

23 - 27 CARDIGAN STREET CARLTON RMIT UNIVERSITY

Managed by the RMIT School of Art and School of Creative Media

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**TELEPHONE** 03 9925 4971 **GALLERY OPENING HOURS** Monday - Friday: 9.30am to 5.00pm, Saturday 12.00pm to 4.00pm

Photography by Jeremy Dillon

Sponsored by

**Design Institute**

**Nicole Polentas**

*Untitled* (bracelet), 2006  
Sterling silver, plastic, copper and image



Depiction of container or vessel as a utilitarian object has continually been explored within the Gold and Silversmithing studios, with two diverse approaches first demonstrated in the industrial designed anodised aluminium *Two Pen Boxes* 1987 by Andrew Last. A culturally imbued expression is found in two copper *Containers* 1997 by Japanese exchange student Makiko Mitsunari.

A third category of vessel since the 1960s is the ongoing reconsiderations of tea and coffee pots. An innovative rendering is evident in the silver plated gilding metal *Teapot* 2002 of Terry Cockrem with its roller bearing feet and rubber 'O' rings.

In 2003 to encourage and support the teaching of silversmithing the sculptor and silversmith Mr. Ernst Fries augmented a second year silversmithing prize resulting in a series of innovative teapots and vessels. Another significant development in the Gold and Silversmithing at RMIT has been the encouragement of postgraduate research by the offering of two major acquisitive prizes by Mrs. Diana Morgan and an international travel prize by Mr. Ronnie Bauer. The specialist focused undergraduate study, B.A. (Fine Art) and Honours, can lead to a PhD by project. This process of learning and research is based on a sequential building towards a high level of technology and understanding of the aesthetics in contemporary jewellery and the significance of the personal object.

Since the first decade of the twentieth century at RMIT there has been an ongoing tradition of teaching goldsmithing, jewellery making and silversmithing. The Gold and Silversmithing program with the W.E. McMillan Collection was within the Department of Design and relocated in the Fine Art Department in 1984 with little noticeable shifts in its philosophy of ideation and teaching. In 2006 RMIT's Gold and Silversmithing was cited as one of the top ten jewellery programs in the world. (Morris R., *Top schools around the World: Jewellery Design, Vogue Gioiello, Mag/Giu* 2006 N.90, p. 96).

**Professor Robert Baines**

*Studio Coordinator*

Gold and Silversmithing

RMIT University

January 2008

(right)

**Katherine Wheeler**

*White series* (rings), 2007  
Fine silver, sterling silver, paper, paint



**PROJECT SPACE/SPARE ROOM**



**W.E. McMillan Collection:  
Selected Gold and Silversmithing 1961-2007**

**FLOOR TALK THURSDAY 14 FEBRUARY 12-1PM**

**MONDAY 11 FEBRUARY – FRIDAY 7 MARCH  
OPENING TUESDAY 12 FEBRUARY 5-7PM**



Claire O'Halloran  
*Untitled* (brooch), 2006  
Aluminium and stainless steel

### RMIT Gold and Silversmithing W.E. McMillan Collection

*In 1962 a Mr. W.E. McMillan approached his friend Mr. Victor Vodicka the then coordinator of RMIT Gold and Silversmithing and stated, "I have seen the silversmithing students' work in the showcase and in my opinion it is equal to any work I have seen anywhere in the world ... I feel such work should be encouraged and I would be willing to purchase some work from students for a college collection to preserve it for posterity – also I feel it would help students financially to buy materials."*

*In 1966, on Mr. Vodicka's recommendation, it was decided to give the collection the name of W.E. McMillan to honour his foresight. Since that time some prize pieces have been donated by the student craftsmen and women or from jewellery firms or individual Gold and Silversmiths, such as K.G. Luke, Dunklings, Mr. M. Hurwitz, and Mr. L. Puzsar (Document: Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Faculty of Art 3/2/'84).*

This W.E. McMillan Collection continues to be an artistic measure of time and teaching practice in the Gold and Silversmithing studios at the RMIT School of Art. The collection of work identifies trends, influences and craft references in jewellery, silverware and personal objects. International trends and Australian influences have been major references in the teaching and making by art students who are

focusing on a vocation as gold and silversmiths.

Foundational to the building of the W.E. McMillan Collection as a developing treasure has been the ongoing support of donors. Their sponsored awards ensure the acquisition of selected works on an annual basis to strengthen the Collection. Patronage and benevolent ongoing support has been particularly notable from Mr. Gabriel Ripke, Mr. Don Begbie, Ms. Janet Le Good and Mr. Ronnie Bauer. Today the Collection is unique for its quality and for the way it reflects the cultural, aesthetic and technological concerns of each decade since its inception.

Silversmithing pieces were the first student works to be collected in the 1960s and the diverse smithing types came within the two broad influences of ecclesiastical works and silverware fulfilling domestic purposes. The first piece to be collected in 1961 is *Sugar Bowl and Spoon* by G. McIntyre and in 1962 a superbly 'high raised' *Jug* by R.K. Cranage. This work, much influenced by master craftsmen such as Henning Koppel, identifies the Scandinavian silver design influence in general, and the Danish silversmith Georg Jensen workshop in particular. Other homeware-based works in the Collection are candle stands, rose bowls, condiment sets, trays, wine decanters, ice buckets, fruit dishes, tea and coffee pots and flatware in the form of serving cutlery. Chess sets became a subject for the students in the early seventies. The design possibilities of trophy-types are investigated by gold and silversmithing students

during this period and this subject has continued to be revisited during the following forty years.

*Altar Cross and Candlesticks* 1964 by B.A. Schache exemplifies the influence of the Church in the commissioning of ecclesiastical works during this period. From this influence the Collection has diverse examples of ciboria, chalice and patens and processional crosses. Enamelling is an integral part of the manufacture in many works of the time, often showing the influence of the active Arts and Crafts movement. The copper enamelled shallow *Bowl* work by N.R. Keogh in 1964 shows the fusing of coloured glass slabs to the white enamelled surface creating natural burnout and textures from the condition of heat. In the late 1990s enamelling was reintroduced as a single subject in Gold and Silversmithing, a revival that was led by the master enamellist Debbie Sheezel, who also provides a student enamelling prize.

Student jewellery pieces were also referencing Scandinavian design, which is evident in *Necklace* 1964 by B.A. Schache. An example of the influence of natural forms in silver jewellery is in *Bracelet* 1966 by K.G. Eastwood. Silver jewellery in the Collection appears more complex consisting of multiple units in the later sixties with an increasing use of semi-precious gems of predominantly amethyst and rutilated quartz. A fine example is *Brooch* 1967 by Greg Scarlett in silver and 'slabbed' quartz. Also in the later sixties are reductionist



Christopher Earl Milbourne  
*BirdPot* (teapot), 2007  
Collected teapot, automotive paint

shaped jewellery of superb manufacture in the hollow construction work in *Bracelet* 1967 and *Necklace* 1968, both by N.A. Creighton. During the late eighties are diamond jewellery influenced pieces in the Collection.

Influenced by a touring exhibition to Melbourne by Andrew Grima is *Brooch* and *Ring* 1970 by Robert Baines and a freer thinking with broader references is evident in the jewellery of the 1970s. The use of acrylic resin and sheet provided new colour options not found in natural materials. Alternatively collected natural materials such as feathers, seeds and woods provide an intrinsic preciousness in jewellery contexts.

Kinetic movement with semi-precious stones in silver jewellery was a new development in the 1970s and the *Pendant Pendulum* 1971 by R. Sterling reflects the international trend particularly by the German Goldsmith Friedrich Becker. The counter culture movement of that era was drawn to natural materials as identified with natural non-precious materials. Feathers in the J. Colclough *Necklace* 1973 are a major component with silver and cast resin. It was the period of personal storytelling, esoteric structures built by artist goldsmiths and jewellers. *Object* 1978 by W. Francis with its depiction of spilled blood at the foreground of a cuttlebone cast boxed acrylic tower.

Wayne Guest's *Container* 1976 is another example of

this genre of non-functional object with a combination of silver, gold and titanium. The increasingly popular use of titanium for that era is utilised with stainless steel and silver by Margaret West (née Jasulaitis) in her modernist *Pendant* 1975. Margaret West proceeded to be a major national influence and educator at the Sydney College of the Arts. The *Neckpiece* 1980 of Mari Funaki with its silver and oxidised steel is another example of formative work that two decades later brought international jewellery acclaim. Personal fashion jewellery such as *Arm Piece* 1997 by Kate Harris is a wonderful 'licorice all-sorts' jewellery object of anodised aluminium, rubber, steel and paint.

The most influential jewellery lecturer of the 1960s and 70s in the RMIT Gold and Silversmithing studio was the German trained Wolf Wennrich. A donated representative piece *Object* 1974, with its figurative identity, reflects the international trends by such German goldsmiths as Hubertus von Skal, Claus Bury, Gerd Rothmann and Claus Ullrich.

Each year there is an acquisitive figurative award provided by the Australian poet, A.D. Hope in memory of his daughter Emily Hope, who studied at RMIT and became a Gold and Silversmith of the 1960s. This award has facilitated the collecting of diverse figurative approaches. The *Three Gun Brooches* 2002 by Katherine Tiffany Fuller fabricated in icing sugar, wallpaper and stainless steel is one example, while a more sculptural figurative work by David Neale in 2003 is revealed in painted silver.