

Wayfaring through jewellery practice

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Work, skill and material production at a time of human and environmental calamity

University of Technology, Gadigal/Sydney

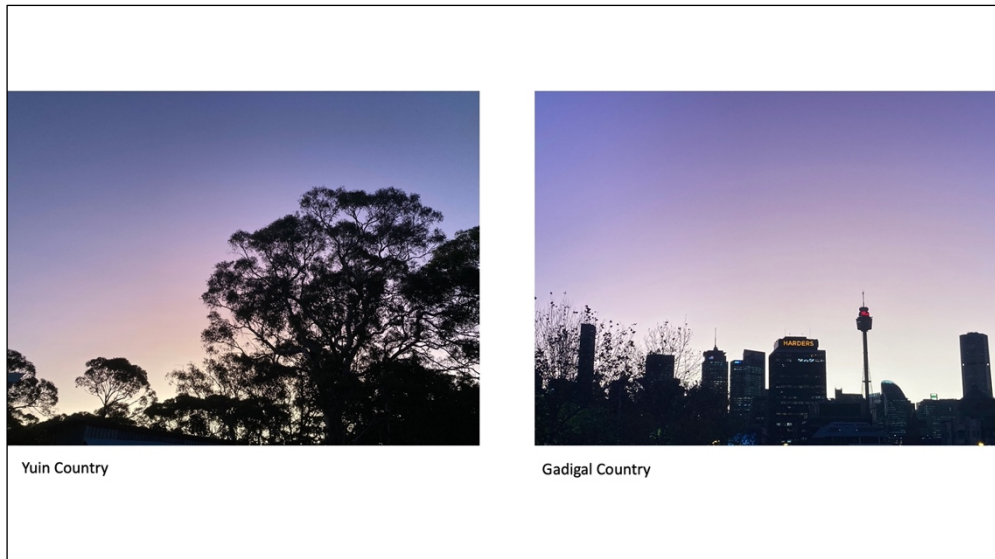
19-21 July 2023

Designing and Making in Times of Crisis

Day 1 Session 4

19 July 2023, 3.15-5.00pm

Slide 1:



I would like to begin by acknowledging the Gadigal people of the Eora nation as the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which I speak today. I'd also like to acknowledge the Yuin people as the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which I work in my home studio 3 hours south of Sydney. I pay my respect to elders past and present and extend this respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are attending this session.

I am a maker of jewellery and vessel objects with a practice that moves between two paths of material enquiry, one that focuses on paper and the other on metal. Both approaches to making are equally valued in my practice for providing the opportunity to explore different ideas and forms. But in this presentation, I discuss the idea of wayfaring in relation to my metalwork, in relation to the use of silver, copper, brass and occasionally gold.

Essentially, we are all wayfarers finding our way through the world along lines of becoming. I think about this often during my travels through the south coast landscape. But wayfaring provides a way of thinking about making that aligns movement, materiality and place within an ethical practice of care.

In *Being Alive, Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (2011) Tim Ingold describes wayfaring as 'the embodied experience of [...] perambulatory movement' (p. 148). For making, this suggests a slower pace

involving time to notice, observe, reflect, negotiate, and improvise along paths that one follows or forges anew. I'm also interested in the relational and processual lines of enquiry wayfaring affords. Despite working in isolation in my studio, by engaging with the flows and resistances of materials I connect with histories of making, geological and material time, and places both strange and familiar.

I briefly examine relational and processual dimensions through notions of place, materiality and making by referring to selected works from two solo exhibitions - *New Terrain in an Old World* which was held at Craft ACT in Canberra in 2017 and *The Stream of Time* which was presented at Woollahra Gallery last year, here in Sydney.

Slide 2:



I first responded to place in my practice during a residency in Edinburgh as an emerging artist many years ago now. Using photography, I recorded my journeys through the Old Town of Edinburgh by focusing on the cobblestone pathways which became the inspiration for creating jewellery. I recall during this time, as I traced the streets of Old Town, not really knowing what I was looking for. It was only after seeing the photographs that a creative direction emerged. This process of knowingly following the unknown is a photographic approach I have continued to explore in my analysis and documentation of a place.

Slide 3:



The use of photography to document place in relation to jewellery practice was inspired by the German-based Australian artist Helen Britton who often creates jewellery in direct response to photographs of urban and natural environments encountered during her everyday. In one of her books titled *Jewellery Life* from 2010 Britton writes about photography as a 'foundation stone' in her work (Britton 2010, p. 7). She continues,

'Snap shots from a plethora of daily impressions [...] the supermarket, the half assembled fair ground, the chunks of roller coaster, the building site, images of the places I visit, my native environment, visual references from my shifting and multifaceted life.' (Britton 2010, p. 7).

Slide 4:



My use of photography is a 'noticing strategy' (Forrest 2016, p. 194) to ongoingly understand place. Like Britton these can be everyday encounters with place or places that I seek out, places that are either new to me or familiar.

New Terrain in an Old World developed in response to kunanyi, also known as Mount Wellington, a place of deep time in nipaluna/Hobart. While working at the University of Tasmania in 2016 I ventured to the summit of the mountain one Spring day and stood with my back to the car park to look across a seemingly endless stretch to the west of alpine terrain like nothing I had seen before. Over consecutive visits I documented the dolerite rock surfaces, eventually selecting four photographs as a source of inspiration for new work. Like Britton's juxtaposition of photograph and jewellery object in her books, I exhibited these four photographs of the lichen covered dolerite with my metal work in the exhibition.

The Stream of Time responded to recollections from my childhood of travelling with my father and siblings from where we lived in Paddington to the harbourside pool of Redleaf near Woollahra Gallery. A journey and place of familiarity and personal resonance. In 2021 I re-traced the journey reconnecting with landmarks along the way.

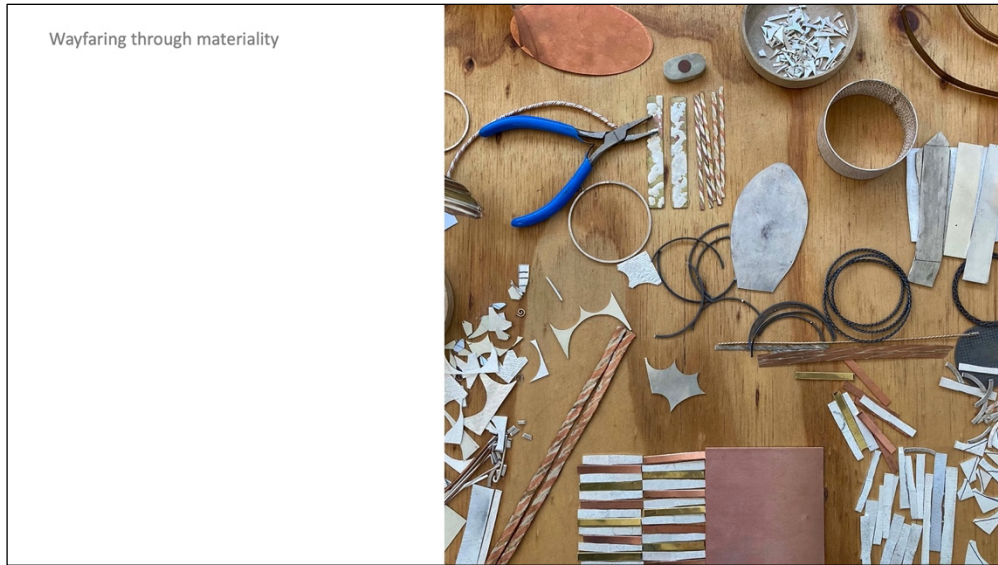
In his essay 'Mobility and Proximity' (2002) British sociologist John Urry explores the notion of facing-the-place (in relation to face-to-face, a form of proximity in modes of communication that has significantly shifted). To touch a place is to directly engage with 'nodes of circulating stories' (Urry 2002, p. 261). By physically visiting places and recording the experience, geographical, cultural and personal narratives begin to open up.

I initially photograph a place from multiple perspectives to include close-up details of surface textures and expansive views of wide stretches of the landscape. Only afterwards while viewing and editing the photographic series do I see what I am looking for. This process of searching and selecting takes time.

I adopt a similar 'noticing strategy' when working with metal processes that are regularly employed in my practice but often require interpretative steps to resolve. I therefore wayfare through images and materials,

criss-crossing along lines of thought and action, intuitively and gradually attuning my skills and knowledge of the world.

Slide 5:



‘Making something’ Ingold writes in his essay ‘An Ecology of Materials’ (2014) ‘is a mode of questioning, in which the maker puts a question to the material, and the material answers it; the maker puts another question, the material answers again, and so on.’ (Ingold 2014, p. 64). This dialogue between maker and materials Ingold describes as ‘correspondence’ or ‘mutual responsiveness’ (Ingold 2014, p. 64) signalling a shift in language from my student days when terms like manipulating and exploiting metals were common to hear.

For *The Stream of Time* exhibition, I decided to re-purpose metals that I already had in my studio, so I pulled apart old work and emptied out my drawers of teaching samples. I gathered the off cuts left over from previous projects and experiments that had been stashed away in containers. I lay them out on my worktable, cut them up into smaller sections, moved the pieces around like a jig-saw puzzle searching for potential patterns and then soldered them together to re-create sheet metal.

Slide 6:



I soon realised that I was employing a laminating method in which ‘metals and alloys of different compositions [...] are combined’ (Untracht 1982, p. 365).

Referring to photographs from my walks through Paddington, this layering effect in which the past is pieced together anew, was reminiscent of topographical or cross-sectional views of the land. Like my photographic approach, these laminating experiments were guided by intuition rather than a hylomorphic, pre-determined outcome - a seeking outward from within the process of ethical, material, and visual enquiry.

Ingold teaches us to correspond with materials by working with material flows and forces. '...[M]aterials don't really exist' writes Ingold, 'rather they carry on, or perdure, through time.' (Ingold 2014, p. 63).

Slide 7:



The Stream of Time
Vessel lids after soldering

This is certainly true of metal. I am frequently reminded of how metal perdures through time as I watch silver or copper change colour under the heat of my torch. On many occasions I photograph the effects after heating the metal knowing the moment is fleeting. Colours such as these are never stable when left untreated and even with the use of waxes to seal the surface, surfaces continue to transform.

Surfaces oxidise in reaction to the atmosphere, the 'weatherworld' (Ingold 2008) to use an Ingold term, and efforts to prevent this from happening, to suspend the patina of time is a fraught business. Polished brass dulls and stains over time, bright silver turns black with tarnish and luminous pinks and reds from heating copper tend to dull over time.

Slide 8:



Koji Hatakeyama Four Faces III 2022

This gradual process of perduring transformation is revered by Japanese metalsmith Koji Hatakeyama who harnesses the unpredictability of patina in a finely balanced interaction or correspondence between maker and material. Describing bronze as a material with 'memories of a thousand years' (Jansen 2018) Hatakeyama creates lidded vessels using bronze casting methods which are buried in sand soaked with vinegars and left for months to create colouring effects that echo the mountainous terrain of the area where he lives in Japan. Hatakeyama has skilfully learned how to work with this element of the unknown to produce sublime surfaces.

Slide 9:



A predominant form across the two exhibitions is the cylindrical vessel, a form that signals potential space, a holding space infused with anticipation.

In the first series for *New Terrain in an Old World*, I played with assembling vessel forms to echo the dolerite terrain of kunanyi and different texturing and finishing methods with roller printed and patinaed surfaces.

Slide 10:



In the second vessel series for *The Stream of Time* I introduced a lid to fully enclose the interior space and viewed the vessels like footsteps with each form exploring new possibilities with laminating techniques. The

work is iterative, evoking Ingold's mode of questioning or 'mutual responsiveness' that I referred to earlier. Each vessel is therefore unique as lessons learned are applied to future forms.

In *Material Perceptions* (Documents on Contemporary Crafts No. 5 2018), Swedish silversmith Anders Ljungberg includes a brief paragraph about the vessel in his essay titled 'An Emotional Perspective on Everyday Use' that caught my eye when thinking about the notion of the vessel. Ljungberg writes, 'The vessel holds its contents in a motionless anticipation of the next stage. In this anticipation, the contents of the vessel are charged with an energy that also characterises the vessel as it prepares itself for the next phase when it will leave its place and continue the journey toward the next stopping point.' (Ljungberg 2018, p. 134).

Interestingly when developing the vessel series, the contents they could hold was not something I considered. But this statement by Ljungberg addresses the intersecting paths symbolised by the vessel and its contents, the space within therefore signifying John Urry's 'node of circulating stories' (2002, p. 261.) in relation to his ideas about mobility and proximity.

Through making I test my own limits of understanding and tolerance, recognising how to follow the ways of the material. It has been a long journey of learning and even still a comprehensive grasp of the limits of metal's materiality is unlikely in my lifetime. But the idea of wayfaring reminds me to be patient, to pay attention to material use, and to care about and value the making process as an ongoing, unfolding path of material enquiry.

Slide 11:



Slides

Slide 1: Right image: Yuin Country, Callala Beach NSW Australia. Left image: Gadigal Country, Sydney NSW Australia. Images by Z. Veness.

Slide 2: Edinburgh Cobblestones 2006. Brooch, paper, sterling silver, stainless steel cable, 2006. From solo exhibition *Mathematical Beauty* at the Australian Design Centre (formerly Object), Gadigal/Sydney, Australia. 11 Nov 2006 -7 January 2007. Images by Z. Veness.

Slide 3: Helen Britton (2004) *Second Nature*. Perth, Australia: FORM Contemporary Craft and Design.

Slide 4: kunanyi/Mount Wellington in nipaluna/Hobart, Tasmania and Gadigal land at Paddington, Gadigal/Sydney. Images by Z. Veness.

Slide 5: Works in progress. Image by Z. Veness.

Slide 6: The making of a pendant from solo exhibition The Stream of Time 2022. Remnants from previous works and test samples in copper, sterling silver, gold. Image by Z. Veness.

Slide 7: Examples of vessel lids in various stages of making from The Stream of Time 2022. Image by Z. Veness.

Slide 8: Koji Hatakeyama Four Faces III, 2022. <https://scottish-gallery.co.uk/product/four-faces-iii/> Accessed 18 November 2022.

Slide 9: Vessels from New Terrain in an Old World 2017. Copper, brass, various patina finishes. From solo exhibition at Craft + Design Canberra. Image by Peter Whyte Photography.

Slide 10: Vessels from The Stream of Time 2022. Copper, brass, sterling silver, gold, various patina finishes. From solo exhibition at Woollahra Gallery, Gadigal/Sydney. Image by Stuart Humphreys.

Slide 11: Vessels from New Terrain in an Old World 2017. Copper, brass, various patina finishes. Image by Peter Whyte Photography.

References

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