

USE

A juried exhibition by the members of the Jewellers and Metalsmiths Group of Queensland

The tools that fill the drawers and cupboards of a jeweller's bench are each imbued with the memories of their use. As hammers swing to shape and mark, so to are they shaped and marked by the materials subject to their blow. Their potential to create is inherent but impotent, unlocked by the skill and drive of the artisan who wields them.

A jeweller's connection to their tools is often intimate and easy, the techniques and 'hold it just so' tricks a second nature. But this easiness is hard-won, through patience and practice. While humans are predisposed to manipulate tools, the intricate craft of jewellery and metalsmithing requires dedication to mastering a litany of processes and necessitates the use of many specialised, and some not-so-specialised, tools.

While contemporary jewellery and small objects practices are highly diverse in their forms and motivations, tools are the common denominator that defines this field of creative practice. From traditional tools like hammers, saws and pliers, to modern innovations like 3D printers and laser-cutting machines, tools are essential in the creation of jewellery and small objects works. That is why they provide such a rich and reflexive theme for a group exhibition of works by jewellery and small objects artists.

Featuring works by seventeen artists from the Jewellers and Metalsmiths Group of Queensland, *Use* invited members of the Group to respond to tools and processes as a thematic premise. Juried by a curatorial panel comprised of Claire Sourgnès, CEO of Artisan, Barbara Heath, Jeweller to the Lost, and myself, Lisa Bryan-Brown, the exhibition's curator, the works selected for inclusion in *Use* bring interesting and diverse interpretations to this theme.

Some artists utilised actual tools in the creation of their pieces for *Use*. Samuel Lintern's *Loupe* series works take as their point of departure the loupe, a powerful magnifying device used by jewellers and watchmakers to work more easily on a tiny scale. Working with found lenses, Lintern's ring and brooch are moveable and encourage the wearer to use them to analyse their own jewellery or any surface more closely. Elizabeth Shaw's *Heads* series responds to found antique nails, one of the most ancient, simple and effective joining devices. Embellishing each with a miniature cast silver human head, Shaw's nail-heads are a wearable pun, at once funny and grotesque in both their form and concept.

Many of the artists chose to focus on the important role their fingers and hands play in their practices. Jac Dyson's *Finger Pockets* are conceived as a kind of armour, inspired by finger pain she experienced from dramatically increased typing in a new job. Combining knitted silver and porcelain in a simultaneously delicate and robust form, Dyson's chainmail-like *Finger Pockets* serve as a reminder to protect our vulnerable extremities. Andy Lowrie's brooches *Lucky Heart*, *Wandering Eyes*, *Heavy Heart* and *Paw* also contemplate hands and pain, created in response to his personal encounters with withered hands; the gnarled finger of a long-

deceased saint displayed in a reliquary, and those of a family member suffering from a degenerative hand condition.

Xiaohui Yang's works also take the hands as their point of departure, considering their physicality and the space that surrounds the body. Interested in the body's intimate spatial relationships, with both adornment objects and other bodies, her *Distance Between Fingers I-VI* and *Beyond Reach* rings toy with notions of proximity while *The Flowing Ink I-III* explore the ways a hand can interact with each tangled form. Helen Bird's *Trace* series too contemplates the body by means of extension, cleverly utilising magnets to allow her intricate pieces to be activated by viewers, in an interactive but only partially controllable drawing machine. Exhibiting the objects alone, removed from their paper and shelf, Bird emphasizes their function as drawing implements, contextualised by video documentation of them in action.

Some artists turned to specific environments for inspiration. Paola Raggo's works look to her studio, and incorporate the broken shards of snapped saw blades that are a common waste item for any jeweller. Casting these blade fragments within beautiful swirling coloured resin, Raggo's *Art Studio Waste* series repurposes that which would otherwise be discarded, thereby reinstating value and prioritising the ethos of sustainability. Helen Wyatt's *Broken Window* series respond to a disused power station, a previously functional infrastructure site that has since been outstripped by technology and modern progress. Her brooches and necklace draw their forms from shards of glass found at the site, a reflection upon society's approach to waste and renewal.

Other artists responded to environments in a more general sense. Catherine Hunter's *Colour Restore Test* series contemplates the impact of consumerism on the environment and the plight of the Great Barrier Reef, incorporating obsolescent technology cables and cheap throw-away plastic items (soy-sauce fish, aquarium plants and coral, acupuncture needle sheaths, imitation crystals and beads) with complex crochet patterns, creating neckpieces that mimic the magnificent, previously vibrant but now bleached and dull corals of the Reef. Lois Hayes's *When the Seas were Bountiful* neckpiece considers the environmental impact of the evolution of fishing tools, with an ancient traditional fishing trap form on one side, and on the other modern violent fishing implements. Utilising thick yachting rope, Hayes work reflects upon the way these different techniques have depleted local fish populations.

Alicia Lane's pair of raised silver cups take their designs from the seed pods of native Australian rainforest trees, their surfaces textured through repoussé and chasing, and darkened with wax. The populations of these trees were devastated by settlement, their timber used to build countless 'Queenslander' homes, which Lane references to speak to the destructive history of colonialism within our nation. Clare Poppi's *Seed Bomb Necklace* kit is a generative necklace that functions as a mould to produce seed-bomb beads, which can be used for guerrilla gardening or kept as beads and worn as their own necklace. Continuing Poppi's investigation into growing jewellery, the *Seed Bomb Necklace* kit explores how a jewellery wearer could function as a tool for an artist, resolving the work by using it.

Interested in anatomy and natural history, Kierra-Jay Power's series of bronze and silver brooches and necklaces incorporate both 3D printing and hand-made processes to explore

ideas around the museological display of anatomical specimens. Contemplating the relationship between the specimen being displayed and the architecture enabling its display, Power's works reflect upon function by considering the skeletons that operate to support parts of skeletons (which used to operate), flattening the privilege of one over the other.

Some artists focussed closely on the materials involved in creating their works. Rebecca Ward's pieces combine foraged wood with found plastic debris to create her quirky works; *The Wingle-Wobb*, *Clean Minty/Pinky Fresh*, *I Am the Armtree* and *Ding Dong, Roll-On*, whose nonsense forms and titles defy logic and reason. They possess a sense of apocalyptic wonder, their ad-hoc bushcraft aesthetic implying a 'make-do with what you can find' attitude towards materials. Conversely, Katie Stormonth's *Blended Modes and Mediums* brooch series are hyper-precise in their forms and assembly. Stormonth's works combine laser-cut timber with die-cut metal elements that are textured using a blend of hand and machine processes, and finished with brightly coloured paint coatings.

Precision is also key in Nellie Peoples' *Signs and Signals – Exit* brooch series, which utilise sections of an 'Exit' sign handpainted by her grandfather. The selected elements of the sign are rendered abstract in their isolation, but through Peoples' precise installation they collectively imply their former purpose. Catherine Large's *Tea Scoops and Sugar Shovels* series of stout spoon-forms use buttons drawn from the artist's extensive collection as their handles. Repurposing these objects, Large transforms each button from a fastening mechanism to a holding form in an intriguing reapplication of domestic purpose.

Each of the artists featured in *Use* has found the common ground between the exhibition's thematic premise of tools and processes, and the existing themes unique to their own practices. The works are awe-inspiring in their intricacy, while the wide variety of techniques and finishes means there are many layers of technical and aesthetic appreciation to enjoy. Foregrounding the significance of tools, materials, processes and techniques to the field of jewellery and small objects practice, *Use* unites the diverse approaches and concepts of the seventeen participants.

Words by Lisa Bryan-Brown, curator, *Use*.

Use was first exhibited at Griffith University's *POP Gallery* from the 8th to 18th February 2018, and will tour to regional venues with the support of Museum and Gallery Services Queensland from 2019-2020.