This book documents Handshake, a mentoring project unique in the contemporary art world. Twelve jewellery graduates were given the opportunity to make work alongside their jewellery heroes from around the globe – without having to leave their own workshops. Handshake takes advantage of new technologies that enable the graduates to develop and refine work alongside their mentors in a virtual studio space.

This project is the brainchild of artist Peter Deckers. At the beginning of 2011, Deckers selected graduate jewellers and asked them to name the artists who most inspired them. He then approached these distinguished, internationally established jewellers and art icons, offering them the opportunity to act as mentors in a collaborative two-year project.

The response was an enthusiastic ‘yes’ from the artists. The result? A lively website, touring exhibitions, an exceptional learning experience for all involved and, now, this book.
Handshake

12 contemporary jewellers connect with their heroes
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Kia whakarongo ake a u
ki te tangi a te manu nei,
A te Matui mātouki.
Tui, tui, tuituia.
Tuia i runga,
Tuia i raro,
Tuia i waho,
Tuia i roto.
Tuia i te here tangata,
Ka rongo te po,
Ka rongo te ao.
Tuia i te muka tangata
I takea mai i Hawaikinui,
I Hawaikiapāmamao,
Te hono i wairua,
Ki te whaiao,
Ki te ao mārama.
Tihei mauriora!

I listen to the cry of the bird, the fern-bird.
It sings: sew it, weave it, bind it together.
Weave the sky above and the earth below,
weave what surrounds us and what hides within,
weaving them into each other,
in the darkness and in the light.
All those different parts of the thread
of lived experience, of being human.
From the fibre of our being
and the distant source, Hawaiki,
the depth of our origin,
the spirits merge and come together,
these splinters of light join in the fullness of life!

This Māori proverb (whakataukī) is performed as a waiata (song) by
a kaikōrero (speaker) when addressing an audience in a whakātore (speech).
Handshake is a mentoring and exhibition project that involves national and international collaborations. It is a project that revolves around the ‘hand’: reaching out for the vital person-to-person contact, making new objects and jewellery, and then letting go of those same integral objects, completing a circle with the public through exhibitions and the dynamic blog. The ‘shake’ in Handshake captures the artist’s touch, where feedback, inspiration and materials are magically shaken into each other, creating awe-inspiring objects. The exhibition programme also plays a pivotal role. Like an Olympian, a maker needs the opportunity to hone their skills under measured pressure to meet the deadline of the race or exhibition. This project gives mentees a reason to train hard and a platform to achieve their best.

Traditionally the apprentice system was connected to the fine jewellery trade, involving standardised, task-based learning. In contemporary jewellery this is a rare occurrence. Tertiary training individualises the learning for each artist. It focuses on research and training the artists to think for themselves. But a by-product of this individuality is studio solitude and little access to informed feedback following graduation. The new graduate often becomes self-employed soon after graduating, creating a steep learning curve that can be difficult to negotiate alone. Handshake hopes to smooth this harsh transition.

Through engagement with new media, Handshake attempts to bring back the tradition of learning with the support of a master. In the past, the apprentice often travelled great distances to learn from their master of choice, following directions and completing tasks to support the master’s career, with little feedback about their own developing practice. Now through Handshake, a master is available to an emerging artist through a virtual window in each Handshaker’s workshop.

For the past two years, the Handshake journey has been rich and energising, and with one year to go, the interest just keeps growing. The mentees and their practices continue to strengthen. They are sorting themselves out, maturing as makers, getting their selections tighter and more focused, but I have also noticed, in this process, confusion and departures from original ideas and use of materials. This prompts instant questions. Is it because of the strong influence a significant mentor can bring? Is it created by stage fright, or is it part of the inevitable process of artistic growth, where training influences are fought off?

On being offered a job by Rodin, Brancusi said, ‘Nothing grows in the shadow of a big tree.’ A mentor can be suffocating – especially modernists like Rodin and Brancusi with their autocratic vision. A good mentor or educator is not necessarily a ‘big tree’, but they know the internals of one. That is what is interesting about this project. After six exhibitions, the mentees’ growth is already noticeable. It’s clear who chose whom and why.
But questions of learning will always remain. At what point does a maker become a master? Is it an instantaneous revelation, or is it a slowly evolving discovery? Or does it require endorsements from outside experts first?

The Handshake project has been helped along by a vast number of very generous people, who have supported the cause with unceasing enthusiasm. First of all I need to thank the mentees, who have fully embraced the opportunity of Handshake: Gillian Deery, Nadene Carr, Sharon Fitness, Kristin D’Agostino, Lysay Raine, Neke Moa, Becky Bliss, Sarah Read, Jessica Winchcombe, Sam Kelly, Debbie Adamson and Jhana Millers. But the biggest thanks go to all of the mentors, who, without even considering remuneration, agreed to guide a stranger at a formative time in their career: Estela Saez, Lucy Sarneel, Lisa Walker, Judy Darragh, Andrea Wagner, Karl Fritsch, Fabrizio Tridenti, Iris Eichenberg, Warwick Freeman, Rian de Jong, Octavia Cook, Hanna Hedman and Suska Mackert. Halfway through the project, Creative New Zealand acknowledged this value by providing an artist fee for mentees and mentors. This project is all about giving. It is a microculture built upon goodwill, setting up an ideal pathway to an ideal future.

Peter Deckers is a jewellery coordinator and art tutor at Whitireia New Zealand, jewellery curator and active maker.

A promise, a bond

There is nothing worse than a limp and sweaty palm proffered as a handshake. A good hearty grasp is what is needed, no knuckle-crushing, but a grip where conviction (if not intent) is clear. Handshake is an innovative mentorship programme instigated and run by Peter Deckers. Handshake paired twelve graduate jewellers from New Zealand with their jewellery heroes from around the world. The plan was for each mentor/mentee pair to work together on six exhibitions, chronicling the progress of the relationship via a blog. The six exhibitions were Studio 20/17, Sydney; New Zealand Jewellery Show, Wellington; Masterworks Gallery, Auckland; Toi Poneke Gallery, Wellington; The National, Christchurch; and Objectspace, Auckland.

In Peter Deckers’ instructions to the mentees he specified ‘a quality handshake’ was needed. The project began in 2011 and is intended to run until 2013. With a two-year commitment in the offing for the participants, a solid footing (apologies for the mixed anatomical metaphors) was vital.

Deckers devised a structure for Handshake that had a specific, well-orchestrated framework, with regular check-ins and exhibition milestones along the way. The original brief to the twelve mentees used precise language: the mentees were framed as ‘apprentices’ and the established makers/mentors as ‘heroes’. It seems that these terms were selected knowingly and with humour, acknowledging but not strictly adhering to a more historical, conservative training system of master/apprentice. In contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand, with its strong tertiary learning sector and key jewellery programmes where conceptual, contextual and technical teaching and learning exist side by side, the apprenticeship model may seem a touch quaint.

The mentees gave Deckers the names of three jewellery ‘heroes’, and the organisers sought to make a connection with one of them. Statements of intent were drawn up, contracts exchanged and timelines articulated. For each exhibition the established makers/mentors were charged with curating the work. The mentee was responsible for collating, editing and posting documentation of the working process on the blog: handshakejewellery.com.

The first phase of the project included a ‘getting to know you’ period of exchanges which varied considerably from case to case in terms of regularity and form. Exchanges ranged from Skype, email, coffee meetings, studio visits, informal chats, and sharing of source materials to highly on-point critical analysis of individual pieces of work. The conversations often involved discussions around or tangential to the specific arena of jewellery – from the importance of being open to expanded frames of reference and new palettes of materials to broader considerations of how to ensure space and time for the creative process within busy and demanding lives.
Working towards and planning for exhibitions in quick-fire succession – in Sydney, Wellington, Auckland and Christchurch – turned up the heat on the mentee/mentor relationship. The public mapping of process on the blog sits alongside the more resolved presentation of suites of work through public exhibition.

The final phase of the project will be a collaboration between mentee and mentor for exhibition at Objectspace, Auckland, in 2013. Each pairing has been able to arrive at a pace and mechanism of exchange over the duration of the project, and approaches to collaboration have been equally organised and bespoke. There are threads of connectivity that link some projects with others – initial shyness or anxiety about having work ‘judged’ by people whose work the mentees greatly admired, excitement about travelling outside comfort zones and the importance of drawing to the thinking and making process (including and in addition to technical preparatory drawings).

The passage of the project wasn’t without elongated pauses, periods of frenetic exchange, makers’ block, kick-starts, routes of enquiry that reached cul-de-sacs and frustrations with the glitches and delays of communicating across time zones. The Handshake blog became more than a site for registering one-to-one exchange; it became a community portal where other mentees could follow their peers’ trials and tribulations, and where broader audiences gained insight into the spectrum of participants’ experiences. Some of the project’s challenges included articulating respective expectations and aspirations within each relationship, maintaining momentum where workloads were highly congested, and the fierce schedule of milestone exhibitions.

Benjamin Lignel’s essay in this book discusses modes of art education – in particular the dialectical and the scholastic – and inherent tensions between them. Contemporary jewellers based in Aotearoa tend to be relatively close-knit and interconnected, largely due to the scale of the country and the scene. In recent times the burgeoning clutch of highly focused tertiary courses with small-scale cohorts has fostered strong peer-based learning during the programmes.

Within the tertiary sector, critical dialogue and skills-based learning happen hand-in-hand. The voices of peers are ever present, witnessing experiments, uncertainties and progress. After formal education, the transition to independent maker is challenging; the peer support and group dynamic becomes harder to sustain.

Initiatives such as PERMIT Contemporary Jewellery Symposium in 2007, led by Manukau Institute of Technology, and JEMposium, initiated by Peter Deckers in association with Whitireia New Zealand, have directly helped emerging makers to build peer networks, and to meet and talk with more experienced makers, curators and writers. More informal workshops, such as Bootcamp 2011, devised by Damian Skinner, Areta Wilkinson and Caroline Billing, gave jewellers who had graduated within the previous five years a chance to work in a three-day workshop with a very strong emphasis on the dialectical. These brief, intense gatherings have been nourishing and expansive, but also frustrating, as it is difficult to sustain afterward the frenzy of talking, sharing, listening, questioning and making that happens at symposia and workshops.

Handshake sought to offer a more sustained, but no less nourishing dialogue over a two-year period. Although centred on the twelve mentees and their mentors, Handshake has had an impact on the broader community through the exhibitions, the blog and now this publication. The effect of the mentoring relationships is at times intangible, but is likely to have ripples of manifestation in the months and years to come.

What a difference a space makes. From ‘handshake’ to ‘hand shake’ there is a sea of difference, with the latter alluding to the physical tremor of fear, strain, illness or weariness. While there was a frustrating incidence of tendonitis for one of the mentees, across the project immense resilience has been demonstrated. The impressive commitment and stamina of making, demonstrated by mentees and mentors alike, is formidable, admirable and exciting. This publication deftly draws together process and product, including images of flawed (but valuable) experiments and knockout finished works. The generous exchanges between mentor and mentee are visible too, where hierarchies of experience became less defining, less concrete. The conversations, coffees and care packages came and went, leaving genuine enquiry and experimentation and a richer, more connected community of makers across the jewellery globe. Now there’s nothing limp about that.

Heather Galbraith is a curator and Head of the School of Fine Arts, Massey University, Wellington.
The handshake is a simple gesture – a greeting where two people clasp hands. It marks an introduction and signals the start of a relationship. In some cultures the handshake is accompanied by a kiss on the cheek or cheeks, and in others it is replaced with a bow. Here in Aotearoa New Zealand, the first physical contact between manuhiri (visitors) and tangata whenua (original inhabitants of the land) on the marae (a Māori extended family space that serves social, spiritual and ceremonial purposes) is made with hongi and hariru (handshake). During the hongi, the nose and forehead of the host and guest are pressed together to allow the breath to mingle in oneness. This removes the tapu (a concept akin to spiritual restriction) that existed between the two groups, and bridges the gap between formal introduction and peaceful relations. Food can now be shared and ideas exchanged. Along similar lines, the handshake establishes good faith and marks the beginning of a fruitful and convivial relationship.

These days, in addition to the handshake, the kiss, the bow and the hongi, relationships are formed via the internet. Friendship is requested with the push of a button, ideas are exchanged through Skype conversations and technical instruction can be found on YouTube. The internet has blown open our access to each other and to information, and this democratisation of knowledge is at the core of the Handshake project. Seven of the twelve New Zealand mentee jewellers have mentors abroad – in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the USA. Of the other five mentors who practice in New Zealand, only Karl Fritsch and Judy Darragh live in the same city as their mentees. New and emerging jewellers from New Zealand clearly look to both home and Europe to identify their jewellery heroes. With the exception of the occasional visit, interaction between the Handshake mentors and mentees has, by necessity, been virtual. Taking their connection beyond the handshake, participants have forged relationships that have enabled the transfer of knowledge, and encouraged a sustained period of experimental making that has led the development of practice.

The tyranny of distance and the power of proximity

The Handshake project is modelled on the traditional mentor/mentee relationship but has redefined its terms of engagement. Skype and email are at the heart of the communication between the Handshakers. This physical remove has given mentees the freedom to make their own decisions in the workshop yet still enjoy insightful conversations with their mentors. Interested parties outside the Handshake project are privy to this exchange via the blog, where struggles, revelations and triumphs are laid out in a diary format.
The exchange of knowledge was not always like this. Traditionally goldsmiths learned their trade as apprentices or at traditional technical colleges. This experience is common amongst the mentors – six of the seven European mentors trained in this manner before they entered an art school and made the shift from the didactic ‘you hold the hammer this way’ style of training to a more expanded view of jewellery. In Europe, contemporary jewellers can have up to ten years’ study behind them, and this sustained period of learning gives them a certainty of purpose that is difficult to attain during a three-year degree experience in New Zealand. And this is where Handshake comes in. The internet and the Handshake project shorten the distance between the twelve New Zealand jewellers and their mentors. It brings them into the proximity of a meaningful and lasting exchange that stands in for extra study.

Trolleys and tree huts

The development of contemporary jewellery in New Zealand has its own history centred on teaching yourself and a ‘give-it-a-go’ attitude. Self-taught Handshake mentor Warwick Freeman attributes his urge to make to a childhood spent building trolleys and tree huts outside the confines of parental jurisdiction.1 Jewellery mentor Warwick Freeman attributes his urge to make to a childhood spent building trolleys and tree huts outside the confines of parental jurisdiction.1 Jewellery knowledge in New Zealand is built on this attitude of self-reliance. Freeman sought out his own mentors to develop his jewellery practice.

This can be seen in his friendship with Otto Kuenzli. Over the years, Kuenzli has sent him found objects to respond to in his workshop. Freeman remembers ‘In one case the material for this remaking process has a very specific source. A colleague, Otto Kuenzli, posts them to me in the mail. Sometimes without any comment, sometimes accompanied by the story of their discovery: 

Yesterday it happened again, just around the corner from where we live, in Luisenstrasse. I almost missed it, that black spot hidden underneath the front wheel of an old Peugeot. But it obviously looked at me with its three holes. And there it was again, your signature. Without hesitation I picked up the oily piece of iron. Together with this letter … it is on the way to Auckland – another ghost…’2

The “oily piece of iron” and the resulting remake in fine gold are about 100mm wide by 150mm high.3 Freeman claims that Kuenzli takes no direct role in his practice but is a shaping influence, because he chooses to let Kuenzli have that influence.4 Freeman’s style of mentoring derives from this relationship – it is mentoring that values the informal, the open-ended and in some cases the imagined. In his view notional mentors can guide practice without having a direct relationship with the ‘mente’. He has found that ‘if imagined conversations fuel the decision-making process in [his] workshop, they are sometimes just as productive as real ones’.5 In return, Freeman had mentored many jewellers with incidental and informal interaction as well as by his own example.

A look into the trajectory of contemporary jewellery in New Zealand also provides some insight into how knowledge has transferred without the presence of longstanding institutions – such as the Munich Academy of Fine Arts, Konstfack in Sweden and the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam – to formalise academic discussion and analysis. Where Europe had the goldsmithing fraternity, Aotearoa has a tradition of adornment crafted from natural materials such as pounamu (New Zealand greenstone or jade) and bone. These materials have their own cultural significance and life force.

But a Eurocentric attitude to contemporary jewellery hitched a ride to New Zealand in the 1960s with a wave of post-war immigrants from Britain, Europe and Scandinavia. Of these jewellers, Jens Hansen, Georg Beer and Kobi Bossard have left the most lasting impression on contemporary jewellery in New Zealand. Warwick Freeman spent time in the Jens Hansen workshop in Nelson in the early 1970s, and Georg Beer was tutor to Lisa Walker when she studied craft and design at the Otago Polytechnic School of Art. Kobi Bossard has mentored a number of jewellers from his workshop in the South Island, and Handshake mentee Debbie Adamson currently spends five days each fortnight there, living with the Bosshard family. Debbie has the double advantage of hands-on experience alongside Bosshard, and access to a new world view via the virtual relationship she has with mentor Hanna Hedman, who lives in Sweden.

While these European immigrants influenced making practices in the South Island, jewellers in the North Island were gleaning knowledge from a variety of sources. With no North Island art school yet catering for the needs of contemporary jewellers, many relied on research and workshop experimentation to find their voice. This was supplemented by short, intensive workshops, most notably led by Hermann Jünger in 1982, Onno Boekhoudt in 1986 and Otto Kuenzli in 1990. These workshops opened communication between New Zealand and Europe and, significantly, enabled jewellers in New Zealand to strengthen their peer relations, sharing knowledge, and exchanging ideas. These peer groups underpinned a new contemporary jewellery that looked to trends in Europe but also developed its own visual and material language born of a sense of place and time in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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1 Warwick Freeman interviewed by Raewyn Walsh, 13 September 2012.
2 Extract from letter from Otto Kuenzli to Warwick Freeman, 30 July 2007.
3 ‘An Unexpected Pleasure’ talk by Warwick Freeman at RMIT, Melbourne, 2 August 2012.
At the centre of this was Fingers Gallery. Initiated by Alan Preston in 1974 and established as a co-operative, Fingers opened its doors on Lorne Street in Auckland as a place for jewellers to exchange techniques and ideas, and to exhibit and sell their work. It offered an alternative to conventional jewellery sold elsewhere. But most importantly it became the hub for a new ideation surrounding jewellery practices, and provided the platform on which the New Zealand contemporary jewellery narrative found its strength.

This story can be traced back to the punk show Guaranteed Trash held at Fingers in 1976. Utilising and embracing new materials, this exhibition marked the moment when jewellers in New Zealand joined the European community in the critique of precious materials and traditions in jewellery. Preston identified Guaranteed Trash as the precursor to Bone and Paua Dreams, the exhibitions that would define New Zealand perspectives on contemporary jewellery in 1981.7

The Fingers cooperative was complemented by Lapis Lazuli, a shared workshop established by Daniel Clasby in 1975.8 Located not far from Fingers in High Street until it closed in the late 1970s, Lapis provided a workshop environment for jewellers to work alongside each other. For a time Warwick Freeman could be found there teaching night classes. In 1987 Jewellery Unlimited, an exhibiting collective that grew out of the Lapis Lazuli workshop, by then located in Ponsonby as the Daniel Clasby access workshop, provided jewellers the opportunity to show work outside Fingers. In 1983 Kobi Bosshard and Stephen Mulqueen established Fluxus Gallery and Workshop for Contemporary Jewellery in Dunedin. Fluxus modelled itself on Fingers but had a shared workspace where a number of jewellers came to work and learn in a communal environment. This cemented relations between the north and the south, and jewellers showed work and held exhibitions in each other’s galleries.

Dialogue was at its most potent in these exchanges, and jewellers communicated primarily through their work. Significant exhibitions such as Bone, Stone, Shell in 19889 and the Jewellery Biennale established by The Dowse Art Museum in Lower Hutt dominated the 1990s. Ideas and knowledge could be seen on the walls and in the vitrines in the group show context.

In parallel, there is a recent history of symposia that have provided a sense of cohesion, and supported makers and making in New Zealand. What was JAM in 1999 became JIM in 2000, PERMIT in 2007 and JEMposium in 2012. Although varied in format, each of these conferences brought together jewellers from across the country to discuss jewellery matters. Connections were also established with visiting international jewellers who modelled a way of thinking about and making jewellery that would be influential in this country. Details was set up in 1984, with the purpose of establishing a system of formal education missing from the New Zealand jewellery-scape. Throughout the 1980s, Details also produced a newsletter that provided information and became one of the few records of events at this time. In 2011 the Details newsletter was resurrected as Overview and now serves a new generation of jewellers.

As a means to transfer knowledge, the art-school model grew from the efforts of the self-taught generation, who recognised that tertiary education was a natural progression for the development of a vibrant jewellery scene in New Zealand. With a lineage that reaches back only 30 or so years, there are now six tertiary institutions that offer study that goes beyond technical training and values conceptual development. Students learn to think critically and are encouraged to develop their own practice in a supervised environment. This cemented relations between the north and the south, and jewellers showed work and held exhibitions in each other’s galleries.

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7 Skinner, p44.
8 Designscape, 90, April 1977.
9 Bone Stone Shell was organised by the Crafts Council and toured Australia and Southeast Asia.
The kindness of strangers

While tertiary education can give individuals the space and time to develop ways of thinking and making, the realities of life as a jeweller after graduation demonstrate that knowledge and support systems dry up completely. Almost. Before Handshake, Bootcamp sought to bridge the gulf between student and established jeweller. The Emerging Jewellers Bootcamp, at Ashley Gorge, Canterbury, 2011, was billed as a mentoring workshop that would critically address aspects of best practice in a whānau (family) environment. Conceived by writer and critic Damian Skinner, practitioner and teacher Areta Wilkinson and gallery owner Caroline Billing, Bootcamp gave fifteen jewellers access to a range of practitioners with experience in the jewellery scene. Over three days, formal sessions were broken up with normal daily activity – lunch, dinner and chores. Knowledge transferred during these social interactions proved as valuable as that offered during official workshop hours. The advice of the Bootcamp leaders, along with jeweller Warwick Freeman, photographers Mark Adams and Haru Sameshima and curator Karl Chitham, was provided pro bono. Like the Handshake project, its success was dependent on the generosity of the mentors.

In contrast to Bootcamp, Handshake is defined by the virtual relationships between most of the mentees and mentors. Where Bootcamp took place at an isolated location with little documentation, Handshake stretches out over the globe, making public the usually private world of research and development, and the jewellery-making process. An intensive exhibition programme has kept the mentees on task during a period when it is difficult to sustain a fledgling practice, and this exposure has quickly affirmed what works and what doesn’t.

A look at the Handshake blog tells us that the mentees identified their jewellery heroes by a respect for, and love of, their work. The mentees were inspired and motivated by the conceptual positioning of their mentor’s practice in relation to their own, rather than by physical proximity. The employment of digital technology is both innovative and appropriate. Their relationship does not rely on the directive instruction of teacher to pupil. Instead mentors provide guidance and feedback and engage the mentees in wider conversations on the nature of contemporary jewellery. Knowledge travels quickly via the internet and exposes mentees and interested parties to a wide range of practices and theory.

Despite these operational differences, the common ground shared by projects such as Bootcamp and Handshake is a culture of conviviality. Jewellers are known for their friendliness, and this collegiality can be attributed to the way jewellery is taught. The workshop culture in our tertiary institutions encourages an environment of open communication that continues into a community scene confident enough to learn from mistakes and make good work. Handshake is built on, and continues with, this generosity. This is confirmed by mentor Lisa Walker who spent time in the workshop of Warwick Freeman, himself mentor to Jessica Winchcombe, in parallel with her post-graduate studies in Munich. Walker willingly accepted the opportunity to join Handshake when asked by mentee Sharon Fitness.

Knowledge travels in many ways. The mentees selected a mentor for reasons that suited their individual practice and, as a result, the relationships have evolved in ways particular to each participant. As Handshake finds its place in the history of contemporary jewellery, it becomes part of a tradition where knowledge transfers through both formal and informal relations, and open communication ensures the continued vibrancy of the discipline.

This text draws largely from conversations with established practitioners in New Zealand and I would like to extend my thanks to Pauline Bern, Kobi Bosshard, Ilse-Marie Erl, Warwick Freeman, Lisa Walker and Areta Wilkinson for imparting their wisdom and knowledge.

Raewyn Walsh is an Auckland-based jeweller.

Sources

Designscape, 90, April 1977, Auckland.
Between March 2011 and July 2012, twelve jewellery graduates from New Zealand have received creative guidance from thirteen established makers from around the world. Several exhibitions – past and future – ensure that this long nurturing process results in actual productions. The quite exceptional creative outcome of Handshake’s unique structure is showcased in other sections in this publication, but the focus of this essay is on the structure itself. The Handshakers’ sustained efforts to record their experiences in individual blogs provide a glimpse of the singular nature of the Handshake project. These records reveal how Handshake differs from both the conventional art-college set-up and the studio apprenticeship, and underlines the particular issues associated with learning contemporary craft: how does one stimulate creative emancipation in an environment that promotes role models? What is being transmitted? Is it knowledge? Experience? Intentionality? Attitude? How does passing on something as personalised and iterative as creative acumen actually work?

For all its limitations, the digital communication favoured by Handshake forced the mentees to articulate their practice, ambitions and plan of attack in a more linear fashion than they would in a classroom, with the candour one expects of personal diaries. The singularity of this project resides in what the blogs make manifest: the condensed arc of learning and self-improvement of twelve emerging artists, under the tutelage of thirteen very different pedagogues, along a shared timeline. The following chronological notes report on the challenges they faced on the way.

Becky, Debbie, Gillian, Jessica, Jhana, Kristin, Lynsay, Nadene, Neke, Sarah, Sam and Sharon: twelve jewellery makers living in New Zealand.

Andrea, Estela, Fabrizio, Hanna, Iris, Judy, Karl, Lisa, Lucy, Rian, Octavia, Suska and Warwick: their mentors.

Mating

Like expectant hikers setting off with near-strangers on a long hike that will undoubtedly tax their emotional and creative reserves, each mentee goes down their check-list: wishing each other well on this long adventure, furbishing their creative guns, projecting a ballistic arc of progress one bullet-pointed resolution at a time. Sarah: ‘Now to begin: being an Artist. Ha.’ Their selection of a mentor, while aspirational, is strategic as well. Each relationship is kicked off with a self-conscious mating dance of desire, identification and pragmatic opportunism. ‘You are this, I like you.’ Everyone’s rucksack of expectations is packed differently: some favour similarities, others opt for opposites, echoing the debate in Plato’s Symposium. All the mentees are in this game to be transformed. It is almost impossible not to see a modern avatar of ancient models of spiritual self-discovery in the Handshake dynamic.
February 2011: Kristin, Linsay, Jhana and Sharon give their impressions of their mentors’ work, and explain why they like it. Sarah prepares herself for her first meeting. The mentees make their first exchanges with their mentors, and define their ambitions.

Transmitting
The Handshakers’ encounters are shaped by their communication protocols and lack of physical proximity. The use of English as a common language, what can be shown, what is omitted or edited out – all have a cumulative effect. Everyone is acutely aware that assessing tactile exercises and productions over Skype is, at best, problematic. Pictures of individual workspaces often complement Handshakers’ self-portraits in this early show-and-tell. Each pair will gradually establish an ad hoc form of interaction. In certain cases these are broken by long silent spells; in others, invigorated by visits. The Handshakers learn to work out emotional imbalance, and try their best to adjust to the many demands made on the mentees by their mentors’ heavy schedules. Sarah, on her second Skype meeting with Iris: ‘We are both mindful of deadlines; Iris leaves for Europe on 30 June, so we have only two weeks of possible contact.’

March 2011: Jessica meets Warwick for lunch and shows him her recent work. Iris and Sarah converse on Skype. Linsay and Andrea communicate intensely by email. The timidity of the first exchanges is already giving way to more robust forms of interaction: to-do lists, self-assessment and so on. Debbie and Hanna make their first contact with one another; Lucy and Nadene are chatting.

Becoming
The project’s vocabulary sets the mentees up for hero worship, an ambiguous place from which to start building self-confidence. Depending on the nature of their interaction, the mentees will learn to instrumentalise their awe, or let go of it altogether. Sam: ‘I don’t want to be Rian de Jong. I want to be me. I think Rian can help in some way define and refine what it is that makes my work mine.’ Some of the exchanges tick boxes along the trajectory of a pilgrim’s emotional progress: imitation, emulation, self-assertion. A lot of the discussions will circle around the idea of ‘being good at being oneself’ – a core tenet of art education – and thus they have not been for naught.

April 2011: Neke and Karl meet for the first time. Large excerpts of the correspondence between Gillian and Estela appear on the blog in what is by far their most active month. Nothing yet from Sam and Becky, but everyone else is posting.

Self-help
Mentees have conversations with themselves in a tone very similar to personal diaries: assessing their own strengths and weaknesses, goading themselves into action, patting themselves on the back, despairing quietly. Their relationships with their mentors have solidified, to the point that the actual person now doubles up as imaginary friend-cum-whip: feeling accountable to both the real person and the construct, mentees engage in mental debates with each. Meanwhile, the blogs bear testimony to the mentees’ huge self-reliance. Most of them are engaging in intense experimentation, spurred by the knowledge that Handshake is the proverbial once-in-a-lifetime sort of thing.


Mentoring? What do you mean, mentoring?
There is something akin to Socratic dialectic in this relationship. In this form of teaching, a disciple acquires knowledge through long discussions with their master, then transcribes the discussion for public consumption. The mentors guide (and inspire) mentees via questions, micro-tests, more questions and approbation. From Rian: ‘I am sorry but for me it seems that you are in need to make something quick to have a product? Am I right or am I wrong? When I am wrong show me why.’ However, an onlooker may sense that most accepted their duties on the premise that their own knowledge is partial, acquired and, in fact, debatable. Nor will it necessarily translate into useful advice. Warwick: ‘If you learn nothing from me then so be it – it means I had nothing to offer you.’

At this stage, and because of the deadlines, the mentors have to articulate how (and if) they will assess the work in front of them. Judy ‘likes’ one piece; Hanna will ‘decide later’ what should be shown. The rules of engagement, here as elsewhere in Handshake, are up for grabs. But in general the mentors are reluctant to veto, forbid or decide: they are here to help, not substitute themselves for the mentee. They are aware that what distinguishes them from their mentee and justifies their mentoring position is not a question of superior talent, but of experience: they have simply been around longer. Andrea: ‘I’m glad you now see the aspects of things that you think you should have done or what would have been better, because that means you are now really seeing and recognising it for yourself. So the experiments haven’t yielded super results, yet they have yielded insight, an eye better trained for judging, and thus they have not been for naught.’
July 2011: Last of the busy blog months. All of the mentees, bar one, post. Debbie and Hanna’s conversations show no sign of abating. Two exhibitions that are part of the Handshake project are looming (or beckoning). Experimental efforts are egged on, or sidelined, by the need to deliver: mentees must submit their work to date to the mentors for curation. ‘It’s crunch time’ – Debbie.

First images of finished pieces. Themes: display, failure, fun.

Defining practice
Exhibition duties encourage mentees to assess the ground covered, the shifts in practice, and to redefine their new creative territory. This expected outcome of the Handshake project is facilitated by blogging, which translates participants’ ongoing existential search (both archaeological and prospective) into bite-size bulletins and reports. Sam: ‘Was I purely using bone because I had become known as “the bone girl”? Yes and no. Was I still even enjoying working with bone? No.’ These regular updates and their attendant soul-searchings – written with a view to documenting progress – are evidence of an evolving practice soon to be repackaged into press releases.

August 2011: Handshake exhibition at Studio 20/17, Sydney, 9–21 August. Fewer posts. Economies of production are discussed. The end of Phase One gives mentors and mentees (Jessica and Warwick in particular) an opportunity to articulate their position with regards to the format of Handshake.

Copying looking like collaborating
Phase Two points towards a collaborative work. Along the line, prickly issues of authenticity are brought up, fuelling the debate between the nature of old craft apprenticeship, which relies in part on imitation, and our contemporary notions of creativity, which rely heavily on innovation and singularity. The conversation takes a particularly interesting turn for Sharon and Lisa, both of whose work promotes appropriation. Sharon: ‘Can I ever make anything with a found object that won’t be accused of being copyist?’

This has been a concern throughout Phase One, as mentors have tried to navigate the identification proclivities inherent in the mentoring format. The mentees’ ability to get beyond the influence of their mentor relies on many factors: emotional maturity, physical distance, the charisma of the mentor and so on. As the collaborative project gets underway, the Handshakers are keen to stake their autonomy and differences from their mentors, and accept the particular thrills and dangers of making. Sharon, again: ‘Sorry, but I am currently feeling the need to say I am going to make a necklace or a brooch, so I say I am going to make some bits, join them together to make a circle, or I am going to bang some metal or play with some paint, almost trick myself into pretending I am not making a piece or an object when in reality that is what I am trying to do.’ Mentors and friends meanwhile provide what best they can. Andrea: ‘Questions, questions, questions.’


Making public
Editing – in all the rich aspects of that verb – is a fundamental part of Handshake. First and foremost, it regulates the process of selecting work for the Handshake exhibitions and, before that, of simply showing some – but not all – works in progress to one’s mentor on Skype. Skype exchanges produce a focused, written, constructed relationship, providing mentors with a keyhole perception of their mentee’s development.

Secondly, the project’s relentless exhibition schedule is counterproductive to letting accidents happen, let alone appear on the blog. Ever required to react, blog and produce high-quality work, the mentees are denied the sort of profitable inattention that breakthroughs sometimes require. Iris: ‘It is a delicate balance, to genuinely explore and experiment, knowing that there is an upcoming exhibition for which finished pieces are required.’

Finally, mentees are careful – with the notable exception of Sharon – to monitor what part of their work they make public, well aware that results are slower in coming than information in going. Kristin: ‘The third idea is too fresh to discuss publicly.’

October–November 2011: Few posts, as individual turns of events seem to hijack the collective momentum so far conveyed by the Handshake blog: Sarah goes to Cranbrook, Octavia replaces Rian as Sam’s mentor, Sam breaks her wrist, Jessica works towards four different shows. Mentees set up at Masterworks Gallery, Auckland. Exhibition fatigue takes its toll.

Trying
The blogs constantly invoke experiences of breakthroughs, of pushing oneself beyond one’s limitations. A large part of the mentees’ efforts consists of setting themselves up for accidents and discoveries: planned benefits, if you will, of breaking one’s habits and finding oneself in creative terra incognita. One of the great side effects of Handshake is to make mentees acutely aware of how this happens, and of the occasional artful dodgery required to get there. Gillian: ‘I find it a bit overwhelming to say I am going to make a necklace or a brooch, so I say I am going to make some bits, join them together to make a circle, or I am going to bang some metal or play with some paint, almost trick myself into pretending I am not making a piece or an object when in reality that is what I am trying to do.’ Mentors and friends meanwhile provide what best they can. Andrea: ‘Questions, questions, questions.’
December 2011–January 2012: 3 December marks an exhibition opening at Masterworks Gallery, Auckland. January marks the project’s first anniversary: mentees have exhibited three times already, and their first creative cycle is brought to a conclusion (of sorts). Creative endeavours are increasingly being tailored to the size and scope of various exhibitions, becoming site-specific, or at least -sensitive. Last post from Nadene.

Esprit de corps
The international jewellery symposium JEMposium, held in Wellington in February 2012, caps a growing awareness of being part of a small, privileged group of makers within a larger national and international contemporary jewellery community. Clues of this esprit de corps include mentees looking at each other’s blogs for alternative advice: to some extent, they are treating the blogs as a free compendium of creative counsel, and finding in the advice given to others answers to their own questions. They are now at their most self-aware: they know that Handshake duplicates conventional forms of mentor-based transmission, but with an intensity that sets it – and them – apart from the norm.

February–March 2012: February sees a flurry of JEMposium-related events and an exhibition at Te Poneke Gallery, Wellington. International participants in the symposium bring mentees an unprecedented level of tutorial exposure to visiting European makers. This suddenly turns the Handshakers’ one-to-one relationship into a critical open season: a lot of good and bad advice given will lead to a ‘jewellery hangover’, which Handshakers eventually metabolise. In March, some of the Handshakers attend the annual jewellery fair, Schmuck, in Munich. Issues of presentation, marketing and self-promotion emerge.

Place
The blogs contain surprisingly few – almost no – references to the issues of isolation that so defined the narrative of New Zealand contemporary jewellery until recently. Expressions of under-dogness vis-à-vis Europe (and its flipside, complacency) only occasionally bubble up. One explanation would be that there is simply too much happening in New Zealand to identify with that story any longer. Another is that the mentees get to experience the thrills and pangs of cultural alienation from the comfort of their home: they mostly travel without moving.

Interestingly enough, instead of having to define their authors’ positions towards the world, Europe or New Zealand, the blogs convey a sense of place that is rooted in the workshop, the network of friends and family. It is worth noting that five of the thirteen chosen mentors are New Zealanders, which would indicate that Europe is losing some of its traction as source and arbiter of the new. Does this mean that addressing issues of New Zealand identity in relation to its jewellery others is now a matter of personal discretion, or that the format of Handshake simply does not allow it? I suspect the former.

April–June 2012: Phase Two is phased in. Cue flat-lined blogs and (presumably) furious bench activity. Gillian, Jhana and Becky go offline; Lynsay resumes posting and takes advantage of her European trip to network, both with Europeans and those New Zealanders who came to Germany. Sarah is busy making a living. Judy leaves to hike the Himalayas. Meanwhile, Sharon and Debbie plough on, undeterred as ever.

Documenting
During Socrates’ lifetime, the manner and purpose of education was a matter of dispute between two models. On one side, the sophists developed the disciplines of rhetoric and logics in order to systematise the contents and the transmission of their discipline, the art of discourse. On the other, traditional teaching methods in ancient Greek society linked apprenticeship to a personal affective relationship linking the master and the disciple, useful to both.

Historians later simplified this opposition as being between a scholastic model and a dialectical model. Scholastic masters contend that knowledge should be supplied by the master, and learnt by rote. Divesting the master/disciple relationship of any personal connection is paramount: knowledge is authoritative and, increasingly, specialised. Its transmission supposes a strict divide between ‘life’ and ‘studies’, and a belief in the objectivity of knowledge.

In sharp contrast, the dialectical approach made famous by Socrates’ long, discursive peregrinations argues that intellectual enquiries should be premised on sensible experience, or life-oriented: the mentor and his disciple talk together, but they also do sports, eat, take long walks together and have sex or discuss the beauty of it. Philosophy, from their point of view, is a way of life based on experience and experimentation, embedded in the everyday experience of the passage of time and embodied in a personal relationship with the master. Its ambition is to help the disciple develop the critical tools necessary to answer his/her own questions.

On one level, Handshake could be described as a modern version of the dialectical model. It uses a similar format to implement with great success the same ideal: the co-production of wisdom. But the unique by-product of this experiment – and the beauty of it, to my eye – is that it crystallises, and makes very public, the specific challenges of nurturing creative minds. One-on-one mentoring, sustained over sixteen months, forced the Handshakers to define their rules of engagement, articulate what knowledge was being transmitted and determine the limitations
of the format they were (re)inventing. Jessica: ‘How can I package the energy of a moment in the middle of the night when a solution has been found for the next big epic idea. How can you respond to a picture of an artist’s change in direction or shift in mind-set. These are the frustrations I have with blogging my practice.’ They had to not only evolve as teachers and makers respectively, but also chronicle their (at times reluctant) participation in a very particular model of pedagogy. In effect, mentoring itself eventually becomes the subject of their exchange.

The future of art education is now the subject of intense speculation: universities, lacking funds, are tempted to replace educators with facilities, ditching disciplines deemed without commercial future while responding to global demands for standardised diploma systems. The debate between the teaching models outlined above takes on renewed urgency: how does one teach art? What is the best model to implement critical and creative self-reliance? On what grounds do we assess its efficiency?

Part of the mentor/mentee interaction, and the results of the project, will resist understanding, let alone analysis. There is a lot in each relationship that is not visible online, as most of the Handshakers’ interactions took place via Skype and email exchanges, of which the blogs provide extracts and impressions only. Furthermore, the mentors are not the mentees’ sole sources of inspiration. Peter Deckers, the project’s mastermind, taught a number of the mentees and is a silent guide for most of them. Each mentee also elected unofficial mentors, who do not always appear in the blog. My guess is that the twelve mentees will feel the effect of Handshake in years to come and that, although the mentors may not be sensitive to the fact from the onset, they too will have been transformed by it.

Despite these limitations, the mentees’ blogs chronicle in near-real time what is ‘happening’ during the project – and most do a pretty thorough job of it. The absolute candour with which they track their ups and downs amounts to an exemplary description of experimental research in contemporary craft. While not providing answers, they help us identify the theoretical issues pertinent to mentoring in craft, and constitute a road map for those who may want to think about art education in the future.

I will borrow Peter Deckers’ words to conclude this essay: ‘This project is unique because the old model of learning with a mentor has been given an injection of youth by new digital technology.’

My thanks to David Beytelmann for sharing his knowledge of pre-Socratic schools.

Benjamin Lignel is a designer, writer and curator. He is secretary of the French association la garantie, and a member of Think Tank, a European Initiative for the Applied Arts. He works and lives in Montreuil, France.

Further readings


Those interested in contemporary long-distance tutoring solutions may find the Khan Academy (www.khanacademy.org) of interest.
When I was invited to mentor one of the participating Handshake jewellers eleven time zones away, it seemed such an utterly logical undertaking that I couldn’t help but wonder why such a project had not been organised earlier. For an emerging jeweller to have the opportunity to consult closely with one of their favourite jewellers is an enriching experience on its own. For it to take place from a distance represented a compelling challenge for both parties that I didn’t want to miss.

It has been a thoroughly enjoyable and rewarding experience to communicate, get acquainted with and then actually meet my Handshake partner, Lynsay Raine, a year later. She chose me because the way I work resonated with her own direction and aims so, from the outset, our conversations have had a common general drift. This paved the way for a mutual, interesting and productive exchange. It has been satisfying for me to see a systematic shift of comprehension in Lynsay, in spite of being restricted from physically working with the jewellery.

Admittedly, I missed being there in the flesh during the process, to directly handle a try-out, physically demonstrate something, or hold or bend an object to quickly get a point across. I won’t deny having fleeting twinges of frustration about process during the course of this long-distance communication. Lynsay and I mainly emailed, which meant that all the visual aspects of physical objects and techniques had to be described in writing. Anyone who has ever filled out an insurance claim can probably imagine our frustration!

I have my doubts that what I meant to convey always came through as I intended, and according to Lynsay it occasionally did feel as though our ideas were getting lost in translation. As a mentor, it is extremely important not to push too much in a certain direction when pointing things out and making suggestions – even if progress or the momentary lack of it creates the impression that one’s previous suggestions haven’t yet registered or sunk in. It becomes a delicate matter when more clarity is called for, as written statements tend to feel less casual and open, and carry more pressure than if spoken. Luckily, we had the chance to spend a number of days together during Lynsay’s visit in Amsterdam, during which our conversations and hours in the studio took away all the fears and opened up a pathway for our future exchange.

In following the blog entries of the other eleven mentees, I recognised a similar development. They too have moved away from their initial working style. Pursuing a more open-minded experimentation led them away from the safety of the way they previously worked. Honing their creative process has entailed much thorough yet playful exploration of material choices. The mentees have also had to take that huge step from grasping to implementing advice while sidestepping the temptation to emulate their mentor’s style.

The resulting jewellery pieces prove that this experience has been successful in helping these emerging jewellers to fine-tune their visual language. The outcome of this project has fulfilled its promise of being highly interesting. The tradition of regularly posting developments on the Handshake blog will continue to make the project’s progress accessible to the international jewellery community. If you haven’t already, join us there!

Andrea Wagner is an Amsterdam-based jeweller and educator.
‘It is a brooch, because it has a pin...’

For many years I have been making things using found objects that instantly tell me they need to be worn just the way they are. Using the minimal intervention techniques I have developed over time, I just stick a pin on it and call it a brooch. The resulting random acts of adornment are the works in my practice that are the closest to what Lisa Walker makes, or may have made (I imagine), if she had found that particular object. These things are very exciting and often become my favourite jewellery to wear, because they really mess with people’s heads. They are not made to look like a “Lisa Walker” – they are made because Lisa Walker has paved the way for us to do things like this.

‘I had to be mean to the sheep sometimes.’

In 2005 I learnt how to use the vacuum forming machine at art school. I shrink-wrapped a little plastic lamb, which I had bought because I had always liked lambs and because I knew Lisa Walker used sheep a lot. Its legs got all squished up and its face looked like it had been slammed against a window. It was trapped in there and didn’t seem all that happy about it, even when I gave it a square of fake grass to lie on. After a few years I cut it free, and it has been walking around on my bedside table ever since. Its legs are still a bit kaput. I haven’t made it into a brooch yet, because that seems like copying.

‘If the metal brooch had been plastic I couldn’t have broken the sheep’s legs like that, so you could say the nature of the material dictated how it turned out.’

I have a habit of (mis)quoting Lisa’s words in my own writing. I find it tremendously funny every time I manage to link something with ‘you could say that the [insert appropriate reference here] dictated ...’ In one of my first Handshake experiments, I managed to name a piece with a misquote. A peg that was holding some tracing paper in a bowl, to capture some urethane I was submerging some silicone blobs in, accidentally got trapped in the object, thereby turning the peg into a brooch pin. I called it *The Peg that Dictated Its Inclusion into the Submerged Blobs Brooch*.

“You just gotta go blah, fuck, and then some good things can start to happen.”

Sometimes Lisa says something that Yoda might have said if he was that brilliant. This is another statement that can be paraphrased in a multitude of situations. Blah, fuck, indeed! It is this kick-arse attitude to making that can drag me out of over-thinking and procrastinating. It is also my favourite phrase to write on my Zoe Brand blackboard speech-bubble brooch.

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“We do not have wearing in common. She does not. I do, a lot.”5

Last year I sent Lisa some things to wear, hoping that I could convert her to the joys of being a wearer. She couldn’t. Or wouldn’t. Instead, she recruited her family to wear them on a seaside excursion, and sent me a photo essay called Fotos von Neuer Ordner. (I entered it on the blog with a ‘misquote’ by-line you could say that Sharon had subliminally infiltrated Lisa’s family.) I like to imagine that, by the end of the Handshake mentorship, I might have subliminally influenced Lisa to start wearing jewellery on a regular basis.

“The [Françoise van den Bosch] awards ceremony was probably the most important jewellery event for you to attend ever; whose necklace were you wearing at the prize giving?”6

Egged on by Lisa’s resistance to wearing jewellery past the moment when she takes a photo of herself wearing a completed piece, I had a brainwave when I was driving one day, wearing my Zoe Brand brooch. I decided to document my own habit of wearing. Every day that I wore jewellery, I took a webcam image of myself and posted it on Facebook and a blog until I had documented everything in my collection. This side project, Saving the World One Brooch at a Time, lasted more than nine months and featured 125 jewelleries. I didn’t realise my collection was quite that big when I started. You could say that I have a bit of a wearing obsession.

“Dang that is good shit.”8

Working with my superhero has been a pretty super thing to do, especially because she has influenced me since the very beginnings of my contemporary jewellery journey. The Handshake project has given me many excuses to make and exhibit exciting work without the constraint of actually making something that someone might want to buy or wear, sticking a pin on every interesting thing I come across – from a photocopied lost owl drawing to a box of fake sushi to a handful of gold bling rings; building really really big necklaces; expanding my normal jewellery making practice with the accidental discoveries I make in my Handshake practice; sharing my making thoughts with another; drinking flat whites together; finding commonalities; defining differences; exploring copyist issues; discovering how different our making decisions are; jumping off the plan all the time; adding addendums; making it up as we go along.

Sharon Fitness is an Auckland-based jeweller, blogger and commentator.

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6 Lisa Walker, interviewed by Sharon Fitness, Overview, 5, November 2011, p17.
Prodigies and heroes

Mentors' biographies Benjamin Lignel
Interviews Mary-Jane Duffy
Hanna had spent time in Dunedin a few years ago, and during our first Skype meeting we had that to talk about – it made the whole process easy.

In the first stage of the project I consciously chose to mimic Hanna’s methodology. I became more aware of how intuitively I work. Interpreting the world through someone else’s eyes helps you see how different you are.

Hanna and I continue an ongoing dialogue, mostly about what feeds our work. Sometimes this is visual, sometimes written, and other times it’s about what’s happening in our lives. All of these factors contribute to the physical making. Then we take a step back and Hanna tells me what she’s seeing. She has great advice like: sometimes you have to trick yourself. When deadlines are looming this takes some planning, but making something unexpected is rewarding.

I’ve also learnt that deliberating can be unhelpful. Sometimes your eyes can’t see what’s in front of them, and it’s best to put the work aside. If you don’t like something you’ve made, it’s not about what’s wrong, it’s about what could be right.

We’ve talked about how important drawing is, how it is a foundation. I make a lot of drawings at the beginning of a project – the looser the better – and when I get stuck I go back to them. I find technical drawings useful when I’m close to a solution.

I have also embraced a new material – rubber. It has limitations and I spend a lot of time looking for solutions to the problems it presents, but that’s really the nature of making. I’m finding a new vocabulary and I can’t wait to see where it takes me.
Broken Branches (2012)
40 x 30 x 30cm necklace
Rubber, butanol

Black Coal and My Father’s Hands (2012)
40 x 20 x 3.5cm necklace
Rubber

Untitled Necklace A & B (2011)
40 x 6 x 2.5cm
Powder-coated copper, cotton, black and white rubber

Untitled Necklace (2011)
40 x 6 x 2.5cm
Powder-coated copper, cotton, rubber
I was honoured that Debbie considered my work inspiring and I felt a great responsibility to support her. It is occasionally a struggle to manage everyday life and work, and I would have loved to have had a mentor to support me when I was a new graduate. At the same time I felt scared of such a great responsibility, since I had only graduated four years earlier. I haven’t much previous experience as a tutor. Debbie and I share a lot of interests. We are both currently interested in depictions of nature and the impact humans have on the Earth. Our previous conversations have dealt with questions around human conflict and the fabricated romantic views we humans have about nature. Debbie and I have lived in the same town in New Zealand as well as been students at the same art school (during different periods), so we have had many conversations about this town and the people who live in it. We have had the same teachers and have some friends in common. The world is small sometimes.

I have talked to Debbie about going deep into the material to find a unique language and method, and being open during the process, since the process can give a lot of surprising directions. I want her to try to trick herself, to find unexpected ways and not think too much about how the finished product will look.

We haven’t had the opportunity to meet in person. Instead we have an enormous physical distance between us as well as a ten-hour time difference. It has sometimes been very hard to correspond and find a time that suits us both since Debbie is sleeping when I am awake and vice versa.

Debbie started out with a project that aimed to mimic my aesthetics and methods. I observed Debbie’s work looking more and more like mine. This was at times awkward and forced me to question the uniqueness of my own work. At times it left me feeling very drained. During the project both our lives have taken many turns, and we will both grow from the experience.

For me it’s the blend of education, teachers and travel that is the foundation of the work I make today. I had the advantage of studying at a university that offered many workshops by artists from all over the world. They all had different methods and views on jewellery. Realising that there are diverse views pushed me to examine what is important to my art and to me. It also gave me an international outlook on the jewellery scene. I am still in close contact with fellow ex-students and I collaborate with many of them in different projects. My education taught me to cherish collaborations – that they are necessary to create a strong voice and become visible in the wider art and design world.

Hanna Hedman is a Swedish maker in her 30s. Her career is as short as it has been prolific and successful. After concluding her nine-year training in 2008, she hit the ground running with a technically dazzling, singular and thematically rich body of work. (She has exhibited nine times on her own since.) Her work consists of exotic bestiaries, sub-aquatic shrubberies and anthropomorphic shapes grown on a strict diet of embossed and cut-out sheet metal, painted in lush bi-chromatic shades. Her technical prowess notwithstanding, her success was cemented by a strategic use of photography; she has used white-clad models to put her clever, talismanic assemblages in relief against an ominous air of modern-day normalcy. Hedman trained in the USA, New Zealand and Sweden. English is her second language.
When I look back on my Whitireia workbook there are a lot of references to, and images of, Fabrizio’s work. I like what he’s doing – it’s industrial and architectural. His work spoke to me.

I couldn’t wait to have a look around his workshop when I went to Italy. I wanted to see what sort of paint he used, and what he did to get the finish on objects. He uses water-based paint, water-based sprays. And he opens a window and sprays, or puts his torch out – he doesn’t have any vents.

He’s encouraged me to trial a lot. Try anything. That was helpful. My studio now has pieces all over it. I try something, then something else. Two weeks later I’ll come back to the first thing, do a bit more. And what I’m doing now I would never have thought of before I met Fabrizio. At the moment I’m using rubber. But I’ve got to be really careful not to make things that look like his.

Fabrizio also suggested I should return to colour. He uses a lot of orange. I love orange. I’d like to make things in orange but I can’t because he does.

Two weeks before the December 2011, exhibition at Masterworks I was wondering what to make. I’d had two exhibitions opening within a day of each other and I needed a rest. Fabrizio said, ‘Just clear your head. Get some metal and solder and start doing anything.’ And it worked, although I made a Fabrizio look-alike! But it doesn’t matter if you make it your own. You’ve got to learn somehow. As long as you reference, then you are on the way somewhere ... or nowhere.
Palimpsest brooch (2011)
5.5 x 7.5 x 0.5cm brooch
Copper, resin, paint

Retread 2 (2012)
Tread Carefully series
8 x 8 x 4cm brooch
Recycled rubber, copper, car paint

Palimpsest Christchurch (2011)
5 x 6 x 0.5cm brooch
Silver, resin, plaster resin, tin, paint, rust

After FT 1 (2011)
6 x 6.5 x 1cm brooch
Copper, screws, car paint

Palimpsest Ring (2011)
3 x 2.5 x 2.5cm
Silver, resin, paint

Palimpsest Christchurch (2011)
5 x 6 x 0.5cm brooch
Silver, resin, plaster resin, tin, paint, rust

Retread 1 (2012)
8 x 13 x 7cm brooch
Recycled rubber, copper
I was surprised I had been selected for such an important project. I appreciate the originality of the project and the fact that it encourages communication and exchanges between artists.

I’ve encouraged Becky to try new materials. One evening at her house we started working together with bike tubes – a material I was experimenting with a few years ago for fun. By coincidence, my wife, Sahaja, was wearing some of my bike-tube work that night, and Becky liked them. From there, she started a number of items she is working on now.

I’ve advised Becky to perfect her work in all its details, even the smallest. To change, diversify, try, test, and develop an idea in other directions, dimensions, materials – daring more. She has been surprisingly quick in understanding my suggestions and putting them into practice, so my job was very easy.

Becky was always conscious of what she wanted to learn and improve, and I just helped her to observe her work better. A nice moment for us was when we all (myself, Sahaja, Becky and other New Zealand and Australian artists) were able to go to Schmuck in 2012. It was highly educational and an exciting opportunity for exchange.

I do not think that anything is more or less important in training and education than anything else. It is necessary to have a level of self-confidence to reach the end of a creative process. All answers can be found in experience. As for the future of education, it more or less follows its cycle, which is dependent on historical context. Solid education and training help you to compete in art and to overcome the cultural gap that still separates the applied arts from contemporary art.
My first Skype with Lucy Sarneel was great. Our lives have many things in common. This gave us a starting point for conversation. Lucy has always been one of my favourite artists. Her choice of materials and her metal skills, combined with this incredible ability to make narrative, are things I’ve admired. I chose Lucy for her sense of scale, balance and proportion as well. These are things I am trying to achieve in my work.

Aotearoa is also in my work, which is about my life. It is important to acknowledge our heritage, and to constantly consider this when making.

But it’s always good to look at someone else’s making process. I’ve enjoyed the reassurance that a process does work whether you are in a good space or a bad space. It’s also given me ideas for my practice.

We started a collaborative work straight away. Lucy sent the first piece, and I must admit it was a little daunting to add something. I then sent it back to her. After she sent it back with alterations and add-ons, it became great fun.

Lucy’s best advice to me is: when you sit at your workstation, have in the forefront of your mind what it is you want to create, such as space or light. And always have a critical eye on your work. This has made my work stronger, more considered, and I play much more with the scale of the pieces.

She also said, ‘You have extended your visual possibilities, which gives you the opportunity to express in a broader way. Beware of the decorativeness of your work. What do you want to experience? If you would regard your pieces as presents, what would you want to give to another person?’
Seventies Series (2012)
14 x 12cm pendant
Copper, enamel, leather, found object

Seventies Series (2012)
8–14cm pendants
Copper, enamel, leather, found object

Untitled (2011)
4 x 7 x 3cm pendant
Powder-coated copper, textiles

Untitled (2011)
7 x 5 x 3cm pendant
Powder-coated copper, textiles

Untitled (2011)
7 x 5 x 3cm pendant
Powder-coated copper, textiles
Lucy Sarneel

I was happily surprised to be chosen by someone from the other side of the world. I was unsure whether it would work out, because it’s difficult to discuss work without close contact with the maker as well as with the work.

These Skype meetings are like stepping into someone else’s life, house, passions ... and I had from the beginning a familiar feeling about Nadene. It’s funny: everything is vague and dreamy because of the visual nature of the Skyping.

We talked about opening up thoughts about the work, broadening and deepening the idea behind it by, for instance, looking at things that are related to it, reading and drawing and so on. About daring to show what you want and not taking into account too much how other people see jewellery. About sizing up the work in order to get closer to the idea of the work. About its relationship with lampshades. About letting the work grow more naturally and playing and then evaluating, playing, evaluating ...

Nadene is a very driven maker and she always took my advice seriously. She’s obviously eager to learn, to move forward, and she’s not easily satisfied with the outcomes. She has followed my advice and is very focused. All this resulted in an impressive development of her work.

It was interesting to see that there can be essential contact despite the limitations of distance. I’m not a regular Skyper so this was a new experience for me. What worked well was creating a real piece together by sending it back and forth. In this way I could see and feel the materiality of her work, and the other way around. I think we could have done this more intensely, for instance by giving our work a mutual title and working on the content together.
Kristin D’Agostino
Judy Darragh

I chose Judy Darragh as a mentor because she is not a jeweller. I was drawn to her practice because she continually bucks trends and works on her own terms. Every meeting is a thrill. I had to bring my little six-week-old along to the first meeting and thought that would seem ‘unprofessional’. But it turned out just the opposite. When he wasn’t asleep, Judy was happy to hold Jackson or cheer me on as I nursed. That one meeting over coffee perfectly illuminated the benefits of feminism that people like Judy have championed, and which have flowed on to my generation.

Judy is very generous with her information and ideas. We talk a lot about things that happen leading up to making: inspiration, books, shows and the structuring of one’s practice in general. We also talk about the decisions we made for particular works, about other activities like drawing and using photography to analyse work. My favourite quotes of Judy’s are ‘do things in threes’, and ‘don’t be afraid to have fun’.

I have switched materials now. I was inspired by the poster/sticker drawings Judy did when her son was little, as I needed a quiet, non-toxic material to work on at home.

Judy is from the contemporary art world and so discussing my work and ideas with someone involved in a different area of practice has been interesting. I’ve started to draw more and have also returned to an idea I’ve been wrestling with – drawing in 3D.

We both have a knack for planning community-oriented events as one aspect of our practices, so we plan to hold an event together. We are still in the brainstorming phase, but dog and horticulture shows are both fair game.
HANDSHAKE

The Egalitarian Project: A Collaboration with Badge King (2011) 5.8 x 5.8cm brooches Tin, sterling silver, pearl, peridot, aquamarine, cellophane, steel wire, polymer clay, non-toxic resin, cotton, styrofoam

Experiments (Following on Rare Fungal Behaviour body of work) (2011) Marquettes Non-toxic resin, found material

Chicken Vindaloo (2012) 8 x 5 x 5.5cm brooch Silver, fishing line, take-away container

Rogan Josh (2012) 6.5 x 6 x 2cm brooch Silver, fishing line, take-away container

Take This (2012) 8.5 x 6.5 x 4.5cm brooch Silver, fishing line, take-away container

KRISTIN D’AGOSTINO
Judy Darragh is a New Zealand artist, writer and educator in her 50s. Her installation work, which from the late 1980s onward established a kitsch, DIY aesthetic scavenged from ‘op shop’ materials, cites Kaprow as an influence. ‘Just doing’ could describe her irreverent position with regard to high art and frames Darragh’s enquiry into what may constitute a work of art (is plastic vomit OK? Dildos?). As the use of everyday material has become more mainstream amongst younger artists – partly under her influence – so has her vocabulary tightened, and her practice shifted away from being apposite. She now incorporates some elements of the institutional gestures she once resisted: in her recent work, her usual exuberant vertical proliferation of stacked vessels is rounded up in neat silver vitrines and lent the air of French-polished curiosa, immortalised in lush photographs. This is probably less about embracing the white cube than play-acting respectability, the better to reboot her enquiries elsewhere (the walls) with a more controlled vocabulary. English is her first language.

I was intrigued by the mentoring project and heartened that it was happening. Conversations and the sharing of ideas and resources are so important within the creative community – especially where artists are competing for funding and support in a decreasingly supportive environment.

I remember meeting Kristin for the first time at a cafe, with her newborn baby. Kristin seemed unphased by the thought that having a baby was going to slow her down. It didn’t, but she was tired! We talked a lot about community, value and currency – how these can operate outside the capitalist structure and provide a new model for support. We shared ideas – how we work, books we were reading and discoveries about ourselves. We talked about ways to sustain your practice with life going on around you.

Handshake is a great project. It has provided a structure for Kristin to proceed in her work. The fact that we were reimbursed for the contact shows a maturing in how artists and mentors are valued. It is a good model for other groups to pick up on.
Estela’s work appeals to me – in its constructing, joining and exploration of form. There is a particular body of work called Good by(e) nest (2008) that I often return to. What appeals about this work is the strong colour alongside the metal, and that the joins are not only functional, but add to the aesthetics.

Estela is based in Amsterdam. We originally emailed, but have recently started Skyping. We discuss what I will make for the Munich exhibitions, and plan back-ups if work doesn’t turn out. She has given a lot of advice on professional practice lately.

The Handshake project has really challenged me. I am a shy, reserved person, so sometimes talking to people seems quite daunting. I talk myself out of approaching Estela to start a conversation if I am not sure what I need from her. To avoid this I am making an effort to be more disciplined about regular contact, even if it is just conversational or an update on my work.

I have struggled with making confidently in the past few years due to worrying what other people think. The more I doubted, the less I liked making, and the less I made and so on ... it was a vicious cycle. Estela’s enthusiasm made me realise that I ached to feel like that again. I had to stop over-thinking and let enjoyment direct my process.

As a result there has been a shift in my practice this year. I have introduced new materials and colours. I have started to draw more – jotting down an idea in a quick sketch or drawing a series of similar but slightly changed ideas. I return to drawings or ideas months later and make them, as I have had time to think about how to go about it.
Woven Neckpiece (2012)
65 x 26 x 3cm
Faux leather, handbag handle, inner tube, acrylic paint, drawer handle

Untitled (2012)
30 x 4 x 2.5cm necklace
Sterling silver, copper, acrylic and watercolour paint

Woven Box (2012)
60 x 3.5 x 2cm necklace
Sterling silver, spray-paint, shoelace

Silver Neckpiece (2012)
57 x 11 x 2cm
Sterling silver, acrylic paint, spray-paint, Adidas shoelace
Handshake was a great idea and a really interesting project. I wanted to participate from the beginning. The transfer of knowledge is something I have always been interested in – it is evolution.

A situation was created by the Handshake project. After I gave my feedback on Gillian’s work, she redirected questions to me and my work, and in this way we started a dialogue as peers. I tried to make Gillian question why, what, and the nature of her making. The freedom of our interaction dictated the experience – I was there; she just had to approach me when she needed to.

I came to understand that there are many ways to communicate and be creative. Daily contact and talks work well. Training should give potential candidates as many opportunities as possible to try different things. Working while learning helps you to find out slowly what you really want to do – or at least what you don’t want to do.
When Peter asked us to name our three superheroes, I instantly thought of Lisa Walker. I had been impressed by Lisa’s kick-arse attitude and was hoping a little bit of that would rub off on me.

Lisa does not like to have plans and is always encouraging me to ‘jump off the plan’. She says I need to make everything that pops into my head before thinking too much about what it will become. Those first instincts or idea flashes usually become the best things.

Her most frequent words of advice are ‘go for it’. She is supportive of my writing ventures and has often sent me a text or email to say she is proud of me or that she really likes my way with words. That kind of affirmation from your superhero is worth a million bucks.

I now have an excuse to experiment widely and have made time in my schedule to play. I am exhibiting strange and unwearable things instead of only sellable things. I spend a lot of time documenting and sharing my thoughts and processes online, and enjoy the openness this brings. I now know how different our found object/ready-made pieces are but I’m still struggling with being seen as ‘copyist’.

We have done one collaborative work (see blog September–November 2011). Lisa was going to send me a bit of broken padded chair to work on, but couldn’t let it go. So I made a thing that I imagined she might be making, trying to make decisions she might make. That was interesting – I hated the restrictions of trying to make Lisa decisions – it affirmed how different my decisions were. The final pieces were different of course, apart from the plaited cord.
Emergency Pendant with a Purple Winkle (2012)
50 x 25 x 3.5cm
Wind-up torch/radio, electrical wire, silicone

Lucky it Didn’t All Go to Custard (2011)
40 x 16 x 3cm pendant
Urethane, pigments, thread

Emergency Necklace with Cable Ties (2012)
60 x 30 x 4cm
Radio kitset, wind-up torch, wires, headphones, cable ties

Preserved Fruit Loops Pendant (2012)
40 x 18 x 10cm
Preserving jar, silicone, pigments, found rock circles
Lisa Walker is a New Zealand jeweller in her 40s. Walker studied at the Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, and later at the famed Munich Academy of Fine Arts. Her irreverent attitude to fabrication techniques (hot glue, here I come!), complete disregard for (or was it understanding of?) material value, and extremely persuasive assemblage of scavenged pop urban bits instantly made her a revered mother figure for deskilled contemporary craft. Her prolific oeuvre derives its strength from the conventions it rejects and the issues it raises about craft’s reliance on conventional notions of skill, intentionality and integrity. More importantly, her work has helped establish a new technical paradigm for contemporary jewellery. Walker’s first language is English.

I thought, ‘This project sounds good and I haven’t seen anything similar before.’ I was a bit daunted by the length of it and wondered how I would manage with the time it would need. I was happy to have some closer contact with Sharon, whom I knew only a little bit.

I didn’t really advise Sharon. It was more communicating and building a relationship. We influenced each other and our project grew like a friendly tentacle. She silicons, I glue; she wears, I smear; she blogs, I smog; she laughs, I snuffle.

My own beginnings were entrenched in learning goldsmithing in a traditional way. After studying I wanted to put myself in situations where I could learn more with fulltime practitioners. I was able to do work experience in Matthew von Sturmer, and Warwick Freeman’s workshops. I then entered post-graduate study in Germany, which was very open and similar to having your own workshop, all self-directed. All these elements worked well for me. Goldsmithing techniques and history; jewellery techniques and the history related to your culture; craft, design, art history and contemporary art are important to learn for the eventual development of your own voice in your work.

Lisa Walker
Sharon Fitness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lisa Walker Pendant (2012)</th>
<th>40 x 18cm</th>
<th>Chair back, thread</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Walker Pendant (2012)</td>
<td>35 x 18 x 12cm</td>
<td>Wood, lacquer, thread</td>
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Necklace (2011)
100 x 60cm
Sheepskin
The intimidating thing about working with Octavia is knowing the time, work, respect and effort that has gone into developing her practice. And here I am, working beside her, having my name associated with hers – though if I said this she would make me get over it.

It has been really helpful getting to know Octavia’s process, as I now know she’s just like me. It affirms the idea that jewellery superstars are average people who have to work hard. They have times when their work is not well received, or they feel insecure.

When I switched from working with bone, I spent months trying to make kaledoscopes from acrylic mirror. When I was venting my frustrations, Octavia reminded me that it was a new material for me, that I hadn’t spent three years getting to know its extremities. She said, ‘Maybe it’s best to figure out what it can do in 2D before you get to 3D. Pare back when you find yourself unable to resolve a piece or material.’ I keep that in my head as a general reminder of how easy it is to expect too much of yourself, that there is no problem with slowing down, taking your time and enjoying the ride. You’ll figure out a few things along the way and get to your final destination eventually.

I am very interested in a technology shift – 3D printing and the like. I am also interested in collaborating with industries outside the jewellery realm, such as mould-makers. These relationships could open up new areas of practice, keeping New Zealand jewellers on the international stage and potentially creating connections to a new audience at home too.
(left) Pendant No 1
(2011)
20 x 9 x 1.7cm
Bone, acrylic mirror,
silicone, copper, balsa
wood, paint, cotton cord
Ditto (2012)
5 x 5 x 2.5cm brooch
Sterling silver, copper,
New Zealand heart rimu,
acrylic mirror

(untitled) (2011)
10 x 10 x 40cm object/
pendant
Sterling silver, copper,
acrylic mirror, silicone,
resin

Inamorato (2012)
42 x 11 x 5cm necklace
Copper, acrylic mirror,
New Zealand heart rimu,
cotton
Octavia Cook

Sam Kelly

I was surprised and honoured to be chosen by Sam. I met her when I taught a workshop at Whitireia while she was a student.

We are similar in some ways. We are both quietly rebellious within our own ordered systems! Our Skype sessions sometimes feel more like mutual jewellery therapy than me passing on pearls of wisdom.

We quite often talk about concept, and I’m an advocate of ‘you can’t force concept’. You just have to make the piece your mind is telling you to make, and the concept will unveil itself during or after the making. You have to trust that your brain has absorbed enough information and done a few calculations without you, and concentrate on making a great piece of jewellery. Either it works or it doesn’t. And sometimes you don’t even need concept at all – just make for the pleasure of the object.

The first couple of years away from study are hard, especially when you have a successful body of work that has been acknowledged internationally, as Sam has. You spend a lot of time trying to break away from what you did as a student, and forging in a new direction. Then people say they like your old stuff better …

Sam has loosened up in her making and is trying to let the materials and forms do the talking rather than getting bogged down in too much meaning. It takes so long to problem-solve new ideas and materials, though. It’s a long way until she realises an end product with which she is completely confident.

Sam has had some problems, first with her broken wrist and now with her injured arm. She can’t do any making for an indefinite amount of time – every jeweller’s worst nightmare. She’s doing her best to circumvent the limitations by outsourcing the manufacturing of components and working out low-fi resolutions to technical problems. Nevertheless, it must be frustrating to be oozing ideas that her hands can’t keep up with. The problems extend to the exhibiting side of Handshake. Sam won’t be able to use the opportunities set up with galleries to her maximum advantage – but she may surprise us all with a fantastic alternative solution.

When I was studying at UNITEC, it was my tutors who enhanced my experience. Fulltime tutor Pauline Bern, and Areta Wilkinson, who was a technician/tutor at the time, had a great effect on my development. They gave me the confidence to connect with them after I’d graduated. I had a decent, broad training in technical, historical and theoretical areas which suited me well and set me up to work on my own.

There seems to be a strong group of recent graduates active in the jewellery community now. It has made our kind of jewellery much more accessible to students and other interested folk in a way that those who attended the jewellery conference JAM (Auckland, 1999) could only have dreamed about. Maybe this is due to technology. But it’s also good to have enthusiastic young players making it look fun and interesting. As long as people still remember to make jewellery instead of just talking about it!
I became aware of Suska Mackert’s work through a show that Liesbeth den Besten and Love Jönsson brought to Objectspace in 2007 as part of Permit Symposium. *Juwelen* (1998) captured my attention. *Juwelen* contains written descriptions of various pieces of up-market jewellery, without any images to accompany them. It still is one of my favourite works of art.

Suska makes work that isn’t tangible – it is often ephemeral and conceptually driven. The concept isn’t the most important part but it is where the creation starts. The process with which she makes is slow, often using repetition to create an effect or to create a large work. Suska thinks of herself as a jeweller, yet makes pieces that are often considered too distant from jewellery to be jewellery. Consequently she has to create her own context for the work.

I find it hard to place myself and my own work. If it isn’t wearable, or for sale, or if it is a DVD or installation, is it still jewellery? And am I a jeweller, artist, designer, or all three? Is what I make art or jewellery – and does it matter?

Seeing and hearing about Suska’s practice allowed me to think about jewellery in another context, not just as an object to be worn but as an experience, a theory and a phenomenon.

Since working with Suska, my work has moved from an autonomous, object-based practice to a socially based practice. And I am aware of the responsibility to someone I have never met before, on the other side of the world, who has given up their valuable time to mentor me. This encourages me to push my practice further than I would if left to my own devices.
How to Make a Ring (2012)
Video and finished ring
$1 American banknote

This Brooch Cost Me My Credit Card (2011)
8.6 x 5.4 x 0.5cm
brooches/performance
Bronze, credit cards

Valid Thru (2011)
8.6cm x 5.4cm object
24 ct gold

JHANA MILLERS | 83
Suska Mackert is a German maker and educator in her 40s. Mackert’s graduation work from the Rietveld Academy set the course of a conceptual oeuvre so novel and singular that it acts like a piece of sticky gum on the sole of every subsequent conceptually driven jeweller. Like the fine art movement that put ‘conceptual’ on the map, her work tends to be object-less, process-based and word-rich. One of its most obvious effects is to make spectators – not wearers – reflect on the conditions of jewellery’s existence, and on the protocols and rituals that lend it value. Most strikingly, absence (or the removal of evidence) is part of her wider strategy to reflect on (and create) the value we associate with jewellery. Mackert now leads the jewellery department at the Rietveld Academy. German is her first of three languages.

I felt very honoured that a young person from New Zealand knew about my work and decided to contact me for this project. I was very positive about the idea and the concept in general; it was an innovative project that made sense in our times.

Since we communicate via Skype, our relationship is defined by the quality of the Skype connection: ‘Can you still hear me?’ or ‘I just lost you ...’ But we did manage to talk a lot about the project, New Zealand jewellery exhibitions, and Jhana’s project at the time: the Visa card becoming a brooch ...

We did not meet until September this year (2012), and I only this year saw Jhana’s work in real life for the first time. Liesbeth den Besten showed me the credit card brooch she had asked Jhana to make for her. That was one of the happiest moments for me in the project – to finally see and feel the work in reality. And see that it is great work!

The best aspects of my own training were meeting the people and teachers at the Rietveld Academy – the different opinions and approaches, the workshops. I also studied various disciplines in fine art with different teachers. The methods of working and teaching at the Academy were designed to displace old dogmas, old methods of teaching, learning and working. This led to great confusion during my studies. But as a result I was able to adopt new points of view. These points of view guide the way I work now.

What is missing from this project is the possibility for ‘accidents’. Normally when teaching I see a student and his or her whole cosmos on the working table – and around it. Students show me their work, but I can see that little thing under the table or left in some corner not getting any attention. Often this piece is interesting to talk about, to take it up to the table and have a look together. It is like science – you do not find exactly what you were looking for but things pass your way, and you have to pick them up; you have to see them.

But these opportunities are rare for me in our Skype conversations, since Jhana is of course always choosing what she wants to show me. I can’t see her whole work, look or go around it. I only see what the camera shows me.
I have known Karl for a while now. He taught a master-craft workshop at Whitireia Polytechnic in 2004 when I was in my first year of study there. He is easygoing and we established a rapport from our first meeting. I enjoyed his work, which is grungy and unconventional, and I was taken by his use of materials, proportions and comedy. Karl is a fulltime artist living with another fulltime artist and children. I have learnt a lot from seeing how he and Lisa work together and manage their lifestyle in and out of the limelight; how work is developed; how they juggle the mundane world and make amazing jewellery. This inspires, encourages and informs my own practice.

The way Karl explores and develops his work is similar to my process. He is not a man to mince words, and he is interested and intrigued by everything in the world. I find myself talking more about my concepts, politics, social and cultural issues, than the actual processes of creating work. Karl is very intuitive with his methods and materials. I have watched him making and contemplating each step as he goes.

The key decisions I’ve made based on knowing him are to keep working, developing and making. I feel more purposeful in my making, and determined to push and develop my skills in all areas. Being a contemporary Māori jeweller based in Aotearoa is pivotal to my work. Who I am and where I come from informs every part of my practice. I look forward to collaborating on an exhibition with Karl. We have talked about it and agree it will be stone-based and the rest will be a surprise.
Kumara Politiv (2011)
6 x 4 x 4cm pendants
Kumara, paint, copper

Astro and Rena (2011)
12 x 7 x 5cm necklace
object
Greywacke, ebony, rimu, paint, sterling silver

Rongo (2012)
120 x 8 x 6cm necklace
Bone, cord, muka, paint

Kumara Chalice and
Kumara Tuturu (2011)
7 x 6 x 3cm and 6 x 4 x 4cm necklaces
Jade, sterling silver, paint, braze, muka
Karl Fritsch
Neke Moa

I liked the idea of having Neke as a mentee. I saw a big chance to learn something about New Zealand in the project, especially as Neke has a Māori background and there is a lot I can learn from her – like ‘the kumara never talk about how sweet they are’.

I am not giving advice as such. We just communicate – not too much – look at each other’s work, have a cup of tea and a muffin (or a beer) and talk about all sorts of things, find out about what we are actually doing.

During my apprenticeship, learning all the skills of the trade was a really rich resource for me. Afterwards the real learning starts, and it is great to have skilled jewellers and artists around and to experience their attitudes.

Karl Fritsch is a German maker in his 40s. His training in both traditional craft technique (Goldsmiths College, Pforzheim) and experimental research (Munich Academy of Fine Arts) inform his sustained – some might say single-minded – reinterpretation of conventional types (the solitary ring) and techniques (the claw, the pavé setting) using unconventional methods. While his rings ape, in Flintstone mode, the technical solutions of high-street jewellery, they also dramatically reframe its expressive range, making him one of the most influential contemporary jewellery makers. As unrefined and occasionally shapeless as his works may be, they have blustered their way to international recognition, in packs of 50 or 100, underscoring Fritsch’s uncanny understanding of the formal codes he travesties and, more recently, his capacity to outgrow them. English is his second language.
I admire the exploration of materials in Andrea Wagner’s work, and the narrative. When I first contacted Andrea it was a few days after my weekend at the Emerging Jewellers Bootcamp at Ashley Gorge near Christchurch. I was shell-shocked by that experience and was glad to have someone who could help me build on what I had learnt there.

As Andrea is based in Amsterdam, our main means of communication has been email. Trying to describe physical objects via email often means ideas get lost in translation. Andrea also found it frustrating to get across what she was trying to explain, and I worried that I was too easily influenced by the direction Andrea suggested. However, after a recent visit, I have a big sense of relief. We had conversations over coffee and she helped with some technical issues. It was so much easier in person!

Andrea has given me many great pieces of advice, but something I often try to do now, thanks to her, is to ‘step outside myself’ in order to critique my own work. It is easier to imagine you are looking at the work through someone else’s eyes. She has also talked about focusing on one idea and letting stories unfold from there, exploring materials further and making strong work that tells its own story.

My aesthetic has changed radically. I have begun to explore alternative materials and techniques, to draw out what is and isn’t working with previous work, and to make a collection that is successful at communicating my ideas.

I am originally from Europe, and it feels natural to make connections internationally. New Zealand jewellers are a strong breed. We have a small audience for contemporary jewellery, yet I have peers who have been very innovative at educating this audience.
Commodotrophia (2012)
47 x 20 x 1cm necklace  
Resin, nylon

Brutal Beauty Block Pendrait (2011)
6.5 x 9.5 x 6.5cm  
Urethane, waxed cord

Old, New, Borrowed series (2011) 
approximately 10 x 9 x 4cm pendants  
Urethane, paint, waxed cord
Andrea Wagner
Lynsay Raine

I felt honoured to be invited. It is a challenge to be engaged in mentoring from afar using only modern long-distance methods. But Lynsay and I have had a lively exchange, touching on all kinds of subjects while circling and being tuned in to the process.

We made numerous conversational detours and shared a multitude of examples to get our thoughts across. I wanted to get Lynsay to better realise the different connotational layers and the possible directions that her work could take – to achieve the feeling that she intended to express. My advice centred on observing what happens when you combine two completely different objects possessing unrelated connotations in an attempt to create an ambiguous ‘story’. This does not work in all combinations, and it is important to see where an interesting ambiguity actually does occur – what happens when our minds register a couple of iconic but disparate messages in a single object.

Our collaboration was pleasurable and rewarding. The only disadvantage was that I could not physically handle Lynsay’s results: feel them, see them in 3D or manipulate things to demonstrate a point.

There are so many aspects to the expression ‘jeweller’ and working methods collected under it. For this reason I do not regard my training as a jeweller to be the most important aspect of my own practice. I was trained to think like a visual artist who works in the medium of jewellery, and this determines how I create. It determines how I am able to ‘read’ what happens at the levels of material choice and material treatment as well as all aspects of the creative process. The jeweller training kicks in with the technical aspects of making pieces and the practical aspects of wearability.

Education is always aligned with the specific politics of any institution and with the quality, experience and training of the teachers themselves. A programme of studies that includes learning the techniques of the jewellery trade often does not leave sufficient time and space for a comprehensive training in design or art jewellery. If students were given as much exposure as possible to the disparate kinds of jewellery, from design to art jewellery, they would be more able to decide which direction they wished to pursue.

Lynsay and I met each other in person during Schmuck in Munich, and she visited me for a week in Amsterdam a couple of months later. We have become friends. We both view the Handshake project as a very strong concept that should continue into Phase Two – with mentor and mentee working together – and Phase Three, in which the mentee becomes mentor to someone else. Funding is obviously crucial for making it possible to exhibit the results and to create a catalogue to document the project. Handshake has the potential to inspire young jewellers and demonstrate the power of tutoring, learning and passing experience on.
My path to contemporary jewellery has been all serendipity. When I set out ten years ago, I had no idea that this world existed. Along the way, I happened upon perhaps a dozen works that caught my attention and drew me on. I chose Iris as my mentor because she made two of these landmark pieces (pictured at left). I see her work as embracing the broadest definitions of jewellery practice.

I’m inspired by the breadth and generosity of Iris’s art practice. She has been an educator since she graduated. She’s based in the United States, and when I chose her it seemed likely that I’d be travelling there for a holiday. As things turned out, I spent a month as her guest at Cranbrook Academy in 2011, and we are discussing a repeat visit later this year.

The challenge for me is to modify my process, rather than understand it. Either that or really own it and ride it through to the end. Iris’s suggestions have included drawing, playing, taking my time and being less afraid to make something ugly and wrong. I observed such good practice at Cranbrook – great rigour in the method of student critiques and the value of peer feedback given at the right time. Iris has impressed upon me the importance of considering every nuance. Her feedback on my work included the loan of a more suitable pair of scissors.

But also: ‘Look at what’s in front of you – embrace it and work with it … the things which are here and you care for are relevant. Don’t feel compelled to make brooches but feel free to make brooches if brooches are required. Censor yourself less. Travel.’

Sarah Read
Iris Eichenberg

Chatelaine (2007)
Brooch
Wool, leather, brass

Two of the Same Kind
Keeping Each Other
Warm (1998)
40cm (h) object
Felted wool
$10 Brooches (2012)
Cotton, steel, silk

This Too Shall Pass (2012)
Approximately 120 x 200cm installation
Mixed materials

Free Time Toolkit (2012)
Approximately 105 x 80cm installation
Mixed materials

Featuring:
- Artist brooch by Jhana Millers
- Home Help brooch by Vivien Atkinson
- Kaituhihangarau/Technical/Writer brooch by Matthew McIntyre Wilson
- Caregiver brooch by Kelly McDonald
- Temporary Assistant brooch by Sarah Read

Free Time – A spare pair of hands in Christchurch performance, 2 weeks duration
Details at: freetime2012.wordpress.com

SARAH READ
Iris Eichenberg
Sarah Read

I remember being brought up to greet others with a good handshake, a short moment of a bended knee (known as a Knicks in German) and a good look in the eyes. Forced upon me, it always gave me the feeling of being belittled.

I must have been twelve when one night I entered the living room of my parents, who were surrounded by their usual group of friends, and of course a handshake was expected. I said ‘hey’ and waved my hand. I knew this was not a welcome but I needed to test it.

I grew older. My friends were late German hippies. We hugged, and you could tell one hug from another. Some were real, some felt like bodies accidentally bumping into each other – unwanted encounters that followed a social code and claimed social belonging. I moved to the Netherlands where people kissed, changing cheeks after every kiss – three times to be precise.

A few years later my parents visited me and they got kisses as well. I can still see the look of total confusion on their faces, but it taught them to give me a kiss and, when I came home once a year, they sort of cultivated it. I moved to the US and, if kissing at all, it is two and my third one often ended in the air.

Now, 20 years later, I have come to appreciate a good handshake, a good touch, a moment of reaching out, a silent but distinct encounter. It signals honesty, openness and willingness between two parties. You feel the firm touch ... you are allowed to hold the other person without being invaded.

Three views of Sense-Mapping (2012)
Smallest 6 x 9cm, largest 25 x 28cm gallery view/ installation shot
Wood, silver, pantyhose, wood, pink plastic, gold, pebbles, produce net, doll stands, beads, wire, leather, linen, cotton

Iris Eichenberg is a German-born Dutch maker and educator in her 40s. In the vein, perhaps, of Louise Bourgeois and Joseph Beuys, Eichenberg’s work seems to use personal effects and emotionally charged materials as quizzical exhibits of a collective (her)story. To work – and they do – her installations leverage the tension between the white cube – the gallery – and vaguely anthropomorphic pink aggregates assembled, threaded or stitched from a wide range of materials and flown in from the dressing room. Some of her objects may be worn, but that’s not the point. Her pervasive influence on the contemporary jewellery community comes from promoting the notion – through her career as maker and educator at the Rietveld Academy and now at Cranbrook Academy – that the word ‘jewellery’ describes a field of enquiry, not a type of object. English is her third language.
I chose Warwick as a mentor because I had participated in a workshop with him as a student and developed some interesting works. I also admire his work and respect his extensive practice, and wanted a mentor who would come from a different angle. I had preconceived ideas about Warwick telling me to tighten groups up, strengthen my technical skills, and professionalise my exhibition process. And these things have happened subconsciously. In reality he has encouraged me to think about my whole practice and how I approach making.

I felt vulnerable showing him my works for the first time as we make in entirely different ways. Warwick is a master of the craft. I am a maker responsive to all types of materials.

Sharing our projects helped us build a communication that has become natural and enjoyable. At the start of the project, it was tricky for Warwick to mentor me in the structured way that the Handshake timeline demanded. It felt like we were playing a game to pass the test and look good on paper. However, Warwick didn’t make me feel that was my fault and was generous with his communications.

Warwick is really into drawing. He has an amazing drawing portfolio, and as I have a painting and drawing background we talked about that for the first six months. After the first year he started to direct his attention to my work and that has been exciting. I am glad it took time, as our relationship has matured and is more considered.

He said, ‘It’s a serious sandpit this jewellery business, don’t treat it as a hobby. Slackness has no part in the work. But don’t see perfection in any narrow way (such as technique or finish). Perfection could be in the editing of the work or in the presentation.’
Imagine (2011)
3 x 4 x 8cm brooch
Ceramic, plastic, paint, leather

Found and Stashed (2012)
5 x 3 x 6cm brooch and necklace
Flocked box, 300 dyed pearls

Crumpled (2012)
6 x 5 x 0.8cm brooch
Silver, leather, steel

Reflections of Architecture (2012)
4 x 4 x 0.7cm ring
Leather, silver, steel

Reflections of Architecture (2012)
4 x 12 x 0.7cm bracelet
Leather, silver, steel

Reflections of Architecture (2012)
10 x 30 x 0.8cm necklace
Leather, silver, steel
I have some reservations about the manufactured relationship of the mentorship and with the public exposure implicit in the blog as a forum for mentor—mentee communication. It is not the form of mentoring I was used to. The distance between Jess’s generation’s acceptance of social networking and my reluctance to have a public conversation, as well as the implication that this format makes personal exchanges public, meant that I gave responsibility for the blog to Jess. She writes it. Apart from my very formal first entry, my contribution is whatever she edits from my emails. I trust her.

By formalising the mentor—mentee relationship, Handshake makes it feel pressured. The relationship has to observe formalities, meet certain deadlines, create a blog record. This means it doesn’t unfold in the usual open-ended way. This formality sometimes makes the relationship more like tutoring. Tutoring is a more confronting encounter – it has responsibility attached to it. Mentoring is more informal – more like rubbing up against one another. It has no responsibility beyond the individual’s sensibility: if you learn nothing from me then so be it – it means I had nothing to offer you. Handshake seems to assume that I do. Mentoring is a relationship where the parties take only what they need. That is not as selfish as it suggests because it works with generosity: not obligation, but goodwill.

Being an artist is a long game, and you have to play it that way to achieve any sort of sustained practice. I bumbled along when I started, but I can see that the art world is now far more strategic than it has ever been in the past.

I remember reading about Frank Zappa’s experience in the 1960s with record company executives, and whether they really knew what was going on when they signed Zappa and other experimental artists. ‘No,’ he said, ‘they were old cigar-chomper guys who listened to the tapes and said, “I dunno. Who knows what the fuck it is? G’head – put it out! Who knows? I dunno.”’ And sometimes they got it right. My experience counts for something, but I think my T-shirt says: ‘What the fuck do I know? G’head.’

For me, Handshake is not sitting down and saying to Jess: ‘Maybe try it like this’, because I’m not very practised in that role. Reviving the masculine/feminine theme of my early emails with Jess: men are supposed to be very keen to provide solutions to problems, but in this case I suspect my solutions aren’t very likely to be hers. Besides, Jess is a whirlwind – she sucks up far more information than what I have lying around and she has opinions that are from a different world of practice from mine. I like that about her.

I’ve had no tutors (not since my secondary school art teacher) but I’ve had a shitload of mentors – most of them playing the role informally to the extent that they didn’t even know they were mentoring me. Some I even imagined in the role. Perhaps my concept of notional mentors is something you can blame on the loneliness of the long-distance maker. But if imagined conversations fuel the decision-making process in my workshop, they are sometimes just as productive as real ones.

Handshake is an opportunity to be open to influence. I didn’t know what I was for a long time and still see it as an open-ended discussion. I have sometimes taken a descriptive position purely for political reasons – a reactionary position usually to counter other people’s claims for me. An example of that was to counter the often-made claim for my practice: ‘Oh you’re not a jeweller – you are an artist who makes small sculptures.’ It was meant as a compliment but there are several reasons to dispute that description – not the least being because it seems to suggest ‘small sculpture’ is a greater endeavour than ‘jewellery’. It reduces the entire history of jewellery-making to a side-bar of sculptural practice – how big something is. So calling myself a jeweller was and is a political statement.

Any project that puts makers in touch with each other is great. While the expectation is that Handshake will have immediate influence and impact – because of its internet-based form of exchange – mentoring is a longer game. It operates like a sleeper in your working life. The pay-off may not appear until years later, when something happens in your work and there’s a little moment of ‘yeah, I get it’. Internet speed is hardly a player in that process.
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Handshake: 12 contemporary jewellers connect with their heroes documents a unique mentoring project, with essays by Benjamin Lignel and Raewyn Walsh, and interviews with the participants.

‘Handshake offers mentees remarkable access to real practitioners in a very personal and real way. The project is most useful for recent graduates still finding their feet, giving them a practical entry point to the jewellery world through support and advice.’

Emma Bugden, Senior Curator, The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, New Zealand

‘Mentees are scaffolded through the potential post-tertiary wasteland by the relationships with their mentors (and, significantly, their developing peer relationships), whilst being publicly challenged by the ongoing exhibition schedule and the forum of the project blog to develop their individual voice and point of view. This catalogue adds another dimension to the potential reach and influence of the project. The first of its kind, this project, devised to overcome the isolation of twelve New Zealand jewellery graduates, can now be showcased deservedly as the pilot of a mentorship model that is useful to other branches of the visual arts, and to other countries.’

Caroline Billing, The National, Christchurch, New Zealand