

HELEN BRITTON
THE STORY
SO FAR



Australian

Design

Centre

Education Kit

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Helen Britton

Helen Britton is a multidisciplinary Australian artist based in Munich, Germany with an international reputation. Her multidisciplinary practice melds jewellery, sculpture, drawings, painting, stencils and installation. Her work is informed by her life and family history along with popular culture, threatened traditions, environmental destruction and human anxiety. Helen is the tenth artist in the Australian Design Centre exhibition series Living Treasures: Masters of Australian Craft honouring eminent Australian craftspeople, celebrating their mastery of skill, their achievements and the unique place they occupy in the national design culture the solo exhibition of new work accompanied by a substantial publication and national exhibition tour through ADC On Tour.



Portrait of Helen Britton in the exhibition at Australian Design Centre. Photo: Jacquie Manning

Exhibition Background

Between 2017 and 2019 Helen Britton travelled three times to Australia to document the house of her great aunt and godmother Kath Carr on the Clarence River (Ngunitiji, Yaegl Country). Kath taught Helen how to make collages with pressed Australian flowers that she had collected or with metal fillings from the lathe in the shed; to paint on porcelain, which was her greatest hobby, and to make jewellery. Kath's house was full of wonders: shells, gemstones, driftwood, dried seaweed and fish. When Kath died in 1996, her house was locked and left completely intact. Helen's detailed photographic investigation of the house was a journey back to the beginnings of her creative practice.

The Story So Far, takes as its starting point this photographic essay creating a network of connections between that time and this. The work comments on the rich and complex world of country women, a time of creativity and frugality that formed Helen's early experience of Australia, of lost possibility, and a colonial past and present, still so deeply problematic. Helen views the exhibition in its entirety as one work, an immersive installation environment where every element from the wall colour to the placement of the works in relation to each other is carefully considered. The exhibition comprises painting, installation, jewellery, drawings and objects alongside the first showing of the photographic work *My Godmother's House* and the book, *The Story So Far*.

In her introduction to the book *The Story So Far*, Australian Design Centre CEO and Artistic Director, Lisa Cahill, writes that *this exhibition is a stepping-off point for us to think more deeply about our own lives and the world around us. What do we see? What do we cherish? Can we live a richer life by tapping into our own creativity? What conversations would we have with the objects around us? What is jewellery? Is it art? Of course it is!*



The Story So Far exhibition at Australian Design Centre in Sydney. Photo: Jacquie Manning

About this Education Kit

This exhibition resource is designed for students of all ages and abilities. In it, selected exhibition themes have been expanded for their relatability. The activities have been designed for adaptation to suit a range of different educational environments and research and creative studies from primary to tertiary and community learning.

It reflects the key themes of Helen Britton's exhibition, drawing on the stories underpinning the works in the exhibition which include formative childhood memories and environments, consideration of the role of objects in our lives and memories, the animal world and observations of Australian and European natural and industrial landscapes and Helen's approach to making as a way of understanding the world. These stories are unpacked via a series of activities to engage students and provide opportunities to reflect on stories from their own lives and experiences, as well as awakening imaginative material play through interacting with objects, making, drawing and writing.

How to use this Education Kit

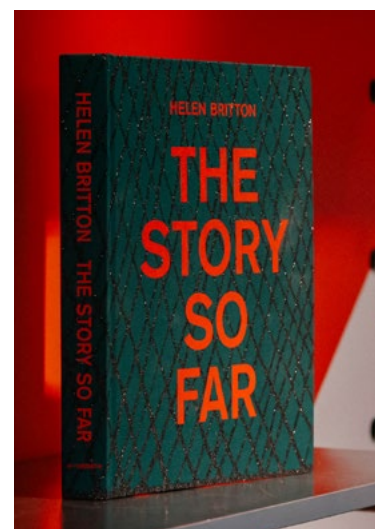
This Education Kit is designed around a series of activities that can be undertaken individually or combined to develop larger class projects.

Helen Britton: The Story So Far Education Kit focuses on the works in the exhibition which include painting, installation, jewellery, drawings and objects and the photographic work *My Godmother's House*, it is broken down into a range of activities reflecting the key themes and engaging with works in the exhibition. The aim of the activities is to extend students understanding of many of the exhibition themes as well as awakening creativity through sharing stories, interacting with objects, photography, drawing, making, research, imaginative and factual writing. Teachers and students are encouraged to engage with the book *The Story So Far* which is included in the exhibition and includes essays, images, stories and biographical information.

Violence, love, riches, sentimentality, humour, wisdom; a friendly companion, a lucky charm, an amulet. Hope. Themes of popular culture, the essence of a pop song in solid form. While the figures themselves draw their shapes from the cheapest trinket, the sentiment that they convey reaches into the deepest abyss. I see in these works all the effort, humour, joy and failure of our existence. They are rough signifiers, visually reduced and emotionally condensed. They are also private icons, some accompanying me from my earliest memories, others invested with my own associations, sifted out of the chaos of possibility through fitting into my hunting patterns. We all live in hope and want luck, more than ever at this point in history. – Helen Britton

This (exhibition) is a tale of three sorts of joy... and it unfolds through three instances of what we may call containers, holding many treasures: a house, a cupboard and a time-travelling assembly of talismans.

– Julie Ewington in her essay 'Magic' p.113



The Story So Far book accompanies the exhibition. Photo: Jacquie Manning

Key Themes

Creativity and making

Storytelling

Objects charged with meaning: amulets, talismans and relics

Family histories

Childhood memories

Home environments

Animal species and habitats

Industry / Nature

Materials

Activities

Photography

Creative writing

Factual writing

Biography/autobiography

Research

Drawing

Painting

Collage

Collecting

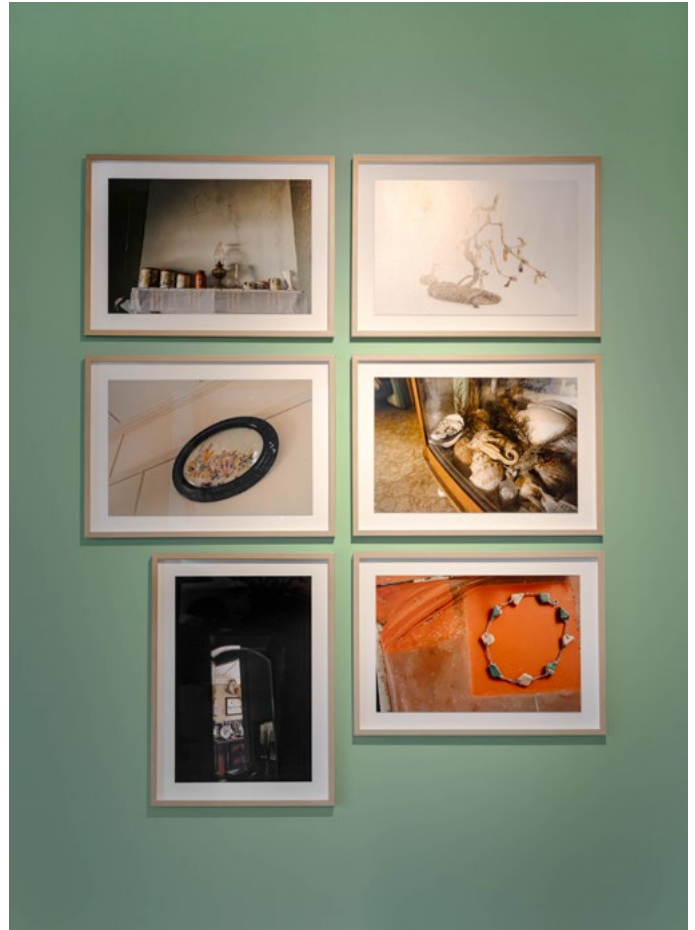
Assemblage – object-based collage/shadowbox

Jewellery making

Preserving Memories – Capturing a Moment in Time and Place

My Godmother's House comprises 20 photographs of Helen's godmother, Kath Carr's house, distilled from more than 700 taken by the artist on several visits to the house during 2018 and 2019. The house was filled with memories for Helen of childhood summer holidays filled with activities such as making jewellery and learning to paint porcelain with her Godmother. The house had remained locked up and untouched since Kath's passing in 1996, and in it Helen discovered a multitude of clues about her own creative practice and that its foundational influences could be traced back to this place.

Helen uses visual cues in her photography to describe to the viewer that these interiors (we never see the outside of the house) are a time capsule. One photograph looks through a mesh screen door to the interior, the interior is mostly dark, it seems to only be lit by the bright exterior light that filters through drawn gauze curtains, themselves the subject of another compelling image. In not showing the exterior of the house, Julie Ewington notes that it is as if we step directly into Helen's dream, into her memory. The photographs examine the house in forensic detail, revealing clues about who the artist has become.



My Godmother's House, Australian Design Centre exhibition view.
Photo: Jacquie Manning



Photograph from *My Godmother's House*. Photo: Helen Britton



Think

Helen was particularly fascinated by her godmother's collections and how they were arranged. Look carefully at the collections of objects Helen photographed in her godmother's house, how many of these things can you find in the work Helen has made for the exhibition?



Explore

Create a photographic documentation of the interior spaces in your home (or school).

When you are photographing, experiment with angles, colours, shadows and capture details to change the mood of the scene. Helen's photographs of the house present it as both loved and 'strange', think about this when you are taking your photographs.



Extend

Print your images and share them with your class. Look for and clues that reveal information about the occupants or purpose of the place you are photographing.

What are some of the stories revealed by the images?

Trinkets and their Tales

Lucky charms, trinkets, costume jewellery, glass Christmas baubles and cheap treasures have long been of interest to Helen Britton and are a recurring element of her material palette, as found objects included in the work, or reimagined in silver and paint.

Helen has a huge archive of flea market finds as well as costume jewellery components that she includes in her work, saved from warehouses of deadstock.

The Trinkets as Prisoners is one of several series of work that Helen has made, depicting the same figures, which represent love, joy, anger and violence. In this work they are presented as emotional prisoners, or perhaps memento mori for the past lives of the trinkets they represent, and the earth we have choked with them – perhaps they are not so lucky after all.



The Trinkets as Prisoners, 2020, Australian Design Centre exhibition view. Photo: Jacquie Manning



The Trinkets as Prisoners, 2020. Photo: Dirk Eisel



Think

What is a trinket? Why are they special?

What are the objects Helen has painted in the work *The Trinkets as Prisoners*? Why do you think they are trapped behind bars?

What are some special or intriguing trinket or objects that you own or encounter in your life? Bring your object, or a picture of it to share with your class.



Explore

Draw one, or a series of portraits of your object/s. You might want to use Helen Britton's works *Louie*, *Prawn Head* or *Wisdom's Despair* as inspiration.



Extend

The book accompanying this exhibition features an imagined dialogue Helen has written between the animals who appear in the exhibition, she describes this story of the trinkets as '*a smattering of human emotions, love, fear, violence, joy, wonder, mystery among others...*'

Imagine having a conversation with your object, what would you talk about? What do you think your object will tell you? Write your conversation.

OR

Write and illustrate a fictional history of your object.

This activity takes the following statement by Julie Ewington in her essay '*Magic*' from the book *The Story So Far* as it's starting point: '*...begin with imagination and end with words*'

Treasured Objects, Charged with Meaning

The Mysterious Path of Matter and Time is a work made with a collection of treasured objects Helen has saved from her childhood. She refers to them as detritus or relics. The brightly coloured objects are almost identifiable behind the misty surface of a cabinet that Helen made about 30 years ago. She has surrounded the cabinet with cement branches that could have come from a forest fairy tale. The intention of the work is for it to have the feeling of a reliquary. That the objects are not quite visible, and out of reach creates desire. Desire to see and understand what they are, and perhaps to touch, wear and play with them.

Helen says 'What's really interesting about this piece is if you look closely into the cabinet, into the little cases, you're going to find all kinds of indicators of my history, such as the train tickets from Newcastle to Sydney, my high school and primary school badges. All kinds of things that played a significant role in growing up.'



The Mysterious Path of Matter and Time, 2025, Australian Design Centre exhibition view. Photo: Jacquie Manning



The Mysterious Path of Matter and Time (Detail), 2025. Photo: Dirk Eisel



Think

What are some of the things that you can identify enclosed in this work?

What is a relic and what is a reliquary? Why do you think Helen has described the work in this way?

Do you have any familiar objects that could be described in this way? What are they?



Explore

Research the history of an historical object or relic and write a biography of the object.

You might want to consider the following prompts: What is it used for? When was it invented? Where does it originate from? What is it made from? When was that invented/discovered? Has it always been made from that material?

OR

Research the artistic history of assemblage and medium of the shadow box. Who are some other artists who have worked in this way?



Extend

Imagine yourself as the object. Write and illustrate an autobiographical story as the object.

OR

Create a reliquary or shadow box assemblage to hold one of your own special object/s.

Portals to Enchanted Worlds

The Magic Cupboard presents another reference to enchanted domestic space. Cupboards appear frequently in fiction as spaces for the imagination and wonder, fear and horror – they are portals to other worlds.

The cupboard in this exhibition comes from Helen's godmother's house. It is an Australian wooden wardrobe, made in a style typical of the early 20th century. Helen was captivated by it as a child, describing it as being like 'a fairytale cupboard'. For the exhibition, Helen has remade and decorated the cupboard, drawing woodgrain patterns on the exterior, referencing the fake wood surfaces of domestic interiors, and the fake naturalism of zoos and animal enclosures. The engraved drawings of the lyrebirds on the door mirrors recall details from her godmother's house.

The cupboard is presented as a 'cabinet of wonders' with its doors open, inviting us into another time capsule, containing the past and the present, guarded by two recently made sentinels – a horse and a wolf.

The objects in the cupboard tell the story of Helen's life so far, it contains relics (or reliquaries) from Helen's childhood and things which have triggered her imagination, including linens, trinkets, toys, small objects from her lifetime of collecting, references to her family of makers, particularly women making things to sustain their families, and an archive of her making life spanning early works made whilst a student to current pieces, there is even a jar containing all of the dust, nails and debris from the process of remaking the cupboard for the exhibition.

The back of the cupboard has been removed, replaced by a grid that recalls shade lattice, or perhaps the mesh screen door seen in the photographs. Through it we not only get a different view of the objects within the cupboard, but also an inside/outside view of the exhibition itself.

* It is important to view this work whilst reading the inventory of the cupboard's contents.



The Magic Cupboard, 2025, Australian Design Centre exhibition view. Photo: Jacquie Manning



The Magic Cupboard, 2025, Australian Design Centre exhibition view. Photo: Jacquie Manning

MAGIC CUPBOARD INVENTORY

Drawer: 4 dolls, 2 quilts ca 1950, 1 piece of flannelette, 1 pair of plastic dolls shoes, 1 lock of fake hair.
Artwork: ROSALIE'S CHATELAINE | 2006

Bottom shelf from left to right:
1 jar of plastic animals, 1 koala muff, 1 etching framed 1986, 1 lithograph framed 1986, 1 empty picture frame, 1 Arnott's biscuit tin 1985 containing 1 pair of swimmers, 1 gum leaf from my mother's driveway, 1 box of Cuisenaire rods, 1 piece of coal from Newcastle, 1 large bottle of zebra top shells, 1 limpet covered in barnacles, 1 empty red ink bottle, 1 painted 'Geckos' plate by Kath Carr 1991, 1 empty bottle of blue ink, 1 woodblock 1985.

Shelf 1 left to right:
1 Music Boy, 8 ½ glass Christmas decorations 1975, 1 textile Christmas decoration 1975, 1 wooden tray, 1 blockprint proof 1989, 1 artist's book 1992, (paperbark, stones, leaves), 1 Riley's toffee tin, 1 skateboard, 1 necklace 2006 (Australian stones, silver), 1 empty wooden picture frame.
Shelf extension: CAR SKIN | 1995

Shelf 2 left to right:
1 miniature wall clock set to midnight, 1 child's dress with corresponding pattern 1969, 1 mohair cardigan knitted by Jenny Britton and worn for two generations, 1 collaged artist's book 'Horses' 1978, 1 ice cream tin of foraged ceramic and glass shards, 1 moth embroidery 1989.

Shelf extension: THREE PHASES OF THE HEART | 1994

Shelf 3 left to right:
1 bundle of printed textiles 1990, DOLPHIN LOVE | 2003
4 jars of Caldwell's velour showcard colour ca 1955, 1 Old Gold chocolate box full of barnacles, 1 purple barnacle, 1 Wedgewood box, 2 Avon jars, 1 Kenneth Pirra shirt Melbourne 1966, 1 handmade coat-hanger, 1 vessel from Kath Carr's house containing coal from Newcastle and 1 operculum, 1 Vegemite jar of violet snails, 1 bivalve from Shelly beach, 1 jar of feathers, 1 rubber monster, 1 tin containing nothing.
Shelf extension: TURD | 2016 | Silver | 10×3×3 cm

Shelf 4 left to right:
1 pair of Barbie's boots, Barbie's camera, 1 jewellery box containing, 1 family of Chinese glass horses among other things, 1 bundle of homemade dolls clothes knitted by Jenny Britton and bound by 1 child's hair ribbon, 1 silver and electrical cord necklace, 5 badges: MacArthur, Charlie Chuckles, Boy Scouts, Red Cross and Victory medal pinned to 1 roll of velvet donated by Chris Maloney, 1 artist's book 'The Car' 1992, 2 salvaged bottles, one containing foil stars and dust, containing feathers.

Shelf extension: COAT BOX | 1994

Top shelf left to right:
1 wooden crocodile, 1 jar of childhood detritus, 3 model airplanes, 1 Vegemite jar of dust and nails from this cupboard, 1 koala purse stuffed with tissues.
Shelf extension: BRAIN CLOUD BOOK | 1995



Think

The Magic Cupboard reveals clues to many of the other works and themes in the exhibition. What do you think they are?

Have you encountered any stories where a cupboard is a portal to another world?

What is the role of furniture in the storytelling of this exhibition?



Explore

The Magic Cupboard draws on the idea of the 'Wunderkammer' or 'Cabinet of Curiosities'. What is the history of the Wunderkammer?

How does *The Magic Cupboard* speak to this tradition?

Research some examples of historical Wunderkammer.

Wunderkammer have inspired artists for centuries. Research the Wunderkammer in art practice.



Extend

Create a Wunderkammer of precious objects as a class or in groups. You might want to use an existing cupboard in the classroom,

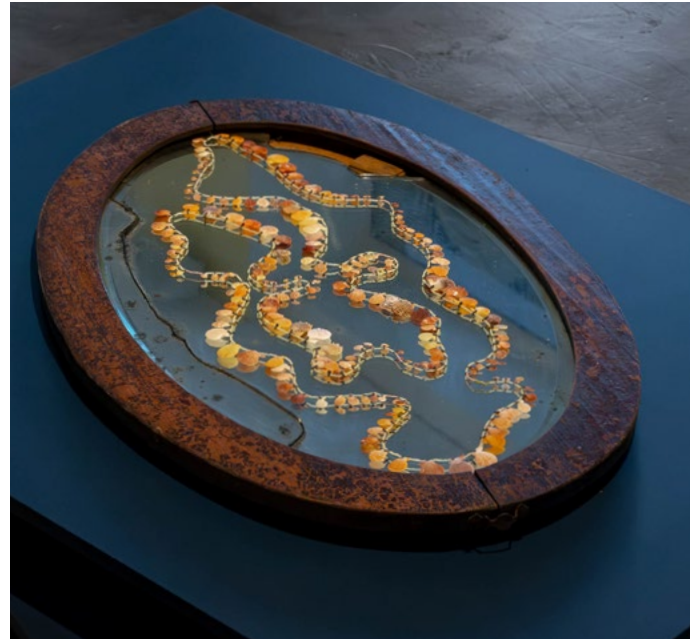
OR

Design, build and decorate a Wunderkammer using recycled materials such as cardboard boxes. Fill your Wunderkammer with marvellous objects that tell stories – these might be things that students bring from home, or objects made in class that tell a particular story.

Wonder and Imagination, Time and Place

Furniture and props play an important role in the storytelling behind this exhibition. Consider the two works: ***Shades of Distance*** and ***Southbeach*** both include an item that inspires imagination and wonder – an old sea chest and a mirror respectively.

Both works are necklaces made from seashells collected on opposite sides of Australia, in important places in Helen's life: Stockton Beach, near Newcastle in NSW, where Helen grew up and South Beach near Fremantle in Western Australia. Helen has been making shell necklaces since she was a child. As an adult Helen has continued this time-consuming practice has continued, using specific shells from specific locations, as an important way of spending time meditating on and engaging with place.



Southbeach, 2016, Australian Design Centre exhibition view.
Photo: Jacquie Manning



Shades of Distance, 2023, Australian Design Centre exhibition view. Photo: Jacquie Manning



Think

Why do you think Helen has chosen this sea chest for *Shades of Distance*, what do you think the title could mean?

Look at the two necklaces – what are the similarities and differences between the materials and methods used?



Explore

Sea chests and mirrors, like other items in the exhibition are often used as narrative devices in historical fiction. Have you read any stories that have mirrors or sea chests in them? What are they? What is the significance of the mirror or sea chest in the story?

How do shells tell the story of a particular location?



Extend

Write and illustrate a story about either the mirror and the necklace, or the sea chest and the necklace.

Shell necklaces have been made for millennia around the world. They are some of the first examples of adornment. Research the history of shell necklace making – how have different cultures around the world worked with shells to tell stories?

You might want to reflect specifically on the shell work traditions near where you live.

The Lives of Animals

Helen Britton has depicted animals in her work throughout her career, enjoying the way they forge connection as popular symbols; with some animals, like the horse becoming a recurring metaphor for the untamed mind, or unfettered imagination. The representation of animals intensified in her work after the Australian Black Summer bushfires of 2019–2020 which were followed by the global Covid pandemic.

The Big and the Small Things is a cloud of paintings made up from some of the 150 paintings of animals Helen made in response to the terrible challenges posed by the fires. The paintings have inspired the accompanying animal pendants carved from French galalith, mounted on velvet padded frames. Helen uses galalith for her animal carvings because the molecules (from milk) that are part of its chemical structure have a conceptual resonance with the animal forms.

Ultimately this work can be seen as a mourning for animals at the time of the Anthropocene. Death accompanies the painted and carved animals in the form of painted bones and coffin-like frames, purchased at flea markets in Munich.

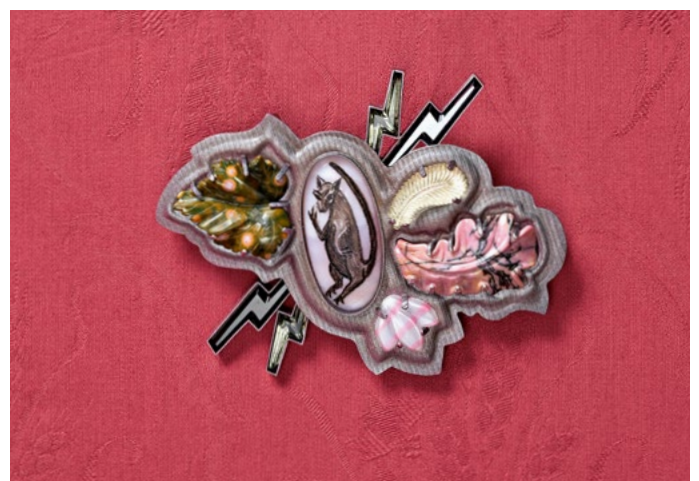
This work 'sketches a globe where all animals are threatened' and leads to other works in the exhibition including *Koala Hotel*, *Cranky Kangaroo* and *Angry Koala* which extend the themes of *The Big and the Small Things* into wearables and small sculpture. *Koala Hotel* also took inspiration from the threat to the koalas through the loss of habitat in the Black Summer bushfires. At the time, many rescued koalas were housed in shelters, not unlike the enforced accommodation of international arrivals, including refugees in hotels at the time.



The Big and the Small Things, 2025, Australian Design Centre exhibition view. Photo: Jacquie Manning



Angry Koala, 2025. Photo: Dirk Eisel



Cranky Kangaroo, 2025. Photo: Dirk Eisel



Think

What can you see in *The Big and the Small Things*? Why do you think Helen has chosen to depict these animals?

Bones are a common metaphor in Helen's work – why do you think she has included bones in *The Big and the Small Things* and can you find other works in the exhibition which include bones? What are they?

Look carefully at *Koala Hotel* what is the mood conveyed by the work?

Helen has titled a pair of wearable works *Cranky Kangaroo* and *Angry Koala* – why? Several of the works in the exhibition feature horses. See if you can find them.



Explore

Research the habitat of the native Australian animals in the works in the exhibition. Are their habitats threatened? How?

Can you identify some other Australian animals whose habitats are threatened?

Consider the following: *Helen Britton sees the horse as 'an emblem of the mind untamed, of imaginative nimbleness... which conquers, intellectually the weight of the knowledge of the outside world. Striving for freedom the unfettered mind is a form of human resistance, the foundation of our dreams, at best naïve, optimistic.'* How do the works in the exhibition depicting horses relate to this quote?

Bones are often used as a metaphor in art practice – research how they have been used by different artists and what they can mean.



Extend

Based on your research, develop 2D images of the animal/s you have researched as paintings, drawings, lino cuts (or other method). Create a collaborative wall piece using the pictures the class have created. Think about how you can tell their stories using framing or other graphic motifs as Helen has done in *The Big and the Small Things*.

OR

Make small 3D sculptures or wearables of the animals researched or an animal that is significant to you. How can you use materials, colour and texture to help tell the story of the animal?

Stones and their Stories

The use of real and artificial, precious and semi-precious stones is a big part of Helen Britton's practice, although she often uses them in ways that are different to traditional jewellery practices.

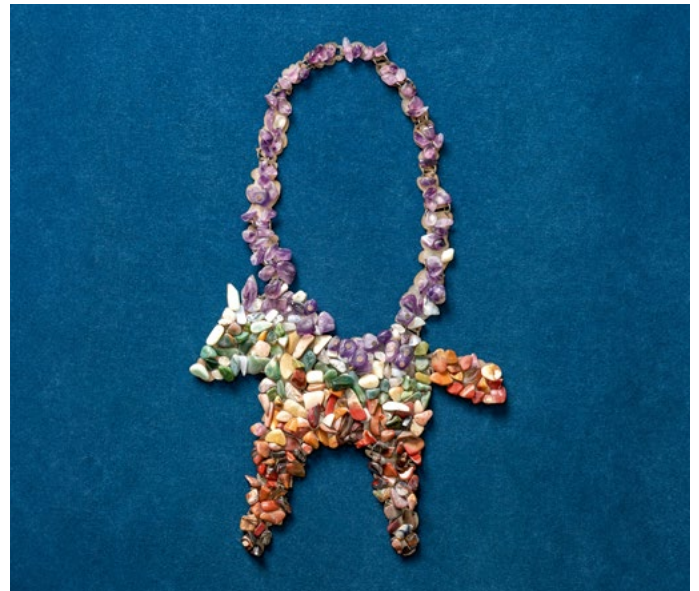
In this exhibition for example, we see stones in the photographic series *My Godmother's House* that are set in pre-fabricated metal bracelets and arranged as ornaments in cabinets. In other works antique opals appear in ***The Stumps***, diamonds are used to animate the eyes of an owl in the work ***Wisdom's Blindness***, or they are used to create the body of a horse in ***Horse of Stone***.

The stones that are used in the works depicting animals are, for Helen, 'a bridge between the mineral and the animate world. The imagination provides unity... the inanimate and the animate connect.'

Helen is also interested in the journeys of stones, tracing them from her homeland Australia to Europe, where they are cut and polished in places like Idar-Oberstein – a famous German town in a deep valley surrounded by forest, with a more than 600-year history tied to the gemstone industry. Helen has visited and stayed in Idar-Oberstein many times and has developed strong relationships there, so much so that the physical location and architecture of this place, as well as the gemstones sourced there, have become important visual references in many of her works, for example in the cement sculpture ***Forest***.



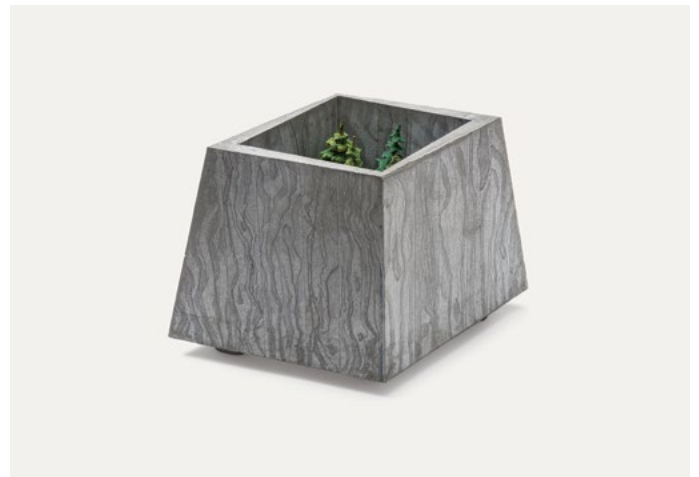
The Stumps, 2016, Photo: Dirk Eisel



Horse of Stone, 2019, Photo: Dirk Eisel



Wisdom's Blindness, 2019, Photo: Dirk Eisel



Forest, 2020, Photo: Dirk Eisel



Think

Look for the different ways that Helen has used stones in the exhibition. What are they?



Explore

Choose a stone that intrigues you in the exhibition, research its origins and properties.

How has Helen used this stone in the exhibition to help tell the story of the work?



Extend

Design a piece of narrative jewellery that uses a stone to help tell its story.

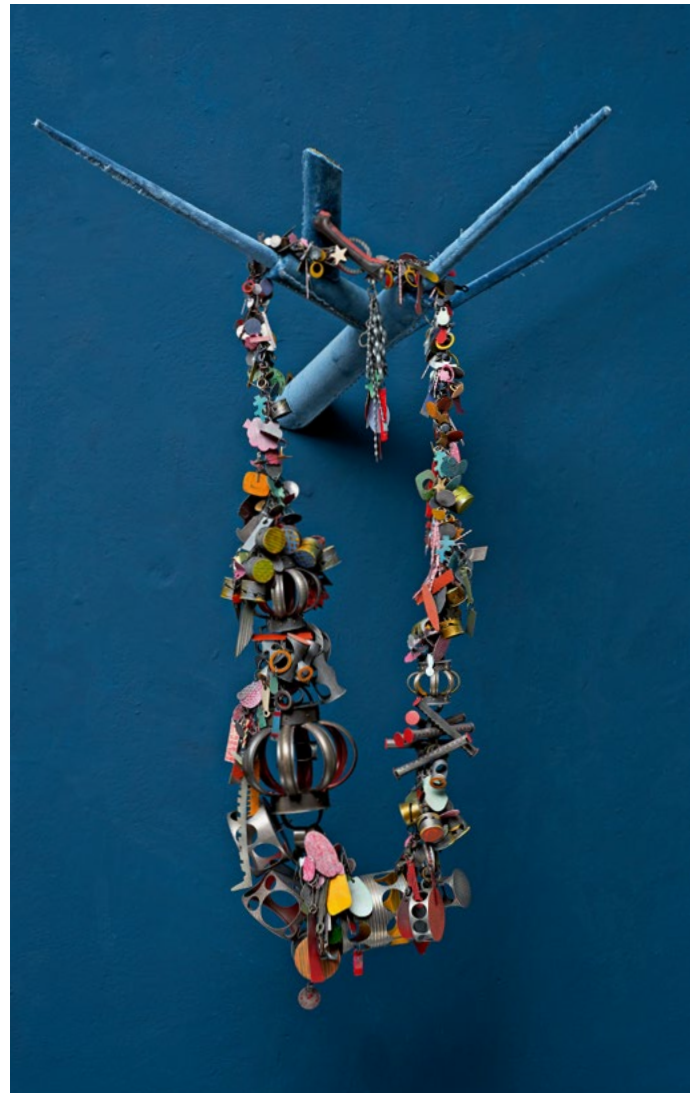
You might want to consider the environmental and human impact of stone mining and production or another story inspired by the exhibition or your own imagination.

Industrial Landscapes

Just as Helen's work is informed by the natural and artificial or imaginary worlds, many of her pieces are influenced by the industrial landscapes where she grew up in Newcastle (Awakabal Country), a steelmaking port city north of Sydney, where the natural and urban environments were in stark contrast; as well as the industrial landscapes of Germany where she has lived for more than 20 years.

In this exhibition, the influence of industry is seen in **Junkyard 3** the third in a series of monumental necklaces or necklace-like objects that Helen has constructed using leftover elements from making other work in her studio, it contains the history of the past 20 years of jewellery and object making practice in her studio – recycled silver and paint put together to make something new. These components are mostly leftovers from her industrial series – works that were preoccupied with active and abandoned industrial sites. The components of the work are reminiscent of the barrels and rods and piles of stuff that you might see lying around on the edges of industrial areas, objects in this distinctive landscape that captivated Helen as a child.

Helen has said *'I have empathy for materials, feeling sad for the discarded and broken things of the everyday... I try to provide them with a new opportunity, a chance to sing again, or sing at last'*.



Junkyard 3, 2025. Photo: Dirk Eisel



Junkyard 3, 2025, Australian Design Centre exhibition view. Photo: Jacquie Manning



Think

Consider the overlooked and mundane things in the place, town or city where you live, or in your immediate neighbourhood. What are they?

List them and discuss how they might be reconsidered as beautiful and important.



Explore

Take a camera or a sketchbook outside and look for the overlooked corners of familiar places. Record details and objects you find, as well as observing and documenting the bigger picture of that environment.

Research the history of the place where you live – does it have current or past links to industry? What are they? Is the industry still active or has it finished? How has industry affected the environment where you live?



Extend

Create a wearable or small sculpture based on the details in your drawings or photographs, try to use scrap or re-used materials.

Glossary

Amulet – an ornament or small piece of jewellery thought to give protection against evil, danger, or disease.

Anthropocene – the current geological age, viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment.

Assemblage – an artwork made up of three-dimensional elements combined to form a whole and typically uses found objects. Assemblage is similar to collage, which is generally two-dimensional.

Clay – consists of fine-grained particles that are relatively weak and porous. Part of the firing process includes heating the clay until the particles partially melt and flow together, creating a strong, single mass. Through firing the pores are reduced in size, causing the material to shrink slightly. The fired clay is very hard and strong, although usually somewhat brittle.

Charm – a small ornament usually worn on a necklace or a bracelet. Can also be an object, act, or saying believed to have magic power; kept or worn to ward off evil and bring good luck.

Collage – an art technique that uses an assembly of different forms to create a new image or object. Collage can refer to the technique in general, or specifically to a two-dimensional work, assembled from cut up elements. Collage can also be three-dimensional; however, this is usually referred to as 'assemblage'.

Conceptual – something to do with the mind, or with mental concepts, philosophical or imaginary ideas. An example is when you formulate an abstract philosophy to explain the world which cannot be proven or seen. In contemporary jewellery practice it can refer to jewellery that is underpinned by ideas that seek to explain or question ideas. For example: value, preciousness or wearability.

Costume Jewellery – cheap, decorative jewellery made from inexpensive materials like base metals, glass, or plastic to imitate expensive jewellery made from precious metals and gemstones.

Diorama – a model representing a scene with three-dimensional figures, in miniature (or as a large-scale exhibit). Usually showing a situation or scene such as a historical event or environment that looks real.

Ephemeral – something that is fleeting or short-lived. In jewellery terms it may relate to a material or wearable that is designed to be temporarily worn or made from fragile materials; or to a work that reflects the idea (concept) of the ephemeral.

Found object – a natural or man-made object or fragment of an object that is found (or bought) not usually considered to be a material for use in jewellery (or art). Found objects are selected and used for their intrinsic narrative or conceptual value as part of the work. They are used either modified or un-modified.

Galalith – invented in Europe in the late 19th Century, galalith is a hard, synthetic plastic material made from milk protein (casein) powder, pigment and formaldehyde. Galalith cannot be moulded, but it can be carved and dyed, and its structure can be manipulated to create a range of effects including to produce gemstone imitations, it was used by Art Deco jewellers including Jakob Bengel (whose factory has hosted Helen Britton as artist in residence).

Galalith became a popular, mainstream material in the 1920's and 1930's, particularly in the fashion industry and was used for jewellery and accessories such as combs, glasses frames, pens. Galalith was also used for household goods such as knitting needles, white piano keys and electrical goods. Although galalith was historically cheap to make, it had several flaws, including the fact that it could not be moulded, which led to its demise along with production restrictions in World War II relating to milk, and the concurrent development of oil-based plastics. Galalith is still used today and produced in small quantities to make buttons, board game pieces and musical instrument accessories such as guitar plectrums.

Maquette – a small preliminary sketch or model.

Materiality – the quality of a material or thing that is emphasized when talking about an object or wearable. The materiality of a piece is often key to understanding its meaning.

Memento Mori – translates as 'remember that you must die' is an artistic or symbolic reminder of the inevitability of death.

Narrative jewellery – jewellery that communicates from the point of view of the maker (and wearer). Narrative jewellery tells stories, contains messages or engages in commentary through its design and the considered use and combination of materials, scale, colour and texture.

Glossary

Relic – an object of historical or religious significance, like the remains of a saint or a memento from the past that has been preserved for veneration or worship as a memorial of a person or event.

Reliquary – a special container crafted to contain relic/s.

Shadow box – a deep, enclosed display case where there is space between the glass, the object or image and the back. Shadow boxes are used for two and three-dimensional art and objects. The term shadow box also refers to a form of assemblage art where found objects are grouped thematically with narrative or conceptual intent. Many artists have worked with the shadow box since the early 20th century, Joseph Cornell is a good example. .

Talisman – an object or wearable that is thought to have magic powers, to bring good luck or keep its owner/wearer safe from harm.

Trinket – a small showy object – usually a piece of jewellery, decorative ornament or souvenir that is cheap or of low quality.

Wunderkammer – or ‘Cabinet of Curiosities’ is the historical name given to encyclopaedic collections of objects kept in cabinets or rooms. The Wunderkammer originated in Europe around the 16th Century and usually held collections of objects relating to natural history. The idea of the Wunderkammer has long been an inspiration to artists, including Helen Britton.

See more at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet_of_curiosities

Further Reading

Links

- <https://australiandesigncentre.com/past-exhibitions-and-events/helen-britton/>
- <https://www.helen-britton.com/>

Selected Online Resources

- https://artjewelryforum.org/articles/a-peek-into-the-collection-of-artist-helen-britton_auth-jen-altmann-authnatl-us_9-16-2024/
- <https://www.artshub.com.au/news/reviews/helen-britton-review-a-jeweller-who-is-so-much-more-2823303/>
- <https://theconversation.com/intrigue-lucky-charms-and-painful-longing-the-art-of-helen-britton-73133>
- <https://www.ft.com/content/4f7a458e-a8f9-4ec7-b294-c80f5584a344>
- <https://thelockup.org.au/helen-britton-air/>
- <https://artjewelryforum.org/hidden-from-homepage/what-makes-helen-brittons-brooch-art-jewelry/>

Listen

- <https://australiandesigncentre.com/podcast/episode-9-helen-britton/>
- <https://australiandesigncentre.com/podcast/episode-10-helen-britton/>
- <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/radionational/archived/booksandarts/helen-britton-interstices/8239380>

Selected Australian Galleries representing Helen Britton's work

- National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
- National Gallery of Victoria International, Melbourne
- Art Gallery of Western Australia
- Gallery Funaki, Melbourne
- Funaki
- Turner Galleries, Western Australia

Selected International Galleries representing Helen Britton's work

- Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam The Netherlands
- Galleria Antonella Villanova, Italy
- Galerie Rob Koudjis
- Sienna Patti Gallery, Massachusetts, USA
- ATTA, Bangkok, Thailand
- Fingers Gallery, Auckland New Zealand
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
- Die Neue Sammlung, Munich

Selected Online Contemporary Jewellery References

- [Klimt02](#)
- [Art Jewelry Forum](#)
- [Current Obsession](#)
- [JMGA \(The Jewellers and Metalsmiths Group of Australia NSW\)](#)
- [Radiant Pavilion](#)
- [Journal of Jewellery Research](#)
- [Garland Magazine](#)

Books About Contemporary Jewellery

- Anderson, Patricia (1998). *Contemporary Jewellery in Australia and New Zealand*. Sydney: Craftsman House.
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- Unger, Marjan & Suzanne Van Leeuwen (2017) *Jewellery Matters*. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Notes



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Living Treasures: Masters of Australian Craft



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