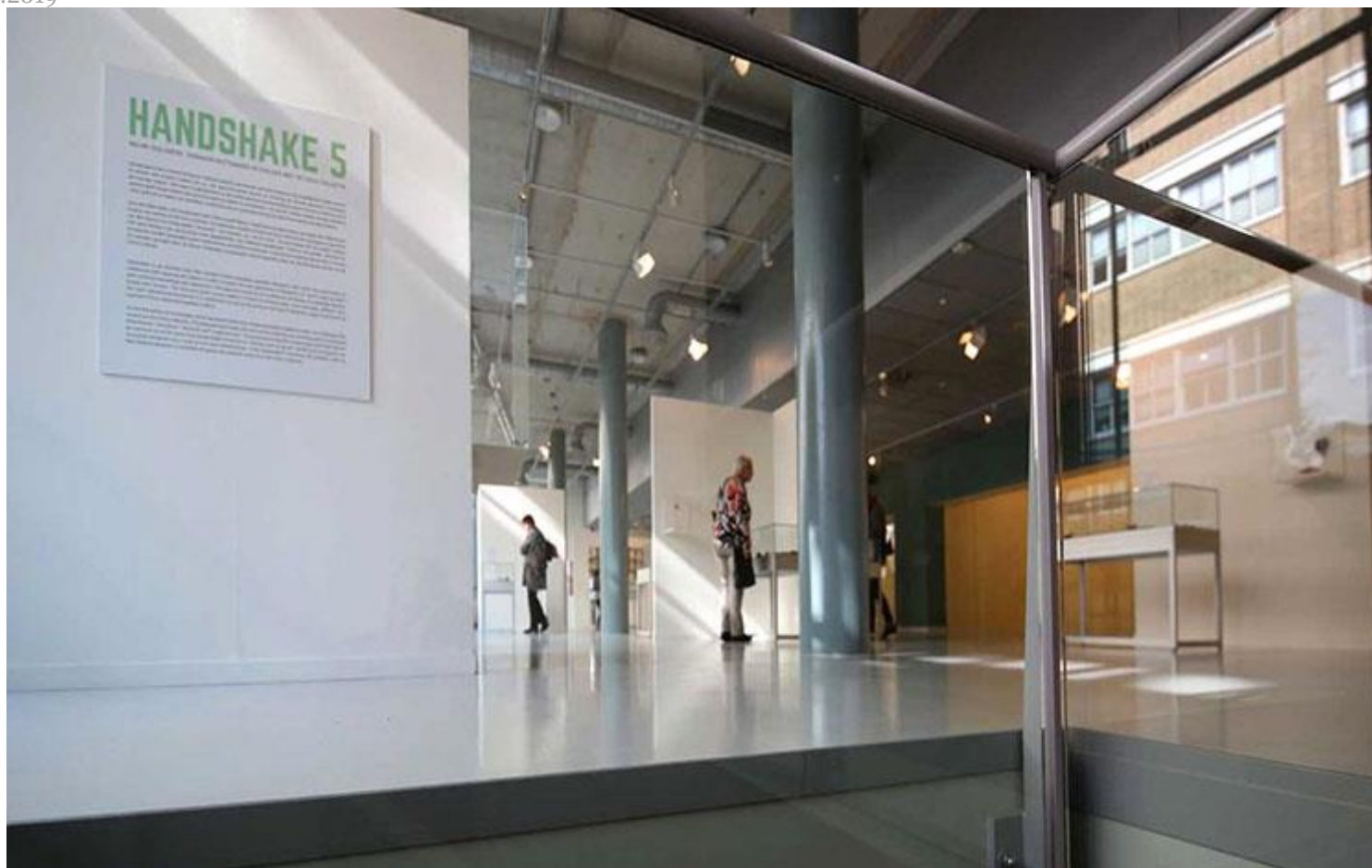


How original is original? Thoughts on Handshake 5 Project

ARTICLE / CURATING CRITICALTHINKING DEBATES BY: PETERDECKERS

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Handshake 5 CODA Exhibition entrance.



This text introduces a unique collaboration between works from the extensive CODA archives and 12 HANDSHAKE 5 artists (HS5) from New Zealand. Aiming to inspire a dialogue between the CODA collection and the artist's own work, each jeweller selected three objects from the collection, with CODA supplying a theme as a further catalyst.

These responses automatically touched on issues inherent to ownership. Who owns what? When is inspiration copying? If all things are reworked copies from other reworked copied things, then who has ultimate authorship? Inspiration can introduce more questions around ownership and ego than just that of simple flattery. At what point does inspiration become a violation of ownership, and what is the defining line between inspiration source and idea theft?



Exhibition venue, left and right pieces by Onno Bookhoudt from CODA Collection, by Vanessa Arthur (pin below), photo by Peter Deckers.



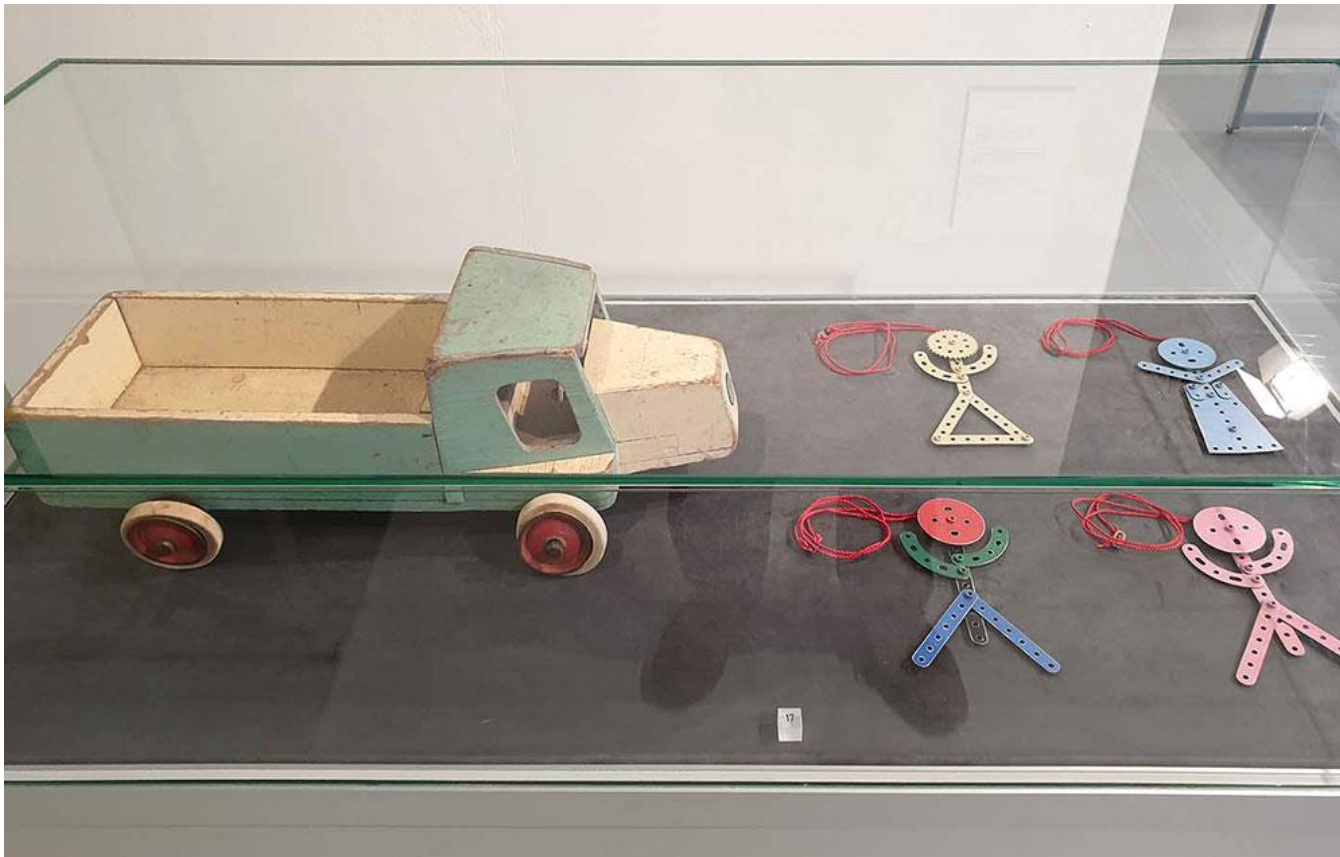
Pin: Remnant Inlay by Vanessa Arthur, 2019. Material: brass, sterling silver, heat set paint, enamel paint, steel pin. Size: 6 x 6 x 0.6 cm.

If we talk about ownership in art, we also talk about the postmodern construct of appropriation. It immediately unfolds a series of issues. In some cases, these New Zealand works might be experienced as close copies or similitudes, or at least, when standing side by side, they might also pose as close associates to the originals.



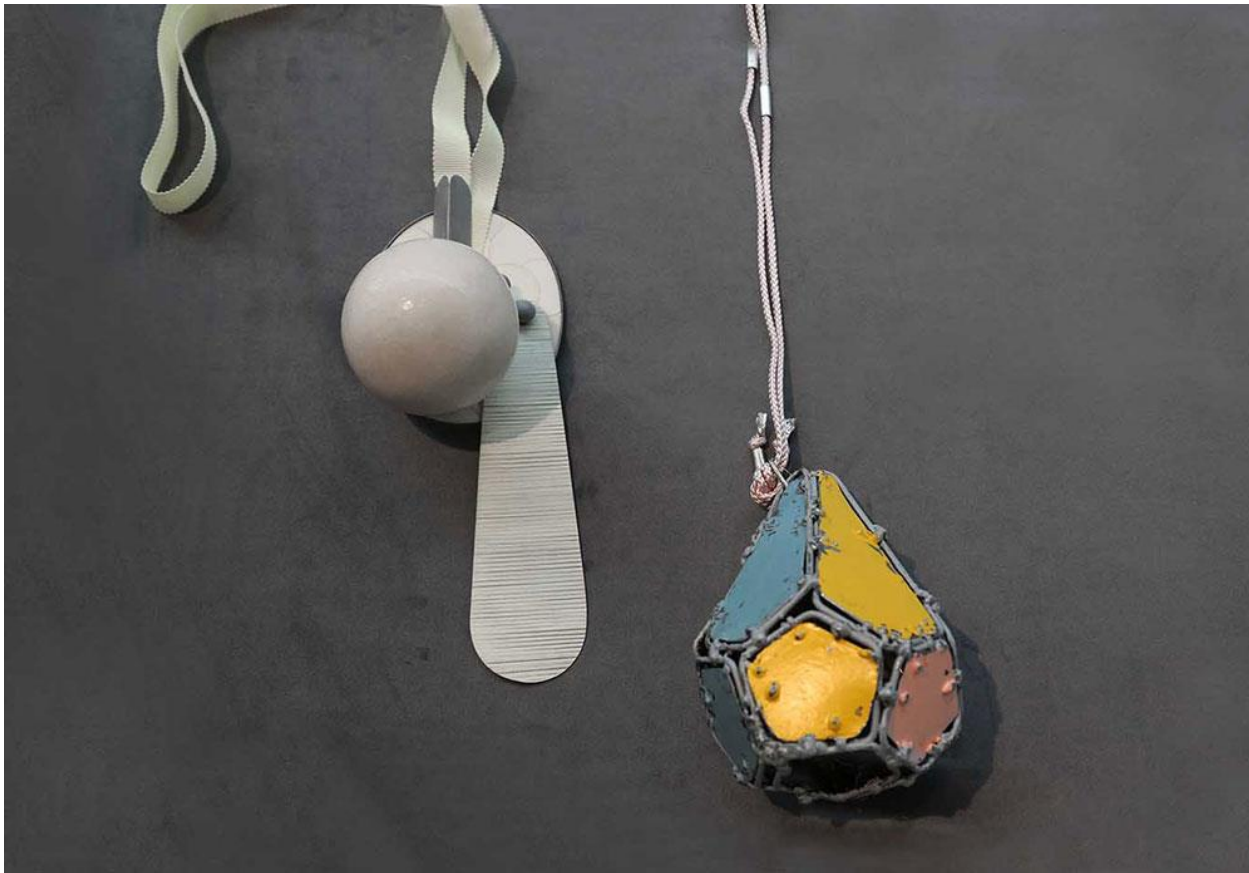
Exhibition venue, left piece by Lam de Wolf from CODA Collection, right piece by Vivien Atkinson, photo by Peter Deckers.

With this in mind, we can question what original means, or even how original is original? Has it to do with divine intervention or with a process of inspired knowledge? It could be both, but I think it is more a process of inspired knowledge. Consider the formation of language. Artists constantly rearrange what already exists. In language, it is the sound production of words, that when strung together, produce meaning. With objects, it is how the three-dimensionality critically relates to space and its surroundings (or a body), and how a recognisable artistic signature distinguishes one work from another. This works differently if commercial considerations come into play. The commercial design needs to be a tested form of what already exists. Innovation in that does not relate to artistic values, but to supply and demand, technology and budget.



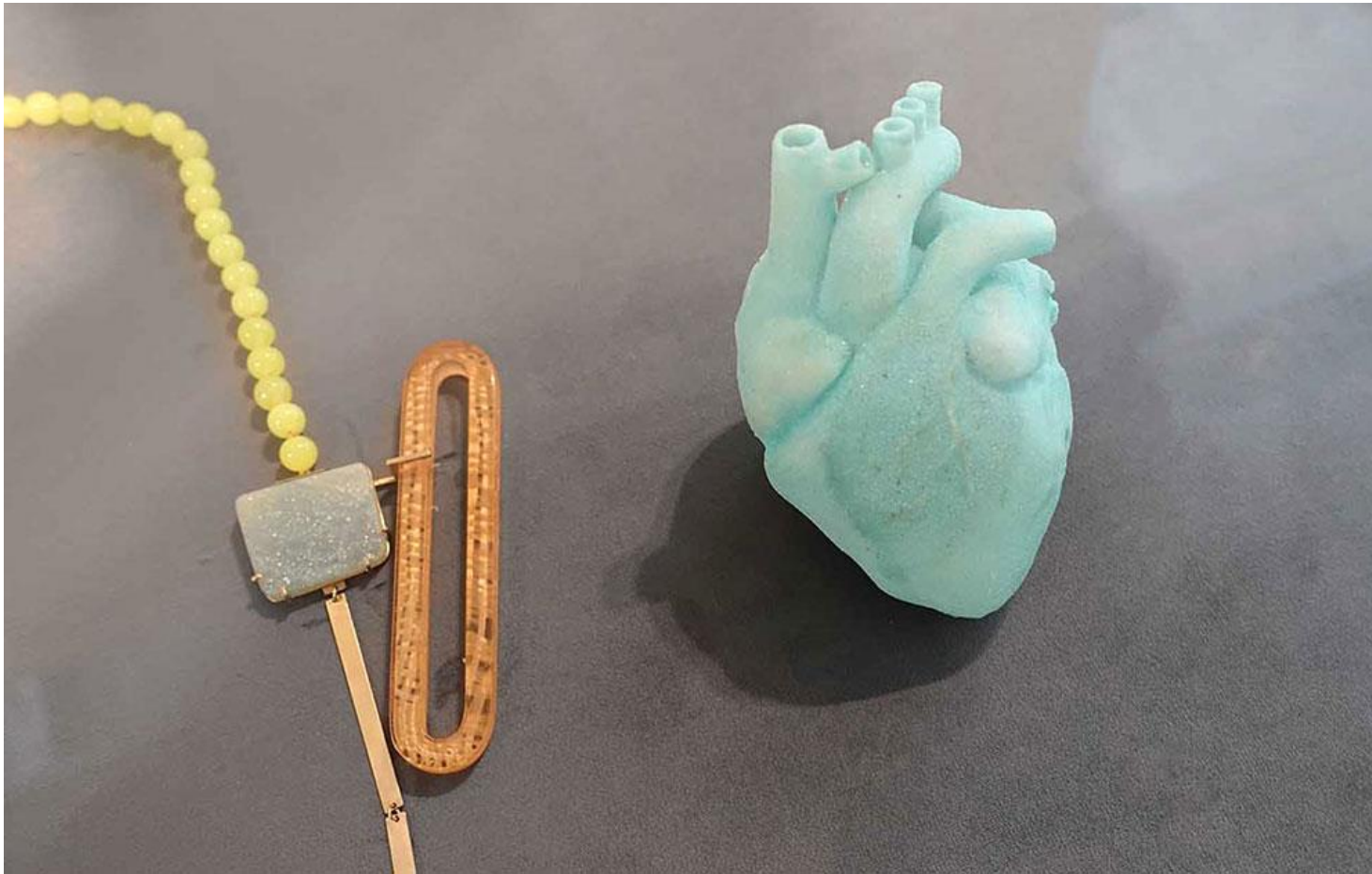
Exhibition venue, ADO melkauto, toy from CODA Collection, the right pieces by Becky Bliss, photo by Peter Deckers.

Babies develop by imitating aspects of their surroundings. This is how we collectively grow to who we are. Artists certainly do not like the accusation of being *idea thieves*. Picasso had a famous aphorism - *good artists copy, the best artists steal*. Appropriated ownership goes hand in hand with this experience - the idea that someone can learn from the best, get inspired, strive to equal or outrun these achievements, and pay tribute at the same time. Most artists who have recognised their own work in another's will be either flattered or annoyed. This too is an act of arrogated ownership or authorship. Does the artist react against somebody interfering in his or her close artistic quarters, or do they welcome newcomers who might extend like-minded perspectives? Is it a *HANDSHAKE*, or does it invoke fists? The audience will have their own thoughts, but only when given a chance to view works in the spirit in which they have been made.



Exhibition venue, left piece by Lucy Sarneel from CODA Collection, right piece by Nadene Carr, photo by Peter Deckers.

Appropriation in the art can mean so much: is it copying, simulating, replicating, emulating, illustrating, imitating, reproducing, pastiche, referring, souveniring, adaptation, borrowing, grabbing, inspiring, responding, stealing, representing, accrediting, attributing or communicating? These are compelling words that all point to process. However, they tell little of the intentions or outcome, and much about the criticality of our society's tolerance and social-political viewpoint.



Exhibition venue, left piece by Jantje Fleischhut from CODA Collection, right piece by Nik Hanton, photo by Peter Deckers.

Prior to the exhibition opening, I asked each artist about their initial approach to the selected CODA works and themes. Interestingly all had quite different motivations and starting points. Some reacted directly to the physicality, others to the sum of the parts or conceptual frameworks, and others emphasised their given theme. Yet what shines through is how the different signatures are expressed in fearless responses full of creative flexibility and experimental discovery.



Exhibition venue, piece by Kelly McDonald, photo by Peter Deckers.

Three years ago, *CODA* director *Carin Reinders* and I discussed the idea of a collaboration with the CODA collection. It offered CODA a great reason to open their archives, and for the HANDSHAKER's it offered a new way of learning through direct responses to physical objects. These benefits also extend to the public. As part of the process, each artist has detailed their ideas and development through a blog ([HS5 blog](#)). Not often is the inspiration and creative focus of artists on display and so easily accessible.



Exhibition venue, left piece by Ruudt Peters from CODA Collection, right piece by Neke Moa, photo by Peter Deckers.

We may wonder whether this collaborative dialogue is the ideal state of mind for an artist to be in. This *thematic* way of working might be too restrictive for most. For me, however, this is how we can be inspired, and as makers, it is how we discover new ideas, how forces mix and work hand in hand with influences, old knowledge, new thinking, time and culture. For the NZ artists, their responses included the essential process of remaining honest to their own ways of working, containing important clues to clearly distinguish between inspiration and idea thievery.



Exhibition venue, left piece by Brendon Monsoon, the right piece is by Senja John from CODA Collection, photo by Peter Deckers.

As part of our handshake, Carin and I agreed that following the conclusion of *HS4*, CODA would select the new *HS5* participants from the growing pool of Handshake jewellers. The *HS* organisation's contributions were to provide various development projects including a masterclass, access to several coaches, and a blog to post each participant's development.

HS5 head coach was Australian based artist, writer and teacher, Roseanne Bartley. In her masterclass, she facilitated various approaches and intervention processes to support the development of the collaboration. Post masterclass, New Zealand writer and curator *Sian van Dyk* followed up on progress with studio visits. The feedback sessions were all voluntary with everyone recognising that ideas can be fragile and might need protection against the possible corruption of feedback.

It is fascinating to see why jewellery goes beyond its physical and commercial appearance. The making process is the most important part for a maker. There are forces at work that connect fragile entities with poetic reactions, bringing fixed objects to life. Roseanne says; *Jewellery is a means of communication, a cultural meaning that can convey notions of individuality, or, common identity*. I would like to add to this. Contemporary jewellery is a media with multiple levels, where complex forces are at work simultaneously. It connects with the body, the object and materials, powers of thought, feelings and stories, it is steeped in ancient knowledge and contains an individual's signature. It goes back to prehistoric days or possibly even earlier. *Damian Skinner* (2013) concludes it elegantly: *...Contemporary jewellery is shaped by a distinct awareness of the situation in which it exists...**

For me, it is foremost *a game of recognition*, a connection between old knowledge and current times, yielding new insights.

The contemporary maker must be both critic and audience, remaining connected to the intention and in our situation, the thematic assignment. These requirements both inform and determine how the work will be experienced and can contribute to crippling artistic fear and doubt – a phenomenon often shrouded in secrecy and remaining totally hidden from the public. What *HS5* offers is access to the whole process and you can read more about each participant's musings, mistakes and ultimately, their many successes on the [HS5 blog](#).

* *Damian Skinner, What is contemporary jewellery in Contemporary Jewellery in Perspective*. Editor Damian Skinner. Published by Art Jewelry Forum Mill Valley California, 2013. pg. 11.



Exhibition venue, small box pieces by Karen Pontoppidan from CODA Collection, right piece by Caroline Thomas, photo by Peter Deckers.



Exhibition venue, left and right piece by Sarah Read, photo by Peter Deckers.



Exhibition venue.



Exhibition venue, CODA Collection piece by Dorothy Prull, photo by Peter Deckers.



Exhibition venue, left piece by Sarah Walker-Holt, right piece by Lucy Sameel from CODA Collection, photo by Peter Deckers.