

Questions for Mary.....

30 May 2014

In 2007 Mary Curtis spent 2 months working in Helen Britton's workshop in Munich, so I caught up with Mary and threw a few questions at her about her time there.....

SWH: I remember and will never forget the presentation you gave, after spending some time with Helen in her Munich studio, it made quite an impression on me. Is there anything from your experience that you think would be helpful for me to know?

MC: *Renee Bevan brought back a catalogue after Talent and I was really taken with it so I asked Helen to come to NZ to do a workshop at MSVA, which took 2 years of correspondence and also led to Helen's Urban Paradise Playground, exhibition at Objectspace in 2006.*

<http://www.objectspace.org.nz/Downloads/Assets/2228/Helen+Britton+publication.pdf>

Helen then invited me to go to Munich the following year for a residency in her shared workshop. Helen is highly professional; it is important to her and she expects "professional respect" in return. She is highly motivated and committed to Contemporary Jewellery and I see you working in a similar way. I see a synergy with the your 2/3D practice and that of Helen's, also your response to surface, I use Helen as an example when teaching as someone who uses surface in her work in a dynamic and layered way.

SWH: There are a number of things that I think Helen can help guide me through in terms of practice as it is easy to see the commonalities between hers and mine, even though, really we are worlds apart. What was the most important thing that you learnt from Helen?

MC: *Forgive yourself for making something even if you feel you are copying. I was self-conscious of making 'Helen pieces' and I expressed this in a crit with Helen and David, Helen told me to just make it and make it again until I find my own voice. I also realised from this it's really important to create pieces you don't know what to do with because it moves your practice.*



Mary's piece that she made in Munich and really likes but never knew what to do with

Helen has a sense of rigor and integrity. You need to look at other artists not just Jewellers; Kobi Bosshard looked a lot at painters and sculptors. I have to look at a lot of jewellers though, because of being a teacher. My time with Helen was also a springboard to my later exhibition Metadecorative at Objectspace,

<http://www.objectspace.org.nz/Exhibitions/Detail/Metadecorative:+New+work+by+Mary+Curtis>

Helen lives and breathes contemporary Jewellery and I have huge respect for that but it helped me to realise that I wanted a balance between contemporary jewellery and family particualrly because I have a young son. I also realised that the focus of my work is about working and exhibiting in NZ.

SWH: Do you have any images from your time in Munich you would like to share with me on the blog, that you think might be relevant, and if so can you tell me a little about them?

MC: *I Spent 2 days with Helen, David and Gabi Green shopping for Christmas ornaments in Lauscha. Lauscha is a village in Thuringia, Germany that is well known for glass blowing, scientific and chemical glass instruments and glass eyes and it was their Christmas festival, the streets were filled with stalls selling ornaments. It was freezing, freezing cold, we had full thermals under our clothes and I remember eating hot sausages was wonderful. I did some glass blowing while I was there too and Helen has worked some blown glass into some of her pieces.*



Lauscha Christmas Festival



Our booty after 2 days solid shopping

The Museums here and across Europe impacted on me and my upcoming exhibition, but this is one of my favourite photos taken by Gabi of me riding a fake stag at the Lauscher Christmas Festival. I remember Helen suggesting I should use it for a catalogue, which I think I did at some point.

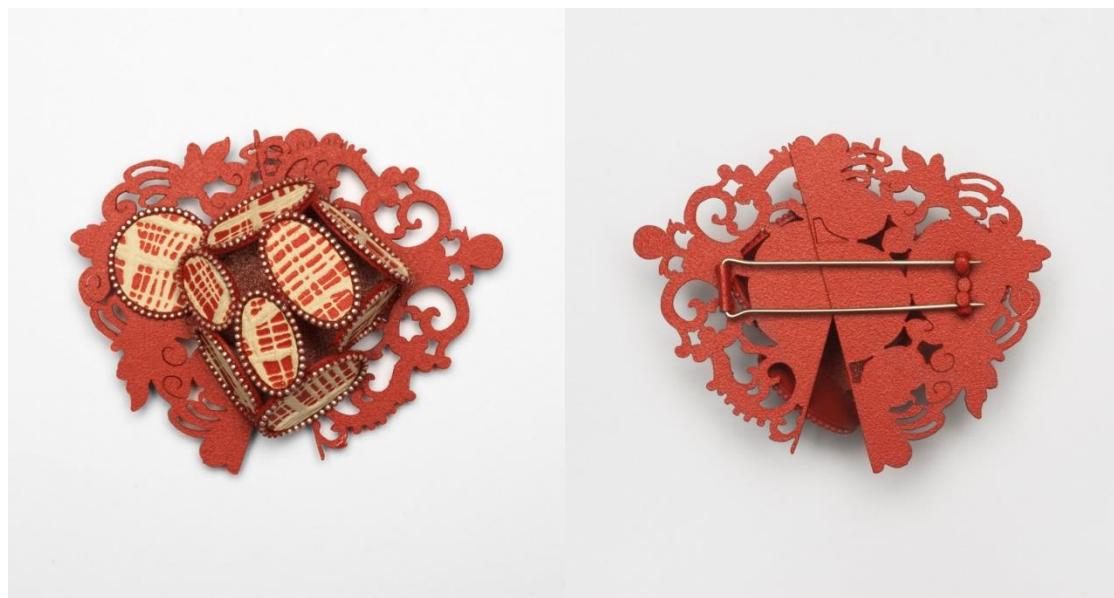


SWH: You know me quite well Mary having taught me a lot in my 2nd year at MSVA and what I did back then is still very, subconsciously, relevant today. Do you have any thoughts on my choice in mentor knowing both of us?

MC: You have made a good choice Sarah; you know your own mind but also listen to what is said while listening to your own voice. You're happy to take a leap of faith, take risks and challenge yourself. You know if you don't you won't learn.

SWH: When choosing a mentor for Handshake2 I was very conscious of the similarities between my own work and theirs. You have already mentioned about being self-conscious of making 'Helen pieces' can you talk some more about this?

MC: Helen gave me permission to make a 'Helen Britton' but she didn't think they were 'Helen Britton's'. It was intimidating at times being in her workshop; Helen, David Bielander, Doris Betz and Japanese jeweller Yutaka Minegishi (who was away at the time) are all excellent artists. I made a mark on the floor for taking photos for a PowerPoint that would show the changes on my bench every day, as I explored with new materials and introduced colour into my work. I came home excited and could see my pieces growing and developing. It all snowballed and gave me confidence to approach Objectspace about a solo show. I tried to approach the process of making Metadecorative with rigor but I look back and feel I was closed minded about some things. The idea of using images of the front and the back of a piece for the catalogue cover and pages came from looking at Daniel Kruger and Rebecca Hannon. Looking back I can acknowledge that I didn't need to put the front and back images on every page and when I found there was some mistakes with some of the pages I took the opportunity to replace some pages with images from the actual exhibition. It was fantastic though; the designer for catalogue Alan Deare understood exactly where I was coming from and made great suggestions like putting in images of the 50's wallpaper and using different paper stock to make these pages feel like wallpaper.



Front and Back of a page from Metadecorative Catalogue, 2010

SWH: I helped you install *Metadecorative* in 2010, where you presented your work in old museum vitrines and at that point I had not researched Helen even though I was aware of her work. I considered Helen to be my mentor now, mainly because of her ability to present her work through engaging installations and I expect that *Metadecorative* had some relevance to your experience with Helen; can you elaborate on this for me?

MC: *I'm not sure that Helens installations influenced Metadecorative because I hadn't seen Helens work actually installed at that point, like I mentioned earlier it was the museums I visited in Europe that influenced my installation. The install is another part of the work, I like my work to have a life on the body but also off the body and play with the space it sits in. I was more inspired by Lisa Walker's busy and intense install of Unwearable at Objectspace.*

<http://www.objectspace.org.nz/Exhibitions/Detail/LISA+WALKER-Unwearable>

I wanted to do the opposite and be minimal, using vitrine's as they create a narrative around objects, shifting and focusing the gaze from a big space to a small space.

SWH: Thanks for sharing with me Mary; you are a true inspiration to me. Is there anything you would like to add that I haven't questioned you about?

MC: *Have fun, enjoy, be open but know yourself. It is an opportunity for your work to grow again.*