

# The Herbal Mixture Areta Wilkinson

28 March – 29 April

Areta Wilkinson describes the objects in her jewellery-based installation *The Herbal Mixture* as amulets for healing. The herbal mixture she took, as part of her recovery from a serious illness, is the central concept for the work, the empty elixir bottles, still bearing labels with the artist's name and dosage requirements ('8ml daily with water or juice'), acting as repositories for ten exquisitely-made silver flowers and branches which spring from their necks. A craftsperson with a fascination for materials, Wilkinson has modelled the plants on the mixture's actual ingredients, including barberry, liquorice and dandelion. This treatment was taken along with orthodox medicine, the combination of scientific and holistic approaches represented in the installation by the presence of a hospital trolley, on top of which the bottles, with their precious contents, are placed.

Jewellery-based installation is a relatively new type of exhibition concept which offers a number of different contexts in which to view work. For example, Wilkinson's description of the objects in *The Herbal Mixture* as amulets is a personal interpretation, one that is not demonstrated in the finished object - as is traditionally the case with talismans - but instead relies on the methods of making and handling as a manifestation of belief.

Seen in the light of her previous and current work, *The Herbal Mixture* continues the artist's investigation into the processes and outcomes of cataloguing through labelling, and colonisation. Her concurrent Residency at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts was an opportunity to study the way in which native flora had been collected by Pakeha, in this case Sir Joseph Banks, as part of the Imperial project. In the gallery context the work attains additional meaning as a commentary on illness, wellness and the often difficult relationship between natural and synthetic medications and conventional and alternative health practices. The diminutive amulets become part of a much larger project involving a combination of other objects which address the architecture of the gallery and the viewers presence within that space. A third setting for interpretation, unique to jewellery, is that of its place on the body. All of the amulets can be individually worn as neckpieces, the wearers establishing their own intimate relationship with the objects. The new meanings they ascribe to them may not necessarily address the concerns illustrated by the installation context and are unlikely to be the same as those imbued into them by the maker, therefore they provide yet another layer of associated korero (stories) which surrounds the work, and its journey through time and space.

**Deidre Brown**





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