

# [Handshake 7](#) at Gallery Marzee. An Exhibition Review by Mia Straka

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The artist Mia Straka gives us a tour of the exhibition *Handshake7 – 12 New Zealand Jewellers*, which invites contemplation and offers a window to contemporary jewellery happening in the South Pacific within the four-story, architecturally renovated gallery spaces at Gallery Marzee in Nijmegen until the 11th of February.

## The Exhibition

Climbing up the industrial iron staircase to our final *Handshake7* exhibition on the second floor of *Gallery Marzee* in the Netherlands, I am greeted by a narrow gallery with twelve rectangular tables. Standing to attention in a linear row, they are reminiscent of the trains I've snaked my way here on.

Theatrical illumination throws graphic shadows along the polished concrete floor spotlighting the work. Each table holds the jewellery of one *Handshake* artist. It's the first time I've seen everyone's work completed and displayed together as a group. I find an exciting exhibition of beautifully cohesive and resolved works by twelve makers with their self-assured style and content. The work is polished without losing the traits of spontaneity and experimental play that the *Handshake* project champions.

Visitor and collector Sara Visbeek comments there is a special quality present in jewellery from Aotearoa, the work carries the feeling of nature being big, wild and close up in our lives. Even when using industrial waste materials there remains a sense of this connection to the natural world and its processes.

As a *Handshake* participant, I was privileged to witness the early sparks of ideas, material explorations and forms becoming manifest during a five-month series of online masterclasses led by jeweller and educator Estela Saez Vilanova. These early months were a flurry of explorative output during which we were divested of preconceived notions about what we might produce and taken to new zones of realisation, learning and discovery.

The experience draws parallels with aspects of travelling or adapting to changing circumstances and environments. Saez's insistent motivating energy threw quick-fire tasks and challenges at us, directing just enough to land us in unfamiliar terrain, from which we'd need to sink or swim. This strategy pushed our parameters and encouraged free experimentation. I'm pleased to see we all swam, not without a few sinking moments behind the scenes but that indicates we were willing to enter the unknown and push ourselves further in our work; which is exactly the purpose of the *Handshake* project. The final works are considerably rendered, fully formed incarnations of this process.

## The Work

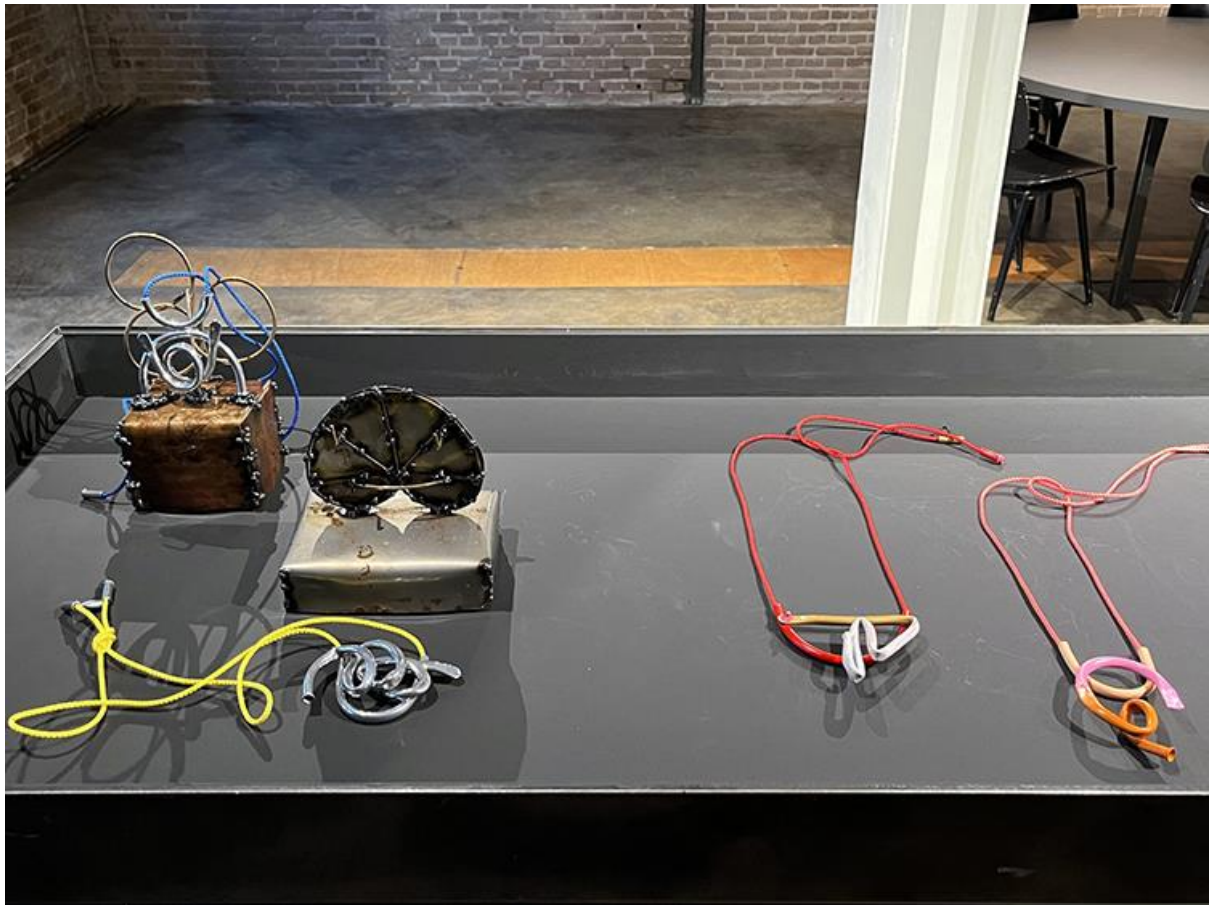
Being fortunate to view the exhibition in person, unifying themes emerge. These include; a sense of lightness, play and wonder, reconnection and mending, regenerating discarded, repurposed and/or ecologically kind materials, an ethos of transformation, the marking of time, place and presence,

**Kristin D'Agostino's** curvy plains in the series of monochrome works titled *Haphazard Joy* extend the intuitive making of the masterclass series. **Nadene Carr's** colourful enamelled bendings in repurposed industrial copper tube evoke a joyful spontaneity, supported when off the body by sculptural *home base* structures. *Play Time* by **Becky**

**Bliss** explores colour, forms and gender in anthropomorphic figures inspired by the work of Friedrich Froebel, the founder of the kindergarten system.



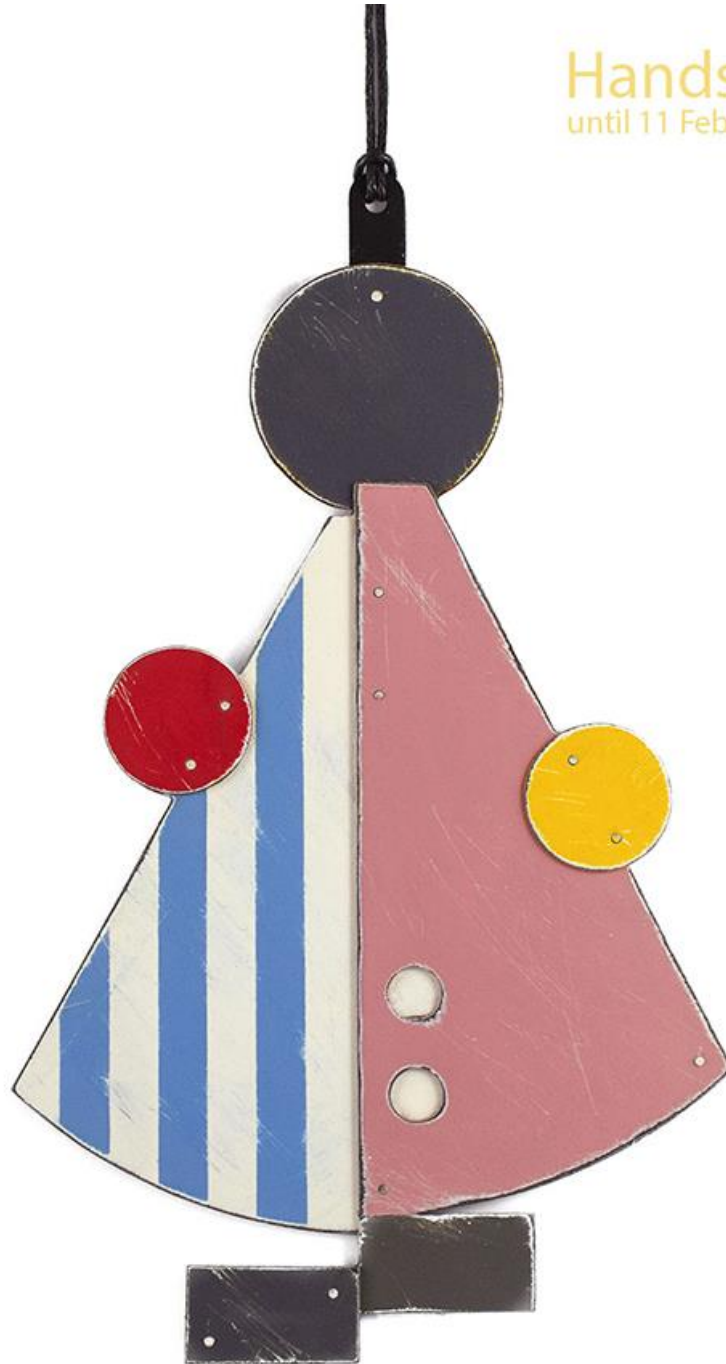
*Haphazard Joy* by Kristin D'Agostino ( All the exhibition display photos in this article are from [handshakeproject.com](http://handshakeproject.com)).



Nadene Carr.



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Becky Bliss

MARZEE

*Play Time* by Becky Bliss. Credit photo: Galerie Marzee

**Mandy Flood**'s carefully embroidered stitches contrast with the burnt contours of their grey mesh landscapes in provocatively titled works such as *The Right to Repair*. An old leather saddle and her late Mother's broken seed pearl necklace become the hero materials of **Caroline Thomas**'s work. Thomas brings meaningful historic objects into the present narrative, offering new life and a future to these reconfigured materials.

Similarly, **Aphra Cheeseman** gleans decaying or old materials and objects to make afresh, skilfully replicating often uncelebrated industrial techniques by hand, drawing attention to the everyday interactive relationship between people and things.

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Mandy Flood

MARZEE

Mandy Flood. Credit photo: Galerie Marzee

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Caroline Thomas

MARZEE

Caroline Thomas. Credit photo: Galerie Marzee

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Aphra Cheesman

MARZEE

Aphra Cheesman. Credit photo: Galerie Marzee

Minimalist forms and a reductive palette embody the calm graceful curves of **Lisa Higgin**'s explorations in liquid rubber, inviting interpretation and a sensual experience of the work. The unknown or undefined area of liminal space is also investigated within the strong pastel shapes of **Nina van Duijnhoven**'s scored and folded paper works. Their ephemeral aesthetic



juxtaposes unexpectedly with the solidity of the layered construction. In *Pollinator mix*, **Raewyn Walsh** combines beeswax collected from her backyard hives with tree rosin and essential oils in a collection of softly curved pendants. Repetitive mark marking on the pastel surfaces accentuates the vessel-like forms, signifying the artist's presence. Their gentle scent offers another layer of sensory engagement to the wearer.

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Lisa Higgins

MARZEE

Lisa Higgin. Credit photo: Galerie Marzee

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Nina van Duijnhoven

MARZEE

Nina van Duijnhoven. Credit photo: Galerie Marzee



Raewyn Walsh. Credit photo: Galerie Marzee

Strong graphic pendants abstract black and white statements, *Yes*, *No* and *Maybe* in **Nik Hanton's** 3D printed plant filament pendants. The specially created typeface takes the rhetoric into the visual language of semiotics, questioning these reductionist notions at the heart of human communication, to be worn front and centre. **Simon Swale** subverts map-making as an inadequate representation of physical

space in his tribute to Berlin-based mentor Gabi Schilling. Place shapes with cutouts referencing public spaces are layered with skewed printed topological maps. Swale creates imaginary spaces in an extension of his interest in our experience of urban spaces. My work, **Mia Straka**, marks a day both real and imagined across a survey of friends and colleagues. Shapes in the series titled *The pursuit of efficiency will drain your life of meaning* are based on radar charts of a recorded 24-hour period in each participant's life, one average day and one imagined ideal day. Sections of foraged bamboo coloured with natural pigment represent space-time made physical and wearable. The work questions what we value and asks us to consider how moments build a life.



Mia Straka

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Mia Straka

Mia Straka, Credit photo: Galerie Marzee

MARZEE



# Handshake 7

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Nik Hanton

MARZEE

Nik Hanton. Credit photo: Galerie Marzee

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Simon Swale

MARZEE

Simon Swale. Credit photo: Galerie Marzee

## In Summary

*Handshake7 – 12 New Zealand Jewellers* invites contemplation and offers a window to contemporary jewellery happening in the South Pacific within the four-story, architecturally renovated gallery spaces. It is an honour and opportunity to exhibit at Gallery Marzee, internationally renowned for representing and supporting the contemporary jewellery movement from early pioneers of the art form to recent graduates since 1979.

Three established jewellery artists from Marzee: [Iris Bodemer](#), [Annelies Planteydt](#) and Katherine Dettar each coached four *Handshake* participants in online feedback sessions during the last few months of preparation. These sessions supported us in resolving the final work and provided the space to answer specific questions around the exhibition process at Marzee. Work by these artists balustrades our exhibition in a semi-circular display of tables heading our row of 12.

During the opening I was able to act as ambassador for *Handshake7*, sharing further context of our work, individual practices and the *Handshake* project with gallery director Marie-José van den Hout, her family and staff, academics, practitioners and collectors including Liesbeth den Besten and husband Jim, Jeroen Redel and Sara Visbeek and Annelies Planteydt, who all attended the opening. This instigated genuine relationships between us and strengthened ties between the contemporary jewellery community in Aotearoa and The Netherlands. On a personal level I was privileged to view the *Marzee* collection and be shown the private collections of both Den Besten and Redel in Amsterdam, viewing world class contemporary jewellery and gaining insight into how important collections are built by individuals, while retaining jewellery's function as wearable adornment of personal significance interacting with the world.

A huge thanks from all of us in *Handshake7* to Peter Deckers and Hilda Gascard for their ongoing work which feeds the contemporary jewellery sector in Aotearoa and beyond. This work is vital to support our growth and development as makers creating important work at an intentional level and strengthening our relationships with an intentional network of curators, practitioners, academics, collectors and wearers. The support of *Creative New Zealand* helps to make this project possible and is so important at this challenging time when opportunity for supported higher level learning is increasingly tenuous in our field.

Thanks to Marie-José van den Hout, Niki, Michiel and Bridgette Heffels plus *Marzee* gallery staff, Jeroen Redel and Sara Visbeek, Liesbeth den Besten and husband Jim, and Annelies Planteydt who all made the opening a wonderful and welcoming place to connect and present the work of 2022

[Handshake7 artists](#) including:

- Aphra Cheesman
- Becky Bliss
- Caroline Thomas
- Kristin D'Agostino
- Lisa Higgins
- Mandy Flood
- Mia Straka
- Nadene Carr
- Nik Hanton
- Nina van Duijnhoven
- Raewyn Walsh
- Simon Swale

Estela Saez Vilanova your energy, insight and enthusiasm took us to new places and will continue to influence our process beyond this project. Also to Katherine Dettar whom I had the pleasure of meeting in London with a tour around *Central St Martin's* jewellery department, and Iris Bodemer for completing our coaching team with Annelies Planteydt, alongside Sarah McClintock from Aotearoa who supported our contextual writing.

Thank you all for reading, sharing, looking and wearing.

The *Handshake* project supports emerging New Zealand jewellery artists, allowing them to develop ideas and artworks for a succession of exhibitions with the assistance of a chosen mentor. The *Handshake* recipients are presented with additional opportunities to develop their practices through a number of challenges, including masterclasses, curated exhibitions, collaborations and network opportunities with both national and international exposure. The progressive nature of the programme aims to develop independent makers with an innovative and energetic practice.

## *About the author*



**Mia Straka** graduated with an Honors degree in 3D Design: Jewellery, from *Unitec Institute of Technology*, Auckland (2001). Her work is shown



in galleries, and has toured public institutions nationally, and internationally. Her work is represented in the Wallace Arts Trust Collection (NZ). She is a current partner of collective jewellery studio *Workshop6*, teaching and facilitating jewellery classes and continuing to evolve her contemporary jewellery practice. From 2020-2022 Straka participated on the *HandShake* programme, provoking creative development and endeavour. Recent work has also included community art projects, workshops, installations, larger-scale sculptural work and objects, notably *The Valere Talisman Project* (est. 2017) and *The Talisman Project* (est. 2014). Straka has participated in artist residencies including the *Institut für Alles Mögliche* in Berlin, Germany 2018 and *Arquetopia* in Oaxaca, Mexico 2014