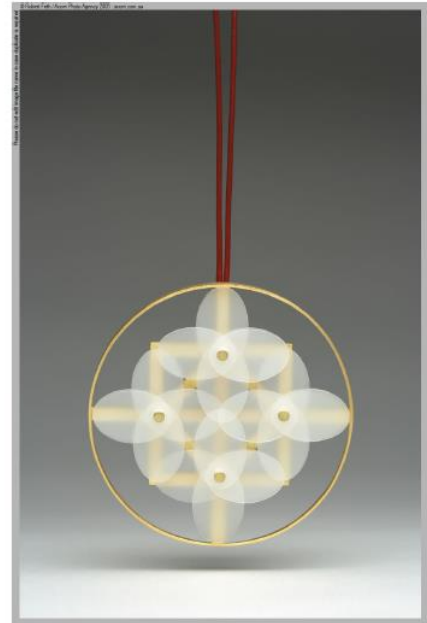
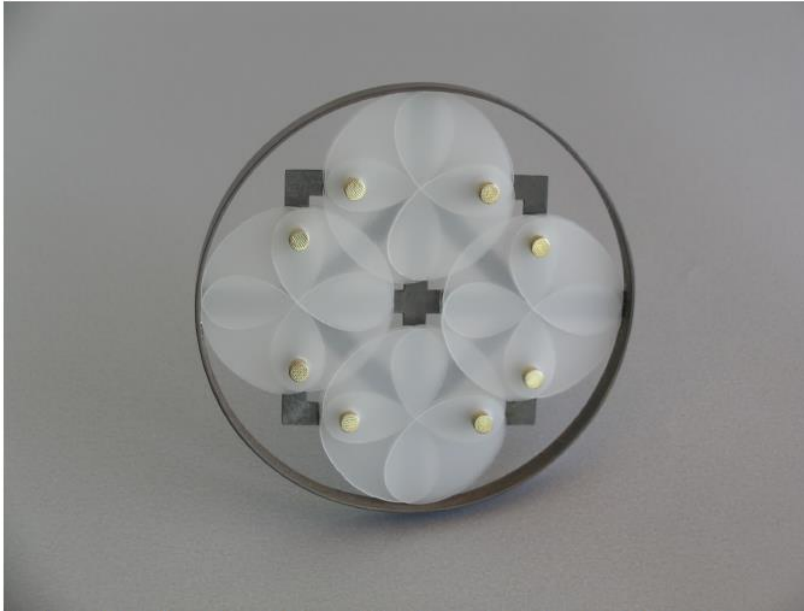


A 'PRICE-LESS' COLLECTION

Dr Dorothy Erickson

Christel van der Laan, who had her first solo exhibition at the Katherine Kalaf Gallery in Cottesloe, Western Australia in February 2006, is an artist who has a fascination with both ideas and structure. Her exquisite jewels, fashioned from such unlikely materials as polypropylene price tags, evoking snowflakes and icicles create a winter wonderland that transports you to another place - that of the country of her birth – The Netherlands. Striking, elegant and timeless her jewels have recently been given world wide exposure through USA publisher Lark Books. In 2004 they also won her the 'Precious Metal Prize' at the *National Contemporary Jewellery Award* at Griffith Regional Gallery.



1. *Priceless Brooch*: 2005, oxidized sterling silver, 18ct gold polypropylene price tags, 62 x 62 x 5 mm. Photograph D. Erickson.

Fig. 2 *Priceless Pendant*: 2005, 18ct gold, polypropylene price tags, leather cord, 67 x 67 x 5mm. Photograph Robert Frith



Fig. 3. *Cut Price Pendant III*, 2005, gold-plated sterling silver, polypropylene swing tag ends, leather, 75 x 75 x 20 mm. Photograph Robert Frith.



Fig. 4. *Cut Price Pendant II*: 2005, polypropylene swing tag ends, 85 x 85 x 20mm. Photograph Robert Frith.

Christel van der Laan was born in a small village in the Netherlands to a textile designer who was an inveterate collector and a structural engineer. Her grandparents had design and collecting interests - one set collected antiques and the other patronized modern art and design so her aesthetic taste was nurtured from an early age. An amalgam of all these influences she is both a collector of modern art and antiques. In her spacious home in a seaside suburb of Perth African wooden objects, Indonesian textiles, contemporary paintings and furniture create an eclectic but restful ambience in which to make her own artworks.

She lived for thirteen years in South Africa and finished her secondary education in The Netherlands before migrating to Australia in 1981. Although an interest in pattern and the intricacies of nature were fostered in each set of surroundings she was encouraged to follow a different career path and studied psychology. However in 1990, well into a Masters Degree and a concurrent MBA, she saw a book on modern American jewellery. This was in the nature of a revelation and she realized her need to follow her true passion and pursue a career in art.

Not one to waste time she soon had places offered to her at Curtin University and at Carine College – at that time the jewellery specialist course within the TAFE system. She opted to take up the Carine place, which she could do part time, a necessity as she had married and was pregnant. Van der Laan graduated from Carine in 1998. She had meanwhile exhibited in two *Western Mining Gold Jewellery Design Awards* being highly commended both times. Her student work included a series of brooches with a wave theme and commendable and varied metalsmithing skills - many of which she had developed through exploration and invention. Reviewer Fred Stewart wrote; “The high spots of the van der Laan presentation is her Wave series in which the frosted corrugated shapes are delightfully refreshed with shapes in gold, silver, copper and mild steel. The strength of her work is the restrained elegance of design and its appeal to the senses.”



Fig. 5 *Wave Series Brooches*: 1998, 24ct gold, opal sterling silver, fine silver, copper, mild steel, 40 x 45 x 10mm. Photograph Victor France. These pieces will be featured in Lark Books *The Art and Craft of Jewellery* being published in 2006.



Fig. 6. Christel van der Laan at work in her workshop. Photograph Alex Macdonald.

Van der Laan set up a studio in her home, undertook commissions and developed a gold and silver production range sold successfully at Maker's Mark in Sydney and Melbourne. By 2002 this began to pall and she decided she really wished to make unique artworks that were 'conceptually interesting'. Once again happenstance played a part. Purchasing a new cat basket her attention was attracted to the polypropylene swing tag and possibilities began to simmer. Experimentation soon had her working in a new direction. The tags were not difficult to source, structure however had to be devised and each 'experiment' led to a new piece. The early artworks incorporating 8-9000 individually drilled or trimmed swing tags were very time consuming - four months work for each. These large ruff-like neckpieces of her *Priceless Series* are surprisingly beautiful, evoking paintings by Rembrandt Van Rijn. The first crisp white ruff was selected to tour in *Contemporary Wearables* in 2003. The reviewer Kirsten Fitzpatrick wrote of this work that is "makes a poignant contribution to the 'non-precious as precious' genre. The white surface, although plastic appears soft and feathery and the form and texture is reminiscent of the lace ruffs that were priceless objects in their own time."



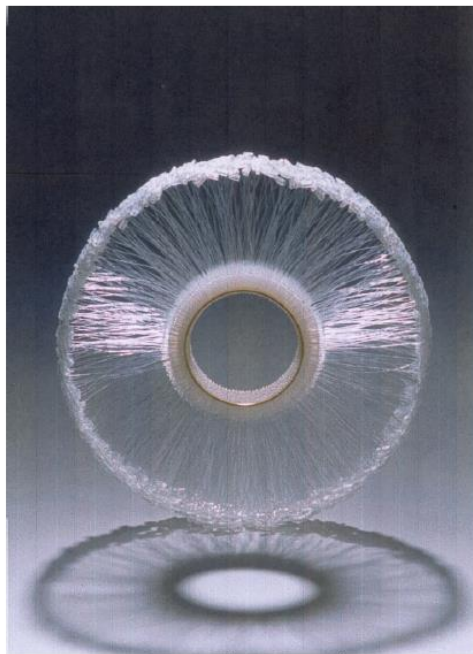
Fig. 7. *Priceless Neckpiece* : 2003, polypropylene swing tags, 340 x 340 x 75mm, exhibited and toured in *Contemporary Wearables 2003* by Toowoomba Regional Gallery. Photograph Robert Frith.

Meanwhile she had submitted images to Lark Books for their *1000 Rings*. Two polypropylene and 18ct gold rings entitled *Priceless Gems* were selected for the book and one for the exhibition *200 Rings* which toured USA in 2004-5. This image was also used in the publicity for the exhibition in Cleveland and at the Society of North American Goldsmiths' Conference 2005. With this success behind her she submitted images of further works for *500 Bracelets* and *500 Brooches* which were published in 2005 and included in the exhibition *100 Brooches* which tours 2005-2006.



8. *Priceless Gems: Ring*: 2003, 18ct gold, polypropylene swing tags, 60 x 40 x 7mm. Photograph Robert Frith.

Figure 9. *Priceless Gems: Ring*: 2003, 18ct gold, polypropylene swing tags, 70 x 35 x 35mm. Photograph Robert Frith.



10 *Priceless Bangle*: 2005, gold plated sterling silver, polypropylene swing tag ends, This was exhibited in *Contemporary Wearables 2005* and illustrated in Lark books *500 Bracelets*. Photograph Robert Frith.

fig. 11 *Cut Price Pendant I*: 2005, gold plated sterling silver, polypropylene swing tag ends, 65 x 65 x 15mm. Photograph Robert Frith.



fig. 12. *Cut Price Bangle*: 2004, gold plated sterling silver, polypropylene swing tags, 115 x 115 x 30mm. Photograph Robert Frith.

13 *Cut Price Ring* 2005, gold plated sterling silver, polypropylene swing tag ends, 58 x 56 x 20cm. Photograph D. Erickson..

When a psychologist changes her spots to become a conceptual jeweller not everything is on the surface. Subterranean play of ideas indicated by language is paramount. The *Priceless Series* was constructed of price tags - minus the price - while the *Cut Price Series* was constructed of tags which had the ends cut off. In the *Price of Love Series* bundles of tags were dyed red and the ends trimmed to tiny heart shapes and set in claw settings as if they were precious gems. The inference being love is more valuable than money. Although Van der Lann may express ideas in her work she also desires to create pieces which at the end of the day are exquisite examples of harmony of design



fig. 14. *The Price of Love: Ring*: 2005, 24ct gold plated sterling silver, cut and dyed nylon swing tags, 70 x 35 x 35mm. Photograph Robert Frith.

Fig. 15. *The Price of Love: Brooch*: 2005, gold plated sterling silver, dyed nylon swing tags, 65 x 60 x 28mm. Photograph D. Erickson.



16 *At Any Price*: ruff and bracelet, 2005, dyed nylon swing tags, old ivory, (ruff) 370 x 360 x 75mm, (bracelet) 170 x 170 x 45mm. The ruff was exhibited in the Alice Craft Acquisition Prize in 2005. Photograph Dorothy Erickson.

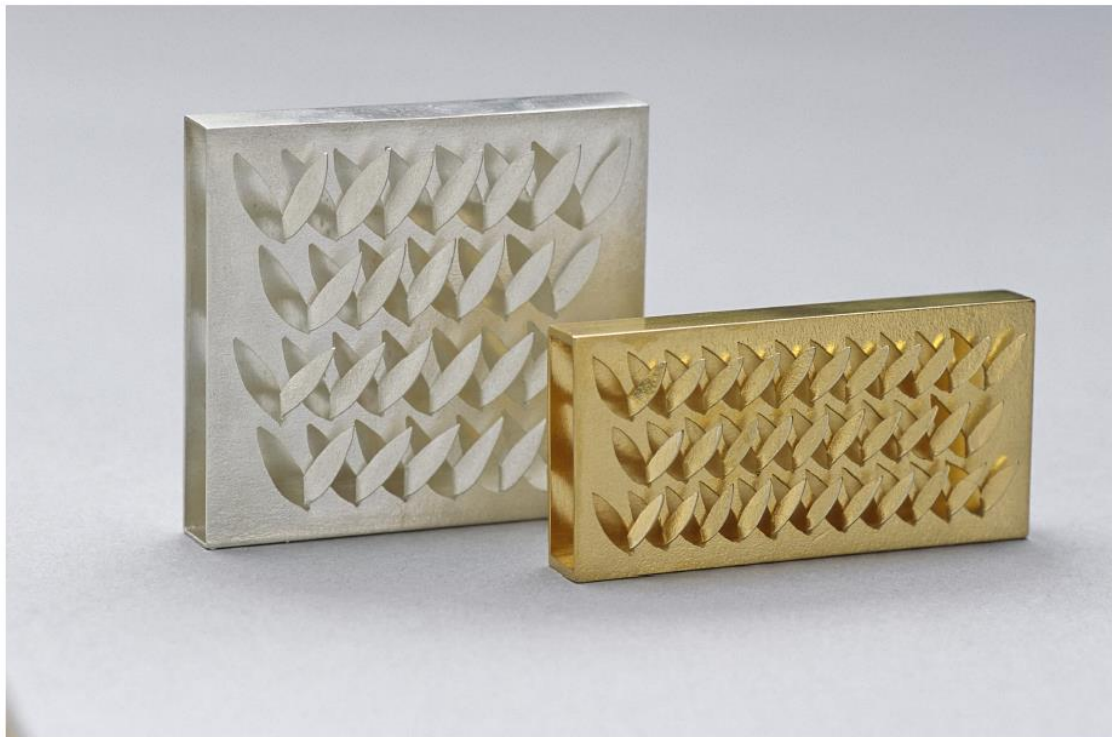
Of the *At Any Price* series which incorporates old ivory she states. "The aim behind this work is to make a powerful statement about the value we place on the life of a noble creature for the sake of adornment." In *Dead Weight* the physical weight of the lead sinkers alludes to the weighing on the conscience while the red thread alludes to the blood of the elephant spilt by ivory poachers.



17. *Dead Weight*: Necklace: 2004, old ivory beads, lead sinkers, red cotton thread, 240 x 240 x 15mm. Photograph Robert Frith.



18. *First Reflex: Brooch*: 2003, gold plated sterling silver, 40 x 38 x 6mm. Photograph Robert Frith. Illustrated in Lark books *500 Brooches* and selected for 100 brooches exhibition at the Velvet da Vinci Gallery in San Francisco. Private Collection Netherlands.

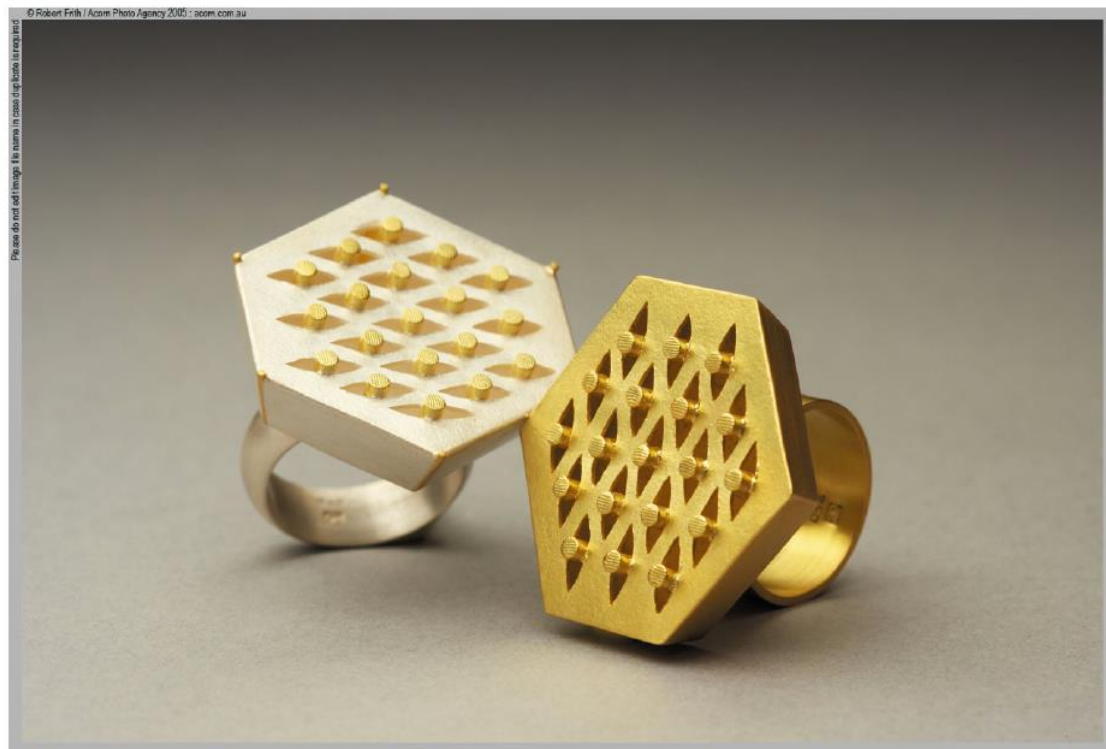


19. *Reflex Series: Brooches*: 2004, sterling silver (1), gold plated sterling silver (2) 45 x 40 x 6mm (1), 30 x 50 x 6mm (2). Photograph Robert Frith.

The elegant metal *Reflex Series* utilizes pattern and precision to create a series of eye-catching and thought-provoking works which had been developing in parallel with the price-tag pieces. These are based on the notion of reflex in its various meanings. The first playful piece, folding back pierced flaps of metal, was a play on reflex action. An intuitive piece it grew organically as she experimented to get altered levels within a simple piece. Later works were more structured with the aim of making complex plays of light, both inside and outside the objects. Reflex is defined as reflected light, colour or glory and also as reactive, introspective and directed back upon itself. The ex-psychologist van der Laan uses these pieces to bounce ideas as well as light and one can never be sure where such reflections will finish. Not only do the cut-out, manipulated or applied motifs create reflections, they are also subversively used to imply 'glory and glittering' as manifested in wealth – glittering jewels without stones.



20 *Promise - Reflex Series*: Brooch: gold plated sterling silver, shattered windscreen glass, 40 x 36 x 6mm. Photograph Robert Frith.



21. *Hex Rings - Reflex Series*: 2006, 18ct gold, sterling silver, and 18ct gold, 31 x 31 x 30mm. Photograph Robert Frith.

At pains to indicate to us that there is beauty in all manner of things she takes tiny shards of shattered windscreen glass and sets them delicately into the rich colour of 24ct gold-plate. Repetition reinforces the message in this square double-layered brooch in which mandorla cut-outs are inset with raised U shapes which cradle and enclose the glass creating a play of shadows and an infinity of reflections.

A sub series which developed are titled 'hex' - as in entrance, bewitch, enchant, hypnotize or spellbind. These large hexagonal rings will certainly enchant as miniature objects but are also likely to mesmerize the viewer as they are waved about on a hand. Are they to cast a spell or perhaps for a bewitching person to wear? The purchaser must decide.

Her family's various collections of seed pods and her fascination with the exotic plant life in Africa and Australia can be seen as contributing to the inspiration of the designs. Mandorla / almond / or eye-shaped cut-outs are the primary motif in recent work - the *Hex* rings and *Promise* brooch. The eye motif is particularly striking in the two hexagonal rings. The intellectual exercise dwells on the promise that eyes can hold, intertwined with that of the promise implied in a gift of jewellery. A massive 18ct gold ring entitled, *Reflex III*, which also has mandorla cut-outs, is a comment on wealth and reflected glory. In this she seditiously undermines the large amount of gold by using an old mother of pearl button as its central precious gem.



22 *Reflex Ring*: 2006, 18ct gold, vintage mother of pearl button, 46 x 46 x 30mm. Photograph Robert Frith.



Fig 23 *Reflex Ring*: 2006, 18ct gold, vintage mother of pearl button, 46 x 46 x 30mm. Photograph Robert Frith.

This body of work, exhibited during the annual Perth International Arts Festival, was created over the past three years. The artist has utilized precious materials where considered appropriate but has also transformed mundane throw-away items into covetable objects. The whimsy of some of the works conceals the more substantial notions of perceived and actual value. The works, created with panache and technical finesse, reference pleasure, desire, greed, consumerism, waste and guilt. They are works to wear for the sheer pleasure of their form or else to use as a conversation starter should the need arise.