

## Downsizing

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Curated by Melanie Katsalidis

Director, Pieces of Eight Gallery



### Essay by

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You wouldn't know it by looking at the work, but the artists represented in 'Downsizing' all share one biographical detail; at some stage or other, they studied interior design and most also worked in this industry. It's not unusual that architects, fashion designers or sculptors are inspired to create jewellery – after all, it's all three-dimensional design, just on a different scale – but the shift from interior design to jewellery making appears to be a phenomenon particular to Melbourne, with its point of origin the interior design program at RMIT.

*So why is it that interior designers in particular are so drawn to making jewellery?*

An informal survey amongst the 'Downsizing' artists reveals a clear answer. It is the concern with the human body that connects both disciplines, so a shift from one to the other seems like a natural progression. A common misconception about interior design is that it's only concerned with tile samples or kitchen joinery but – at least as it is taught at RMIT – its focus lies elsewhere. Interior design is all about the relationship between a space (a building, an exhibition space, a living environment or a set design) and the human body. While its sibling, architecture, is more concerned with the sculptural and formal aspects of a space, interior design places the person at the centre of its inquiry, just like the art of making jewellery does.

Djordjica Kesic, a former classical dancer who studied and taught in the RMIT interior design program, explains that the first impetus for her shift to jewellery came from the preparation for her lectures, where she frequently found references to contemporary jewellery as she investigated the body-space relationship. Katrina Tyler suggests that in both disciplines, "the inhabitant/occupier/wearer/viewer is considered in an intimate way," while Tessa Blazey says that "both interior design and jewellery have to comply by varying degrees to practical aspects like structural constraints and ergonomics. Both have to consider the way in which the body inhabits them. Interior design and jewellery both frame the body at differing scales."

*Another question remains. Why did these former interior designers shift to jewellery making?*

Again, while each artist cites their own key moments and realisations, their answers to these questions reveal a shared motivation. In practice, interior designers create drawings or sometimes model but leave the execution of their design to others. Often, the work is constrained by a clients' expectations and further modified by budget constraints or planning overlays. "The reality of working in the commercial industry with clients who were more focused on the financial bottom-line than innovation, combined with finding myself sitting on AutoCAD all day, did not feel right to me," says Kim Wearne, who studied interior design because of her love of the performing arts and the possibilities of becoming a set designer, but shifted to study gold and silversmithing not long after finishing her degree. Jewellery, thanks to its much smaller proportions, circumnavigates many of these constraints. Belinda Esperson, who became a contemporary jeweller after a career in marketing and interior design, suggests that making jewellery allows her much more freedom: "The jewellery scale is comprehensible and the impact of an error of judgment is not catastrophic - the realisation of which frees me up enormously in my design." Freedom is a key word. Karen Hamilton also points to it: "I recognised how much I needed more creative freedom to express something more personal." Tessa Blazey has expanded and contracted the scale at which she works a few times, first moving to interior design from doing a Fine Arts degree in sculpture, where she had started to create room-sized installations, then contracting again from interior design to jewellery, inspired by her love for model-making. So she has thought much about her own motivations, but also about the aspects that make jewellery such a desirable medium for interior designers. When you contemplate the pieces in this exhibition, keep in mind her statement: "A piece can be invented and realised without having to involve anyone else. I was frustrated just drawing my ideas – I wanted to enjoy the process of crafting objects again with my own hands."

*Contemporary Jewellery  
and Small Art Objects*

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