



Contemporary jeweller Johanna Zellmer, preparing for this afternoon's opening of her exhibition, *Forged*, in the Ashburton Art Gallery. PHOTO JOSEPH JOHNSON 250915-JJ-016

Jeweller taps into immigrants' journeys

By **SUE NEWMAN**
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The very personal stories of New Zealanders caught between two cultures formed the inspiration for contemporary jeweller Johanna Zellmer's exhibition *Forged*, opening at the Ashburton Art Gallery today.

As a German citizen who had lived in New Zealand for 15 years, Zellmer found herself questioning her reasons for continuing to remain a resident in her new country rather than throwing away her German passport and becoming a New Zealand citizen.

If she was grappling with this issue she knew there would be other new, New Zealanders dealing with the same question. She went looking and was overwhelmed by the number of

people wanting to share their stories and their reasons.

And those stories became the catalyst for a new range of work that would see her create very personal items of jewellery that would be worn by just one person, the holder of the passport number punched into its heart.

Her exhibition *Forged* is an exhibition in two parts. In one she has taken coins, flattened these and created intricate landscapes. Each piece is mounted in a display box.

The piece de resistance, however, are the multiple human passport works.

Each tells the story of an immigrant who has held onto their culture and nationality in their new country. Zellmer has listened to their stories and

then retold those stories by creating a single ear ring from a coin and hearing aid tube.

The ear ring appears as 'brand' on each neck and that, Zellmer said is symbolic of a nation's branding.

"This has been quite an emotional project for me. Often these people told me very personal stories about their experiences. They felt no one had listened to them before, no one had ever wanted to know," she said.

She has published a book that will be for sale during the exhibition.

This book tells the stories of the individuals who are part of the exhibition.

Zellmer trained as a jeweller in Germany but with her apprenticeship behind her decided

to push her boundaries beyond the tradition of bending over a bench working on small pieces of adornment.

She continued to study, training as a silversmith and working with larger items such as utensils and plates.

In 2000 she moved to New Zealand, taking up a position at the Dunedin School of Art and began working again on smaller pieces of jewellery.

Forged has been funded by the Otago Polytechnic and at the end of its touring exhibition, the ear rings will become the property of each individual portrayed.

Forged opens at the Ashburton Art Gallery today at 2pm and the opening will feature readings by Zellmer from her book.

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Johanna Zellmer
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Dear Johanna,

On behalf of the Ashburton Art Gallery I would like to thank you for your recent exhibition *Forged* held at the Gallery 26 September – 15 November 2015. Your work was very well received with many visitors returning several times to view the works. In total we recorded 2,380 visitors during the exhibition. I appreciate you making the trip to Ashburton and presenting a floor talk which was very informative and thought provoking for so many of our visitors.

We were also delighted in selling all of your outstanding limited edition books. They went to the following people:

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| 1. Shirin Khosraviani, Ashburton | 2. Anne Carr, Ashburton |
| 3. Nicole Bourke, Ashburton | 4. Barbara Davidson, Ashburton |
| 5. Linda Petrie, Ashburton | 6. Ashburton Art Gallery |
| 7. Hedwig, Christchurch | 8. Pam Burdett, Ashburton |
| 9. Fiona Van Oyen, Christchurch | |

I would like to thank you again for a remarkable exhibition and for bringing contemporary jewellery to the Gallery. I wish you every success for the future and look forward to working with you again. Please find enclosed newspaper articles and comments relating to your exhibition.

Kind regards,



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Identity exploration

By Mick Jensen

The latest exhibition at the Ashburton Art Gallery features a unique take on national identity and cross-cultural matters.

Contemporary jeweller Johanna Zellmer's interest in the subjects is explored in her exhibition 'Forged' which has two parts - "coinscapes", which reflects change in her former homeland of Germany and another exhibition that uses mock passports and other symbolism to reflect nationalities.

The exhibitions were first shown in Europe in 2009 and 2013 respectively.

Her coin exhibition questions the idea of national identity with a series of commemorative coins with the German emblem of an eagle separated from the surrounding metal.

Zellmer said she had been struck by the many different eagle designs and patriotic writing on the coins which showed that Germany was not necessarily just one country after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The second part of the exhibition is much more of a hands-on affair. The public is invited to sit down and to read through a mock passport that tells the stories of immigrants to this country, specifically those that had had to choose between gaining New Zealand citizenship or retaining citizenship from their birth countries.

The artist uses partial portraits of the subjects with their national symbol, which is separated from the surrounding coin on their passport and then hammered flat.

The metal symbol hung down like a hearing aid to show the idea of "impairment", a feeling some immigrants felt when they couldn't fully speak the language of their new country, said Johanna Zellmer.

Johanna Zellmer completed a formal apprenticeship as a goldsmith in Germany and holds a masters degree from the Australian



Artist Johanna Zellmer with one of her mock passport exhibits.

National University Canberra School of Art. She currently co-ordinates the Master of Fine Arts programme and continues to lecture in jewellery and metalsmithing at the Otago Polytechnic School of Art and calls a small farm in Dunedin home.

Ashburton Art Gallery is selling a hand-bound, limited edition book of the *Forged* exhibition in its shop.

The book has the gallery name embossed on the inside and is the size of a large passport.

The *Forged* exhibition runs until November 15.