February: Leslie Matthews  
(Partner of Gray Street Workshop for 23 Years)

Anecdote about Leslie’s time at Gray Street Workshop

It was during my Grad Show exhibition, after just completing a Bachelor of Design in Jewellery and Metalsmithing that I was approached by Catherine Truman, Sue Lorraine and Anne Brennan to work in their newly established studios in Gray Street, Norwood, as an access tenant. After one year I then became a partner in the workshop, and for the next 23 years I was involved in the daily running of the studio until 2009. It was a rich environment of disciplined practice, chats around the lunch table, intense discussions, monthly organisational meetings and many, many emerging and established jewellers passing through the doors of the studio. The years spent at Gray Street from the beginnings of my practice to now has informed my working methods. I observed the possibilities and experienced the diversity of an arts practice that extended beyond the linear pathway implied or expected. The dialogue that was often explored impressed on me, that it was possible to create work that went further than the realms of just decorative jewellery making, such as challenging the notion of body adornment, travelling through residencies and undertaking larger sculptural works or architectural commissions. As a collective there were many professional opportunities, from group exhibitions held in Adelaide as well nationally and internationally to workshops, public art commissions, Christmas sales and chook raffles. During my time at Gray Street we moved studios four times, each space having its own atmosphere and expectations, which also included running a private gallery on Payneham Road. The discipline and work ethic of the members and access tenants observed daily has formed the basis of a resolute commitment to my own practice as a contemporary craftsperson.

Q&A with Leslie Matthews

How do you get from point A – B, from idea to out-come?

Through my work I endeavor to go beyond the decorative surface metaphorically and symbolically, analyzing the making process and investigating how the work is seen. Organic imagery and structures are often the starting point of the research, highlighting traces of the subtle linear surface impressions. I strive to create work that impresses on the viewer the transient nature of a living organism through the selection of materials and forms. During the process of making I often impress on the surface of the
silver delicately woven muslin cloth to create textured lines. This compression in the metal gives a random drawing quality, a trace of the fabric of the everyday. Visually opposing dark and light shades are created in the silver. The soft white finish produced through brushed pumiced powder achieves a pale pearlescent glow in contrast a deep blue-black lustrous patina darkens the surface, each opposing and complementing.

What gives you pleasure in your practice?
I have found that each stage of the making process gives me pleasure, exploring new imagery, collecting materials, drawing in my journal, walking and observing and then translating these ideas into form. The action of repetition and the rhythms of my body also inform the work produced. I am continually reassessing, evaluating and critiquing my ideas. I do find it is important to take risks where possible and challenge my working methods. This I feel maintains the excitement and fascination of being in the studio on a daily basis. Once the works are made and sent to galleries, it always gives me pleasure to receive positive responses to the jewellery and objects I’ve created.
Leslie Matthews worked at the Gray Street Workshop for 24 years until 2009. After leaving the workshop she undertook an independent studio within the JamFactory Contemporary Craft and Design (2010-2014) and since that time has set up a private studio at her home in Adelaide. Leslie has maintained her practice for 30 years, exhibiting in local, national and international exhibitions, having solo and group shows. She studied at the University of South Australia gaining a Bachelor of Design, (Jewellery and Metalsmithing, 1985) and a Master of Visual Arts (Research, 2006). Teaching has also been an important part of her practice, for the last 14 years she has lectured within the School of Art, Architecture and Design, University of South Australia, part-time and from 2007-2010 was the Studio Head of Jewellery and Metal. In 2007 Leslie received an Australia Council residency to spend 4 months at The British School at Rome. This residency gave the opportunity to research the extraordinary examples of anatomical sculptural carvings on the architecture and monuments throughout Rome and to explore the Catacombs and Ossuaries found there. Other overseas residencies undertaken were an Artist in Residence at Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand (2005) and the Japan/South Australia Cultural Exchange (1999) Arts SA. During the residency in Japan Leslie investigated the techniques of repousse and metal chasing. In 2015 Leslie received an Independent Makers and Presenters grant, from Arts SA to create a series of jewellery and objects for a solo exhibition, to be held in May 2016 at COTA Gallery in Sydney. Leslie's work is held in several private collections and the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, ACT; Art Gallery of South Australia; Art Bank, ACT; Alice Craft Acquisition, Crafts Council of Northern Territory, Alice Springs Division; Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin.

Up and coming events
Solo exhibition at COTA (Courtesy of the Artist) Jewellery Gallery, May 2016

Image: Bloom, 2012, Vessels, Sterling Silver, Sterling Silver Blackened. Photo: Grant Hancock
CV (Selected) – Leslie Matthews

Education and Workshops
Master of Visual Arts (Research) School of Art, Architecture and Design, University of South Aust 2004-06
Bachelor of Design (Jewellery and Metalsmithing) School of Design - University of South Australia 1982-85

Professional Positions/Experience
Lecturer/Studio Head  Jewellery + Metal Studio (Sessional & Studio Head 2007-2010)) School of Art, Architecture and Design - UniSA 2001-2015
Master of Visual Art and Design (Specialisation) and Graduate Diploma of Visual and Design (Specialisation) Sessional teaching, School of Art, Architecture and Design, University of South Australia 2010-2015

Lecturer/Tutor  Adelaide College of the Arts/Flinders University – Jewellery Studio 2014
Independent Studio  JamFactory Contemporary Craft and Design, Adelaide 2010-2014
Workshop Partner  Gray Street Workshop Jewellery Collective, Adelaide 1986-2010

Solo Exhibitions
Light and Shadow  e.g.etal contemporary jewellery & objects gallery, Melbourne 2014
Chiaro Oscura  JamFactory Contemporary Craft & Design, Adelaide 2012

Shadows hold their breath  Master of Visual Arts (Research), Nexus Gallery, SA 2006

The Gentle Wash of Memory  The Helen Maxwell Gallery, Canberra, ACT 2002
An omen in the bone  JamFactory Contemporary Craft and Design, Adelaide, SA 1999

Inner Vane  Craftspace, Sydney NSW 1994

Collections and Acquisitions
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, ACT,  Art Gallery of South Australia, Art Bank, Canberra, ACT, Alice Craft Acquisition, Crafts Council of Northern Territory, Alice Springs Division, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin.