

Amelia Pascoe - My journey to and through jewellery

[1] When I went through school everyone did art in their first year, but only those with 'talent' were invited to continue. I was never shoulder tapped [2] so accepted that mine was not to be an artistic path and followed the route of sciences. I graduated with a Masters in Zoology in 1995 [3] and after a few years of travel returned to New Zealand and embarked on a career in science-based organisations. [4]

However, from the moment I submitted my thesis there began a creative stir. I scratched the itch first with life drawing classes [5], then progressed through all manner of creative based short courses until in the year 2000 I stumbled on contemporary jewellery. In 2010, [6] I resigned from my job of 9 years at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and commenced full-time study at Whitireia New Zealand [7], graduating with a Bachelor of Visual Arts and Design in 2012. It was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

[08-11] I now lead a dual life I work as a business analyst for MPI three days a week (not nearly as dry as it sounds!), and focus on my creative practice outside of these hours. Both paths hold significant interest and stimulation for me, and it continues to surprise me how much each informs and supports the other.

My creative practice

[12-13] Since embarking on my artistic journey I have aspired to make work that can be appreciated on different levels – aesthetic form and craftsmanship, stories that it alludes to.

[14-17] My work tends to be project based, with each new collection centred around different ideas, medium and approaches. The joy comes through finding connections between seemingly unrelated ideas and finding ways to represent these visually – both through the work itself and the way in which it is installed.

[18-19] I like to make object as well as jewellery, including blends of the two and enjoy the slightly ambiguous nature of some of the pieces that result.

[20-22] I am fascinated by the creative process; the opportunities for crossover between craft, design, applied and fine arts; the integration of structured thought and research with intuition and play; and different modes of presentation.

Development focus

[23-26] In terms of my own creative process, my brain loves to get a look in, I like to have a plan, to be in control, and to problem solve. However, I also love those moments when my brain shuts down and magic just happens. I find it easy to get stranded between these left and right brain states and over recent years have become very curious about bridges.

[27-30] It is very important to me that my finished works are well crafted. A challenge associated with this is to have the confidence that a piece that is quick and simple to make can be just as important as one that has involved extensive

labour. To embrace those ‘imperfections’ that make a piece interesting, and not to feel like I need to refine the crap out of everything to make it ‘worthy’.

These were things that I was keen to explore through Handshake.

Handshake and Ruudt

[31] Don’t make beautiful things he says. Be less rationale he says. Embrace chaos he says. OK.

For Handshake 2 I was matched with Ruudt Peters.

[32-35] Until recently I really had only ever seen Ruudt’s work in books. I was drawn in by the variety of his work, fine craftsmanship, aesthetic quality supported by strong conceptual basis, and innovative installation. Ruudt talks about being inspired both by the fields of jewellery and fine arts, and of the importance of gut instinct and the role of the unconscious in the creative process

[36] My key focus for the first 6 months of HS was on completing work for pre-existing solo exhibition commitments. As the work for these collections was already well down a path that I was happy with, rather than mess with this we had more general conversations about creativity and my ideas for installation [37].

Before being accepted into HS I had applied for and been accepted into one of Ruudt’s summer workshops in the Netherlands. We agreed that my return from the workshop presented a great opportunity to embark on new projects free from constraint.

Starting point

[38-43] I did a lot of walking when I was in the Netherlands, and on day two was struck by sudden ankle pain. It continued on for the duration of my stay, and for many months after. On returning to NZ, the first instruction from my podiatrist was to throw out all my old shoes. Wanting to experiment with a different way of getting into a new work, I thought rather than throwing them out, I would try deconstructing them and to see what creative inspiration might arise through the process.

[44-47] I didn’t feel at all attached or emotionally connected to the idea of working with the shoe. It just seemed like a good way of starting from a place not associated with a pre-conceived idea. To work with unfamiliar materials that have a history, are dirty, smelly, worn and don’t naturally lend themselves to the creation of nice shiny structures. And to learn to trust in the process.

Developments

[48-50] Initially I found the exercise incredibly difficult. My brain desperately wanted to create some meaning, and the process of just pulling things apart and trying to put them together in interesting ways for the sake of it felt frustrating and empty. However, I did warm up.

[51] The more time I spent with my shoes (and now also other peoples), the

more fun I started having with them.

[52-55] I found the pale colour palettes and dream-like quality of the inner fabrics very beautiful. I also loved the way people seemed to be drawn to the final forms and the dramatic reaction that often followed once they realised what the pieces were made from. That simultaneous attraction and repulsion really appeals to me.

[56] Many times during the process I was seduced by the call of the concept.

[57-62] However, every time I was tempted to latch onto and follow an idea, Ruudt gave me a virtual slap around the ears, encouraging me to let go and forge on. This also happened if I started to make work that was too representational, too 'girlie', too 'jewellery-like', or too refined. While at times I found this challenging, the knowledge that I could come back to those ideas, techniques and forms at a later stage; and the allure of discovering what lay further down the rabbit hole kept me moving forward.

[63] These are the works I presented at Pah Homestead for the final HS2 show in December - made almost entirely out of used inner-soles/inner souls?. With the exception of one piece they are all incredibly low tech, but they fill me with a sense of creative peace.

The final forms make me think of dead or dying trees, which hold so much memory of life. As do the materials from which they are constructed.

Some of these can be worn, but I question whether they need to be. It really appeals to me that the human body is already an integral part of these objects – through wear patterns, imprints and smell

Where to next?

I like and feel proud of my pre-Handshake practice. However, through Handshake2 I have been exploring new ways. I have thrown myself at this challenge, and over the last 18months have started to develop and refine a new visual language.

Through Handshake3, my intention is to investigate the potential for drawing together these old and new ways of working, and to extend these lines of exploration to installation.