

Silver standard

THE UNIQUE QUALITIES OF SILVER AND THE FUNDAMENTALS OF AN AGES-OLD CRAFT ARE THE INSPIRATION AND STARTING POINT FOR SILVERSMITH ALISON JACKSON

SILVER HAS A PARTICULAR allure for Alison Jackson, something she discovered many years ago when she first began to experiment with precious metals in an after-school jewellery-making class.

"It is a truly beautiful material, both to look at and to work with," Jackson says. "It has a wonderful and unique malleability and luminosity. I find that metal, silver in particular, has a freedom about it that I really enjoy. It still amazes me what you can achieve with a sheet of metal and a hammer."

The Canberra-based silversmith and jeweller creates one-off and limited-edition jewellery pieces and hollowware, with a focus on functionality and an aesthetic of elegant simplicity. Her latest project, a collection of flatware she calls "table tools", explores the roles objects can play in shaping an environment. "Functional, tactile objects – like tableware – can reinvent a space, dictate the way people behave and create a unique experience," Jackson says.

From her first high school silversmithing training in Sydney, Jackson continued refining her craft at the Australian National University School of Art in Canberra. Over the past few years, Jackson has exhibited her work throughout Australia and Germany, and has been awarded grants, mentorships and prizes including an artsACT grant and a JUMP mentorship with German silversmith Maike Dahl.

Traditional processes form the cornerstone of Jackson's work. She hand-raises each hollowware piece from a single flat sheet of metal, which is then hammered, shaped and worked. It's a slow, laboured process that often takes days to complete. Yet she also infuses her own contemporary flair within the framework

of traditional craft. "The freedom to include a wide range of non-traditional materials, including other metals, helps to keep my designs fresh while creating interesting challenges," she says.

Jackson's sterling silver jewellery collection incorporates a similar mix of classic processes and contemporary design thinking. "The silver is worked from various pieces of wire, rod and sheet to form the finished pieces," she says. "It is a labour-intensive process that involves design sketching, prototyping and then forming or folding, soldering and surface-finishing the final piece." For one-off exhibition pieces, she often makes use of non-traditional materials such as plastics and volcanic rock, adding a unique element to her craft.

Through her newest hollowware and jewellery work, Jackson hopes to keep refining her techniques to create pieces that are suitable for small-run production while still keeping a handcrafted element. "I am planning on extending my hollowware to incorporate a more affordable range that combines handmade elements with industrial processes," she says. "I hope to develop this mix of techniques and processes further to enable me to reduce some of the costs, so that my work is accessible to a wider audience." **M**



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