

# Persuasions of Memory:

## The Metamorphosis of Memory in the Precious Object

A project submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Fine Art)

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declaration

To RMIT Higher Degrees  
For Appropriate Durable Record

I hereby declare that the Appropriate Durable Record for the work entitled *Persuasions of Memory: The Metamorphosis of Memory in the Precious Object* as submitted on 9 February 2009 for the qualification of Master of Arts, represents the work of myself, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the documentation.

The work entitled *Persuasions of Memory: The Metamorphosis of Memory in the Precious Object* has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for any other academic award. The Appropriate Durable Record represents the work undertaken during the period of candidature from 15 February 2007 to 15 February 2009, being full-time by research.

Yours sincerely

Melissa Miller

9 February 2009

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# research proposal

summary

This project will take the portrayal of memory in wearable jewellery and jewellery object making in two directions. The relationship between memory and the events it represents will be revealed within the singular jewellery object through structural, iconographical, or material relationships among elements of the object. Reinterpretations of the original primary jewellery object will result in series of jewellery objects and wearable jewellery that express ideas about the altering of memory. Jewellery objects with removable wearable jewellery components will reveal ideas about memory processes through the relationships among their elements. The juxtaposition of soft and hard materials will be used as a metaphor of memory.

introduction

This project will result in a body of work consisting of wearable jewellery and jewellery objects<sup>1</sup> which manifest ideas about memory<sup>2</sup> and the relationship between memory and the experiences it represents. This work will draw on traditions in the gold- and silversmithing field of creating objects to be used as signifiers of memories<sup>3</sup> and mnemonic devices.<sup>4</sup> The primary aim is decidedly not to create direct representations of personal memories or collections of found objects that represent cultural histories. My aim is to engage in a visual and tactile exploration of memory itself; for example, the processes of remembering experiences and the alteration such memories undergo. Series of jewellery objects and wearable jewellery will reveal ideas about the relationship between memory and experience both within singular objects and among altered objects in series. Singular jewellery objects will manifest ideas about processes of memory through the relationships among their elements, some of which will be removable wearable jewellery. Reinterpretations of these primary jewellery objects will explore the alteration of memory in series consisting of jewellery objects and wearable jewellery. I will alter the jewellery object in two ways. One way is to remove components, which will then be available as wearable jewellery. The second way is to create additional objects; by exaggeration of form, changing of material, or use of other techniques and processes. Combinations of hard and soft materials will embody the interaction between memory and experience.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “object” is commonly used in craft fields to indicate a small sculpture or handmade work of art. The terms “jewellery object” and “precious object” are commonly used in the gold- and silversmithing field to indicate a work that is not wearable jewellery but is made using techniques, materials or a scale usually associated with gold- and silversmithing. This project will produce both wearable jewellery, such as neckpieces, finger rings, brooches, and bracelets, and non-wearable jewellery objects.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this proposal “memory” refers to episodic memory, “a type of long-term memory for personal experiences and events... Such knowledge is characteristically stored as information about specific experiences and events occurring at particular times and places, and it affords a sense of personal continuity and familiarity with the past” (Oxford Dictionary of Psychology, 2nd Edition 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Examples of jewellery pieces that signify memories range from Victorian sentimental jewellery commemorating lost loved ones with inclusions of photographs or hair (Cooper & Battershill 1972) to contemporary jewellery such as Gerd Rothmann’s Body Prints, which capture and preserve the imprint of a loved one’s skin (Rothmann 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Mnemonic: relating to, assisting, or intended to assist the memory (American Heritage Dictionary 2004). Well-known mnemonic devices such as the rhyme for remembering days of the month “Thirty days has September” and the acronym representing the colors of the rainbow “Roy G. Biv” aid the semantic memory, which deals with fact-retention. Episodic memory can also be triggered by such associations, for example by using the Method of Loci, originally used in ancient Greece to recall attendees at an event by associating them with their seat location (Oxford Dictionary of Psychology, 2nd Edition 2006). Thus jewellery that acts as a reminder (of, for example, a loved one or an event) can also be used as a mnemonic device.

background

According to a recently influential memory model known as Connectionism, the brain stores memories by strengthening connections between certain neurons.<sup>5</sup> Remembering occurs when these connections are reactivated by present experiences that produce “retrieval cues” closely corresponding to previously stored connections. Remembering, then, is not merely a snapshot of the past, but an interaction between past and present. It follows that memories do not correspond precisely with events past, and that the relationship between memories and the events they represent is continuously changing, as each successive present moment interacts with a fixed moment in the past.

This project will explore the complex interactions between past and present that make up memory through the creation of jewellery objects and wearable jewellery. Singular jewellery objects will manifest ideas about processes of memory, acting as a kind of memory model themselves. Series based on alterations of the original primary object will develop the changeable nature of memory.

Contemporary German goldsmith Gerd Rothmann has long explored the relationship between object and memory in his “Body Prints,” jewellery pieces cast from impressions taken directly from the body of the wearer or a loved one.<sup>6</sup> The connection between the original object (the body) and the jewellery piece is eternally preserved in an unforgettable association between sign and signified. In this context the remembered impression, in its changed form, takes on greater significance than the original, often overlooked, details of the body.

The removable, wearable jewellery components of jewellery objects in this project will act as reminders or signifiers of the jewellery objects as a whole. The complete objects themselves will signify the processes of creating, storing, and retrieving memories. The removed wearable jewellery components will identify a change to the object, leaving the complete unchanged object but a memory signified by the removed pieces.

German jeweller Georg Dobler’s linear jewellery structures of the 1980s abstract and reduce forms to bare skeletons of line and geometry.<sup>7</sup> The same simplified forms are altered by a further reduction, reconfiguration or collapse and presented again in corresponding works. The abstraction and alteration in Dobler’s work relate to ideas about memory and its reinterpretation of experience.

My project will create jewellery objects and wearable jewellery in series based on modifications and alterations of similar initial iconography, materials, or techniques, in order to build upon the idea that memory is abstracted and modified as it retracts from experience.

A recent series of rings by Dagmar Schink reverses the role of the memory-laden object, transforming it into the source material, rather than the memory.<sup>8</sup> “Fingersprache” consists of rings that fit over the first joint of the finger and cover the fingerprint with words in typeface, facing outward. Skin pressed against by the wearer will bear the imprint of these words, a transient memory of the object itself. “Selbstlaute” is a similar ring with typeface facing inward, leaving an impression beneath the ring on the wearer’s finger that reads “ring.” The transformation of object to language, as well as the lingering reminder of the absent object, directly communicate ideas about memory.

Much like the impressions left by Schink’s rings, the wearable jewellery pieces created in this project will act as a reminder of absent jewellery objects with which they are associated.

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<sup>5</sup> Schacter 1996, p. 71    <sup>6</sup> Rothmann 2003, p. 44    <sup>7</sup> Lorenzen 1989, pp. 40-43    <sup>8</sup> Schwarzinger 2000, pp. 110-111

proposed research  
main objectives

This project will produce a body of work consisting of wearable jewellery and jewellery objects that manifest ideas about memory; specifically, the interaction between past and present that creates memory, and the alteration of memory. I will pursue the portrayal of these aspects of memory in two directions. In the first, ideas about memory's relationship to the experiences it represents will be conveyed through structural, iconographic, or material changes within the singular jewellery object. In the second, the changeable nature of memory will be developed through reinterpretations of the original in series.

The juxtaposition of hard materials such as metal and soft materials such as wool will act as metaphors for the interaction between past and present in the formation of memory. The incorporation of soft materials will allow me to more thoroughly explore the malleability of memory and the loss of definition in remembered occurrences. Materials that can appear to possess properties of both hardness and softness, such as enamel<sup>9</sup> and steel wool, will be incorporated as a mediator between the hardness and softness of experience and memory or as an illusory device.

The proposed body of work will consist primarily of jewellery objects with certain components that can be removed and worn as jewellery. These objects will act as memory models through which I will explore the interaction between memory and experience; in other words, the roles of past and present in the formation of memory. These interactions will be represented by the relationships between removable wearable components and the jewellery object. When removed, the wearable jewellery will act as a reminder or mnemonic device signifying the memory of the original complete object.

Series based on reinterpretations of primary jewellery objects will develop ideas about the alteration of memory. Series may consist of both altered jewellery objects and independent wearable jewellery pieces that expand upon related forms and concepts.

In these two ways the relationship between memory and the experiences it represents can be depicted through the relationship between one object and the memory of that object as represented in another.

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<sup>9</sup> Vitreous enamel, a layer of glass fused to a metal surface, can appear smooth and hard or velvety soft, depending on firing methods.

proposed research  
aims

- To experiment with the use of soft and hard materials to embody the relationship between memory and experience.
- To explore the potential of jewellery objects with wearable jewellery components to reveal ideas about the nature of memory and the process of remembering.
- To explore ways of representing the malleability of memory through wearable jewellery and the jewellery object.

proposed research  
research questions

- In what ways can the combination of soft and hard materials embody ideas about memory's interaction with experience?
- In what ways can the association between jewellery objects and their wearable jewellery components reveal ideas about the relationship between memory and the experience it represents?
- In what ways can the malleability of memory be expressed through jewellery objects and wearable jewellery in series?

rationale

Objects can play an important role in the creation, storage, and retrieval of memories. In a well-known episode from *Remembrance of Things Past*, Marcel Proust details the experience of a flood of childhood memories triggered by the smell and taste of madeleines, accentuating the idea that objects are sometimes essential in retrieving memories of one's past.<sup>10</sup> This project will explore the significance of objects to the process of remembering by focusing on the processes of memory itself and on the interaction between objects and their removable parts that serve as reminders.

Gaby Dewald (2006) argues that as contemporary society becomes increasingly nomadic, the applied art objects we keep close, on the body or in the home, take on greater significance as mementoes of our pasts and even “provide a sense of identity.”<sup>11</sup> Given the importance of art objects and autobiographical memory to one another and to people's lives, an investigation into the relationships between experience and memory within object-making will offer fertile ground for new insights.

Jewellery and precious objects have often been used to preserve and display personal and cultural memories,<sup>12</sup> and there are numerous artists, including Rothmann, Schink, and Dobler, currently investigating memory in a variety of ways. Through a visual and tactile exploration of the relationship between memory and experience, this project will draw on existing traditions but will take a new direction by concentrating on the portrayal of memory itself through visual models of memory. Drawing the focus away from the referents memory points to and toward the formation and alteration of memory itself, this body of work will create a greater awareness of the persuasive power and simultaneous malleability of memory.

Positioned within a gold- and silversmithing context traditionally employed in unquestioning representation of individual memories, this investigation will add a new dimension to the ongoing dialogue between jewellery and memory.

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<sup>10</sup> Proust 1922, pp. 57-62

<sup>11</sup> Dewald 2006, p. 22

<sup>12</sup> Particular historical trends, such as Victorian sentimental jewellery, as well as certain forms of jewellery, such as locketts, exemplify the use of jewellery as a commemorative device.

methods

## Timeline

### Stage 1: Investigation of Existing Artefacts and Ideas

- Research the historical use of jewellery and the jewellery object as representations of memory through books, journals, museum visits, etc.
- Research contemporary artists who address issues relating to memory through jewellery and object-making through books, journals, catalogues, gallery visits, internet research, etc.
- Survey jewellery artists creating jewellery objects with wearable jewellery components through books, journals, catalogues, gallery visits, internet research, etc.
- Survey jewellery artists using soft materials through books, journals, catalogues, gallery visits, internet research, etc.
- Identify different ways in which historical and contemporary jewellery artists have addressed issues of memory through artworks.
- Survey representations of memory and related issues in visual art forms as well as in literature and film.
- Study psychological and sociological knowledge and beliefs about memory through library research.

### Stage 2: Analysis and Incorporation of Data into New Work

- Explore ways in which knowledge gained in Stage 1 can be applied to the project.
- Choose elements and forms of the historical jewellery and objects studied, (such as locket,) to reinterpret in a contemporary context for this project.
- Choose materials and techniques used in historical and contemporary jewellery work, (for example, enameling, repoussé,<sup>13</sup> forging, and granulation),<sup>14</sup> to explore in this project.
- Identify ways in which understanding of memory can be represented and rediscovered through the jewellery object and wearable jewellery.
- Create iconography and structural forms representing processes of memory and the interaction between memory and experience.
- Create sketches, collages, models, and other conceptualization of ideas for works, informed by data researched in Stage 1.

### Stage 3: Technical Understanding and Experimentation

- Choose and experiment with soft materials such as wool, felt, yarn, and textiles.
- Choose and experiment with hard materials such as copper, silver and wood.
- Choose and experiment with materials having appearances both soft and hard, such as vitreous enamel, steel wool, and flocking.<sup>15</sup>
- Experiment with techniques having the potential to represent the malleable nature of memory, such as felting, enameling and repoussé.
- Research and experiment with non-metalworking techniques I am unfamiliar with, (such as wet and dry felting, hand sewing, and textile techniques).
- Experiment with combinations of hard materials (such as metal) and soft materials (such as felted wool and fabric), as well as materials having both

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<sup>13</sup> A metalworking technique that involves pushing metal with a variety of small hammer-like tools in order to achieve a three-dimensional form.

<sup>14</sup> A metalworking technique in which small spherical grains of metal are fused onto a larger piece.

<sup>15</sup> A thin layer of rayon fibers applied as a coating on a hard surface, resulting in a hard surface with a fuzzy veneer.



properties (such as enamel and steel wool), in order to reveal ideas about the nature of memory.

- Create wearable jewellery and jewellery object forms that can contribute to the representation of memory.
- Discover methods of combining and connecting jewellery objects and their wearable components in order to emphasize ideas about the relationship between memory and experience.
- Produce technical and conceptual samples that can be used as references for artworks and further experimentation.
- Create preliminary and test artworks, informed by conceptualization of Stage 2.

#### Stage 4: Production of Work

- Create primary jewellery objects with wearable jewellery components that reveal ideas about the interaction between past and present in the formation of memory, informed by Stages 1-3.
- Create wearable jewellery components of jewellery objects that can be removed and worn, signifying the memory of the original primary object and absent components with which they are associated.
- Create alterations and reinterpretations of primary jewellery objects to produce series of jewellery objects that reveal ideas about the altering of memory.
- Create as parts of series accompanying independent wearable jewellery pieces that develop concepts and forms taken from original jewellery objects.

#### Stage 5: Presentation of Work

- Develop ways of presenting works, both individually and in series.
- Exhibit works in public arenas.
- Document works photographically.
- Compile documentation of prior stages of production and experimentation.
- Complete Appropriate Durable Record
- Present ADR for review

Stages 1-5 will overlap, and will occur over the following period:

#### Timeline for Completion of Stages

Feb - June 2007	July - Dec 2007	Jan - June 2008	July - Dec 2008	Jan - Feb 2009
Stage 1				
Stage 2	Stage 2			
Stage 3	Stage 3	Stage 3		
	Stage 4	Stage 4	Stage 4	
			Stage 5	Stage 5

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list of series

1. In Search of Memory
2. Objects Reminiscent of Things Past
3. A Stitch in Time
4. Collective Memory/Collected Memories
5. Blast from the Past
6. Petit Madeleines
7. I remember you!
8. Remember when...
9. Mnemochronology

*All dimensions are given as Height  $\times$  Width  $\times$  Depth, in millimetres.*

Blue Raspberry Madeleines, Remember when...(Red Bear) and Remember when...(Blue Cat) *photography by Jeremy Dillon.*

*All other photography by the artist.*

