



Craft ACT 16 November – 16 December 2017

NEW TERRAIN IN AN OLD WORLD

Zoë Veness



kunanyi/Mount Wellington 1, 2017
digital print on composite aluminium panel
42.0 x 59.4 cm



kunanyi/Mount Wellington 2, 2017
digital print on composite aluminium panel
42.0 x 59.4 cm



kunanyi/Mount Wellington 3, 2017
digital print on composite aluminium panel
42.0 x 59.4 cm



kunanyi/Mount Wellington 4, 2017
digital print on composite aluminium panel
42.0 x 59.4 cm



kunanyi/Mount Wellington 5, 2017
digital print on composite aluminium panel
42.0 x 59.4 cm



kunanyi/Mount Wellington 6, 2017
digital print on composite aluminium panel
42.0 x 59.4 cm

IT PRESIDES OVER EVERYTHING IN THIS PLACE

On clear days, the rocky faces of the mountain glow pink in the dawn, giving way to deep blue as the sun rises. The mountain presides over everything in this place; it has done for hundreds of millions of years.

An old word, and the official new name is *Kunanyi* which simply means *Mountain*, has its origins from the first people here. Kunanyi is singular. Monolithic. Its moods determine the atmosphere of our days. We glance up at it to gauge the weather. On a clear summer day, it looms dark against a searing bright blue sky. In winter, it has a mantle of snow.

Zoë Veness is coming to terms with living under the aegis of this singularity. In winter, she wrote this about the town:

I see through my workshop window a view up Elizabeth Street to the houses and weather beyond. Clouds collecting and passing by. Brief moments of sun. In this space, I build small things and piece them together to make larger things, constantly searching for new and meaningful connections.¹

Newcomers to Hobart are virtually compelled to go to the Mountain's pinnacle in order to really arrive. When it is cloudless, if standing exposed at the apex dwarfed and buffeted outside, or enclosed in the shelter, one can see vast tracts of land and water stretching to the horizon. The experience of looking down connects one to the land and casts human activity into its own rather insignificant dimension.

Facing east toward the estuary, one surveys Hobart and its environs, clusters of buildings gathered into the foothills, hugged by the banks of the river, nestled in the folds of valleys, and cradled by coves and inlets. Viewing the city from this height, the markers of human habitation look trifling. You can follow the skimpy lines of habitation as they stretch in many directions: northwest, upriver, and in the other direction – out to sea, but the undulating clusters of human occupation peter out, and the view is utterly dominated by swathes of mountain ranges, forested land, and various bodies of water extending into the periphery. Under a clear sky your eye can follow the land and water to the horizon; under cloud, they recede into haze.

A walk from the car park and the coach stop and along some duckboard or across a rocky plain, affords views completely devoid of human markers. The forested lands roll away, vast and deep. If I press my face against the wind – which is often a gale scouring the rocky plain, even without walking to look over the escarpment, I can sense the great quadrant of wild country in the South West.

Zoë Veness moved to Tasmania in 2016 and that year, horrifically, great tracts of forests in the South West were ravaged by catastrophic fires which burned for days. Thousand-year-old giant trees burned; the hoary peat lands ignited and smouldered. Conservationists mourned deeply for the grave threat that climate change poses for the ancient forests, the remaining fragments of an ecosystem that once spread across the supercontinent of Gondwana.²

It is terrain that has been vigorously fought for by environmentalists. Its World Heritage listing was a hard-won victory. For many of us, this triumph over rampant industrialism was a source of great pride, a symbol of strength in deeper values, and hope. Now, as the planet grows hotter, the deep forests grow drier, and while they are legislatively protected from human incursions, they are imperilled by immolation. Fires in these remote forests are generally started by lightning strikes and, given the remoteness and impenetrability of the wilderness areas, once they have started, in these areas they rage virtually unchecked. Helicopters dropping in water make little impact.

With the major fires in 2016, the contrast between the extraordinary longevity and immediate peril of this land was thrown into sharp relief. Newly arrived, Zoë Veness became vividly aware of the import of the geography of this place, and it had direct consequences for her way of working. Zoë's arrival in Tasmania last year, if anything, compounded an existing poetics of durability and delicacy in her work.

A poetics of endurance versus fragility is a feature of Veness's signature serpentine paper jewellery. Paper can be eminently resilient though also flimsy. In this exhibition, the work *Waiting for Tomorrow* (2017) follows the type of painstaking and systematic work that she is best known for. Constructed from concertina-folded paper strung on stainless steel cable, it harnesses a characteristic tension between strength and assailability. Laboriously and meticulously controlled in its construction, paradoxically though, ultimately this necklace is languorous, forming a loop or spiral, its curvature determined by its own weight and its relation to its suspension or resting point.

New Terrain in an Old World comprises works that are deeply imbued with new beginnings – Zoë is adamant that were she not here, she would not have been moved to made work of this kind – but also a return to foundations. Some of the methods reprised here are influenced by Zoë's new teaching position. She has incorporated techniques that lately she has demonstrated to her students: primary methods and basic materials that speak of fundamentals. Copper and brass are base metals in the language of jewellery; cutting, filing and soldering are the rudiments of metal smithing. The new works spell an opening point through reprising old methods in a new place; a point at which landscape insisted itself as a prominent feature in Veness's making.

Direct references to Kunanyi drive the work: the height, mass and reach of the mountain range and, in particular, the alpine landscape of the mountain's uppermost reaches. These are quite literal references to the actuality of the place and, on another register, through the language of jewellery, these elemental objects operate as votive pieces. They are tributes, expressions of concern, care, respect and awe; possibly even some kind of devotion.

Visiting the summit of the Mountain on an overcast day, especially when cloud obscures the distant views, one's attention is brought to the alpine terrain which is spectacular in itself. The rough ground, carpeted with ground-hugging heath and shrubs, is arresting (if not universally inviting). Hunched eucalypts, no higher than four metres tall, contrast in size and

shape to their towering, straight cousins which occupy the slopes only metres below, where there is often voluminous birdsong. Here, there is only the sound of wind. Small shrubs, with surprising rosy or golden tiny leaf tips, encircle the boulders and smaller rocks with their grey and orange faces; these are festooned with lichens.

The detail of lichen on rock, and low ground covering shrubs is shown in the series of six photographs: *kunanyi/Mount Wellington*, here enlarged and laminated onto aluminium. In these images, we see the alpine carpet poking through remnant snow. To my eye, these images capture a scene that I am used to: colours and patterns magically organised like a tended garden, shaped into beautiful patterns by wind and cold and the mineral composition of the rock.

The diversity of the textures and colours of the lichens is remarkable. Some are pale. Some are so dark as to be practically black: some sleek, some sooty. Some are rich terracotta swirls, which seem to have been lovingly and daringly arranged in combination with light green. The photographs demonstrate the invitation that the lichens extend in real life: to be examined up close so that the intricacy and variety of their wonderful morphology can be witnessed. Up close, some lichens are ragged and entangled. Some are velvety; and shaped like spiky coral or miniature trees. Some are scaly, dry, crusty and brittle looking; others are leathery and succulent, with a ripple shape that's a bit like miniature kelp.

I feel personally attached to these forms. They are deeply familiar as my relationship with this place began almost in infancy, and I recall looking at the lichens with the microscopic close-to-the-ground enraptured gaze of the very young. There are some black-and-white photos of me at the summit as a one year old. Standing with my first snowman that we'd made – the first of many made over the years, I am dressed robustly, in a snow suit my mother sewed from a blanket, a hand knitted beanie and mittens, and tiny rubber boots. As a young child, I could not help but read the lichen covered rocks as miniature planets, to be read with eyes and fingertips. I understand how Zoë, the newcomer, finds the same landscape alien and forbidding. For her, the work she has made so attentively is a way of making sense of tensions between the past and the present. She is coming to terms by highlighting the detail in things.

Her series called *Rose Petal Pins* (2017) takes up the far more familiar domestic reference point of rose petals, and carries it through a series of exchanges. Rich heavy clay soils characterise the gardens in the town of Hobart and many of the suburbs, along with sedimentary sandstones and mudstones, laid down during the Permian Period, some two or three hundred million years ago – give or take. The geology and temperate climate here proved highly favourable for growing roses which flourish here and, since white settlement, many cultivars have been bred. We can understand roses as symbolic of colonialism – the wilful conversion of this place to conform to European standards, and thus read into them a drive for domination over nature. In the colonialising gesture though, we can read nostalgia and trauma, and in the stories of rose

cultivations we can also read many acts of hybridisation as migration, acculturation, mourning and adjustment. The forms of the pins speak partly of rose petals, but are also inscribed by colours and indentations that refer to the patterns and hues of the mountain rock and lichen.

Shaped in brass sections, *Butterfly gathering necklace* (2017, approximately 86 cm long) is a homage to the Ptunarra Brown Butterfly (*Oreixenica ptunarra*). These small brown and orange butterflies are exclusive to Tasmania and dwell in the tussock plains, shrubby and wooded areas in the centre of the Island, in regions above four hundred metres. The Ptunarra Brown is now a threatened species, a casualty of colonialism, as large areas of its habitat are lost to conversion to grazing pasture and plantation. The butterflies are also threatened by predation by the introduced European wasp.³ The *Butterfly gathering necklace* is a lament, also perhaps a stubborn act of faith or a totem to this humble species which, though threatened, still remains.

The threat to a species of perhaps unremarkable brown butterflies has been materialised into a curious piece of jewellery, which strung from its support, behaves sculpturally like a signal or sign of memorial. Were it to be worn, it would be quite imposing, like a mayoral chain. I enjoyed pursuing this line of association to its extreme, and I considered the signification of a *livery collar* as a traditional material means of showing *fealty*, an ancient idea of sworn allegiance. Allegiance implies duties incumbent on a vassal, to provide service and aid. I read this necklace as such a marker of fealty: a committed association with the fragility of natural places and the tremulous chain of lives of butterflies and all species.

Like the butterfly necklace, the set of small copper cylinders and the series of cups or bowls, borrow from ancient physical languages long shaped by jewellers, of loyalty, reverence and homage. The cylinders have been formed according to time-honoured methods: metals rolled through rolling mills, sometimes tempered with heat, then soldered, buffed and polished. Zoë says that prior to soldering a solid form, a tiny hole must be bored to act as a vent, lest gases build up inside. She describes the slow process of filing and sanding whereby the silver solder line reveals itself, and it is clear that she takes great pleasure in disclosing what is hopefully a fine, crisp seam – a mark of origin.

The flecked cylinders, speckled with bright blue highlights, owe their colour to having been steeped for three to four days in a solution of vinegar and ammonia, with woodchips of Celery Top pine. The vinegar and ammonia bites a little, and the woodchips provide the resist.

The vessel forms are darkened by virtue of a chemical blackening process using liver of sulphur added to water. The copper is dunked into the solution. Incrementally, with more dips, the depth of colour can be darkened, though the blush of the copper remains visible through the coating. Chemical processes, which tell old stories of familiarity and mastery with metals and acids, are incomplete and incompletable. These forms are small and they beckon the touch of the hand. The surface markings beg to be traced with a curious fingertip. The surfaces will change with handling. The metals are quite soft, and will collect patina and damage.

The geology of Kunanyi evolved through millions of years of erosive processes, crags of rock falling asunder across great fault lines. These small objects chime with devotional reverence to the greater history of geomorphology, humbly acknowledging that we must assume a small place in this story.

Maria Kunda
October 2017

Dr Maria Kunda lectures in Art and Design Theory at the School of Creative Arts, University of Tasmania.

1. Notes by Zoë Veness, October 2017.
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jan/27/world-heritage-forests-burn-as-global-tragedy-unfolds-in-tasmania>
3. <http://www.threatenedspecieslink.tas.gov.au/pages/ptunarra-brown-butterfly.aspx>



Waiting for tomorrow, 2017
paper, 10ct yellow gold, stainless steel cable
3 metres long



A landscape of our making, 2017
brass and copper
largest vessel ø 5.7 cm, h 3.0 cm



A landscape of our making, 2017
brass and copper
largest vessel ø 5.7 cm, h 3.0 cm



A landscape of our making: rose petal pins, 2017
25 pins, copper, brass, sterling silver
average size 3.0 x 2.6 x 1.0 cm



A landscape of our making, 2017
copper vessel i, ø 5.7 cm, h 3.0 cm
brass vessel i, ø 6.0 cm, h 4.0 cm
copper and brass pins, average size 3.0 x 2.6 x 1.0 cm



Butterfly gathering, 2017
brass
86.0 cm long



Remnants, 2017
brass, sterling silver
87.0 cm long

NEWNESS IN AN OLD WORLD

When is brass not brass? When it becomes anti-brass. A particular mix of zinc and copper. Admiralty brass, alpha brass, beta brass, high brass or naval brass. Brass can be polished and made golden, it can be a new type of fools gold that tricks us into the seduction of luxury. Not to be confused with iron pyrite, the true fools gold. Brass takes us to unstable territory. Nordic gold is brass made up of 89% copper, 5% aluminium, 5% zinc, 1% tin, and used in 10, 20 and 50 cent euro coins. Copper as a numismatic element has been used for eons. Zoë Veness has created irregular metal rose petals, each carefully smithed and then linked together. They have a relationship to ancient coinage.

“In 390BCE the Romans built a shrine to Moneta, the goddess of warning, or of advice, after some noisy geese alerted them to an oncoming attack by the Gauls. It is from Moneta that we derive both ‘money’ and ‘mint’. Among many other Latin influences on our terms related to coinage are copper and brass.”¹

The use of the rose symbolism is a stand in for the coloniser. The English rose as a living tribute to the foundational colonial roots of modern Hobart. Its cultivation created as a geographic boundary marker for the utopian annex of England. The rose symbolism can be seen as simultaneously acknowledging the past and their fragmentation as petals that are still anchored together, presents them as a state of currency. It is the native fauna surrounding the built environment and only a few kilometres away is a natural wilderness to reminds us of nature's threat.

The British made Van Dieman's Land a hard place, the name was changed to Tasmania in 1856. A key penal outpost that today still tussles with this dark heritage; one of criminality, European settlement and Aboriginal genocide.² Tasmania is now rapidly evolving, constantly looking to recreate itself with contemporary relevancy. As the only island state in Australia, it wants to stand apart.

Zoë heats and plunges her brass into cold water, into hot water. Each alchemical process defies its precision and renders it helpless, its quenching reveals an unruly substance whose qualities defy predictability and perfection. It's contrary to the metallurgical promise offered by its molecules.

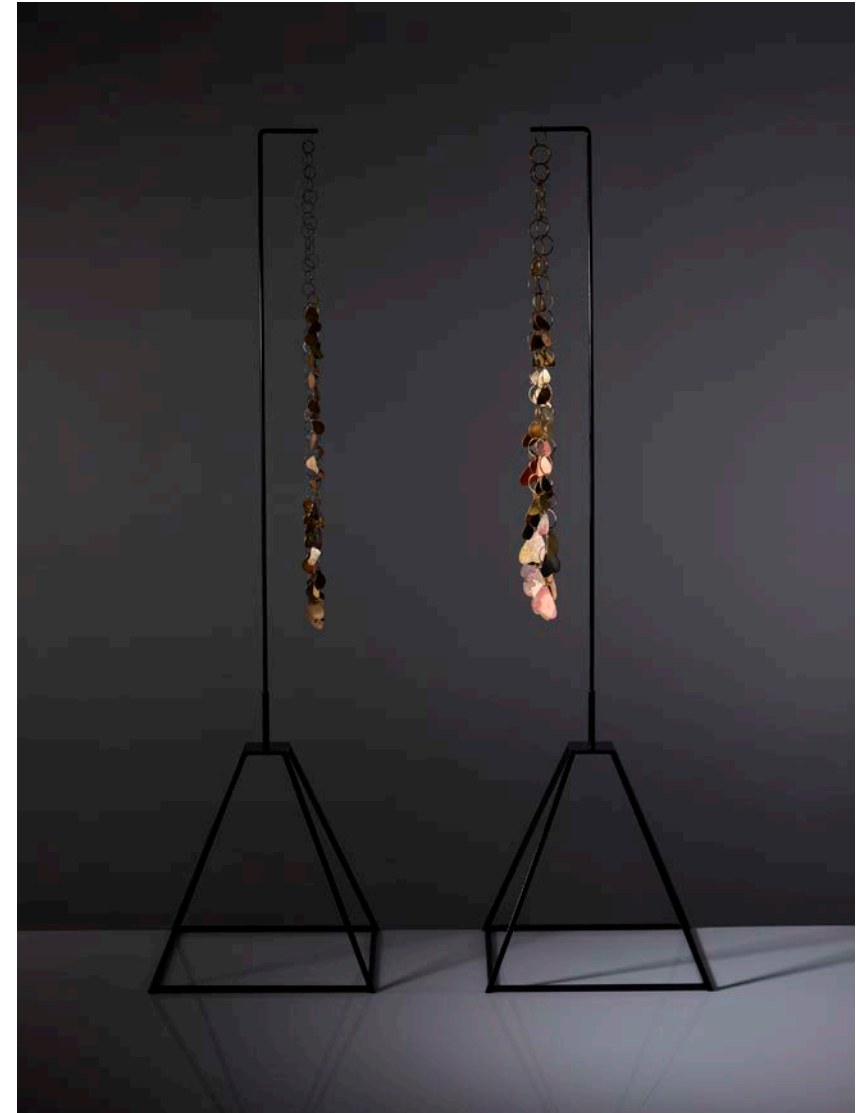
“An interregnum is an era when an established power system ends, the symbols of authority are challenged by the new order and there is a horizon that has not yet imposed its laws.”³

For Zoë, an interregnum emerges in her work, one of materiality; between old and new, stability and liquidity, between metal and paper. The crafted pieces expose a multi layered tension that juxtaposes the uncertainty of stable materials against her confidence in the working of their materiality as objects of beauty.

Yiorgos Zafiriou
October 2017

Yiorgos Zafiriou is a visual artist and PhD candidate at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney.

1. Davies, Glyn and Connors, Duncan (2016) *The History of Money: from ancient times to the present day*. University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 133.
2. Lawson, Tom (2014) *The last man: A British genocide in Tasmania*. I.B Tauris, 30.
3. Bordoni, Carlo (2016) *Interregnum: Beyond Liquid Modernity*. Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 9.



BIOGRAPHY

Born 1973, Sydney

Currently lives and works in Hobart

Zoë Veness is a contemporary jeweller and craft artist with interests in body-object relations particularly the transitional space between wearable and autonomous forms.

STUDIES

- 2014 University of New South Wales, Art & Design, Sydney, Australia
Doctorate of Philosophy
- 2004 University of New South Wales, Art & Design, Sydney, Australia
Master of Design (Research)
- 1998 University of New South Wales, Art & Design, Sydney, Australia
Bachelor of Design
- 1991 Australian Ballet School, Melbourne
Diploma of Dance

GRANTS, AWARDS & RESIDENCIES

- 2017 Australia Council, Arts Project Grant
- 2012 UNSW Postgraduate Research Student Support Travel Grant
- 2011 Australian Postgraduate Award
- 2011 UNSW Art & Design Top Up Scholarship
- 2010 Artist-in-Residence, Arthur Boyd Bundanon Trust, West Cambewarra, NSW, Australia
- 2006 Australia Council, Visual Arts Development Grant
- 2006 Artist-in-Residence, Edinburgh College of Art, Scotland
- 2005 Craft-in-Site Grant, Australian Design Centre (formerly Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design)
- 2004 Category winner, National Contemporary Jewellery Award, Griffith Regional Art Gallery, NSW Australia
- 2003 Postgraduate Research Grant, UNSW Art & Design
- 2002 Australia Council, Visual Arts Development Grant

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *New Terrain in an Old World*, Craft ACT: Craft and Design Centre, Canberra, Australia
- 2015 *Autonomous Jewellery*, Studio 20/17 Contemporary Jewellery, Sydney, Australia
- 2014 *To make an end is to make a beginning*, AD Space, UNSW Art & Design, Sydney, Australia

- 2009 *The Infinite Fold*, Jam Factory Contemporary Craft and Design, Adelaide, Australia
- 2008 *Transformations*, Masterworks Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand
- 2007 *Mathematical Beauty*, Project Space, Australian Design Centre, Sydney, Australia
- 2006 *In Between Grey*, e.g.etal, Melbourne, Australia
- 2005 *Alchemical Analogies II*, Shoalhaven City Arts Centre, Nowra, NSW, Australia
- 2005 *1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8... Two Cubed*, Sherman Galleries, Sydney, Australia
- 2004 *Alchemical Analogies*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, Australia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *The Posterzine Project* curated with Sarah Jones, Radiant Pavilion: Melbourne Contemporary Jewellery and Object Trail, Studio Ingot, Melbourne, Australia
- 2017 *Urban A-Wear-Ness*, Radiant Pavilion: Melbourne Contemporary Jewellery and Object Trail, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia
- 2017 *Remanence*, Ten Days on the Island, Domain House, Hobart, Australia
- 2016 *National Contemporary Jewellery Award*, Griffith Regional Art Gallery, NSW, Australia
- 2015 *Under Fire*, International Online Exhibition, Enamel Guild North East, USA
- 2015 *ITAMI International Jewellery Exhibition*, Museum of Arts & Crafts, Itami, Japan
- 2011 *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor*, Gallery Artisan, Brisbane, national tour till 2014
- 2010 *Excessory - Contemporary Australian Jewellery*, Museums & Galleries NSW, national tour till 2011
- 2008 *Fossik Australian Made*, London Design Festival, London, United Kingdom
- 2008 *The Blue Room*, The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom
- 2008 *Outside In, Regional Jewellery Artists*, New Land Gallery, Adelaide and national tour
- 2007 *Contemporary Wearables '07*, Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery, QLD, Australia
- 2007 *Spinning Straw*, Masterworks Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand
- 2007 *Catch on 2*, organised by Zu Design, Korean Trade Fair, Seoul, Korea
- 2007 *50 brooches*, Craft Queensland Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
- 2006 *City of Hobart Art Prize*, Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, Hobart, Australia
- 2004 *Metal Element Seven*, Quadrivium, Sydney, Australia
- 2004 *Design Down Under*, South Shore Art Center, Bancroft Gallery, Boston, USA
- 2002 *Metamorphosis, Emerging Sydney*, Glasgow School of Art, Scotland, United Kingdom
- 2002 *Simply Hers*, Chateau D'Arts Gallery, Singapore
- 2002 *City of Hobart Art Prize*, Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, Hobart, Australia
- 2002 *Talente*, International Trade Fair, Munich, Germany
- 2001 *Contemporary Wearables*, Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery, QLD, Australia

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- 2013 The National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
2007 The Rhianon Vernon-Roberts Memorial Collection, Art Gallery of South Australia
2004 Griffith Regional Art Gallery, NSW Australia
2003 Decorative Arts Collection, Art Gallery of South Australia

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- 2015 Ewington, Julie. 'Wearing it Lightly.' *Autonomous Jewellery*. Exh. Cat. Sydney: Zoë Veness.
2015 *ITAMI International Jewellery Exhibition*. Exh. Cat. Itami, Japan: Museum of Arts & Crafts.
2011 *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor*. Brisbane: Artisan. First Edition. (Second Edition, 2012).
2010 Veness, Zoe Jay. Interview. *Excessory – Contemporary Australian Jewellery*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOk1yh--yZc> (uploaded August 12, 2010).
2010 *Excessory – Contemporary Australian Jewellery*. Exh. Cat. Sydney: Museum & Galleries NSW.
2009 Clement, Tracey. 'More than metal & gems.' *Driven Magazine* no. 3 pp. 18-23.
2009 Litson, Jo. 'Craft Masters in demand for Munich.' *The Australian*, 15 March, p. 19.
2009 Sheen, Rani. 'Code Poet.' *Silverlimbo online magazine*. Issue 2, pp. 79-82.
<https://issuu.com/silverlimbo/docs/silverlimbo2/79> (published March 8, 2010).
2007 *Catch On 2*. Exh. Cat. Adelaide: Zu Design.
2007 *Contemporary Wearables '07*. Exh. Cat. Toowoomba: Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery.
2007 *Curio: A Contemporary Jewellery Exhibition*. Exh. Cat. Brisbane: Redland Art Gallery.
2007 Farmer, Margaret. 'The Beautiful Alchemist.' *COFA Magazine* no. 19, p. 38.
2007 *Integration: The Nature of Objects*. Exh. Cat. Sydney: Ivan Dougherty Gallery.
2006 *City of Hobart Art Prize 2006 Jewellery/Printmaking*. Exh. Cat. Tasmania: Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery.
2006 LeVan, Marthe. (ed). *The Art of Paper Jewelry*. NY: Lark Books.
2004 Osborne, Margot. 'Zoe Veness: Beauty and Alchemy.' *COFA Magazine* no. 10, p. 12.
2003 Cunningham, Jack. 'Metamorphosis – Emerging Sydney.' *Crafts Arts International* no. 59, p. 107.
2002 *Talente 2002*. Exh. Cat. Munich: Bayerischer Handwerkstag e. V., p. 109.

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Zoë Veness
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craft + design centre

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