

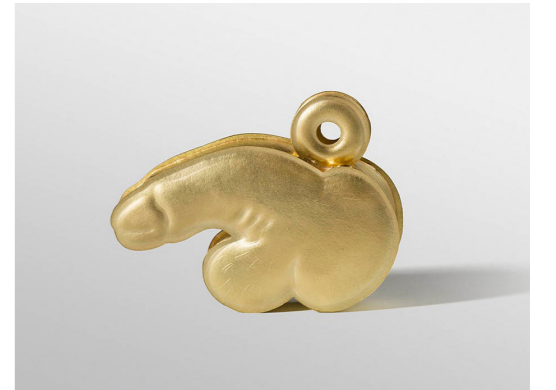
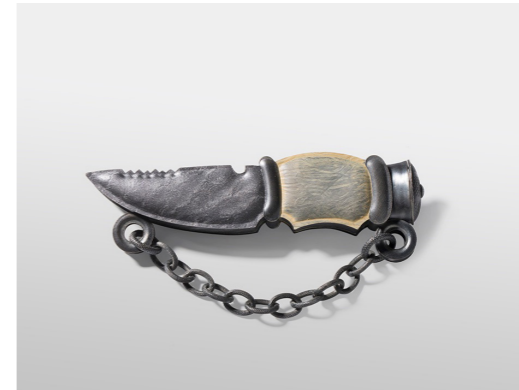
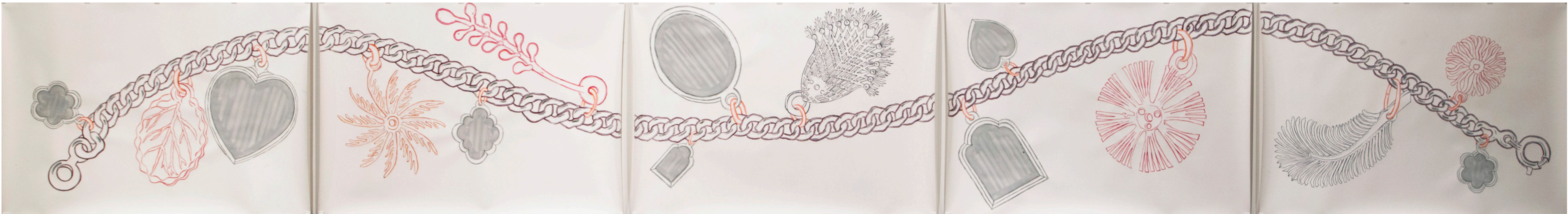
HELEN BRITTON

INTERSTICES



LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY

11 FEBRUARY - 15 APRIL 2017



INTERSTICES: THE WORK OF HELEN BRITTON

In a polarised world, we seek solace in the interstices, those allusive spaces between where possibility flourishes, where poetry is found. This is the territory of the artist, fuelled with an inquiring mind, intent on the deployment of accumulated knowledge. In this liminal zone, Helen Britton discovers the extraordinary in the everyday and re-focuses our understanding of what it means to be human.

Her studio is a *Wunderkammer*, a room of marvels where worlds collide, and meanings proliferate. In this charged space of focused inquisitiveness, analytical investigation and passionate engagement she seeks out the exotic, the elemental and the esoteric with childlike wonder, determined to know more, to understand and to embrace what she encounters. She is driven by that sense of wonder when seeing reveals the unexpected and ignites the fuse of creative reinterpretation and intervention. *“My objects are romantic, but also explorative and direct; collisions of elements from the chaos and order of lived experience.”*¹

Releasing the emotional charge of this liminal zone is at the core of her practice. Richly populated by the imagination, fuelled by the experience of this world, in the studio Britton makes those synaptic leaps from what is, to what might be. It is a space invaded by memories, shaped by encounters from the past and present, a space that is as much a fiction and a rich potpourri of conjecture, as a real space brimming with real things.

Memories from childhood pervade the studio and are re-imagined there. Her sense of wonder when confronted by the fabulous, when the annual Royal Agricultural Show brought the country to the city, when the carnival came to town. A time when tantalising treats were offered in show bags full

of promise — each a cornucopia of delight — and fear was artfully orchestrated in Side Show Alley. There, the Ghost Train thrilled and terrified and the world was momentarily turned upside down. *“The fear was genuine, but so was the fascination. Carefully kept trinkets from that distant past have become symbols of a primal contradiction, the allure of the unknown and ultimately unknowable.”*²

These ideas coalesce within the studio, a space brimmed full of treasures, catalogued and collated, ready for reinvention, ripe for transfiguration. A place for play, serious play, where the relationships between objects, their histories, their materials and the contexts within which we relate to them are ‘played out’, then ‘playfully’ re-organised and ‘re-played’ in various scenarios and configurations. This sense of play is manifest in the final works, reminiscent of toys, reflecting a bright, joyous abundance in their boisterous assemblage of elements. Seriously playful they manifest both the optimism of childhood and the anxiety of lived experience.

The terrain for this theatre of humanity is the body — her body, our bodies — landscapes formed by time and experience upon which each brooch, ring or necklace shapes new understandings and interpretations. Somewhere between, in that space orchestrated by Britton’s vision and our sense of who we are, is the point of re-activation and articulation of our relationship to the world. Wearing a piece of Britton’s jewellery is the catalyst, the moment of opening up a new conversation, the point of frisson between one idea and its counter. For Andrea Dinoto it is *“... a means to express and share her deeply personal experiences of the world — its mysteries, confusions, and interrelated forms, both natural and man-made.”*³

Britton is herself ‘in between’, rooted in both Germany and Australia. Her work is a meditation on her own history as she engages with artefacts and environments that act as powerful triggers. Both places are experienced physically and through memory, informed by her knowledge *“... of the vast and layered history reflected in the built environment”*⁴, as she meticulously constructs her work from metals, glass, precious stones and found components.

In Germany *“...there is a mixture of a natural and constructed environment so intimately entwined that there is no possibility to discern any seams between the two”*⁵. Germany’s weight of history stabilises, while Australia generates a sense of urgency and of making do. Australia’s history can only be borrowed from those that have lived here for millennia; it is a place that requires re-forming and re-imagining to make it your own. In Australia, Britton draws from the specificity of the Western Australian coastal environment and its openness as a space for reflection and inspiration. Over the past two decades she has created a small series of private works on regular visits to Western Australia, and her survey exhibition at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery in Perth, Western Australia, will be the first time they will all be shown together in the context of a new body of work that interprets this activity from the distance of her studio in Munich. Worlds collide *“... from the chaos and order of lived experience.”*⁶

Making is fundamental to Britton’s practice. How things go together reflects the rationale of their union, and it remains visible. Each individual work is a machine for capturing ideas, processing relationships and combining the intangible in concrete form. Each brooch is wrought from the blueprint of a complex process of research, conceptualisation, thinking and re-thinking.

Their final form is the synthesis of memory, history, meaning and revelation. *“I play out the tensions and beautiful collisions of my practice in a small complex space”*⁷, Britton comments, and in that liminal space of the studio new forms evolve, new interpretations emerge and possibilities expand endlessly.

Once they leave the studio all interpretations are open and each work becomes re-activated through our engagement as wearers / participants / viewers. Examining these finely crafted objects we seek out the codes that resonate. For some this requires a forensic investigation of the structure that holds the elements together, while for others it is detailed analysis of the component parts and their interconnections that provides meaning. We are open to their histories and each of us brings our own narratives to play as we enter into multifaceted dialogue. This is the moment of transfiguration!

Professor Ted Snell
Curator
October 2016

1. Helen Britton, Munich 2016
2. Helen Britton, Munich 2016
3. Andrea Dinoto, *Helen Britton: Narratives of Creation*, Metalsmith Magazine, Volume 34 Issue 3, pp45-51, 2014
4. Helen Britton, <http://galleryfunaki.com.au/artists/helen-britton/> accessed 30 October 2016
5. Helen Britton, notes to Forest, 2011
6. Helen Britton, Munich 2016
7. Helen Britton, Munich 2016



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Front and back cover image
[Stencils] Unicorn, Skull, Knife, Penis, Chimney Sweep, Cat, Tooth, Jeep, Owl, Devil, 2015-16, acrylic, rag paper, tusche, each sheet 53 x 39 cm (irreg), editions of 7. Photo Lyle Branson.

Inside images first spread
Top centre: Decorative Violence, 2016, acrylic on paper, 5 parts, 140 x 1000cm. Photo Lyle Branson.

Below centre l-r:
Cat, 2016, silver, paint, natural yellow rose-cut diamonds, 16 x 8 x 1.5 cm. Photo Guillen F-H
Clover, 2016, silver, paint, 7.5 x 4.5 x 1.5 cm. Photo Guillen F-H

Horse, 2007, silver, glass, 5.3 x 8 x 2.3 cm. Photo Dirk Eisel
Knife, 2016, silver, paint, 13 x 3 x 1.5 cm. Photo Guillen F-H
Lucky Dick, 2016, 18ct yellow gold, 6 x 4 x 1.5 cm. Photo Guillen F-H

Inside images second spread
Left: Snapper Fish Scales Necklace, 2011, fish scales, paint, glue, string, 25 cm diameter. Photo Dirk Eisel

Right: Big Bouquet, 2013, rose gold-plated silver, glass, steel, plastic, paint, 14 x 8 x 4.5 cm. Photo Dirk Eisel. On loan from Rob Koudijs and Ward Schriver.



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LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY
OPEN TUES - SAT 11AM - 5PM
FREE ADMITTANCE
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