

## The HANDSHAKE project,

**An art development programme for progressive ideas, making, presentations, feedback and networking.**

*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.*



HANDSHAKE1 stand, Handwerksmesse, Munich during Schmuck Jewellery week 2013 (photo: Peter Deckers)

HandShake is a mentoring and exhibition project and blog, involving emerging jewellers from around New Zealand being matched with their chosen mentors from across the globe. HandShake 1 began in February 2011 and in 2014 a fresh group continued with more national and international exhibitions in HandShake 2.

In February 2016 HandShake 2 will end making way for a third HandShake project to bring together selected creative enthusiasts from the first two projects. Next to the development of new bodies of work, HandShake 3 (HS3) will also focus on collaboration in its widest sense and will be accompanied by a fresh series of exhibitions at national and international galleries. The purpose of this programme is to allow the former mentee to become an independent artist steering their own development. The mentor now becomes a colleague and in most cases also a fellow art collaborator. The HS3 collaboration will be exhibited in July 2016 at Objectspace, Auckland where the first HandShake 1 collaboration took place in 2013: <http://www.objectspace.org.nz/Exhibitions/Detail/HandShake>

The 'HandShakers' will also collaborate with exciting London jewellery group Dialogue Collective, jointly developing collaborative ideas from one side of the world to the other during 2016, for presentation at Munich Jewellery week in February 2017.



Jhana Millers with mentor Suska Mackert, HandShake 1, Objectspace, Auckland, 2013



Collaboration works of HS1 mentee Sharon Fitness and mentor Lisa Walker, Objectspace 2013 (photo: 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 with its collaborative knowledge-pool through contemporary technology and social media. The HandShake project moves within these platforms through the use of blogs to chart developments in each participant's practice, as they happen.

In the four years since its inception the HandShake programme has built a large reputation for excellence and inclusion has been sought by well-known and emerging jewellers from all over New Zealand. The

participants of all three projects (HandShake 1, 2 and 3) were selected through an open call to graduates of a degree course with art knowledge and a technical foundation. The selection panels consisted of renowned experts from diverse art practices, and looked to the developmental hunger and potential pairing of each applicant with their mentor requests. The mentees also needed to have a demonstrated drive with the ability to take risks in their experimentations. A significant part of the assessment focussed on the potential benefit of a relationship with a mentor to the mentee's practice. It is of course a fine-tuning process, but the selection panel had to ask themselves if the chosen mentor also had the potential to progress their candidate. HS depends heavily on the developing relationship and the concentrated focus of each mentee in tandem with the generosity and knowledge of the 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 specific aims towards deepening and extending their individual art practice at a period in their career when 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 that 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 sometimes 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 development process of all the exhibitions can be followed on the active HandShake blog (<http://HandShakeproject.com/>).



Avid, dealer gallery: HandShake 2 exhibition with mentors and mentees, 2015 (photo: Peter Deckers)

Each exhibition space brings its challenges: a dealer gallery with its object focus and commercial interest, or spaces like Toi Pōneke, Wellington with its art and installation focus where the presentation takes centre stage. Each exhibition shows progression through the developmental processes of experimentation with

support through feedback from a mentor. Therefore each exhibition is original, well researched and considered. Here art is produced out of quite unexpected interactions.



HandShake 1 third exhibition at Toi Pōneke gallery, Wellington February 2012 (photo: Peter Deckers)

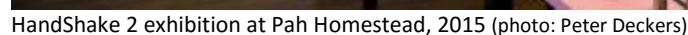
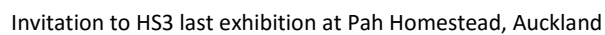


HandShake 2 first exhibition, Toi Pōneke gallery, Wellington November 2014, curated by Gabby O'Connor (photo: Peter Deckers)

Reflection, in the form of an artist blog is necessary for evaluation, critical analysis and also to provide a record of the communication between mentor and mentee. The HandShake blog has become a mirror for the project's advance. Insights into an artist's thinking are not something the public normally has access to and has drawn relatively large numbers of people to continue visiting the blogs over the duration of the project. It details unscripted journeys with potential for surprise developments, as well as offering diverse learning through each of the different mentee and mentor interactions and progress.



The HandShake package is innovative and radically different from everything I've been exposed to in my own learning. There are few opportunities for formal support for the emerging artist after graduation. Their battle and the learning involved is often overlooked through the reality of survival and negotiating the many obstacles that get in the way when establishing an art practice. The HandShake project offers a series of unique opportunities where experimentation and development is fundamental for progressive art to thrive.



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At JEWELcamp 2016 Sofia Björkman from Sweden will do a workshop for HandShake 3 Jewelcamp followed by exciting innovator, Hilde de Decker from Belgium, who will run the HandShake masterclass.



Amelia Pascoe, brooch, old shoes, and 2015 (photo: Peter Deckers)

#### **HANDSHAKE future projects:**

HandShake 3 **exhibitions:** Objectspace, Auckland July 2016 | Gallery Platina, Stockholm September 2016 | Dialogue Collective London/Munich March 2017 | Dowse Art Museum, Wellington June 2017

The HandShake Alumni exhibition, titled "*SPECIALS*" will feature during Munich Jewellery Week in February 2016. A selection of past works from former exhibitions has been curated by Peter Deckers for this exhibition at the Einsäulensaal of the prestigious Residenz Palace.



(left) Raewyn Walsh, series of work, 2015 (photo: Peter Deckers) and (right) Kathryn Yeats, necklace 2015 (photo: Kathryn Yeats)