



Metro  
**Students' collection tells many stories**

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NEWS & REVIEWS - CRAFT

W.E. McMILLAN COLLECTION

Selected Gold and Silversmith 1961-2007, **RMIT** Project Space/Spare Room, Carlton, ends Friday  
[schoolofartgalleries.dsc.rmit.edu.au](http://schoolofartgalleries.dsc.rmit.edu.au)

THE gold and silversmithing department of **RMIT** has an extensive collection of award-winning student pieces gathered over almost 50 years, the W. E. McMillan Collection.

At the very least, this show of more than 100 pieces, about half the department's holdings, surveys changing attitudes to materials in what is acknowledged as one of the best teaching departments in the world.

The shift from the Scandinavian-influenced hollow ware of the 1960s (the perfection of R. K. Cranage's silver-plate jug evokes Georg Jensen's Danish workshop) to more recent, selfreflexive work (such as Chris Milbourne's anarchistic cut-and-paste approach to some found metal teapots, acquired last year through donor Don Begbie) signals a move from preciousness and ceremonial use to a more personal engagement with objects.

The change from industrial models to one-off pieces also reflects the department's move in the mid-1980s from a design to a fine art context at **RMIT**.

Precious gems are not in evidence, but Craig Spark's three brooches (acquired through the Klepner Award in 2004) include fragments of banknotes. You may question the aesthetic merit of Spark's conception, but he has cleverly critiqued our obsession with dollar values.

Materials are made to appear other than they are in quite a lot of the more recent work. David Scully's Ra666it ring, made of silver, steel bicycle chain and polymer, looks like black rubber (an Emily Hope award acquisition from last year).

James Andrew's paper neckpieces might have been made of segments of flat metal (Klepner Award 2005). In Elrun Lach's neckpiece, ring and brooch, the glass beads of the latter ape the coral of the former (Emily Hope award 2005).

Outrageously, Jessica Morrison's silver and enamel sugar bowl and jug look like ceramics (Emily Hope 2004).

Some real success stories are represented. Mari Funaki has an international reputation, but what became of Ildiko Kopas, whose three rings, also in mild steel (Klepner Award 1990), are so confronting in their angularity? Professor Robert Baines, who heads the department, is represented by a brooch and ring from 1970.

More than 25 years ago, poet A. D. Hope endowed a figurative award in memory of his daughter, Emily. David Neale's painted silver Bird Container (2003), above, entered the collection in this way. In its sensitive evocation of forms in nature, Neale's work stands as a symbol of the opportunity afforded by this wonderful program for artistic development away from commercial pressures.

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