



PHOTO: BEWLEY SHAYLOR, COURTESY OF FORM

'Heel to Throat', 2010, necklace, hand-cut anodised titanium, stg silver, 21 x 15 cm. Collection of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney



PHOTO: B. SHAYLOR

'Winged Alates', 2012, necklace, hand-cut anodised titanium and silver cable, w 38 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Australia

BETHAMY LINTON: A FAMILY TRADITION

With such a prominent family history in the field of jewellery making and metalwork, it was a daunting challenge for Bethamy Linton to follow in the footsteps of her forbears. Profile by Dorothy Erickson.

It is rare to find someone who is a fifth generation artist let alone one who is also a fourth generation Australian silversmith, but that is the pedigree of Bethamy Linton. This can come at a cost. Shouldering more than a century of family tradition was originally too heavy a burden for teenage Bethamy. However, after some detours, strength of character and empathy for her materials, as well as her skill with a saw and torch, have seen her produce pieces recently purchased for the collections of the Powerhouse Museum and the National Gallery of Australia. She said, 'Eventually I realised I simply couldn't live another life, and I had to get over all the family legacy inhibitions and the lack of confidence, stop torturing myself about worthiness, and just make because I love to and because it's much more important to me than a regular income with paid holidays and perks.' She now carries her heritage with ease and writes

with confidence, 'My interest in metalsmithing began as a child during hours spent in the family workshops. This experience and legacy has instilled in me a deep respect for handcrafts and a love of working with metals.' Her striking collar now in the collection of the Powerhouse Museum illustrates the care and attention she devotes to designing and making her work. Inspired by her reading of Yeats' poem *A Coat*, the collar incorporates motifs of the herbaceous Euphrasia, commonly known as eyebright, a useful medicinal herb with many species found all over world. It's valued as an apparent panacea for many ailments but perhaps not for the emptiness of finery that Yeats laments. The Euphrasia she has depicted is native to Western Australia and at the time of making was supposedly extinct. Linton says of the piece, 'The delicacy of the bush and the flower struck me – it was a comment on imperialism, control and



PHOTO: B. SHAYLOR

'Bloom', 2012, ring, anodized titanium, silver cable, 4 x 4.4 cm

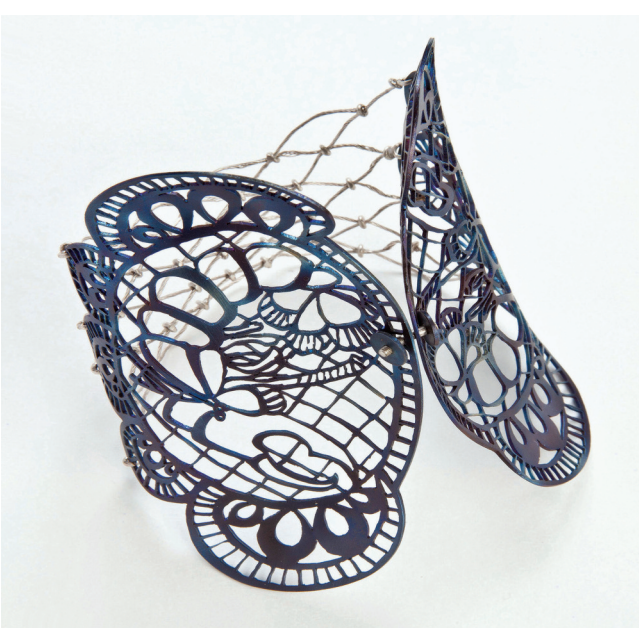


PHOTO: B. SHAYLOR

'Duel', 2012, bracelet, anodized titanium, silver cable, 8 x 9 cm



Bethamy Linton in her Middle Swan studio, Western Australia, 2012

how much we unthinkingly destroy.' The collar was first exhibited in "Signs of Change" at FORM, Perth in 2010 and then in "Lovelace" at The Powerhouse, Sydney in 2011.

Bethamy Linton works from a studio in the Swan Valley on the outskirts of Perth. It is part of a complex featuring an art gallery and printmaking workshop, a restaurant and sculpture collection set among gum trees and undulating vineyards. It is a pleasant setting midway between her new home in the hills and the Central Institute of Technology where she teaches part of the course for the Advanced Diploma of Jewellery. She moved to the area in 2012 when the jewellery studios at the FORM Midland Atelier where she had been based closed.

Her great, great grandfather was Sir James Dromgole Linton, art tutor to Queen Victoria's daughters one of whom, Princess Louise, went on to become a sculptor of note. Her great grandfather was his son, the charismatic James Walter Robert Linton premier art teacher in Western Australia from 1902–1930. He was a painter who also made



J.W.R. Linton, 'The Peacock', stg silver, gold, opal, pearls. Family collection



Commissioned engagement ring, diamond, sapphires and platinum

beautiful jewellery as well as silversmithing and lived a bohemian life neglecting his wife Charlotte Barrow who was a writer of children's books and an artist.

Their son, her grandfather Jamie (James Alexander Barrow) Linton, a sculptor who also painted, was the best known silversmith in Australia immediately following WWII. He had begun his career at seven years of age with a miniature set of tools supplied by his father. Jamie was interested in native flora and sculpted the well known range of silver cutlery featuring some 20 different WA wildflowers. Jamie married Marguerite Stubbs, who had also studied art and was a competent portrait painter. They were very private people who lamented their family having been somewhat traumatised by government interest in their youthful membership of the Communist Party and society's disapproval of his father living with his last mistress, Betsey Currie.

Bethamy's father, John Alexander Linton, and her uncle George Lucas, who married John's sister Linley, continued Jamie's workshop after his retirement, fabricating orders for his designs, and when time permitted, making some of their own. John married Lina di Carlo but they separated when Bethamy was about three and she grew up between households having a nanny who cooked mouth-watering Italian cuisine and instilled in the child a love of good food, a mother who was a single parent working at various jobs to fund going to art school, and another studio where a whiff of scented smoke helped her father's creative juices flow. Lina Linton became a painter and also developed a jewellery range. Bethamy decided to leave home at 15 and make her own way. The "teenager with attitude" rapidly became self-sufficient developing a resilience which has stood her in good stead as an independent artist.

She had not been encouraged to take up silversmithing, and painting had seemed too hard an option. Instead she had gravitated towards drama and music. Nevertheless, she started her silversmithing career at 16 in 1993 when her father required extra hands in his workshop to undertake restoration and electroplating. Two years later she decided to make it a career and took up an apprenticeship at Artisans of the Sea – the retail arm of Kailis Broome Pearls, and the special project of Dr Patricia Kailis the doyenne of the company. Artisans of the Sea was run by enameller and silversmith the late Glenice Leslie Matthews with a team of designers and makers located in the port city of Fremantle. Apprenticed to Simon Henderson from 1995–1997, the weight of expectation and the tensions in the workshop saw Linton floundering. Working seven days a week in the retail area as well as the workshop she lost her passion, left and, as she says, 'just meandered for a few years', working again for her father in his Central Silver Studios making Linton Silver.



PHOTO: B. SHAYLOR

'Bloom Series', 2013, rings, anodised titanium and embossed silver

A turning point came when her boyfriend of the time moved to Sydney in 2001 and she joined him. Thereafter she soon discovered the workshop of Sydney silversmith David Cruikshank, whose enthusiasm for making Linton found quite infectious and a love of creating began. On regaining her mojo she set up "Talem", making silver and resin jewellery until the call of home became too strong and she returned to the west in 2004.

In 2007 she set up the Linton Studio Fine Arts and Crafts gallery in the city and encouraged by a Small Business Grant by the City of Perth in 2008, she held exhibitions such as "Spring in the City" and was nominated to sit on the Peer Assessment Panel for Designer Fashion Grants for the Department of Culture and Arts from 2008–2011. She was also selected to be part of the FORM (former Craft Council of WA) Jewellery Design Cluster project at the Midland Workshops Atelier from 2008–2011. Four emergent metalsmiths were provided with studio space and marketing support in a project aimed at assisting them in self-sufficiency and to rehabilitate the heritage-listed former railway workshops in a nearby town formerly known as Midland Junction. Despite the project being of short duration owing to its location, she was a stand-out success with her work being shown in exhibitions such as "Illicit Making" and "Signs of Change" at the FORM gallery in the city of Perth.

Feeling the need to rekindle her relationship with larger objects, sort out the direction her practice should take and how to make it sustainable, she sought further guidance. In 2010 she undertook a mentorship with Hendrik Forster which included a residency period in his Victorian studio. He and his wife Kerry were generous with their advice which greatly assisted her in deciding her future path.

Their advice proved especially useful when she was com-



PHOTO: B. SHAYLOR

'Protection', 2012, necklace, embossed stg silver, anodised titanium, 9 x 6.3 cm

missioned to make door handles for the refurbishment of the Anglican St George's Cathedral in Perth, where her great grandfather's metalwork and stained-glass window design are installed. Her elegant door handles with their stylized evocation of a swan, cast in white brass with a red bronze inlay, were first carved as prototypes in wood into which she built provision for the findings which were then cast in a two-part process. Five sets adorn the new glass doors which assist with temperature control inside the historic building.

With her life more settled Bethamy has recently moved to a peaceful bush acreage in virtually undeveloped land in the hills behind Perth. The location is just north of Hovea where her great grandfather once lived during his retirement. The area abounds with wildflowers and other not so attractive wild life such as tics and snakes which make an appearance in her jewellery and metalwork. Like her grandfather and great grandfather she is particularly interested in the native flora and fauna. She and her partner Craig Reid purchased the land in 2012 and embarked on



PHOTO: B. SHAYLOR

'Dryandra Collar', 2014, gilding metal and sterling silver



PHOTO: B. SHAYLOR

'Dryandra Collar' (detail)



PHOTO: B. SHAYLOR

'King Brown', 2013, casket, anodised titanium, silver, 16.4 x 10.4 x 7.7 cm



PHOTO: B. SHAYLOR

'Door Handles', 2011, white brass, bronze, ht 9 cm. St George's Cathedral, WA

rehabilitating a rammed earth house set on a hill amidst a jarrah and wandoo forest overlooking an attractive valley. The wildflowers she sees in spring, creatures in the dam, the insects she encounters and the reptiles that invade their habitation are all grist to her designing mill.

Quite a collection were featured in her solo exhibitions "Imprint" at Gallows Gallery in Mosman Park in Western Australia in 2012 and at Studio 20/17 in Sydney in 2013. Each piece had a story to tell. The small crustacean seen facing-off on her bracelet *Duel* is a tiny shrimp with a big pincer which comes out and shoots an electric shock into its prey. *Protection* is the partner piece to *Duel* with the same shrimp embossed in silver. If you look carefully at the pretty petals of *Bloom* you can find silhouettes of ticks that infest the bush, while *Courtiers* have the male termites (which are 'eating them out of house and home') vying for the attention of the queen. *Winged Alates*, a delicate collar in anodised titanium and silver cable with a central flower composed of silhouettes of the insect, was purchased for the national collection from this solo exhibition.

One particular visitor in the summer of 2012, a bad year for snakes, was a king brown which became the inspiration for an intricately pierced titanium box – her *Ode to Old Jack Snake*. She had been sitting on the grass with some new kids when a rustle behind her alerted her to the snake heading towards her. Jumping up and gathering the baby goats she called to Craig who dispatched the creature with a long-handled paint scraper. Guilt overcame them at the loss of its life so they decided they had better make use of it. The skin became a useful inspiration while the snake was made into tasty chilli tacos. The pattern of the scales fascinated her and she researched snakes and sinuous movement to "weave" the memory around the sides and the lid of a titanium casket. There is a grace and



PHOTO: B. SHAYLOR

Door Handles in place, St George's Anglican Cathedral, Perth, WA

elegance to the design indicating that she has inherited talent from the many family members who were artists. The form has been treated to colour the titanium before being riveted to a silver base and rim. Linton generally prefers to colour her titanium using a torch rather than an anodizing machine as it allows for a dappled effect and a degree of variation of colour in a piece. The casket was entered and shortlisted in the 2013 Bendigo Contemporary Metal Award and also features in an online exhibition and publication for the Society of North American Goldsmiths in the US in 2014.

The collection she is currently working on focuses on three Dryandra species which grow in profusion on their land. Environmentally concerned, she noticed that they tended to grow where the canopy had been eroded due to human activities like felling or others that contribute to climate change. Dryandra have become emblematic for her of the immediacy and gravity of human impact on the natural environment. As part of this she is currently exploring the contrasting forms of the leaves of the various Dryandra species. The first piece made is a striking collar of patinated gilding metal and silver for inclusion in the 2014 Perth Fashion Festival's "Fashioning Form: The Craft of Making" exhibition. Making one-off creative pieces, as opposed to the repetition of production work, together with commissioned work is the path she has determined to follow and further progress will be worth watching as with her "can-do" attitude she develops a steady clientele who are seeking her out to commission unique pieces. Bethamy Linton has indeed risen to become a worthy contributor to the family tradition.

Dr Dorothy Erickson

Dr Dorothy Erickson is an art historian, curator, author and practising jeweller who will be exhibiting this year in London, Milan and Sydney.