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The Mother Lode: A Tragicomedy

The space between pleasure and necessity



An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the postgraduate degree of

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Kelly McDonald

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Abstract

This exegesis discusses aspects of my current practice where I make jewellery that melds the narratives of home, workshop and motherhood, to explore power and gender and the subtle and sometimes not so subtle burden they place on women.

Drawing on the previous function of objects collected and selected from domestic, industrial and utilitarian realms, these jewellery re-contextualisations traverse tense and complex territories between people, bodies and things. While exploring the material traces of the everyday, they open a space for engagement and debate about womanhood and the emotional labour of parenting.

Whatever is produced or constructed in the superior realms of social practice must demonstrate its reality in the everyday, whether it be art, philosophy or politics.

At this level alone can it be authenticated...

Henri Lefebvre (1961)

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Figure 1. Image from opening night of *The Mother Lode: A Tragicomedy*, 2019, Te Auaha Gallery, Wellington.

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Introduction



Figure 2. Yallourn Power Station, Victoria, Australia. (7minute drive from family home).

My life has been inextricably linked to power and its processes of production. Incongruously nestled amongst dairy farms in a rural Australian valley, were six functioning power stations and the largest brown coal deposit in the southern hemisphere. I grew up in this industrial landscape, amongst the power stations (slowly being decommissioned) and an endless and visually brutal, open-cut coal mine covering more than 50 square kilometres.¹ The ‘brutality’ part of the description is an adult addition, noticed only on my return many years later. As a kid, I didn’t see any brutality; I simply saw an unimaginably vast black hole where Dad went to work to get money to buy us stuff. At sixteen my father began his work life as an apprentice fitter and turner in the Central Workshop Maintenance team. His job was to keep the steam powered turbines turning and the coal dredgers dredging. This was the same job his father had before him, and the same job boys from my high school class expected to get. Even with a child’s awareness, the social and political importance of my father’s role in maintaining power to the state of Victoria, was not lost on me. In contrast, my Mum’s job was to keep the house running. Apart from getting married, girls had two career options, nursing or teaching. Pragmatically, and consistent with my interest in the body, I became a registered nurse. I worked in the healthcare sector for many years concurrently pursuing my jewellery and object degree. This latter training aligned with my determination to subvert society’s vocational expectations.

¹ This quote from environmental activist group ‘Stop These Things’ gives a good insight into the sheer size of the open cut: “Few people outside the Latrobe Valley have even the slightest appreciation of the enormous scale of the open cuts. Even many Latrobe Valley residents are not particularly appreciative of the massive scale of the mines. Apart from limited passing glimpses of the Yallourn and Hazelwood mines from either the Princes Freeway or the Gippsland Rail Line, most people would not normally be in locations which would enable them to see the scale of even one of the open-cut mines.” From <https://landscapeaustralia.com/articles/latrobe-valley-open-cuts-wastelands-or-treasured-assets/>

I saw power and autonomy in my father's way of life, with a home workshop and quiet kingdom where he was answerable to no-one's expectations but his own. A sharp contrast to the life choices open to Mum. Considering these contrasts in my own work, I use materials taken from traditionally masculine and industrial spheres, combining these with objects and ideas exported from domestic environments. Just as roles move between architectural spaces, as a mother of three children, my work also moves between a tool-filled workshop and the home. The historical and visual rhythms of my work, problem solving in three dimensions and the value of and for careful crafting are central to my making, and relate directly to the place I grew up. My material selection criteria also originates here; the evidence of time, ownership, a previous life, or an interaction with the environment, tool marks, impressions from manufacturing and porosity or imperfections from the casting process. These accumulations are all valued for the stories they tell and their contribution to both the object's history and its potential as jewellery. My materials are both found and fossicked for; collected from the ground, selected from second-hand shops, metal-recyclers and the hardware shop. The objects are ordinary and come from my everyday. Although often hidden within machinery or with unrecognised functions, these objects' necessary relationship with our day-to-day is unknown to many, yet integral to my narratives.

The unique surface accretions present in the selected forms magnify their value. For me, they demonstrate evidence of useful employment by many hands across time, contributing to an idea of preciousness usually understood in relation to valuable materials such as gold. My preference is always for used objects, especially those from an era where people had a more sophisticated understanding of elemental materials and through necessity, knew how to make and maintain their own things. This history and these ways of thinking still shape my work, as do my many years of making things on the floor of my father's workshop.



Figure 3. *Mother*, 2019, (Neckpiece) Steel neck ring, cast bronze power point.
L350mm x W230mm x H30mm

Approaching study again for the first time in twenty years, the MFA offered me an opportunity to deepen all aspects of my practice. I felt that my previous work was aesthetically refined, yet lacked critical content. The first MFA assignment required re-interpretation of a previous work with the application of a catalyst. Seemingly a momentous task, I set a few simple parameters. The first required that any idea would dictate the necessary technical and material choices and the second required me to invest more of myself in my work. This led me to reflect on my current circumstances.

Amongst my year cohort, no other students had children and I felt alien, struggling to reconcile a very domestic home life with serious study in a fine art institution. I realised early in the program that if I was going to get on, I needed to get some 'brass balls' that could extend to both worlds. So I made myself a neck piece from long strips of rusty steel wire and two battered brass bed knobs (Fig. 4).

It hung around the neck and down the front of the body, positioning the jangling knobs directly over the genitals. Referencing the history of a marital bedroom, the bed knobs had a weight directly related to their previous function. They'd born silent witness to intimate relationships within the sanctity of a bedroom, fulfilling their decorative purpose without judgement. And in this instance, they acted as a stand in for 'relationship' and more importantly the power struggles that happen within these partnerships.

Un-fussily constructed, the looseness enabled a discordant clanging sound between the two knobs, demanding attention from viewers. The immediacy of the making process was a relief and a joy. Completely denying the usual tenets of more passive jewellery, such as precious materials in a delicate relationship to the body, laborious and thoughtful crafting and clever resolutions in relation to wearability, not to mention modest scaling. *Brass Balls* offered a place to stand as a new student and a brash place to build from as a maker. It also proposed a rich source for authentic content, a veritable mother lode, where my everyday experiences could inform a new approach in my practice, with a basis in critical rigour missing from previous work.



Figure 4. *Brass Balls*, 2019, (Neckpiece) Steel, brass bed knobs.
L680mm x W270mm x H110mm

Building a body of work around my own biography in conjunction with history laden materials required a robust title that could go the two year distance. The term *mother lode* has its origins in mining, denoting a principal vein of gold or silver, although it's more often used colloquially in reference to finding an abundance of something valuable that will make you successful, rich or happy. Playing with the common miss-spelling of mother lode, the phrase considers the loaded associations and expectations that often accompany the word 'mother'. The title is also an apt reference to both the use of precious metals in jewellery and my formative years growing up surrounded by open-cut coal mines.



Figure 5. Me in my workshop.

My work, as befits the title, blends aspects of the tragic and the comic with large helpings of repetition and the mundane. No-one can deny the tragicomedy of physically expelling your own flesh through your vagina, meeting decades of physical and emotional needs of this now other being, then feeling the taut snap of the broken cord when you find your first born watching porn at night. Obviously parenthood has its many positives, but there are also a lot of moments where it's more akin to a heavy load and in exploration of these ideas I hope to make visible aspects of the emotional labour involved in parenting and womanhood within a family, to provide a space for shared empathy and ensuing discussion.

What is Contemporary Jewellery?

Moving from an entirely craft-based community and training into fine arts focused study, also contributed to the alien feeling. Although I had never seen a distinction between the two, this disparity simultaneously offered a freedom to 'begin again', while tying me to less contemporary or knowledgeable understandings of what jewellery is and can be. This disparity also required me to be very clear about my own definition of what contemporary jewellery is and even clearer about what I propose it could be.

According to our national postal service, jewellery is a 'Prohibited or Restricted Item' that may not be posted, with a definition as follows in the *New Zealand Postal User's Guide* (2019):

Jewellery is any object that is typically worn for personal adornment (such as bracelets, rings, necklaces, earrings, watches, cuff links, etc) which is made of precious stones or metals – except where it is made entirely of plastic and or elastic and/or cotton.

It might seem odd for me to look to New Zealand Post for a definition of jewellery, but New Zealand's geographic isolation and sheer distance from the apparent European hot seat and 'birth place of contemporary jewellery' means that for New Zealand jewellers with internationally focused practices, there's a considerable reliance on postal and courier services to keep you in the game.² For the sake of financial expediency, the weekly act of posting jewellery anywhere requires the continually fraught renegotiation of your jewellery as 'Christmas ornaments' or such in order to avoid New Zealand Post's thin definition and enable postage to actually occur.

Looking to more informed definitions, in his book *Contemporary Jewellery in Perspective*, it takes the first chapter titled 'What is contemporary jewellery?' for NZ contemporary craft writer Damian Skinner (2013) to explain:

Contemporary jewellery is a self-reflexive practice, which means that it's concerned with reflecting on itself and the conditions in which it takes place. In general, contemporary jewelers work in a critical or conscious relationship to the history of the practice and to the wider field of jewellery and adornment. This is what makes contemporary jewellery different from other forms of body adornment, and it isn't found just in the way contemporary jewellery objects and practices engage with the history of jewellery, or the relationship to the body and wearing. Contemporary jewellery is shaped by a distinct awareness of the situation in which it exists... not all contemporary jewellery is equally self-reflexive, but as a field this is one of its notable characteristics (p.11).

² Damian Skinner states in *Contemporary Jewellery in Perspective* (2013): "While the critique of preciousness is a good way to organize a history of contemporary jewelry, because it captures precisely what makes contemporary jewelry different from other forms of jewelry, it also sets up a hierarchy. European contemporary jewelry, where the critique of preciousness emerged first, becomes the standard against which all other regional forms of contemporary jewelry are compared" (p.83). Skinner goes on to say: "contemporary jewelry takes place in different countries all around the world. Even though we mostly hear what's going on in Europe" (p. 84).

The relationship with a body or the origins of the adornment production process are the consistently central ideas in all definitions of jewellery be they trade or fashion jewellery, art/studio jewellery (American) or gold-smithing (Dutch/Italian). Esteemed jewellery writer Benjamin Lignel (2006) says in *Metalsmith* magazine “contemporary jewellery is a type of practice - understood as the contemporary offspring of a craft-based design activity that finds its origin in medieval workshops.” He writes two further pages in an attempt to offer clarity, but he also says “the otherwise simple task of defining one’s activity is unexpectedly daunting for us, and continues to fuel many of our conversations.” In her treatise, *On Jewellery: A Compendium of International Contemporary Art Jewellery*, art historian and internationally recognised jewellery authority Liesbeth den Besten (2011) looks at the definition through its various names and associated geographic locations just as Lignel does. Yet, even with a whole book at her disposal for explication, we still do not arrive at one authoritative definition, agreed on internationally.

Skinner eventually offers a more direct definition ten pages into his book: “Contemporary jewelry is a self-reflexive studio craft practice that is oriented to the body” (p.10). Apparently more direct, he then unpacks this definition in a further six pages, supporting my idea that while there are several consistencies occurring between the definitions from these three internationally recognised authorities, none will make their statement of definition in one unsupported line. Rather than finding issue with this lack of authoritative determination, it instead provides an immense freedom. This lack has also driven my own need for a personal definition. The key aspect of my definition is that of a relationship with a body, implied or otherwise. And while it may be argued that this definition might equally apply to other object or body centric practices such as furniture and fashion, this is in fact, part of my intention. The deficiencies I see in many of the existing definitions is the self-referential nature of jewellery, although termed ‘contemporary’, they continue to look backward to the origins of jewellery, tying jewellery to its history in a way that compromises its ability to remain contemporary.

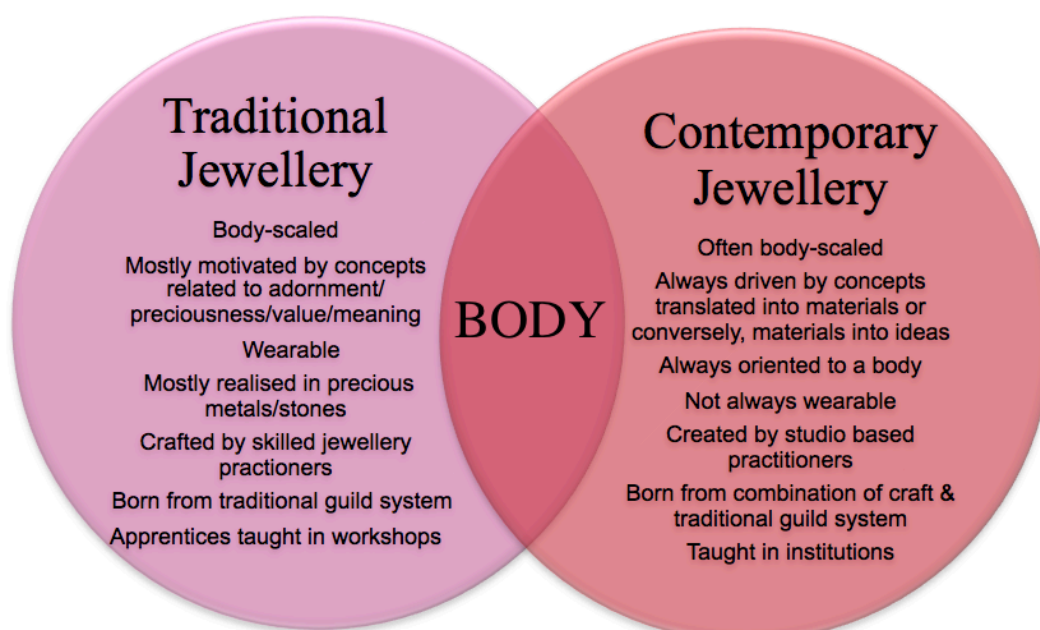


Figure 6. Comparison of my definition with traditional jewellery (left) likely located within a design house/retail outlet.

My own personal definition (Fig. 6) attempts to avoid this hierarchy, while not wanting to completely disavow its history, I'd hope that a broader definition allows for a more forward facing position with more consideration given to intersectionalities. For me, contemporary jewellery is: *An idea fundamentally driven by a relationship with a body, often, but not required to manifest in a body-scaled object, material, visual or audible representation of the idea.*

The Mother Lode

Determining my own definition of jewellery ties back to the need to establish an initial pivot point as a maker. Understanding exactly what it is I do, where I fit within the greater creative community and even why I am a maker has been at the centre of my masters quest. Apparently, by virtue of my sex, I was born a carer. In 1974 in rural Moe, Victoria, issuing from between my mother's legs was another one for the only noble vocations open to women, nursing or teaching. "Look at this." says Doctor Pearson, "It's a girl! Another for the honourable task of ministering to the ill and the injured – I can see it in her eyes." Maybe not – but I did grow up believing that nursing was my only choice despite my overwhelming desire to make stuff. It never occurred to me that jewellery might supplant nursing, such was Doctor Pearson's prophecy. That commitment to caring has been a hard one to shake. My Nanna was the much respected matron at the local Latrobe Valley Hospital and I was reminded throughout my childhood of her very pragmatic offerings: "If you don't eat, you don't shit and if you don't shit, you die." Working in nursing homes with my aunt throughout my teens inevitably led to registered nursing and since then, ADLs have been a part of my lexicon.

Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), is a term used in healthcare. It refers to the things we normally do within and around our homes, and encompasses our everyday fundamental activities such as feeding ourselves, grooming, dressing and bathing, work, homemaking, and leisure. Noelker and Browdie (2014) say ADLs provide healthcare professionals with a measurement tool for assessing an individual's ability or inability to perform ADLs, thus determining 'the functional status' of a person (p.13-16).

The point of coalescence for parenting and nursing is facilitating the development and maintenance of healthy bodies. But in our busy and often fractious lives, our focus doesn't often extend to our emotional health. Managing concurrent home and study pressures in the face of a new awareness of patriarchy's many oppressions, alongside performing these 'activities of daily living' for myself and the entire family, a significant frustration developed. Concurrent research took me to the quotidian. The 'everyday' draws on the normally unnoticed – it's everywhere and nowhere at the same time. In *The Everyday: Documents of Contemporary Art*, Stephen Johnstone (2008) talks about the everyday drawing from trivial and repetitive actions, the common habits and routines that make up daily life, and within art, it is usually understood in terms of a desire to make visible these authentic yet uneventful or overlooked aspects of lived experience. This resonated clearly with me. I looked extensively at artists also working in this area, both more historic; Bela Kolarova, Martha Rosler, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and Mary Kelly, and contemporary; Lenka Clayton, Lisa Walker, Tiffany Parbs, Francis Alys, Annette Messenger, Sarah Lucas and Cornelia Parker. Considering their bodies of work to date offered me perspectives on the

dimensionality of my ideas. Their work encouraged me to think of the different angles to approach my making from, and helped me to consider the emotional representation of my ideas in material form.

French philosopher Henri Lefebvre first wrote about the everyday in 1961. He believed that art was not external or superior to real life and that politics and the state were not above everyday life, but instead they occupied the same level. Cited in Johnstone's (2008) *The Everyday: Documents of Contemporary Art*, and hereafter referenced as Lefebvre (1961), he says:

Critique of everyday life encompasses a critique of art by the everyday and critique of the everyday by art [...] How can everyday life be defined? It surrounds us, it besieges us, on all sides and from all directions. We are inside it and outside it. No so-called 'elevated' activity can be reduced to it, nor can it be separated from it (p.29).

Whatever is produced or constructed in the superior realms of social practice must demonstrate its reality in the everyday, whether it be art, philosophy or politics. At this level alone can it be authenticated [...] it is defined by this intermediate and mediating level (p.32).

While Lefebvre was predominantly concerned with the critique and consequent transformation of the everyday, Kristin Ross (1997) writes that Michel de Certeau (1980) 'reinvented' the quotidian, celebrating homely practices such as cooking, and dwelling in life, as lived in the here and the now. Ross (1997) notes that everyday life for Certeau was 'a complex geography of social ruses' — who better to understand this intimately than women! In Ben Highmore's (2002) *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*, he talks about Certeau's problematic archival of the everyday. While Certeau's written archive of everyday life includes walking, talking and eating etc, Highmore proposes that the everyday actually exists between the lines of these archival practices, and that they do not account for the totality of sensory life" (pp.17 – 20). It is this sensorial aspect of the everyday that I am most interested in, specifically for its intersection with the haptic nature of jewellery.

The synthesis of many years of healthful maintenance of bodies, my 'significant frustrations' with balancing study, making and family, alongside research and the acquisition of new knowledge, led me to artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* (1969). In her manifesto, she writes, "Now, I will simply do these maintenance everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art" (p.3).

Ukeles' manifesto sprang out of her frustrations with societal judgements relating to her concurrent art practice and motherhood. While society's expectations of women have certainly progressed in the ensuing sixty years, the manifesto continues to have relevance in the 21st century. This particular line above, more than any other, struck several cords with me and consequently the *The Mother Lode* was born. This ongoing series of neckpieces (Fig. 7) continued both the ideas initially developed in *Brass Balls*, and carried forward such inspirations as Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79), Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Maintenance Art* (1969 - ongoing) and Martha Rosler's video performance *Semiotics*

of *the Kitchen* (1975). Just as their work did, my work also considers the invisibility of domestic labour. Where it differs is that my work lets the materials, their contrasts (past and present) and the relationship with jewellery and the body tell stories that specifically seek to recognise the dignity, value and legitimacy of our ordinary, everyday, emotional responses in relation to parenting and womanhood.



Figure 7. *The Mother Lode*, 2019 (11 Neckpieces). Installation approx. 7m wide.

In contrast to Kelly, Ukeles and Rosler, no battle was required to have my work recognised within an art gallery, due in part, to their efforts and legacy. Just as Ukeles' *Manifesto* (1969) sprang from the irreconcilable frustrations she experienced in her dual pursuit of art and motherhood, my work aims for a representation of the tensions between the domestic sphere and the workshop, locations I predominantly exist in as both mother and artist. By sharing these ideas in a material form, there's a degree of personal liberation and for those who recognise their own situations, the work generates a shared empathy, much as Kelly's and Ukeles' art aimed for.

Throughout the two years of this study I have searched extensively for other jewellers working with similar ideas or touching on these areas of interest. To date I have identified individual maker Tiffany Parbs (Australia), and the more project focused; Laura Bradshaw-Heap (UK) and Laurie Schram's (NL) *Mother Makers*, and Lesli Robertson and Natalie Macellaio's *The Mother Load* (USA). While there are many makers who touch on the topics of womanhood and occasionally motherhood, I am yet to find any other jewellers who have made extensive bodies of work in response to similar ideas. This seems oddly inconsistent with the predominance of women working within contemporary jewellery in comparison to men. Although this disparity is anecdotal, during a recent day long seminar in Melbourne (as part of *Radiant Pavilion*, the pre-eminent southern hemisphere contemporary jewellery biennial) the room was at capacity with 100 tickets sold and only 8 men in the room. Through my experiences across the last 10

years, this is roughly representative of the ratios of males to females within the greater contemporary jewellery community.

While Tiffany Parbs is a jeweller, her preferred medium for presentation of her ideas is photography (Fig. 8). In the accompanying catalogue to *smother* (2018), Parbs says it “examines the gap between the visceral reality of motherhood and gamut of unrealistic expectations placed on mothers from external influences.” More specifically, photography of her objects makes sense in the context of her work being focused around “the saturation of ‘Ideal Mother’ myths permeating western advertising that promote nurturing perfection and unattainable standards.” (Tiffany Parbs, artist catalogue *smother*, 2018).



Figure 8. Tiffany Parbs, *baggage*, 2015, from the *smother* series. Pvc, satin, foam, galvanized iron. Giclee print. Object L550mm x W470mm x H170mm

Further research extensively viewed although not specific to jewellery includes; the comprehensive M.A.M.A. publications within Dyana Gravina’s art and social enterprise organisation, the *Procreate Project* (founded 2013), Lenka Clayton’s *Artist Residency in Motherhood (ARIM)* (founded 2016), described on the website as “a self-directed, open-source artist residency to empower and inspire artists who are also mothers” and Amy Dignam’s online space for activism and motherhood, *Desperate Artwives* (founded 2011). The mission statements/aims of the two projects with a jewellery focus *The Mother Load* (founded 2012) and *Mother Makers* (founded 2017) differ little from those previously mentioned. All are working towards equal representation for women working in the arts, most especially during pregnancy and motherhood, regardless of whether their art focuses on these topics or not. Through these online platforms, their efforts are also focused on various levels of practical support such as the provision of digital forums for sharing ideas/artwork or connecting the like minded. The overriding mission for all is to increase visibility, decrease isolation and facilitate social change for mother artists.

In New Zealand recently, curator Sarah Hudson included eleven artist's responses to 'What does Mother mean to you?' in her exhibition *M/other*, exhibited at Whakatāne Museum and Arts. The responses were inclusive and diverse considerations of motherhood, mothering and maternal roles. All of the founding dates of these projects mentioned, fall within the last eight years, pointing to a definite and significant increase in the visibility and appetite for 'Mother art' and even more encouragingly, for those at the margins of mainstream society.



Figure 9. *Keep yourself nice*, 2019, (Neckpiece) Lace made by Aunt Agnes (1960) Scotland, sterling silver.
L350mm x W240mm x H10mm

Just as my research has been rooted in the 1960s and 2000s, I deliberately mix contemporary objects with historical objects and contemporary techniques (laser etching from a vector file to produce a stamp) with their traditional counterparts (lost wax casting with its 6,000 year history). The juxtaposition of objects from different time periods recalls several generations, suggesting a durational or intergenerational consideration of domestic and emotional labour within familial relationships. The deodorant ball 'pearls' in *13 Sweat Free Years* (Fig. 7. second from right) were collected over my thirteen years of motherhood and the lacework from *Keep yourself nice* (a dying art now seldom seen) was made by Aunt Agnes in Scotland in the 1960s (Fig. 9).

These materials sit alongside the image of a modern front loader washing machine, pictured in the stamped lead medal *For Long Service and Efficient Conduct* (Fig. 10), serving as time or era contrasts and bringing 'back then', forward, to our 'right now'. As a result they consider the histories that mediate domestic spaces, alongside the burden that outdated and still very real gendered roles place on women in the home.



Figure 10. Detail, *For Long Service & Efficient Conduct*, 2019, (Neckpiece) Lead, steel coat hanger.
L440mm x W350mm x H60mm

Giddy Up (centre piece in Fig. 7) talks to a 'parental attendance' required at any given moment. Made from leather horse reins and a flattened steel section sitting closely across the front of the neck, it references moments from the choker necklace's long history; from the French Revolution when women wore red ribbons around their necks to pay homage to those who had met their death at the guillotine, to its modern popularity with transgender women for its association with femininity and its simultaneous ability to hide the Adam's apple. The reins cascade provocatively down the wearer's back while the cold solid steel choker sits tight against the throat, keeping the wearer erect and fearful lest someone actually does pull on the reins. The length of the reins signify a child's reach, and the fetishistic associations with leather, refer to the convoluted role that sexual expectations play within relationships, with further associations pointing to ownership, likening the wearer to a chattel.



Figure 11. *Pearly Gates*, 2018, freshwater pearls, silk, 1920s brass and steel door lock plate.
L440mm x W350mm x H60mm

Pearly Gates (Fig. 11) represents a heteronormative social contract between husband and wife – “I’ll give you a house, will you accept my pearls till death do us part?” – a domestic relationship or arrangement where she provides the children and attends to their daily maintenance and he provides and maintains her house or ‘safety and security’. The work alludes to these ideas by pairing a rusty old paint stained door lock plate, taken from the front door of a house built in the 1920s, with large white fresh-water pearls. There are many traditions across cultures where pearls are gifted to women, namely by men. Throughout colonial history pearls were presented to the bride-to-be for her wedding day, other popular occasions to be marked by a strand of pearls include Mother’s Day, anniversaries and Valentines Day. Speaking directly to these long-held jewellery traditions across both Eastern and Western cultures, the gift of jewellery in exchange or confirmation of partnerships, alliances and commemorations, can be traced throughout humanity, marking moments of intimate significance in people’s lives. Modern examples are of course the diamond ring to mark an engagement and wedding rings to mark the commitment of marriage.

Condorman (Fig. 12) is the latest piece made for The Mother Lode. It references the direction my research has begun to take at the very tail end of the MFA. Made in direct response to Laura Mulvey's (1975) research around the male gaze, the mask neckpiece borrows its aesthetic and title from the 1981 Walt Disney adventure comedy and superhero film, *Condorman*. The movie follows a cartoonist's comedic adventures, where he transforms into the superhero he illustrates in his cartoons in his bid to rescue a beautiful female Soviet spy. In her book *Gender and Jewellery: A Feminist Analysis*, Rebecca Ross Russell (2010) cites Mulvey (1975), noting the way the gaze interacts with the female figure also has application to ornamentation:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness (p.4).



Figure 12. *Condorman*, 2019, (Neckpiece) Steel, industrial silver solder (37% silver).
L510mm x W250mm x H150mm

Mulvey introduced the concept of the male gaze the year after I was born, although her theories had little bearing on the many movies like *Condorman* I watched as a child. In this digital age parental responsibilities require a new level of vigilance that can be absolutely exhausting. Forty plus years later, the male gaze is still routinely seen in advertising and cinema and the same story continues to play out in the movies my children now watch, for example; the *Transformer* series (2006 - 2014), *Aquaman* (2018), the complete franchises of *Spiderman* (1977-2019) and *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003 -17), *Deadpool* (2016), and *Spectre* (2015) to name a few. The beautiful heroine is rescued time and again, helplessly

clutching stylish yet skimpy clothing to her exposed or partially naked frame, and at this tense narrative height, the hero saves the day, and of course, the woman. Citing the research findings of Nowak, Abel, and deBruin (2010) and Shields with Heineken (2002), media and popular culture researchers, McAllister and Decarvalho (2014) note in their research titled *Sexualized Branded Entertainment and the Male Consumer Gaze*:

The highly gendered nature of product advertising – specifically the commercial subordination of women – is arguably one of the most replicated findings in all of media studies (p.300).

Women continue to wear the legacy of the male gaze. It hangs heavily and rustily about our necks, requiring constant vigilance lest we pass these stereotypical ideas onto our children, perpetuating the myth that women are ‘to be looked at’ rather than really seen, and to be saved rather than able to meet our own requirements for safety.

While all of these pieces have been made for a body, the method of exhibition explores ‘body’ as a site for sculpture and the gallery ‘wall’ as a site for jewellery. The relationship to a body is signalled through various devices; the provision of a hole for the neck, being hung at particular heights on the wall, the body scale of the materials, and their previous history as objects employed by a hand/body to meet everyday purposes. While not direct, the viewer still reads the significance of the body and neck as being places these works were made to sit.

Although I’m primarily driven to comment on my own realities, I am careful to avoid gendering my work. I do this through multiple considerations; my sizing decisions, the choice of materials and their traditional associations, and the way the work sits equally on a body with a flat chest or with breasts. I have come to understand that it is not ‘the’ body I am responding to, but ‘a’ body. And through these considerations, my work seeks to critique the assumption that because I am making jewellery, it will be both wearable and be made for a female body. Despite this, the work also relies on this common assumption. It offers the possibility of a subversion where I co-opt the ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ of jewellery. Playing with the age-old desire of humans to adorn themselves, the careful crafting and aesthetically balanced installation draws the viewer in, only to confront them with questions once they understand what the work is about. In this way I am pursuing a felt or embodied experience in the viewer, where the work looks for a balance between argumentation and contemplation.

Although some of the pieces in *The Mother Lode* (Fig. 7) represent seemingly outdated and traditional ideas, this installation of work is in part a visual conversation about the stereotypes that continue to effect women in spite of feminist thought and influence. In reference to Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), by exhibiting these works I hope to open up a space for a type of shared empathy that might contribute to the emotional well-being or the ‘functional status of a person’. In May 2019, the current Labour Government of New Zealand released their *Wellbeing Budget*. This budget signals an increasing receptiveness to and recognition of the importance of wellbeing to everyday life. In a June media release published on the Labour Party website titled *Budget 2019 Recognises Creative Community*, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said “Arts and culture are central to the wellbeing of our communities”.

Technique

Within jewellery terms, there is no specific technique that aligns to my making process. When required to fill the 'technique' box in applications, I have come to use the term 'constructed'. This describes the putting together of found elements rather than those you may have cast or fabricated yourself, which would instead be called 'cast' or 'fabricated'. While my work operates within the field of contemporary jewellery, my explorations marry jewellery with the art making techniques of assemblage and bricolage for their relationships to both the wall and a body. As mentioned previously, this combination suggests the body as a site for sculpture and the wall as a site for jewellery, playing with the traditions of jewellery and moving a body from display mechanism to that of subject.



Figure 13. Lisa Walker, *Necklace*, 2009, Mobile phones, lacquer, thread.

Within contemporary jewellery there are long established traditions in the use of found objects as materials, yet almost no makers identify with bricolage as a method for production. This is quite possibly because bricolage has a relationship to DIY, and Do It Yourself can sometimes be considered a preclusion to 'good jewellery'.³ Certainly in relation to the definition of contemporary jewellery, any association with low skill or less than supremely careful crafting is considered antithetical especially with its common requirement for 'durable wearability'. An exception to this rule is New Zealander, Lisa Walker (Fig. 13 & 14). Assemblage and bricolage are noted as having central importance to her making methods. Craft critic, Damien Skinner (2015) says "She deliberately turns her back on the idea of the right tools, the appropriate materials and the correct processes. The term bricoleur helps explain the way Walker's jewellery looks — those unexpected combinations of different elements — but it also makes sense of her process" (p.58).

³ In Anna Dezeuze's (2008) journal article, *Assemblage, Bricolage and the Practice of Everyday Life*, she says that bricolage is the French word for 'do-it-yourself' and is a process of constructing objects from odds and ends (p.31).

He says; her work asks “hard questions about jewellery's traditional preoccupations such as preciousness, permanence and craft or skill. Her work is also often engaged with issues of identity (personal and national), and conducts a thorough exploration of the inherited expectations of New Zealand jewellery around materials and subjects” (p.54). Walker’s work thoroughly stretches and critiques the traditional preoccupations of jewellery, most definitively through her material choices and imaginative exhibition solutions. While there are many crossovers in our work, including a lack of any material or technique hierarchy and a playful approach to the making process, Walker’s work very rarely turns its focus to the body, other than as a surface for adornment. In this way our work differs considerably.



Figure 14. Lisa Walker, *Low Culture Necklace*, 2010, Magazine, brass, aluminium, thread.

Art researcher, Anna Deuze (2008) suggests that contemporary practices of bricolage focus on one of two central themes; “as a studio practice for artists revisiting the failed utopias of past avant-garde movements, or as an everyday model of activism”... she continues, ...“one is resolutely directed towards self-reflexive explorations, and the other is more obviously engaged with wider social and political concerns” (p.34). Deuze (2008) also talks about the true potential of bricolage lying in “the space between pleasure and necessity” (p.37). This quote, like that of Ukeles’ line from her manifesto, resounds loudly for me. I believe Deuze has captured the lived experience of the everyday with these six words, and as a consequence they echo throughout my body of work. This can be seen specifically in the ideas I’ve chosen to make in response to, for example *DIY IUDs* (Fig. 22). This series of ‘home-made’ intrauterine devices reflect on the responsibility of contraception within a relationship, the role governments take in ensuring equitable access and the measures people take themselves in the absence of this access.

Pursuing both activism and failed utopias within my practice, by shining a spotlight on my everyday, I'm endeavouring to critically examine a cis, white, forty-five year old mother of three's lived realities. By reflecting these back in object equivalency, I hope to highlight the tensions and social inequalities women remain painfully aware of yet continue to face on a daily basis. Jewellery seems an obvious way to do this, for two reasons: the first is the subversion of the adornment aspect of jewellery – where jewellery is worn to embellish the wearer in some way and the second is as a subtle yet sophisticated communication device.

Consider politician and diplomat Madeleine Albright (2009). She was the first female United States Secretary of State in American history, and she has an extensive collection of pins (brooches) that number into the hundreds. So prevalent were her pins that they became part of her diplomatic signature. Once their value as communication devices were recognised, they became her way to indirectly communicate with fellow staff, media and international leaders. Albright (2009) says in her book *Read my Pins*, a strategically placed 'shimmering sun' bode well for negotiations, while a crab or 'menacing wasp' (Fig. 15) spoke of less positive dialogue, and astute watchers would track the mood of the day by watching her left jacket lapel.



Figure 15. Madeleine Albright with Yasser Arafat (1999)



Figure 16. Madeleine with Kim Jong Il (2000)

Testing Ideas

Throughout the MFA I felt it was important to test my work in the public domain and continue to build relationships with my audience. Taking my cue from Lefebvre (1961) who said:

What is important is to note that feelings, ideas, lifestyles and pleasures are confirmed in the everyday. Even, and above all, when exceptional activities have created them, they have to turn back towards everyday life to verify and confirm the validity of that creation (p.31).

For this exhibition at a dealer gallery in Christchurch, 2018, I made three sets of work, *The Mother Lode* (Fig. 17) *TOOL LOOT* (Fig. 18) and *Portraits* (Fig. 19).



Figure 17. First iteration of *The Mother Lode*, 2018, (10 Neckpieces). Installation approx. 7m wide.

This suite of work was the first iteration of *The Mother Lode*. It strove to comment on my daily life in the domestic setting. It was during this exhibition I established the importance of the individual titles and the material list, to the overall narrative of the show.



Figure 18. *TOOL LOOT*, 2018, (Brooches, pendants, objects). Installation approx. 5m wide.

By contrast, the *TOOL LOOT* (Fig. 18) installation of brooches, pendants and objects was inspired by my tool filled workshop. By re-contextualising these works as jewellery the work reflected a multiplicity and complexity of roles, mimicking my lived experience. Without tools humans wouldn't be modern creatures, yet tools also represent the opportunity to create, and consequently the opportunity for commerce in both the creative sector and all other aspects of life and living.



Figure 19. *Family Portraits*, 2018, (7 Brooches, 2 pendants). Installation approx. W1200mm x H800mm

Watching this 'match' play out from a third wall, was a series of brooches and pendants (Fig. 19). Titled *Family Portraits*, and straddling the line of sand, they silently observed the audience's decision to stand with *TOOL LOOT* or *The Mother Lode*, drawing attention to the art life divide.



Figure 20. Gallery installation image showing location of works.



Figure 21. Sand line.

The work was intentionally installed in opposition where the match was played out between *TOOL LOOT*, or the workshop - the place I'd rather be, and the domestic sphere or *The Mother Lode*. For me, the line between the two is often mediated by a gallery, an audience and the commercial viabilities of work. In lieu of being able to draw a line in the sand between the two walls, purposely installed to 'face off' with each other, I drew a line down the centre of the gallery with the sand. The sets of work traced my roles and physical movements between kitchen and workshop, while the sand traced that of the audience. By recording their movements in the gallery as they negotiated the sand, the line between *The Mother Lode* and *TOOL LOOT* was intentionally blurred, with Figure. 21 showing the sand part way through the exhibition.

The Object and the Materiality of Materials

I love the materiality of materials. Namely for their relationship to the senses; the ductility of metals, their very individual properties, their smell, a metal's ability to take on heat from the body or a jeweller's torch, the sound produced when hammering metal against an anvil . . . the list feels endless. After many years of making things, I hold sensorial knowledge of some materials. The extent of this knowledge is not matched with an equivalent translation in words. For this reason I often look for an authoritative definition, something to match the full sensorial description I hold in my head. Because my work always embarks from the object, it felt important to search for a definition that gives as full consideration as possible to the sensorial aspect of objects. As seemingly tangential as the NZ Post definition of jewellery, my preferred definition comes from Booch's 1994 computer software development book, *Object-oriented Analysis and Design*, where Booch says the object can be defined as having:

- An object has **identity** (each object is a distinct individual, it holds together as a single whole with crisply defined boundaries).
- An object has **state** (it has various properties, exists in time, and is made of tangible materials that can be created, destroyed or shared).
- An object has **behaviour** (it acts and reacts in terms of its state changes and message passing — it can do things and can have things done to it). (pp. 81-84).

This definition also alludes to the idea that an object has a history and that it is present through time. It's this element that provides much intrigue for me. While objects in art are often separated from life, it is through looking at everyday life, the repetition of actions, emotions and relationships with things, that I develop possible ideas about objects in art, offering a mediation to navigate and order the art of life.

In his role as Director of the British Museum, Neil MacGregor (2012) presented a talk titled *2600 years of history in one object*, he said "The things we make have one supreme quality, they live longer than us. We perish, they survive. We have one life, they have many lives, and in each life they can mean different things".

Marrying Booch's definition of the object with MacGregor's idea and that of Wendy Leeds Hurwitz (1993), a Professor of Communication, moves closer to contextualising my use of objects. Leeds Hurwitz talks about objects having physical boundaries so that we think of them as discrete units, but their social meanings appear when they're used in connection with other objects – in systems of meaning. In her 1993 book, *Semiotics & Communications; signs, codes, cultures*, she says there's a combination of concepts that exist in any one concrete object, it can be: a tool useful for something; a commodity with exchange value; a sign with social value. Or, it can be all of these things at once.

While these ideas account for the object they don't draw a direct enough line between people and things. In her chapter on 'Agency, Biography and Objects' in *The Handbook of Material Culture*, Janet Hoskins (2008) talks about Gell's (1998) suggestion of a more "active model of an object's biography, in which the object may not only assume a number of different identities as imported wealth, ancestral valuable or commodity, but may also 'interact' with the people who gaze upon it and try to possess it" (p.76). Hoskins (2008) also points out, "Things can be said to have 'biographies' as they go through a series of transformations from gift to commodity to inalienable possessions, and persons can also be said to invest aspects of their own biographies in things" (p.74).

My ideas are grounded in the function of the object with its patina of layered stories and histories, rather than using it as a souvenir as I did in the past. The idea that objects do not exist in a vacuum is central to material culture, added to this is my invitation to an audience to bring their own personal values, and their past and present experiences to the work. Hoskins (2008) cites Gell (1998) further "art is about doing things, that it is a system of social action – and that we have to look at how people act through objects by distributing parts of their personhood into things. These things have agency because they produce effects, they cause us to feel happy, angry, fearful or lustful (p.76).

Dell Upton (1985) builds on this idea further;

Whatever else they might be, artifacts are at the deepest level expressive forms. The manufacture of an artifact is an act of creation equal to, rather than reflective of, the manufacture of a social system or an intellectual concept. All are part of the symbolic process that continuously recreates the world by imposing meaning and order on it. (pp.85, 87).

Although a natural fit, material culture and its deep investigation of all aspects of the object has only recently begun to consider the senses. David Howes (2008) says in his chapter 'Scent, Sound and Synaesthesia' in *The Handbook of Material Culture*:

Every artefact embodies a particular sensory mix. It does so in terms of its production (i.e. the sensory skills and values that go into its making), in the sensory qualities it presents, and in its consumption (i.e. the meanings and uses people discover in or ascribe to it in accordance with the sensory order of their culture or subculture) (p.166).

By drawing on the form, role and residues of an object's previous functions or lives and aestheticising the emotions and experiences of the everyday, I reanimate these through new material equivalencies, bringing them into relationship with the body, altering their social, material and exchange values and moving them into a contradictory discourse. This can be seen in my wall installation titled *DIY IUDs* (Fig. 22). The work is not designed to be worn, yet it is felt viscerally through the understanding that these works are referencing an intrauterine device (IUD) to be medically installed within the top of a woman's uterus. The soft of internal skin and mucous membranes and the hard of metal is an incongruence we all understand, and the work exploits this sensorial recognition in an audience.

DIY IUDs



Figure 22. *DIY IUDs*, 2019, Steel, brass, ceramic, sterling silver, bronze, 24ct gold. Wall installation on panel. L1400mm x W1200mm x H150mm

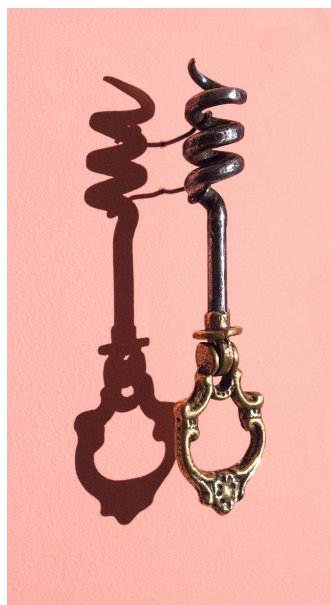


Figure 23. *Screwed*, detail from *DIY IUDs*, 2019, Steel tip of a plumber's rigid sewer snake, brass kitchen drawer handle. L120mm x W50mm x H30mm

The objects I use are often found like components of locks or the internal mechanisms of domestic and workshop machinery like this detail from *DIY IUDs* (Fig. 23). Made from the steel tip of a plumber's rigid sewer snake (used for clearing blocked pipes) and soldered to an ornate brass kitchen drawer handle, the title *Screwed*, has a multitude of possible references; to the act of sex, as a colloquial reference to failure, to the domestic corkscrew of which it resembles, to a tool or the suggested screwing action the twist of metal immediately brings to mind. From a distance, in *DIY IUDs* (Fig. 22) each work looks remarkably like an enlarged version of the mechanical looking contraceptive device. Yet when considering the pieces alongside their titles and media, a new agenda becomes more obvious. Works such as *Sponge* (Goldilocks pan scourer, silver ball chain, central in Fig. 22) and *Tart* (French tart baking tin, copper wire, second from right in Fig. 22) combine found objects from traditionally masculine and feminine domains posing a series of potential questions about roles and responsibilities in relation to contraception.

Playing with words and their meaning as both titles and prompts for and of process, technique or concept is an important part of my practice. I employ titles for their ability to move in both directions, between unlocking and revealing ideas and concepts for and to myself, as well the provision of entry points for an audience. Titling offers a liberation. It moves the objects from their previous life or their historical function into a new art context, while not requiring the objects to give up any of their relationship to history or function. This aspect of my work, along with careful attention to the material list, is of central importance to my making process, second only to the full consideration of 'object.' We all understand the concept of titling, 'to give a name to', but just as a metal-smith approaches their materials, stretching, heating and manipulating metal, while I'm tinkering with ideas I'm also moving words around a definition, looking for double meanings or colloquial usage, exploiting their ductility in relation to the object and the narrative, and searching for slippage between the concrete definition of the word to evoke more 'everyday' associations.

Politics have begun to influence my practice, particularly the abortion law reforms in New Zealand and the United States which have echoed loudly in the media over the past year. While New Zealand is on the brink of decriminalising abortion, American media reports ever more states campaigning for abortion restrictions. My response to this pro-life versus pro-choice debate manifested in *DIY IUD's*, where the language and material choices highlight my disillusionment. The subject is a sensitive one, and although the work could be seen as confronting, I've avoided any mention of abortion and employed humour to draw in a wider audience. The method of display is reminiscent of a workshop tool shadow-board where the tools patiently wait their use, it also references the surgical implement trays so frequently sighted during my nursing years. The titles, material choices, artist statement and display all aim for a tragicomic consideration of the tumultuous 110 year history and development of the IUD, inviting the audience to speculate about what might happen if contraception is not able to be equitably accessed by all.

The Honeymoon Day 1 - Day 7

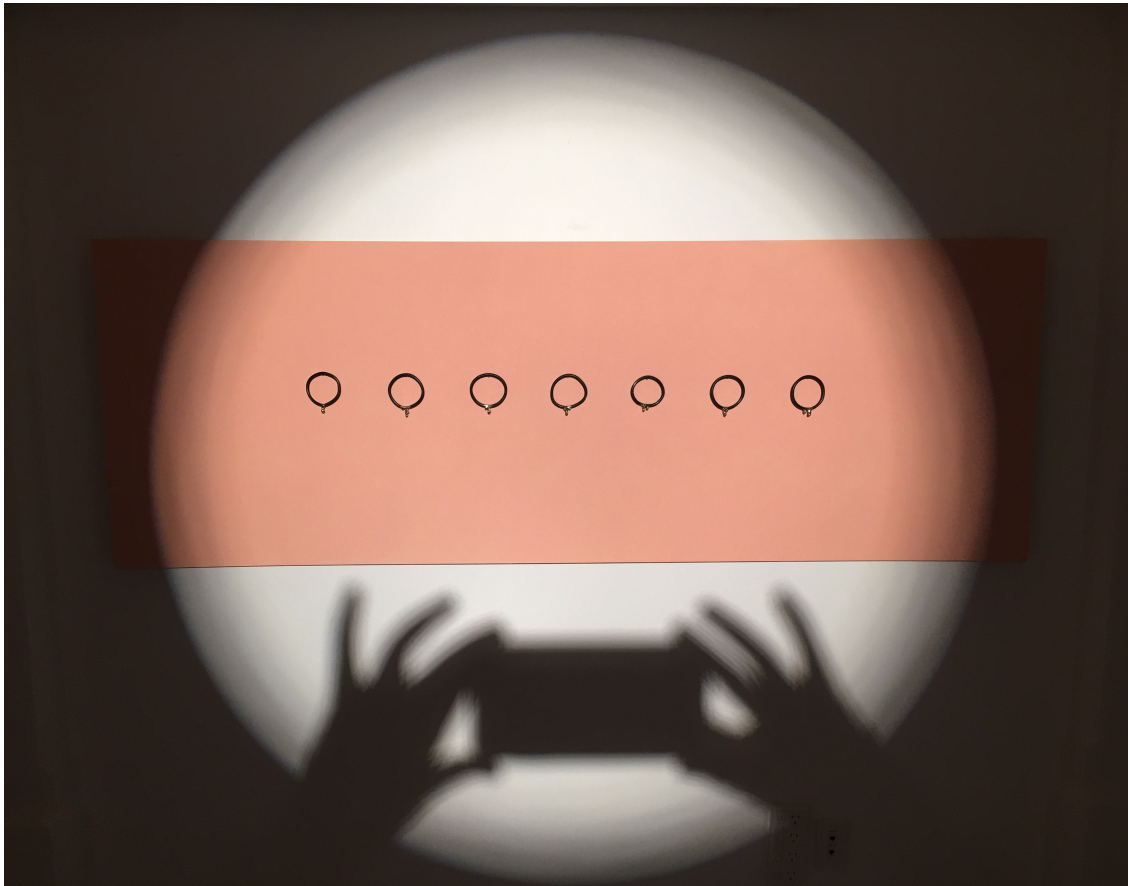


Figure 24. *The Honeymoon Day 1 to Day 7, 2019*

Steel (from Bunnings Warehouse used to wrap wooden house palings for delivery) and silver solder (37% silver)
Installation dimensions L1400mm x W700mm. Individual bangles approx. L80mm x W80mm x H15mm

Titled *The Honeymoon Day 1 – Day 7*, (Fig. 24) this series of bangles totes body referencing protrusions and plays with mainstream narratives of power and gender. The bangles are made from drips of industrial silver solder commonly used in engineering industries, where it ‘dribbles’ over the steel wire, seeming to defy gravity. Sourced from Bunnings Warehouse, the wire is used to bundle wooden housing weather-boards for delivery. More specifically, these bangles were made in response to the power that sex has within the everyday, and while a honeymoon doesn't fit the definition of the everyday, what follows the honeymoon for the next forty years certainly does.

Initially I made a single bangle, but it didn't make any sense on it's own. Once I had a title, the whole intention of the work became clearer. It dictated the number required, the forms they would take, the exact materials I needed to use and the way they needed to be exhibited - in a neat line - mimicking the way you would read the days on a contraceptive pill packet. The ideas informing the bangles are simultaneously as elementary and uncomplicated as procreation, and as convoluted and interwoven as the role of sex throughout a long relationship.

My process and materials are simple but specific. First I carefully extricate the steel from the Bunnings timber yard. As a waste product, Bunnings' rules are clear and the steel is not allowed to be sold or given to customers. I then bend the steel loop by inserting the length of wire into a hole in the top of my anvil (Fig. 27) and using the long length of steel wire as a lever, I pull the steel down repeatedly against the walls of the hole until an approximation of a circle forms, being careful to avoid symmetry. I cut the excess steel from this loop, hammering and manipulating in my vice until the ends of the circle are flush, tightly pressing together with no light to be seen where the two ends meet. Making the drip requires an unpredictable and labour intensive process to get the right balance between gravity, heat and silver solder, where, just at the tense moment of complete perfection, the solder might drop to the floor and I have to begin over (Fig. 25 & 26). Finishing off the bangles requires the removal of any burrs, or sharp edges, and with little intervention and polishing of the nipple or drip as they've variously been referred to, the bangle is waxed to prevent rusting.



Figure 25. Making the drip for *The Honeymoon Day 1*.

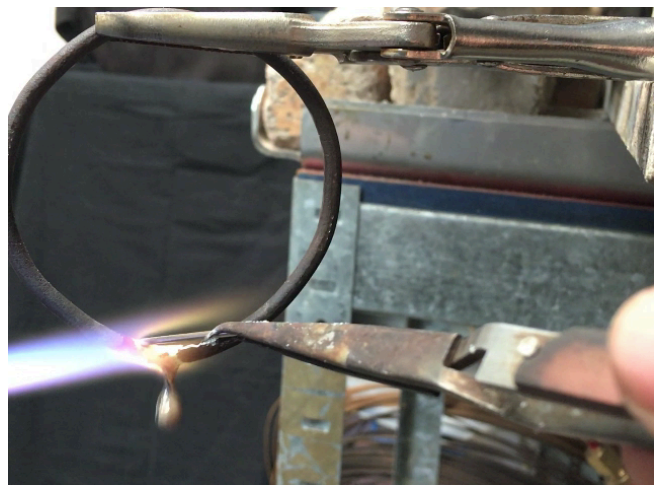


Figure 26. Losing the drip for *The Honeymoon Day 1*.



Figure 27. Bending the steel in the top of the anvil for *The Honeymoon Day 1*.



Figure 28. Showing single pin placement.

My installation method has developed for the way it allows a play with shadows and minimal visual intrusion within the arrangement. I use a simple system of pins for their utilitarian relationship to domesticity, attaching the work in an unobtrusive 'floating-like' relationship with the wall (Fig. 28).



Figure 29. Detail of shadow from *The Honeymoon Day 1 - Day 7*, 2019.

The space between the wall and the work provides a productive tension, offering itself as a secondary surface for play or translation where careful lighting allows the shadow to repeat the work, calling attention to the space between the wall and the bangles, and subtly inviting touch or insertion of a body. While the bangles are intended to be worn, there is an intentional absence of a body. The minimalism and immediacy of the single pins supports the tension between the work and audience, where the gentle cupping of the pin suggests easy removal, a momentary barrier between the wall and the desire to wear. There is an additional distortion enabled by the pin, where a gentle responsive swaying movement of the bangles is caused by the foot fall and air displacement of people as they pass the work.

Achieving a shadow is a definite part of my installation consideration. The multiplicity of the shadow mimicking the real offers an 'other' space, as does the word play mentioned earlier in relation to titling – a space of distortion where the shadow never truly replicates the actual, a space that opens up for false meaning (e.g. Fig. 23 & 29).

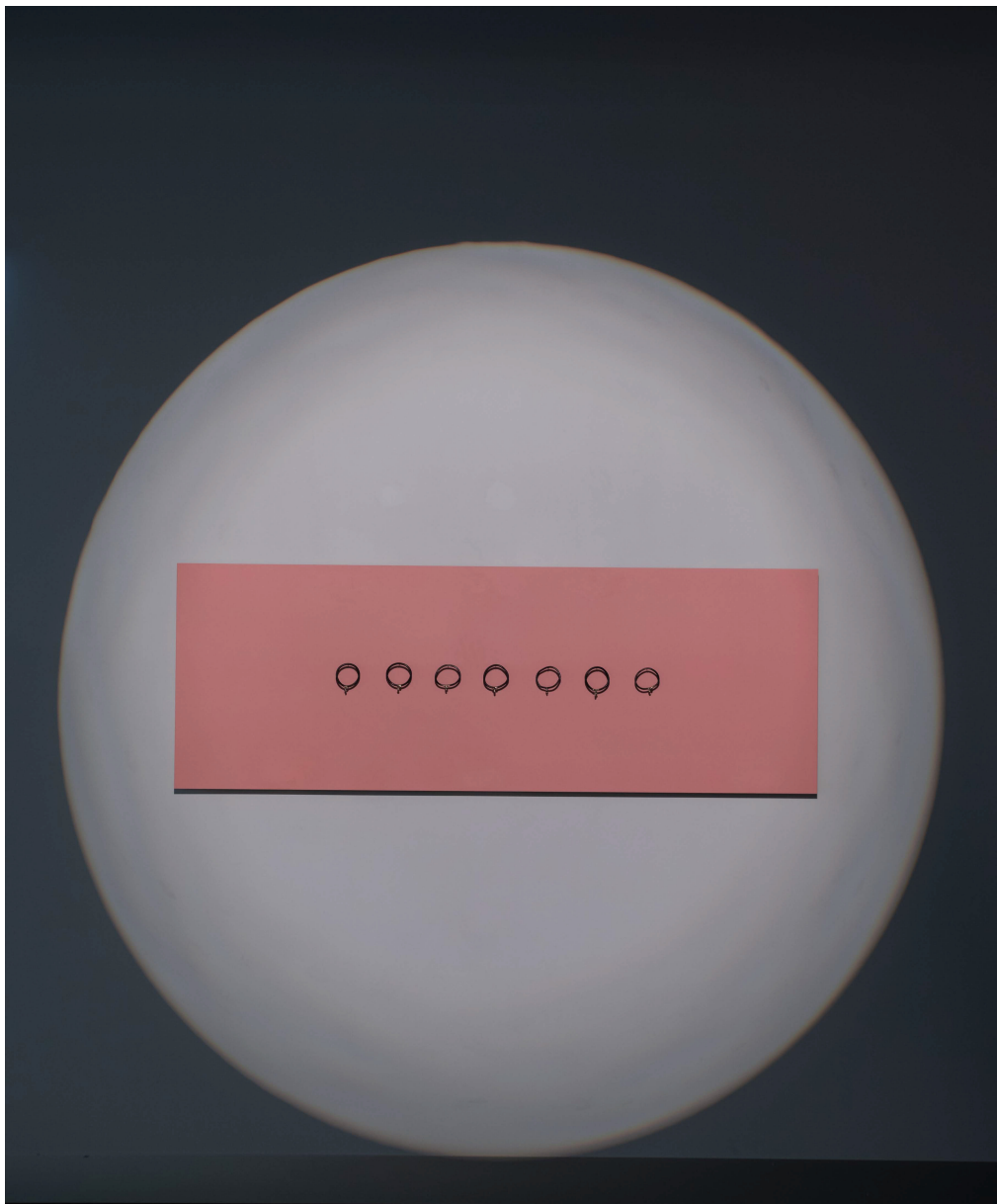


Figure 30. *The Honeymoon Day 1 - Day 7*, as installed in *The Mother Lode: A Tragicomedy*, 2019.

In support of this idea I have used a more theatrical style of lighting to provide a definitive edge and a crisp shadow. The lighting (Fig. 30, 34 & 35) also plays with multiple references including; the peep-hole, it mimics the sphere of a scientific petri-dish under the scrutiny of a high powered microscope, it references the theatre spotlight and talks about the theatre of everyday life, and it suggests the orb of the moon anchoring us to the here and now with it's gravitational force.



Figure 31. Selfie of my friend wearing *Access, Denied.*, 2018

Wearability is an ongoing tension and driver in my making and although my work is always of the body and expressly for a body, rarely do I see it on anyone else's body, except my own as part of the making process. The significance of the body and the site it was intended for are always of central importance to the work's ability to communicate with a viewer. Receiving a selfie (Fig. 31) from my friend prior to her attendance at the New Zealand Book awards wearing my jewellery, brought home the fact that the legibility of my intended connotations may be missed when fixed to a wall. Seeing this piece worn, I understood I'd missed opportunities to access an audience, and the audience had possibly missed opportunities to access the work.

My friend is a confident book publicist. I'm not sure many others would have the fortitude or drive to wear this piece, certainly to such a public event. For me, this was the information this image contained. Why choose such an aggressive, weapon-like, apparent jewel? She'd called to ask 'Do you have any fuck-off jewellery I could wear to the book awards?' Made entirely from blackened steel tools, *Access, Denied.* references the chatelaine, gaoler's keys, and various other punishment and restraint devices, decisively meeting her request. Wearing this piece offered her two things; empowerment, and an opportunity to communicate visually what was happening for her. The piece definitely has an element of 'fuck off', but combined with the elegance of her outfit there was also a disconnect, or a space for others to fit.

Throughout the night it invited questions and direct communication from people she did not know who felt emboldened to ask – “What does your neck piece mean?” Contrary to her intentions of communicating ‘Keep away’ and despite the intention of wearing it similarly to armour herself, she was inundated with attention. Just as the chatelaine came to be seen as a symbol of power and authority where whoever held the keys to the food also held the power, the duality of power over others was also a burden, trapping the owner into a role of having to maintain order, essentially wearing the keys of their own imprisonment. While my friend had intended communication of one kind, the agency of the piece exerted its own power over her as the wearer, and the potency of the work as a communication device was more effective than either of us had anticipated. This idea ties back to the example of Madeleine Albright and the potential of jewellery as an effective communicator once in contact with the body. Reflecting on Lefebvre’s (1961) ideas quoted earlier, that whatever has been made, must demonstrate its reality in the everyday otherwise it cannot be authenticated, I began to wonder how relevant my work was to an audience.

The Bangle Project

This prompted me to devise *The Bangle Project*. For a week, fourteen people volunteered to wear a *Honeymoon* bangle within their everyday contexts to investigate the interaction of the bangle with space, bodies and life in general. Responses ranged from using the bangle as a patterning tool in the making of ceramic dishes (Fig. 32 middle image — still from short video), lots of images (small sample shown in Fig. 32 & 33), a fantastic zine, to a woman who would caress hers as a way of keeping calm every time one of her many male colleagues ‘man-splained’ her own head of department job to her. The breadth of responses not only confirmed how the work communicated to an audience, it also reinforced the intentions of the work. Seeing my theories transposed into the everyday experience of wearing, rather than the works resting on a wall only ‘to be looked at’ confirmed Highmore’s (2002) theory that the everyday actually exists ‘between the lines’ and that this wearing of the art account can account for the totality of our sensory lives (p.17-20).

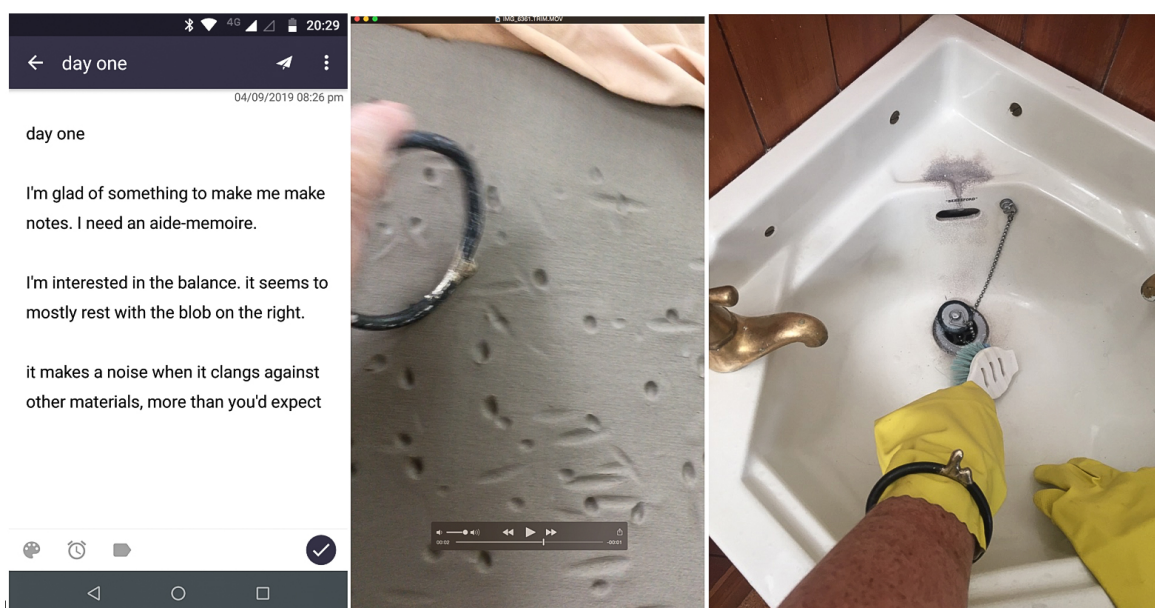


Figure 32. Images from participants in *The Bangle Project*.

The bangles marked a new shift in my approach to research, and consequently, to my making. Jewellery as both object and subject has driven my work for a while, but with this project I realised that jewellery could also be integral to the various role performances that are required in everyday life. One woman now carries her bangle in her backpack at all times “in case she needs it for support”, speaking to the subtle, social inequalities women face on a daily basis. Another has never worn bangles, but since developing an affinity with it during the project, has not taken it off except to pass through airport security because she says it “tethers me to right now and I like the way it feels against my body and the sound reminds when it hits hard surfaces.” (taken from a conversation with participant, Sarah Nightingale). Seeing these bangles quietly empower women in a variety of understated ways, has also empowered my practice as a maker and confirmed the direction I now require of my jewellery. These bangles are not pretty, they're in fact quite noisy, the protrusion bangs and clangs against things, there is the potential for frequent rust stains along the arm depending on your skin type and body lotion choices, they invite uncomfortable questions such as "what does your bangle mean?" and they're also physically heavy.

For me they successfully move outside simple adornment, they have a greater purpose that lies beneath the camouflage of 'jewellery' — a thing we all apparently 'know' — yet they offer the individual an opportunity to renegotiate aspects of their own everyday with a visible secret that only some carry the code for.

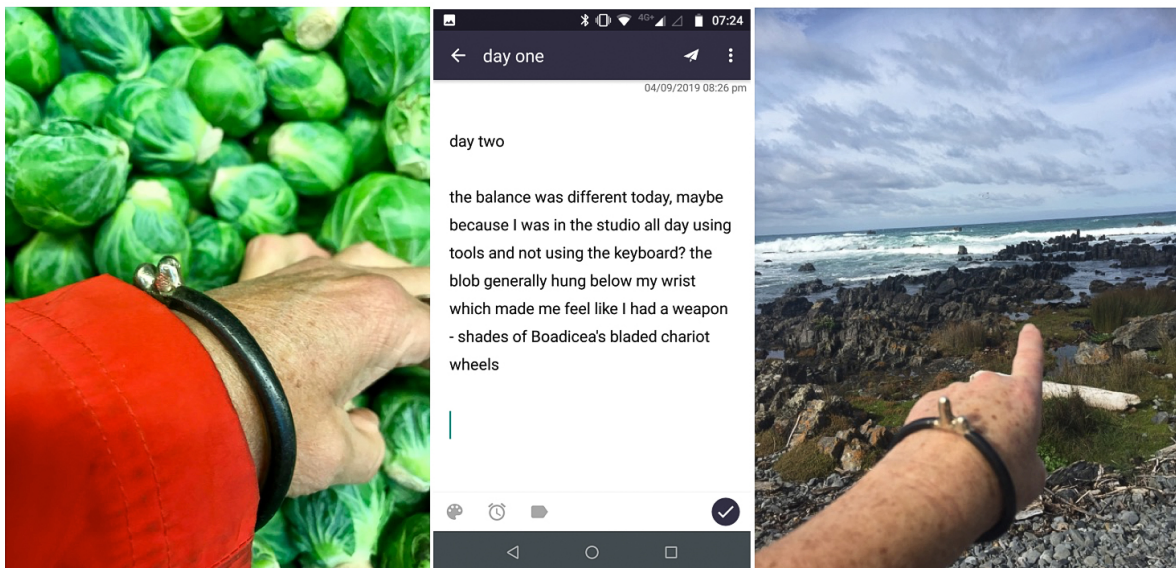


Figure 33. Images from participants in *The Bangle Project*.

Conclusion

It is important to conclude as I began, with Henri Lefebvre's (1961) quote:

Whatever is produced or constructed in the superior realms of social practice must demonstrate its reality in the everyday, whether it be art, philosophy or politics. At this level alone can it be authenticated [...] It is defined by this intermediate and mediating *level*: everyday life. In it, the most concretely dialectical movements can be observed: need and desire, pleasure and absence of pleasure, satisfaction and privation (or frustration), fulfilment and empty spaces, work and non-work. The repetitive part, in the mechanical sense of the term, and the creative part of the everyday become embroiled in a permanently reactivated circuit...(p.32).

Generally when a work of art is purchased we take it to our homes or the space it was purchased for and we 'install' it. We would never imagine to wear it on our bodies to the supermarket or take it to a party, and we would not wear a painting to do the school pick up run. Art is usually located in and around our homes, it speaks little to our bodies and even less to the dynamism of our broader day-to-day. Jewellery is an art form that moves beyond this immobility because of its integral relationship to a body. When we think about Lefebvre's (1961) post war hope for France; that creativity and its manifestations would reintegrate with the everyday and offer positive change, the prevalence of art focused on the 'everyday' suggests Lefebvre's ideas still have much currency. Stephen Johnstone (2008) says it well:

...when artists and curators allude to the everyday it is almost always to suggest that what is at stake in such a gesture is the extent to which an artist is able to get close to things, to be immersed in the world, as opposed to observing and judging from afar... [it] is the sometimes unstated but always implicit notion that a turn to the every day will bring art and life closer together (p.13).

It is this hope I have of my jewellery. By making jewellery from everyday objects in response to the common and mundane circumstances afflicting parents and women, I both answer my everyday and offer an empathy to others. By broadening my definition of jewellery, I open a space where rather than looking backwards to what jewellery has always been, my work is human facing. This 'looking to life' decreases the gap between life and art as Lefebvre (1961) and Johnstone (2008) hoped creativity would do. Jewellery - like few other art mediums - facilitates and enables this movement from life into art and art into life, testing the everyday on bodies that operate within their own everyday, allowing a truthful acknowledgment that the 'space between pleasure and necessity' is reality and lived experience.

The everyday makes the invisible visible, highlighting the potential for transformation. As Lefebvre (1961) notes, this occurs at the level of the individual, and by shining a light here, it offers a critique of broader structures.

The personal is still political.



Figure 34. Installation view, *The Mother Lode: A Tragicomedy*, 2019, Te Auaha Gallery, Wellington.



Figure 35. Installation view, *The Mother Lode: A Tragicomedy*, 2019, Te Auaha Gallery, Wellington.

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