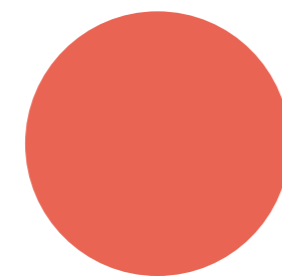
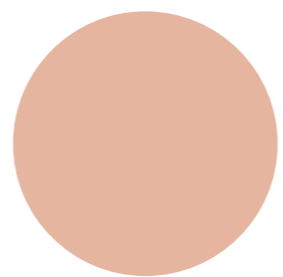


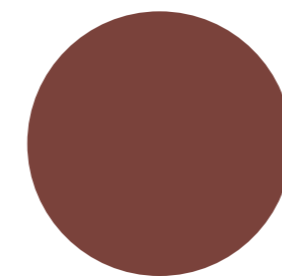
**Ben
Pearce**



**Victoria
McIntosh**



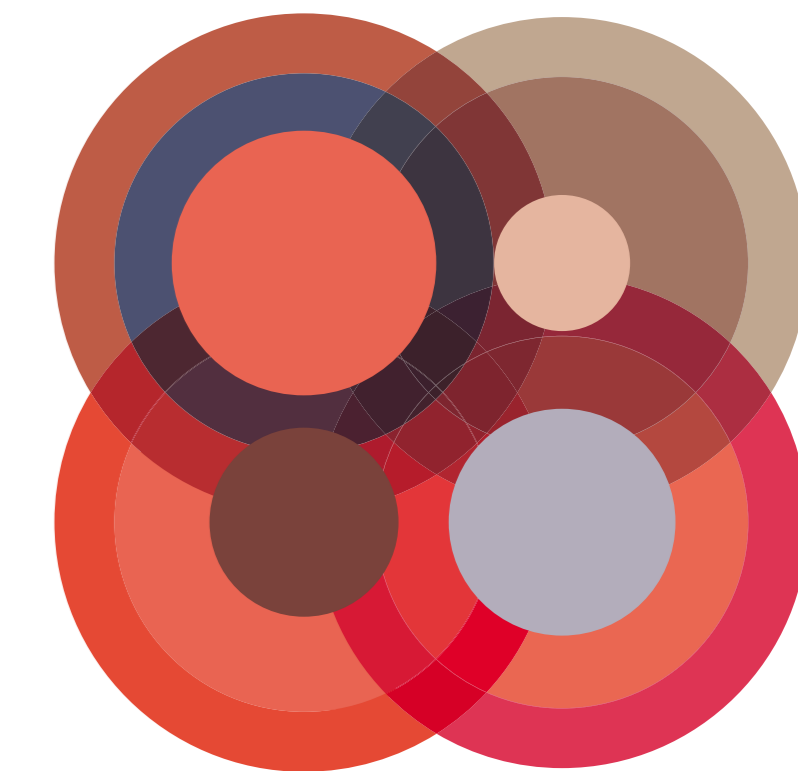
**Blue
Black**



**Renee
Bevan**

in from the garden

An exhibition of
establishing makers
June 06.09 – July 18.09



object
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Half the interest of a garden is the constant exercise of the imagination. You are always living three, or indeed six, months hence. I believe that people entirely devoid of imagination never can be really good gardeners. To be content with the present, and not striving about the future, is fatal. — Alice Morse Earle (1897)

In from the Garden
Matt Blomeley
Curator
May 28.09

1. <http://www.objectspace.org.nz/programme/works.php?documentCode=696> (26 May 2009)
 2. A fine arts technique where imagery, or an object, is borrowed or reused to make a new work; often containing a different message than intended by the original author.
 3. Jenkins, Douglas Lloyd, Volume: After The Makeover, keynote presentation, "Volume" symposium, Hawkes Bay Museum and Art Gallery, Napier, 18 October 2008, http://www.hbmag.co.nz/item/volume_djl.pdf (26 May 2009). Jenkins' notes that this emphasis on degree credentials at the expense

of skills is not limited to New Zealand and he quotes Jane Jacobs, who has cited a similar concern within the diploma system in Canadian community colleges.

Twentieth century German conceptual artist Joseph Beuys famously proclaimed "every man is an artist" and it seems that we have built upon this notion to include craft practice. It is perhaps easy to utilise Beuys' statement as a truism for considering all creative practice as equivalent but the realities are much different. For the majority of us, one reminder from our time spent making is the sobering discovery that the vision and skills necessary to realize a well crafted object readily identifies the *amateur* from the *auteur*.

Art, including craft is a barometer of the times, and as Alice Morse Earle observed, notable practice always looks to the future. Gleaning information about the practices of a new generation of contemporary craft artists, *In from the Garden* showcases four currently establishing makers who clearly have strived for the future, both creatively and professionally. These exhibitors, since emerging from their respective New Zealand tertiary arts programmes during the last half decade, have between them exhibited nationally and internationally, entering and winning awards and demonstrating capabilities as makers of artistically attuned craft.

There is a certain period in a creative practice where a maker has attained that fine balance between exhibiting and selling work, making a living and having time in the studio: i.e. the realities of professional creative practice. During this period, where there is often much more to achieve, there is a sense that an epochal work could be just around the corner. Objectspace has observed the opportunities and difficulties makers can encounter in establishing practices. With this in mind, *In from the Garden* is intended to look closer at four makers from around New Zealand who, currently at this period of their respective careers, are staying the course and readying to settle in for the long haul.

A new series of work by jeweller Renee Bevan goes by the boldly self-explanatory title, *Blooming Big Brooches* (2008-9). One can confidently claim that Bevan is currently obsessed with flowers. Bevan recalls, "I have long been fascinated with the pre-packaged emotive power of flowers; specifically the rose. Its manufactured sentimentality, vast symbolism and long-standing history in jewellery and adornment; the rose has a unique ability to speak of love, life and death all at the same time. Transforming imagery and materials already entrenched with an abundance of history and meaning I exaggerate and play on their existing connotations and suggestions."

These brooches engage in a distinctive new conversation for Bevan regarding dimension, subject and adornment. Earlier in her career, Bevan was fascinated by pre-existing jewellery. A series of work entitled *Lost and Found* (2005) resulted from casting new works in precious metals as direct impressions from mass produced jewellery.¹

This time around, Bevan has borrowed generic images of roses, the kind of images which proliferated in 1960s and '70s gardening related publications. In these new works, the rose image is détourned,² cut-and-pasted to become sections of petals on successive layers of wood. The resulting brooches are kind of clunky yet elegant and not entirely disposed of their former glory.

Ceramic artist Blue Black is engaged in a practice which emerges from "an organized and ordered place to disorderly, freeplay chaos and back to organizing what happened." Embodying these words, Black's works arrive from the kiln as perlocutionary statements after this energetic and performative process as variously charred, colourful, grotesque and ultimately striking objects.

Blue Black's work is refreshing at a time when it often seems every aspect of the craft process is over-investigated for relevance in order to be vindicated, sometimes stifling free expression. Black tackles expressive processes with relish explaining that "while my imaginings take a back seat the physical pleasure of the actions of making is the focus... My priority is finding my own rhythm and being swept along in the sensations of the body and materials, as if it is a performance."

Through the study of expression, Black's research forms an organic part of ceramic practice. Pushing clay around freely is championed and thus allowed to inform the artist's thinking about modernist concepts like the sublime and the subconscious as something "produced from automatic emotional responses of the artist which can be perceived by the viewer."

In Harm's Way? (2008) is a central work for Jeweller Victoria McIntosh, who presents this installation with the quote, "Primum non Nocere - First do no harm." A maker of finely crafted individual works and installations, McIntosh's work often seems to poke at the vagaries of how we each relate to objects and in the process of doing so emotionally attach ourselves to them, using this emotional resonance to draw meaning and define our notions of individual identity.

A provocation is deliberately set-up and 'emotionally fractured' in *In Harm's Way?* by McIntosh. A collection of found and hand altered finely crafted objects are subjected to the notion of separation – a central idea in McIntosh's practice, as an adoptee. In this work a framed found image depicts metaphorically separating the two intimate subjects, is installed beside a matching frame containing various objects. The words *Nature* and *Nurture* are finely embroidered onto the labels of two vintage lace collars, subtly embodying the dichotomy that may come to bear if we are separated from our genetic past.

Echoing Alice Morse Earle's observation, McIntosh is concerned with the future, as she observes, "science moves us further away from the tried and tested methods of conception – I am left wondering the impact this will have on future generations. The concerns I have stem from my experience growing up as an adoptee without access or knowledge of my own genetic origins. This piece is a response to the new reproductive technologies and the ethical questions they raise for society as a whole."

Ben Pearce's practice illustrates the value of tinkering around in the studio with conceptual ideas and technical craft skills ready to be freely deployed. Pearce's objects are predominantly of wood, which is minutely crafted and skillfully combines locally found objects and machine parts.

Pearce is inspired by memory and childhood. For Pearce childhood is a metaphor for the act of looking at something potentially unknown, as an adult. A recent work, *28 Various Preservations* (2009) delved into this idea in depth, with Pearce noting "28 actual memories may be recalled and visited here, just one small section of a vast inter-related

city. A City of desperation and adaptation, the forms are not eloquent or fancy, they take on a tree hut feel, that of ingenuity, as if constructed simply to perform a basic function of protection."

Similar in some respects to Victoria McIntosh, Pearce is also interested in family history and genealogy but from a more general perspective. A recent work, *Grandfather Clock* (2009) "presents a window into the idea about the connections that we make and construct around an ancestor un-met. The pieced together nature of information that in-stills in us a type of familiarity of them, we wish to meet them face to face, stand in their air and time."

The makers in *In from the Garden* emerged from educational programmes developed in the 1980s for an art sector which has evolved since then. A number of New Zealand tertiary institutions have expressed a reinvigorated level of enthusiasm towards craft in the two ensuing decades. This is in no small part due to the successes of a select group of New Zealand craft-aligned artists gaining international recognition. Some of these makers trained in the above programmes, along with mid-career makers who emerged earlier.

Accommodating for and building upon the interest in a small but vital and expanding field like contemporary craft requires not only innovative ideas but also forward thinking at an educational level. Despite certain regional strengths within disciplines of craft education, care is needed to develop and ensure existing programmes stay relevant. The perceived strength of craft programmes is on one level the opportunity for students to acquire craft skills and on another level the opportunity to refine their critical (fine art) acumen: there is often an issue with the balancing of these two dimensions.³

The four makers in this exhibition have established a strong case for the continued valuing of craft skill. Without a place to learn these skills, aspiring makers in craft disciplines have limited options outside of established community-based societies. It is a concern for many that some institutions are moving towards combined art and design programmes, where the balance between theory and practice does not address the distinctive nature of craft practice and the needs of emerging practitioners.

The context for making contemporary craft and art is an intimate occasion, drawing upon makers wants, needs and concerns and it is a natural conclusion that these makers are often drawn to the deepest recesses of their imagination. These unique vantage points are a rich source for rewarding and enlightening projects. Helping to redefine the parameters of contemporary craft and fine art practice, the makers featuring in *In from the Garden* demonstrate that they are "striving about the future".

Salmon, blush, gold 2008–9

Walnut, glue, image, polyurethane, resin, oxidised silver, stainless steel wire
 Courtesy of the artist

Renee Bevan graduated Bachelor of Visual Arts at The University of Auckland in 2002, majoring in jewellery at Manukau Institute of Technology.

Ellipsis 2008

Ceramic
 Courtesy of the artist

Blue Black graduated Bachelor of Fine Arts at Otago Polytechnic School of Art in 2005, majoring in ceramics.

In Harm's Way? 2008

Found objects
 Courtesy of the artist

Victoria McIntosh graduated Bachelor of Fine Arts at Otago Polytechnic School of Art in 2005, majoring in jewellery and metalsmithing.

Alone Home No. 2 2009

English Beech, English Walnut, Cotton
 Courtesy of the artist
 (photo Peter Tang)

Ben Pearce graduated Bachelor of Visual Arts at Ucol Quay School of Arts, Wanganui, in 2003 majoring in sculpture.
www.benpearce.co.nz

