

# RECOLLECTIONS OF HOME: A STUDY OF THE USE OF DOMESTIC OBJECTS AND NEEDLEWORK IN CONTEMPORARY JEWELLERY AND MY ART PRACTICE

by  
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**Declaration:**

By submitting this dissertation, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that production and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Date.....

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## Abstract

This study is motivated by my own art practice, which exhibits a keen interest in objects and activities historically associated with the domestic, specifically with relation to needlework, in the making or producing of contemporary jewellery. Visual analysis of the work of other contemporary jewellers resulted in my realisation that the use of domestic objects and needlework in contemporary jewellery can refer to the idea of “home” through the use of phenomenological devices such as memory and nostalgia. My own art practice makes specific use of memory and nostalgia, and references trauma as experienced in the home. I investigate these themes specifically as they are depicted in contemporary jewellery.

I begin my study by discussing how humans go about forming relationships with the objects with which they surround themselves. I discuss Martin Heidegger’s theory of hermeneutic phenomenology, regarding human interaction with objects and our relationship to them with regard to their specific functionality. I argue that taking the domestic objects out of their context, and in so doing ‘removing’ their functionality, allows the subject (maker, viewer, wearer) to suggest a new ‘*background* or horizon’ (Thomas 2006: 47) against which the object can now be read and understood. I discuss how jewellery can function as a mnemonic device, and how the domestic objects used in the specific jewellery pieces that I discuss add to this reading, identifying memory and nostalgia as the main devices facilitating a discussion of these themes. From here I work towards a definition of the domestic.

By tracing the ways in which the domestic has come to denote a “space” traditionally gendered female, I look at the material culture represented within this “space” and how it relates to women. I draw on Svetlana Boym and Susan Stewart’s thoughts regarding nostalgia and its appearance in contemporary culture. Trauma and how it manifests in individual identities is then discussed with the aid of Michael S. Roth and his discussion surrounding *Memory, Trauma, and History* (2012). I discuss specific contemporary jewellery projects by Manon van Kouswijk (*Lepidoptera Domestica*, 2007); Gesine Hackenberg (*Ceramic Jewellery*, 2006-2011); Esther Knobel (*My Grandmother is Knitting too*, 2000-2002); and Iris Eichenberg (*Heimat*, 2004). In my final chapter I discuss my own work, and highlight the ways in which I use domestic objects and needlework to reference memory, nostalgia and trauma thematically with relation to my own recollections of home.



## Opsomming

Hierdie studie is gemotiveer deur my eie kunspraktyk, wat my belangstelling toon in voorwerpe en aktiwiteite wat histories verband hou met die huis, spesifiek met betrekking tot naaldwerk, in die vervaardiging van kontemporêre juweliersware. Visuele analise van die werk van ander kontemporêre juweliers het gelei tot die besef dat die gebruik van huishoudelike voorwerpe en naaldwerk in kontemporêre juweliersware kan verwys na die idee van "huis" deur die gebruik van fenomenologiese idees soos herinneringe en nostalgie. My kunspraktyk maak spesifiek gebruik van herinneringe en nostalgie, en verwys na trauma soos in die huis ervaar. Ek ondersoek hierdie temas spesifiek soos hulle uitgebeeld word in kontemporêre juweliersware.

Ek begin my studie deur die wyses te bespreek waarop mense te werk gaan in die vorming van verhoudings met die voorwerpe waarmee hulle hulself omring. Ek verwys na Martin Heidegger se teorie van hermeneutiese fenomenologie, ten opsigte van menslike interaksie met voorwerpe en die verhouding wat met hulle gevorm word met betrekking tot hul spesifieke funksies. Ek argumenteer dat deur die huishoudelike voorwerpe uit hulle oorspronklike konteks te neem, en sodoende hul funksie te 'verwyder', kan die subjek (maker, kyker, draer) 'n nuwe "agtergrond of horison" (Thomas 2006: 47) voor stel waarteen die voorwerp gelees en verstaan kan word. Ek bespreek hoe juweliersware kan funksioneer as 'n mnemoniese toestel, en hoe die huishoudelike voorwerpe wat gebruik word in die spesifieke juweliersware wat ek in hierdie studie bespreek kan toevoeg tot hierdie bespreking, deur die identifisering van herinneringe en nostalgie as die hoof toestelle. Van hier het ek gewerk aan 'n definisie van wat die huishoudelike behels.

Deur ondersoek in te stel na die manier waarop die huishoudelike as 'n tradisioneel vroulike "ruimte" geïdentifiseer is, kyk ek na die materiële kultuur verteenwoordig binne hierdie "ruimte" en hoe dit verband hou met vroue. Ek verwys na Svetlana Boym en Susan Stewart se idees rakende nostalgie en die voorkoms daarvan in hedendaagse kultuur. Trauma en die maniere waarop dit in individuele identiteite manifesteer word vervolgens bespreek met die hulp van Michael S. Roth en sy bespreking van *"Memory, Trauma, and History"* (2012). Ek analiseer spesifieke kontemporêre juwelierswareprojekte deur Manon van Kouswijk (*Lepidoptera Domestica*, 2007), Gesine Hackenberg (*Ceramic Jewellery*, 2006-2011), Ester

Knobel (*My Grandmother is Knitting too*, 2000-2002), en Iris Eichenberg (*Heimat*, 2004). In my laaste hoofstuk bespreek ek my eie werk, en verwys veral die maniere waarop ek huishoudelike voorwerpe en naaldwerk gebruik om temas na geheue, nostalgie en trauma met betrekking tot my eie herinneringe van die huis te verwys.

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## Introduction

### Background

The practical component which forms part of this research project exhibits a keen interest in the use of objects and activities historically associated with the domestic, specifically in relation to the realm of needlework,<sup>1</sup> as a means of producing contemporary jewellery. This dissertation is the result of visual analysis of my own art practice. My art practice centers on the use of domestic objects and needlework to portray specific conceptual themes<sup>2</sup> in the form of contemporary jewellery. I am also conceptually interested in the notion of home, and ways in which the use of domestic objects and needlework can serve as mnemonic devices through which the home can be revisited. I conduct this study from within the field of Postmodernism, as this is a theoretical field concerned with representation and context. In his essay titled *Postmodernism and the Art of Identity*, Christopher Reed (1993: 272) discusses the specific tendency within Postmodernism with which I am concerned for the purpose of this study. Reed states that

[f]or the postmodernist, then, nothing we can do or say is truly 'original', for our thoughts are constructed from our experience of a lifetime of representation, so it is naïve to imagine a work's author inventing its forms or controlling its meaning. Instead of pretending to an authoritative originality, postmodernism concentrates on the way images and symbols ('signifiers') shift or lose their meaning when put in different context ('appropriated').

Helen W. Drutt and Peter Dormer are two respected writers in the field of contemporary jewellery. Drutt, who is best known for her inspiring and diverse collection of contemporary jewellery,<sup>3</sup> and Dormer, who was a pioneer in writing about art and craft in Great Britain,

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<sup>1</sup> When talking of needlework, I refer to work done or objects made with the aid of a needle. This includes, but is not limited to, sewing, embroidery, crochet and knitting. I will elaborate on the domestic and needlework in chapter 2 section 2.2 *Towards a definition of the Domestic*.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis I will refer to the subject matter of the artwork discussed as the theme. I will also interchange 'theme' with 'concept'. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2007) defines 'theme' as: "A subject on which a person speaks, writes, or thinks: a topic of discussion or composition" (Oxford English Dictionary 2007. Sv. 'theme').: 'Concept is defined as: "...a general notion: a theme, a design" (Oxford English Dictionary 2007. Sv. 'concept'). I use these terms interchangeably because I am of the opinion that the way in which I discuss the artworks underlines the topics that the artists address in their work, while also focusing on the way in which the artists have conceptualized and portrayed their subject matter in the pieces of contemporary jewellery that they produce.

<sup>3</sup> The Helen W. Drutt contemporary jewellery collection dates back to 1963 and consists of over 170 pieces of contemporary jewellery. In 2002, the collection was donated to the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas in

co-wrote the book *Jewelry of our Time: Art, Ornament and Obsession* (1995: 14). In the book, they set out to map and discuss the changes that had been occurring in the contemporary jewellery movement since the early 1960s. They state that

[j]ewelry has a rich and complex subject matter: it has a long history of being intertwined with people's imagination. Jewelry is present in familiar rituals and institutions: engagement, marriage, the church, the military (medals and 'decorations'), coming of age, declarations of personal status and group identity. Jewelry has its own social anthropology and when one adds the notion of ritual (with all the metaphor, symbolism and design vocabulary that each ritual generates) the further meanings and associations that are attendant upon materials, the different ways of working materials, then the contemporary jeweler has an embarrassment of riches. These riches are embedded in connections between people (Drutt & Dormer 1995: 14).

From the extract above, it can be gathered that contemporary jewellery holds a valid and historically rich position in our everyday lives. Relating the extract by Drutt and Dormer back to Reed's description of Postmodernism, it can be argued that, just as in Postmodernism "our thoughts are constructed from our experience of a lifetime of representation" (Reed 1993:272), so also our relationship to jewellery is influenced and guided by "a long history of being intertwined with people's imagination" (Drutt & Dormer 1995:14). For this reason, contemporary jewellery can serve as an ample platform from which I can investigate how the use of domestic objects and needlework in contemporary jewellery can be employed to discuss and portray certain themes conceptually. The changes that took place in the contemporary jewellery movement since the early 1960s are also discussed by Ursula Ilse-Neuman in the introduction to *Inspired Jewelry: From the Museum of Arts and Design*. Ilse-Neuman (2009: 9) explains that,

[i]n jewelry, which has always been a barometer of society, the radical changes in the postwar landscape gave rise to a new and enduring art form that is known today as studio, or art, jewelry. Rejecting mass production and traditional jewelry's reliance on gemstones and precious metals, pioneering artists/craftsmen extolled the value of works made by one individual, from concept to execution, and sought out new sources of inspiration, primarily in the fine arts.

Isle-Neuman stresses the importance that contemporary jewellers place on the concepts they address in their artwork. My own use of domestic objects and needlework led me to study the artwork of other contemporary jewellers who use similar domestic objects and needlework techniques in their art practice. Through visual analysis of my own artwork and theirs I became aware that the appropriation of these domestic objects and needlework techniques by the realm of contemporary jewellery results in the emergence of similar themes or conceptual interests. The 'new' meanings or ideas that the domestic objects and needlework techniques could reference from within the realm of contemporary jewellery, can again be traced back to Reed's thoughts on Postmodernism when he states that "postmodernism concentrates on the way images and symbols ('signifiers') shift or lose their meaning when put in different context ('appropriated')" (Reed 1993: 272). The objects are still reminiscent of the domestic or 'home', but removed from that context they can serve to reference broader themes such as memory, nostalgia and trauma. These then are the specific themes that I have identified for the scope of this study.

I argue that memory and nostalgia are closely related, and that separating the two themes would not be possible, but that each has its own function. My own art practice is deeply influenced by my personal memories and nostalgic longings for 'home'. My own childhood, and events that took place in my life, are translated in my art practice through the use of domestic objects and needlework. Due to the subject matter, there is also an element of trauma present in my artwork.<sup>4</sup> As part of the research done for this study, I identified specific artists who also incorporate domestic objects and needlework in their contemporary jewellery. The artists and works that I discuss are Manon van Kouswijk, *Lepidoptera Domestica*, 2007 (fig. 3-15, pg: 93); Gesine Hackenberg, *Ceramic Jewellery*, 2006-2011 (fig. 16-23, pg: 99); Esther Knobel, *My Grandmother is Knitting too*, 2000 (fig. 24-29, pg: 104); and Iris Eichenberg, *Heimat*, 2004 (fig. 30-35, pg: 106).<sup>5</sup> All four of these artists are women.<sup>6</sup> I

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<sup>4</sup> The trauma I am referring to, relates to my parent's divorce and the subsequent disruption of my home life. I elaborate on this event in chapter four, when I discuss my own work.

<sup>5</sup> All figures can be located between pages 92 and 122.

<sup>6</sup> I did not set out with the intention of only discussing contemporary jewellery made by women. However, the work that I found to have the closest relation to my own, in terms of subject matter and materials used, happened to be made by women. The discourses surrounding art made by women are vast and have been discussed in a number of areas. I consulted *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985* (1987) by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock. This book specifically discusses The Women's Art Movement and the effect that it had on the acceptance or reception of art made by women from the 1970s onwards,

have chosen to discuss these specific artworks, by these four artists, due to the way in which they incorporate domestic objects and needlework in their work in relation to the themes and conceptual outcomes I mentioned above. I do not discuss all the work that these artists have made, but only the specific artworks as listed in this paragraph. My own artwork *Blue and white*, 2011-2012 (fig. 38, 39, 41-48, 50-52, 54-62 pg: 110) is then discussed in relation to the themes identified within the scope of this study. I am aware that 'home' as a thematic concern is subjective, and, as Meike Behm<sup>7</sup> states, "I think the word home means something different to every person who uses it" (Elmgreen & Dragset 2008: 15). My aim is to present my art practice as a physical embodiment of my own recollections of 'home', thematically referencing memory, nostalgia and trauma.

The contemporary jewellers I discuss in this study use domestic objects and needlework in differing ways, yet similar sentiments of 'home' with relation to memory, nostalgia and trauma emerge. Jivan Astfalck (2005:23), a United Kingdom-based jeweller and writer on contemporary jewellery, explains this quality of jewellery in the essay *Jewellery as a Fine Art Practice*, which forms part of the text in *New Directions in Jewellery*, a compendium of new and (then) upcoming contemporary jewellery designers:

A metaphor, in short, tells us something new about reality. This to me implies that innovation and the all-important shift in the status of the work can be obtained through the metaphorical 'twist' in the object or the discourse around the work. Jewellery Art has the capacity to deal with complex ideas whose components are derived from simpler images or previous experience, which are then combined in new and unexpected ways.

From what Astfalck has stated above, it can be deduced that contemporary jewellery has the capacity to use metaphors in a way that allows for complex ideas to be represented through

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together with the Women's Movement. Linda Nochlin's *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* published in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (1989) was also consulted. This essay discusses certain very important changes within the bureaucratic systems surrounding art, and it also includes a suggestion by Nochlin that the fault may also lie with the women artists themselves: "What is important is that women face up to the reality of their history and of their present situation, without making excuses or puffing mediocrity. Disadvantage may indeed be an excuse; it is not, however, an intellectual position" (Nochlin 1989: 176). However, I did not find the discussion in the article to be of significance within the scope of this study. I also consulted more recent theories on art made by women, namely Hilary Robinson's book *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art Made By Women* (2006). After some investigation of this field, I decided that taking a political stance on this specific matter does not fall within the scope of this study, and have therefore chosen not to elaborate on it further. Although I have chosen not to elaborate on this discourse, I do still refer to the artists as female, and I do also reference certain feminist texts late in this study.

<sup>7</sup> Meike Behm is a German-based artist whose extract was taken from the catalogue *Home Is The Place You Left* (Elmgreen & Dragset 2008). This catalogue was created in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title in Norway in 2008.

simpler imagery.<sup>8</sup> In this study, I propose to show how domestic objects and needlework can be used to produce contemporary jewellery pieces, thereby turning the abstract idea of home into a physical, wearable object that can reference 'home'. In this study, I aim to show how the use of domestic objects and needlework in contemporary jewellery can be employed by the artists to address larger themes such as memory, nostalgia and trauma subjectively. The domestic objects and needlework techniques now appropriated in contemporary jewellery, can use the "metaphorical twist" suggested by Astfalck to reference possible interpretations of 'home' conceptually.

### Research question and aims

The main research question for this study is:

"How are domestic objects and needlework techniques used in contemporary jewellery to serve as vessels of memory, nostalgia and trauma in relation to the notion of home?"

In order to assist answering this question, I have set certain aims:

1. To discuss thoughts on the domestic and how it manifests in relation to material culture.
2. To discuss how contemporary jewellery can function as mnemonic devices that relate to memory, nostalgia and trauma.

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<sup>8</sup> To serve as visual proof of Astfalck's statement, I will briefly discuss two examples. The first example, while not from within the realm of contemporary jewellery, but which relates back to Drutt and Dormer's description of what forms part of jewellery's domain, is the Medal of Honour awarded by the United States of America's military. ( fig.1 pg: 93) This medal, which has three different designs, depending on whether the recipient is in the Army, Navy or Air Force, consists of a five-pointed star or pentagram that hangs on a blue ribbon. This medal, which is designed around the basic structure of a simple image such as a star, can stand as a metaphor for bravery, valour and a selfless service to one's country, qualities which form part of the strict criteria to which soldiers need to adhere before being awarded this prestigious medal. For more information on the Medal of Honor, please see the Army.Mil Features website: <http://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/history.html>.

The second example, which is from within the contemporary jewellery movement, is Mette Saabye's *The Brooch Collection: Guldbroche (Golden Brooch)* (2008: fig. 2) The brooch is made by wrapping a large circular badge in 24ct gold leaf. Liesbeth den Besten, well-known writer on contemporary jewellery, discusses Saabye's project in her book titled *On Jewellery: A Compendium of International Contemporary Art Jewellery* (2011). Den Besten states: "...she offers the client a genuine, original, big, fat gold brooch – a badge wrapped in gold leaf – questioning value and singularity in a very cool and appealing way. It is a badge about fake and real, about real gold and its value, a piece of jewellery that democratizes the status and aura of gold" (Den Besten 2011: 26). Both these examples show how jewellery can use simple imagery (such as a star or a golden circle) to metaphorically reference a much larger field of themes or concepts.

3. To discuss my own visual analysis of art work made by other female contemporary jewellers who also use domestic objects and needlework to reference the complexities of home.
4. To position my own work within this field of study, and to show how I use domestic objects and needlework to reference memory, nostalgia and trauma thematically, with specific focus on my own recollections of 'home'.

### **Research methodology**

This study falls within the ambit of practice-based research. For the purpose of this study the research is presented in both a practical and theoretical component. These components are interwoven and should be understood as supporting one another. The practical component consists of my own artwork, made over a period of three years. Visual analysis of this work, as well as of artwork made by other contemporary jewellers, has led me to identify certain recurring themes and concepts. These themes and concepts served as inspiration for the theoretical component of this study. Identification of these themes led me to investigate relevant theories, with the aim of enhancing my understanding of their presence. In this way, the practical and theoretical components support each other, with the aim of answering the research questions stated earlier in this section.

Even though I have made a larger body of work (which will be shown at my final exhibition) during the period that I have been working on this study, the theoretical component only concerns one body of work or series,<sup>9</sup> titled *Blue and white* (2011-2012). The reason for discussing only this one series is not only because it is the final artwork to form part of this study, but also because it is the artwork that helped me to frame this study theoretically. It is the artwork which deals most aptly with the theories I will discuss in this study, and which has also developed in such a way as to handle the subject matter in a mature fashion. The other work is still significant, however, since it was through the process of making it that I could investigate more closely how domestic objects and needlework can be used in contemporary jewellery.

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<sup>9</sup> Throughout this study, I will use 'artwork' and 'series' interchangeably when referring to the larger group of individual pieces of jewellery that can be viewed as a complete artwork or that falls under the same title.

The main research question is how domestic objects and needlework are used in contemporary jewellery, and what the thematic outcomes of their presence are. I argue that domestic objects can function as mnemonic devices, and therefore their reading will differ from person to person. It is therefore important to keep in mind that my visual analysis is subjective, although I do try to point out themes or concepts that a wider audience can relate to. Throughout this study it should also be kept in mind that I approached this investigation as a contemporary jeweller. I therefore have a certain perspective about contemporary jewellery and how it is read. I am also constantly aware of the presence of a maker, wearer and viewer, although I do not always state this explicitly. Also, I write this text with the understanding that jewellery in itself has a rich history embedded within culture, and that contemporary jewellery sets out to depict this history in new and challenging ways. Contemporary jewellery deals with specific concepts, and it uses jewellery's placement within culture and the relationship that people have with jewellery to convey this message or ideas in new and interesting ways. Jewellery can function in the space between private and public, because while it is worn on the body<sup>10</sup> and thus presented to be viewed, it also involves an element of secrecy, because it is often that only the wearer, owner or maker of the piece are fully informed of the story behind the piece of jewellery. I return to Drutt and Dormer (1995: 14) when they state that

[i]t is probably true that often the objects produced in jewelry have aspects known only to their makers and their owners – only the maker/owner knows the full richness of a piece of jewelry and understand its other life, for when it is not being worn then it becomes a private work of art.

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<sup>10</sup> Body politics and its relation to jewellery is a separate field of study within the contemporary jewellery movement. Liesbeth den Besten discusses the relationship between contemporary jewellery and the body in her book *On Jewellery: A Compendium of International Contemporary Jewellery* (2011) in the chapter *The Body*. Helen W. Drutt and Peter Dormer also discuss this relationship in their book *Jewellery of our Time: Art, Ornament and Obsession* (1995). Drutt and Dormer state: "...it might be argued that jewelers have used the body to reclaim jewelry as art. That is to say, not content with using the humdrum idea that people wear jewelry, art jewelers have used the body in photography as a near-inanimate sculpture upon which their own art may work" (Drutt & Dormer 1995: 10). Caroline Broadhead, well-known writer within the field of contemporary jewellery and professor at the Middlesex University in London, wrote about contemporary jewellery's interest with the body in her article *A Part/Apart* which can be located in the book *New Directions in Jewellery* (2005). Broadhead states: "When objects are active at the boundary of the body – jewellery in its widest sense – there is the potential to explore identity and meaning. Wearing something close to the body offers the circumstances and territory to explore issues that arise at this junction of the personal, social and cultural. Objects that are used in a close relationship to an individual can indicate a personal history, declare a relationship to others, and raise issues of identity and status" (Broadhead 2005: 25). When I refer to jewellery's placement on the body, I do so without wishing to enter into the politics surrounding it. Due to the parameters that I have set for my research question and aims, this topic does not fall within the scope of this study, and I will therefore not further elaborate on it.



Astfalck (2005: 19) also touches on this quality within jewellery when she explains the relationship that people form with the pieces of jewellery that they own:

In excess of their own materiality and formal qualities, objects made in this mode have often strong narratives inscribed, which are concerned with the symbolic and emotional investment we all have in the objects we make, wear and love. Such objects can be used as devices for the visible transmission of messages, a way of communicating by means of visual signs and signals.

Throughout this study my aim is to point out the “visual signs and signals”<sup>11</sup> portrayed by the domestic objects and needlework in the jewellery I discuss, and to focus on the messages that they might be aiming to communicate. The messages or ideas that I point out are influenced by concepts and themes that I deal with in my own art practice.

### **Theoretical framework and chapter layout**

In this thesis, I use a number of theories to support the visual analysis of my artworks as well as the work of the artists I discuss. My main focus is to investigate how domestic objects and needlework can introduce and conceptually portray certain themes through their placement in contemporary jewellery. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, I have conducted this study from within a Postmodernist view. I use Postmodernism as a strategic tool which I can use to discuss my thoughts on the concepts and themes that appear in the artworks I have visually analysed for this study, knowing that within Postmodern theory it is understood that meaning is unstable and that my own analysis is subjective due to my position within the study. I will plot how the domestic objects and needlework techniques that I consider are employed to comment on or reference larger themes such as memory, nostalgia and trauma, and how the use of these objects and needlework techniques can function to suggest new interpretations to the maker/viewer/wearer. In my own art

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Signs’ and ‘signals’ are terms most often used with relation to the theoretical field of Semiotics. Semiotics, first defined by Saussure in 1916, can be defined as the “science of signs or the study of the life of signs within social life” (Dictionary of Critical Theory 2005. Sv. ‘semiology/semiotics’). David Macey, in his *Dictionary of Critical Theory* (2005), discusses a “sign” as follows: “Within Saussurean linguistics, the sign becomes the basic unit of the analysis of language. A sign is defined as a physical entity consisting of a SIGNIFIER (an acoustic image) and a SIGNIFIED (a concept). A sign is not a combination of an object and a name for that object, and language therefore cannot be regarded as a nomenclature or a list of names for things. The nature of the sign is said to be arbitrary, as there is nothing logical or necessary about the relationship between signifier and signified...” (Dictionary of Critical Theory 2005. Sv. ‘sign’). Throughout this study, I discuss possible meanings or concepts that can be seen or read within the jewellery that I discuss. This study is, however, not meant to be seen as a semiotic deconstruction, but rather as a reading influenced by my own subjective memories and nostalgic longings for home. For this reason, I will not elaborate further on the theory of semiotics, as it does not fall within the scope of this study.

practice, I employ domestic objects and needlework techniques specifically to reference conceptually my own memories, nostalgic longings and feelings of trauma that are inherent in my recollections of 'home'. With this study I aim to point out and discuss similar occurrences or conceptual references in the artwork of the four jewellers that I chose, as listed earlier in this section.

In chapter one I will discuss the basic theories on which the rest of the thesis will be based. This study is constructed around the idea of taking objects (specifically of a domestic nature) out of their original context and appropriating them in the realm of contemporary jewellery. For this reason, I will begin chapter one with a discussion surrounding Martin Heidegger's theory of phenomenology and material culture, specifically his thoughts on 'hermeneutic phenomenology' (Thomas 2006: 43) and the character of human understanding. I discuss Heidegger's thoughts on how 'things' constitute being in the world only when it is understood as some 'thing'. (Frede, cited in Thomas 2006: 44). When Heidegger wrote his theory of hermeneutic phenomenology, the current Western philosophical tradition at the time stated that there is "only one possible relationship between people and things: that between subject and object, in which we observe some entity in a distanced, dispassionate and analytical function" (Heidegger cited in Thomas 2006: 44). In *Being and Time* (1962), Heidegger argues that, in reality we can view these 'things' in a vast array of manners, depending on our immediate relationship to them and the level to which we are involved with the objects. I will discuss how women's decades-long involvement with domestic objects and needlework has led to a point where these objects can now be removed from their original 'space' and be appropriated in contemporary jewellery, thus allowing the maker/viewer/wearer to re-evaluate their relationship to the objects and the other possible ideas or concepts they can refer to.

The second vital point in this study refers to the ways in which the now appropriated domestic objects and needlework techniques can function within contemporary jewellery. For this reason, I follow my discussion on Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology with thoughts and theories on memory and how jewellery can serve as mnemonic devices. My main text for this section is Allan Megill and Jan Assman and their extracts from *The Collective Memory Reader* (2011); Lena Vigna's article *Heirlooms: Navigating the Personal in Contemporary Jewellery* (2009); Tilman Habermass' essay "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend:

The Psychology of Jewellery as Beloved Objects”, which was published in *Thinking Jewellery: On the Way Towards a Theory of Jewellery* (2011); and other sources on the function of memory in contemporary culture.

Chapter two begins with the necessary task of working towards a definition of the domestic. As I have mentioned, within this study I specifically investigate how domestic objects and needlework can be used in contemporary jewellery. In order to aid the understanding of exactly the type of objects and needlework techniques I am referring to, I will discuss thoughts and opinions on defining the domestic, and how it has been gendered. I make use of a number of texts in an attempt to show the vast field of theory that this ‘space’ encompasses. *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles: 1750-1950* (2009), edited by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, assists as one of my main sources in this section. Although the book focuses on the relationship to needlework specifically, in my opinion its analysis can be broadened to include other domestic objects, specifically those associated with what has historically been referred to as “women’s work”.<sup>12</sup> In the introduction to this text, Maureen Daly Goggin (2009: 309-338) traces how women’s relationship to needlework has affected their standing in the world:

The relationship historically between needlework and women has been far more complex than previously assumed and that commonly held views certainly grant. For women of all stations in life and in all socioeconomic classes, needlework has been both a domestic and domesticating labor, both a tool of oppression and an instrument of liberation, both a professional endeavour and a leisure pastime, both an avenue for crossing class boundaries and a barrier confirming class status. It has been constructed and pursued as a religious duty and a secular pleasure, as a prison sentence and an escape, as an innocuous pastime and a powerful political weapon. Depending on a women’s station, needlework was either a necessity to live or a luxury reserved only for those who could afford the leisure time. Reviled and celebrated, it has nevertheless been a significant cultural practice of meaning-making.

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<sup>12</sup> In the introduction to *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework & Textiles: 1750-1950* (2009), Maureen Daily Goggin describes “Women’s work” by referencing historian Merry Wiesner, who defines it as: “an epithet for the boring, mundane, domestic tasks beneath the dignity of a man... but any work done by a women, even if it is the same as (or ‘of comparable value’ to) that done by a man, is *prima facie* worth less” (Wiesner 1986, cited in Goggin 2009: 2). I will not aim to further define “women’s work” or take on a position concerning the political correctness of this definition. This thesis was not intended to serve as a feminist text and further delving in the classification of “women’s work” does not fall within the scope of this study. This definition given by Goggin is added to the text to serve as a reference for the types of domestic objects and activities that I identify as they appear in the contemporary jewellery that I discuss later in this thesis.

From this extract it can be gathered that the realm of needlework (and as I argue, other domestic objects) has played a significant part in the identity formation of women. In this study I will focus specifically on how female contemporary jewellers have set out to use these domestic objects and needlework techniques to reference their own memories, nostalgic longings and feelings of trauma related to home.

I also discuss ways in which domestic objects and needlework can function as mnemonic devices within contemporary jewellery. I argue that domestic objects and needlework can serve as vehicles for nostalgia, and specifically for nostalgic longings of home. In this chapter I discuss the artwork of Manon van Kouswijk, *Lepidoptera Domestica*, 2007 (fig. 3-15), and Gesine Hackenberg, *Ceramic Jewellery*, 2006-2011 (fig. 16-23). Both Van Kouswijk and Hackenberg use domestic objects (plastic containers such as 'Tupperware'; ceramic plates; glass, metal and wooden bowls; books; and also the sole of a discarded shoe) in the contemporary jewellery they produce. Unlike the artworks that I discuss in chapter three (fig. 24-35), which have a distinct 'handmade' look and feel and which employ needlework techniques which are historically associated with women and the home, the artworks I discuss in this chapter have incorporated techniques that remove them from the 'home'. These two artists employ a more technologically advanced process (specifically laser-cutting) to assist in the production of their artwork. Despite the 'modern' technique employed to produce the artworks, the jewellery pieces can still be read as nostalgic. In my reading of the jewellery pieces, I was visually reminded of home, albeit more because of the domestic objects that Van Kouswijk and Hackenberg use, rather than the specific techniques they employ to produce their jewellery. The way in which Van Kouswijk and Hackenberg have appropriated domestic objects for use in the realm of contemporary jewellery, also serves to suggest other concepts or themes that fall on the fringe of the scope of this study. In chapter two, I also suggest and discuss these other possible interpretations or references.

Chapter three deals with memory, nostalgia and trauma within contemporary jewellery. In this chapter I discuss the history of nostalgia as a cultural disease through *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) by Svetlana Boym, and Susan Stewart's book *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (2007) I also suggest the relationship between memory, nostalgia and trauma. This relation to trauma is referenced through Michael S. Roth's book *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past* (2012).

In this chapter I also discuss the artworks of Esther Knobel, *My Grandmother is Knitting too*, 2000-2002 (fig. 24-29) and Iris Eichenberg, *Heimat*, 2004 (fig. 30-35), both of which deal with the notion of homesickness and a nostalgic longing for a time gone by. The artworks that I discuss also emphasise the relationship between mother and daughter, and the memories surrounding childhood, which are elements that are also present within my own art practice. In this chapter, I elaborate on this idea. Visual analyses of their artwork, supplemented by writings done either by the artists themselves or by other contemporary jewellers, form the main part of this section. The two artists that I discuss in this chapter use needlework as a technique, or a supplementary technique, in the production of their jewellery. When discussing their artwork, I also look at possible reasons why the use of needlework adds an elevated element of nostalgia to the artwork that they produce.

In chapter four I discuss my own artwork, specifically the series *Blue and white*, 2011-2012 (fig. 38, 39, 41-48, 50-52, 54-62). As I have mentioned, this is the only series that I discuss in this thesis, although I will exhibit other artwork at my final exhibition. Visual analysis of my own artwork aims to show how domestic objects and needlework can be used in contemporary jewellery to comment on themes such as nostalgic longing and trauma, with specific reference to my own recollections of home and the events that have taken place in my life over the past thirteen years, as well as earlier memories from my childhood. My own artwork draws heavily on personal experience, and for this reason there is a strong notion of self-analysis and introspective discussion inherent in the artworks that I will discuss.

## Chapter 1 – Jewellery as mnemonic device

### 1.1 Introduction

As I mentioned in my thesis topic and motivation, my inspiration for this study is guided by my own art practice. Ponderings about my reasons for choosing to work with domestic objects and needlework techniques, and the reasons why I felt comfortable with this subject matter, led me to investigate the role that these objects have played in my life and how they have functioned in my own visual formation of 'home'. In my opinion the subconscious plays a significant part in the creative process, and therefore no art can ever be made without considering the specific situation within which the artist finds him/herself. In order better to understand my own impressions and ideas with regard to the domestic objects and needlework techniques that I worked with during this study, I investigated specific theories as and how I felt them to be related to my visual research. In this chapter I discuss these theories and lay the groundwork according to which the rest of this study will be formulated.

The chapter is divided into two main subdivisions, namely 1.2 *Heidegger's theory on material culture and phenomenology*, and 1.3 *Memory and mnemonic devices in contemporary jewellery*. Since this study centres on domestic objects and needlework techniques and their appropriation in contemporary jewellery, I chose to first discuss my thoughts about and research on the way in which these objects have been removed from their initial 'space' or 'function' and appropriated in the realm of contemporary jewellery, to emphasise that this forms the basis upon which the rest of this study is built. For this section I draw on Heidegger and his discussion of hermeneutic phenomenology and our relationship to the 'things' that form part of our daily lives. I show how his thoughts on "equipmental totality" (Heidegger 1962) can be employed to discuss how the objects in question can function as reference to other phenomena, depending on each individual's relationship to the specific object.

Following my discussion of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, I will deal with memory and mnemonic devices in contemporary jewellery. It is important to discuss ways in which jewellery can function as mnemonic devices and aid in triggering memories in the individuals who make, own or wear the jewellery, since this study deals specifically with the

way in which the placement of domestic objects and needlework within contemporary jewellery can lead to the recollection of memories and nostalgic longings for home. Understanding how and why jewellery functions in this way will help to build the rest of my argument, especially in chapters two and three, when I discuss the specific artworks indicated in the introduction. In this section I also list and discuss the domestic objects that appear in the contemporary jewellery that I chose, and I explain why/how these objects can be referred to as mnemonic devices.

## **1.2 Heidegger's theory on material culture and phenomenology.**

Objects, or 'things', in whichever format they appear, make up a large part of the day-to-day activities of the majority of people. These 'things' have specific functions, and are mostly obtained with a specific purpose in mind. In this study, I specifically investigate the 'things' that we use within the domestic terrain. However, I investigate how these objects can be used within a new context, namely that of contemporary jewellery. To aid in understanding how this new positioning of the objects can function, and also the relationship between humans and objects, I turned to Martin Heidegger's theories on Phenomenology.<sup>13</sup> Because this is not the main interest of this study, I will not delve too deeply into this theory, but I will limit my discussion to its relevance. In my own practice, and also from what I have read about the work of the artists that I discuss in this study, the domestic objects used have an inherent visual appeal. These objects have a function before they are used in the jewellery and the objects are made and used with/for this specific function, however, their visual appearance is often overlooked, and more emphasis is placed on how well the objects execute whichever task they have been acquired for.<sup>14</sup> I am also aware that it is my

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<sup>13</sup> Phenomenology can, broadly, be described as: "...philosophy that investigates experience from a first-person point of view, that is, as it is presented to the subject" (Romdenh-Romluc 2011: 4). The experience, as undergone by the subject, is structured around intentionality: "... its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object. An experience is directed toward an object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions" (Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy Sv. 'phenomenology' available online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>).

<sup>14</sup> I am aware that, especially in the specific time frame in which I live, there is a more avid interest in and importance attached to the 'design' or visual appearance of the day-to-day objects with which we choose to surround ourselves. Browsing through any interior design magazine will probably prove this point. My intention with saying that the objects are considered for their function rather than any aesthetic quality, is to show that, within this section and within the field of hermeneutic phenomenology, emphasis is placed on the function of the object, rather than our relationship to it. To use my own artwork as an example: I use

subjective view that these objects contain a certain beauty,<sup>15</sup> and this is due to my relationship with or reading of the objects and techniques, which is re-informed by the memories that these objects and needlework techniques evoke when I view them. In an attempt to understand why I have such an affinity for these objects, I began investigating the field of Phenomenology and material culture.

Martin Heidegger, specifically his 1962 text *Being and Time*, discusses hermeneutic phenomenology. Heidegger (1962: 97) speaks of “equipment”, and states that we can distinguish between different types of equipment, depending on what we use the ‘things’ for. He goes further to state that while we possess over certain ‘things’ with which to do certain jobs or activities, we rarely distinguish between the thing and its purpose. The one is because of the other. The ‘thing’ is because of what it does or can do. Heidegger’s well known example is that of the hammer. He explains that we do not focus on the hammer itself, but on the action we do with it (hammering in a nail), and that it is this action that dictates our relationship with the hammer, rather than the hammer itself as a thing in its own right. Julian Thomas (2006: 46), in his article “Phenomenology and Material Culture” in *The Handbook of Material Culture* (2006), explains this relationship we have with things or “equipment” in the following manner:

In *Being and Time* (1962) Heidegger explains that when we use something as a piece of equipment, a ‘thing-for’, it is always part of an ‘equipmental totality’, so that, as well as being submerged in the practice of use, the thing is also bound to a network of reference and connection. The hammer is in the first instance known as part of a constellation that includes the nail, the roof tile, the rafter, and so on. Our everyday understanding is of totalities, contexts, projects and relationships, rather than of isolated objects. Only when the hammer fails in use, malfunctioning or

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dishtowels to produce my jewellery. When these dishtowels were first bought (by my mother, my grandmother, my friends or the other people from whom I sourced them) they were bought specifically to be used to dry dishes or clean up spills. They were chosen for their durability and the rate at which they can absorb liquid. Only once I took them out of their functional role and used them in the production of contemporary jewellery, did the previous ‘owners’ pay attention to the visual appearance of the dishtowels.

<sup>15</sup> I use ‘beauty’ here to convey that my subjective reading of the object involves a certain visual appearance that I find pleasing. My relationship with these objects, especially within my own past, has led me to consider them beautiful. The notion of defining something as beautiful is problematic, precisely because it is subjective. Amelia Jones, art historian and Professor at the McGill University in Montreal, wrote an essay titled “*Every Man Knows Where and How Beauty Gives Him Pleasure*”: *Beauty Discourse and the Logic of Aesthetics* (n.d.). This essay is one of many that discuss the discourse surrounding beauty. It ends, fittingly for my argument, as follows: “Either way, it behooves all of us to recognize and to remind you all that beauty – there’s no doubt about it – is in the eye of the beholder” (Jones n.d.: [Online]). The discourses surrounding beauty, however, do not fall within the scope of this study, and I will therefore not elaborate on it further.



breaking down... does it become present-at-hand, something that we just look at and contemplate in its uselessness.

From this I gathered that only when an object or “equipment” loses its function, can we see it and experience it for what it truly is, a thing ‘being’ in the world. Only then can we completely view it for its beauty or our visual response to it. Also, once the functionality is no longer part of the equation, the object can appear to us in different contexts, depending on our relationship to it. We should also be aware that our relationship to certain objects is based on our exposure to them. As Thomas (2006: 47) continues:

...the way that people gain an understanding of material entities depends upon *background* or horizon. This background is composed of a variety of embodied skills and means of coping, cultural traditions, a general conception of how the world is ordered, and a variety of human projects and requirements. It is in the context of this network of entities and practices that things reveal themselves, not for the most part as puzzling or requiring explanation but as always-already understood.

It is in a specific network or context, in this case my own, that the domestic objects and techniques that I choose to discuss can be considered to reference memory, nostalgia and trauma thematically. These objects have always been understood as pertaining to and therefore representing ‘home’, which is further evidence for my argument. In the case of the objects and needlework I use in my work, or the objects and needlework used by the artists I discuss, the objects do not break, and are *therefore* considered in a new way. Their function or “equipmental totality” is removed deliberately. Manon van Kouswijk, in *Lepidoptera Domestica* (fig. 3-15), deliberately uses laser technology to cut butterflies out of her chosen domestic objects, rendering them “useless”, and although both parts of the domestic object are kept and displayed, neither of them can function as they were originally intended to. Gesine Hackenberg, in *Ceramic Jewellery* (fig. 16-23), cuts the ceramic plates into discs and strings them into a necklace, consequently leaving the plate “unusable”, but in the process creating a very wearable piece of contemporary jewellery. In each instance, the domestic object or technique loses its original function, but is given a “new” function when the artist appropriates it into the realm of contemporary jewellery, thus encouraging us to view the object, and our relationship to it, differently. In my own artwork (fig. 38, 39, 41-48, 50-52, 54-62), the dishtowels I adorn with metal and gemstones can no longer be used to dry dishes

or clean up spills, but are now rather put in a position where the viewer/wearer can observe the object and the needlework techniques used in the making of the contemporary piece of jewellery. This leads to a re-evaluation of their own relationship to the object with which they (possibly) had a purely functional 'relationship' until they viewed the object in a different light.

From Heidegger I would like to move on to look briefly at Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty shared Heidegger's opinion about the "lived world of everyday activity" (Thomas 2006: 47), specifically because he understood our interaction with certain objects to be culturally driven, and therefore, like Heidegger, rejected Husserl's attempt at creating a science for human existence. Merleau-Ponty focused on *perception*, arguing that "the world and consciousness are mutually dependant parts of one whole. Neither can exist without standing in this relation to the other" (Romdenh-Romluc 2011: 3). I agree with this theory, and I think it is exemplified in my own work, as well as that of the artists I discuss later in this study. The objects that people come into contact with cannot be removed from the way that the objects are experienced. The two cannot exist separately, and it is exactly when this conscious realisation happens, that it becomes possible to use these objects to address other concerns or thoughts. In my own artwork, I can view the domestic objects (the dishtowels) as physical representations of home. When I deliberately remove their function, I begin to view the objects in a different light, and the objects are no longer viewed as mere functional, day-to-day dishtowels, but rather as vessels within which a vast array of memories are contained. Appropriating the dishtowels into a new and different realm, and spending time with and on each individual dishtowel with the aim to produce a wearable piece of contemporary jewellery, puts me, the maker, in the position where I can now review my relationship with the object, regardless of its "equipmentality". My perception of the dishtowel is shifted, and as a result I am in a position where I can review my own recollections of home, using the dishtowel as a tangible object on which my new perception can be built in a process that results in a wearable piece of contemporary jewellery.

## 1.2 Memory and mnemonic devices in contemporary jewellery

In the section above, I discussed how domestic objects and needlework can attain a new function when the initial intended function is removed and the domestic object or needlework is used within a new context. In this study, I focus specifically on domestic objects and needlework that have been appropriated within the context of contemporary jewellery. I argue that the newly appropriated objects and needlework can assist in the recollection of certain memories and nostalgic longings, specifically with relation to home.

Memory and nostalgia are two concepts or phenomena that are very closely linked. From what I have gathered through my research, it seems that memory can be considered as the function of the mind which allows us mentally to store and recall certain events, and to remember them after the events have taken place. Nostalgia, however, is a specific way of remembering the past, with an emphasis on a longing for a specific time, rather than a specific place. Memory co-exists with its opposite, amnesia (Megill 2011: 193-197). Susan Stewart (2007: 24), in her book *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (2007), states that “[m]emory, at once impoverished and enriched, presents itself as a device for measurement”. To apply Stewart’s statement to this study, I would argue that contemporary jewellery can aid in the enrichment of memory, as a tangible object which can function as a vessel for memory. Allan Megill (2011: 193-197), a professor in the History Department at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, USA wrote in “History, Memory, Identity”, in *The Collective Memory Reader* (2011), that the difference between nostalgia and memory is that

...whereas nostalgia is oriented outward *from* the subject (the individual person; the group), focussing attention on a real or imagined past, memory is oriented *toward* the subject and is concerned with a real or imagined past only because that past is perceived as crucial for the subject, even constitutive of it.

According to Megill, memory is used to aid the subject to form his or her identity, based on what the subject does or does not remember from their past. Memory is a crucial part of the way in which we perceive the world and also form our identities based on what we remember. This thought is echoed in the writings of Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone in their book *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (2003). Hodgkin and Radstone (2003: 8) state that

[m]emory in common use is tied to the individual: memory is indeed the defining moment of western subjectivity, that which distinguishes one person from another and anchors social beings in their individual identities... it is in certain ways a metaphorical extension, a way of drawing an equivalence from the workings of the mind to the workings of society at large...

Memory then, although unstable and prone to change, is still a defining part of our individual identity, and a way in which humans can work towards understanding their presence in the world. The main drive behind memory is fear, specifically the fear of illnesses such as Alzheimer's or dementia which prohibit our ability to remember clearly characteristics about ourselves or details about our lives (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi & Levy 2011:4). Megill (2011: 193-197) explains this subjective approach to memory by saying that "...an appeal to memory – that is, an appeal to what is subjective and personal – is likely to arise only when objectively existing supports are felt to be inadequate". Memory is therefore deeply imbedded in our emotions. And because memory works towards the subject, it is difficult to challenge facts when someone brings their own memories into play, as each individual remembers different occurrences differently, depending on how the specific memory in question contributes to the way in which they have used the specific memory to form their identity. For example, if a specific memory has led to an individual constructing their identity in a certain way, based on how they remember a specific thing or event, they will defend the memory with much greater fervour than a trivial memory which only serves as a fringe addition to their identity formation. "Memory is an image of the past constructed by a subjectivity in the present" (Megill 2011: 193-197).

In his entry in *The Collective Memory Reader* (2011), titled "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", Jan Assmann, a German Egyptologist, discusses the occurrence of collective or cultural memory. Assmann (2011: 209-215) refers to Nietzsche, who theorised that, while animals are genetically programmed, with regard to mating habits and preferences in vegetation, in a way that will ensure the survival of the species, humans have to find a way to maintain our nature from generation to generation. The solution to this dilemma can be found in cultural memory, which can be described as "a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation" (Assmann 2011: 209-215). Assmann (2011: 209-215) writes specifically about the use of memory as a tool in

identity formation. He speaks about the ways in which collective or cultural memories can aid in the arrangement of a cultural heritage.

The objectivation or crystallization of communicated meaning and collectively shared knowledge is a prerequisite of its transmission *in the culturally institutionalized heritage of society*. “Stable” formation is not dependant on a single medium such as writing. Pictorial images and rituals can also function in the same way.

To this end then, certain rituals, images or texts can function as mnemonic<sup>16</sup> devices by which not only an individual, but a whole group, community or society can remember certain cultural elements that form part of the groups’ identity. I argue that the domestic objects used in the works that I have chosen to analyse, remind the maker/viewer/wearer of certain aspects that have been grounded in his/her cultural identity. The piece of contemporary jewellery functions as a mnemonic device, and the specific placement of domestic objects and needlework within the piece of jewellery recall memories of ‘home’. Marjan Unger, a Dutch art historian who wrote her PhD on the theory of contemporary jewellery,<sup>17</sup> also addresses this inherent quality of jewellery. In a 2012 talk given at the Pinakothek der Moderne, which forms part of the *Schmuck* jewellery fair held annually in Munich and which can be considered to be one of largest events on the contemporary jewellery calendar each year, Unger (2012: 7) stated the following: “One of the most endearing qualities of jewellery is that, small and close to people as they are, they are perfect vehicles for memory”. At the beginning of 2012 David Skinner (2012 [Online]), editor of the online editorial *Art Jewellery Forum*, wrote a report on an exhibition titled *Jewels, Gems, and Treasures: Ancient to Modern* which is on display at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts until November 2012. In his report, he comments on how jewellery can “operate as a kind of object across different cultures and periods” (Skinner 2012 [Online]). In 2010 Roch Huschka, curator at the Tacoma Art Museum in Tacoma, USA, wrote an essay dealing with the intricate relationship that evolves between contemporary jewellers and the individuals who buy, wear and collect their work. The paper, titled *Holding Objects: The Psychoanalytic*

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<sup>16</sup> “Mnemonic, any device for aiding the memory. Named for Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory in Greek mythology, mnemonics are also called *memoria technica* (Latin: “memory technique”). The principle is to create in the mind an artificial structure that incorporates unfamiliar ideas or, especially, a series of dissociated ideas that by themselves are difficult to remember. Ideally, the structure is designed so that its parts are mutually suggestive” (Britannica Online Encyclopaedia Sv: ‘mnemonic’ [Online]).

<sup>17</sup> Unger’s thesis is titled *Jewellery in context, a multidisciplinary framework of the consideration of the jewel* and was completed in 2010. A summary of her thesis can be found online at: <http://www.news.leiden.edu/news/jewellery-in-context.html>.

*Mechanisms of Wearing Jewelry* (2010), deals more specifically with Sigmund Freud's theory on object relations.<sup>18</sup> Towards the end of the article Huschka (2010 [Online]) touches on an idea that I think is relevant to this study, in as much as it comments on how contemporary jewellery can function:

The concepts<sup>19</sup> help us understand better how the individual objects function as multi-faceted signifiers, organizing points around which relationship meet and interactions with the world are possible. They help us articulate how jewelry nurtures an independent vision and identity for the wearer and the artist... and psychoanalysis offers a powerful tool to unlock the meaning and intent of studio art jewelry.

I argue that the "concepts" that are addressed or portrayed in contemporary jewellery can refer to memory, nostalgia and trauma, and that the contemporary jewellery piece can function as a mnemonic device that helps us to understand our relationship to both the object and our own relation to the specific memory, nostalgic longing or traumatic feeling that the jewellery piece evokes when we are confronted with it. Incorporating domestic objects and needlework in the jewellery pieces serves to enhance the mnemonic function, as the jewellery piece can now thematically suggest how we interpret our relationship to 'home' by way of memory, nostalgia and trauma.

Lena Vigna, curator of and writer on contemporary jewellery, in 2009 wrote an article titled *Heirlooms: Navigating the Personal in Contemporary Jewelry* for *Art Jewelry Forum*, an online, non-profit organisation aimed at supporting and promoting the field of

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<sup>18</sup> Huschka's article deals specifically with Freud's theory of object relations and how it can be applied within contemporary jewellery. Although this is not the main focus of this study, I will give a brief introduction to the psychoanalytical theory of *Object Relations*. I refer to Michael St. Clair, clinical therapist and professor of Psychology at Emmanuel College, Boston, USA, who gives the following summary: "Object relations can be understood to mean interpersonal relations. The term *object* was first introduced by Freud, and refers to that which will satisfy a need" (St. Clair 1996: 1). When using the word *object*, psychoanalysts imply that it can relate to either a person or thing. The human drive manifests itself in the object. To further explain this tendency within object relations, I refer to St. Clair's explanation of *representation*. The term *representation* refers to how the person has or possesses an object; that is, how the person physically represents an object: "[We can generally] distinguish between two worlds or frames of reference: the external world of observable objects and an internal psychic world where there are mental representations of objects. The external world refers to the realm of observable objects that exist in a social environment, the world of every day. The internal world refers to the subject's mental images and representations of that external world; that is, how the subject experiences and represents that external world" (Boesky, 1983; Sander & Rosenblatt, 1962. Cited in St. Clair 1996: 6). Freud's theory regarding object relations is, however, not within the scope of this thesis, and for that reason I will not elaborate on the theory.

<sup>19</sup> Huschka is here referring to the specific concepts that he addresses in his article. Specifically they are: "the psychoanalytic tenets of the transference, intersubjectivity, transitional object, the 'bad breast/good breast' and narcissism" (Huschka 2010 [Online].)

contemporary jewellery. Her introduction to the article states how heirlooms function as objects that can contain memories and emotional recollections but, due to the emotional element present in the object and the instability of memory, these objects can also become vessels of sentiment and nostalgia. Vigna states that these very elements are also present in jewellery, and that they are 'tools' contemporary jewellers can use when conveying a certain message with their work. Vigna (2009 [Online]) discusses how contemporary jewellery can function to "underscore the link, inherited or not, between past and present and establish a framework for investigating the role of jewelry as a conveyor of personal, social and cultural meaning".

To continue my argument that contemporary jewellery has the capacity to function as a mnemonic device, I refer to the *ThinkingJewellery: On the Way Towards a Theory of Jewellery* (2011) compendium. *ThinkingJewellery* is a symposium where jewellers, teachers of jewellery, keen observers and theorists from outside the field of jewellery have been converging since 2004. The aim of this symposium, held annually at the Idar-Oberstein University of applied arts in Germany, is to create a space in which the participants can "...shed light on the question of a 'theory of jewellery' as viewed from different angles", as stated by Lothar Brügel, Ute Eitzenhöfer and Theo Smeets, professors at the University and the authors of the introduction for the compendium. Tilmann Habermass(2011: 100), one of the writers contributing to the book, states in his article, '*Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend*': *The Psychology of Jewellery as Beloved Objects* (2011), that

[j]ewellery, therefore, also recalls faraway places, trips, past experiences and successfully survived adventures. Hence jewellery basically also has a souvenir value. Pieces of jewellery are mnemonic symbols... literally, recollections. Objects that recall specific people, objects that were once part of those people or used or worn by them, such as inherited pieces of jewellery...

Habermas (2011: 106) continues to discuss ways in which jewellery can function metonymically: "However, the quintessential type of signification through jewellery is indexical or metonymic". The piece of jewellery which has incorporated the domestic object or needlework can function in such a way that it refers to a "whole" thing, by showing only a part thereof. Jewellery can refer to any number of things or places, but, as Habermas (2011: 106) continues, what makes this specific metonymical reference so special

...is that the only person to understand them is the person who is sufficiently in the know to do so. Like other personal objects, jewellery, therefore, is particularly well suited to signifying something that remains hidden from others...*Hence* jewellery is suited to being used as a sort of secret language.

Although this “secret language” Habermas refers to is not discussed explicitly in this study, I think that mentioning it is important, especially since the contemporary jewellery pieces that I discuss do make use of this element. The viewer or wearer can guess at the message that the jeweller is attempting to convey. The use of certain components, such as the domestic objects and needlework that I focus on in this study, gives the viewer or wearer specific clues about the message. Buying, owning and wearing a piece of contemporary jewellery, however, also involves realising that the “meaning” or “message” in the piece is unstable, like memory. This is a thought that I will refer back to later in this study when discussing the specific artists’ work.

### **1.3 Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter was to discuss Martin Heidegger’s theory on hermeneutic phenomenology, and to look at the ways in which people form relationships with certain objects based on the function that the individual objects serve. We observe day to day objects as “a ‘thing-for’, it is always part of an ‘equipmental totality’, so that, as well as being submerged in the practice of use, the thing is also bound to a network of reference and connection” (Thomas 2006: 46). I argue, in this chapter and throughout this study, that the objects can be viewed in a different light when they are removed from the “practice of use”, and they can serve a new function, namely that of a mnemonic device. I conclude my discussion on Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology by suggesting that the domestic objects and needlework that form the centre of this study can serve to suggest new possible interpretations when they are removed from their domestic surroundings, and appropriated within the realm of contemporary jewellery. The newly located domestic objects and needlework can implore the maker/wearer/owner of the piece of contemporary jewellery to re-asses their relationship with the specific domestic object or needlework as it is now viewed within the piece of jewellery.



Following my discussion on hermeneutic phenomenology, I considered how contemporary jewellery can function as a mnemonic device and how the placement of specific domestic objects or needlework can aid in the recalling of certain memories in an individual. This is emphasised by Lena Vigna's (2009 [Online]) point that contemporary jewellery can "underscore the link, inherited or not, between past and present". The link between past and present that can be created within contemporary jewellery, is an element or quality of jewellery which will be used throughout this study. This quality can show how the use of domestic objects and needlework in contemporary jewellery can aid the maker/viewer/wearer in remembering their own recollection of home. This quality of contemporary jewellery is one that I will touch on again later in this study, specifically when I discuss the artists and artworks indicated in the introduction.

Having presented the two main theories upon which the rest of the study will be built, I continue in the next chapter to work towards a definition of 'domestic', and also start my discussion of certain artworks, namely Manon van Kouswijk's artwork *Lepidoptera Domestica* (fig. 3-15) and Gesine Hackenberg's series *Ceramic Jewellery* (fig. 16-23).

## Chapter 2 – Domestic objects as a vehicle for memory and nostalgia in contemporary jewellery

### 2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I set out to discuss theories that will form the basis upon which the rest of my study will be built. The discussion of Martin Heidegger's theory of hermeneutic phenomenology and human relationships with specific objects will allow me to continue my argument in focussing specifically on objects historically associated with the domestic. I also discussed how contemporary jewellery aids in the creation of mnemonic devices and how our relationship with specific jewellery objects re-enforces certain memories. In this chapter, I focus specifically on discussing and outlining what I mean when referring to the objects and needlework used in the contemporary jewellery that I discuss, as domestic.

This chapter also sets out to discuss how domestic objects can function as vehicles for memory and nostalgia in contemporary jewellery. In the previous chapter, I discussed how memory and mnemonic devices appear in contemporary jewellery. I referred to Megill(2011: 193-197), who defined the difference between memory and nostalgia as follows:

...whereas nostalgia is oriented outward *from* the subject (the individual person; the group), focussing attention on a real or imagined past, memory is oriented *toward* the subject and is concerned with a real or imagined past only because that past is perceived as crucial for the subject, even constitutive of it.

Although Megill differentiates between nostalgia and memory in this way, I would suggest that memory and nostalgia often function together. While the memory serves to function for the subject in terms of their identity formation, and nostalgia serves the past (whether real or imagined) by keeping it 'alive', both these phenomena can also work together to the extent that they both serve some event, place or thing (whether real or imagined) which the individual feels the need to remember. Susan Stewart (2007: 23) says that "[n]ostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience". In their book *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (2003), Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (2003: 11) say that

[m]emory, of course, does not operate only as an abstract (mental) system: it is generated by and channelled through an endless variety of media and artefacts.

Closely related to the anxiety of loss of memory in the persons of the disappearing generations is the anxiety about objects and places, the stuff of memory which itself has power to represent or stand in for the past, and whose destruction must be fended off.

For the purpose of this study, I would argue that the appropriation of domestic objects in contemporary jewellery serves to let the object become a vessel for both memory and nostalgia. If there is any truth in Marjan Unger's (2012: 7) statement that "jewellery... small and close to people as they are... are the perfect vehicles for memories", then appropriating the domestic objects to the field of contemporary jewellery can be considered an appropriate way in which to ensure that the past is remembered (which serves nostalgia) and that the maker/wearer/owner of the piece of jewellery can hold the memory close to them (which serves memory).

To serve as visual examples for this study, I will discuss Manon van Kouswijk's artwork *Lepidoptera Domestica* (fig. 3-15) and Gesine Hackenberg's series of artworks *Ceramic Jewellery* (fig. 16-23). Each jeweller will be introduced when I discuss their specific works of art. In this section, I refer to contemporary jewellery writer Liesbeth den Besten and her book titled *On Jewellery: A Compendium of International Contemporary Art Jewellery* (2011).

## **2.2 Towards a definition of the Domestic**

The main research question for this study is: "How are domestic objects and needlework techniques used in contemporary jewellery, and what are the thematic outcomes thereof?". In order to answer this question successfully, it would seem necessary to first address what exactly is meant by 'domestic'. Domestic, a word that is used often (in my case, daily) proved to be more difficult to define than I initially anticipated. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines domestic as: "Of or pertaining to the home, house, or household; pertaining to one's home or family affairs". It continues to say: "Attached to home; fond of home life or duties... An article of home manufacture" (OED 2007. Sv. 'domestic'). Yet, domestic can also be used when referring to anything happening within a certain country's borders, to an animal that has been tamed or to "a violent quarrel between husband and wife" (OED 2007. Sv. 'domestic'). And when talking of 'domesticate' we refer to making

something or someone comfortable and content at home. For the purpose of this study, I define 'domestic' as that which refers to things or activities that happen in and around the house or home. And while domestic refers to the tangible objects, rituals and events that happen within the house or home, domesticity refers more broadly to the idea of what it means to operate within the domestic space. This notion of 'domesticity' was discussed in a November 2011 article posted in the online version of the *Washington Post*, titled *The New Domesticity: Fun, Empowering or a Step Back for American Women?* (Rothman 2011 [Online]). In the article, Julia Rothman discusses the emergence of a trend among young women (she mentions her own age as twenty-nine). Rothman (2011 [Online]) refers to

“...my generation’s newfound mania for old-fashioned domestic work. Around the country, women my age (I’m 29),... are embracing the very homemaking activities our mothers and grandmothers so eagerly shucked off. We’re heading back to jam-canning and knitting needles... But in an era when women still do the majority of the housework and earn far less of the money, “reclaiming” domesticity is about more than homemade holiday treats. Could this “new domesticity” start to look like old-fashioned obligation?”.

As Rothman mentions, this ‘new-found domesticity’ has the potential to become the ‘obligation’ against which the women in the First and Second wave feminist movement<sup>20</sup> fought. However, it is not my intention in the scope of this study to take on a political stance with regard to the domestic and the discourses that surround it. Although I am aware that the domestic is an area that is gendered, my intention with employing and discussing the

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<sup>20</sup> In his *Dictionary of Critical Theory* (2005) David Macey defines feminism as follows: “Although feminism, which became one of the most important forces in twentieth-century politics and thought, can take many different forms, its common core is the thesis that the relationship between the sexes is one of inequality or oppression. All forms of feminism seek to identify the causes of that inequality and to remedy it, but the issue of precisely which agency produces and reproduces inequality is the source of many of the differences between feminists” (*Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Sv. ‘feminism’). First wave feminism refers to a period dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, during which women in Europe, Canada and North America rose up against social constraints which stated that women were not allowed to vote. “...it became synonymous with ‘advocacy of women’s rights’ and was associated with the suffragette movement led by the Women’s Social and Political Union...” (Liddington & Norris, cited in Macey 2005: 123). This movement was followed by the 1970s Women’s Liberation Movement, which was pioneered by women such as Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir, and which is also referred to as Second Wave feminism. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock state in their book *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women’s Movement 1970-1985* (1987) that: “In the early years of the 1970s there was an explosion of political energy, accompanied by a growth of political movements. One of the most vital was the Women’s Movement” (1987: 3). Macey continues: “It has become conventional to describe the history of feminism as one of successive waves which peak and then recede”. Macey refers to “post-feminism” as an era within which a new generation of women can enjoy the freedom that their forebears have attained for them, and goes further to mention that a “new feminism” was proposed by feminists such as Naomi Wolf and Natasha Walter. According to Macey, the purpose of the ‘new feminism’ is to “function as a spreading consensus or social movement promoting a long overdue economic equality with men, and not a female-centred culture” (*Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Sv. ‘feminism’).

domestic is influenced more by the presence of domestic objects and needlework in my own art practice, than by a political position or opinion. And, as I have mentioned earlier in this study, domestic objects and needlework are employed in my own art practice specifically because they aid in referencing my own recollections of home.

The home can, however, also be divided into sub-categories, and these different divisions or spaces are also gendered. In the book *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps* (1993), Shirley Ardener, the editor and author of the introduction, quotes Erving Goffman's 1979 paper titled *Gender Advertisements*. Goffman states: "The division and hierarchies of social structures are depicted microecologically, that is, through the use of small-scale spatial metaphors" (cited in Ardener 1979:1). Ardener (1993: 2) elaborates on this idea, when she says: "This suggests that *space reflects social organisation*, but of course, once space has been bounded and shaped it is no longer merely a neutral background: it exerts its own influence". From this we can gather that the hierarchies imbedded in certain spaces are due to the social structures that have been set in place over a prolonged period of time. These social structures will differ depending on the specific culture in question, but for the purpose of this study, I will focus on a Western, male-dominant society.

Some scholars, such as Catherine Lemmer, argue that this gendering, specifically in the context that I would like to discuss it, is a trait that has been inherited from the Victorian age. As Lemmer (2007:1) puts it in her thesis, *Victorian Respectability: The Gendering of Domestic Space* (2007):

Victorian respectability, a complex combination of moral, religious, economic and cultural systems (Nead 1988: 8), contains a dichotomy structured around a heavily polarised understanding of gender. Respectability was an essential objective of Victorian existence... Respectability became inseparable from the home, the site of complementary masculinity and femininity, and can therefore, be used to understand the gendering of domestic space.

While Victorian respectability might not form part of our daily lives anymore, and may seem an outdated idea to many, this very formal structuring of the interior space of the home did leave some residual traces behind; if for no other reason than it has led to a lot of research being done on the topic. As Alison Blunt (2005: 507) states in her article *Cultural Geography: Cultural Geographies of the Home* (2005):

In a rich range of historical and contemporary research, cultural geographies have explored the ways in which domestic architecture and design are inscribed with meanings, values and beliefs that both reflect and reproduce ideas about gender, class, sexuality, family and nation.

This idea that the home space is an area in which gender roles and assumptions are reinforced is also taken up by Justine Lloyd and Lesley Johnson (2004: 251) in their article *Dream Stuff: The Post-war Home and the Australian Housewife* (2004), when they say that

[o]n the one hand, both state and market discourses suggested that women could sweep away the elements of traditional, particularly pre-war, home designs that bound them to the home. On the other, popular magazines also placed a great deal of emphasis on the look of things and on looking itself, further inscribing women's identity within domestic space.

From the excerpts above, it can be gathered that there are theorists and writers who suggest that the domestic, and those activities or objects that form part of it, is an area that is historically gendered female. Apart from the different areas within the home, there are also certain tasks that are gendered.<sup>21</sup> The objects and techniques that I refer to throughout this study as being domestic are those that have historically been considered to belong to the areas of the house or home, or the activities that take place within the home, that have been gendered as female. I am referring to objects from within the kitchen, such as ceramic plates; plastic containers of varying colours, sizes, shapes and functions; dish-towels; as well as knitting, sewing and other items associated with needlework.

To discuss further how the domestic and the activities that happen within its confines are considered gendered, I will now refer to third wave feminist Debbie Stoller's (2003: 9) book *Stitch 'n Bitch: The Knitter's Handbook* (2003), in the introduction of which she states:

Whenever I would take up the needles I would feel myself connected not only to my own mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, but also to the women who had developed the craft, the women who had known, as I did, the incredible satisfaction and sense of serenity that could come from the steady, rhythmic click-click-click of one's knitting needles... Betty Friedan and other like-minded feminists had overlooked an important aspect of knitting when they viewed it simply as part

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<sup>21</sup> In *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (1984), Rozsika Parker discusses how femininity has been 'made' within the confines of social structure. Although this text is outdated in the sense that embroidery (needlework) no longer forms a large part of the daily lives of women, it is still relevant when tracing how the task of needlework, or the domestic area within which it occurs, has been gendered. As Parker states: "The sexual division that assigns women to sewing is inscribed in our social institutions, fostered by school curricula which still direct boys to carpentry and girls to needlework... Embroidery has become indelibly associated with stereotypes of femininity" (1984: 1-2).

of women's social obligation to serve everyone around them – they had forgotten that knitting serves the knitter as well.

In my opinion this extract, which is specifically linked with knitting, can be suggestive of a wider scope of “women's work”, including needlework (sewing, embroidery, crochet). With this statement, Stoller is suggesting that, although needlework has been gendered female it does not necessarily have to be viewed in a negative light. Also, Stoller emphasises the link that is created between the woman who knits, and the generations before her who also partook in this activity. I am not suggesting that all women knit, or that all women who knit also had mothers and grandmothers who knitted. But, because my own art practice is concerned with my recollections of my childhood home and my relationship with my mother, and because the artwork that I discuss in chapter three (fig. 24-35) shares similar interests, it is appropriate to add Stoller's thoughts on the potential purpose that knitting (needlework) can serve. There is a certain repetitive action inherent in this type of work, and my reading of Stoller's extract suggests that it is within this action that the knitting/sewing/stringing serves whoever is engaged in the action. As I have mentioned in my chapter layout, my own artwork draws heavily on personal experience, and for this reason it exhibits a strong notion of self-analysis. During the process of making the work, I found that the repetitive action involved in sewing, and my involvement with the domestic objects that I use in my artwork, assisted me in recalling and referencing my childhood memories.

The idea that needlework can function as a ‘liberating’ act within the domestic realm is discussed by Heather Pristach, Inez Schaechterle and Sue Carter in their essay titled *The Needle as the Pen: Intentionality, Needlework, and the Production of Alternate Discourses of Power* (2009). The authors argue that needlework holds the opportunity for women to “shape identity, build community, and prompt engagement with social action” (Pristach, Schaechterle & Carter 2009: 13-29). They continue to state that “needlework need not function as an *alternative* to discourse, but as a *form* of discourse” (Pristach, Schaechterle & Carter 2009: 13-29). They also suggest that needlework can function as a rhetorical discourse, and that there is (and has been) a certain system of coding inherent in

needlework, which for a long time could function as a type of “secret” language.<sup>22</sup> They continue to say that there is a tendency within the study of rhetoric (even by those individuals who focus on visual or material practices) to focus on the marks that have been made and their readability as text, rather than looking at the actual method of making these marks. In this study, I aim to give attention not only to how the jewellery pieces that I discuss might be read or understood, but also to discuss the actual method of making, and how this could add to the themes of memory, nostalgia and trauma that is inherent in the contemporary jewellery that I discuss.

In his book *The Archaeology of Women in Rhetoric* (2002), Richard Leo Enos (2002 [Online]) argues that there is a need to broaden the rhetorical horizon with regards to the spaces, practices and artefacts that have hitherto been discussed:

If we are to provide a sensitive accounting of women in the rhetorical tradition...our mentality toward rhetoric must expand beyond civic, agnostic discourse to include alternative modes of expression used by women.

In this study my aim is to show how contemporary jewellery, specifically jewellery pieces that incorporate domestic objects and needlework, can be viewed as a form of rhetoric employed by female contemporary jewellers. Jewellery, in itself, has a long standing tradition of being associated with objects that we treasure and hold dear.<sup>23</sup> By appropriating the domestic objects and needlework into contemporary jewellery, I argue that this is a way in which these female jewellers can show that they also treasure these objects and thematic reference of the domestic, with specific reference to their own recollections of home.

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<sup>22</sup> Joan Newlon Radner and Susan Lanser discuss this phenomenon more directly in their article *Strategies of Coding in Women's Culture* (in *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture*, University of Illinois Press 1993).

<sup>23</sup> This topic is also discussed by Lin Cheung in her article *Wear, wearing, worn: The Transitions of Jewels to Jewellery* (2006) when she states: “...all jewellery also has the endless capacity to hold personal, unique meaning for the wearer, eventually defining the piece beyond its initial design and conception. By wearing, owning and interacting with jewellery, we breathe new life into it. We activate it and set it on a life-long journey to collect and absorb its surroundings” (2006: 12).



### 2.3 Domestic objects as mnemonic device in contemporary jewellery

In her book *On Jewellery: A Compendium of International Contemporary Art Jewellery* (2011), Liesbeth den Besten (2011: 55-56) writes about the tendency of some contemporary jewellers to work with the domestic as thematic reference:

Many jewellery artists today take jewels as part of an everyday world filled with objects that have a domestic and ritual character in the life of human beings... The 'daily life' strategy became extremely popular at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy's jewellery department, under the leadership of Iris Eichenberg<sup>24</sup>. It culminated in the 2004 graduate show where three students... created their own explicit mini worlds... The wallpaper and power sockets were decorated with elegant flower patterns hand drawn in pencil. Different scattered objects, like a pair of socks or a dishcloth, were embroidered with silk...

Den Besten states in this section what my aim is with saying that there is a space within contemporary jewellery where domestic objects and "rituals", as she terms it, can be used to reference the everyday world of human beings. Due to the placement within the realm of contemporary jewellery, which has a long tradition of being considered precious, the domestic objects and everyday rituals also attain a certain element of preciousness once they have been appropriated by this realm. The domestic as visual reference can also be employed to suggest the space in which we spend a large portion of time, namely our home or domestic surroundings. An aspect of the work of Van Kouswijk (fig. 3-15) and Hackenberg (fig. 16-23) that I discuss later in this section is that the artists use one object and cut pieces out of it. It could be argued that the object, in its original state, could stand to reference the whole memory caught up in the domestic, and that by cutting pieces out of it, the artist is choosing which part she wants to remember. However, the artist does not discard the pieces that she 'does not want'. Both pieces are kept and displayed. This is an element of the work by Van Kouswijk (fig. 3-15) and Hackenberg (fig. 16-23) that I will discuss later in this section. Mònica Gaspar, a writer in the field of contemporary jewellery, who co-created the book *Lepidoptera Domestica* (2007), which catalogues the work of art by the same title with Manon van Kouswijk, writes about home and the objects that we collect within it in her contribution to this catalogue. Although Gaspar's extract deals specifically with collecting, I think that the very act of collecting the domestic objects with which we choose to surround

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<sup>24</sup> This is the same Iris Eichenberg whose work I discuss in chapter two.

ourselves can already serve as an indication of the relationship that humans have with these objects. Gaspar (2007: n.pag.) explains it thus:

The space of a house is a symbol of comfort, security, and memory; and therefore the perfect place for accumulating objects – the personal museum of one’s life. The house and the museum are both social spaces in which similar activities take place: people select and arrange objects in both contexts. It could be said that any grouping of objects is a type of exhibit, a portrait, a statement of identity.

These objects that humans choose to display or use from day to day, as in the case of some of the work that I will discuss, function as objects with which we portray parts of our identity. When these objects are removed from their original context and appropriated by contemporary jewellery, this identity statement leaves the private sphere of the home and enters the public domain when worn on the body. In the artworks that I discuss in this study, both Van Kouswijk and Hackenberg present or produce their work in the form of a collection. By showing and discussing their work, I aim to give examples of how domestic objects can function as vehicles for memory and nostalgia in contemporary jewellery. Susan Stewart (2007: 151) states the following about the way in which a collection functions with relation to memory and nostalgia, in her book *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (2007):

In contrast to the souvenir, the collection offers example rather than sample, metaphor rather than metonymy. The collection does not displace attention to the past; rather, the past is at the service of the collection, for whereas the souvenir lends authenticity to the past, the past lends authenticity to the collection. The collection seeks a form of self-enclosure which is possible because of its ahistoricism. The collection replaces history with *classification*, with order beyond the realm of temporality. In the collection, time is not something to be restored to an origin; rather, all time is made simultaneous or synchronous within the collection’s world.

From Stewart’s extract, we can gather that, by producing their work in the form of a collection, both van Kouswijk and Hackenberg are allowing the past to ‘serve’ their work, in as much as the vastness of their artworks can allow the past to lend authenticity to their collections. The individual objects within the collection serve as vessels for memory, while the collection in its totality can serve as a vessel for nostalgia, as it is referencing a time, rather than an individual event. As Stewart (2007: 151) states: “...time is made simultaneous or synchronous within the collection’s world”.

When discussing the work of Van Kouswijk (fig. 3-15) and Hackenberg (fig. 16-23), I will set out to show how these two contemporary jewellers use domestic objects in the jewellery they produce, and discuss possible interpretations of the artworks.

### **2.3.1 Manon van Kouswijk – *Lepidoptera Domestica* (2007)**

As mentioned earlier in this section, I will discuss contemporary Dutch jeweller Manon van Kouswijk's work, specifically the artwork *Lepidoptera Domestica* (2007). Van Kouswijk, born in the Netherlands, underwent her training in contemporary jewellery at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, Netherlands. She also spent some time at the Munich Arts Academy under Professor Otto Künzli and worked as an apprentice in the studio of Ruudt Peters.<sup>25</sup> In *Lepidoptera Domestica* (fig. 3-15), van Kouswijk collected 683 objects of everyday use and cut out the silhouettes of 683 different butterfly shapes with the aid of laser-cutting. My main source for discussing this series is the catalogue also named *Lepidoptera Domestica*, which was created by Van Kouswijk and Mònica Gaspar, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. The catalogue, which contains images of all 683 domestic objects, also contains a portion of text compiled by Gaspar. Her compilation draws from a vast array of sources, ranging from dictionary extracts, excerpts from academic as well as fictional books, nursery rhymes and text written by Gaspar herself. Throughout this discussion on *Lepidoptera Domestica* (fig. 3-15) I will refer to my visual analysis of the artwork as well as the text located in the catalogue as compiled by Gaspar.

On her artist page on Klimt02,<sup>26</sup> the international contemporary jewellery website, Van Kouswijk (van Kouswijk [Sa] [Online]) says the following about the inspiration for her practice and working method:

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<sup>25</sup> Both Künzli and Peters are well known and acclaimed contemporary jewellers, situated in Germany and The Netherlands respectively.

<sup>26</sup> Klimt02 is an international database on contemporary jewellery design. On the home page, the website is described as: "Klimt02 is a initiative in the world of nowadays jewellery. It is a website that offers space of knowledge, information, debates and exchanges inside the context of contemporary jewellery. Klimt02 shows the creations existing in contemporary jewellery's world" (Amador Bertomeu and Leo Caballero [Sa] [Online]). This website, which also functions as a meeting place for young and up-coming jewellery designers, has a large section devoted to the distribution of articles, forums and essays written about contemporary jewellery. It also promotes exhibitions and newly published books and catalogues on contemporary jewellery. This website is of

Within my work I focus on the value and meaning that everyday objects represent to us. I am interested in actions and rituals in which these objects take part, like finding, buying, collecting, receiving and giving. In the works I visualise aspects of their function, of use and wear, and of associations that are connected with them. The archetypical object serves as a starting point in this process; the outcome and appearance of the work is diverse and ranges from jewellery, cutlery, tableware and textiles to works in paper. The making process I view as a way of making things visible rather than designing; I stay quite close to the objects in a sense that I work with the materials and techniques that the archetypes I start from have been made with.

Based on the artist's statement above, I have deduced that her work is conceptually concerned with the everyday objects with which we surround ourselves. If we refer back to Heidegger and his thoughts on hermeneutic phenomenology, it is of significant interest that Van Kouswijk also states that she considers the objects with relation to the actions and rituals that they are connected to. Van Kouswijk (van Kouswijk [Sa] [Online]) specifically observes the objects coupled with their functions and the possible positions or situations within which they could be used, and incorporates this into her working process when she produces her "[j]ewellery, cutlery, tableware and textiles to work on paper". I am also specifically drawn to Van Kouswijk's statement that she views her creative process as one of making visible rather than designing and making new objects out of raw materials. Although Van Kouswijk states that she does not limit herself only to the production of jewellery, she does still associate with the field of contemporary jewellery. At a lecture she presented at the Koru2 International Contemporary Jewellery Symposium in 2006, van Kouswijk (van Kouswijk 2006 [Online]) said the following about her initial education and the purpose it serves in her working method:

Before I studied at the jewellery department of the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam I was educated as a goldsmith in a small town in the Netherlands. This technical basis I still consider to be crucial for the way I have developed my work, even though I don't work with metal so much anymore and my approach is anyway not a technical one to start with.

The artist states that her "technical basis" is still very crucial to her working method, and that it is from this base that she develops her work, and for this reason her work can be considered as contemporary jewellery, even though it might not always look the part. Van Kouswijk describes the objects around which she builds her works of art as "archetypical",

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invaluable worth to the contemporary jewellery community. During this study, I sourced a number of articles on contemporary jewellery, as well as artists statements from the artists I discussed, from this online portal.

suggesting that the domestic objects she uses can be considered as the starting point from which her work then evolves. However, referring to the domestic objects as “archetypical” also suggests that these objects have been within our frame of reference long enough to attain the status of an archetype. In this sense then, the domestic objects are also carriers of memory and nostalgia.

Nicola Waugh, who recently completed her Masters studies at the Ryerson University in Toronto Canada, researched this cultural phenomenon in her thesis titled *Embodied Artefacts: Memory, Nostalgia and Mid-Century Objects* (2011). In this documentary, Waugh interviews traders, collectors and keen observers of what she classifies as “mid-century” objects. The introduction to the research project describes it as follows: “This documentary video explores the aesthetic, mythological and cultural relationships that we have with domestic objects from the Mid-Century period” (available online: <http://vimeo.com/24285433>). Waugh argues that one of the reasons for this cultural phenomenon of collecting “old” objects could be due to the strains created by mass media, politics and the pace at which ‘we’ are encouraged to consume. A percentage of people consciously choose against this fast-paced lifestyle, and the objects that they choose to surround themselves with reflect one of the ways in which they are portraying their choice. Also, the people who are (generally) choosing to surround themselves with these objects, are “one-generation removed”, as one of the collector’s in Waugh’s video stated, and can therefore idealise the objects and the time, choosing to live only in the “good memories”.<sup>27</sup> Waugh’s thesis and the accompanying documentary film attest to a need or want within a certain sector of society for a nostalgic longing for a less fast-paced lifestyle.

Many of the objects used in *Lepidoptera Domestica* fall in the category that Waugh has classified as “Mid-Century” objects (fig. 3, 4). These domestic objects range from plastic ‘Tupperware’ containers to glass bowls, books, an assortment of spoons, plastic cups and glasses, and the sole of a shoe. Producing jewellery from domestic objects that can visually be placed in a category that refers to a period in time roughly sixty years ago, due to the style and appearance of the objects, can stand as proof that Van Kouswijk is incorporating an

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<sup>27</sup> This statement refers to the fact that the “mid-Century” period that Waugh references, was the period right after WW2. After the war, the world was plummeted into a general state of “lost utopia” and the soldiers who returned home (or those who did not) were a reminder of the trauma and grief that the war had caused.

element of nostalgia in her work. Had she produced the same body of work from a different material or from products that were easily categorised as 'belonging' to a more contemporary or current time-frame, the series may not have referenced memory and nostalgia as acutely. If, for example, Van Kouswijk produced the same series, but instead of the collection of domestic objects, she cut the butterflies out of fast-food packaging, the artwork would have dealt with a different conceptual subject matter.<sup>28</sup> Using the specific domestic objects that she does, the artist not only displays her collection, but also visually references the space within which the objects might once have been used, as well as the function and rituals that accompany the objects. In this way, Van Kouswijk's artwork employs memory and nostalgia through the appropriation of domestic objects in her contemporary jewellery.

Another aspect that needs discussion with regards to *Lepidoptera Domestica* is the way in which Van Kouswijk presented or displayed the artwork, specifically in the catalogue with the same name. As can be seen in figure 4, the artist places numbers, which form part of her own coding system for the objects, next to each object. This coding or sorting system stands as a reminder that these objects, first and foremost, form part of a collection that the artist built up, over time, meticulously documenting what each object is and where it was found. In this way, each object functions mnemonically to reference the time, place and events that took place in the obtaining of the specific object. Van Kouswijk also groups the objects, both the actual object and the cut-out butterfly section, in other combinations. Figures 5, 6 and 7 show three of these groupings in which Van Kouswijk arranges the domestic objects according to colour (fig. 5, 6) or according to the shape or function of the initial object, as with the "cup" grouping in figure 7.

Figures 8 to 15 show the butterflies after they have been cut out of the initial object. In her online artist statement on the Klimt02 website, Van Kouswijk (Van Kouswijk [Sa] [Online]) says: "I stay quite close to the objects in a sense that I work with the materials and techniques that the archetypes I start from have been made with".

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<sup>28</sup> Had Van Kouswijk produced this project with the use of fast food containers, possible concepts could have included consumer culture, pop culture, recycling/upcycling or media indoctrination, to name but a few. However, Van Kouswijk did not produce this project from fast food containers, I employed the analogy merely to support my argument that her choice of objects added significantly to the reading of the project.

In this series, Van Kouswijk does not only start the process with the materials that the archetypes were made from; she creates the whole series without adding other materials. Van Kouswijk also keeps and displays both the initial domestic object, and the butterfly shape that has been cut out. Although the object is 'broken', the 'breaking' is done deliberately. This is a reminder of Julian Thomas's (2006: 46) discussion of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, where he states that:

Our everyday understanding is of totalities, contexts, projects and relationships, rather than of isolated objects. Only when the hammer fails in use, malfunctioning or breaking down... does it become present-at-hand, something that we just look at and contemplate in its uselessness.

Van Kouswijk sets out to 'break' the domestic object deliberately, forcing the audience to view the object in a new way. Or, as Thomas (2006: 46) puts it: "just look at it and contemplate its uselessness". It is important to note that Van Kouswijk does not 'break' the object at random. She 'breaks' the object specifically by cutting out the silhouette shape of a butterfly. The choice of a butterfly was not a mere coincidence. While it is never explicitly stated why the artist chose the form of a butterfly, I can attempt a few suggestions, after reviewing the catalogue and the extracts it contains regarding butterflies. Gaspar (2007: n.pag.) writes:

The showcase, the glass dome, or the cabinet, are containers for capturing nature and bringing it into the cultured, domestic environment. The fascination during the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the "domestication" of nature was translated in the obsessive encyclopaedic drive to categorize everything from stars to insects. In the social context, the scientific approach was translated into a real fashion. The bourgeoisie enjoyed creating their own amateur cabinets, collecting sea-shells, butterflies, ferns and other miniaturized, colourful samples of the realm of nature. Unlike the Japanese model, which accepts the impossibility of fixing the life flow of nature, and settles for enjoying its fleeting instants, this practice embraced a domesticated, drawing room nature, "dry", trapped between the pages of herbaria or dissected to the point of abstraction in scientific plates, which made a micro-organism look more like a gemstone than a living being.

It is possible to guess at the reason why Van Kouswijk chose the butterfly silhouette as the shape cut out of the initial domestic object, based on this text fragment. My reading of Van Kouswijk's artwork, coupled with Gaspar's catalogue text, would suggest that one of the main conceptual interests in the *Lepidoptera Domestica* series is the human need to constantly surround oneself with 'things'. During the Renaissance, when it was considered

fashionable to collect and 'tame' nature in the form of cabinets of curiosity, the bourgeoisie surrounded themselves with 'things' that were strange, foreign, spectacular or very rare. There is little within nature that humans currently still feel the need to classify, and the greater part of life is lived in a much less hostile environment. Van Kouswijk has set out to create a "modern day" cabinets of curiosity, building up a collection of the everyday objects that we come into contact with, and presenting them in such a way that they reference the level to which the world has been "domesticated". It is no longer a fashion to collect and 'tame' or 'classify' nature. A much greater fashion has evolved, namely to fill up our immediate space with 'things'. To portray this, Van Kouswijk has created a cabinets of curiosity, not out of the strange, unfathomable objects found in nature, but rather from what has become 'natural' in our everyday lives: domestic objects. The cut-out butterflies are displayed in a manner that mimics the butterfly collections found in entomology collections. Van Kouswijk uses this easily recognisable structure of a butterfly collection, to portray her own collection of domestic objects.

This work of art by Van Kouswijk thematically uses domestic objects to reference collecting and cabinets of curiosity. This can be seen in the way in which the domestic objects are displayed, as well as the size of the collection. To refer back to Susan Stewart's (2007: 151) extract about the nostalgia inherent in collections:

...the collection offers example rather than sample, metaphor rather than metonymy. The collection does not displace attention to the past; rather, the past is at the service of the collection...the past lends authenticity to the collection. The collection seeks a form of self-enclosure which is possible because of its ahistoricism...In the collection, time is not something to be restored to an origin; rather, all time is made simultaneous or synchronous within the collection's world.

For the purpose of this study, I would suggest that Van Kouswijk's series also appropriates domestic objects to the field of contemporary jewellery, with the result of recalling memory and nostalgia. The work, vast in size and content, succeeds in referencing a nostalgic sense of 'home', because the objects serve to recollect a specific time which has passed, and to which neither the viewer nor the object can return, because the initial function of the object has been removed. But the artwork can also recall specific memories for the individual, based on the viewer's response to each individual object. These objects become souvenirs of the life that the artist has lived. In closing, I will refer to Susan M. Pearce as she is quoted by



Gaspar in the catalogue: “Souvenirs are samples of events which can be remembered but not relived” (cited in Gaspar 2007: n.pag.).

### **2.3.2 Gesine Hackenberg – *Ceramic Jewellery* (2006-2011)**

German-born Gesine Hackenberg is the next artist whose work I discuss in this chapter. Hackenberg, who now lives and works in Amsterdam, studied jewellery design at the Fachhochschule für Gestaltung Pforzheim (Germany). In 2001 she received her degree from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam (NL). At present, she holds the position of Visiting Professor at the MAD-faculty in Hasselt (Belgium) and has been teaching technical metalsmithing classes at the Vakschool Edelsmeden in Amsterdam since 2008 (Hackenberg [Sa] [Online]). Hackenberg ([Sa] [Online]) uses objects in her jewellery that “usually come from interlocking themes of household, kitchen, table and food culture”. The specific body of work made by Hackenberg that I will discuss is one that the artist refers to as *Ceramic Jewellery* (fig.16-23). This series consists of a number of pieces made between 2006 and 2011. The series can be divided into smaller sets, consisting of necklaces, brooches, earrings and rings. All the jewellery pieces are, however, made in a similar manner from similar domestic objects, namely domestic ceramic plates, bowls or vases. Figures 16 to 23 show some examples of the work that I discuss here.

An important aspect to take into account when discussing this series by Hackenberg, is the type of domestic objects she uses in *Ceramic Jewellery*. Hackenberg uses what she describes as “earthenware” objects that can be grouped into the category of vessels, in as much as they all have the ability to contain or carry other objects. When viewing the work, it becomes apparent that the specific types of vessels that Hackenberg uses can also be classified as antiques (fig. 17, 18, 21, 23). This brings us to Baudrillard. Jean Baudrillard’s seminal essay “Subjective Discourse or the Non-functional System of Objects”, was originally published in *The System of Objects* (1996), but I sourced it in *The Object Reader* (2009) edited by Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins. Baudrillard, originally a German teacher, who later established himself as a sociologist in the 1960’s, is known for his significant commentary on Postmodernity (*Dictionary of Critical Theory* 2005. Sv. ‘Baudrillard’). According to Baudrillard, antiques fall into a different system than other everyday objects. Baudrillard (2009: 41) states the following about the non-functionality of antiques:

The antique object no longer has any practical application, its role being merely to *signify*. It is astructural, it refuses structure, it is the extreme case of disavowal of primary functions. Yet it is not afunctional, nor purely 'decorative', for it has a very specific function within the system, namely the signifying of time.

The signification of time is a very important factor to take into account in this series, especially as my aim with discussing it is to show how domestic objects appropriated by contemporary jewellery can serve as vessels for memory and nostalgia. Baudrillard (2009: 45) continues to say:

Man is not 'at home' amid pure functionality – he requires something like that lustre of wood on the True Cross which could make a church truly holy, some kind of talisman – a shard of absolute reality ensconced, enshrined at the heart of ordinary reality in order to justify it... such objects carry human beings back beyond time to their childhood.

It can thus be deduced that pure functionality, as Baudrillard says, is not enough for "man" to feel at home or justify reality. Antiques, which function as signifiers of time, allow humans to place themselves within a specific context, knowing that time has gone by before their existence. Antiques can also function as vessels of memory and nostalgia, since they allow the viewer to think back to the past, knowing that the object they are viewing was "there", but is also "here". This idea of objects being simultaneously "there" and "here" is also discussed by Hodgkin and Radstone (2003: 2) in their book *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (2003): "...both 'memory' and 'truth' here are unstable and destabilising terms". Although Hodgkin and Radstone refer to memory and truth, as opposed to memory and nostalgia, which form the focus of this study, I think their statement is still useful to my investigation. Nostalgia, as Hodgkin and Radstone (2003: 82) discuss it later in the same book, can also be experienced in the following manner:

...the feelings associated with 'looking back' to a place or time in the past generally reflect a bitter-sweet, affectionate, positive relationship to the 'lost'. They express a contrast between 'there' and 'here', 'then' and 'now', in which the absent/gone is valued as somehow better, simpler, less fragmented, more comprehensible, than its existent alternative in the present.

If we take this definition of nostalgia into account, then Hackenberg's body of work *Ceramic Jewellery* can serve as a very apt contemporary jewellery example of domestic objects evoking feelings of nostalgia. Hackenberg's choice of earthenware vessels, linked with her interference with the objects, create the contrast or tension between "'there' and 'here',

‘then’ and ‘now’” that Hodgkin and Radstone refer to. About her own work, Hackenberg (Hackenberg [Sa] [Online]) has said:

Occasionally, the realm of jewellery and commodities shift together very closely... Objects of use often become intimately precious and indispensable to us, as it happens sometimes to a piece of jewellery that we wear day in, day out. On the one hand there are objects that help us master our daily life’s course in a purely functional way. But on the other hand there are those others we feel really close to, joined to us as it were. Maybe because they’ve just always been there, or maybe our mother and grandmother already used them. Or it might be just a tiny detail that fascinates us, almost nothing. Sometimes they seem to embody our wishes, or moods, a certain goal, or memories, a certain habit, or they might represent our affiliation to a certain group. And then again, they might even not be really practical at all.

But still we like using them. Maybe in a very personal way. They seem to belong to us the same way we belong to them. Because such an object actually adapts through our specific way of handling it. We love them. They become the jewels in our daily life.

Hackenberg speaks here of the very personal relationship that forms between humans and the objects with which they choose to surround themselves. The artist is aware that no two people will necessarily have the same relationship with any one object, just as no two people will share the exact same memory or harbour the exact same nostalgic longing. Individuals, or even a group of people, might remember the same event, but the memory will be etched in each person’s mind depending on how that memory serves their own identity formation. The same scenario can be applied to nostalgia, in as much as people might have similar nostalgic longings for a specific time or place, but the way in which the time or place for which they long manifests itself, will be different for each person.

The objects that form part of our daily lives, become objects that we love and hold dear, as Tilmann Habermas (2011: 104) says: “Personal objects have usually been owned by a person for quite a long time and share a common history with that person. They are familiar and taken for granted”. Hackenberg’s appropriation of these domestic objects into the realm of contemporary jewellery forces the maker/owner/wearer to not take the object for granted anymore, as Habermas states, but to view it in a new light, and imbue it with a new function. The objects share a history with their ‘owner’, and this history is often personal.

The ceramic plates, bowls and vases used by Hackenberg in the production of her jewellery can also fall in a similar category as the domestic objects used by Van Kouswijk in

*Lepidoptera Domestica*, if we use van Kouswijk's description of "archetypal". The majority of people who will see, buy and wear Hackenberg's work, will most probably have had exposure to or even have used the type of ceramic objects that the artist uses in her work. I am referring here specifically to the ceramic plates Hackenberg used in *Kitchen Necklace* (fig. 16) and also the works in figures 17, 18 and 21, of which Hackenberg specifically states that she used *Delft* earthenware. While I (or any other viewer/wearer) might not have a relationship with that particular plate, we can have a relationship with what the plate references, namely the memory and nostalgic longings that relate to 'home'. And this relationship that the broader audience has with the object that the artist chooses to use will never be the same between different individuals. As Mieke Bal (2001: 71) states in her book *Looking in: The Art of Viewing* (2001): "It has been convincingly argued that since viewers bring their own cultural baggage to images, there can be no such thing as a fixed, predetermined, or unified meaning". Although no one individual who views or wears the work will harbour the same relationship with the objects, Hackenberg ([Sa] [Online]) suggests that a certain amount of recognition exists between viewer and object, when she states that "[t]hese materials seem to catch and ennoble this fleeting commonplace culture that surrounds us and preserve it".

Hackenberg's working method entails selecting the ceramic domestic objects, and then cutting out circular or oval shapes from them. When producing a necklace, these cut-outs are strung next to each other using thread. In producing the brooches, earrings or rings, the cut-outs are set in sterling silver casings, and in some cases finished with 18ct yellow gold (fig. 22, 23). Figure 17 shows a detailed view of one of Hackenberg's ceramic necklaces. It is evident that the artist strings the 'beads' in the same sequence as they are cut out of the initial domestic object. The sequence in which the discs or 'beads' are cut out of the ceramic objects does not, however, always follow a logical pattern. This can be seen in figures 16, 18 and 19. When the necklace is thus worn, as in figure 16, the pattern of the initial ceramic plate is lost, but a new pattern emerges. If we consider the often fragmented and non-linear nature of memory and nostalgia (Hodgkin & Radstone 2003: 2), I would argue that the sequence of the stringing, fragmented and non-linear as it is, can be seen as a metaphor for the nature of memory. As Hodgkin and Radstone (2003: 11) state:

Memory, of course, does not operate only as an abstract (mental) system: it is generated by and channelled through an endless variety of media and artefacts. Closely related to the anxiety of loss of memory... is the anxiety about objects and places, the stuff of memory which itself has power to represent or stand in for the past.

The ceramic domestic objects that Hackenberg uses to produce her jewellery, can serve as “the stuff of memory”, as referred to by Hodgkin and Radstone. Taking these objects out of contexts, and making them into wearable pieces of contemporary jewellery, is one way in which Hackenberg can ensure that the objects are not lost, but are rather given a “new life”.

What is interesting to note is that Hackenberg, like Van Kouswijk, also displays both parts of the objects: that which is left behind after the discs have been cut out, and the new, finished piece of jewellery. Again, this presentation thematically suggests that certain elements of memory are, or can be, removed from the past, and that we can choose which parts of the memories we want to remember, employing nostalgia to remember the time or place as we wish to. This series utilises a deliberate removal of “equipmentality” in the work, as does *Lepidoptera Domestica*. However, in Hackenberg’s *Ceramic Jewellery* series (fig. 16-23), the now ‘broken’ object is granted a new function, since the ‘broken’ pieces of the domestic objects can be worn on the body in the form of contemporary jewellery. Hackenberg’s artwork reflects a very successful appropriation of domestic objects that can be taken from the private (home) space, and placed in the public space when the owner wears the jewellery piece.

The metalwork employed on the brooch, earrings and rings that can be seen in figures 20 to 23 is very simplistic in its design. Hackenberg does not add an extra element of ornamentation in her work, as the patterns on the ceramic objects are ornamental enough in themselves. Her unadorned metalwork designs prevents the viewer from being distracted, allowing the viewer to view the domestic object which has been stripped of its “equipmentality” as an object, rather than as an object with a pre-destined function. The new function of wearable contemporary jewellery is overtly suggested through the very visible presence of earring-hooks and rings.

This artwork contains elements of a personal nature due to the artists’ relationship with the objects, but it can also be read and interpreted by a wider audience, because many people

can relate to the domestic objects used. It is thus possible to “distinguish two ‘moments of meaning production’”, as Mieke Bal (2001: 76) says about the production of meaning. “The first ‘moment’ involves the author, but it is no more ‘original’ or ‘primary’ than the second ‘moment’, whose subject is the reader”. Due to the very personal nature of memory and nostalgia, the “second” reading that Bal suggests is of great importance in this artwork. To end off this discussion on Hackenberg’s *Ceramic Jewellery* series, I refer to Lin Cheung (2006: 23) and her article *Wear, Wearing, Worn: The Transitions of Jewels to Jewellery* (2006), where she mentions this “second meaning”:

By observing how and what additional values are placed onto jewellery through the wearing and owning of it, we can aim to fully address the part that contemporary jewellery can play towards a greater understanding of the personal and social values made manifest through all objects.

Contemporary jewellery, according to Cheung, can make us aware of the value humans add to all objects, especially when the jewellery is worn and owned. As Hackenberg ([Sa] [Online]) states about her own work: “They seem to belong to us the same way that we belong to them. Because such an object actually adapts through our specific way of handling it. We love them”. Hackenberg’s appropriation of domestic objects to the realm of contemporary jewellery allows for these same qualities inherent in jewellery to be transferred to the domestic objects. The objects become the jewellery. And the objects, as vessels of memory and nostalgia locked up in their existence as antiques, transfer these memories and nostalgic longings to the new pieces of contemporary jewellery. In this way, Hackenberg’s *Ceramic Jewellery* series can serve as an example of domestic objects serving as vessels for memory and nostalgia in contemporary jewellery.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter set out to discuss ways in which domestic objects can be used in contemporary jewellery to serve as vessels for memory and nostalgia. My argument necessarily started with a discussion of thoughts and theories that could lead to a definition of the domestic. In this section, I enlisted an array of sources in an attempt to show how the domestic has been structured and gendered as a space traditionally associated with women. Although I am aware of the politics inherent in this area, it was not my aim to take a political position, as

my interest in the domestic is related more to the objects and rituals that reside within the space than the gendering of the space. The main function of this section was to create an idea of what the domestic entails, and to qualify why the objects and needlework techniques that I discuss throughout this study can be classified as domestic.

In the following section, I discussed how domestic objects are employed in the work of two international contemporary jewellery artists. Gaspar's (2007: n.pag) discussion of the space of the 'home' as a site for collecting is useful in this regard:

The space of a house is a symbol of comfort, security, and memory; and therefore the perfect place for accumulating objects – the personal museum of one's life. The house and the museum are both social spaces in which similar activities take place: people select and arrange objects in both contexts. It could be said that any grouping of objects is a type of exhibit, a portrait, a statement of identity.

When discussing the artists' works, I set about showing how they appropriate the objects that we accumulate in our homes to the realm of contemporary jewellery, thereby allowing the memories and nostalgic longings inherent in the domestic objects to be transferred to the contemporary jewellery pieces. In discussing specific artworks by Manon van Kouswijk (*Lepidoptera Domestica*, 2007) and Gesine Hackenberg (*Ceramic Jewellery*, 2006-2011), I could show how these two artists set about producing contemporary jewellery with the aid of domestic objects. To revert my argument back to Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, I could also discuss the deliberate "breaking" that takes place in both these bodies of work, and show how this "breaking" allows the maker/wearer/owner to re-evaluate their relationship with the objects, once its initial function has been removed.

Baudrillard's discussion of the functionality of antiques also facilitated an understanding that the domestic objects used, specifically by Hackenberg, serve to function as signifiers of time. The antique domestic objects evoke memory in the viewer, because they have existed "then" and they exist "now". Finally, the appropriation of the domestic objects to the realm of contemporary jewellery allowed these objects to be viewed by a "second" audience (Bal 2001: 76), and it is within this second viewing that the domestic objects can be viewed as vessels for memory and nostalgia, as each individual viewing the work brings to it their own recollections and perceptions, based on "our experience of a lifetime of representation" (Reed 1993: 272).

In the next chapter, I discuss ways in which the use of domestic objects and needlework can function to reference memory, nostalgia and trauma in contemporary jewellery. To aid in my discussion, I will reference the work of Esther Knobel, *My Grandmother is Knitting too* 2000 - 2002 (fig. 24-29), and Iris Eichenberg, *Heimat* 2004 (fig. 30-35). Both these artists conceptualise the memories, nostalgic longings and trauma involved in the loss of childhood.



## **Chapter 3 – Memory, nostalgia and trauma in contemporary jewellery**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I discussed how domestic objects can function to reference memory and nostalgia in contemporary jewellery, specifically memories and nostalgic longings for home. In chapter three, I will discuss how the appropriation of domestic objects and needlework techniques can function conceptually to reference memory, nostalgia and trauma in contemporary jewellery. To begin, I will investigate nostalgia and trauma and analyse how these phenomena are manifested in contemporary culture. My main theoretical source for this section is Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), and *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (2003) edited by Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, which I also referenced in chapter two. For my discussion on trauma, I will look at Michael S. Roth's book *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past* (2012).

I will then proceed to discuss how nostalgia and trauma can manifest in contemporary jewellery. For this section, I will reference Liesbeth den Besten's book *On Jewellery: A Compendium of International Contemporary Jewellery* (2011), as well as Lena Vigna's article *Heirlooms: Navigating the Personal in Contemporary Jewellery* (2009). To serve as visual examples for my arguments on nostalgia and trauma, I will visually analyse the contemporary jewellery of Esther Knobel, *My Grandmother is Knitting too*, 2000-2002 (fig. 24-29) and Iris Eichenberg, *Heimat*, 2004 (fig. 30-35). Both artists conceptually reference the memories and nostalgic longings they harbour for the time and space of their childhood, in the chosen artworks that I will discuss. Both artists have also moved away from the countries of their birth, and the trauma inherent in this move can also be read into the artworks that I will discuss.

### **3.2 The appearance of nostalgia and trauma in contemporary culture**

Svetlana Boym is a writer, theorist, and media artist. When not producing art, Boym teaches in Comparative Literature at Harvard University and is an Associate of the Graduate School of Design. Born in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1966, she now lives and works in Cambridge,

USA. (Boym [Sa] [Online]). Boym (2001: xiii) wrote the book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) from which I take the following definition of nostalgia:

Nostalgia (from *nostos* – return home, and *alga* – longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy".

This is reminiscent of Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone's explanation of nostalgia in their book *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (2003):

Although interest in nostalgia as a medical problem waned considerably by the mid-nineteenth century, its link with absence or removal from home or homeland has continued to remain one of its definitional components. But the *meaning of nostalgia* also broadened over the years to encompass 'loss' of a more general and abstract type, including the yearning for a 'lost childhood', for 'irretrievable youth', for a vanished 'world of yesterday'. Since no *actual* turning back and return in time is possible in this latter sense of the term, nostalgia became an incurable state of mind, a signifier of 'absence' and 'loss' that could in effect never be made 'presence' and 'gain' except through memory and the creativity of reconstruction (Spitzer & Boym cited in Hodgkin & Radstone 2003: 82).

One of the contributing factors to the shift in nostalgia from the medical to the poetic or philosophical "world" came with the advance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With industrialisation "[t]he rapid pace... increased the intensity of people's longing for the slower rhythms of the past, for continuity, social cohesion and tradition" (Boym 2001: 16). And if we consider the pace at which life moves in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is no wonder that nostalgia is a condition that is so widely accepted and experienced. Nostalgia can also be considered as a potentially warped perception of time and space. The time and space for which the individual (or group) longs is not necessarily a linear step backwards or forwards. As Boym (2001: 8) explains:

Modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history. The nostalgic is looking for a spiritual addressee. Encountering silence, he looks for memorable signs, desperately misreading them".

The time and space that is longed for is often a combination of the past and future. The individual or group look towards the past, and retrieve those specific details that are felt to be "good" or "true" or "necessary". The fact that it is feelings that are retrieved underscores the importance of emotions in nostalgia. Those retrieved details are projected onto the wished-for future, but with the added benefits of modern society such as technology or

virtual communication. As Boym (2001: xvi) states: “Nostalgia is not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space that make the division into ‘local’ and ‘universal’ possible”. As I have stated above, although nostalgia is often felt by an individual longing for a certain time or place, it can also manifest in a group identity. The group forms precisely because of this shared nostalgia.

Boym (2009 [Online]), in an online essay titled *Nostalgia and its Discontents* which is a shortened adaptation of her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, differentiates between Restorative and Reflective nostalgia in the following manner:

Restorative nostalgia is at the core of recent national and religious revivals. It knows two main plots—the return to origins and the conspiracy. Reflective nostalgia does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones. It loves details, not symbols. At best, it can present an ethical and creative challenge, not merely a pretext for midnight melancholias. This typology of nostalgia allows me to distinguish between national memory that is based on a single version of national identity, on the one hand, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define individual memory, on the other hand. The rhetoric of restorative nostalgia is not about “the past,” but rather about universal values, family, nature, homeland, truth. The rhetoric of reflective nostalgia is about taking time out of time and about grasping the fleeing present.

From the above extract it can be gathered that Restorative nostalgia, as the name implies, focuses its attention on *restoring* or *reconstructing* the home that has been lost. This can be seen in the expression of certain traditions and the repetition of what the group or individual considers to be “the truth” about the home or time or space that they are longing for. Reflective nostalgia, in comparison, focuses mainly on the actual longing itself, and rarely, if ever, allows the nostalgia to pass. Reflective nostalgia pines for feelings of sentiment and desperation. It questions all the “truths” told about the home that has been lost and also does not often focus on a single area of longing, recollecting rather a nuance or a feeling instead of a specific time or occasion. As Boym states; “it loves details”. The purpose of this distinction between the two types of nostalgia is that we can differentiate between: “...national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory” (Boym 2001: xviii). In my opinion, both types of nostalgia are present in contemporary culture. I say this because there are certain groups or institutions that employ

Restorative nostalgia to add conviction to their cause or dogma.<sup>29</sup> There are however also individuals who employ Reflective nostalgia merely to “grasp the fleeing present” as Boym suggests, using nostalgia as a means to ‘reflect’ on the what is happening in a specific time.

The element of trauma is another aspect that should be added to the discussion at this point, especially as it relates more specifically to Reflective nostalgia. Michael S. Roth (2012: xix), a professor in history and the humanities and current president of the Wesleyan University states in his book *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past* (2012) that

[i]n critical theory the traumatic has been framed as a window into more general issues of representation. The inability to properly represent some events is said to show the inadequacy of representation of any and all events, the painful gap between meaning-making and experience that comes to light in the processing of trauma is said to illuminate the more general failure to make sense of experience. Trauma in this regard is linked to notions of the sublime...The sublime, like the traumatic, reminds us that the unrepresentable is always lurking if we dare pay attention to it. The sublime, like the traumatic, reminds us that efforts at meaning-making must always circumvent an intensity that would otherwise disrupt all coherence.

Trauma is an ever-present component of our lives, whether as a result of a specific traumatic event, or based solely on an individual’s routine tracking and viewing of current events. We live with constant reference to traumatic events. War, crime, the economic crisis in Europe – all these events and more form part of the pieces of information with which we are confronted on a daily basis. If chosen to be acknowledged, trauma is within our immediate or peripheral vision, depending on your specific position. Making meaning, however, is a ‘tool’ we can use to deal with the traumatic experiences that we encounter. Roth refers to Sander L. Gilman and his book *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (1988) when stating: “The fear we have for our own collapse does not remain internalized. Rather, we project this fear onto the world in order to localize it, and indeed, to domesticate it” (cited in Roth 2012: 4). In my opinion, this “domestication” of fear that

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<sup>29</sup> A South African example of this, could be the Afrikaner nationalistic institution *Die Voortrekkers*. This cultural organisation is based on the initial group of white Afrikaner settlers who left the Cape Colony in 1834 and set out to find a new area in which they could continue to live by their own governance. As the organisation exists today, it encourages its members to remember their heritage through the re-enactment of certain traditions. While the organisation is a lot smaller than it was when it was initially founded, it is still active and aims at ensuring that white Afrikaners are given the opportunity to ‘re-live’ the times that have past. For more information on this organisation, see their official website: <http://voortrekker-history.co.za/>

Gillman refers to can be seen in the contemporary jewellery work that I discuss later in this chapter.

Roth (2012: 77) asks the question: “What does one do with a painful past that cannot be simply willed to disappear yet is a source of enormous difficulties in the present?”. Answering this question does not fall within the scope of this study. Since I am concerned with the ways in which trauma is conceptually referenced in contemporary jewellery through the appropriation of domestic objects and needlework, however, I will aim to discuss examples of work by two contemporary jewellers who have possibly attempted to answer this question through their artwork.

### **3.3 Domestic objects and techniques as a vehicle for nostalgia and trauma in contemporary jewellery**

In chapter two I discussed ways in which the appropriation of domestic objects in contemporary jewellery can aid in the recollection of memories and nostalgia. Although the use of domestic objects can conceptually reference other ideas, for the purpose of this study I focus specifically on the home. In this section, I will discuss how the appropriation of domestic objects and needlework techniques in contemporary jewellery serve to reference nostalgia and trauma, especially the trauma involved in losing a home, or the nostalgic longing for a childhood home to which one cannot return. The jewellery that I discuss in this section has an inherent narrative quality. Liesbeth den Besten (2011: 104-105), in *On Jewellery: A Compendium of International Contemporary Jewellery* (2011), says about the narrative quality inherent in contemporary jewellery:

...perceptions depend on many factors. A piece of jewellery is not only charged by both the deliberate and unconscious intentions of the maker; the wearer also influences a piece of jewellery with their personality, clothing and movement, as well as the viewer who dares to perceive and takes his or her own perspective. The narrative is there in the piece, but it has to be stirred up by the viewer, who will complete it. Therefore the maker, the wearer, the viewer and the message are entangled in an indefinable and ongoing discourse with one another.

I would be so bold as to place myself in the viewer’s position that Den Besten has mentioned. I perceive the pieces of jewellery and form my own perspective. I am stirring up the narrative with the aim of showing how the appropriation of domestic objects and

needlework in contemporary jewellery can serve to reference nostalgia and trauma with relation to home. Jewellery in itself is an object for representation (Den Besten 2011: 146), and it is this function of representation that I will discuss next with reference to Michael S. Roth's book *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past* (2012). Roth (2012: xviii) has this to say about trauma:

In trauma, the recollected past causes suffering, and the traumatic event has a magnetic appeal that pulls a wide constellation of experience (often, an individual's whole life) into its orbit. But the extreme event itself resists representation, but it is "too big to fail" – too important to be left out of an attempt to make sense of the past at either the individual or collective level.

From Roth's statement I gathered that trauma is simultaneously too big an event to be represented, but that it is also too big an event *not* to be represented. This puts the sufferer of a traumatic event in a difficult position, because, as Roth (2012: 91) states later in his book:

...a "successful" representation (a representation that others understand) of trauma will necessarily seem like trivialization, or worse, like betrayal. The intensity of a trauma is what defies understanding, and so a representation that someone else understands seems to indicate that the event wasn't as intense as it seemed to be.

This study is based on an investigation of how domestic objects and needlework are appropriated by contemporary jewellery, and the possible thematic outcomes of their presence. The work made by the contemporary jewellers who I discuss in this study, is by its very nature 'representational'. I am by no means implying that these contemporary jewellers are trivialising the trauma experienced and referenced in their work through the process of representing it in their artwork. On the contrary, I would like to suggest that, because of the very personal nature of jewellery (Unger 2012: 7), it might very well be a particularly appropriate medium in which to represent trauma, without the risk of making the event trivial. To use Den Besten's statement on the narrative inherent in contemporary jewellery as context: I am positioning myself as the viewer who perceives the artwork and "stirs up the narrative".

Each of the artists that I discuss in this chapter deals with nostalgia and trauma that relate, in a sense, to the traumatic experience of moving (or displacement). Neither artist still resides in the country in which they were born. Their work references the 'home' of their childhood

and the traumatic nostalgia that goes with remembering this place; and simultaneously knowing that, even though they might be able to return to the physical place in which they grew up and created the memories, they can never return to that *specific* time and place. They project this fear into the world and domesticate it in the process of producing pieces of contemporary jewellery. The incorporation of domestic objects and needlework techniques serves as a reference to the traumatic nostalgia that they feel when remembering the 'home' to which they cannot return.

As an introduction to the artists I discuss in this chapter, I will look specifically at how domestic objects and techniques can function as a vehicle for nostalgia in contemporary jewellery. Jewellery, in itself, has a capacity to be viewed with nostalgic longing, especially when the jewellery in question forms part of a set of family heirlooms which has been handed down through generations. I refer again to Lena Vigna's (2009 [Online]) article *Heirlooms: Navigating the Personal in Contemporary Jewelry* (2009), in which she talks about this quality of jewellery in the following way:

[It can] convey the emotional potential of certain objects, places, or ideas (stories, techniques, or perhaps even traditions) that could all be heirlooms in one sense or another. One of the difficulties in talking about heirlooms is that they are often associated with emotion and memory – qualities that change with time and as the 'property' is passed along and that are often derided as sentimental or nostalgic. This complex connection to the emotional, personal or sentimental can also be an important element of jewelry. When the two meet the results are intensely engaging.

This links to Julian Thomas (2006: 46) and his thoughts on Heidegger when he states that

[w]hat is significant here is that readiness-to-hand and presence-to-hand are both ways in which things can be disclosed to us, although they engender quite different kinds of familiarity. So the same object or artefact can become known to us in a series of distinct ways".

These two quotations show that there exists a certain correlation between Heidegger's theory on phenomenology and current thought within the field of contemporary jewellery. As a contemporary jeweller, I can relate to Vigna's view of the "complex connection to the emotional, personal or sentimental" relations we have with certain pieces of jewellery. I would argue that the appropriation of domestic objects and needlework in contemporary jewellery allows for this "complex connection" to be transferred to the objects as well. The three artists I discuss later in this chapter all use domestic objects and needlework to recall

certain elements of their childhood and the homes that they have had to leave behind. The nostalgic longings and the trauma that form part of the memory that these artists use as inspiration for their work, are manifested in the use of domestic objects and needlework that can be related to home and childhood, according to my interpretation of the work. These jewellers do exactly what Vigna (2009 [Online]) describes:

Rather than seeing sentiment or nostalgia as content to be avoided... represent and embrace the past and a willingness to challenge and explore meaning complicated by the idea of personal history and emotion.

To refer back to Heidegger, who suggested that “our moods or attunements are ‘world-disclosing’; they are implicated in the way that things show up in the first place... [Yet] we have no choice over which mood we will find ourselves in at a given time: we are ‘delivered over’ our mood” (Thomas 2006: 46). I would argue that these artists, who actively go about investigating the emotional, nostalgic and traumatic connection with certain domestic objects and needlework’s appearance in jewellery, are actively “surrendering” to their mood and how it might influence the reading of their jewellery. However, they are also in the process, employing “meaning-making” and in so doing finding ways to deal with the fear associated with the memories they recall. Roth (2012: 82) mentions “...a desire that can result in an effort to link present and past through narrative”; and, later in the same chapter, states that “...the phenomenon of defining one’s identity through articulating the traces of one’s traumas has become a much more general phenomenon” (2012: 96). Based on these two extracts, it could be argued that the jewellers I discuss are actively defining their identity “through articulating the traces” that the trauma left in their memories. They do this by referencing the nostalgia and the trauma they experienced when recollecting their childhood homes and memories during the process of making their work.

### **3.3.1 Esther Knobel – *My Grandmother is Knitting too* (2000-2002)**

Esther Knobel was born in Poland in 1949, but moved to Israel when she was only two years old. The artist currently lives and works in Jerusalem. Her work revolves around the essence of ornamentation and self-adornment. The series that I focus on is titled *My Grandmother is Knitting too* (fig. 24-29). This body of work, which stretched over a two-year period, was produced through the process of crochet. The jewellery and objects that form part of this



series contains a visible element of fragility, creating in the viewer the sense that, while beautiful and precious, wearing these objects might result in them being damaged. Knobel's artwork deals subjectively with her nostalgic longing and traumatic recollections of her childhood and her family's roots, and also with memory in all its fragile forms, an element that can be read in the physical appearance of the work. A catalogue produced by Knobel in 2008, *The Mind in the Hand*, references artwork she made from 1977 onwards and contains a number of artworks, each of which draws in some way from specific childhood memories or objects which the artist has reworked into delicate, content-rich pieces of jewellery. It is this catalogue which served as my main source of information for discussing Knobel's series *My Grandmother is Knitting too* (fig. 24-29). The catalogue, apart from being a rich source of visual images, also contains conversations with the artist and descriptions she wrote about specific artworks. This type of information has been an invaluable component in discussing Knobel's work, as it is not often that the viewer is privileged with such intimate knowledge.

This series consists of objects and rings. Each piece was produced from electrical wire the artist picked up in the street, which was then crocheted into the specific designs she decided on. The jewellery pieces were then fired in a kiln, after which they were coated with enamel powder and fired again for a number of times, until the artist was satisfied with the outcome.<sup>30</sup> The first component of this series, which was created in 2000 (fig. 24-27), consists of a teddy bear, a pair of pliers with coated handles and a number of thimbles. The second component, produced in 2002, consists of a group of rings (fig. 28-29). Knobel refers to these rings specifically as a "family", a labelling which I think is of specific relevance to this series, as the artist references a needlework technique she learnt from her mother. In an interview with the artist, which is documented in *The Mind in the Hand* (2008), Tamar Manor-Friedman asks Knobel about the significance of this series and how it came into being. Knobel (2008: xix) explains:

Towards the end of the twentieth century, a renewed interest in handicraft began to preoccupy the world of art and design. I had in mind a doll kit. I knitted using thin plastic-coated copper telephone wire that I found in the street. I fired

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<sup>30</sup> This process of firing and re-firing is common when producing enamel work. The technique requires that the enamel powder be applied in thin layers, cleaning and sanding each layer in between firing cycles. Enamel work is a very tedious and time-consuming technique, which I think is also of specific relevance in this project. The process, while taking a lot of time, also contains a lot of "waiting" time, a time which could have aided the artist in the recollecting of her specific childhood memories.

the knitted object and the plastic insulation melted. I recoated the object with enamel, and fired it at high temperature. The series *Grandma knitting* appeared after my mother passed away. My mother knitted a great deal. Only after her death did I gain a broader perspective of the past and the memory, and only then could I deal in an emotive sense with the Holocaust experience. Previously, I had suppressed the issue, despite the fact that I had grown up with parents who were Holocaust survivors. The Holocaust was not consciously addressed in my works before then, but since I began this series, the issue is pervasive and persistent.

Knobel thus states that working with the subject matter of her childhood brought up her families' connection with the Holocaust,<sup>31</sup> a well-known traumatic event in the history of the world. As a response to this statement I would like to argue that there are a number of elements which are worth mentioning in order to divulge the intricacies that make up the totality of this body of work. The first of these elements is the process of knitting. Knobel states that that she could only fully understand and rethink the memories she had of her mother after her mother passed away. The process of knitting, which is a repetitive action, leaves a lot of room to let one's mind wander. In this regard Roth's (2012: xxvi) statement that "[t]here is always some repetition in every effort to understand the traumatic", is also relevant. As I mentioned earlier, the process of producing enamel work is also a repetitive action. Knitting then, in this case, can be seen as part of the process of coming to terms with her loss, and the trauma that came with it, in a physical manner. Knitting, as a domestic activity, then becomes the metaphor for her deceased mother. In this way the memories she has of her mother and the knitting become intertwined, juxtaposing the (happy) childhood memories and recollections of her mother when she was still alive, with the (traumatic) emotion of losing a parent. In this sense, this series is a visual example of nostalgia, holding both positive and negative connotations. Also, unlike memory, the nostalgia Knobel has for this time/place projects outward from her, towards her mother. As Knobel states, it was only by recalling these memories that she became aware of the astute and traumatic presence of the Holocaust during her childhood. This piece then also becomes about the Holocaust, more so than about the artist.

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<sup>31</sup> The Holocaust is not a topic that I will discuss further during this discussion, I mention it merely because it influenced the artist's work when she actively began to engage with her own childhood recollection through the process of knitting.

The interview continues with Friedman pointing out the melancholy expression on the teddy bear's face. The expression, which is caused by the constant firing and re-firing of the object at high temperatures, takes on a symbolic meaning in this series, because it becomes a visual personification of the nostalgic longings and traumatic recollection of the artist's childhood. The act of knitting these objects, and also covering the handles of her pliers with knitted "sleeves", is discussed by the artist through the recollection of a specific object from her childhood:

I remember a particular hanger with some sort of knitted padding that was meant to protect the hanging garment. In the course of my work on the kit, it seemed that the most natural thing to do was to add knitted handles to my pliers. Obviously, the knitted handles render the pliers useless, because they simply can't be used when wrapped in metal wire and enamel... It's worth noting that only later did I find out about the story *Grandma Knitting* by Uri Orlev, which tells of a grandmother, a Holocaust survivor, who knitted an entire imaginary world... This wild coincidence proved to me once again that archetypal reservoirs exist in the inner recesses of the memory, and these reservoirs reveal themselves in the most surprising ways... (Knobel 2008: xx-xxi).

The "sleeves" knitted for the pliers render them 'useless'. This removal of their functionality can then refer to Heidegger's theory of our relationship to objects. Again, this removal of function is done deliberately. It is only once we view them outside their "equipmentality" that we can truly assess the object for what it is, rather than for what it does. Knobel's recollection of the hanger from her childhood, and her immediate reaction of repeating this visual image in the artwork she was working on at the time, speaks of the interconnected relationship between humans and objects. And while the covering on the hanger enhanced the function of the object (serving as a hanger and protecting the clothing), the covering of the pliers' handles removes its function, which could also be read as a negative view of the 'function' of nostalgia and a projection onto the object of the trauma the artist experiences. Trauma leaves the artist feeling 'useless', in much the same way that the artist renders the pliers useless by covering their handles with the crocheted wire. While nostalgia can function as a tool to ensure that individuals or groups can feel a connection to time gone by, it can also have a crippling effect, especially when trauma is present. One way in which to deal with trauma is to sublimate it by actively engaging with the trauma and, as is the case with this artist, making something beautiful from it. In this regard I return again to Roth, who quotes Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart:

Traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experience, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language (cited in Roth 2012: 82).

Knobel's process of knitting the objects, thimbles and rings, allows the artist to integrate her traumatic memories into a scheme which she already understands, and in so doing, the artist is creating a narrative and presenting it in the form of contemporary jewellery.

Knobel (2008: xxi) touches on a subject which I think is of particular importance to this study, namely her statement with regards to a story she had read: "[It] proved to me once again that archetypal reservoirs exist in the inner recesses of the memory". The artist is echoing an opinion I have been forming since I embarked on this study, namely that when concerned with visual imagery surrounding domestic objects or needlework and their capacity to function as vessels of nostalgia, certain images or objects will always be read as nostalgic, in the present circumstances that I find myself, or the world around me.

The "handicraft revival" that Knobel (2008: xix) mentions had a large impact on the visual imagery used in art and design, and there is a visual, subjective link between the artists that I am discussing, relating to the ways in which they go about recalling these nostalgic longings (refer to fig. 24-39). "Craft" or "domestic" techniques such as knitting, crochet, embroidery and incorporating objects such as buttons, ribbon and fabrics, can all be read as a metaphor for this nostalgic domestic space that relates to the home that Knobel remembers through the knitting technique she learnt from her mother.

While the knitting is a technique that a wider audience will be able to relate to, Knobel shifts the tension in this series by covering the fine metal wire with enamel. Crochet thread or wool is known to be soft to the touch and have a very fine texture. Thimbles are made to be smooth to the touch to protect the finger. Pliers usually have smooth, comfortably fitting handles to ease the working process, and teddy bears are given to young children so that they can have something soft to cuddle. Rings usually have a smooth fitting inner band to make it comfortable to wear. Making these objects from metal wire, and then covering them in enamel, creates a tension between what the viewer expects to see and feel and what the artist presents them with. This work becomes a visual reference for the nostalgia and trauma that the artist experienced while recalling her childhood memories, shortly after the death of

her mother. The viewer is confronted with the hard, rigid structure of the objects, but there is also another element that should be taken into account: crochet, or any other type of knitting, can unravel. By covering the objects in enamel, a hard, glass-based substance that can chip, and can only be removed completely with great difficulty, the artist is “containing” the objects with the memories or nostalgic longings and the trauma intact. The objects also serve as a vessel to safeguard the childhood memories. As mentioned in the introduction to this section, the artist produces these pieces (fig. 24-29) from electrical wire she picks up in the street, knits with, fires in a kiln and then covers in enamel. This process of production is rather time consuming. Covering the objects and rings in enamel is the artist’s way of preserving her childhood and the way that she remembers it, and of showing that the memories are precious to her. This is then another aspect that renders this work nostalgic, because it is a projection from the subject towards the past/place. As the artist herself states:

The thread of memories unravels, it unravels like a spool of wool from which Grandma would have knitted socks, hats, vests; for children, for grandchildren. To shield against the cold, to wrap up with love, even the work tools! The pliers, the thimble. After all, to whom shall we be grateful, and whom shall we bless? There is such comfort and consolation in the enamel-coated copper wire! The ones that can’t be unravelled with such intolerable ease. The teeth of time will be blunted! Goldilocks and the Teddy bear are genuinely pleased (Knobel 2008: n.pag.).

Figures 28 and 29, *My Grandmother is Knitting too: Family of Rings*, depict a group consisting of six rings. As I have mentioned, the use of “family” in the title is of specific importance, as the memories from which the concept for this series was drawn, are related to Knobel’s family and her relationship to it. If we consider that a mother, usually, forms a central part in the structure of a family, then the loss of that mother can greatly disrupt the family structure. The rings, with different sized shanks, can be viewed as each belonging to or being made for a specific family member. The top part of the rings, even though similar in design and pod-like in their shape, are all slightly different. The use of colour in the enamel work also differs slightly in each ring. The shank is the same colour, but the top sections of the rings are in different shades of blue and red. This similarity and difference that can be seen in the rings can also be interpreted to refer to the similarities and differences in a family. While there are certain traits or characteristics that all or many members of a family will share, such as specifically thick hair, or an athletic build, there are also other qualities unique

to each individual member. To take this metaphor, which “[t]ells us something new about reality” (Astfalck 2005: 23) further, the combination of similarities and differences in the *Family of Rings* can also refer to Knobel’s conceptual interpretation of how certain memories, nostalgic longings and traumatic events will appear different to each person who has experienced the event. Each member of the family will have had a different relationship with Knobel’s mother, and will therefore experience the loss of her death differently. My visual analysis of this series by Knobel, would suggest that she has successfully executed a visual representation of the different ways in which individuals remember certain events. The “base” of the memory might be the same (as with the green colour in the ring shanks, fig. 28 and 29), but the little details, which give meaning to the memory or make it important to the individual, will always differ (as with the difference in the top parts of the rings). To give further cognisance to this idea, I refer to Roth (2012: 3), who says the following about remembering and forgetting:

Individual memory is notoriously difficult to comprehend, and we are currently witnessing resurgences of interest both in social memory and in the ways in which the brain stores and organizes memories.

As the viewer of this artwork who “stirs up the narrative” (Den Besten 2011: 105), I would suggest that Knobel’s production of the *Family of Rings* (fig. 28, 29) could refer to her own interest in memory, and the ways in which individuals remember events.

This series, and the way in which the artist has written about it, speaks of a time gone by, a time not fully experienced when actually living through it, a time and place that could only be fully understood in retrospect. “...trauma points to an occurrence that both demands representation and refuses to be represented. The intensity of the occurrence seems to make it impossible to remember or to forget” (Roth 2012: 91). *My Grandmother is Knitting too* speaks of not wanting to forget, but also of the realisation that forcing oneself to remember has other repercussions. Knobel’s keen attention to detail in this series shows how domestic objects can function as vessels for nostalgia that recall certain traumatic events within contemporary jewellery.

### 3.3.2 Iris Eichenberg – *Heimat* (2004)

Iris Eichenberg was born in Göttingen, Germany in 1965. After studying jewellery design at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, Eichenberg worked as an independent jeweller for a few years, before going back to the Academy as a teacher in the jewellery department. She was appointed head of the jewellery department in 2000, a position she kept until 2007, at which time she accepted an invitation to become an artist in residency and head of the Metalsmithing department at Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan, USA. The specific series by Eichenberg that I will discuss is titled *Heimat* (fig. 30-35). This series deals specifically with Eichenberg's childhood landscape in Germany and her departure from it. When looking at this work, the title of the work *Heimat* adds immediate connotations of home to the work. Liesbeth den Besten (2011: 64), in *On Jewellery: A Compendium of International Contemporary Jewellery* (2011), describes *Heimat* as meaning:

...a German word, loaded with emotion and referring to notions of native country, home and native region. It is also a word with a rather negative connotation because of its (mis)use by the Nazis.

On Eichenberg's website, René C. Hoogland<sup>32</sup> ([Sa] [Online]) describes *Heimat* as

[o]ne of those untranslatable German words that have crossed their national boundaries to find their way also into other language domains. *Heimat* – place of origins, place of birth, home. A symbolic realm, which, unlike the more ominous *Vaterland*, knows no geographical or linguistic borders. A spacetime ridden with desire, site of irreducible longing.

From the descriptions given by Den Besten and Hoogland it becomes apparent that the word *Heimat* functions in a realm of uncertainty and longing. In this sense, then, the work also deals with the trauma involved in leaving one's home behind. This series, consisting of ten pieces, visually represents all the different elements that Eichenberg remembers from her childhood home life. I will look specifically at the pieces *Deutschland ist ein mädchen*, *Gross-Schneen*, *Felder (1&2)*, *Hackelberg* and *Otto* (fig. 30 - 35). I chose these pieces from the larger group of ten, because they are the ones in which she specifically uses domestic objects and needlework. Eichenberg uses fabric and sewing to reference the domestic.

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<sup>32</sup> Hoogland is an Associate Professor of English at Wayne State University, Detroit, USA. Her academic interests include: cultural studies; gender/sexuality studies; Critical theory; new aesthetics; art; American & British lit. & film. Hoogland also wrote the introduction and presentation for a catalogue, *Tenement*, created about Eichenberg's work after an exhibition by the same name, in 2007. The exhibition was held at the Galerie Louise Smit in Amsterdam, Netherlands (2007 [Online]).

Another reason why I chose specifically these pieces is because of the way in which Eichenberg uses sewing in her work. Other than simply using it as a technique to keep two pieces together, Eichenberg shows how sewing can be used as a visual tool to imply “keeping together”.

When viewing Eichenberg’s artwork (fig. 30-35), this uncertainty and longing of which Den Besten and Hoogland speak in their definition of *Heimat* can be seen in the compositions which she has used for producing the contemporary jewellery pieces that form part of this series. The composition of the pieces, all in the form of brooches, has been considered, and each object or stitch has been placed where the artist intended it to be, but at the same time the artworks also suggest a ‘haphazard throwing together’ of objects that the artist had at her disposal.

There is a longing inherent in the objects that Eichenberg has used. There seems to be a reason why every individual object has been added to the artworks, yet there is also a sense of uncertainty in the work, which can be seen in the choice of (seemingly) random objects from which the brooches have been made. Looking at *Hackelberg* (fig. 34), which consists of silver, hair, fur, cotton and a frog, this uncertainty becomes apparent. It is also significant that this brooch has a front and back component, as do *Felder 1* (fig. 32) and *Otto* (fig. 35). This “front” and “back” suggest that, while the wearer of the piece is willing to show a certain aspect of the memory or nostalgic longing to the audience (or viewer), there is also an element of secrecy involved, which the wearer is not willing to share, and holds close to her/himself, hidden from view.

In her artist’s statement on Klimt02, the international contemporary jewellery website, Eichenberg (2010 [Online]) describes her production process as follows:

So how do I work? I collect things, pile them up, listen to them talk to one another, striking up conversations. I introduce strangers to each other, urge them to meet, giving them a space in which to get to know each other. I rearrange them, and change the direction of their conversations. I collect and order, trying to find the key to what is hidden in objects and materials. I surround myself with things that trigger and provoke me.

Fusing and melting the ugly and the beautiful, merging the seductive and the repulsive, just to reach the moment of what is, after all, a form of beauty. A



beauty that challenges, that may not be pleasing, but that offers the comfort of an ongoing endeavour.

Nostalgia, as Hodgkin and Radstone (2003: 82) discuss it in their book *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (2003), can also be experienced in the following manner:

...the feelings associated with 'looking back' to a place or time in the past generally reflect a bitter-sweet, affectionate, positive relationship to the 'lost'. They express a contrast between 'there' and 'here', 'then' and 'now', in which the absent/gone is valued as somehow better, simpler, less fragmented, more comprehensible, than its existent alternative in the present.

By combining what Eichenberg has said about her own working method with what Hodgkin and Radstone have said about nostalgia, we can deduce that Eichenberg's (2010 [Online]) search for "the key to what is hidden in objects and materials" can be seen as a nostalgic endeavour, because the artist is hoping that she will find something "better, simpler, less fragmented, more comprehensible, than its existent alternative in the present" (Hodgkin & Radstone 2003:82). By placing the objects that she collects in different compositions, Eichenberg is searching for the "hidden" meaning which she feels is inherent within all objects. Eichenberg (2010 [Online]) is searching for a place or time in which the objects can be read together as "a form of beauty", and this search can be interpreted as a nostalgic longing for a time or place that might once have existed, but which has since been lost.

The suggested 'haphazard throwing together' of Eichenberg's work can also be traced back to the way in which humans deal with trauma. I refer again to Roth (2012: 91), who states that

[c]ontemporary psychiatry tends to define trauma as an event that overwhelms one's perceptual-cognitive faculties, creating a situation in which the individual does not really experience the event as it happens. This may be why victims often describe themselves as spectators of their own trauma. In any case, the traumatic occurrence is not remembered normally because it has not registered through the standard neurochemical networks. The lack of reliable memory of the trauma is felt by many as a gaping absence, sometimes filled with flashbacks or other symptoms. Yet the occurrence was too intense to be forgotten, it requires some form of representation.

The seemingly 'thrown together' appearance of Eichenberg's compositions could therefore attest to the artist's uncertainty about what the experienced trauma actually entailed. The "flashbacks" that Roth refers to can be seen as the different components from which the work has been assembled.

I would also like to discuss Eichenberg's use of fabric. With the shift in thought regarding contemporary jewellery, which started in the early 1960s,<sup>33</sup> it became acceptable and later commonplace for jewellers to use alternative materials such as paper, plastic and fabric in their jewellery, rather than only the gold, silver or precious stones that had been used to produce jewellery up until that time. Using fabric to make jewellery created a tension in the work, because it presented the viewer/wearer with ideas (with regards to the materiality and value of the piece) that they had not been confronted with before. Making jewellery from fabric, a much softer and suppler material, changed the sensory element of what jewellery *can* feel like. The term "soft as a mother's touch" comes to mind if I think of this appearance of fabric in jewellery. And the fact that fabric is used mostly to make clothing, curtains, bedding or upholstered furniture adds to the domestic element present in the work. In *the Handbook of Material Culture* (2006), Jane Schneider wrote about the material culture of fabric in her contribution titled "Cloth and Clothing". Schneider (2006: 204) states the following about the spirituality of cloth and clothing:

The spiritual properties of cloth and clothing, whether they derive from soaking up historical and mythical associations, or from artisan's incantations... render these materials ideal media for connecting humans with one another.

This statement by Schneider underscores why Eichenberg's use of fabric or cloth is so significant, especially because this series is conceptually interested with referencing her childhood memories of her home. Through fabric or cloth humans can connect with one another, and these relationships often take place within the home. Leaving a home behind is a traumatic event, and encapsulating the trauma in fabric, which is known for absorbing, seems fitting for Eichenberg's artwork.

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<sup>33</sup> It was during this time that jewellers began incorporating 'found objects' in their work, commenting on discourses surrounding value and preciousness. Paul Derrez, owner of Galerie Ra in Amsterdam, Netherlands, contemporary jeweller and writer on contemporary jewellery stated in his essay *Jewellery? What type of jewellery are we actually talking about?*, which can be found in the book *New Directions in Jewellery* (2005) : "...there was simultaneously an invigorating and exciting experimentation in jewellery design. This experimentation continued throughout the 1970's and 80's, as complete freedom was created regarding form, material, technique, production methods, serial production and jewellery's relationship to the body – anything became possible" (Derrez 2005: 12).

In *Hackelberg* (fig. 34) Eichenberg also uses sewing as a technique to attach hair to the piece of jewellery. Using hair in jewellery is reminiscent of the Victorian period, when locks of hair (of a loved one, often a person who had passed away) were kept in locket that could be worn by the mourner.<sup>34</sup> The hair that Eichenberg incorporates in this piece of contemporary jewellery, references this time in the history of Europe and portrays the trauma involved in losing both the comforts of home as well as a loved one. In *Felder1* (fig. 32) Eichenberg layers different pieces of cotton and suede, with the white suede forming the base on to which the buttons are sewn. The back of the brooch consists of a red, black and beige striped fabric on to which is attached the silver frame that holds the brooch's working mechanism. These two parts are sewn together with the same linear stitching that can be seen in *Deutschland ist ein mädchen* and *Gross-Schneen* (fig. 30, 31). These linear patterns replicate the outline of a *Fachwerk* (timbered) house (Den Besten 2011: 63). By using the outline of a very traditional German house style<sup>35</sup> as the frame on which she builds the rest of the piece, Eichenberg can be understood to imply that her memories of this time revolve around her home. *Gross-Schneen* (fig. 31) consists of several layers: silver, suede buttons and paper. The silver frame that constitutes the top layer of the brooch mimics this outline of the *Fachwerk* house mentioned above. Den Besten (2011: 64) writes the following about the use of this visual reference:

On a psychoanalytical level, the house can represent mixed feelings: family-life, home as a place of repression and restriction for women. When looking at this brooch you can imagine grey-haired women doing their never-ending needlework, the buttons, the seams, the holes and the hems. In this sense the brooch becomes an emblematic representation of family-life: rest and warmth on the one hand, suffocating hopelessness and unsatisfied ambition on the other.

Den Besten reiterates my suggestion that there is a duality of themes within this series. There is the romanticised nostalgic longing, linked with the trauma that can just as easily form part of the 'home'–life.

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<sup>34</sup> Lena Vigna touches on this subject in her article *Heirlooms: Navigating the Personal in Contemporary Jewelry* when she states: "the Victorian era (1837-1901) set a tone for imbuing objects with personal meaning that remains attractive today. Many types of jewelry were fashionable, but those that seem to most exemplify the period in a historical capacity are those that embody a certain type of romanticism namely, hair and mourning jewelry" (2009 [Online]).

<sup>35</sup> Figure 40 shows a photograph of the oldest *Fachwerk-Haus* that can be seen in the German city of Nuremberg. The house dates from 1338 ([Sa] [Online]).

*Otto* (fig. 35) contains another domestic object at the back of the piece, apart from the sewing, wool, fur and buttons, namely the bent and distorted spoon. The spoon, which has been bent and looks dirty (quite possibly by means of oxidising the silver) sits uncomfortably with the viewer because the spoon is not in the 'condition' that we are used to seeing it. Silver, when not used often, becomes oxidised and turns black. The blackness of the spoon indicates that time has passed during which the spoon has not been used. It could also suggest that Eichenberg has not revisited her childhood memories for some time, and that the black spoon serves as a reminder of the time that has passed since she has left her childhood home. The spoon is the visual metaphor for the trauma involved in displacement. Its presence in the piece serves to inform the reader that leaving her hometown behind was a traumatic event for Eichenberg, but that she still harbours a nostalgic longing for her childhood, fully aware of the trauma that is contained in those memories.

A last point to discuss with regards to Eichenberg's work is the colour palette within which she works. This series draws on our response to dark and sombre colours such as the grey of the oxidised silver, the black of the thread and the general colour scheme in the work that references "earth", "ground" and the general colours one could associate with the physical, earthy matter that is connected with a specific place. Eichenberg positions her memories of her childhood and hometown with the forlorn colour palette that could resemble a desolate winter landscape, which speaks of the cold, harsh reality of the trauma involved in displacement while simultaneously containing certain beautiful elements and colour nuances for which we can harbour romanticised nostalgic longings. The specific colour palette that Eichenberg employs in the production of this series is described as "time-worn" by Diana Young in her article "The Colours of Things", published in *The Handbook of Material Culture* (2006). Young (2006: 174) says:

Time-worn patina is what is generally valued in European art, an aesthetic exported into ethnographic collection. Authenticity resides in the faded surface and rarely, for example, in a coating of fluorescent acrylic paints.

The colour palette used by Eichenberg can thus be labelled "authentic". The colours suggest that the objects used in the production of the jewellery are old, and therefore reference memory and nostalgia. And the specific type of objects, such as the buttons, fabric and spoon, when linked to the title of this series, suggests that the memory and nostalgia are related to home. Eichenberg manages to convey this longing for home to her audience

because, as Mieke Bal stated in her description of Louise Bourgeois' *Spider*,<sup>36</sup> "the use of objects from one's own past can evoke the individual's life in the past" (Bal, cited in Den Besten 2011: 63).

### 3.4 Conclusion

This chapter set out to discuss the occurrence of 'modern' nostalgia in contemporary culture, as well as the presence of trauma and the ways in which it manifests in an individual. "Modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values" (Boym 2001:8). My aim with this chapter was to give visual examples of how Esther Knobel and Iris Eichenberg aim to recreate or represent this "enchanted world" in the contemporary jewellery that they produce.

Michael S. Roth (2012: xviii) stated, about the nature of traumatic events, that

[i]n trauma, the recollected past causes suffering, and the traumatic event has a magnetic appeal that pulls a wide constellation of experience (often, an individual's whole life) into its orbit. But the extreme event itself resists representation, but it is "too big to fail" – too important to be left out of an attempt to make sense of the past at either the individual or collective level.

As I stated in the section on trauma, this creates a problematic situation for the contemporary jeweller concerned with referencing trauma in their work. They stand at risk of "trivialising" the trauma, but at the same time they cannot shy away from its presence, either in the memory or nostalgic longing that they are referencing, or in the domestic objects that they appropriate into their artwork. Lena Vigna (2009 [Online]) relates how contemporary jewellers have succeeded in dealing with this situation:

Rather than seeing sentiment or nostalgia as content to be avoided...represent and embrace of the past and a willingness to challenge and explore meaning complicated by the idea of personal history and emotion.

Georges Vigarello, director of studies at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, wrote the introduction to the catalogue *Heimat* (2009), which is a compilation of work

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<sup>36</sup> Figure 41 shows Louise Bourgeois' *Spider* (1997).

by contemporary jeweller Monika Brugger, whose jewellery also references memory, specifically memories related to her childhood, and nostalgia. Vigarello (2009:11) wrote the following about the use of everyday<sup>37</sup> objects in contemporary jewellery:

The specificity of the gesture is accentuated by the fact that the adopted object is characterised, precisely, by familiarity. It still has “the appearance of...”, but no longer “the signification of...”. And the fact that it has been stripped of this signification is the source of its value, but also the reason why it merits the most refined of repositories.

In this chapter, I discussed how the contemporary jewellery of Knobel and Eichenberg takes on the function of being *that place* where one can store the nostalgic longings for a time and a place to which one cannot return. Knobel and Eichenberg manage in their work to make the viewer aware of what they are seeing, but at the same time they also twist the context in such a way that it allows the viewer to re-assess their relationship with the objects they are being confronted with. Knobel and Eichenberg take seemingly mundane objects and needlework techniques, and by the mere act of *distinguishing* them, bestow upon them an element of preciousness which cannot be ignored. In my opinion, this is one of the main functions or positive repercussions of using domestic objects and needlework in contemporary jewellery. Jewellery, by its very nature, constitutes an element of preciousness. Using domestic objects within a field that is already associated with value, sentiment and preciousness, allows for some of these characteristics to be transferred to the domestic objects, and thus ‘elevating’ them to a different level of “meaning-making”.

This chapter set out to give examples of the way in which two international contemporary jewellers have used domestic objects or needlework in their artwork to reference the memories, nostalgic longings and trauma inherent in the loss of home. This discussion also functions as the springboard for the final step in this study, which is to discuss my own art practice. In the following chapter, I will discuss the final series I have produced, titled *Blue & white* (fig. 38, 39, 41-48, 50-52, 54-62).

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<sup>37</sup> For the purpose of this study, I think that the objects Vigarello refers to can also be seen as “domestic” in the way that I have defined it in chapter two.

## **Chapter 4 – Memory, nostalgia and trauma in my own work**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In the previous three chapters, I set out to build this study layer by layer. I began by discussing how individuals or groups form specific relationships with certain objects, and focused on directing the discussion to domestic objects and needlework. I then continued my discussion by explaining how jewellery can function as a mnemonic device, and how the appropriation of domestic objects and needlework into the realm of contemporary jewellery can serve to broaden the mnemonic function to include the now appropriated objects as well.

Chapter two formed the next level in my discussion, as I focussed on discussing certain thoughts and theories that could aid in working towards a definition of the domestic. The work of international contemporary jewellers Manon van Kouswijk and Gesine Hackenberg was employed to serve as visual examples of how domestic objects can be appropriated into the realm of contemporary jewellery and serve to reference memory and nostalgia.

In chapter three, I broadened the discussion slightly by also suggesting that, linked with the presence of memory and nostalgia, the use of domestic objects and needlework in contemporary jewellery can also reference trauma, specifically the trauma involved in the loss of home or childhood. The work of Esther Knobel and Iris Eichenberg was used to give visual examples of how nostalgia and trauma can be conceptually referenced in contemporary jewellery through the use of domestic objects and needlework. This chapter served as the final layer of my discussion, before discussing how the above-mentioned phenomena can manifest through the appropriation of domestic objects and needlework in contemporary jewellery.

My own work, which deals with my personal recollections of home and my ardent search for a physical representation of the abstract idea of home, conceptually references memory, nostalgia and trauma. In this chapter, I will discuss the background against which my work was produced. Through visual analysis, I will work towards showing how my own childhood memories, and a nostalgic longing for the time that has been lost, as well as the trauma involved in the loss, have manifested in the contemporary jewellery I have produced for this

study. The series that I discuss in this chapter is titled *Blue and white* (fig. 38, 39, 41-48, 50-52, 54-62).

#### 4.2 Nini van der Merwe – *Blue and white* (2011-2012)

When I was thirteen years old, my parents told my sister and me that they were separating. My sister and I stayed with my mother, and we saw our father occasionally. I remember thinking at the time: “This can’t be happening, this only happens in movies”.<sup>38</sup> This event led to the stable, coherent place or space that I understood as home being dismantled and leaving a void that had to be filled. Two years later, my sister moved abroad, and the new “idea of home” that I, my sister and my mother had created, was again disrupted. During this time, my mother also experienced some personal problems,<sup>39</sup> further upsetting the harmony that one would (ideally) associate with home. After high school, I ‘left’ my home for the first time, and moved to an on-campus residence. This move, however, was not very disruptive, as I was still close to both my parents and went ‘home’ regularly. During my tertiary studies, I spent six months studying abroad, in Germany. This physical shift in home had an immense effect on my ideas and opinions pertaining to the ideal home situation. I struggled to adapt in the new country, and found myself constantly longing for home. Upon my return, the situation in my home had again changed, and the image of home that I had idealized during my time abroad no longer existed. My mother and my sister had both made major life decisions in my absence, which included both of them moving to different towns. Although I was left with the house in which the three of us had lived, the people, and many of the objects, rituals and day-to-day activities were no longer part of the house that I used to call home.<sup>40</sup> Despite the fact that my family is still a large and constant part of my life, I have in recent years found myself longing for home, or the idea of home. If I look back on the past thirteen years of my life, it becomes apparent that this idea of home for which I am longing, has never existed in the capacity that I imagine it. My longing for this time, space

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<sup>38</sup> My parents were the first and only couple in my group of friends at the time to get separated.

<sup>39</sup> Although the nature of the problems are not relevant to this study, I can say that it involved her being absent from our home for some time. During this time, I stayed with friends or relatives.

<sup>40</sup> I should mention that while I do have a very good relationship with my father, I have never referred to his house as home. And because we have not lived together for such a long time, and due to the nature of our relationship, events that happen at his house are somehow labeled as gatherings of friends, rather than a familial home life.



and feeling is thus a longing for a figment of my imagination. From this sprouted the motivation and inspiration for my practice and also this study.

Upon my return from Germany, due to the changes that had occurred in my absence and the difficulty I experienced to adapt to the new situation, I decided to see a psychologist. It was through my sessions with him, as well as a lot of self-reflective introspection, that I became aware that the trauma inherent in my parents' divorce and the subsequent loss of home was an occurrence or event that I had never fully processed. Another component to my recollections that became apparent was that I seemed to be the only member in my family who was concerned about the disruption that had taken place in our home. This notion I found particularly problematic, because my response to what in my opinion seemed like negligence on the part of my family, was to take the responsibility of remembering on myself. My art practice at the time was also suffering from this stagnation of my mental state. It was only once I began to delve actively into my childhood memories, and transform these memories into tangible objects, that I became aware that I have ardently been searching for home for the past thirteen years. Throughout this study, I had been interested in the visual aspects of working with domestic objects and needlework in my art practice. The use of domestic objects and needlework was therefore not decided upon *after* I became aware of my search for home.

I should state that I am not the type of person who enjoys feeling sorry for myself, or revels in it. For this reason, the decision to use my own memories as inspiration for my practical work was not an easy one. I refer back to Roth's (2012: 39) chapter *Hysterical Remembering* in his book *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past* (2012):

What does it mean to suffer from the past, to be pained by memory? How is it that some people manage not to suffer from the past, to orient themselves properly in relation to the loss of the present? How does attention to the past develop from being a choice, a matter of taste, to being a duty, a matter of obligation, to being an obsession, a matter of mental illness?.

This statement by Roth aided my realisation that, as much as I did not want to feel sorry for myself or exaggerate the gravity of the situation, it could also be that I was one of the people Roth referred to as feeling "obligated" by or "obsessive" about remembering. Once I realised this, I was again faced with Roth's (2012: 77) question that I quoted in chapter three: "What does one do with a painful past that cannot be simply willed to disappear yet is a source of

enormous difficulties in the present?”. I realised that using this obsession as inspiration for my art practice could serve in some way to alleviate some of the duty I felt in remembering my home. In doing so, I would be producing tangible objects that could serve as vessels for the memories and nostalgic longings I felt for my home.

The domestic object that I chose to work with in my physical manifestation of ‘home’ is a blue and white dishtowel. My mother’s favorite colour is blue, and due to this, the majority of the appliances, objects and decorations in our kitchen has always been blue. Blue thus becomes the colour through which I remember ‘home’. Diana Young (2006: 173), in her essay *The Colours of Things*, states that: “...colour is a crucial... part of understanding how material things can constitute social relations”. I also use old or used dishtowels, which I have acquired from a number of sources. Most of the dishtowels are stained, and some are also torn. I use silk thread, silver and in some cases precious stones to embellish the dishtowels, focusing on ‘fixing’ the tears, but also adding my own ‘stains’. The final aim is to display thirteen of these re-worked dishtowels. I decided on this number because I was thirteen years old when my ‘home’ life was disrupted for the first time, and in January 2013, when I host my exhibition, it will be thirteen years after that initial disruption. In this sense, this work also functions as a physical reminder of the past thirteen years of my life. Figure 38 shows the six dishtowels that I have completed so far, as they were exhibited at the University of Stellenbosch Art Gallery, at the annual mid-year review Master’s program exhibition. Also, another reason for making thirteen pieces, rather than just one, can be explained by referring to Jivan Astfalck and her essay “Jewellery as a Fine Art Practice”, which was published in the *New Directions in Jewellery* (2005). Astfalck (2005: 20) states:

The thought processes which inform most of Jewellery Art unfold across larger groups of work, rather than just an individual piece, and are often dependent on careful staging and environments... The often rather more ‘introverted’ objects acquire heightened theatricality and performativity; a powerful strategy giving more artistic control over the interpretive reading of the work.

Compiling this series from a number of dishtowels, rather than just one, would serve to increase the visual impact, in the sense that a larger number of objects would imply that the objects (the dishtowels) are of significant importance as visual recollections of my memories and nostalgic longings for a home to which I cannot return. Using more than one dishtowel would also imply to the viewer that this specific domestic object is of significant importance

to me. By using multiple dishtowels, I could also reference different memories in different pieces, and in this way my thought processes could develop over a larger number of pieces. For this reason, some of the pieces reference specific memories, which I elaborate on in this chapter, while some of the other pieces reference more generally my visual surroundings in my home.

Some of the pieces have added components that reference specific memories. An example of this would be *Blue and white #2* (fig. 39-43). This dishtowel can be worn as a brooch, as can be seen in figure 43. The big Maltese cross has a brooch-pin at the back (fig. 40). This specific towel is white, with blue stripes evenly spaced along the width of the towel, creating a very linear pattern. The embellishments on this dishtowel were deliberately spaced in a way that does not follow this linear design. This was done to reference the unpredictable nature of memory, nostalgia, trauma and contentment. The Maltese cross,<sup>41</sup> which in this example has been altered slightly (the ends of the cross are straight, rather than the traditional arrowhead shape), is another visual reference to my mother. My mother is fascinated with the shape, and during the thirteen-year period that this series references, she also went on a trip to the Mediterranean island of Malta. *Blue and white #2* contains three sterling silver Maltese crosses. The largest of the three also contains

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<sup>41</sup> The story of this symbol's relation to my family was told to me by my mother's father. This story is fictional, and my retelling is based on how it was told to me. This story forms part of my personal memories with regards to this cross symbol. My great-grandmother (my grandfather's mother) was named Helena du Toit. "Du Toit" was one of the original French Huguenot surnames that was brought to South Africa when the French Huguenots fled their country so that they could follow the Christian religion in the manner that they wanted to. The Huguenot cross (fig. 40) is similar in shape to the Maltese cross, with the exception of a little dove that hangs from the bottom of the Huguenot cross. Tradition stated that when a young French girl took on the Christian faith, she would be presented with this Huguenot cross, to show her affiliation with the religious group. According to my grandfather, his mother bought one of these Huguenot crosses at a Huguenot fair that she visited as a young woman. When my grandfather married my grandmother, his mother gave the little brass cross that she had bought for herself, to her daughter-in-law. When my grandparents had been married for a while, and my grandfather managed to make a success of his farm, he had the little brass Huguenot cross re-made for his wife, in gold. My mother and her sisters thus grew up with this symbol of a golden Huguenot cross, as it was a piece of jewellery that my grandmother wore often. Unfortunately, many years later, this golden cross, along with the majority of my grandmother's jewellery, was stolen when their house was burgled. The symbol of this cross did not, however, leave my family, and was especially important to my mother, who owns two brooches of a similar design. The little dove that hangs from the traditional Huguenot cross has been removed in the intervening years, but the shape of the cross with legs of equal length, has not. A cross of which the four legs are the same length is referred to as a Maltese cross. The Maltese cross is identified as the symbol of an order of Christian warriors known as the Knights Hospitaller or Knights of Malta. This symbol was introduced as the national symbol of the Mediterranean Island of Malta through its connection with this group of Knights ([Sa] [Online]). At my grandmother's recent eightieth birthday, myself, my sister and my mother gave her a silver Maltese cross pendant as a birthday gift. This symbol has been part of my family for some time, and for that reason I felt it a fitting symbol to incorporate in a piece of jewellery that draws on my own recollections of home.

moonstone beads. Further down from the silver crosses, I have embroidered or stitched a large area of the dishtowel with similar crosses in various sizes using white silk thread (fig. 41).

A large part of the area covered by these crosses shows a big, brown coloured stain. This stain attests to the 'life' the dishtowel had before I appropriated it for my jewellery. When looking at the function of a dishtowel, I refer back to Heidegger's theory with regards to how people form relationships with certain objects. Heidegger states that while we possess over certain 'things' with which to do certain jobs or activities, we rarely distinguish between the two. The one is because of the other. The 'thing' is because of what it does or can do (Heidegger 1962: 97). Relating this theory to the dishtowels I use would imply that the direct relationship between a person and a dishtowel is concerned more with the mess or liquid that the dishtowel is employed to clean up, than with the actual appearance of the dishtowel. When using a dishtowel, the individual is not concerned with the 'damage' that the mess or liquid will do to the dishtowel, because it is more important for the mess or liquid to be removed. In this way, stains are never 'planned'. Their presence on the dishtowels serves as proof that they are objects that have been used, and have served their purpose, namely to clean up spills or dry dishes. The stain on figure 39 does not follow the linear grid of the dishtowel's design, because the dishtowel and its physical appearance was not taken into account when the dishtowel was used for its' "equipmentality". This presence of a stain that does not fall within the boundaries of its surface can also be seen in some of the other dishtowels I use. The stain and its placement on the dishtowel can be read as reference to how little control humans have over the things they do or do not remember. And the stains on the dishtowels can also serve as a visual indication of the 'memories' of each dishtowel. Each stain is a remnant of some function the dishtowel executed before it was appropriated into the realm of contemporary jewellery.

It was only once I realised that certain factors and events that contribute to our experience as human being are beyond our control, that I could learn how to 'make do' with the way in which my life has unfolded during the past thirteen years. Choosing to use the dirty dishtowel, and choosing to embellish it despite the stains, and going so far as to deliberately work against the linear design of the cloth, attest to my knowledge that I could choose how the memories of my 'home' would form part of my identity formation. In this sense, then, I

am using memory and nostalgia to look back at my childhood and my thoughts of 'home'. Roth (2012: 92) says the following about what an individual can 'do' with the trauma they feel or have experienced:

One might say that in looking at trauma, one is looking at a past that in a fundamental sense is *immune* to *use* since by definition the traumatic defies sense making. This is part of what Freud meant by his phrase "unfinished business" – traumatized people still have the "immediate task" of processing an occurrence that has overwhelmed their faculties...One can use the isolation of the trauma from integration into broader patterns of meaning...although nothing can be made out of the trauma, one can use *this* very fact about it as identity defining.

For the purpose of this study, I am using the trauma inherent in my recollections of home, due to the disjointed nature of the emotional support structures within my home. Allan Megill (2011: 195) states the following about this tendency in his article "History, Memory, and Identity", which was published in *The Collective Memory Reader 2011*: "...an appeal to memory – that is, an appeal to what is subjective and personal – is likely to arise only when objectively existing supports are felt to be inadequate".

Another piece in this series, *Blue and white #2* (fig. 44-46), refers thematically to an archetypal piece of jewellery, namely a string of graded pearls. When worn, this dishtowel suggests a string of enlarged, graded pearls. The 'pearls', which are made from upholstery foam and wood, are domes, with a flat back, and the pearl necklace is thus only 'half' a pearl necklace. The piece can be worn with either the domed or the flat surface towards the body. The string of pearls is covered by the dishtowel, although the section of towel not covering them was left intact. When one wears this piece, it resembles a string of pearls, while simultaneously suggesting a type of bib. Liesbeth den Besten (2011: 24) writes that, in the Netherlands, around the 16<sup>th</sup> century, pearls were seen as a sign of "respectability and social belonging" and were only worn by the wives of governors and rich citizens. This piece was made with the intention to reference the transition that I have undergone over the last thirteen years. I have, literally and figuratively, 'grown up'. As I mentioned before, this series was inspired by my own personal recollections of my childhood and my idea of 'home'. I actively set about to remember this time, and the nostalgic longings have often been accompanied by feelings of trauma. The trauma of 'losing home' was reiterated during my time abroad, and also upon my return when the status quo of my 'home' was again

disrupted. Since my return, and since the start of this artwork, I set it as a personal goal to come to terms with my feelings of homesickness. With that in mind, this piece suggests how I have worked towards finding comfort in my own personal history, and how I can confidently claim a position for myself in the space of my own 'home', now that I am 'grown up'. This dishtowel, with its reference to an archetypal piece of jewellery, is in a sense a prized possession that I have made for myself. This piece suggests that I have claimed "respectability and social belonging" for myself within the disrupted notion of home that I have experienced, starting thirteen years ago.

The string of graded pearls,<sup>42</sup> which has by now been established as an important, archetypal piece of jewellery, is also of significance, specifically because I have chosen the occupation of jeweller for myself as a future career. This piece suggests growth, because it is still rooted in my recollections of home, specifically through the use of the dishtowel, but it has also developed into a new object, namely the string of pearls which references the career path I have chosen. A string of graded pearls is an archetypal piece of jewellery that is 'easy' for my immediate community to relate to. They understand it, because it has, in some way, formed part of their own ideas regarding jewellery. To refer again to den Besten (2011: 14): "Though we may not do this consciously, we know how to read jewellery because jewellery plays a role in our personal lives and in society". However, the specific way in which this pearl necklace has been presented, and the materials from which it is made, while recognisable, seems out of place. In this sense, this piece can also reference how I have, in a sense, removed myself from the home for which I long. I can, through this piece, look back on my recollections of home with nostalgia, but I do not necessarily want to return there. In terms of the "unfolding" that Astfalck referred to, this piece "unfolds" towards a more positive connotation for my recollections of home.

*Blue and white #1* (fig. 47-50) was the first piece in this series that I made. The piece, which is meant to be worn around the shoulders, is, in my opinion, the piece that has been 'the

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<sup>42</sup> A pearl necklace can be considered as an "archetypal" piece of jewellery. It is easily recognised and understood to belong in the realm of contemporary jewellery. Liesbeth den Besten groups the pearl necklace with other 'everyday' pieces of jewellery when she states: "People are used to reading jewellery, whether it is a conventional gold heart, a medallion or a name on a chain, a wedding ring, a pearl necklace..." (2011: 24). This thought about the archetypal nature of a pearl necklace is echoed by F Ward who states on the history of pearls: "Throughout much of recorded history, a natural pearl necklace comprised of matched spheres was a treasure of almost incomparable value, in fact the most expensive jewelry in the world" (Ward 1998 [Online]).

least' reworked. I say this because, even though the dishtowel has been interfered with, when the piece is worn it still references the way in which a dishtowel can be thrown over the shoulder when, for example, cooking in the kitchen. The two ways in which this piece can be worn, can be seen in figure 50. I see this piece as the initial transition between domestic object and contemporary jewellery. The manner in which the two dishtowels have been attached represents the memory and nostalgic longing that have been used as reference of home in this piece (fig. 45). This section of the piece is a visual reference to smocking.<sup>43</sup> When we were little, my mother made the majority of the clothes for me and my sister. One particular technique that she enjoyed, and of which we had a number of examples, was smocking. In figure 46 I am wearing one of these smocked dresses that my mother had made for me with the help of my godmother who lived across the road. I still have the majority of these very labour-intensive dresses, hoping to save them for my own children one day. Many years later, when I embarked on this study and chose to investigate the discipline of needlework as a medium, I was again reminded of these smocked dresses. These recollections, and my choice to "recreate" them in my art practice many years later, relate to Allan Megil's (2011: 196) theory on memory: "Memory is an image of the past constructed by a subjectivity in the present. It is thus by definition subjective; it may also be irrational and inconsistent". My choice for using the technique of smocking as a reference for home, was very subjective. I was made aware of this tendency within my work, and in this sense became aware of the "irrationality" in my work. The different pieces, while all centered around the appropriation of a domestic object, could also be interpreted in many different ways. In this sense then, *Blue and white #1* served the additional function of also reinforcing the knowledge that, as the maker of the work, I had very little control over how it would be interpreted by the viewer/wearer. And it was with this piece that I was again reminded of the 'power' inherent in contemporary jewellery. To refer back to Astfalck (2005: 21):

...the objects assume new identities while dialogically interacting with their environment. What is denied is a standard version of what is commonly thought

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<sup>43</sup> "Smocking is the decorative stitching that is used to control the pleats or gathers of loose-fitting, traditional blouses called smocks (also known as chemises or shifts). It is a simple yet very versatile and decorative form of embroidery. Smocking began in England in the 13th or 14th century. It consisted of linen fabric which was gathered into pleats, and then the pleats were secured with embroidery stitches...In the 1940s a South African man, Mr Read, invented a smocking pleater machine and this has truly revolutionised the art of smocking world-wide." (Joomla [Sa] [Online]).

of as jewellery; what is the condition for the emergence of new dimensions of experience and reality, and the possibility that old and empty worlds, old and tired formulae, can be made new.

Since this was the first piece I made in this series, it reminded me of this tendency within contemporary jewellery, and in that sense it set the tone for my approach to making the other pieces within this series. Rather than try and control the way in which the pieces in this series were interpreted, I would allow the pieces to “dialogically interact with their environment”.

Figures 51-58 show two of the pieces that do not reference a specific memory or nostalgic longing, but rather just relates to the domestic space of my home in general. Figure 53 shows three blue and white ceramic pitchers that I have in my kitchen. The largest of the three is a pitcher that my mother inherited from her mother, when they moved off their farm many years ago. The smallest of the three pitchers is one my mother found at an auction that we attended in 1996, when I was nine years old. The auction was of the original farm house of what used to be the farm *Mostertsdrift*.<sup>44</sup> The house and its contents, the auction of which we attended, was the only bit that was left of the original farmstead. The pitcher was part of a random lot my mother bid on, and we only discovered the pitcher when we got home and unpacked the box. We found the third pitcher in the house that my mother, my sister and I moved into after my parents got divorced. The pitcher was left in a cupboard by the previous owner of the house. I feel that this random acquisition of these three pitchers can be related to what Esther Knobel (2008: xxi) said in her catalogue *The Mind in the Hand* (2008) about the story of a grandmother knitting an imaginary world: “This wild coincidence proved to me once again that archetypal reservoirs exist in the inner recesses of memory, and these reservoirs reveal themselves in the most surprising ways”. I am aware that Knobel is here referring to memory, rather than tangible objects, but these objects have served in the formation of certain memories that I have about my home, and for this reason I used the flower motif on the pitchers in the piece *Blue and white #5* (fig. 51, 52, 54). My use of this motif was deliberate, because I hoped that I could evoke sentiments of home or memories in the viewer, who had maybe seen the pitcher or the motif before.

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<sup>44</sup> The original farm is now an urban neighbourhood in the Stellenbosch area. It is located at the upper end of the University of Stellenbosch grounds. The old farmstead and the adjacent piece of land were bought by the University and converted into a research facility. The neighbourhood has retained the name of the original farm.



This piece, which can be worn as a brooch, also mimics the shape of a badge or rosette. Den Besten (2011: 14) says the following about the badge as a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon:

Medieval badges, openly signs of alliance to a Lord, find their contemporary counterpart in signs of membership, such as those of the Rotary organization. In our modern times, buttons are used to express a political message.

Although I did not create this piece with a specific political message in mind, I did find the connotation that the visual appearance of the piece could suggest rather pleasing. Wearing a dishtowel in this manner could reference a number of ideas or concepts. Although I was aware that I had little power over how the piece would be interpreted, I was assured that the placement of the piece on the body could serve as an enhancement of the piece, assuming it would be worn on the torso, where a badge is normally worn. As Den Besten (2011: 25) explains: “the neck and chest are special places on the body... where power, dignity and status are celebrated”.

*Blue and white #3* (fig. 55-58) takes on the shape of a neckpiece. When worn, this garment covers both the front and back of the torso. An oval shape is added to this piece. On the front of the piece a large oval has been stitched around a tear, as can be seen in figure 56. This tear, which was in the dishtowel when I received it, was “fixed” with the use of white silk thread. However, as the image shows, the fixing of the tear left a scar, as is often the case with a traumatic event. I refer here to Roth (2012:91), who states that “...trauma points to an occurrence that both demands representation and refuses to be represented. The intensity of the occurrence seems to make it impossible to remember or to forget”. The scar left by the attempt to fix the tear is suggestive of this duality present within trauma. While not wanting to remember the event, it also cannot be forgotten. So, even though the wound left by the trauma has healed, the traces of the event can still be seen. During the introspective self-analysis that I underwent as part of the process of producing the artwork for this study, I was made aware that the scar left by the wound was still present, even though the trauma of losing home might have passed. For this reason, I decided to encase the wound on this dishtowel with a sterling silver oval frame, which was then stitched to the dishtowel with silk thread. I embellished the wound, rather than trying to hide from my past or ignore the trauma that was present during this time in my life. By doing this, I tried to find the beauty inherent in the ‘ugliness’ of the situation. This is also mimicked on the back of the piece, as can be seen in figure 57. The placement of the three smoothly finished sterling

silver oval discs is suggestive of the beauty that could emerge from the pain that can be seen in the 'scar' on the front of the piece.

The final piece to be discussed is *Blue and white #6* (fig. 59-62). This piece can be worn as a large pendant on a chain through the sterling silver 'loop' (fig. 61) that mimics the tag normally found on a dishtowel which contains the washing instructions and textile information. The way in which this piece can be worn, can be seen in figure 62. The rest of the dishtowel has been embellished with a number of sterling silver domes, which were sewn onto the dishtowel, all facing the same direction. In this sense, the dishtowel has two sides that can be displayed to the viewer. This function of the piece relates to Iris Eichenberg's series *Heimat*, specifically figures 32, 34 and 35. The domes and their random placement on the dishtowel attest to the instability of memory. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (2003: 23) say this about memory:

An event, an emotion remembered, inevitably cannot have the same meaning retrospectively as it had at the time, weighted as the memory must be with everything that has happened subsequently...confronting the problems of thinking through memory as at once individual and collective, public and private.

The random placement of the domes, as well as the ability of this piece to be worn showing either the shiny, inner surface of the domes (fig. 59) or the matte, fabric outer shapes of the domes (fig. 60), can be related to Hodgkin and Radstone's theory of the ways in which the meaning of memory changes. The events that have happened in the time frame between the creation of the memory and the time at which the memory is recalled, can influence how much of the memory an individual wants to share. This is true also of my own memories and recollection of home, and the narrative surrounding my parents' divorce and the subsequent disruption in my home life. As I have grown older, I have found that I want to talk less and less about this occurrence. This is not because I still feel extremely traumatized by the event, but rather because I no longer wish to be defined by this one event. The retrospective meaning of my memories are different from the memory when it was first created. Conceptually, this piece could function as serving either nostalgia or memory. To refer back to Megill's (2011: 195) distinction between nostalgia and memory:

"...nostalgia is oriented outward *from* the subject (the individual person, the group), focusing attention on a real or imagined past, memory is oriented *toward* the subject and is concerned with a real or imagined past only because that past is perceived as crucial for the subject, even constitutive of it.

Megill's distinction can be directly interpreted when considering the reflective property of the sterling silver domes in *Blue and white #6*. Should the wearer choose to serve memory, they could wear the piece with the reflective domes facing their body. In this way, the domes would not reflect that which they are facing; the viewer would not see any reflection, but only the dull bumps as a slight disturbance in the surface of the dishtowel. Should the wearer wish to serve nostalgia, however, the piece could be worn with the domes facing away from the wearer's body, thus reflecting whatever is immediately in front of the wearer and projecting it away from the wearer, towards the viewer. This specific function of this piece is of significance to me, the maker, especially as I have come to a point in my life where I no longer feel the need to serve memory, since I no longer feel that this particular event is "crucial for the subject". While I can, and do, look back on this time with nostalgia, reminiscing about the home of my childhood, but realizing that I can never return to it, I therefore choose to serve nostalgia.

### 4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I set out to discuss my own artistic practice, with specific reference to the series *Blue and white* (2011-2012). Giving background information on the source of inspiration for this series, and explaining some of the conceptual references in certain pieces, I described how I went about working towards a physical manifestation of my own ideas of 'home'.

From the discussion above, it should be clear that each of the pieces in this series has a specific reference that falls within the thirteen year timeframe that this series conceptually suggests. Certain pieces, such as *Blue and white #4*, *#1*, and *#3*, have very specific memories that reference the trauma inherent in the loss of home that I experienced at thirteen, and that I have struggled to find for the past thirteen years. Others in the series, such as *Blue and white #5*, *#2* and *#6*, are general references to the memories, nostalgic longings and trauma that I experienced throughout the process of making these contemporary jewellery pieces.

Mieke Bal (2001: 76) states that we can "distinguish two 'moments of meaning production'". The first involves the author, but it is no more 'original' or 'primary' than the second, whose

subject is the reader". I am aware that these pieces, while very strongly referencing my idea of home and my own recollections of this place, whether real or imagined, will not necessarily recall similar memories or longings in the audience that will view and wear my artwork. However, because I am of the opinion that a domestic object as 'mundane' and everyday as a dishtowel is something that many people will be able to relate to, I would like to leave it up to the viewer to further investigate the objects, and search for ways in which they can connect with or relate to the contemporary jewellery I have produced. Recalling that Mieke Behm said "I think the word home means something different to every person who uses it" (Elmgreen & Dragset 2008: 15), this series then also leaves a lot of room for personal interpretation.

Roth's (2012: 77) question "What does one do with a painful past that cannot be simply willed to disappear yet is a source of enormous difficulties in the present?" has been an important framing device for my thoughts concerning my work. I would like to suggest that, with the production of the series *Blue and white*, I have attempted to use my "painful past" as a source of inspiration in the production of my artwork in an attempt to prevent it from creating further "enormous difficulties in the present". Through the process of making this series and the research involved in the formation of this study, I have managed to use the feeling of "obligation, [of] an obsession, a matter of mental illness" that Roth (2012: 39) refers to with regards to the act of remembering, in a manner that I am comfortable with, and that results in the production of tangible objects that can serve as vessels for my memories.

## Conclusion

The research question that is stated in the introduction to this study is: “How are domestic objects and needlework techniques used in contemporary jewellery to serve as vessels of memory, nostalgia and trauma with relation to the notion of home?”. The most important aspect of this study is thus the use of domestic objects and needlework in contemporary jewellery; or, stated differently, the appropriation of domestic objects into a new context. For this reason, it was necessary for me first to discuss how humans go about forming relationships and interacting with the objects with which they come into contact on a daily basis. For this purpose, I referenced Martin Heidegger, specifically his 1962 text *Being and Time*, in which he discusses hermeneutic phenomenology. Heidegger (1962: 97) speaks of “equipment”, and states that we can distinguish between different types of equipment, depending on what we use the objects for. We rarely differentiate between the object and its function, the one is because of the other. The ‘thing’ is because of what it does or can do. According to Heidegger, it is only once the pre-determined function of the object is lost, that we can begin to re-assess our relationship to the object. In the work that I discussed in this study, the “loss of function” was done deliberately, however, and the domestic objects and needlework were given a new function within the realm of contemporary jewellery.

From Heidegger I moved on to discuss how contemporary jewellery can function as mnemonic devices. Discussing Allan Megil’s explanation of how memory functions, I related the purpose of memory to contemporary jewellery. Marjan Unger (2012: 7), well-known theorist in the field of contemporary jewellery, states that “[o]ne of the most endearing qualities of jewellery is that, small and close to people as they are, they are perfect vehicles for memory”. This inherent function of jewellery is one that I employ throughout this study. This section answered one of the aims I had set to define the scope of this study, namely: “To discuss how contemporary jewellery can function as mnemonic devices that relate to memory, nostalgia and trauma”.

I argued that the placement of domestic objects and needlework within the realm of jewellery allowed for this mnemonic function of jewellery to be transferred also to the domestic objects and needlework used in the production of the contemporary jewellery that I discussed in this study.

Chapter two set out to define the area that I referred to when speaking of the domestic. I included this discussion to aid in ensuring that the type of objects and needlework that I referred to in this study be understood against the correct background. Working towards a definition of this space also succeeded in fulfilling another of the aims I set for this study, namely: “To discuss thoughts on the domestic and how it manifests in relation to material culture”. Once the premise of the domestic had been set, I could continue my discussion by focussing on how domestic objects and needlework can function as vessels of memory and nostalgia within the realm of contemporary jewellery. This chapter was concluded with a visual analysis of the work of Manon van Kouswijk (*Lepidoptera Domestica* 2007) and Gesine Hackenberg (*Ceramic Jewellery* 2006-2011), two international contemporary jewellers who employ domestic objects in the production of their jewellery. These two artists also deliberately remove the “equipmentality” of their chosen domestic objects, thus forcing the viewer/wearer to re-assess their relationship with the object.

Chapter three broadened the discussion slightly, with the addition of trauma to the phenomenon that could be referenced through the appropriation of domestic objects and needlework to the realm of contemporary jewellery. Drawing on the manifestation of nostalgia and trauma in contemporary culture, as discussed by Michael S. Roth in his book *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past* (2012), I could unpack the nostalgia and trauma present in the specific work of two international contemporary jewellers, Esther Knobel (*My Grandmother is Knitting too* 2000-2002) and Iris Eichenberg (*Heimat* 2004). These two artists conceptually portray their recollections of childhood and the homes they inhabited during their youth, by employing domestic objects and needlework to aid in referencing the specific time or place to which they cannot return. Discussing how nostalgia and trauma are manifested in contemporary culture, and relating this discussion to the field of contemporary jewellery, allowed me to discuss my own work based on the premise that had been set in chapters one, two and three. With the discussion of the two artists in this chapter, I completed yet another aim to define the scope of this study, namely: “To analyse visually work made by other female contemporary jewellers who also use domestic objects and needlework to reference the complexities of home”.

The final aim set for this study was “to position my own work within this field of study and show how I use domestic objects and needlework to thematically reference memory, nostalgia and trauma, with specific relation to my own recollections of ‘home’”. In the fourth and final chapter in this study, I completed that aim, by giving the necessary background information to ground my own art practice within the scope of this study, and to give a detailed analysis of the pieces in the series *Blue and white #1 - #6*, which formed the practical component of this study.

In closing, I would like to state that this study did not only serve to form the theoretical component necessary for the completion of a Masters degree. It also allowed me to reach a certain level of peace with the events that have unfolded in my life over the past thirteen years. This study has served me well, in the same way that Debbie Stoller (2003: 9) refers to “knitting [that] serves the knitter as well”. I have used the obsession I feel about remembering my past as inspiration for my art practice, and in that way I have alleviated some of the duty I felt in remembering my home. In doing so, I have produced tangible objects that could serve as vessels for the memories and nostalgic longings I felt for my home.

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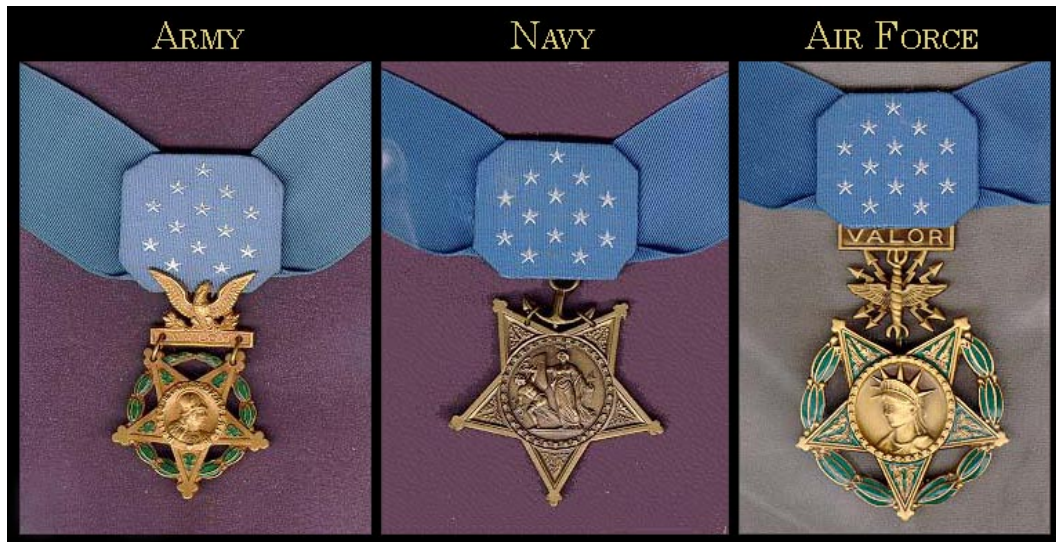
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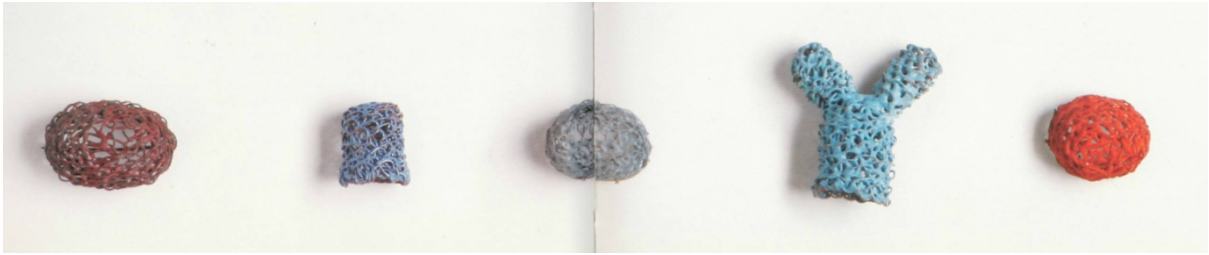




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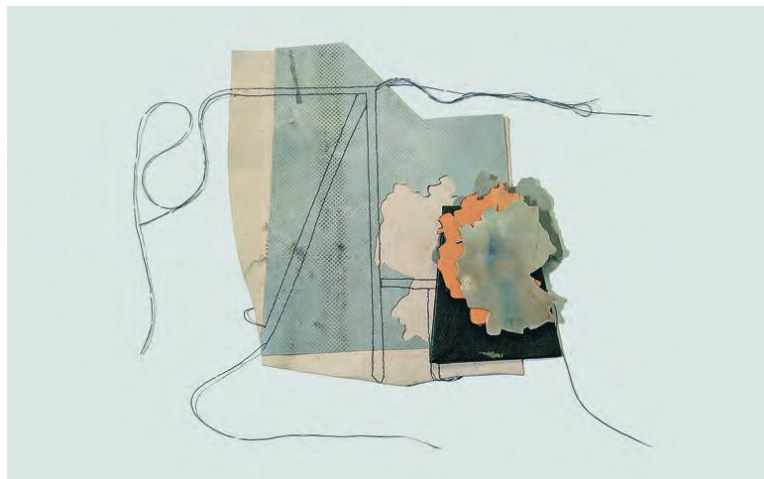
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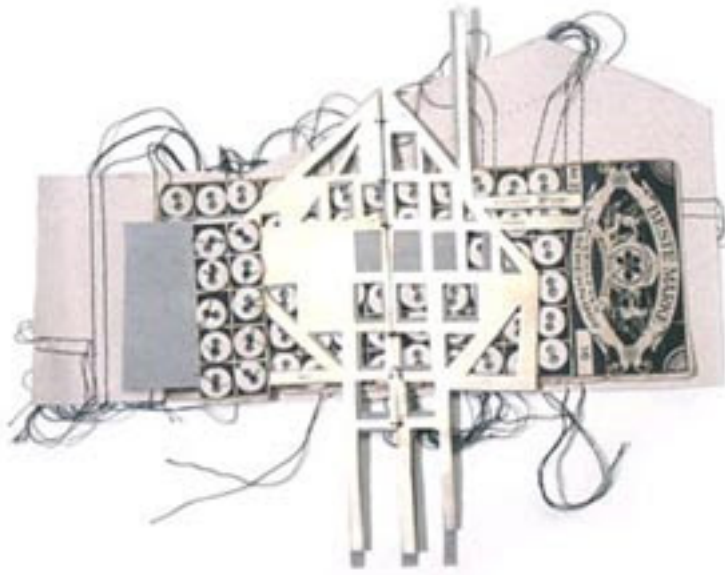
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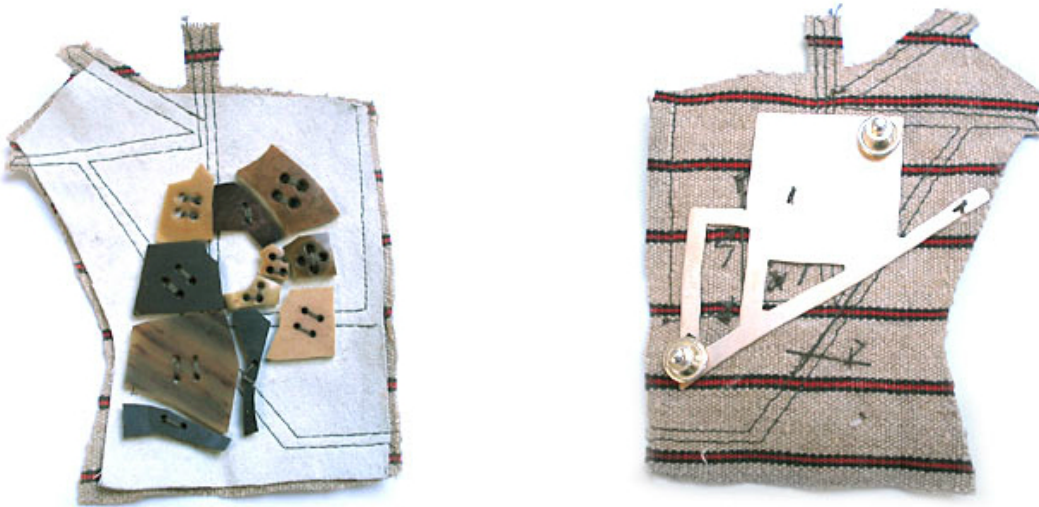
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**Front**

**Back**

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**Front**



**Back**

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**Front**

**Back**

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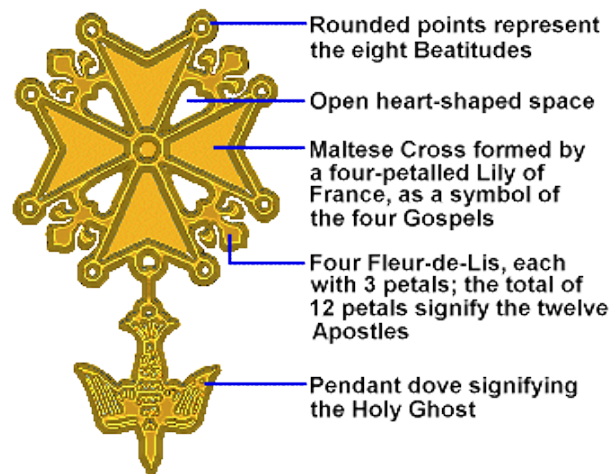
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**Figure 61.** Nini van der Merwe, *Blue and white #6* (2012). Cotton, silk thread, sterling silver.  
Digital photograph.



**Figure 62.** Nini van der Merwe, *Blue and white #6* (2012). Cotton, silk thread, sterling silver.  
Digital photograph.