

Sarah Walker-Holt completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts at Auckland University's MSVA in 2010. She was the recipient of MSVA-Fingers Graduating Students Award and the winner of the New Zealand Contemporary Jewellery Award in 2011. She was the only contemporary jeweller selected to represent New Zealand in Galerie Marzee's 2012 Graduate Show, *Work in Progress* in The Netherlands. Sarah is currently an exhibitor in The Dowse Art Museum's *Wunderruma: New Zealand Jewellery* and a mentee in the *Handshake 2* Prentice and Prodigy project.

Deborah Crowe is an Auckland-based artist, educator and professional mentor. Her work is in significant collections and various publications. Crowe has written and presented nationally and internationally on issues related to making, objects, jewellery, textiles, fashion, nomenclature and a conceptual approach to weaving.

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1. In conversation Walker-Holt is very considered regarding the terms she selects when discussing her work. She chooses 'interaction', talks about strategies to expose the viewer to her methods of construction and to address viewers' fear of participation, but she most certainly doesn't like the term play. 'Play' in Walker-Holt's thinking lightens the work too much, negating the many layers of meaning she carefully considers when constructing these pieces. I, on the other hand, am reminded of IDEO's Tim Brown's *Tales of Creativity and Play* TED Talk and read play and invention as almost interchangeable.

2. The term 'tactic knowledge' is attributed to Michael Polanyi, defined specifically in his *Tacit Dimension*, 1966. It is sometimes referred to as know-how (Brown & Duguid 1998) and refers to intuitive, largely experience based knowledge, often transferred in situations of interaction, trust and personal contact. Walker-Holt discusses her own tacit knowledge emerging from many hours spent in her father's workshop as a child. She also believes that a tactile experience of an object creates a deeper understanding of it, writing 'We see, understand and learn from using both our eyes and hands simultaneously.'

3. Crawford owns a motorcycle repair shop in Richmond, Virginia and is a Senior Fellow at the University of Virginia's Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, USA. In his 2010 review in *The Guardian* newspaper, Peter Forbes describes Crawford as an 'advocate who swaps the overalls and the thinking cap regularly' – he has a doctorate in political philosophy and used to work for a think tank. Forbes also draws attention to other publications that look at the role of handwork in relation to job satisfaction, notably Richard Sennett's *The Craftsman* and Alain de Botton's *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work*.

4. Sarah Walker-Holt interview Left Field Studio 10 June 2015



SARAH WALKER-HOLT:
KITSET

Sum of the parts

For a number of years, Sarah Walker-Holt has encouraged viewers to interact with her jewellery. Through constructing works with moving parts, employing interchangeable components or documenting the numerous ways these pieces can be assembled, attached to clothing or manipulated to create forms, she explores relationships between objects and wearability. Consequently, some of these works require a degree of manual dexterity and labour from her audience.

Observing varying levels of voluntary interaction from her gallery viewers, Walker-Holt was inspired to incorporate video in *Kitset*. The 40-second semi-instructional loop provides an introduction to the work. It is a prompt for more reserved viewers to sit down at the table and begin assembling something from Walker-Holt's parts. It gives permission to invent, to touch, to build, to arrange and, depending on how much each viewer enjoys hands-on play¹, to enter her world. This is a world in which a participant can easily become engrossed; lost in constructing and occupied with the act of building.

Walker-Holt admits a slight fetish of mechanisms and is a keen observer of behavioral patterns. Driven by process and a desire to share knowledge, she views interaction with the components of *Kitset* as a conduit to viewers' tacit knowledge, i.e. access to some hand/eye/cognitive skills they are familiar with from a previous exercise, a construction process learned during their formative years perhaps, or what they recollect following the video prompt². Constructing composites or making arrangements with Walker-Holt's objects and findings reminds me of Matthew Crawford's writing about the rewards of manual work. In his book, *The Case for Working with Your Hands: or Why Office Work is Bad for Us and Fixing Things Feels Good*, Crawford endorses the psychological and spiritual benefits of making. He promotes manual work as intellectually absorbing, possessing an intrinsic richness and providing fulfillment to those engaged in building things³.

Walker-Holt is a careful considerer of things. Our conversation about *Kitset* involved discussion of the balance of control and spontaneity in the creative process, and in the situation this work sets up. Walker-Holt acknowledges her control of the various components in the installation: the uniform colour of the parts, their range of shapes, the small variety of fixings and the positioning of the instructional video. We also discussed the role the 'new' pieces take on once constructed by visitors. Alongside this work, Walker-Holt reflects on her experience of working in an art gallery where she observes apprehension in some visitors. Conscious of this attitude towards some contemporary art, in *Kitset* she aims to enable viewers not to be scared of artworks⁴, a nod perhaps towards democratising roles between artist, institution and viewer or of her own (learned) perceptions around contemporary art? She promotes engaging the audience with hands-on making as a method to foster membership of a community in which they may originally feel marginalised.

Sarah Walker-Holt is a fan of jigsaw puzzles, contemporary jewellery and dissecting/reconfiguring used everyday objects. In *Kitset*, her approach involves scrutiny, invitation, activity, engagement and sharing aspects of her process and thinking. It also constructs a platform to consider 'in built' knowledge bases, the benefits of hands-on activity and perceptions around gallery/viewer politics. *Kitset* raises some questions about these concerns without proposing to answer them, but to build curiosity. Te Uru's Curiosity Corner seems an entirely appropriate place to sit down, put some pieces together and see what happens next...

Deborah Crowe