

Jewellery frontiers' virtual and analogue HANDSHAKE

ARTICLE / [MAKING](#) [DEBATES](#) [REVIEW](#) [PETERDECKERS](#)

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HANDSHAKE1 stand, Handwerksmesse, Munich during Schmuck 2013
photo: Peter Deckers



HANDSHAKE project founder, Peter Deckers, unravels how the pairing of mentors and exhibitions accelerates selected New Zealand jewellery artists in their thinking, making, presentation and networking.

HANDSHAKE is a mentoring and exhibition project involving emerging jewellers from New Zealand being matched with their chosen idols from across the globe in mentoring roles. The project began in February 2011, with a series of national and international exhibitions. HANDSHAKE is now in its second iteration – HANDSHAKE 2 - with professional development workshops and masterclasses aiding the mentees in their development for exhibitions and the growth of their professional practice. Each HANDSHAKE project has its own [blog](#), where the participants report on the progress of their research and development. From 2016 a third HANDSHAKE project will bring together selected creative enthusiasts from the former HANDSHAKE 1 and 2 projects. Next to the development of new bodies of work, HANDSHAKE 3 will focus on collaboration in its widest sense and will be accompanied by a fresh series of exhibitions at prestigious national and international galleries. HANDSHAKE2's next stop is Sydney's Stanley Street Gallery in July, as part of the JMGA 2015 series of conference exhibitions.



*Collaboration works of HS1 mentee Sharon Fitness and mentor Lisa Walker,
Objectspace 2013.
Photo by Peter Deckers*

The ability to collaborate and communicate is an important component of the necessary skills needed by successful contemporary artists. Collaboration is not easy and only equal partners can open up those rare opportunities where the sum of the whole is more than the separate parts. The entire world is interconnected around us in its knowledge-pool through contemporary technology and social media. The HANDSHAKE project moves within this platform through the use of blogs to chart the developments as they are happening.

The participants of all three projects (HANDSHAKE 1, 2 and 3) are selected through an open call. A selection panel looks to the developmental hunger and potential pairing of each participant. A significant part of the assessment focusses on the potential benefit to the mentee's practice of continuing their relationship with a mentor. The mentees must also have demonstrated drive and the ability to take risks in their experimentation. The project relies on the energetic commitment and concentrated focus of each mentee and the relationship they build to make use of the invaluable knowledge of participating mentors.

Most emerging artists can only dream of getting professional assistance from their chosen idols. While most find a mentor one way or another, here the selected mentees are paired with their heroes, carefully chosen by each mentee with specific aims towards deepening and extending their individual art practice at a period in their career that it's most needed. This innovative programme is based on the old apprentice system but in reverse, where the mentor works for the mentee with digital media as one of the vehicles for communication. The mentee gets a helping hand from their chosen hero artist through their virtual workshop window, using Skype, blogs, and emails as well as the old-fashioned post to connect. Some also travel long distances to meet with their mentors face to face, building ongoing relationships and connections of invaluable importance.

Mentoring does not follow any prescribed roads. *Warwick Freeman* mentioned: *It can be about working in the gaps of the relationship you have with others - the capacity to fill in missing information for yourself and that information might even be in opposition to something the mentor has said.* It is not necessarily the mentor's pearls of wisdom that are remembered, but often their discards. Each mentor has had to find the best way they can to help the mentees move forward confidently and independently while not imposing their 'hero' status on the mentee.

Knocking on your hero's door and asking for guidance is not a common practice, which became clear with the HS matchmaking process. But increasingly there are new changes detectable in the prevailing winds of exchange. Our participatory society has broken down old hierarchical modernist barriers and made possible other options for the transfer and exchange of knowledge. The developing process of each exhibition can be followed on the active HANDSHAKE blog www.handshakejewellery.com. Here art is being produced out of quite unexpected interactions.



*HANDSHAKE2 first exhibition, Toi Pōneke gallery, Wellington November 2014
photo by Peter Deckers*

HANDSHAKE has only been successful through the generosity of those involved. The funding for HANDSHAKE 1 was small and an unpaid busy mentor could easily decide to quit. There was nothing to hold them but choice and the relationship carefully built between the mentee and mentor, and all stuck with it. Each pair developed methods on their own terms and long-distance relationships have fared as well as those living in the same city. It is the direct face to face communication (real or on screen) with direct access to workbooks and working models stimulate direct conversations and responses.

The HANDSHAKE package (support with the development of work for exhibitions and reflections) is innovative and radically different from everything I have been exposed to in my own learning. Although differing, it still requires basic knowledge, a platform, a time span and a level of introspection. All those selected are graduates from a degree course where they develop knowledge and a technical foundation. The platform is a series of exhibitions in different locations, where each exhibition marks the progress from the last. The introspection, in the form of an artist blog is needed for evaluation, critical analysis, rebooting and also provides a record of the communication between mentor and mentee.

The HANDSHAKE blog has become a mirror for the project's advance. Insights to artist's thinking are not something the public normally has access to. Is that why relatively large numbers of people continue to visit the HANDSHAKE blog ... could it be likened to reality TV with its unscripted journey and its potential for surprise developments, or is it simply to know and learn about the diversity in mentee and mentor interactions and progress?

The shoestring budget of HANDSHAKE1 was remedied in HANDSHAKE2 with the generous support of the national arts funding agent, Creative New Zealand. The grant made it possible to pay mentors and additionally provide vitally important professional practice workshops and masterclasses. [Benjamin Lignel](#) a noted jeweller, curator, writer and editor of [Art Jewellery Forum](#) conducted the HANDSHAKE2 masterclass. We very much look forward to the visit from exciting innovator, [Hilde de Decker](#), who will run a masterclass for HANDSHAKE 3.

Stanley Street Gallery, Sydney will host the exhibition of ten HANDSHAKE 2 jewellery mentees. They are Amelia Pascoe, Karren Dale, Kathryn Yeats, Kelly McDonald, Lisa Higgins, Raewyn Walsh, [Renee Bevan](#), Sarah Walker-Holt, Tineke Jansen and Vanessa Arthur, and are mentored by [Ruudt Peters](#), [Gemma Draper](#), Ben Pearce, Kirsten Haydon, Cal Lane, Henriette Schuster, Harrell Fletcher, [Helen Britton](#), [Ela Bauer](#) and David Neale.



*brooches by Amelia Pascoe. "Old ballet shoes", 2015
Photo by Amelia Pascoe*

Handshake2 exhibitions:

[Stanley Street Gallery](#), Sydney 8 July – 1 August 2015

[AVID](#), Wellington 08 – 22 September 2015

[Pah Homestead](#), Auckland 14 December 2015

HANDSHAKE3 coming exhibitions:

[Objectspace](#), Auckland July 2016

[Gallery Platina](#), Stockholm September 2016

Dialogue Collective London/Munich March 2017

Dowse Art Museum, Wellington June 2017

About the author

Peter Deckers was born in the Netherlands and completed his early jewellery training and education there. He immigrated to New Zealand in 1985 and completed a Master of Fine Arts degree at Elam, Auckland University, in 2003. Deckers, the jewellery coordinator and a part time lecturer/ senior tutor at [Whitireia NZ](#), Porirua, is both a contemporary artist and a craftsman. Ideas that make distinctive connections with jewellery are the inspiration for his work, often incorporated with discerning installations.

Deckers exhibits with galleries throughout New Zealand and internationally. His work, philosophy and ideas have also been the subject of a book, *Choices of the Hand; a Survey of Work from New Zealand Jeweller Peter Deckers*, introduction by *Stevan Eldred-Grigg*, published by First Editions, Wellington (supported by Creative New Zealand).

His practice extends into curatorial projects. Notable ones are *Deep* and *Deeper Still*, [Jewellery Out of Context](#) in Sydney and JOC/JOC world tour), *HandStand* and currently *HandShake*. He is founding-member of [The SeeHere gallery / website](#). In February 2012 Peter was the artistic director and organiser for an international jewellery symposium, named *Jemposium*, supported by Creative NZ. Jemposium was associated with an extensive NZ exhibition programme.

See also [JEM blog](#) for more details, photos of the event, radio/tv interviews and reviews).