

Almost Settled

Jewelling at the Edges of Place

an exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at
Massey University, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa New Zealand, 2026.

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Art can be understood as a way of seeing and
being in relation to what was, is,
or might come into being.

—after Barrett and Bolt¹

¹ Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, eds., *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

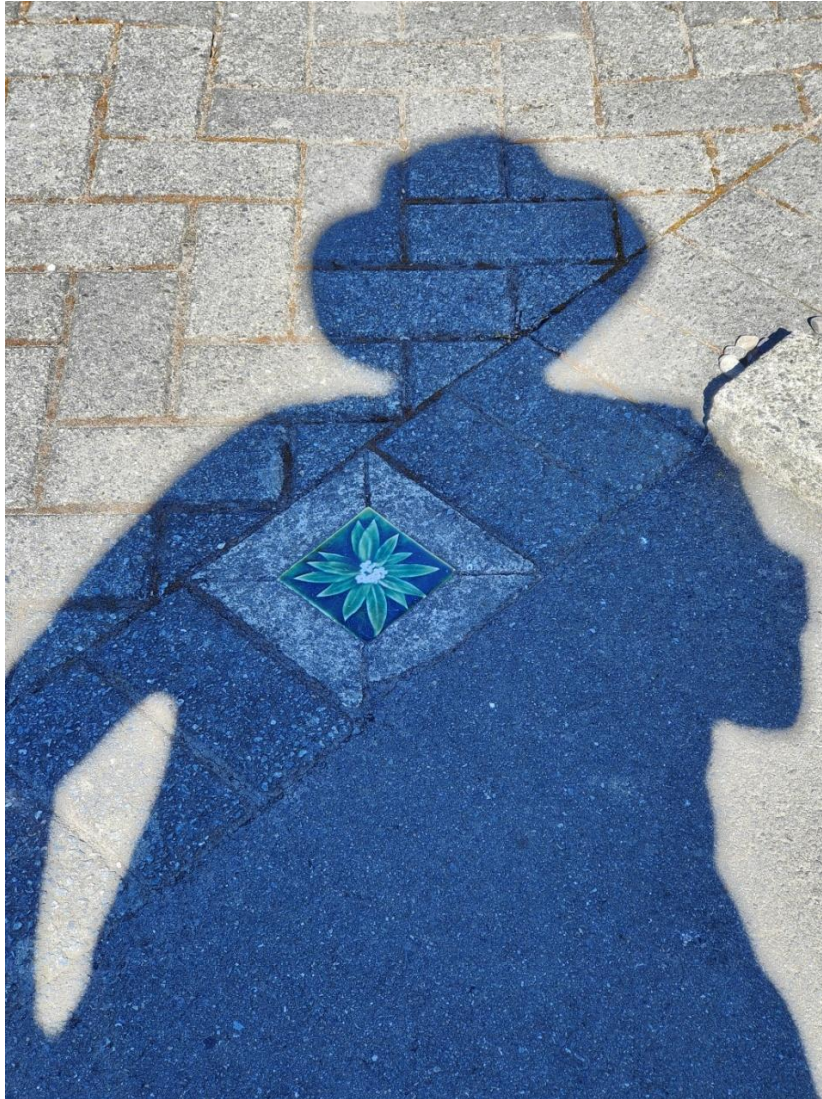


Figure 1
Dawn Wilce, *Jewels of 6035*, 2025.
Ngaio, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

With love and gratitude to all of those who have offered their support, encouragement, and wisdom throughout the course of this project and during my undergraduate studies at Massey University.

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Figure 2
Dawn Wilce, *Almost Settled*, 2025–.
Found ceramic fragments, parking line.
King Street, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

Preface

I'm from Wales but with few close relatives anchoring me to my homeland, I migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2018. My Britishness offered me reassurance and familiarity, yet I also came to see how my heritage complicated the act of settling. After the occasional embarrassing cultural misstep, came humility and a desire to know more about this place I wanted to call home. This marked the beginning of a slow, reflective process to figure out how to operate in the context of a new place and what it means to belong.

Several months after moving to the hilly northern suburbs of Wellington, I decided that my arthritic back felt strong enough to walk the 4.2km route to collect my youngest from school. From the footpath I noticed how the mailboxes on one street leaned at a curious angle into an absent wind. I found the little community book exchange built into the mossy bank near the dairy and wondered who else might enjoy the books I'd never got around to reading. My eyes scanned the silent windows of the old villas and squinted at the litter jewelling the edge of the park. I picked up a shard of a broken brake light, stopped and held it to the light, and saw the irony. I stepped only within the lines of the terracotta pavers and the bitumen seams of past repairs, and finally I thought about how Admiralty Street got its name.

Abandoning my car that day allowed me to slow down and reorient myself with my locality. What had been a blur of nothingness as I raced towards the school bell became textured, dimensional, alive. I realised that it was the ordinary, nuanced characteristics that distinguished this place from the other places I had known.

This experience forms the foundation of my art practice research, which is grounded in locality as a lived and situated experience. As the artist, my narrative is inevitably shaped by my own position and perspective of the place that I occupy. I am less interested in telling people *what* to see than in offering *how* to see for themselves: to notice what is often hidden in the everyday, to attend to what is taken for granted, to look more critically at our surroundings and ourselves. In doing so, perhaps this may provide an opportunity for others to explore assumptions about identity and place.

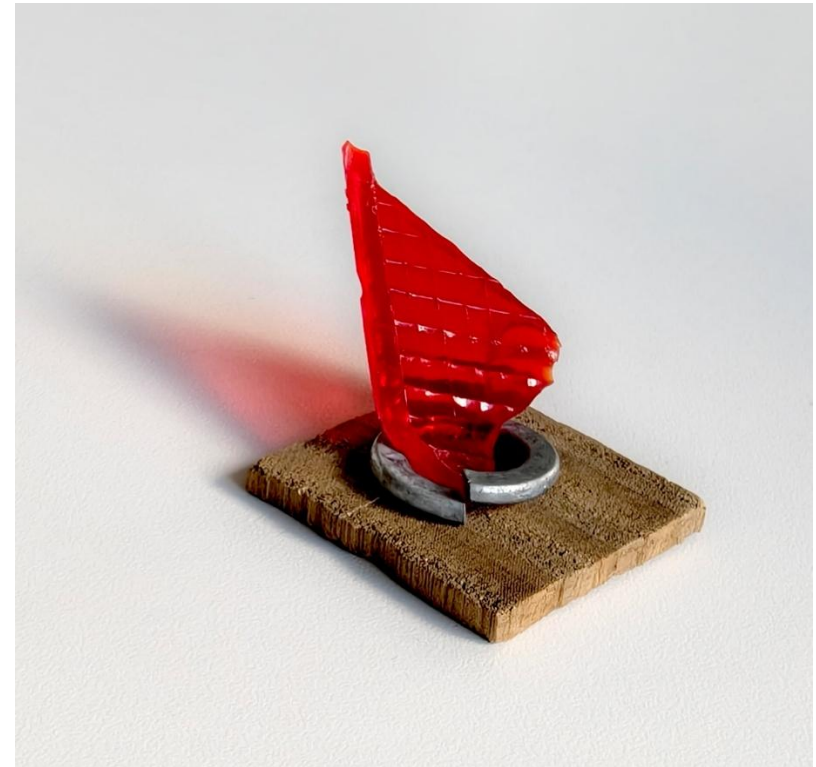


Figure 3
Dawn Wilce, *Brake Light, Stopped (Ngaio)*, 2025.
Brooch. Materials found during walk.
Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist

Introduction

This research investigates how site-responsive artistic practice can cultivate forms of noticing that reveal the overlooked and materially subtle within everyday places. The perceptual shift described in the preface emerged through the simple act of slowing down and being present with my locality. This moment becomes a prompt for a broader enquiry into the conditions that allow noticing to occur.

I use the term *attunement* (the act of tuning in; the state of being tuned in) to describe the quality of attention that arises by being present with a location long enough, or closely enough, for its nuances to surface. These nuances may take the form of small infrastructural details usually overlooked, or the quiet signs of wear that accumulate through occupation. Each offers a point of connection that can alter one's pace, physical orientation, or rhythm of engagement.

Attunement names the moment when perception becomes relational—when the body adjusts to the cues, resistances, and provocations of locality, and a sense of knowing emerges through this exchange. In my practice, small jewellery-like objects gently intervene to stimulate this relational encounter between the viewer and locality. These encounters reveal attunement as an intimate, co-produced process in which both body and object participate in shaping the affective encounter. Locality is defined in the context of practice in Chapter 2.

This definition of attunement will be applied through a practice of contemporary jewellery and will be elaborated on further in Chapter 1, where I situate the term in relation to existing scholarly uses and practitioners. Grounded in this relational perspective, my position in this research is shaped by an evolving affiliation with materials, objects, and locality, and the project is framed as three interconnected strands: the conceptual, the method of making, and the material.

Conceptually, it draws on theories of locality and embodied perception, as well as object-centred frameworks that consider how materials and things shape encounters with place. In practice, the project employs methods of presence—which I position as forms of dwelling—such as pausing, returning, drifting, sustained looking, and making, as ways of prompting a relationship with locality.



Figure 4
Dawn Wilce, *Fallen Field*, 2025.
Necklace. Pohutukawa leaves, faux pearls,
embroidery thread.
Pukeahu, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

This forms a process that is slow, iterative, open-ended, and receptive to the subtle contingencies of the everyday. These encounters are mirrored in the making, which generates site-responsive jewellery gestures that shapes the way viewers encounter the work, encouraging relational connection, attunement, and reflective insight. Materially, the work engages with fragments, residues, intimate objects, and small-scale encounters to examine how meaning is embedded in the ordinary, and how aspects of place might be re-imagined through artistic intervention. These are propositional encounters, not representations, that provoke an active, situated engagement. The aim is to create conditions of noticing and to foster a heightened connection to the spatial conditions that shape experience and influence perception.

Coming to this project as an artist, the field of contemporary jewellery provides the disciplinary lens through which these strands converge. This lens emerged through the creative practice, rather than preceding it, arising from a deeper understanding of the nature of materials and objects. Clarifying this position helps frame how I make decisions and how I consider the viewer's act of discovery as central to the work's meaning. Jewellery's forms, scale, and embedded languages shape how I notice, handle, and interpret the materials and situations I encounter, and inform how these encounters are reconfigured as artwork. Its intimacy and portability align with the sensibilities of attention that underpin this research, enabling subtle interventions that operate at the threshold of visibility, revealing themselves only through close or sustained attention. This framing also supports a more involved and embodied lens, where jewellery is not only situated, but worn by place, prompting awareness of the space it occupies and the connections it activates. When installed, these re-imagined fragments of locality, what I call *attunement devices*, invite a choreography of noticing. These subtle gestures encourage viewers to move through space differently and encounter the work in ways that feel responsive to their own curiosity and attention. In this way, agency is distributed across space, materials, and viewers in the making of meaning. The installation becomes a site for a discursive encounter in which viewers assemble their own connections, allowing renewed perspectives on the places they inhabit to emerge.

While my articulation of these concepts may now appear grounded, they began as aspirational aims at the project's inception. Attunement, as an experiential modality and ethereal concept, resisted early definition. It was only through sustained making, repeated testing, and ongoing reflection over the past two years that my understanding matured. In this sense, the practice itself became the teacher, shaping the enquiry from within.

Early experiments centred on testing the affordances of costume jewellery to understand how it might mediate an audience's response, revealing the ways small, wearable objects can influence perception and bodily gesture. My focus then turned to making jewellery-like objects that might stimulate engagement with locality. This began with walking and making in situ, generating performative gestures and provisional forms. As the project developed, I began taking materials away from their sites and reconfiguring them as objects to be placed elsewhere, with installation and viewer engagement becoming a significant mode of enquiry. The most recent works in the series *Almost Settled* (2025–) (see Chapter 3) return to the site of locality itself, combining found materials with existing infrastructure to create subtle interventions that sit quietly within the environment.

Reflecting on my approach, I see that each iteration afforded a re-shuffling of the hierarchy of the tools I had available to support the act of discovery for the viewers. Each stage of the practice has helped refine my understanding of how materials and jewellery objects communicate, how subtle gestures can initiate engagement, and how the conditions of locality shape the ways viewers encounter the work.

The chapters that follow build on these foundations by articulating how the project works through the lens of contemporary jewellery, foregrounding the significance of materials, intimate objects, and their capacity to mediate viewer behaviour. Dwelling and orientation are developed as key frameworks for understanding how the body encounters and co-produces a sense of locality. Though not in date order, selected works are presented as exemplars through which ideas are tested, re-imagined, and installed, allowing a discussion of theory and practice to evolve in parallel. The text concludes by reflecting on the contributions the project offers at the interface of contemporary jewellery and site-responsive practice.



Figure 5
Dawn Wilce, *Footnotes*, 2025.
Brooch. Akeake seed pod, steel wire, safety chain & pin, lens from
artist's reading glasses.
Massey University, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

Chapter 1: Jewellery as Attunement Device

As I alluded to in the introduction, creative practice sat at the centre of my evolving understanding of the conditions that might actualise a state of embodied attunement. It helped me consider how jewellery can operate as a device that shapes this mode of attention. This insight developed alongside scholarly applications across philosophy, affect theory, and material studies, which frame attunement as an embodied, relational mode of perception that unfolds through encounter.

Scholar of contemporary cultural theory Kathleen Stewart positions attunement as an atmospheric and affective sensitivity to the ordinary, where attention is drawn to the textures and rhythms that circulate within everyday environments.² Stewart's focus on the ambient and the overlooked resonates with my interest in surfacing the muted material traces and residues that quietly register occupation and shape the character of locality.

Cultural theorist and political philosopher Erin Manning extends this by allowing me to recognise how such sensitivities take hold in the body. Manning defines attunement as a minor gesture—a subtle, emergent shift through which bodies and environments co-compose experience.³ Her emphasis on movement, micro-adjustments, and the pre-conscious highlights how attunement unfolds before intention fully forms. This resonates with the subtle bodily recalibrations that occur when viewers mobilise their gaze and edge closer to my jewellery-like interventions.

Stewart and Manning establish attunement as both atmospheric and embodied, which contemporary philosopher of ecology and affect theory Russell Duvernoy grounds as an ecological responsiveness informed by process philosophy. Drawing on the ideas of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Alfred North Whitehead, he argues

² Kathleen Stewart, "Atmospheric Attunements," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29, no. 3 (2011): 445–453.

³ Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

that attention is not a mental act but a relational process in which bodies and environments continually tune to one another.⁴

Attunement in my practice emerges through encounters with both the jewellery-like interventions and the material and atmospheric textures of locality. The object mediates this process by first drawing the viewer's attention to its placement, before the field of noticing widens to register surrounding material cues—such as the scuffed edge of a curb, the resilience of a fallen leaf, or the way moss has overcome a discarded battery (Figure 6). This emphasis on co-composition therefore supports my understanding of attunement as a perceptual state that arises through the situated relations between object, body, and the environmental conditions of locality.

Material mediation theorists such as Don Ihde further illuminate this relationality by showing how objects and materials actively mediate perception by amplifying, redirecting, or filtering aspects of the world.⁵ His account offers a useful bridge to contemporary jewellery, where scale, immediacy, and physical orientation are also central to how jewellery objects are encountered.

The Evocative Nature of Jewellery

Framing jewellery as an attunement device requires situating this claim with the specific histories and conventions of the field. Jewellery is synonymous with the body and speaks to presence. This relational condition is activated through being worn, carried, held close and endures when displayed off the body. In this way, it can be argued that jewellery objects are not passive possessions but active accomplices that will inevitably carry memory, affect, and relational charge.

Ethnographer and psychologist Sherry Turkle describes such things as evocative objects: capable of sustaining relationships and provoking new ideas through a



Figure 6
Dawn Wilce, *Almost Settled*, 2025–.
Explorations in the local, documentation of site.
King Street, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

⁴ Russell J. Duvernoy, *Affect and Attention After Deleuze and Whitehead: Ecological Attunement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

⁵ Don Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), accessed via EBSCOhost.

sense of reciprocity,⁶ and I understand jewellery as befitting this categorisation. Personally, I have found that pieces inherited, gifted, or found carry the atmospheres of specific people, places, or communities, allowing locality to travel with me and be reactivated through touch or wear. In this sense, jewellery has the capacity to locate oneself in the world, shaping experience, and forms the foundation from which the jewellery lens becomes meaningful to my project.

The emergence of contemporary jewellery as a studio craft in the mid-twentieth century marked a decisive shift away from the traditions of preciousness, adornment, and technical mastery toward a more conceptually driven practice.⁷ Art writer Damien Skinner states that contemporary jewellery is a self-reflective practice, shaped by a specific sensitivity to the situations in which it exists, which includes critique of the history of the practice, and the broader field of jewellery and adornment.⁸ Makers typically treat jewellery as a site for questioning value, material hierarchies, and the social codes that govern how objects are worn, handled, and approached—including an engagement with the spaces in which work exists.

The Active Thing

Liesbeth den Besten reinforces this orientation by framing contemporary jewellery as a way of thinking through its embedded material codes. Her notion of *jewelleryness* foregrounds experimentation and context-responsive modes of presentation, where jewellery functions as a spatialised tool for attuned engagement between the body and the world.⁹ Her emphasis on jewellery's active, propositional capacities supports my understanding of how small jewellery objects

can adorn, but also assert their agency to provoke, signal, and invite—precisely the conditions for attunement to occur. Pravu Mazumdar builds on this by positioning jewellery as an epistemic gesture through which meaning, memory, and identity are formed via acts of making, wearing, and sharing.¹⁰ He considers jewellery as fundamentally relational medium whose meaning emerges through encounter, and activates knowledge through proximity, orientation, and the negotiations between object and wearer. What matters is not what jewellery is, but what it does: how it generates affect, redirects attention, and participates in a wider *dispositive* of relations that shape the conditions of encounter.¹¹

Philosophy and material-culture theorists, including Elizabeth Grosz, likewise argue that materials and objects do not remain inert within a composition; they respond to their surroundings, asserting tendencies and histories that exceed my intention as the maker. This broader perspective reinforces the claims made by Mazumdar and den Besten, situating jewellery within a wider field of object agency.

Taken together with the nature of contemporary jewellery, this establishes the disciplinary and conceptual terrain that my practice both inherits and extends. Noting the significance and value of the codes embedded in materials and jewellery, much of my work begins with the discovery and collection of fragments, residues, small found objects, and detritus gathered from sites within a locality that hold traces of occupation or use. Whether organic or synthetic, each material's weight, composition, fragility, surface condition, and social-cultural references suggest what it might offer and guide my creative decisions around the possibility of form, combination, and placement.

⁶ Sherry Turkle, ed., *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007). Examples given of objects with evocative qualities are a violin, a bracelet, rope, silver pin.

⁷ Damien Skinner, "Thinking about Contemporary Jewelry," in *Contemporary Jewelry in Perspective*, ed. Damien Skinner (New York: Lark Books, 2013), 33.

⁸ Damien Skinner, "What Is Contemporary Jewelry," in *Contemporary Jewelry in Perspective*, ed. Damien Skinner (New York: Lark Books, 2013), 11.

⁹ Liesbeth den Besten, "Making: Jewellery Making," in *Contemporary Jewellery in Context: A Handshake Blueprint*, ed. Peter Deckers (Wellington: Handshake Project, 2017), 20-45.

¹⁰ Pravu Mazumdar, "Jewellery and Hybridity: On Human Nature and the Future of Jewellery," *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue* 17 (2016): 96-107.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 101.



Figure 7

Dawn Wilce, *Take the Red Line to La Reforma*, 2025.

Page from the artist's workbook: decoding material fragments from Mexico acquired in November 2024. Photo: Artist.

This heightened material sensitivity and collecting impulse came about during a month-long research trip to Mexico in late 2024. Arriving during the festival of *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead)¹² set the tone for my curiosity toward the traditions, histories, and cultural threads that connect people over time. In this atmosphere of heightened ritual awareness, I instinctively began gathering modest, everyday fragments from the localities of Mexico City and Oaxaca. Rusted metal, mica shards, flower heads, and architectural debris accumulated as a palimpsest of encounters and impressions gained from my explorations (Figure 7). As I handled the fragments, their colours, textures, and contextual density oriented my movements through Mexico, and guided the making of new artworks. Their material properties suggested how they might be combined, altered, and formed into jewellery-like objects, and what kinds of spatial tensions they could hold, revealing the possibilities the fragment afforded. In this sense, the fragments shifted from souvenirs to material agents of an active dialogue between the locality of their origin and the site in which they would eventually be installed.

Among the fragments I gathered was small cluster of mica shards, gifted to me by a native guardian of the UNESCO site of Monte Albán,¹³ a material valued because of its cosmological associations with the sun (Figure 8). Its shimmering layered structure carried an archaeological presence that felt both ancient and immediate. In Elizabeth Grosz's sense, the mica operated as an "active thing": an artefact whose material life extends beyond its immediate use, accumulating histories and potentials that can be reactivated for reinterpretation in new contexts.¹⁴

Three jewellery-like works were made for the series *Take the Red Line to La Reforma* (2025) which was installed as part of a group exhibition *Floración de*



Figure 8

Dawn Wilce, *Take the Red Line to La Reforma*, 2025.
Process documentation: mica, light, and rivet impressions.
Photo: Artist.

¹² National Museum of the American Latino, "Day of the Dead Resources," National Museum of the American Latino. <https://latino.si.edu/learn/teaching-and-learning-resources/day-dead-resources>.

¹³ For more information on the cultural and historical significance of Monte Albán within the Oaxaca region, see UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Historic Centre of Oaxaca and Archaeological Site of Monte Albán."

¹⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, "The Thing // 2001," in *Materiality*, ed. Petra Lange-Berndt (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 146.

Corazón - A Kārangā to Mexico at the Engine Room Gallery.¹⁵ Once placed within the gallery, the mica not only recalled the site it came from but also it asserted its own tendencies—catching light, refracting colour, and drawing attention to the overlooked fuse-box where it was installed (Figure 9). Positioned there, it quietly echoed another of its histories: the value of mica as a vital component in electrical circuitry¹⁶, gently folding in the fragment’s geological past to the industrial and colonial networks through which such materials circulate. Subtle demonstrations of the affordances the materials offered were evident in how they shaped how viewers approached the work, prompting pauses, glances, and shifts in orientation.

Affordances for Attunement

James J. Gibson’s notion of affordances offers a useful grounding for understanding how objects are activated and invite forms of engagement. Affordances describe the possibilities for action that an object makes available through its material properties—such as its scale, weight, texture, and cultural associations—without the need for explicit instruction.¹⁷ Attunement emerges through the encounter between a body and these cues.

Earlier creative practice had set the groundwork for investigating the distinction between what an object is and how it exists. *Foraging* (2024) was a performative installation involving a large collection of previously worn, vintage costume jewellery brooches and their containers (Figure 10). Brooches have their origins in utilitarian dress practices as functional clasps. Over time they became understood as intimate, outward-facing objects whose proximity to the body gives it a haptic charge, while its orientation to the world enables brooches to operate as

¹⁵ *Floración de Corazón – A Kārangā to Mexico*, exhibition brochure, Engine Room Gallery, Massey University, Wellington, November 2024. The brochure states: “The exhibition speaks of culture, place, love and loss, life and death”, and acknowledges the vast and complex country that left enduring traces on the practices of the exhibiting artists.



Figure 9
Dawn Wilce, *Take the Red Line to La Reforma (Fused)*, 2025.
Mica shards from Oaxaca, tin coated steel,
glass seed beads, thermally bonded wire.
The Engine Room, Massey University, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

¹⁶ Minerals Education Coalition, “Mica,” Minerals Education Coalition.

<https://mineralseducationcoalition.org/minerals-database/mica/>.

¹⁷ James J. Gibson, “The Theory of Affordances,” in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception: Classic Edition* (New York: Psychology Press, 2014), 119-135.

communicative and perceptual devices.¹⁸ The viewers' responses to the objects suggested that *Foraging* (2024) was a live demonstration of affordances in play.

During the performance, people reached into the boxes of costume jewellery without prompting, engaging with a curiosity-driven understanding of the objects and an intuitive recognition of the acquisitional logic of thrifting. Collectively and instinctively, the viewers sorted, re-ordered, and cast aside the brooches as if guided by a shared, embodied familiarity—what one person described as a kind of muscle memory. They touched, pinned on, selected their favourite, and recounted their own memories. Their affordances shifted as the viewer approached, noticed their weight, how they compared to others in the box, whether they fit with the wearer's outfit, or how their sheen contrasted with the world beyond the box. The viewer's actions were not fixed or predetermined, but most likely influenced by cues from the brooches' histories of wear, use, and repair that surfaced through these interactions. This demonstrates how evocative objects such as jewellery accumulate traces of their own encounters and continue to act within new relational fields, affording possibilities through the ongoing interaction between body, object, and environment.

Traditionally, the affordances of jewellery were tightly bound to the conventions of use and wearability: fastening, adorning, and signalling. As was apparent in *Foraging* (2024), the latent affordances within the old brooches could be re-activated during an encounter with the objects, yet I felt that the kinds of actions and responses the brooches invited were constrained by their inherited forms. Contemporary jewellery writer and curator Benjamin Lignel states that physical interaction is neither essential nor necessary for a jewellery object to be activated in contemporary practice.¹⁹ In this sense, I considered that jewellery could be liberated from the body and freed from display protocols to mediate the viewer's encounter with locality.

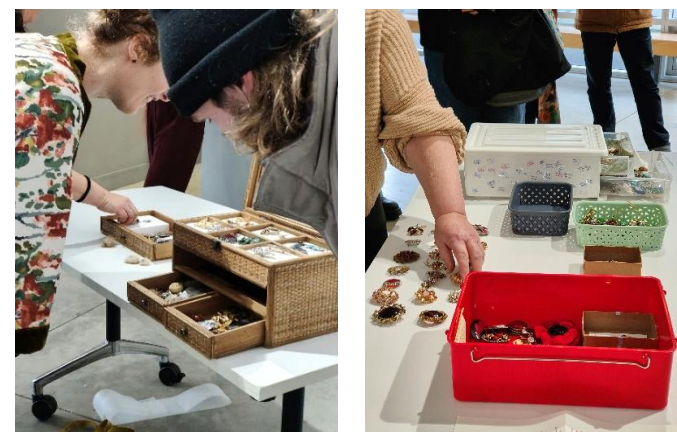


Figure 10
Dawn Wilce, *Foraging*, 2024.
Performative installation of costume brooches.
Massey University, Wellington, NZ.
Photos: Courtesy of Fiona Campbell (top) and Artist (bottom).

¹⁸ Rachel Church, *Brooches and Badges* (London: Thames & Hudson; V&A Publishing, 2019), 8.

¹⁹ Benjamin Lignel, "Redefining Use," in *Contemporary Jewelry in Perspective*, ed. Damien Skinner (New York: Lark Books, 2013), 52.



Figure 11

Jacqui Chan, *Host a Brooch*, 2011.

Christchurch, NZ. Photo: Courtesy of the Artist. Reproduced with permission.

Contemporary jewellers such as Jacqui Chan, originally from Aotearoa, build on this expanded understanding of what jewellery can do beyond its conventional affordances, and are increasingly drawing from social studies and performance art to extend these possibilities into participatory and socially engaged contexts. The sensitivity to material cues and the subtle invitations embedded in jewellery underpins Chan's practice, and her project *Host a Brooch* (2011) offers a compelling example of how contemporary jewellery can act as an attunement device.²⁰ Chan created a series of brooches from the rubble of the Christchurch earthquake that occurred in February 2011, and invited participants to walk with them, attending to how the brooch altered their experience of the city (Figure 11). Participants reported becoming absorbed in the detail, colour, and structure of their surroundings as they reconnected to their environment. Many described a renewed sense of hope because the brooches drew attention to what remained, rather than what had been lost in the quake.²¹

Chan's jewellery objects successfully resisted ornamentation and instead they actively directed perception outward toward a damaged landscape and its lost architecture. Her practice demonstrates how even modest, fragmentary jewellery forms can recalibrate perception and emotional orientation through their material presence and the affordances they offer. In contrast, my own work aims to frame attunement as a relational event that emerges through the encounter with the jewellery object itself, rather than guiding attention to an external scene. My aim is for the quality of attention to be shaped by subtle, affective negotiations between bodies, objects, and the contingencies of locality. Gestures remain suggestive, provisional, responsive to micro-adjustments in proximity and sensation that jewellery invites. For me, attunement is not a matter of re-seeing the attributes of the world but of sensing through the body, and a relational encounter better aligned with Erin Manning's account of affective, pre-cognitive orientation.

²⁰ Sally Blundell, "Brooch Adventures... Text by Sally Blundell," *Host A Brooch*, 25 November 2011. <https://hostabrooch.blogspot.com/2011/11/brooch-adventures-text-by-sally.html>.

²¹ Jacqui Chan, *Host A Brooch*, exhibition catalogue (Christchurch: The National, 2011); see also Chan's project blog, *Host A Brooch*, accessed 3 Jan 2026, <https://hostabrooch.blogspot.com/>.

Jewellery as an Exploratory Practice

I had already developed a curiosity about how jewellery's solid and subjective qualities generate multiple realities of action and representation, but *Foraging* (2024) and Chan's practice were pivotal in prompting me to begin making jewellery rather than engaging solely with existing, commercially produced pieces. Making offered a way to activate these potentials directly, allowing materials and forms to participate in shaping attention, orientation, and affect through encounter.

As already noted, contemporary jewellery discourse positions the field as one defined by experimentation and the loosening of conventional typologies, treating it as an exploratory mode rather than a fixed category. As I began to make jewellery, my own pieces shifted toward experimental material combinations and eventually more provisional structures that resisted conventions of preciousness, and expectations around finish and form (see Figures 4, 13 and 14 as examples). Although constructional integrity remained important, these experiments opened a space for jewellery to function less as a resolved object and more as a catalyst for attunement.

My ethos is similarly resonant with the practice of Aotearoa contemporary jeweller Lisa Walker, even though her pieces are wearable whereas mine are not always capable of being worn. Walker questions what jewellery can be and has a fascination for new materials not typically used in conventional jewellery. Her assemblages often emerge from familiar, everyday materials that carry their own histories of making, use, and discard (Figure 12). I have always loved her brooch *Untitled*, (2006) constructed from a concoction of debris from the workshop floor. She unapologetically claims that "just because it's jewellery doesn't mean we have to clam up and be well behaved."²² It was a bold and significant move to select dust, wood shavings, used plastic wrap—perhaps the lowest value materials—but, her approach affirms that value can reside in what might otherwise be considered unremarkable.



Figure 12
Lisa Walker, *Untitled*, 2006.
Brooch. Rubbish from the workshop floor,
100 mm diameter. Photo: Courtesy of the Artist.

²² Lisa Walker, *An Unreliable Guidebook to Jewellery*, 2nd ed. (Melbourne: Perimeter Editions, 2021), 335.

Taking everything into account, this expanded understanding of jewellery supports a hybrid practice that moves fluidly between studio and site, remaining responsive to context, and using small, materially charged objects to prompt momentary alignments of attention. My interest lies in creating a field of distributed agency, where jewellery-like forms can “jewel” place—animating and being animated by the surfaces, textures, and environmental conditions they meet. In this sense, the site itself becomes a kind of wearer, carrying and extending jewellery’s logic of adornment as it unfolds across the environment.

What emerges is a practice that makes *with* place rather than simply in it, positioning jewellery as an attunement device capable of inviting connection. Locality becomes perceptible from the subtle spatial, sensorial, and situational negotiations between body, material, and surroundings. The next chapter considers how this orientation to locality is felt, navigated, and co-produced in detail.



Figure 13
Dawn Wilce, *Hard Landing*, 2025.
Necklace. Concrete, plastic coated garden wire, crystal beads.
Owhiro Bay, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.



Figure 14
Dawn Wilce, *Footnotes*, 2025.
Installation detail.
Massey University, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

Chapter 2: Jewelling at the Edges

Encountering Locality

My creative research is concerned with the conditions through which a sense of locality is generated. Locality, as I use the term, emerges through the places I pass through repeatedly, and is not tied to a single address or stable site, but to the contingent, experiential, and relational conditions through which encounters with place unfold.

I distinguish locality from *place*, with its emotional and symbolic associations; from *site*, which refers to the physical or architectural substrate of an encounter; and from *space*, which often carries more abstract or conceptual understandings of spatiality. These terms appear throughout the exegesis not to flatten their differences, but to reflect the shifting relational and material conditions through which the work is encountered. Locality, in this sense, is an orientation—a way of meeting the world that is continually made and remade through movement, attention, and embodied presence.

Attending to locality in Aotearoa also requires acknowledging its layered, shifting, and often contested nature. Drawing on the work of Ella Kahu, a psychologist from Aotearoa whose research examines belonging and the affective dimensions of place, I recognise that gaining a sense of locality here is not fixed or singular. It is shaped by personal histories, cultural frameworks, and emotional connections that evolve over time.²³ In Aotearoa, these dynamics are further complicated by the ongoing impacts of colonisation and the responsibilities of Tangata Tiriti, which shape where one stands in relation to place. As a relative newcomer, I do not attempt to resolve these wider complexities; instead, I recognise them as part of the relational conditions through which an awareness of locality is slowly untangled and formed through repeated encounters and the gradual accumulation of lived experience and situated knowledge.

²³ Ella R. Kahu, "Framing Student Engagement in Higher Education," *Studies in Higher Education* 38, no. 5 (2013): 758–773.

Art writer Martin Patrick notes that “cultural production depends on and acts in relation to the surrounding lifeworld and cannot escape from it.”²⁴ His emphasis on the lifeworld supports my understanding of locality as an active state of the everyday: responsive, contingent, and charged with the relational exchanges that unfold within it. This sense of liveness underpins my practice, where my own awareness of locality first develops through attunement to the rhythms and residues of the environments I move through, and subsequently, represented in the jewellery-like objects and slight site-responsive interventions that arise through my creative work. The relational circuit is completed when the work meets its environment and prompts the viewer to notice and re-orient themselves within that locality. In this way, locality is not presented or forced, but produced relationally through the interplay between site, object, and viewer.

This relational understanding of locality becomes especially significant in environments where the sense of place has been weakened by the ways a site is coded, used, and maintained. My recent research has focused on a car park off King Street, Mount Cook, Wellington, where any historical specificity the site once held has been overwritten by its current banal function in the everyday (Figure 15). The car park is a site of transit, efficiency, and transactional anonymity. The painted lines, asphalted surfaces, and utilitarian signage organise movement and behaviour in ways that flatten the site’s character, and depth of communal relationality. In this context, I have been exploring how my practice might operate as a counter-gesture to the sense of placelessness that prevails at the site in the series *Almost Settled* (2025–). Through this work, I propose that locality can be produced through repetition, attention, and embodied presence rather than being something inherent in the site itself. This series of work is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.



Figure 15
Dawn Wilce, *Almost Settled*, 2025–.
Explorations in the local, documentation of site.
King Street, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

²⁴ Martin Patrick, *Across the Art/Life Divide: Performance, Subjectivity, and Social Practice in Contemporary Art* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2017), 5.

A Note on Walking and Attention

Miwon Kwon, an art historian and theorist whose work on site-specific art and the politics of place observes that postmodern site-based practices often seek to counter the “placelessness” of globalized urban life by reactivating local, lived, and situated experience.²⁵ Although walking is not currently the focus of this research, it became an early way to enter into an immersive and intimate encounter with locality, and resonated with the impulse Kwon describes. It also became an early way of testing the distinctions I was beginning to make between: site, place, and locality; between method and condition; and between movement and the relational dynamics that enable noticing.

Walking offered a provisional entry into the conditions through which locality began to surface which prioritised presence, repetition, and embodied attention as modes of inquiry. Walking through my neighbourhood revealed the subtle rhythms, textures, and overlooked details that sharpened my focus and started to shape how the area felt. Initially resisting objecthood, *Jewels of 6035* (2025) tested the notion of Liesbeth den Besten’s concept of *jewelleryness* through shadow play as a relational trace and spatial gesture of the every-day (Figures 1 and 16).

Most striking of the observations was the proliferation of fences, railings, and other boundary reinforcements—everyday structures that, on one level, signalled neighbourly coexistence, yet another hinted at deeper questions of status and the contested histories of land ownership in Aotearoa. I became unsettled with photography as a mode of documentation; its fleeting ephemerality felt insufficient to fully capture the relational and somatic intimacy of these encounters. I began to question whether such gestures could sustain agency beyond the moment of enactment.

Reflecting on this, I adopted a more relational and conceptually embedded approach. *Chainwalking* (2025) was created through a series of repeated walks through the suburban landscape, slowly knitting wire chains that unfolded one



Figure 16
Dawn Wilce, *Jewels of 6035*, 2025.
Ngaio, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

²⁵ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 7-11.

stitch with each step I took (Figure 17). I am not a knitter, so at first my attention was firmly focused on my craft, and I rarely looked up except to check my footing. Over several clumsy kilometres, my dexterity became almost autonomous, allowing me to look up and be present with my surroundings for more sustained periods. As the chain grew heavy around my neck, I noticed how virtually all the mailboxes screamed ‘NO JUNK MAIL’ (or variations of it), and how the grass was far coarser underfoot than back in Wales.

The interaction between site and walking generated a syntax through which thoughts, emotions, and encounters organised themselves in real time—amplified, and almost choreographed, by the restraint imposed and gradually released through learning a craft. The resulting object became a wearable trace of my embodied experience, and the conditions became a metaphor for the slow emergence of attunement to the latent life of my locality. The deeply absorbing and connective qualities of the walks felt palpable—though only to me.

This approach revealed the limitations of a solitary, mobile practice, and attempts to document the work (through photography or sound) inevitably reduced it to archival residue, further displacing its immediacy and undermining its site-specific resonance. Recognising this distinction was crucial, as it made clear that locality in my project is not something I can access alone but something that must be co-produced through a more concrete relational encounter. In retrospect, walking functioned less a primary mode of working and more as a temporary scaffold that helped me grasp the relational dynamics in play. This enabled me to refine my intent, sharpen my tools, and clarify the conditions necessary for noticing. This realisation also signalled the need for a more tangible mode of practice, one capable of anchoring itself in the world and sustaining a social charge beyond the moment of enactment.



Figure 17
Dawn Wilce, *Chain Walking*, 2025.
Digital photographic documentation of walking/chaining experience.
Crofton Downs, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

Dwelling on Affect

As walking revealed its limitations, dwelling became an alternative method for developing a felt sense of locality to which I could respond creatively. Here, the first major work of the project, *Footnotes* (2025), emerged as a grounded, situated response to these relational dynamics. This series of jewellery-like objects marks the moment where locality, attunement, and jewellery's orientational capacities converge in practice, giving material form to the relational insights that had begun to surface.

Dwelling offered a slower, more sustained mode of engagement with creative practice—a way of being-with site rather than moving through it. Tim Ingold's dwelling perspective positions locality as something that evolves through presence, gesture, rhythm, and duration.²⁶ Elizabeth Grosz's account of lived spatiality further emphasises how the body's unfolding relations with its surroundings co-produces place.²⁷ Together, these perspectives suggest that locality is continually co-produced, and that knowledge and attunement arise slowly through the body over time. Writer and cultural historian Rebecca Solnit poetically adds that “the art of noticing is about letting oneself be touched by the world.”²⁸ So, with those dynamics in mind, I got closer and began to inhabit my locality more slowly and intentionally: pausing to bend for a closer look, lingering at the end of the path, and dragging my feet across the asphalt. Remaining in one place for extended periods allowed surfaces, shadows, and overlooked details to gradually reveal themselves. I found myself tracing the contours of a crooked line with my finger, inspecting my dusty fingertip, and loosely knotting a weathered cord around the girth of an old native tree (Figure 18).

This mode of attunement resonates with the practice of Melbourne-based Inari Kiuru, whose work emerges from foraging within her local urban environment. Kiuru gathers fragments that carry atmospheric and temporal traces of place, such as leaf matter, wire, and torn cardboard. The objects, installations, and photographs



Figure 18
Dawn Wilce, *Footnotes*, 2025.
Explorations in the local, documentation of dwelling.
Ngaio, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

²⁶ Tim Ingold, “Building, Dwelling, Living: How Animals and People Make Themselves at Home in the World,” in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 172-188.

²⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, “Architecture from the Outside,” in *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 57-73.

²⁸ Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 5.

that form her practice reveal a heightened sensitivity to the residues and textures of the overlooked (Figure 19). Her practice affirms that attention itself can become a material, shape the conditions of encounter, and allow locality to be felt as active, contingent, and alive.

Footnotes (2025) emerged directly from my own explorations of the local. Rather than documenting the site, the work materialises the perceptual sensitivities cultivated through the reciprocal and embodied act of dwelling, translating them into specific material and spatial propositions. The title of the series plays on the notes that shaped the creative response, such as the distilled observations, fleeting sensations, and small fragments gathered (at times quite literally underfoot) during repeated visits to my locality. Foraged along the edges of my suburb, these notes build a composite material profile of one site in my locality: native kōwhai seeds signal the end of spring, lichen from shaded paths, the domestic spoils of shredded paper and plastic twine. I can never know the full story of these materials or objects, yet what we perceive and interact with retains a memory of their existence beyond our subjective interpretations—even if it reaches us only as a fragment or trace. These minor tokens of site register the subtle shifts in noticing that dwelling made possible, becoming the material vocabulary through which the jewellery works take form.

The jewellery was constructed from these quiet and unassuming textures of locality. These were paired with a personal material offering each to mark a trace of bodily presence—a well-chewed piece of gum, the lens from my broken reading glasses, strands of hair snagged in my comb, and the sole of my boot. The addition of a vintage jewellery component references time, and the inherited forms and narratives which also induce a sense of place. The assemblages were joined with cotton thread, steel wire, and weathered flax fibres that were stitched and wrapped with basic tools and craft-based techniques.

The resulting objects were mostly recognisable as a necklace, brooch, and ring. The significance of the material attributes and qualities are important to *Footnotes* (2025) because they align with the everyday conditions from which the work emerges—such as the well-trodden walking routes, the overlooked textures of locality, and the modest gestures of picking up and carrying. Philosopher Wenn-C.



Figure 19
Inari Kiuru, *Eye, the beholder*, 2021.
Photo: Courtesy of the Artist. Reproduced with permission.

Tsai and design researcher Elise van den Hoven suggest that human traces like these are “potential memory cues that have the capability of triggering our autobiographical memories and connecting us socially”.²⁹ This insight is significant because the lived residues embedded in *Footnotes* (2025) operate as material prompts that can activate recognition, association, or relational awareness in ways that exceed my own authorship. It is hoped that in this sense, the objects participate in the social and mnemonic life of place, extending the work beyond its material composition.

As already mentioned in the earlier discussion on contemporary jewellery, the non-preciousness of the material choices resists the hierarchies traditionally associated with jewellery, allowing the objects to remain grounded in the ordinary and the contingent. One ring, for instance, echoes the bevel set presentation of a traditional cameo but subverts its conventions entirely (Figure 20). Instead of an intricately carved profile set in precious metal, the cameo is pressed into well-chewed gum and stuffed into an acorn cup as an improvised setting. The makeshift coiled wire ring presents the assemblage as an intimate portrait of the overlooked. In this way, the ring reworks the cameo’s logic: not a fixed likeness, but a moment of attunement drawn from the textures and gestures of the everyday.

Rings carry some of the most enduring symbolic weight in the history of jewellery as a cultural, political, and relational object. Their circular form is associated with continuity, commitment, and the binding of relationships—in this case with the maker/wearer and the world.³⁰ Yet the materials used complicate this lineage. The acorn carries its own symbolism of endurance and longevity, but it is also a colonial import, naturalised into the local environment through histories of settlement and displacement. Likewise, the raised portrait of a cameo is a miniature assertion of endurance, identity, and cultural heritage, but the delicately carved shell traditionally relies on being set in more enduring and precious metals to assert permanence and value.³¹ The base metal wire and chewing gum construction



Figure 20
Dawn Wilce, *Footnotes*, 2025.
Ring. Acorn cup, shell cameo, steel coated wire, chewing gum.
Massey University, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

²⁹ Wenn-C. Tsai and Elise van den Hoven, “Memory Probes: Exploring Retrospective User Experience Through Traces of Use on Cherished Objects,” *International Journal of Design* 12, no. 3 (2018): 57.

³⁰ Marcia Pointon, *Brilliant Effects: A Cultural History of Gem Stones and Jewellery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

³¹ Diana Scarisbrick, *Portrait Jewels: Opulence and Intimacy from the Medici to the Romanovs* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008).

anchors the ring in the material conditions of the present, echoing the industrial workshop and current day references to material culture. Their resilience, however, ensures that these fragments hold their own temporal weight, carrying enduring traces of place, weathering, and prior use.

Bodily Orientation

Although the work emerged from dwelling within my local environment, I chose not to return and reinstall the pieces back at the original site. At the time, I was interested in testing whether the sense of locality cultivated through embodied engagement could endure in the material and compositional qualities of the objects themselves, and whether these sensibilities could be reactivated in a different spatial context with a ready set of viewers (such as a gallery). I did, however, choose a location that sat outside conventional exhibition formats that had its own atmospheric conditions and potential for encounter.

The jewellery series *Footnotes* (2025) was integrated within the architecture of an old workshop formerly used by fine art students at Massey University. The layered history of the university's site and utilitarian character of the workshop offered a textured, non-neutral environment rich with overlooked attributes and spatial traces (Figure 22). Massey University's Wellington campus sits on the site of Pukeahu and is a place associated with long Māori occupation, and later a military and industrial precinct after colonisation by the British.³²

Miwon Kwon reminds me that space is not a neutral container but an active constellation of histories, institutional frameworks, and conditions of access that influence how we move and behave within it.³³ Although Pukeahu is now configured as a site of tertiary education, its deeper material and colonial strata

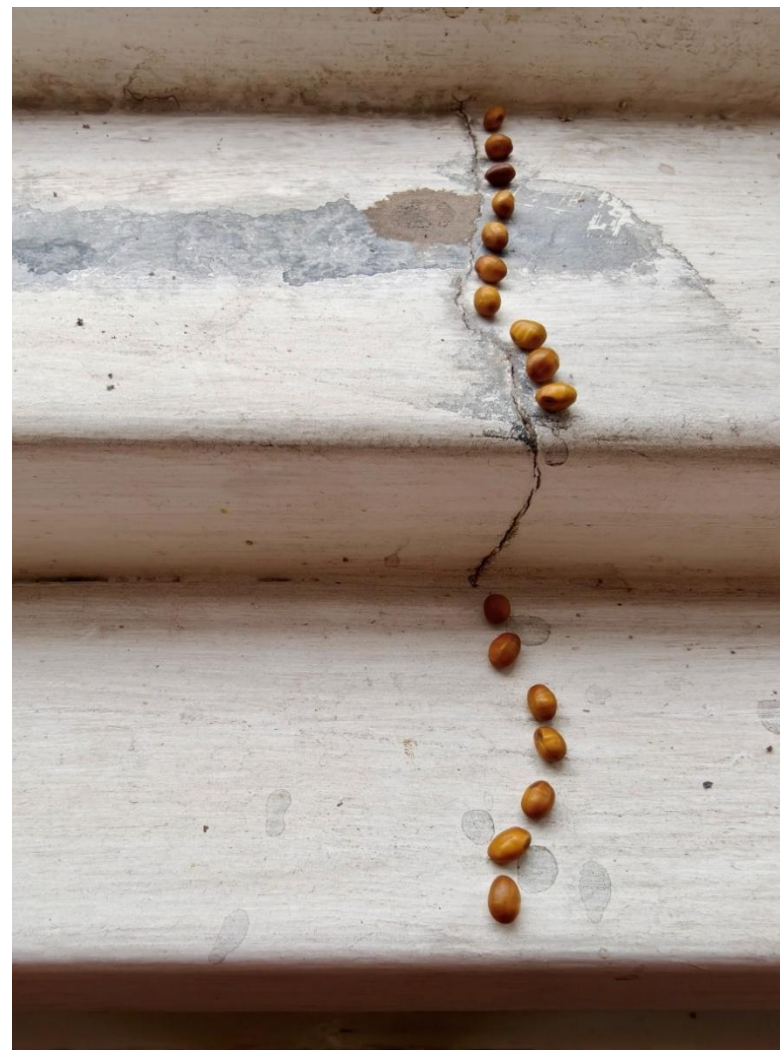


Figure 21
Dawn Wilce, *Footnotes*, 2025.
Chain. Kōwhai seeds and cracked sill.
Massey University, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

³² Aliyah Winter, Angela Kilford, Bronwyn Holloway-Smith, and Izzy O'Neill, "The Levelling of Puke Ahu," *Enjoy Contemporary Art Space*, March 2015,

<https://enjoy.org.nz/publishing/exhibition-essays/the-levelling-of-puke-ahu/the-levelling-of-puke-ahu>.

³³ Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, 7-11.



Figure 22
Dawn Wilce, *Footnotes*, 2025.
Installation detail.
Massey University, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

remain ever present but buried. These layered histories prompted me to consider how the jewellery might converse with the architectural features, industrial remnants, and latent memories embedded in the workshop. This influenced decisions about the material composition, construction, and form of the jewellery objects, and how I approached the installation in terms of their physical orientation and how they were placed or fixed.

Sara Ahmed's concept of orientation offered a way to understand how this encounter might unfold differently for different bodies—how what comes into view, and what remains peripheral, is shaped by personal histories, cultural frameworks, and habitual lines of movement.³⁴ In this sense, the installation's liveness did not solely arise from the objects themselves but from the shifting perceptual orientations of those who entered the workshop. Certain elements felt immediately “given”, such as the window that naturally invited looking beyond the frame of the workshop. Everyday infrastructure such as the floor underfoot or the exposed pipes and wiring tracing the edge of the space, were far more resistant to attention. Although the workshop was not a conventional gallery space, several other artists had installed paintings and sculptures, so viewers automatically carried with them the protocols of gallery viewership. This tends to direct attention toward walls, plinths and traditional display surfaces. These conditioned habits of perception pushed the workshop's features and past life further out of view, rendering them part of the unnoticed background.

Jewellery, when situated within architectural or ecological settings, becomes a tool for re-orientation, shaping how bodies navigate and perceive their surroundings. with them. But I also acknowledged that viewers would approach the work through what they already knew, what they had learned to notice, and what they were conditioned to turn away from. These orientations determined which aspects of the workshop came into focus and which receded into the background, setting the terms for how the work could be encountered.

³⁴ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1-14.



Figure 23
Dawn Wilce, *Footnotes*, 2025.
Brooch. Kōwhai seeds, freshwater pearls,
cotton thread, tacks, sole of the artist's gum boot.
Massey University, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist

Footnotes on Locality

Rather than treating the workshop as a backdrop, I engaged the attributes that referenced its past life and context, refusing the traditions of the white cube. My intention was to create situations that might unsettle habitual perception and draw viewers into a heightened curiosity about the work in the hope that this would initiate a more attentive relation with the site.

With that in mind, the jewellery-like pieces were not installed on a plinth or in a display case. Instead, the workshop's worn surfaces, residual marks, and pedagogical legacy provided a spatial proposition where the works could be slowly discovered, unfolding through proximity and offering a means of attuning to the understated rhythms of the space. The jewellery objects could not be apprehended from a distance. They resisted spectacle in favour of intimacy and sat quietly at the edges of the room, waiting to be discovered. The placements were intentionally non-hierarchical and deliberately unframed. The partial sole of a gum boot—its tread wedged with rusted tacks and pearls—slouched in a brooch-like form on the windowsill, orienting itself in relation to the viewer's body. An organic fragment encapsulated between a pair of reading lenses hung in the window like a pendant, subtly magnifying the view of the wider locality and context beyond the workshop. A string of native seeds traced a hairline crack, exposing the flaw and revealing past traces of occupation. A brooch-like assemblage of a lichen-encrusted twig and faux pearls was caught in the recess of the window frame, lingering at the margins of attention (see Figures 5, 21, 23 and 25).

The pieces hummed softly and steadily, like a low-frequency memory vibrating through the architecture, prompting viewers to renegotiate their orientation to the space by inviting slow looking, second glances, and quiet discovery. Their near invisibility against the expansive space resisted traditional jewellery notions of power and preciousness, and instead, emphasised the understated and the overlooked. This subtlety produced interesting outcomes. For some viewers the work was almost entirely mute, its elusiveness compounded by two large-scale artworks flanking it on either side (by other artists); one viewer stood unknowingly on a ring of pearls embedded within the worn timber floor as they took in a painting, and another leaned against the windowsill almost knocking the gum-boot

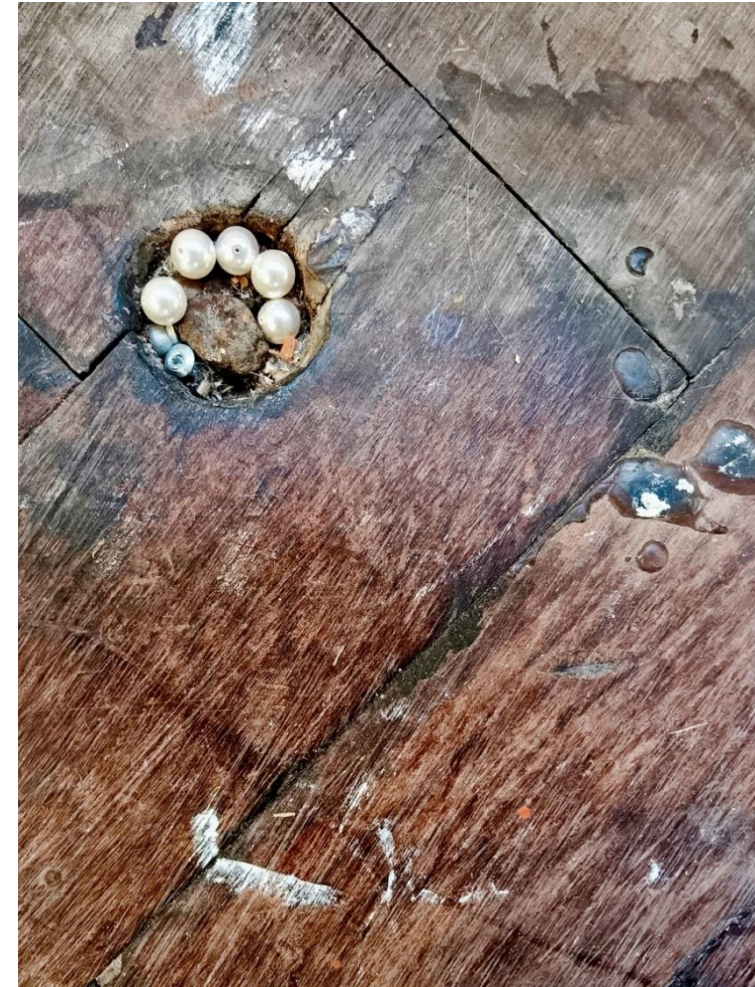


Figure 24
Dawn Wilce, *Footnotes*, 2025.
Ring. Faux pearl beads and debris in the workshop floor.
Massey University, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

brooch to the floor (Figure 24). For others, this restraint became a catalyst for discovery; they noticed a single piece and gradually tuned in, tracing the edges of the space as each object came into view. Due to the fragmented nature and rustic quality of some of the materials, the viewers questioned what gestures were intentionally meant as art and what were the historic remnants of the site, opening additional possibilities for engagement.

The gestural restraint and unconventional framing revealed both the risk and potential of the work's understated approach. These gestures extended the work's relational field, encouraging viewers to attune not only to the objects but to the spatial histories they were entangled with. In this sense the site participates in the making of the work. The architectural edges, shadows, and ambient conditions all influence how the work is perceived, and careful placement offers spatial cues that heighten awareness of the environment. For example, a fragment placed at ankle height may shift the viewer's gaze downward, inviting them to crouch and look more closely at the signs of age and wear on the floor—and possibly cast their mind to who might have walked there before them.

Such participatory modes are understated but central to the practice, marking the moment when the viewer becomes attuned to the spatial and material propositions of the work. This framing supports an involved and embodied mode of viewership, reinforced by the way in which the jewellery objects inhabit the site. Their subtlety resists ornamentation, both through their small proportions—which sit in tension with the vastness of the space—and the modesty of their placement. While they could be read as 'jewellery for buildings', they remain tied to the scale of the human body. I also made a deliberate decision to restrict their fixability to the architecture or body, as they are without their clasp or pin. This incompleteness adds to the conceptual basis of this work. Although jewellery always maintains an active dialogue with the body, withholding wearability allows these pieces to step outside the conventions that define traditional jewellery as something that serves, adorns, or completes a human subject. Instead, they occupy a threshold state in which their agency can surface, asserting the reflexive and experimental capacities of contemporary jewellery.



Figure 25
Dawn Wilce, *Footnotes*, 2025.
Installation detail.
Massey University, Wellington, NZ.

Setting the right conditions for this agency is crucial: the objects must not be over-determined by function, preciousness, or technical virtuosity. Their incompleteness creates space for them to act—to lean, to rest, to slip into architectural seams, to be animated, and prompt noticing. In this state, they participate in the relational field rather than being subordinated to it, allowing attunement to arise through encounter rather than intention.

In larger, ambiguous, or more visually charged spaces, such as the workshop, a slightly more pronounced object could, in future, act as a trigger, offering an initial cue about how to proceed through the work and how to read the quieter gestures that follow without becoming didactic. The rudimentary methods of assembly reinforce this tension, foregrounding responsiveness over refinement and allowing the materials to assert their own tendencies rather than being forged into predetermined and enduring forms.

These altered rhythms and attentional shifts arise from affordances that provoke re-orientation, becoming a way of understanding locality as co-produced through embodied presence and the histories in place that guide how the encounter unfolds.



Figure 26

Dawn Wilce, *Footnotes*, 2025.

Brooch. Kōwhai seeds, freshwater pearls,
cotton thread, tacks, sole of the artist's gum boot.
Massey University, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist

Chapter 3: Almost Settled in Practice

A Choreography of Noticing

In following the quiet rhythms of locality, I have found my way back to the early moment described in the Preface—the moment when locality first revealed itself as something alive, textured, and asking to be met. Since that moment, the unfolding practice has clarified what that encounter set in motion: an understanding of aliveness not only as a quality of locality, but as an active state within the work itself. Through dwelling I have learnt how to notice the shifting textures of the everyday, the temporal conditions that shape how locality is lived and felt, and to meet each site where it is rather than where I expect it to be.

I have sought to stay with these encounters of the everyday long enough for them to speak, allowing contemporary jewellery to become a way of listening as much as a way of forming. In that sense, the notion of jewellery has shifted from noun to verb; from object to action. To jewel (the act of jewelling) is a way of returning to being in locality—a relational event that is responsive, contingent, and open to what unfolds.

In the expanded sense of contemporary jewellery, framing the work this way has asked me to loosen the impulse to adorn, ornament, or resolve an object through wearability and conventional form. If I am to address the implicit connection with the body, the question becomes not *who* is wearing the jewellery, but *what* the jewellery is carrying. In the context of this practice, I have a sense that it is the jewellery that wears locality. Each piece holds the essence of place through its materials, composition, and the traces it gathers, and it is this carrying that prompts viewers to notice and attune. Rather than serving the body, the work becomes a familiar conduit through which the textures, histories, and atmospheres of locality can be felt. This is a subtle, but significant agential shift based on my understanding of what contemporary jewellery can do.

I remain curious about the possibilities of a practice that is provisional, fragmentary, and open-ended; one that allows the viewer to fill in the gaps and ground the narrative in their own subjectivity. These learnings have guided the



Figure 27
Dawn Wilce, *Almost Settled*, 2025–.
Installation view.
King Street, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

development of *Almost Settled* (2025–), the current (at time of writing) series of jewellery that brings together all the concerns of responsiveness, agential currency, and encounter, with the aim of guiding viewers to a state of heightened attunement to locality.

Jewelling, in practice as it stands, is a way of attending to place, not embellishing; a mode of encounter, not completion; a form of attunement, not adornment. It subtly creates the conditions for noticing; shifting jewellery from something that *serves* the body to something that *mediates* between bodies and place. It is an agent that stimulates a choreography of noticing.

This may read like a conclusion, but it should perhaps be considered as an interim settlement of my negotiations to this point. Working in this way has taught me to trust the quiet. It has shown me that the smallest encounters can open entire ways of thinking and making and recognise them as the ground from which this work continues to grow. Taking all these elements together informs the position my practice takes as I near the conclusion of this project and is the basis of my intentions for *Almost Settled* (2025–).

***Almost Settled* (2025–): An Ongoing Series of Jewelling at the Edges of Place**

While earlier works echoed more recognisable jewellery forms, this loosens those conventions of form and moves into sites that operate outside of gallery protocols. In a barely used car park, I developed a site-responsive intervention where fragmentation and intimate placement—shaped by the conditions and materials of the site—became a method of ‘jewelling locality’ (Figure 28).

Smashed pieces of domestic crockery incongruously littered the fractured surface of the well-worn tarmacadam: blue-and-white motifs associated with colonial tableware, contemporary cosmic patterns, the cropped profile of a kitten, and



Figure 28
Dawn Wilce, *Almost Settled*, 2025–.
Found ceramic fragments, parking line.
King Street, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

snippets of text. After collecting what amounted to a mug and a plate's worth of shards, I arranged them in a small mosaic-like form at the end of an abraded parking line. The gesture reinstated the painted boundary, not to restore its function, but to register a response to the site's layered condition, influenced by its histories, patterns of use, and forms of neglect that shape how it is encountered.

The mosaic-like form echoed the broader material state of the site, marked by the crockery shards, accumulated litter, persistent weeds, and neglected construction. I also considered them fragments of multiple histories, marked by industrial production, everyday use, and the informal pathways through which such objects circulate and enter public space. As well as the traces of domesticity in their material construction, the decorative surfaces of the ceramic pieces introduced another level of fragmentation: they bore cropped imagery, patterns, and partial text that were severed from their original contexts and redistributed across the ground. Once representational, these images became material residues, pitted with dirt from lengthy exposure to the site. The act of reassembly into a makeshift mosaic was a deliberate spatial adjustment to shift their status from overlooked debris to active agents within the site, capable of drawing attention to the components of a constructed locality (Figure 29).

The car park sits off King Street in Te Aro, Wellington, where I park occasionally when I attend university (Figure 15). This locality also formed part of the wider Te Aro Pā and its associated cultivations before the land was subdivided and intensively built up under colonial urban development.³⁵ Its current state carries the imprint of these broader historical shifts, perhaps emphasised by the elevated colonial villas that overlook the recessed car park.

Car parks carry an inherent sense of placelessness—devoid of the conditions in which a sense of locality can be felt—influenced by its functional and transitional mode of encounter. Marked bays, directional notations, and implied payment



Figure 29
Dawn Wilce, *Almost Settled*, 2025–.
Installation detail.
King Street, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

³⁵ For accounts of the extent of Te Aro Pā, its cultivations, and subsequent subdivision, see Heritage New Zealand, *Toenga o Te Aro (remains of Te Aro Pā)*, List No. 7771; and Wellington City Council, *Te Aro Pā* booklet.

systems organise movement and capitalise land, and such spaces are designed for regulated passage rather than prolonged attention. The accumulation of discarded vapes, bottle tops, and fast-food containers point to the varied rhythms of unregulated occupation that take place beyond day-time use. This debris, along with the persistent weeds and fading paint, signal the site's low priority within the urban locality.

Unlike other works which introduced new materials to those found in a location, this intervention responded to the conditions by working with what had already settled there. This sensibility aligns with the practice of artist Kate Newby, whose work is “rooted in the act of collecting,” gathering “matters, materials, and fragments that contain only the memory of the object they used to be.”³⁶ Although an artist rather than a contemporary jeweller, Newby often relocates these fragments into new spatial contexts, in ways that feel like jewellery. Her installations often use commonplace materials such as pebbles, glass splinters, and pieces of metal to heighten awareness of the everyday (Figure 30). Newby's approach demonstrates how humble materials can operate as active agents within a site, subtly altering perception and activating the edges and thresholds.

Reinstating the line through the provisional placement of ceramic shards into a mosaic pattern, acknowledged these conditions without attempting to resolve them or impose a corrective order. The line was returned only as a fragmentary echo of its former function, drawing attention to the regulatory logic of the car park while also temporarily interrupting it. The mosaic acted as an attunement device, prompting a shift in how the ground could be read, and interrupting the usual mode of passing through a car park. Its scale required viewers to look down and engage with the site at close range, registering surface details and features that would usually be disregarded within the fleeting spatial routine of parking.

Similarly, contemporary artist Bena Jackson's mosaic-encrusted bollards comment on community actions in public spaces and urban environments, inviting the public

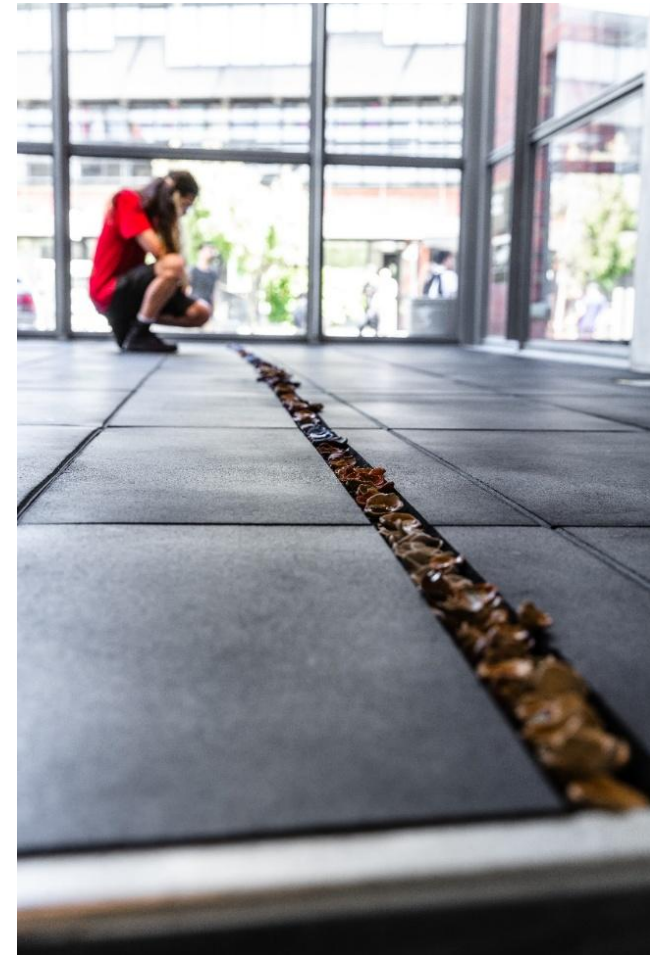


Figure 30
Kate Newby, *you run it*, 2021.
Assorted clay, collected broken glass.
Installation view, *YES TOMORROW*, Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art
Gallery, Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of
Wellington, 2021.
Photo: Courtesy of Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery.

³⁶ Tique, “Loved Like a Sunbeam.”

to question the built world around them.³⁷ Her work repositions an everyday object that regulates movement, transforming it into something that asks to be approached, examined, and reconsidered. This shift from a directive barrier to a textured, attention-seeking surface activates a mode of viewing that parallels the provocations in my own. Both practices encourage the viewer to slow down, to notice what ordinarily recedes into the background, and to recognise how spatial cues shape our behaviours and assumptions. While operating on a slightly different level to Jackson, both works draw people closer, foregrounding the subtle negotiations of attention that occur as we move through public space.

The use of mosaic in this context captured my interest as I recalled being enthralled by the excavated mosaic floors at the House of Dionysos during a visit to Paphos, Cyprus in the early 2000's. Composed of countless tiny stones (tesserae), these mosaics depict ancient cultural narratives, scenes of daily life, and offer insight into the social functions of Roman dwellings.³⁸ Mosaics have long been used in domestic, public, and community settings to communicate values and aspects of social identity. A notable example in Wellington is the Clyde Quay Wharf Mosaics, by G.V. Hansen (1964), which incorporate Māori motifs and cultural elements (Figure 31) that speak to the indigenous heritage of Aotearoa.³⁹ Although no longer widely integrated into the architecture of modern civic spaces, mosaics continue to be cultivated in schools and community initiatives to foster a sense of belonging and cohesion.

Italian micromosaics laboriously assemble tiny glass tesserae into highly rendered imagery of landscapes and architecture, often set into jewellery such as brooches,



Figure 31
Mural inside overseas terminal, Clyde Quay, Wellington harbour, ca. 1962-1965. National Library of New Zealand, Tiaki Catalogue, Ref. 583515.
Photo: Duncan Winder Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library.

³⁷ Bena Jackson, *Here we all are: Sculpture, ingenuity and urban environments* (MFA Exegesis, Massey University Wellington, 2023).

³⁸ David Parrish, "Review of *Domestic and Divine: Roman Mosaics in the House of Dionysos*, by Christine Kondolean," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 57, no. 3 (1998): 327-29. <https://doi.org/10.2307/991353>.

³⁹ Public Art Heritage Aotearoa New Zealand, "Clyde Quay Wharf Mosaics," accessed 11 Jan 2026, <https://publicart.nz/artworks/g-v-hansen-1964>.

necklaces, and bracelets (Figure 32). Emerging from Rome's long mosaic tradition and flourishing around 1800, Italian micromosaics became a key Neoclassical medium, using meticulously rendered scenes of ancient monuments and Italian vistas to circulate cultural ideals, historical narratives, and Grand Tour appetite for portable images of antiquity.⁴⁰

As miniature pictorial objects, micromosaics concentrate attention on a single subject or narrative, drawing the viewer in through their illusionistic precision. Their visual impact relies on a perceptual shift: from afar the image reads as a coherent scene, yet close inspection reveals its construction from countless discrete fragments. As micromosaic master Di Castro notes, like Impressionism, the effect depends on this deception of distance and proximity.⁴¹

These dynamics parallel the logic of my own work, which appears as a continuous painted line from a distance but discloses its ceramic fragments in proximity. This activated mode of viewing makes the viewer's spatial position and field of attention integral to the work's meaning, as each relation affords a different mode of engagement. What initially seems stable and coherent gives way to its constituent parts when approached, prompting a heightened experience of noticing shaped by the viewer's embodied movement through the space.

These works go further than the fixed memorialisation of the micromosaic's imagery, by holding space for new things to happen. The line turns into a mosaic up close, yet the mosaic resists resolving into a coherent picture. When viewed from above, it might suggest a loose topography—a scattering of boundaries or parcels of land in miniature. The ceramic fragments rest lightly on the asphalt, vulnerable to being swept outward the moment a car tyre passes over them. This fractured composition echoes the idea that locality is dynamic and contingent, assembled from partial, shifting, and sometimes conflicting elements.



Figure 32
Micromosaic brooch panel, maker unknown, Italy,
ca. 19th century. Glass tesserae.
Photo: by the Author.

⁴⁰ Stephanie Sporn, "The Magic of Micromosaics: How Makers from Giacomo Raffaelli to Castellani Painted with Glass," TEAF, March 9, 2023,

<https://www.tefaf.com/stories/the-magic-of-micromosaics-how-makers-from-giacomo-raffaelli-to-castellani-painted-with-glass>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

In this sense, the work shares something with the composite logic seen in contemporary jewellery practices such as Octavia Cook's *Ancestral Home & Garage (Pakuranga) [pair of earrings]* (2009),⁴² where fragmentation and reassembly create surfaces that refuse singular readings and instead hold multiple, unsettled possibilities. Although Cook does not describe her work in terms of mosaics, the technique aligns with her broader interest in the constructed nature of identity and value.⁴³

The car park contains an abundance of other discarded materials and architectural textures that I consider a ready-made palette to engage with further. These are materials that carry identities specific to their local community, lingering stories, complex histories, and the physical buildup of marks left by people's use. These materials and spatial conditions offer additional possibilities for further fragment-based responses that extend the logic of jewellery beyond the ceramic shards. The aim of the series is not to beautify or ornament the unkempt car park, but to register the conditions under which such sites persist and trigger acts of noticing. I am optimistic about the potential of jewellerying the car park and hope to visualise this work as a contribution both to my ongoing practice and the wider field of contemporary jewellery.



Figure 33
Dawn Wilce, *Almost Settled*, 2025–.
Explorations in the local, documentation of site.
King Street, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

⁴² See Octavia Cook, *Ancestral Home & Garage (Pakuranga) [pair of earrings]*, 2009, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/1069168>.

⁴³ Objectspace, "Cook & Company," for contextual discussion of Cook's interest in constructed identity and value.



Figure 34
Dawn Wilce, *Almost Settled*, 2025–.
Installation detail.
King Street, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

Reflection

The works that emerged trace a practice of attunement: a slow choreography of looking down, leaning in, and letting materials guide the pace of thought. In their modest gestures and conditional arrangements, they ask what might surface when we pause within the ordinary, when we let locality reveal itself as layered, responsive, and alive.

Reflecting on the turns and eddies of this project, I recognise how far my practice has travelled over the last two years, fully embracing the experimental possibilities within the expanded field of contemporary jewellery. The locus shifted from re-activating used costume jewellery, to object-centred making through the disciplinary lens of contemporary jewellery. Walking first activated an interest in the relational potential of making within locality, but the practice soon shifted toward more sustained modes of dwelling, collecting, and making that redistributed agency to both site, object, and viewer. Over time creative gestures leaned away from the conventions of traditional jewellery and toward the reflexive and experiential capacities of contemporary jewellery. Value was determined not by preciousness or finish, but by jewellery's capacity to carry a sense of locality and stimulate the conditions for attunement.

Jewellery became a mode of subtle encounter, shifting my practice to the intersection of contemporary jewellery and site-responsive installation. Everyday materials and fragments were collected and combined into more unconventional and provisional forms, then re-oriented in dialogue with the architectural, historical, and material textures of place. Most recently, jewelling has emerged as an active, agential process—a way of engaging with the affective sensibilities of locality and allowing the work to remain open, adaptive, and charged.

Situated at the edges of both place and discipline, the practice offers a mode of viewer encounter and a discursive site for attunement. *Almost Settled* (2025–) is the current iteration of this trajectory, yet it does not signal an endpoint. Instead, it marks an ongoing enquiry into how these small acts of jewelling might continue to expand, testing the boundaries of the discipline while remaining anchored in the quiet, attentive practices from which this work first emerged.

If this research has a hope, it is that these small acts of attention might ripple outward: that others, too, might find themselves pausing, sensing the ground beneath them, and reconsidering the assumptions that shape their relationship with place. In noticing what usually recedes, we open the possibility of meeting the world—and ourselves—with greater awareness and care.



Figure 35
Dawn Wilce, *Almost Settled* 2025–.
Explorations in the local, documentation of site.
King Street, Wellington, NZ. Photo: Artist.

And at the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
—T.S. Eliot⁴⁴

⁴⁴ T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1943).

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