

decorative arts

Journeys in design

Vibrant contemporary jewellers

Together, the work of seven artisans makes a strong statement about what it is to be a Western Australian artist practicing as a jeweller



Dorothy Erickson

SINCE THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD in the 1880s Western Australia has been known as the 'Cinderella of the South' as the colony struggled until its fortunes were transformed by gold. This adversity bred a sense of self-reliance, still seen in newcomers who settle there. David Walker and Felicity Peters arrived in the mineral boom of the 1960s to join native-born Dorothy Erickson, Brenda Ridgewell and Carlier Makigawa. While the globe-trotting childhoods of Gillian Rainer and Christel van der Laan created the self-reliance to succeed in one of the most isolated capital cities in the world.

Of the seven jewellers mentioned only David Walker took his original qualification overseas. The others trained in Western Australia, five at WAIT (now Curtin University) and the youngest of the group Christel, at Carine College of TAFE. Jewellery was not a first career for most of these artists as 'jeweller' was not a professional option in Western Australia before the 1970s, except via the apprentice system.

Gillian Rainer's most recent solo exhibition *Litter of the Littoral* showed her use of techniques of casting and carving to tell of mysteries gleaned from myths and fables, rhymes and histories. The work was cast in silver, which had fascinated her since childhood. Her early work saw her experimenting with reflections in



Pendant by Gillian Rainer, 2006, sterling silver and stainless steel cable, h: 90 mm

Pendant *Memento Mori* 1 by David Walker, 2009, 925 silver, stainless steel, Victorian ash, 13.2 x 5.3 x 2.9 cm

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Neckpiece by Brenda Ridgwell, 2004, sterling silver, stainless steel, cubic zirconia, 230 x 60 mm

Multiculture rings by Felicity Peters, 2007, sterling silver, 18 ct gold, 24 ct gold, tourmaline, amethyst and glass

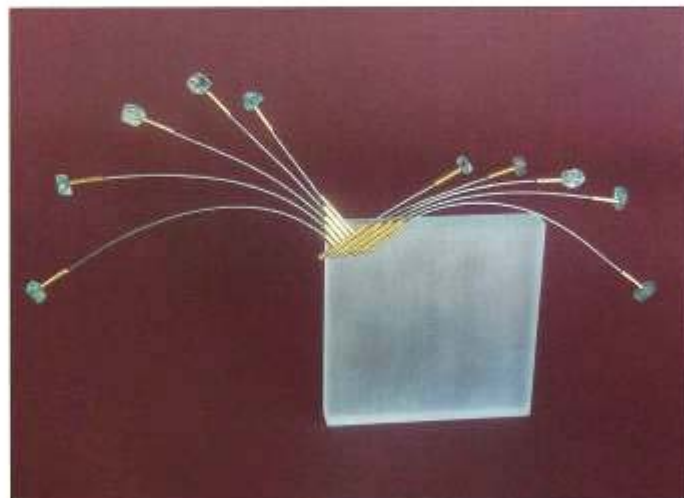
Bluebird of Paradise pectoral by Dorothy Erickson, 2000-2011, 18 ct gold, aquamarine, steel cable, 270 x 90 x 8 mm on frosted perspex stand

highly polished surfaces to be followed by an interest in inlay and patination. In recent years she has travelled overseas investigating 'high tech' instruments to assist in construction and studied the unique flora of Western Australia, making immaculately fabricated works of art, which can be seen in the exhibition.

Brenda Ridgwell, who is the Director in Jewellery / 3D Design at Curtin University, has been exhibiting since she was a student in the late 1970s. Her large exuberant body works have won many awards. The work is intricately fabricated from sterling silver rod and steel wire highlighted at times by a hint of nine carat gold or cubic zirconia. Recent work is more restrained and quieter but still features articulated, three-dimensional jewellery that encloses space around parts of the body.

Felicity Peters has been exhibiting since the 1970s. When at last settled in Perth and awarded her degree in 1986 she experimented with techniques and attended workshops at the Haystack School in Maine, USA. Since then she has researched the techniques of Keum boo (a Korean technique of fusing very thin 24 carat gold sheet to sterling silver), granulation and computer aided design and travelled the world. A recent fellowship has enabled her to make work for a solo exhibition in Legnica, Poland in 2009, and Lesley Craze Gallery in London in 2010. Much of the work in the exhibition at Lesley Craze was based on images and experiences of Poland.

The author, Dorothy Erickson, formerly a teacher, was a latecomer to art school in 1969 before returning to WAIT in 1975 as a postgraduate student and lecturer until 1980. She held her first solo exhibition in 1977. A solo





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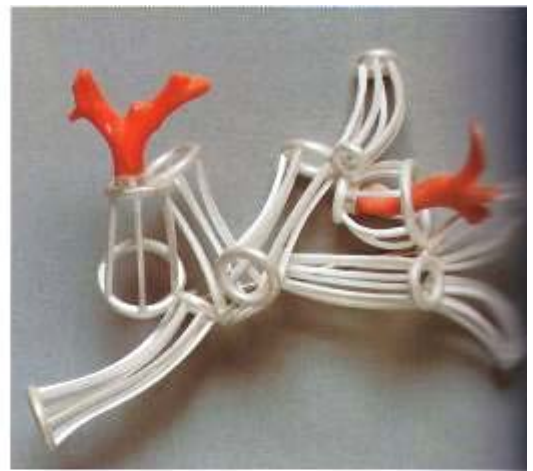
exhibition at Galerie am Graben in Vienna in 1983 featuring the *Sunrise – Sunset* and *Pilbara* works opened many doors and in the late 1980s she worked with steel cable, making kinetic works for the body introducing semi-precious stones. A chronic illness has resulted in her now making works with the help of assistants. 'I like to work in gold—a metal that has always attracted me as my grandfather had a gold mine.' Her *Homage to Klimt* collections have a colourful palette featuring multicoloured sapphires and unusually cut stones set in gold while the most recent collection is based on Western Australian wildflowers.

Carlier Makigawa, the daughter of award-winning architect Desmond Sands held her first solo exhibition in 1981 before studying for a master's degree becoming course co-ordinator at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Exhibiting widely in Australia, Europe, Asia and USA she shared a number of the Australian exhibitions with her late husband the sculptor Akio Makigawa (1948-1999). Early work was influenced by a Japanese packaging exhibition she saw as a student and progressed through wrapped stones to papier-mâché to metal with carved marble. The work always relied on structure with small sculptural objects exhibited with the jewellery. Skeletal structures define her later oeuvre with delicate castings or carved coral enclosed within the cage-like structures.

David Walker migrated to Australia from England in 1964 and is now well known for his delicate cage-like work. An Australia Council residency in Besozzo, Italy, in 1992-3, a six

Brooch *Nature in Structure* by Carlier Makigawa, 2011, sterling silver, coral, 100 x 60 x 30 mm

Ring *Whole heartedly* by Christel van der Laan, 2011, 18 ct gold, ceramic honeycomb block carved and painted, 38 x 37 x 31 cm. Photography: Adrian Lambert



month visiting professorship at San Diego in 1993 and an Asialink residency in Silapakorn University in 1995-6 provided inspiration for further solo exhibitions. The time in Thailand inspired his use of fish traps and market produce as points of departure for delicate jewellery. Walker returned to Silapakorn in 1998 as visiting international professor and in 2001 had a solo exhibition of the Thai inspired work at the Galerie Slavik in Vienna.

In the last two decades he has undertaken public art commissions resulting in a retrospective at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 2009 which included *Memento mori* pendants, his response to bush fires, in which the cage-like structures enclose delicately carved and stained wooden twigs.

Christel van der Laan, held her first solo exhibition in Western Australia in February 2006. Her exquisite jewels are fashioned from such unlikely materials as polypropylene price tags. She says emigration to South Africa as a child, back to the Netherlands and then Australia, presented 'dazzling natural environments and cultures for exploration.' In 1990, well into a masters degree in psychology and a concurrent MBA, she saw a book on modern American jewellery and changed careers, enrolling at Carine College graduating in 1998 and setting up her studio.

The makers in this exhibition live in an area of exceptional bio-diversity which due to global warming is a conservation hotspot and a sense of place can readily be seen in much of the work. However the artists also allow us to glimpse a sense of person, for there are purely cerebral works and others influenced by travels in distant places, for isolated Western Australians continue to need to engage with the rest of the world.

The exhibition *Cinderella's Stories: Contemporary Jewellery from Western Australia*, is touring commercial galleries in Australia and the Lesley Craze Gallery in London in 2011.