LISA WALKER

A Children’s Guide

IT’S OK THAT MY WORK DOESN’T ALWAYS MAKE OBVIOUS SENSE AS JEWELLERY

GOOD ART IS AS POWERFUL AS NATURE

BY ISAAC DU TOIT & MEGAN DU TOIT
Jewellery: decorative objects worn on your clothes or body that are usually made from valuable metals, such as gold and silver, and precious stones.

Lisa Walker’s jewellery challenges the narrow definition of jewellery (like the one above).

Instead of using precious metals or valuable gemstones, she often re-uses discarded objects and uses other non-precious materials like fabric, paper, plastic, glue and blobs of paint.

The necklace (pictured right) is made of plastic tape, tape reels and some kind of ribbon. It’s not intricate nor particularly well crafted but, nonetheless, it is instantly recognisable as a necklace.

"It's ok that my work doesn't make obvious sense as jewellery" - Lisa Walker

The Te Papa exhibition I Want To Go To My Bedroom But I Can't Be Bothered charts Lisa Walker's 30 year exploration of what "jewellery" is or can be.

Lisa Walker's early work more closely resembles what we would expect traditional jewellery to look like - made of silver, finely crafted, small, easy-to-wear, decorative and intricate.
Human beings have been adorning themselves with jewellery for thousands of years. Jewellery made from shells, stone and bones survives from prehistoric times. Perforated pea-sized snail shells used as beads dating back 75,000 years have been unearthed in a cave, named Blombos, on the coast of South Africa.

Beyond their use for self adornment jewellery often had cultural significance. It could indicate an individual's wealth, power and their standing in society.

Jewellery from the tomb of Thutmose III's (1479 BC to 1425 BC) three foreign (Syrian) wives, Menhet, Menwi and Merti, found at Wady Gabbanat el-Qurud (Egypt).

It could be a talisman. A talisman is an object that someone believes holds magical properties that bring good luck to the possessor or protect the possessor from evil or harm.

There are superstitions associated with many gemstones and gemstones were (and still are by some) accredited with healing powers.

Agate: At one time, this stone was believed to confer the power of invisibility on its owner and to turn enemies' swords against themselves. The stone offered protection against the Evil Eye and storms, plus granted its wearer an eloquent tongue. Agate was said to cure fever and poisonous bites and stings, improve eyesight, promote fertility, and make its wearer lucky in love and athletic competitions.

A modern day equivalent might be the amber teething necklaces that have become increasingly popular in the last few years. Despite the lack of hard scientific evidence to support the claim that children are calmer, cry less and generally experience less discomfort when wearing an amber bead necklace while teething, many infants in New Zealand can be seen wearing them.
Most necklaces made of pounamu in New Zealand are carved and polished. However, Lisa Walker has assembled sharp edged pieces that look like off-cuts from an industrial process for her necklace (pictured right). The necklace, like many of Lisa Walker’s ‘pendants’, fastens with a similar cord and toggle system you might find on a traditional hei tiki, though uses modern materials. Maybe this is Lisa Walker’s way of paying homage to her New Zealand roots whilst avoiding the cultural appropriation of Māori taonga?

Lisa Walker was based in Germany from 1995 to 2009 and perhaps she was feeling homesick for this part of the world when she made the necklace (pictured right) for a friend who was getting married as it has a very ‘Pacific’ feel to it despite being made with very modern materials like plastic and glue.

This piece is unusual for her in that it’s "rare for her to make a piece with a person in mind and an event in mind."

Pounamu (jade) is a material that has a very ‘kiwi’ feel. However, jade has been used as a precious material historically by many different cultures particularly in what is now modern-day China, India, Korea and South-East Asia.

"I need to make my work back in New Zealand again. I need to live there again." - Lisa Walker

Our ancestors valued pounamu for its beauty and for its quality of holding fine hard edges. It's still an important resource, sought after by craftspeople and lapidary artists as a precious gem for personal ornaments and sculptural works.

Maori artisans fashioned pounamu into personal ornaments such as hei tiki (neck pendants), kuru and kapeu (ear pendants), mere pounamu (greenstone weapons), and toki (adzes).

from Taonga Māori at Te Papa: Pounamu (Te Papa Website)

This mecwe (necklace of jade beads) was made by the Kanak people of New Caledonia. Just as the Māori used pounamu, so the Kanaks used their jade for utilitarian and ceremonial axe blades and personal adornments. In the early 19th century, jade necklaces were amongst the most highly valued of Kanak possessions and were the exclusive property of the wives of chiefs.
Does jewellery need to be made from expensive materials in order to be precious or valuable?


Lisa Walker is interested in how the act of wearing can change or transform things. She assembled the necklace "What Karl didn't take with him" (pictured left) from things left in the bottom of a drawer by her husband when they were preparing to move back to New Zealand. She often uses discarded objects or interesting materials not usually associated with jewellery-making in her work.

Throughout history, jewellery has been used to display the wealth and status of the wearer. Certainly many definitions of jewellery focus on this i.e. that valuable jewellery is made of precious materials.

"I worked with some materials from the rubbish bin in my workshop" - Lisa Walker

In 2018, the mobile phone you own or laptop you carry around is likely to cost as much, or more, than any piece of jewellery you will buy in your lifetime. The old mobile phones used to make some of Lisa Walker’s necklaces look dated now but were once valuable covetable objects. The latest model iPhone doesn’t text or call people any better than any other 'smart' phone but it might signal to others your higher status or greater wealth (given that you can afford the latest model phone).
As the quote (right) illustrates, traditionally, the use of glue by a jeweller would devalue the worth of any piece of jewellery or is a "total taboo". Lisa Walker, however, often uses glue and she doesn't try to hide it. The glue is often visible to the eye as in the necklace made with mussel shells pictured above. Sometimes the glue itself is a primary material that the piece is made of, as in the necklace pictured on the next page with the yellow thread, freshwater pearls and glue.

"Just because it's jewellery it doesn't mean we have to clam up and be well behaved."

- Lisa Walker
Lisa Walker uses pearls in many of the pieces of jewellery in this exhibition. Is this because of their perceived preciousness? Perhaps she just likes the colour and shape of them?

The finest quality natural pearls were highly valued as gemstones and objects of beauty for many centuries. Because of this, pearl become a metaphor for something rare, fine, admirable and valuable.

The process to culture or farm pearls was patented in 1916 and since the development of plastics we now have many imitation pearls. Possibly, as a consequence of mass production (and that you can now buy similar looking gems at Spotlight)

Notice the pearls in the hairpiece, wound through her hair and decorating her dress in the portrait (right) of Queen Marie Antoinette of France, circa 1775.

Pearls are not as popular or fashionable as they were in previous centuries.

What would Marie Antoinette and fashionable European society make of Lisa Walker's "In Here Is A Fart and a Pearl" (left), the freshwater pearls and blobs of paint decorating the inner-sole on the pendant (previous page) or the pearls slathered with translucent glue (bottom right).


What are your your chances of finding a gem quality real pearl in the wild (not a farmed or synthetic one)? It's extremely unlikely. The chance of finding of pearl in an oyster is apparently about one in 12,000.

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A pearl is a hard glistening object produced within the soft tissue (specifically the mantle) of a living shelled mollusc or another animal. Just like the shell of a mollusc, a pearl is composed of calcium carbonate in minute crystalline form, which has been deposited in concentric layers.

Pearls are formed inside the shell of certain molluscs as a defense mechanism against a potentially threatening irritant such as a parasite inside the shell, or an attack from outside that injures the mantle tissue. The mollusc creates a pearl sac to seal off the irritation.
**Art Vs Craft**

In western culture we seem to want to categorise objects as either one or the other.

Some definitions suggest "art" has creative merit and intent whereas craft is the application of learned skills and techniques. That "art" is the communication of an idea or thought that it will evoke an emotional response from the viewer. "Art" doesn't have to be beautiful, attractive or pleasing - it is commentary or an observation by the artist on some aspect of existence.

However, the idea of an "artist" is a relatively modern one. The word would not have been used, for example, during the Renaissance. A painter was called a painter, a sculptor a sculptor, and so on. Today we know them as great artists, but people like Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo learned their craft through apprenticeships and they were seen as members of a particular occupation. Paintings were often collaborative and done by groups of people, directed by a master.

"The strange world of contemporary jewellery would fit perfectly into contemporary art. Some day they'll finally realise this." - Lisa Walker

Lisa Walker was an apprentice jeweller, but arguably the eggbeater pendant (right) bears more similarity to Duchamp's "fountain" (bottom right) than the application of skills and techniques she picked up as an apprentice jeweller.

"America" (pictured right) is a satirical sculpture by the Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan. It is a fully functioning toilet made of solid gold. Cattelan created the toilet in 2016 for the Guggenheim Museum in New York. It was made to look like the museum's other toilets, and was installed in one of the museum's bathrooms for visitors to use. The gold is estimated to be worth more than a million dollars. A toilet is sometimes colloquially known as a "throne" so it is a clever play on this idea to make one of solid gold. It may also reference "Fountain" (1917) by Marcel Duchamp - an icon of twentieth-century art which was a porcelain urinal (a copy of "Fountain" is picture bottom right).

In 2017, when the Guggenheim Museum declined a White House request to loan it a Van Gogh painting for President Trump's private rooms, curator Nancy Spector offered to loan "America" instead.
If You Can't Wear It, Is It Still Jewellery?

Some people maintain that something useable or functional - ceramics, furniture or jewellery, for example, fit neatly under the craft label while something that has no clear practical purpose might be called art. However, is jewellery useful in the same way a ceramic bowl or a chair might be?

Many of Lisa Walker's pieces don't look like you could wear them comfortably. Can you imagine how heavy an old fashioned rotary-dial telephone or a laptop around your neck would be? The pendant made from the skateboard with the toy squirrel on board also looks like it would be pretty impractical to wear around your neck! The sheer size of Lisa Walker's 'pendants' make them impractical to wear for the purpose of mere adornment or decoration.

"I just had this big %$&*ing desire to make something big." - Lisa Walker

Beados (below left) are plastic beads that join together with a spray of water. They are a popular present for children who like crafts. The finished crafts don't look too dis-similar to Lisa Walker's butterfly brooch pictured (below right).

Cynics suggest the real difference between art and craft is the price tag. It is a little bit ironic that when an object's purpose is compromised i.e. when it becomes less useful and the maker less likely to be applying learned skills and technique to the work that it is more likely that object considered "art" and have a higher monetary value placed on it.

At the end of the 1940s (when he was well into his 60's), the artist Pablo Picasso started creating ceramic works in collaboration with the Madoura Pottery workshop in France. He began with simple functional, utilitarian objects, such as plates and bowls. He then proceeded to create more ambitious forms, such as pitchers and vases. Picasso produced over 600 works in clay. The majority were editions, some of 500 or more. He intended the pieces to be accessible and affordable to the general public.
The modern men's necktie traces back to the time of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) when Croatian mercenaries in French service wearing their traditional small, knotted neckerchiefs, aroused the interest of the Parisians. The boy-king Louis XIV began wearing a lace cravat about 1646, when he was seven, and set the fashion for French nobility. This new article of clothing started a fashion craze in Europe; both men and women wore pieces of fabric around their necks.

In comparison, Lisa Walker's clasped hands necklace (pictured below left), although quite bulky, is made out of fabric and stuffing and looks quite it might be quite soft and squishy. Wearing this necklace might be like having a cushion to lay your head on, at your disposal all day.

Perhaps we should be thankful elaborate powdered wigs went out of fashion! Like the tie, periwigs (as they were known then) also first became fashionable in Europe in the 17th century. Periwigs did serve a practical purpose - the unhygienic conditions of the time meant that hair attracted head lice, a problem that could be much reduced if natural hair were shaved and replaced with a wig.

In New Zealand a tie is a part of many school uniforms, for both boys and girls, and many men are expected to wear a tie to work everyday.

A necktie is purely a decorative accessory. It doesn't keep us warm or dry, and certainly does not add comfort.


Louis XIV of France helped popularise both neckties and wigs of the 17th century.
In Victorian England, artisans often incorporated animal and human parts (like hair and teeth) into jewellery and accessories. This fashion was also popular in New Zealand, for example the brooch made from kea beaks (pictured right) made in Timaru in the early 1900’s.

Early Pākehā (European New Zealanders) stuffed birds like the now extinct huia for drawing rooms and museum collections, sported huia feathers on their hats, and used the beaks for brooches.

1907 marked the last official sighting of huia. Forest clearance for farmland, introduced predators, and demand for curios and museum specimens all contributed to the bird’s extinction.

Memorial jewellery like this brooch containing human hair (pictured left) became popular during the early nineteenth century. Although people had kept locks of hair from deceased family members and friends since the Renaissance period, it was not until the 19th century that whole jewellery created out such hair became part of a wider Victorian fashion of remembrance and sentimentality towards those that had passed on.

Fur coats and hats such as this fox-fur stole (left) were the height of fashion in the first half of the 20th century particularly in the 1930’s. But in more recent decades fur has gone out of fashion. Animal rights advocates (including many celebrities) have called attention to fur farming since the 1980s and 1990s. I imagine there would not be too many people likely to brave wearing Lisa Walker’s necklace above.

Do you look at Lisa Walker’s necklace made with taxidermy ducklings and think you would like to wear it out in public? What would be the reactions if you did? Would it be better if the ducklings were fake chickens that you can buy at the $2 shop for crafts at Easter?

Most people probably look at this necklace and think it is pretty gross.

Most people probably look at this necklace and think it is pretty gross.
Likewise, the women campaigning to give women the right to vote (called 'suffragettes') used jewellery to promote their cause. In the United Kingdom the official colours of the Suffragettes were green, white and violet. Green symbolised hope, white for purity and violet or purple represented loyalty and dignity. The colours are said to perhaps also symbolize (G)ive (W)omen the (V)ote.

Frances Parker was a New Zealander living in Britain who became a prominent suffrage activist. She left New Zealand in 1896, aged 22 and her suffrage activism may have been motivated by the fact that New Zealand women had had voting rights since 1893.

This medal was presented to Frances Parker in 'Recognition of a Gallant Action, whereby through Endurance to the last Extremity of Hunger and Hardship, a Great Principle of Political Justice was Vindicated'.

Would the duckling necklace be okay to wear if people looking at you knew it was being worn to protest battery farming? Maybe Lisa Walker's blue hand pendant could represent the #metoo movement?

Does jewellery have to be pretty or delicate?

In the 1780s Josiah Wedgwood became increasingly concerned about the inhumanity of slavery so he designed, manufactured and distributed the slave medallion, at his own expense. The distribution and circulation of these medallions was central to the anti-slavery movement, as they publicly advertised the wearer’s support. The slave medallions were worn in hatpins, brooches and necklaces and were one of the earliest examples of a fashion item that was used to support a cause.

Pussy Riot is a Russian punk rock group who wear brightly coloured dresses and tights with their faces masked by balaclavas. Themes in their music include feminism, LGBT rights, and opposition to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The group staged unauthorized performances in public places that were filmed as music videos and posted on the Internet. They gained world-wide attention in 2012 when three members were arrested and consequently convicted of “hooliganism motivated by religious hatred”.

Fashionable London shops sold tricolour-striped ribbon for hats, rosettes, badges and belts. It became fashionable for women to identify with the cause by wearing the colours, often discreetly in a small piece of jewellery.

**What's your favourite?**

"My favourite piece in this exhibition is the necklace made from pieces of pounamu. I like it because it feels quite 'New Zealandy' to me."

*Isaac du Toit*

"This is my favourite piece in the exhibition because I like the colouring and the shape of it."

*Paddy Rockell*

"When first asked this question, my favourite piece was the back of the seat that has been embroidered. I love the beautiful decorative pattern of the embroidery and although I can't imagine wearing it as jewellery I'd love to hang it on my wall by my dining table and get to look at it everyday. It has a very "happy" feel to it. Since then I have a developed a bit of a soft spot for the inner-sole pendant which to begin with I thought was quite strange and weird."

*Megan du Toit*

"My favourite piece was "What Karl didn't take with him", a necklace assembled from the detritus left at the bottom of a drawer when Lisa Walker and her husband, Karl Fritsch moved back to New Zealand. There is a familiarity that everyone can relate to in the collection of random small objects that accumulate in drawers and other convenient spaces. The collection of objects used gives a glimpse of the personality of Lisa's husband and their relationship. I can imagine Lisa's affectionate exasperation when confronted with the remaining objects when she assumed that everything had been packed ready for moving."

*Josephine Roberts*

"My favourite was the squirrel on the skateboard because it was amusing and I imagine a child a walking into the workshop asking for their skateboard only to see it glued to a squirrel."

*Aurelia Hercock-Roberts*
In February 2018 Isaac, Kia, Paddy, Aurelia, Megan and Jo were lucky enough to visit and preview the Lisa Walker exhibition at Te Papa I Want to Go to My Bedroom But I Can’t Be Bothered while it was being installed.

Isaac du Toit is the co-author of A Children’s Guide To Splendour - a guide to the 2017/18 Te Papa exhibition "European Splendour 1500 -1800". He is a student at Kapiti College.

"I don’t always know what I’m doing, I hope it stays like that." - Lisa Walker


2. By Hans Ollermann [CC BY 2.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0)], via Wikimedia Commons


7. quote from Te Papa "Interview with Lisa Walker [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36598_5iraM]


10. Maurizio Cattelan “America” 2016. By stu_spivack (DSC_0476) [CC BY-SA 2.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0)], via Wikimedia Commons.

11. Marcel Duchamp, "Fountain", 1964 replica on display at The Tate Modern, London (the 1917 original artwork is lost). Original photo GNU from Gtanguy [Public domain, GFDL (http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html) or CC-BY-SA-3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)], via Wikimedia Commons


15. Pablo Picasso, Plate. By MollySVH (Picasso plate in the ceramics museum) [CC BY 2.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0)], via Wikimedia Commons

16. Pink and black stiletto-heeled sandals by Sophia Webster, England. Chosen as part of the Dress of the Year ensemble for 2013. Photograph by Mabalu [CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0)].

17. Wigs [CC BY 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0)], via Wikimedia Commons
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<td>Louis XIV, circa 1662, attributed to Charles Le Brun, Palace of Versailles. [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.</td>
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