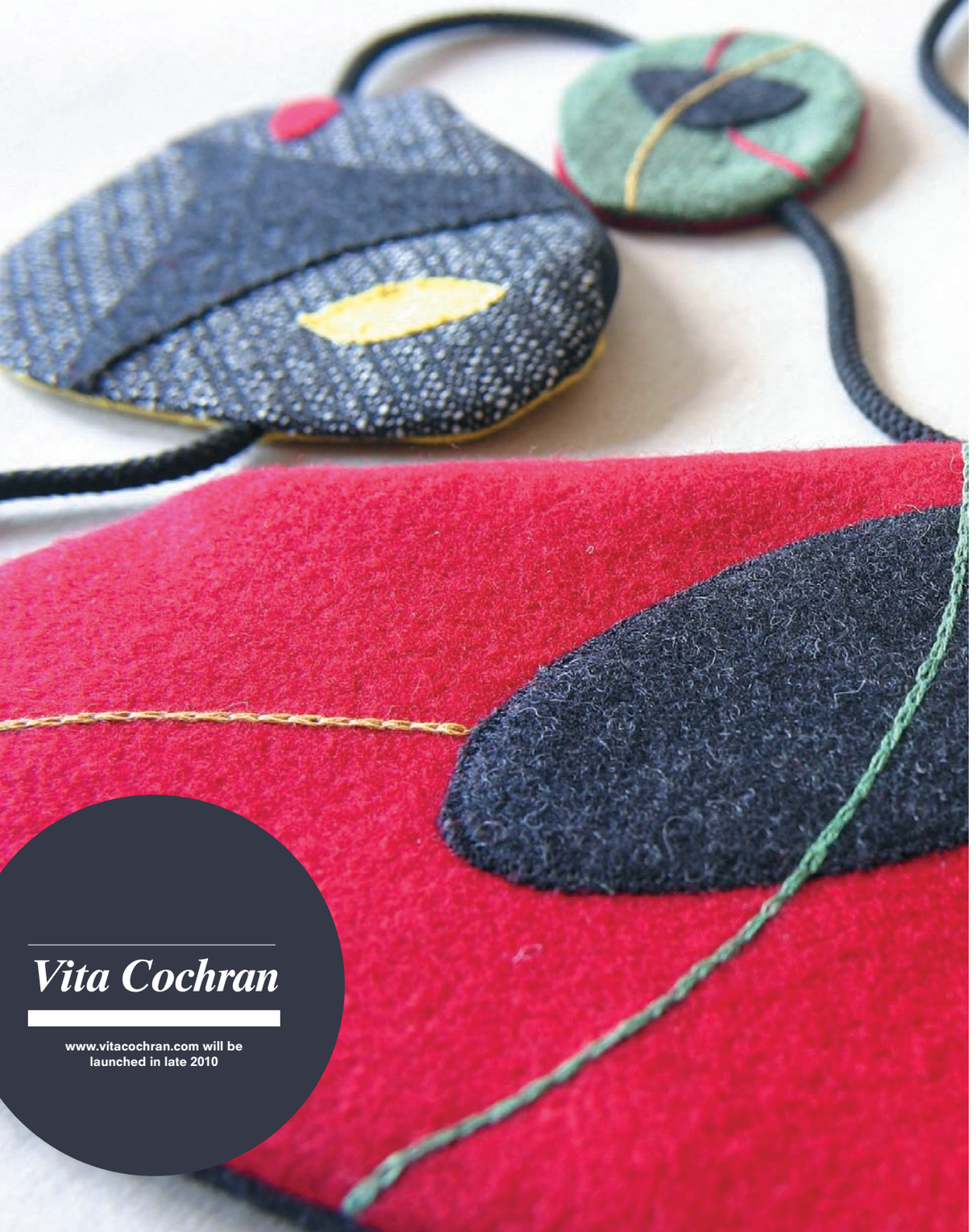
The collecting and collections of these makers is so closely related to their making that it offers a fresh lens for understanding both their practice and works. Lifting the lens up a level, the information within these stories yield up information about the fundamental character of contemporary craft practice itself.

1. http://www.objectspace.org.nz/programme/show.php?documentCode=2192

2. http://www.objectspace.org.nz/programme/show.php?documentCode=1923

3. Bruce Metcalf in NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts, 2007 p4-31

Vita Cochran
Andrea Daly
Warwick Freeman
Simon Gamble
Genevieve Packer
Emily Siddell
Richard Stratton



Vita Cochran
Orbit, 2010.

Maker Vita Cochran professes a strong interest in the handmade, the rituals of life and for finding items that are undervalued, which often means others' discards. Consequently, she has spent a lot of time op shopping which for her, as she jokingly points out, is a tax deductible activity. This admission is not surprising when one knows that Cochran is a renowned maker of handbags and other accessories whose designs have been widely appreciated for their craftsmanship, originality and witty 'craft' sensibility and which can be found in leading New Zealand public and private collections and illustrated in major fashion and textile publications.

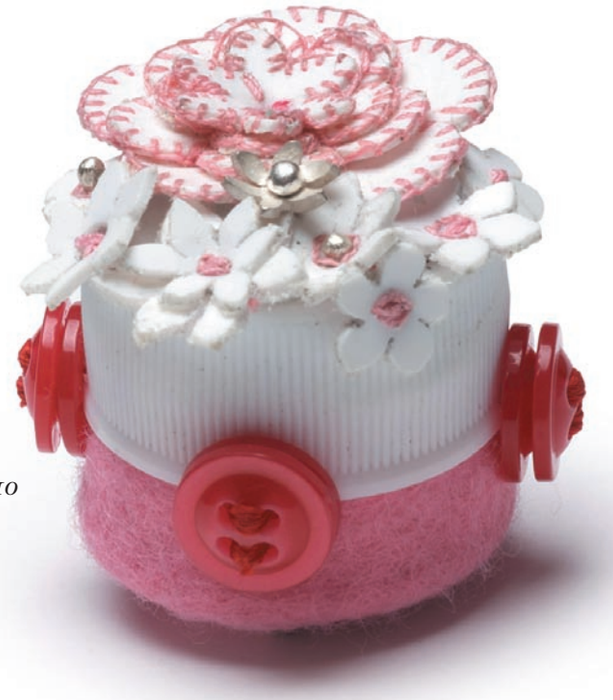
The lure of second-hand shops is intense for Cochran as she is a collector as well as a maker. An early collecting interest was tea cosies, of which she amassed a collection numbering in the hundreds. That interest has now been superseded by her collecting of Japanese lacquer ware, Bakelite buckles and hand-worked items across a variety of media. In thinking about some of her very favourite pieces, which include a fifties gingko leaf apron and an obsessively chain-stitched cushion, she says "I come back to these objects all the time...These are objects I really respect."

Some of Cochran's designs have employed recycled buttons, fabric, gloves and zips that she has sourced from op shops. Other designs have employed textiles and techniques associated with earlier times such as appliqué and floral felt work while some designs have drawn upon colour combinations found in works she admires. She says "my work is more generally influenced by the economy, beauty, and attention to hand worked detail that characterises many different craft traditions, from the subsistence crafts of the post-war period, to Japanese textiles of the late nineteenth century, to, in my most recent work, the graphic inventions of early women modernists such as Sonia Delaunay."

Through her attention to fine hand detailing and finish Cochran's works evoke the sensibility of times when grooming and personal presentation was a matter of considerable pride and ritual. These are bags that are made for parade just as much as use; bags that will turn heads and consequently require a high standard of performance by the owner.

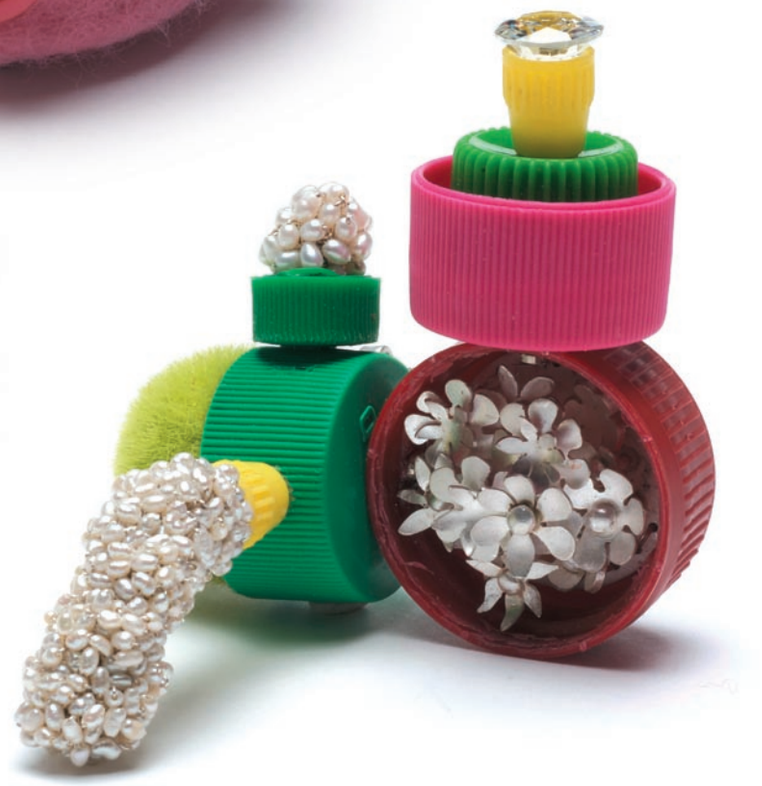
The recent Orbit bag is consciously evocative of fifties America recalling the 'Atomic Age', the 'Space Race' and the mobile sculptures of Alexander Calder in its strong form, colouration and textures. Cochran relishes the tension between the sleek futuristic aesthetics of that period and the resolutely handmade and warmly textured qualities of her final product. At the same time Orbit is completely contemporary as it offers the wearer choices as to what it is, - is it a bag or a piece of jewellery - and how it might engage with their body. Another recent bag Every Cloud possesses quite different qualities. A simple tote bag form, that any home crafter might attempt, Every Cloud is made of grey linen embroidered with patiently stitched clouds in restrained shades of grey. The user's reward is revealed on the bag's inside: it is lined with a heavy silver canvas. Cochran says this work is partly inspired by a favourite breakfast tray that features a wistful stylised landscape with sliver-lined clouds painted on glass.

Without them needing to be literal, connections are discernible between the works that Cochran makes and collects in terms of their materiality and sensibility. It is also apparent that the process of the collector - searching and looking, searching and looking – supports her practice as a maker. The collecting process locates visual or design stimulation but it also helps her to locate new technical information. Irrespective of whether she acquires an object, the style, skills and sensibilities of past makers will continue to inform her practice as a designer maker.



Andrea Daly

Andrea Daly works can be viewed at Fingers www.fingers.co.nz



As a youth jeweller Andrea Daly lived in the Hokianga area of Northland, the landscape of which has been often noted for an intense spiritual quality. This was one of the first areas of significant European settlement and has been considered the cradle of New Zealand Roman Catholicism. Daly was brought up in the Roman Catholic Church and notes that Hokianga Catholicism "has a special feral quality" which she describes as being palpable, rooted to the ground and for that reason lived rather than practised. Although no longer a Catholic practitioner she is, what has been termed, an 'ethnic Catholic' in the sense that Catholic knowledge and sensibilities remain deeply ingrained and these sensibilities continue to inform and be celebrated within her jewellery practice.

Daly completed under-graduate jewellery training in Australia and has gone on to complete post- graduate training in jewellery and art history. She has been an active member of the jewellery community since the early 1990s as a regular exhibitor, teacher, writer and commentator. She has also been active, and known, as a collector of Catholica. "I collect Catholic imagery and religious objects which are mainly cheap mass produced items that seem to be mementoes for the religious tourist. I am also in love with the more valued works that have become cultural and religious treasures".

For Daly these objects are compelling on a number of levels. Because of her religious background these objects are representative of formative aesthetic experiences, "light through stained glass windows, the stitching on the priest's robes, the Stations of the Cross, rosary beads, crosses, the smell of incense, the ritual, music and the romance, the magic and tragedy of the stories involved". On another level Daly finds them powerful because she has an ongoing interest in how people construct conceptions of the world. Religion provides one way of seeing and knowing the world, science another and secular intellectual theory yet another. She regards the objects she collects as being conduits to "knowledge bases that exist outside of our accepted empirical scientific knowledge pathway". Daly confesses to having an ongoing curiosity about all of these world view options, and their limitations, which she summarises in her query "how can you get an object to talk to you?" This is a very interesting question which illuminates something of Daly's own journey. Traditionally Catholica objects have not been conceived as talking objects but conduits through which the faithful can speak directly to God and the saints. It is the artist, or maker, that creates objects that talk.

Daly's own works possess a Catholic sensibility in terms of their beaded, embroidered and golden surfaces and use of angel, heart, skull and wing forms. In the past she has also used Catholic ex votos as the foundation for brooches. In her most recent jewellery, detritus, particularly discarded bottle tops, is the foundation of works which are also richly beaded, embroidered and decorated. The Catholica that Daly collects are objects that help to transport the faithful to a world beyond the quotidian. In using the decorative enchantments that she has experienced within Roman Catholicism, Daly's works own speak about the possibilities of finding meaning and enchantment in the human, small and quotidian.

Andrea Daly
Brooches, 2009.
Images courtesy of Allan McDonald

Warwick Freeman

Warwick Freeman is represented by Fingers and Starkwhite, Auckland, Bowen Galleries, Wellington, Nadene Milne Gallery, Arrowtown

Warwick Freeman is one of New Zealand's most eminent artists, and makers, recognised nationally, by the Arts Foundation, and internationally by way of his receipt of the prestigious Francoise van der Bosch Prize. Similarly his jewellery is represented in many outstanding national and international public and private collections. He has been a committeed professional maker since the 1970s and in the process has been active as an advocate for jewellery and the wider craft sector.

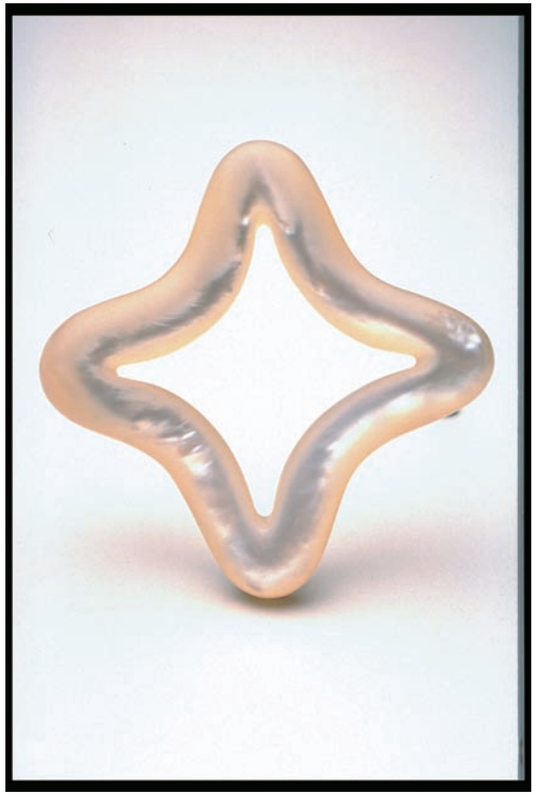
Freeman has made many works based on the star form and this form has been described as his signature motif.[1] The first star brooch was made in 1989 at a time when Freeman was interested to work with simple commonplace motifs. The last star brooch was made in 2004 with the main period of production being the 1990s. Freeman found the star form a rich vein to explore in formal terms with variations standing in relation to each other. For instance the shape of the Green Star is formed from the negative shape of the Ngataringa Star and the Flower Star is a stretched version of the Ngataringa Star which in turn yielded the positive shape of the Pillow Star. As the star proved to be a rich seam to mine Freeman committeed himself to producing at least one star brooch annually and this commitment was attained until the end of the 1990s.

In addition to creating star brooches Freeman has produced other stars. A flag with a star motif – as a contribution to the debate around a new national flag - and various star form badges. The later might be considered as an example of Freeman's conscious decision, taken in the 1990s, to professionally associate, or brand himself, with the star form. This is a very interesting 'speculation' on his part that can, in hindsight, be related to various developments regarding intellectual property, commercial branding and art world positioning that included the creation of Starform as a brand name.

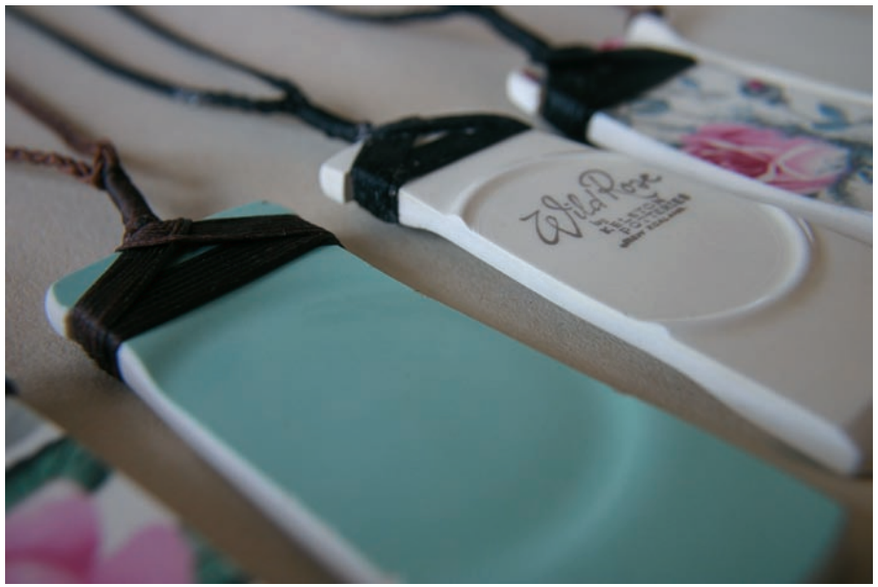
Freeman talks about how this identification still engages him although he would now reject overt expressions like his earlier flag preferring to consider such usages belonging within the emerging arena of the Creative Commons. It is a little known fact that in the mid 1990s Freeman out-ed himself as a collector when he launched his I Collect Stars project. Like many artists Freeman makes and collects images of subjects that visually attract him. He recalls one of his first star image photographs is from an idea that was given to him in 1990 by a friend , it is of the star created by joining the thumb and fingertips of both hands, the gesture that begat the Ngataringa Star. His collection of star form photographs now stands at somewhere between 80 and 100 examples and continues to grow. At an early stage in the life of the collection these images operated as references and some of them informed the development of particular star brooches – the Soft Star and Hard Star came from a trip to New York in 1989. The Soft Star from a neon for Miller's Beer and the Hard Star from the Case Manhattan Bank logo. The images at this time had a service or secondary status within his practice as a maker. For some time now, and especially since the cessation of star brooch production, these images have become a primary area of his practice, as a collector.

Freeman's jewellery is highly locatable to New Zealand. Damian Skinner has written "Freeman's jewellery is clearly about place, about the cultures and raw materials that exist in New Zealand. It is informed by the specific features of this country".[2] In the same publication Freeman's own final statement talks about " 'the novelty of our own situation'. "[3] By contrast Freeman's collection of star form images is not at all locatable to New Zealand; in fact any good image of any good star form in any situation will gain admittance to the collection. Just as the early examples of the Soft Star and Hard Star were collected on the road, travel is still central in the collecting of new star images, the latest coming from a Fitzroy streetscape in Melbourne and another recent addition being provided by the Hubble Telescope. He notes with some satisfaction that the Hubble images, from the far side of our galaxy, are noteworthy for the way they refract with only four points.

1. Damian Skinner, Given: Jewellery by Warwick Freeman, Starform, 2004, p42
2. Ibid, p2
3. Ibid, p75



Warwick Freeman
Soft Star, 1991.
Image courtesy of Warwick Freeman



Simon Gamble
Toki, 2010.

Simon Gamble

Simon Gamble's jewellery can be viewed at www.thepoiroom.co.nz and www.nativeagent.co.nz

Simon Gamble is a maker/designer who produces furniture, jewellery and objects for both commercial and exhibition contexts. While his current jewellery practice might be hard to connect with his furniture designs these different dimensions of his practice do have similar characteristics in that they are both invested with the qualities of 'craft', paradox and they both relate to his practice as a collector. Just as the fields of his production are diverse, Gamble's fields of collecting are similarly diverse.

One field of his collecting is Crown Lynn dinnerware, very specifically the pattern Green Bamboo. By scouring Op Shops and car boot sales, purchases of individual pieces have accumulated into an extensive Green Bamboo service. This process of collecting, in an unplanned way, has shaped an aspect of his own production as a designer/maker. Sifting through piles of discarded plates for his preferred pattern the designer got to wonder about the possibilities for the recuperation of other discarded Crown Lynn wares. A spell of living in Melbourne had made him aware of the cultural differences between the two countries and of the role of pounamu pendants as unique cultural signifiers. Pulling these various ideas together Gamble started making his now quite commercial line of Toki. These are ceramic pendants made of Crown Lynn plates, preferably damaged ones that Gamble finds. The original plates is subverted in that the adze form of the Toki focuses on the plate's back stamp, these are pendants for Ngati Kiwi. While the material is recycled and industrially produced each Toki, and Gamble has produced about a thousand of them, involves a considerable amount of hand work as the cording for each is hand done.

The other major area of Gamble's design work is his furniture design. This sphere of his production also relates to a dimension of his collecting but in quite a different way. In his recent Piix furniture works Gamble twins two digital technologies, 3D top down scanner and a CNC milling. By selectively employing and manipulating two technologies, Gamble can produce unique results. He believes that digitally controlled cutting machinery as holding "dormant potential for crafting unique objects."

Gamble's embrace of technology is highly selective. He uses computers for modelling his designs and for his work as a craft and design tutor. But he eschews personal computers for what he views as distasteful and indiscriminate recreation. Gamble says that if he wants to play he "prefers to use a chisel". This selective engagement with technology is also evidenced in his other collection, the earliest generation of consumer electronics, such as calculators and computers. It is hard to recall that these now affordable and ubiquitous appliances, at the time they first became available, were expensive and accorded a respect that now seems incomprehensible. The electronics in his collection may appear obsolete however all of them are quite functional. In the information economy in which we dwell this collection of early consumer electronics is a reminder of the paradigm shift that has taken place, the shift from working and playing with Gamble's preferred chisels to working and playing with computers.

Both Gamble's furniture and jewellery possess highly crafted and paradoxical qualities. In the case of his furniture this crafted quality has, paradoxically, been invested through the manipulation of its processing technologies. In the case of his jewellery it is through the reworking of an inherently democratic material – mass produced dinnerware – to fashion, paradoxically, personal signifiers. In subverting the inherent democratic nature of his chosen materials and processes Gamble is able to make works which he describes as "bespoke objects".

Genevieve Packer

Genevieve Packer works can be viewed at www.genevievepacker.com

Genevieve Packer says that she made her first purchase of 1950s and 1960s dinner plates nearly twelve years ago. It was a small job lot at the Martinborough Fair, bought, because she was dissatisfied with the second rate plates that she did own and because she was particularly attracted to their solid and strong colours. Since then she has continued to acquire similar plates, round and square, and other items of crockery, that have the same colour qualities, for everyday use. This household 'collection' of domestic crockery is kept handy for use on open kitchen shelves and the changing colour combinations of the stacks of crockery are ever visible.

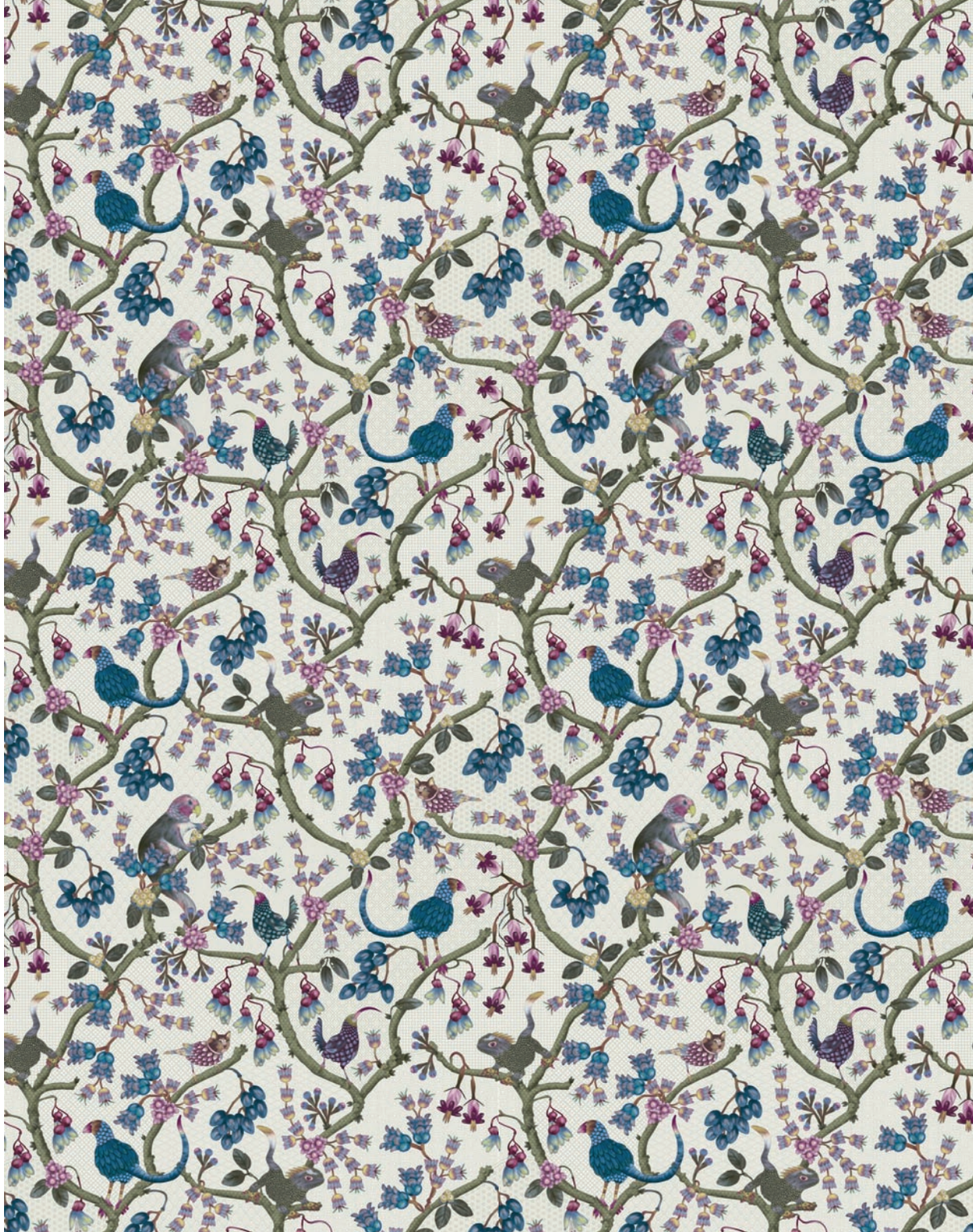
Packer is a Wellington based textile designer-maker, craft enthusiast and educator who has recently noticed a change in her practice. The colour palette of her embossed, laser cut and printed Wish you were here range was changing as the range expanded from one-off pieces to more commercial products. Previously dark monotones dominated this range of wallpapers and textiles. The palette change was not a conscious decision on her part, it just happened. And it was only with the benefit of hindsight she realised that the coloration of the new palette was that of her crockery collection.

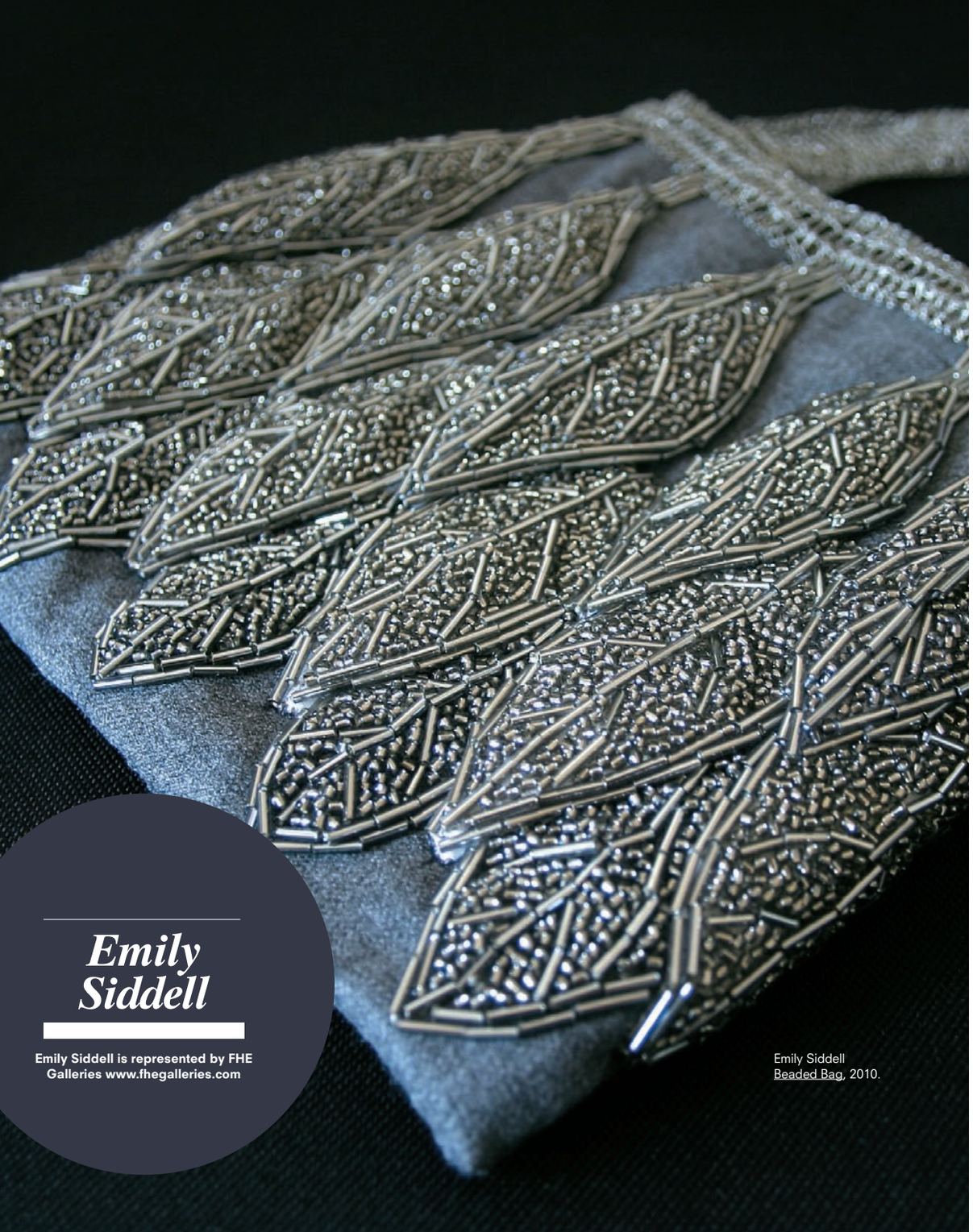
Genevieve Packer
Heads and Tails, 2010.
Image courtesy of Genevieve Packer

Packer has another major collection that she has been actively developing also for about ten years and which is principally a reference collection in her design work. It is her collection of vintage wallpaper which includes examples that are embossed, flocked, hand-screened and spliced which now stands at about a 1000 rolls, mostly found at op shops. She says she will buy just about any wallpaper but prefers examples from periods "when we weren't afraid of pattern and colour" and regrets that since the early 1980s and until recently "we've been shy of colour and pattern." Packer uses the collection as a design source, for studying how repeat patterns work across a surface and how colours work with patterns. For one of her first digital fabric prints, Packer designed a surface pattern based on fan tail shaped wallpaper cut-outs which were then stitched together, made into a seamless repeating tile and digitally printed on fabric.

Her participation in a very recent Suter Gallery project Infill: a suburban experience, which explored the desire to control and contain the environment, led her to create a new pattern that quite consciously draws upon both the palette of her crockery collection and the patterns represented in her wallpaper collection. This is her densely patterned arborescent-style pattern Heads and Tails which portrays a romanticised, yet uneasy and precarious, cohabitation between the native flora and fauna and introduced species, where to survive is to adapt to the rapidly changing landscape. She says "aesthetically it is both inspired by the pattern and textures of my wallpaper collection (it has layers of pattern on pattern - with no space left unfilled) as well as textures of some worked into the design."

While Heads and Tails is reminiscent of nineteenth century wallpapers it is rather remarkable that Packer, by drawing on the aesthetic qualities of her two quite disparate vintage collections, is able to tackle and illustrate a very contemporary, and local, cultural and environmental issue.





Emily Siddell

Emily Siddell is represented by FHE Galleries www.fhegalleries.com

Emily Siddell
Beaded Bag, 2010.

Emily Siddell has been a regular exhibitor since the 1990s and her works are held in many leading private as well as nationally important public collections and is particularly acclaimed for various 'signature' forms including kete and lei. She is also well known as a collector who says, "I am an obsessive collector and have to admit that the time and space in my life is cluttered by collections of simple domestic objects, unified by similarities of shape, texture, colour and functions."

Siddell enjoys gardening, the gardener being another type of collector who composes and tends their collection over time to a pleasing whole. An earlier writer on Siddell has said "The garden is a personal space for Emily... she cites the provenance of each plant, like inventorying an art collection"[1] Her collections of beaded and embroidered objects, ceramics, shoes and garden are used as a source of visual inspiration. But in looking at the collections one can see discern a number of characteristics which are also present in her own practice. The commonalities of accumulation, detail, monochrome, nature and variation suggest that there is a two-way relationship between her collecting and her practice.

Siddell's collecting started many years ago and her first object was a green ceramic kettle. A shelf of them now adorns the kitchen. While this collection has stopped her collection of green ceramic table wares as well as cream Crown Lynn wares continues to grow. Works are usually acquired singly but composed in monochromatic groups. The effect is pleasing to the eye as it enables the easy identification of detail and variation within the group. A large cabinet of green ceramics is positioned close to the French doors that lead into the garden - which like the cabinet of ceramics - is a carefully composed mass of green patterns and texture.

Her own works frequently have the same qualities of monochrome and accumulation regardless of whether she is working with ceramic or glass. Her Flock bag is an accumulation of many small slip cast ceramic 'feathers' brought together by wire mesh and crocheted wire. As with her collections, the massing of small elements enables the eye to locate variations. The bag form she finds an intriguing form partly because of its universality as a 'canvas' for detail, pattern and texture and because of its very local associations with kete.

Siddell's love of detail, and the time and skill required to produce this, is present in a very recent grey Beaded Bag. She says she enjoys the repetition, and labour intensiveness, required to make such works. "Embroidery and bead work give me great pleasure and satisfaction. Collections of hundreds of tiny stitches and beads are employed to produce a surface with unity of texture, colour and tone. I will then produce groups of many similar objects with slight variations, such as small bags, using similar techniques and shapes, echoing the repetitive forms found in nature." The qualities of detail and repetition, which she admires in the works of other makers, she admires in the Beaded Bag and beaded and embroidered clothing that she collects. Her collection of beaded works is also noticeably monochromatic. These collected objects posses the qualities of fragility and preciousness which are also found in her own work.

Siddell has said "I can't resist assembling objects - the sum of the parts is always more appealing to me than the individual items. Keeping to a monochrome palette, the texture and repetitive patterns formed when many similar elements are placed together make a satisfying whole." This description of her collecting could just as easily be a description of her own making practice.

1. Bronwyn Lloyd, Emily Siddell, FHE Galleries, 2008 p5

Ceramics maker Richard Stratton reports that he is currently searching for "rococo revival" objects as these are his latest collecting enthusiasm. Stratton's collection of ersatz 'rococo objects' includes items made of metal, plastic or ceramic. The material is immaterial to him, examples of rococo form is what he is seeking. These objects he collects are part of his 'form library' because "I like the idea of using old things and old materials to make new work".

While the 'rococo' is his principal current collecting interest Stratton has been collecting for many years and his 'rococo' collection sits alongside ceramic dolls, ceramic figures, furniture (hotchpotch rather than Hepple-white), eleventh to thirteenth century Burmese ceramics and a variety of Asian and Indian objects. The common factor across this diversity of form, function and material is the decorative quality of the works. He says his "eye is grabbed by ornamentation that disguises the object from its purposes". On a more practical level he also collects technical ceramics manuals and sets of china paints.

Stratton's quest for rococo forms, in particular, arises because he currently finds inspiration in eighteenth century ceramic forms and he cites some of the most famous of such manufactories, Minton, Sevres and Wedgwood as sources of interest. What Stratton has been doing is making casts of various 'rococo' features of objects in his collection, perhaps a handle, lid or surface ornamentation and then modeling an element for a new work of his own from the cast, as it "saves time". One of the reasons that Stratton likes to own the objects he models from is that the making of his works is technically challenging and the kiln loss rate can be up to ten per cent as works usually require multiple firings. Being able to handle the 'original' is an advantage.

While Stratton may incorporate 'quotes' from his ersatz rococo, or other collections, there is nothing ersatz about his finished works which are distinctive contemporary artworks often decorated with highly personal narratives. While bearing some similarity to eighteenth century forms such as lidded urns, steeple cups or tea pots Stratton's own works are wayward in comparison with their elegant progenitors in terms of their decorative and physical exuberance.

In his recent Road to Peace Teapot the surface embellishment is inspired by 'Dazzle' World War One camouflage. This style of camouflage, unlike the usual form of camouflage which aims to disguise, aims to render perception of the camouflaged object more difficult. The name of this work is inspired by a Tom Waits' song whose lyrics tell the story of a young Jewish man's occupation as a suicide bomber in Gaza and deal with the political spin doctoring of Israel, Palestine and America, and the devastation wrought on non-combatants. The raised 'foot' of the pot is similar to the foot of a tureen made at about the same time. The bodies of this teapot and the 200 to 1 teapot were thrown and altered on the wheel and the spouts were made from a press mould of a 1940s enamel ware teapot spout.

The 200 to 1 Teapot made about the same time explores a familial narrative. The figure on the top is an impression of Richard's partner, Frances Scott, pregnant and with black bags under her eyes induced by not sleeping due to the anxiety of awaiting the results of an amniocentesis test. A large rendering of a syringe is visible on this teapot and the work is named after the risk factor. The modelling of this teapot - in particular the bulging, distended and asymmetric qualities evoke the pregnant form.

Stratton's collecting is not about styling his environment. It's a hard working collection that provides visual stimulation to him as a maker .It is an expanding collection, not just in the usual sense of being added to, but it is literally re-producing: it has offspring. How Stratton's collection stands in relation to his own production is an ongoing paradox; reproductions of ersatz objects begetting highly original and distinctive contemporary works.

Richard Stratton

Richard Stratton is represented by Anna Miles Gallery www.annamilesgallery.com

Richard Stratton
Road to Peace Teapot, 2009.

Afterword

PHILIP CLARKE / DIRECTOR

Talking to Me: collecting and making stands in direct relationship to two earlier Objectspace projects. In late 2009 we presented To Have & To Hold: Making Collections which surveyed the collections and achievements of 18 different collectors. And earlier in 2010 we presented Quotidian: Finding Inspiration in everyday design curated by Matt Blomeley which considered the designs of nine individual designers and two collectives in relation to quotidian objects that provide inspiration to their practice. Talking to Me stands somewhere between these two antecedents in that it considers the collecting and making practice of seven designer/makers. Talking to Me has found that these two practices are so inter-related that the collecting and collection of these makers provide a fresh and revealing lens for understanding for understanding the practice and works of these notable makers. These same stories I suggest "tell us something important about the character of contemporary craft practice itself".

This trio of conceptually linked projects presented within the same 12 months is no accident as together they demonstrate Objectspace's ongoing commitment to considering, and supporting, the professional development of makers as well as recognising the role of important role of collectors and collecting within our sector. This is the reason why the Quotidian and Talking to Me catalogues are bound together, as conjoined they provide a snapshot of the professional practice of 18 designers and makers and the various sources of inspiration that resource that practice.

I would like to thank Vita Cochran, Andrea Daly, Warwick Freeman, Simon Gamble, Genevieve Packer, Emily Siddell and Richard Stratton for their candour, time and enthusiasm for Talking to Me. All of these designer makers are notable and it is a privilege to present their work together at Objectspace. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Objectspace staffers Matt Blomeley and Bronwyn Lloyd.

Objectspace gratefully acknowledges the major funding of Creative New Zealand and the support of the ASB Trust, Auckland City, the Objectspace Donors, Pasquale Viticultura, The Chartwell Trust and The Lion Foundation. Without the assistance of these supporters Objectspace would not be able to support makers such as those featured in Talking to Me.

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Published on the occasion of Talking to Me: collecting and making.

18 Sept—30 Oct 2010

and Quotidian: finding inspiration in everyday design at Objectspace.

ISBN 978-0-9582811-7-1

Objectspace is a dedicated and award winning centre for innovative craft and design which receives ongoing support from:

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Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa

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