

‘CHAINreaction: Handshakes at the Refinery’ exhibition & ‘HS Archival Moments’ presentation at ‘Nelson Jewellery Week 2021’ by Sarah McClintock



A handshake is a sign of peace, in the offering of open hands you are showing that you bear no ill will. A give and take, there is no winner in a handshake. Instead it is a mutual ritual, an exchange of power and expression of trust and respect. The Handshake Project is a mentorship and exhibition project established and led by Wellington-based jeweller, tutor, curator and writer Peter Deckers. For the last decade it has paired emerging jewellers with established makers to develop their practice and strengthen the community of contemporary jewellers in our country. Making can become a solitary endeavour, alone in the studio the jeweller often works without a cohort. Handshake provides not only mentorship and guidance from established artists but also the comfort and support of peers in the other mentees. Rather than remaining segregated from each other, the project provides connection. CHAINreaction was an exhibition that was on display at Refinery ArtSpace in Nelson 27 March – 17 April 2021 that celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Handshake Project and the various makers, artists and jewellers who have made Handshake the force it is today.

What links the chains in CHAINreaction is an understanding of connection that is central to the Handshake project. The only requirement given to the 49 artists was that their chain measure at least 1.2 metres. Each piece, from the intimate to the insane, was then joined together in a singular chain. The



connections were both sympathetic and jarring. An important distinction is that these are not described as a series of necklaces, but instead chains. Chains bring with them complicated meanings – they bind, restrain, support, and connect. They represent not only physical links, but the emotional, spiritual and intellectual relationships between people, places and objects. These links are strong, but they are not always comfortable. The emotional weight of the chains that bind us to each other is most poignantly displayed in Amelia Rothwell's tears for *A mother (1942-2020)*, *A friend (1972-2020)* and Caroline Thomas' *Isambard*, her interpretation of Victorian memorial jewellery and the weight of love and grief. Loss is guaranteed, and while there is pain, we cannot live without each other.

Jewellery is also a repository for memory. Passed through generations and bought to commemorate important events, they act as talismans of the past and the people we care about. The labels that accompany the chains also reinforce this reading. Presented in the form of swinging specimen or archival tags they

transform the chains into artefacts. They become important representations of the history of the project. In the adjoining room was an exhibition that detailed this history. Mind-mapped on the walls was text and images from each iteration of the project. Rather than a linear progression, people and ideas weave throughout the project to create a community that is bound together through complex strands of ideas, place, objects and individuals.

Exhibiting jewellery is a challenge. In its display in a gallery environment it is being removed from that which gives it life - the body. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why many of the works in the exhibition reference the human form. Katie Pascoe's *Feeling Brains*, Mia Straka's *Many Manos* hands, Peter Decker's *4 CORNERS* figures, Antonia Boyle's *Screwed together* bones and Sandra Schmid's *Breath* are each concerned with the physical and metaphorical potential of the human body as a vessel for knowledge, emotion, resilience and connection.



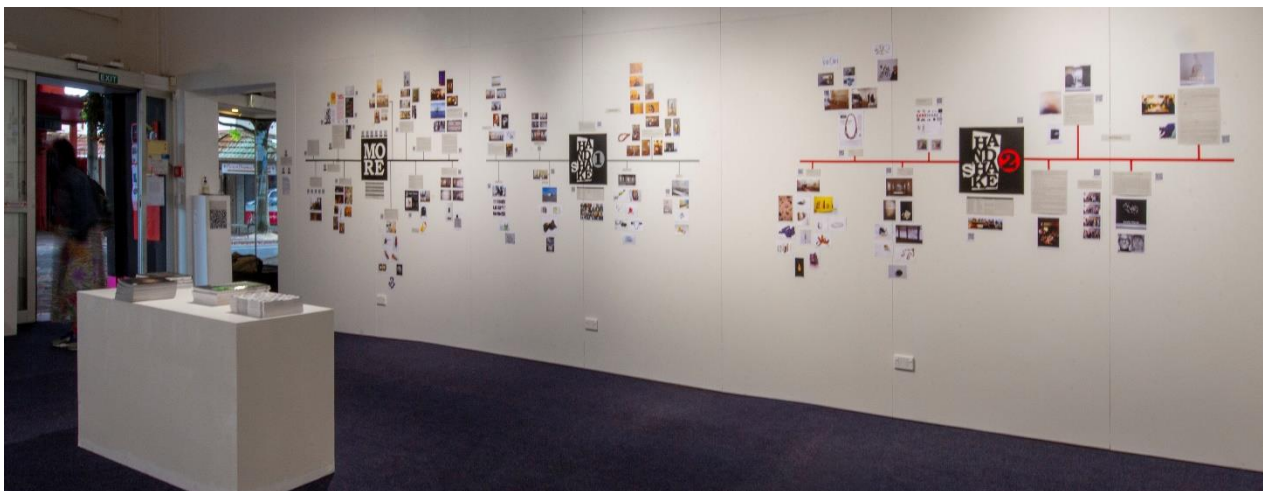
The physical presentation of the chains in the gallery was as a continuous loop, you entered into the artwork and became immediately trapped within it. Many of the makers played with the form of the chain itself. As a series of rings connected in a continuous loop it is a perfect metaphor for the Handshake project. Each individual maker enters the loop and connects to the other makers. They maintain their own autonomy and individuality, but now have the support of the community that surrounds them. Renee Bevan and Regan Gentry took this even further in their works though the inclusion of more makers. Both invited others to create a loop in their chain, either physically as in Bevan's ongoing untitled chain or through the lending of material as in Gentry's *Joining Forces*. By inviting others into the making process, these artists and the Handshake project, create a circle of influence. A circle has no visual hierarchy, therefore each part is equal. In Handshake, while there is a formal mentor and mentee relationship, growth, knowledge and connection flows both ways.

The context in which the links within CHAINreaction were created cannot be ignored. It is too soon to consider the influence that this COVID era will have on art, but that these chains were made in 2020 is central to our understanding of them. In Aotearoa we know we had it 'easy', with a government that locked down our borders and movement quickly, we were able to return to a 'normal' life fairly quickly. It meant that in March 2021, exactly one year after the country was locked down, a large group of jewellers

were able to gather together to celebrate this exhibition and the Handshake project. While we feel lucky, we also live in a global community and this ongoing pandemic has made clear how essential our connections to each other are to our lives.



CHAINreaction exhibition (the Refinery ArtSpace)



HS Archival Moments presentation (the Refinery ArtSpace)

More: <https://handshakeproject.com/chainreaction-handshakes-at-the-refinery/>



Regan Gentry
Joining Forces, 2021
82 borrowed clamps



Renee Bevan
Untitled 2021 – (ongoing)
Silver



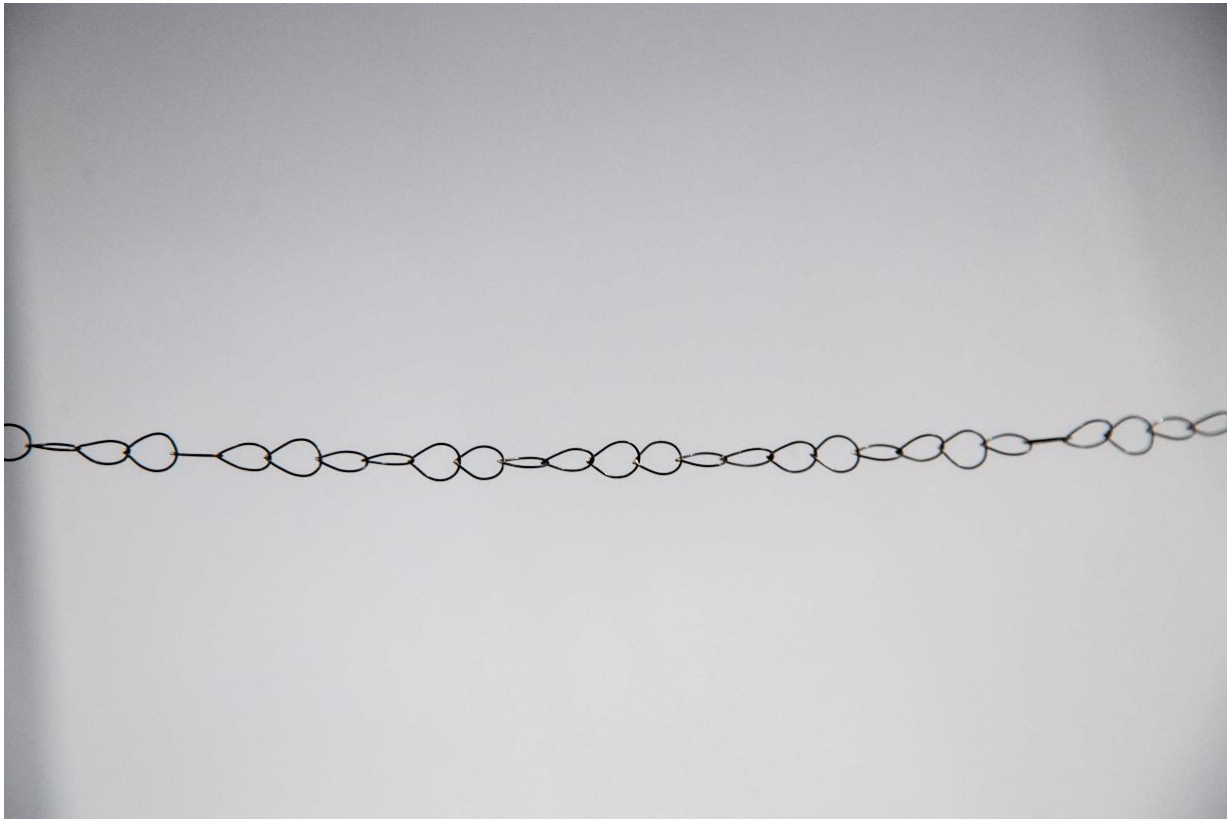
Mia Straka, artist talk



Mia Straka

Many Manos, 2021

Bamboo, repurposed beads, brass, steel wire, enamel paint, natural dye



Amelia Rothwell

1. *A mother (1942-2020)*
2. *A friend (1972-2020)*

Binding wire, solder

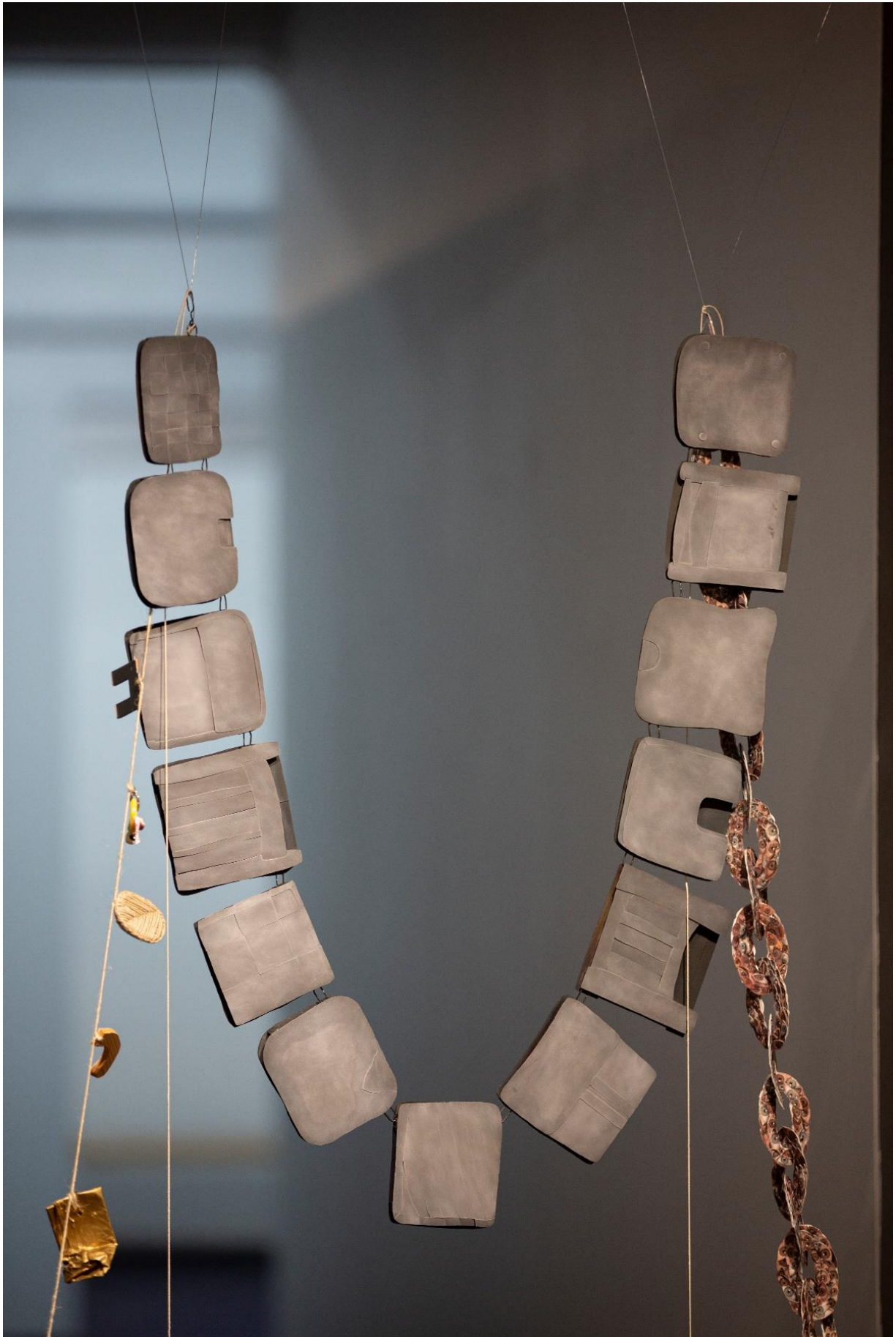


Peter Deckers

4 CORNERS, 2021

4x necklaces

Wood products



Aphra Cheesman

Chairs, 2021

Mild steel, furniture paint



Caroline Thomas

Isambard, 2021

Polymer clay, oxidised copper wire,
18ct gold wedding ring



Katie Pascoe

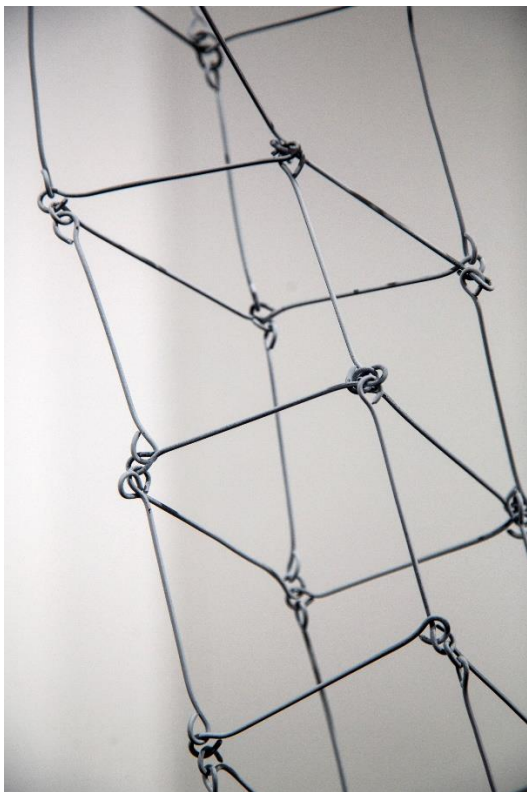
Feeling Brains, 2021

Necklace

Conkers, acrylic and gouache paint, matte varnish, silk thread



Sandra Schmid
Breath, 2021
Steel Wire



Sandra Schmid
Breath, 2021 (detail)
Steel Wire



Nadene Carr
Don't worry, 2021
Aluminium, powder coat, textiles



Karl Fritsch
Untitled, 2021
Kelp and copper



Jessica Winchcombe
Untitled, 2021
Acrylic, Canvas, Steel Lei



Michelle Wilkinson
Builders Tea, 2021
Pine dowel, builders paper, heat shrink tube, adhesive, carpet tacks



Vernon Bowden
Invader III: Fever Dreams, 2020, Lei
Soap, Crayons, A birdcage, Lotus flower tea
My supermarket receipts



Gillian Deery
Ticket Home, 2021
Photographs, acrylic paint, glue, string



Antonia Boyle

Screwed together

2021

Sterling silver, Beef bone, lamb bone



Sarah McClintock is the Curator and Collection Manager at *The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū* in Nelson, NZ. She has a M.A. in Art History from Victoria University, Wellington and one of her primary curatorial interests is contemporary craft. She has published widely through art-form publications, magazines and is a contributing writer to *Ceramics New Zealand*.