

THE BODY POLITICAL: WEARABLE OBJECTS AS SOCIAL TOOLS

Andrew Last

LAUREN KALMAN MASTERCLASS AT THE DUNEDIN SCHOOL OF ART, 5 MARCH 2018

"Lauren Kalman is a visual artist based in Detroit, whose practice is invested in contemporary craft, video, photography and performance. Through her work she investigates beauty, adornment, body image, and the built environment."¹



Figure 1. Lauren Kalman, *But if the Crime is Beautiful ... Strangers to the Garden*, 2016, inkjet print. Courtesy of the artist and Sienna Patti Contemporary Art Gallery.

Lauren was brought to New Zealand by the Dowse Art Museum and the HANDSHAKE project. The HANDSHAKE project was created by Wellington-based jewellery activist, artist, curator, writer and tutor Peter Deckers, from an idea born out of recognition of the need for ongoing support for talented New Zealand graduates after completing their jewellery art study. HANDSHAKE reverses the old apprentice model whereby a mentee works for a mentor – here the mentor, through feedback and support in the development of ideas and presentation, works more for the mentee.²

Prior to running masterclasses at Hungry Creek Art & Craft School and the Dunedin School of Art, Lauren was an invited speaker at the opening of Dowse Museum's exhibition, "The Language of Things: Meaning and Value in Contemporary Jewellery."³

In Dunedin, Lauren's workshop was attended by 13 students and staff from the Dunedin School of Art's jewellery and textile studios. The objective of the masterclass was to explore and produce a dynamic, human-scale wearable object addressing the issue of wearable objects as performed social tools. Our personal politics are rooted in values and these values can be projected through wearable objects.

Participants were asked to source found objects (around 100); these would ideally be 3D objects – plastic cups work better than old CDs, for example – but anything could work. These were used in the building process, so finds that were inexpensive or free were encouraged. Things that students had used in similar projects in the past included (hundreds of...) old cans, plastic cups, leaves, scraps of industrial material and old shampoo bottle caps. Other workshop materials included bindings such as string, thread, steel wire and, most importantly, a hot glue gun. Finally, participants were asked to bring along a camera.

Lauren introduced the workshop with a slide-show discussion that served as a brief history of wearable protest, objects of identity and craft as political tool. She gave particular attention to the work of contemporary artists working in these areas including Nick Cave, Theaster Gates, Tiff Massey, Tiffany Parbs and Jennifer Crupi. The use of humble materials by contemporary artists transforms them in a way that often exceeds expectations.



Figure 2. Andrew Last at the Lauren Kalman workshop, Dunedin School of Art, 2018.



Figure 3. Using furniture and bodies to establish a position of social dominance. Lauren Kalman workshop, Dunedin School of Art, 2018.

Following the introduction, the participants formed three sub-groups. These groups were led through a series of exercises that provoked thinking about the language that conveys or removes power; and the ways that an object might activate or negate a body's sense of power. In the concluding exercise, individual participants were asked to make a list of things they sought to champion and things they sought to change. The brief called for a selection of a single item from these lists, and participants were challenged to use the materials at hand to make a wearable object in response to their selection.

Remarkably, in the remaining four to five hours of the workshop, everyone made and photographed a work:



Figure 4. Vivian Dwyer



Figure 5. Jose Ran

Figure 6. Andrew Last

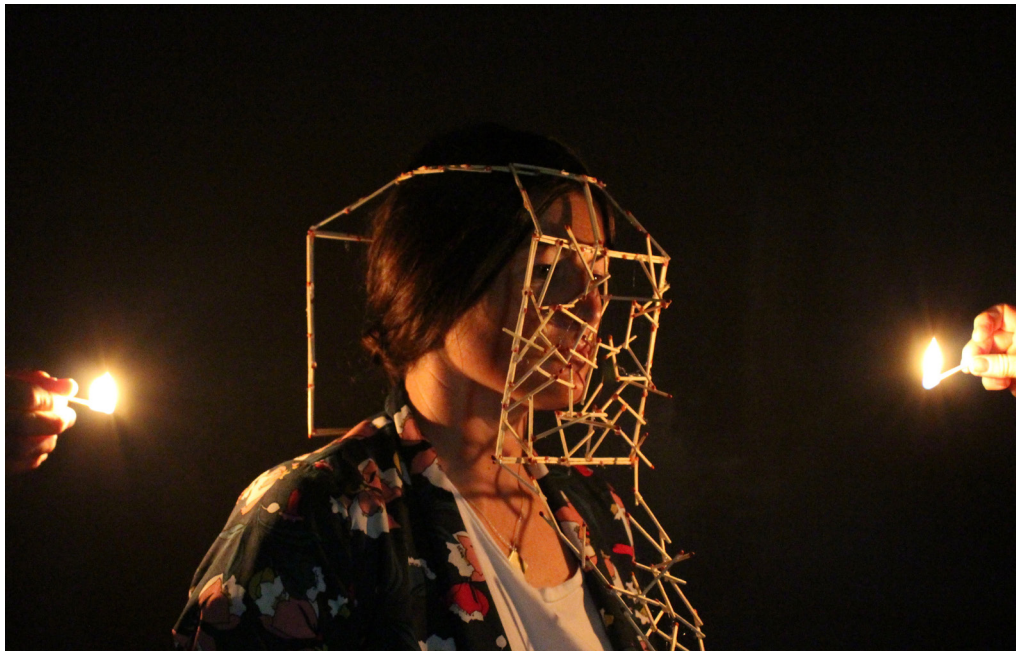


Figure 7. Rachel O'connell



Figure 8. Simon Swale



Figure 9. Hope Duncan

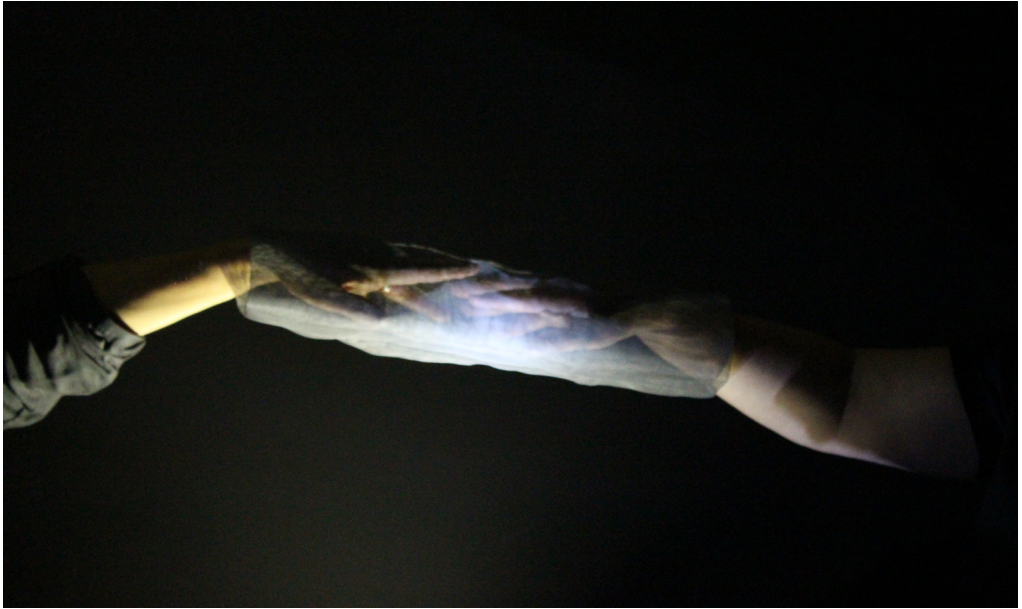


Figure 10. Cyndy Mckenzie

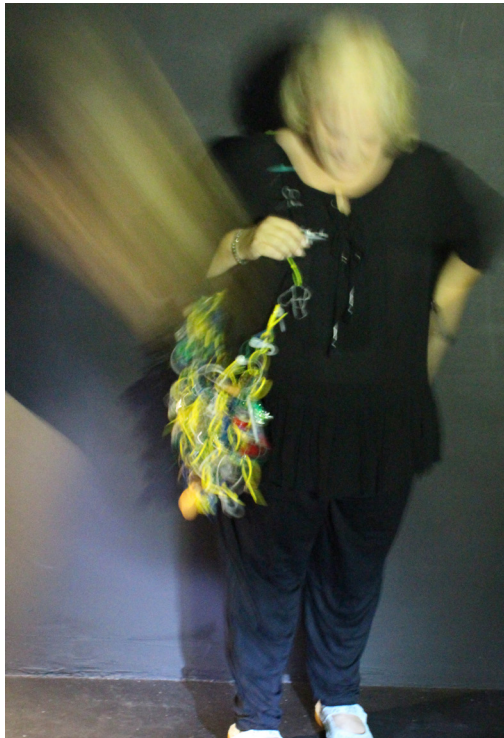


Figure 11. Megan Griffith



Figure 12. Victoria Bell



Figure 13. Andrea Muggeridge



Figure 14. Anataia Wong



Figure 15. Susan Videler

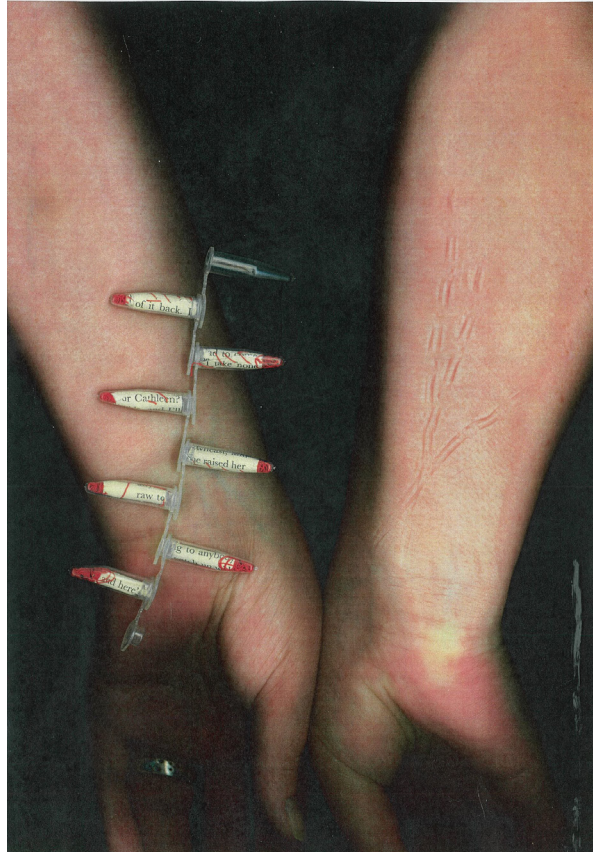


Figure 16. Tracey Kennedy

In addition to the challenges of the masterclass workshop, several participants committed to presenting their work performatively during the same week at the Dunedin Fringe Festival's Short Black Box space in Dunedin's main thoroughfare, Princes Street.

The pressure-cooker format of Lauren's schedule, combined with Johanna Zellmer's organisational zeal, allowed no opportunity for participants to waver in embracing the spirit of the workshop. Students in their second year of undergraduate studies worked alongside Masters students and staff in a non-hierarchical classroom environment. Everyone was pushed to work in ways that went well beyond established levels of familiarity or comfort. The atmosphere of cooperation and mutual support enabled the production of work that will continue to fuel individual practices and that added a richness and diversity to the jewellery and textiles studio curriculum.

All participants shout out a big mihi to Lauren for her generosity and energy, and to Johanna for engineering and supporting the kaupapa of this masterclass.



Figure 17. Cyndy and Tracy, Dunedin Fringe Festival 2018, Short Black Box space.



Figure 18. Simon, Dunedin Fringe Festival 2018, Short Black Box space, window reflection.



Figure 19. Andrew Last, Dunedin Fringe Festival 2018, Short Black Box performance, street view.

Andrew Last is a Senior Lecturer and the Studio Coordinator for Jewellery & Metalsmithing in the Dunedin School of Art. Originally from Australia, he holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in Gold and Silversmithing from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

- 1 <http://www.laurenkalman.com/about.html>.
- 2 See <https://www.handshakeproject.com/about-us/>.
- 3 See <http://dowse.org.nz/exhibitions/detail/the-language-of-things>.