

How Original Is Original? Thoughts on the Handshake 5 Project

By Peter Deckers | first [Published: 17.11.2019 \(Klimt02\)](#)

This text introduces a unique collaboration between works from the extensive CODA archives (Apeldoorn, NL) and [12 Handshake5 \(HS5\)](#) artists from Aotearoa New Zealand. Each artist selected three objects from the collection, responding to a theme provided by CODA as a further catalyst. The resulting works sparked a layered dialogue—between past and present, ownership and influence, originality and appropriation.



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

These responses inevitably touched on questions of authorship. Who owns what? When does inspiration become imitation? If all things are reworked copies of other reworked copies, then who holds the claim to originality? Inspiration can provoke more tension around ownership and ego than mere flattery. At what point does influence become violation? Where is the line between homage and theft?

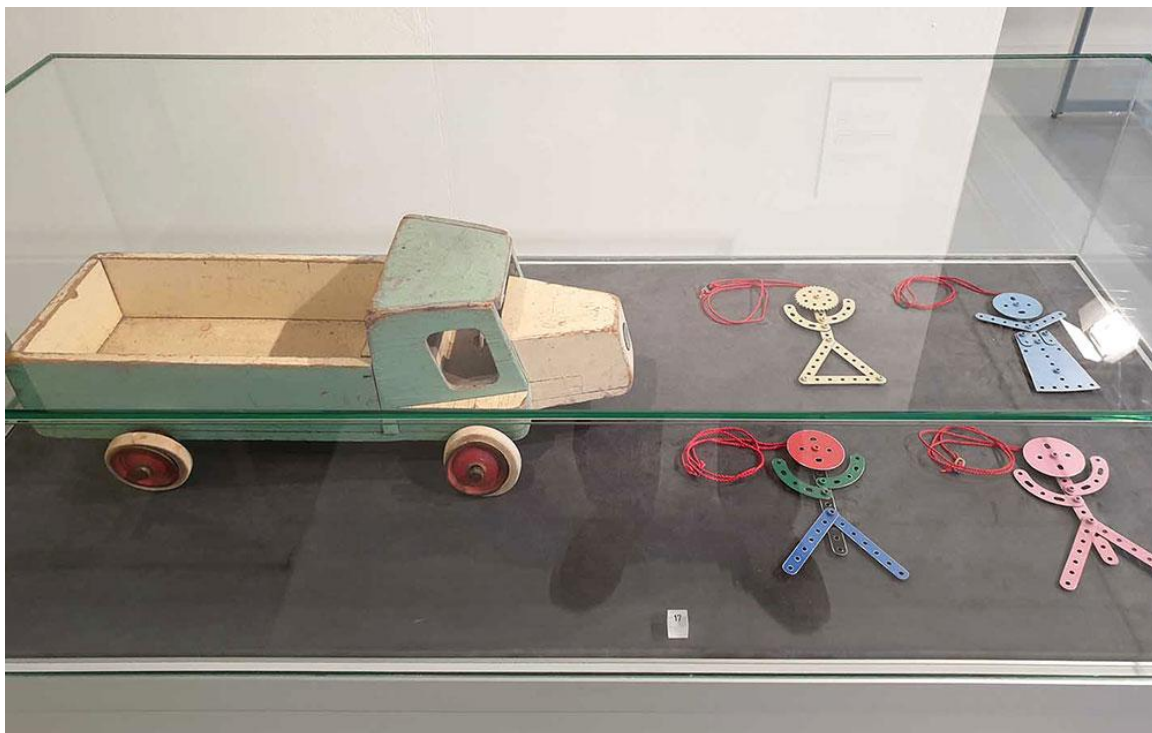
If we talk about ownership in art, we must also confront the postmodern construct of appropriation. This opens a complex terrain. Some works may appear as close copies or visual echoes, especially when placed side by side with their archival counterparts. Yet this proximity invites deeper inquiry: what does it mean to be original?

Perhaps originality is not a fixed point, but a moment of recognition—an encounter with something that feels new because it reconfigures what already exists. If it cannot be recognised, it cannot be original. Originality, then, is not invention *ex nihilo*, but a synthesis of details, histories, and contexts that have been worked out, accepted, and absorbed—like language itself. Words are not original, yet the sentence can be. The artist, like the speaker, draws from a shared vocabulary to create something that resonates as unique.

Artists constantly rearrange what already exists. In language, meaning emerges from the sound and structure of words. In objects, it's the critical relationship between form, space, and context—and the recognisable signature that distinguishes one maker from another. This shifts when commercial design enters the frame, where innovation is shaped by market forces, not artistic values.

Babies learn by imitating. This is how we grow into ourselves. Artists, too, are shaped by their surroundings, though they resist the label of idea thieves. Picasso famously said, “Good artists copy; great artists steal.” Appropriated ownership lives in this tension—the desire to learn from the best, to be inspired, to pay tribute, and to push further. Artists who see echoes of their own work in another's may feel flattered or affronted. This, too, is a form of arrogated authorship. Does the artist recoil from intrusion, or welcome the extension of a shared perspective? Is it a *handshake*—or a *fist*?

Appropriation can mean many things: copying, simulating, emulating, adapting, borrowing, responding, representing, accrediting. These words point to process, but say little about intention or outcome. They reflect our society's tolerance, its criticality, and its shifting political lens.



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

Before the exhibition opened at CODA Museum, I asked each HS5 artist about their initial approach to the selected CODA works and themes. Their motivations varied—some responded to physical form, others to conceptual frameworks, and others to the given theme. What emerged was a fearless spectrum of creative flexibility and experimental discovery.

Three years ago, CODA director Carin Reinders and I discussed the idea of this collaboration. It offered CODA a reason to open its archives, and for the Handshake artists, a new way of learning through direct response to physical objects. These benefits extended to the public, with each artist documenting their process on the HS5 blog. Rarely is the creative journey so visible, so accessible.

This collaborative dialogue may not suit every artist. Thematic constraints can feel restrictive. But for me, this is where inspiration lives—where forces mix and move through old knowledge, new thinking, time, and culture. The New Zealand artists remained true to their own ways of working, revealing how intention can distinguish inspiration from appropriation.



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

As part of **our Handshake**, Carin and I agreed that CODA would select the HS5 participants from the growing pool of Handshake jewellers. The organisation supported the project with development opportunities, including a masterclass, coaching, and a blog platform. HS5 head coach *Roseanne Bartley* facilitated intervention strategies to deepen the collaboration, while

curator *Sian van Dyk* followed up with studio visits. These feedback sessions were voluntary, recognising that ideas are fragile and sometimes need protection from premature critique.

Jewellery, in this context, goes beyond its physical and commercial aspects. The creation process is essential. Forces connect fragile entities with poetic reactions, bringing life to fixed objects. Roseanne describes jewellery as a means of communication—a cultural language that expresses individuality and shared identity. I would add: contemporary jewellery is a medium of multiplicities, where complex forces come together. It engages the body, the object, the material, and the mind. It carries ancient knowledge and personal signatures. It reaches back to prehistoric times, or perhaps even earlier.

Damian Skinner (2013) [writes](#): “Contemporary jewellery is shaped by a distinct awareness of the situation in which it exists.” For me, it is a game of recognition—a connection between old knowledge and current time, yielding new insights.

The contemporary maker must be both critic and audience, remaining tethered to intention and, in this case, the thematic assignment. These demands shape how the work is experienced and can provoke artistic fear and doubt—often hidden from public view. What HS5 offers is access to the full process: the musings, the mistakes, and the many moments of success. You can read more on the [HS5 blog](#).



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