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Edith Morris: Jewellery designer and silversmith

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ABSTRACT: The documented history of New Zealand's silversmiths and jewellers seems to shift from the nineteenth-century immigrant manufacturers, through the Arts and Crafts-influenced first decades of the twentieth century, to the artist jewellers who rose to prominence in the 1970s and continue to be an important aspect of our international craft and art reputation. There is, however, little record of those individuals who worked in the intervening decades. Edith Morris trained in New Zealand and worked as a silversmith and jeweller from her home in Wellington for more than 25 years in the middle of the twentieth century. Visually, conceptually and chronologically, her work can be seen to span and fit between those better known aspects of New Zealand jewellery.

KEYWORDS: Edith Morris, New Zealand jewellery, studio jewellery, New Zealand craftswomen, New Zealand silversmiths, Charles Brasch.

Introduction

In 2008, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) acquired two pairs of earrings made by New Zealand jeweller Edith Morris, who worked in Wellington in the middle decades of the twentieth century – from the late 1930s to the early 1960s. These are the first examples of her work in the museum's collection, and they constitute an important addition to Te Papa's representation of the early years of studio jewellery production in New Zealand.

Born Edith Emily Hopson on 6 December 1895 in Hougham, Kent, England, Edith Morris (Fig. 1) was the daughter of Emily Elizabeth Hopson (née Whittingstall) and Edward Richard Hopson. Edith married Leonard Kenneth Morris, a captain in the machine-gun corps, in Hendon, Middlesex, on 2 November 1918. They immigrated to New Zealand in 1924, arriving in Auckland. Leonard was apparently to start a branch of a family business here, selling men's hats (Pat O'Brien, pers. comm. 1995). By 1927, they had moved to Dunedin and, by 1930, to Wanganui. Here the Morrises were involved in amateur theatricals, especially the design of costumes and stage sets (Pat O'Brien, pers. comm. 1995).

Fig. 1 Edith Emily Morris, wearing a star sapphire ring of her own manufacture (photographer and date unknown).

By 1934 the Morrises had moved to Wellington. Here Edith took a course in metalworking at Wellington Technical

College (Pat O'Brien, pers. comm. 1995), where the subject – comprising jewellery, enamelling, chasing, repoussé and silversmithing – was taught as part of the School of Art's artistic crafts curriculum. Nelson Isaac[1] was then the head of the college's School of Art. All students who attended the art craft classes were also expected to take a course in design. Other members of staff listed as teaching the design or art craft classes were Roland Hipkins,[2] Mrs C. Bolton, F. Lispcombe[3] and Frederick Vincent Ellis[4] (Wellington Technical College 1886–1963).

Building on the skills she acquired at the college, Morris began producing jewellery and other silverwork from a workshop overlooking the sea at her home in Days Bay in 1936 (Gillies 1945). Days Bay and nearby York Bay were home to a number of artists and craftspeople, so the cultural and physical surroundings were perhaps both factors in that choice of location. During the Second World War, when Wellington gas supplies were compromised, a neighbour recalls Morris working at night, when the gas flow was stronger, enabling her to use her burner for soldering (Angela Lassig, pers. comm. 2007). Friends described her as a talented pianist, and she drew, painted and sewed. She was also known for her spontaneous generosity and respected for her integrity (Pat O'Brien, pers. comm. 1995; Anonymous 1966).

The international context

Women craft artists

Among the social changes that accompanied the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century were the global development of leisure-time activities and evening classes, public appreciation of handmade things, and an acceptance that jewellery-making was a career appropriate to the circumstances of some women (Cartlidge 1985; Karlin 1993). Greenbaum & Kirkham (2000) offered a specific illustration of this context when they noted that: most North American female jewellers working in the early decades of the twentieth century attended colleges of art and design with instruction in jewellery and art metalwork; most were from middle-class backgrounds; production could often be carried out at their homes; and their market was 'artistically inclined "progressive" middle-class women'. It was this social shift that made it possible for Edith Morris to pursue a career as a jeweller and silversmith in New Zealand half a century later. Harrod (1999: 117) has described the crafts in the inter-war years in England as providing: an 'important creative space and income for middle-class women in a time of social and economic stasis for women in general'.

Contemporary women jewellers

There are relatively few comparisons to make with Morris's career in New Zealand. Alice Elsie Reeve (1885–1927) was one of the first women to pursue a career as a professional jeweller here (Lassig 1996). She was born in Australia, trained in London, and in New Zealand worked in both Wellington and Auckland. She maintained a studio and displayed work at exhibitions, but her period of activity was at least a decade earlier than the time in which Edith Morris was working. Also notable in this earlier period is the work of Annie Buckhurst (1893–1959), who studied and, after 1917, tutored at the Canterbury College of Art in Christchurch. Te Papa holds examples of work by both women in its collections.

The impact of the 1906–07 International Exhibition in Christchurch on the art school there, and the increased general appreciation of art jewellery, metalwork and enamelling that it brought about in the following decade, had very important effects in New Zealand. Calhoun (2000) lists, for example, 10 women exhibiting their art jewellery and metalwork at the Canterbury Society of Arts in the late 1910s to early 1920s. These women would have been trained by Frederick Gurnsey (1863–1953) at the Canterbury College School of Art; most also became applied art instructors in institutions or offered private tuition, and in addition they continued to exhibit their own work. Some of these jewellers used Māori decorative motifs and included specifically New Zealand materials – particularly pāua and nephrite – in their work, but for the most part this seems to have been done as part of an expression of national identity, and it does not appear that the artists engaged with the ethnic traditions of other countries. It is difficult to know to what extent the examples of these individual women affected Edith Morris, who arrived from England as an adult well after the end of the First World War.

In Wellington, night classes in metalwork were offered at the Wellington Technical College, although one student in the 1920s felt the classes were taken up more by those looking for a hobby, rather than career training. The appointment of Nelson Isaac to the art department at the college was also a focus for a noticeable enthusiasm for craft in the city in the 1930s (Calhoun 2000).

Mollie Miller (1909–50) is probably Morris's nearest New Zealand contemporary. Following initial study in a general arts course at Southland Technical College, she later attended the Wellington Technical College, where it is thought she studied metalcraft with 'Freddy' Lipscombe, who was employed there from 1931 (Calhoun 2000). Thereafter she practised her art metalwork from a Molesworth Street workshop and a workshop in her York Bay home. She married Hal Atkinson in 1936. Ill health, however, caused her to concentrate on painting rather than metalwork in the 1940s, and she also authored three books in that decade. Seven examples of her work are listed on Te Papa's Collections online (accessed 2009): two silver spoons, a silver ladle, two silver forks, a silver sugar bowl, and a silver and copper teapot. It is easy to believe the two women might have met.

Edith Morris exhibited work at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wellington between 1937 and 1955, and in those years at least, two other women silversmiths also exhibited. Mary Hanham was an artist member between 1929 and 1951, as was Eileen K. Rose from 1935 to 1954 (Kay & Eden 1983), but little more is documented about either of them. No doubt the Second World War had an impact on the production of, and demand for, jewellery, as well as on the ability of jewellers to create a reputation in those years. There is little published material focusing on New Zealand women jewellers in the decades just before the emergence of the first of the new generation of contemporary artist jewellers such as Elena Gee (b. 1949) and Ruth Baird (b. 1941).

In Australia, a number of women jewellers are documented as working in the early decades of the twentieth century. In addition to some women artists who, for example, painted plaques set as brooches and the like, Schofield & Fahy (1991) and Kerr (1995) list and give some notes about Ethel Barringer, Mildred Creed, Daisy Nosworthy, Rhoda Wager and Vera Whitesides. However, these women were working before Edith Morris and are more comparable with Elsie Reeve and her contemporaries. Dorothy Judge (1912–2001), Rhoda Wager's niece and apprentice, overlaps with Morris's dates of production most closely. She worked with Wager from 1928, established her own business in 1939, and exhibited with the Society of Arts and Crafts from 1947 to 1971 (Schofield & Fahy 1991: 209). Examples of Judge's work held in the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, show the use of semi-precious stones and pearls, and a preference for silver, but also the use of gold and silver-gilt metal on occasion. Among the 42 objects linked to her name in the Powerhouse Museum Collection database (accessed 2008) are: a silver and lapis lazuli ring, earring and necklace; silver and opal rings and earrings; a silver and amber necklace, earrings, ring and brooch; a silver and cornelian brooch; a silver and moss agate brooch; a silver and topaz pendant; and a silver brooch set with gemstones, described by Schofield & Fahy (1991: 208) as 'Celtic'.

A larger number of North American women jewellers are recorded working during the 1940s and 1950s. Greenbaum (1996) lists Irena Brynner, Betty Cooke, Margaret De Patta, Elsa Freund, Frances Higgins, Merry Renk and Marianne Strengell, all of whom have work represented in the collection of the Montreal Museum of Decorative Arts. Greenbaum & Kirkham (2000) include Anni Albers and Claire Falkenstein. In contrast to the extended time during which an Arts and Crafts-like appearance seems to have been popular for jewellery in Australasia, some of the North American jewellers appear to have embraced the issues and look of modernism earlier, and produced work of a more experimental and 'modern' character; work more in tune with the contemporary art issues of their day. Edith Morris's work rarely invites visual comparisons with that of this group, but it does share evidence of an interest in global ethnic art traditions. Although one cannot know if Morris was aware of the work of her Australian or American contemporaries, perhaps this is a possibility in the case of a figure as internationally well known as, for example, Alexander Calder (1898–1976) (Adlin 2007).

The work

Influences

The prospectus of the Wellington Technical College's School of Art stated that 'when convenient visits are made to the Dominion Museum to study Natural History and Maori Art … Lectures on the History of Art are arranged from time to time' (Wellington Technical College 1886–1963). Morris's copy of *Silverwork and jewellery* by Wilson (1912) – a leading proponent of Arts and Crafts silverwork – had the following passage, from the Editor's Preface by W.R. Lethaby, marked by her: 'the best complement to workshop practice is to study the old work stored in our museums, without intention to copy specific types, but to gather ideas generally applicable. From this point of view, all ancient art is a vast encyclopaedia of methods and experience.'

Morris was an eager and eclectic reader, and became familiar with the art and design traditions of many cultures.

Fig. 2 Silver necklace made by Edith Morris (late 1950s). Otago Museum Collections F96.46 (photo: Scott Reeves).

Fig. 3 Silver earrings made by Edith Morris (1940s). Te Papa Collection GH012080.

Fig. 4 Silver earrings made by Edith Morris (1940s). Te Papa Collection GH012079.

Fig. 5 Ivory earrings with clip fittings made by Edith Morris (late 1940s). Otago Museum Collections F95.54 (photo: Scott Reeves).

Fig. 6 Pendant silver earrings with stars made by Edith Morris (1950s). Otago Museum Collections F95.23 (photo: Scott Reeves).

We can track some of these enthusiasms through her episodic correspondence with Charles Brasch[5] during the 1950s. She wrote to him in August 1954 that she was 'rather soaked in China at the moment with the room full of prune blossom & reading the White Pony & Monkey' (Morris to Brasch, 14 August 1954); later that year she returned his copy of '*Early C. I. art*'[6] with thanks and a reference to 'Ian Finlay's "Scottish Crafts"' (Morris to Brasch, 5 October 1954); and at another time reported 'reading Maria Dermoûts' "The Ten Thousand Things" which treats of many natural wonders of the East Indies' and described herself as having 'a love for all things Russian, maybe due to my early – youthful introduction to the Authentic Ballet' (Morris to Brasch, n.d.). That influences from these and other exotic traditions were sometimes incorporated into Morris's work is attested by the names or descriptions she gave to some pieces – for example, 'Indian armlet', 'Aztec silver necklace', 'Albanian spoon', 'Celtic Trefoil brooch', '"Round Mexican" earrings' and 'an inch wide bracelet – done with the traditional Greek galley pattern' (Morris to Brasch, 3 July 1954). The facial representations on a necklace in the Otago Museum (Fig. 2) show influences from Central and South America. This interest in the traditions of other ethnic groups is one she had in common with a number of international craftspeople working in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

Fig. 7 Silver bracelet with gilded detail made by Edith Morris (early 1950s). Otago Museum Collections F54.156 (photo: Lindsay McLeod).

Fig. 8 Silver earrings, set with turquoise (early 1950s; matching bracelet shown in Fig. 9). Otago Museum Collections F54.154-155 (photo: Lindsay McLeod).

Fig. 9 Silver bracelet, set with turquoise (early 1950s; matching earrings shown in Fig. 8). Otago Museum Collections F54.153 (photo: Scott Reeves).

Fig. 10 Matching silver brooch and bracelet made by Edith Morris (1940s). Private collection (photo: Scott Reeves).

On occasion, Morris also used New Zealand materials and subject matter. Nephrite, obsidian, Māori kōwhaiwhai-like design elements, a tuatara (or lizard), and native birds including kiwi, tūī and fantails all featured at times. The birds were used primarily – perhaps exclusively – to embellish the handles of sets of spoons.

In 1945, the arts columnist Joan Gillies said that Morris's work had 'such a feeling of life and vitality' (Gillies 1945) that one almost expected the creatures she depicted to start moving. It is a response that some people still have to seeing her work, and one that Morris herself would probably have valued. After an exercise in weighing her spoons, she wrote: 'I … shall not continue with the practice. I think absolute precision would take all the life out of my work' (Morris to Brasch, 3 July 1954). Tellingly, another marked passage in Wilson's *Silverwork and jewellery* (1912) reads: 'Design is,

Fig. 11 Silver necklace and matching earrings made by Edith Morris (1953–54). Private collection (photographer unknown).

Fig. 12 Silver necklace set with garnets (date unknown). Morris wrote about this piece to Charles Brasch (12 July 1954): 'The garnets are the bluish-red alamandine found in Ceylon, Burma and Brazil. These are supposed to have come from Burma and I do wish I could get more of them.' Otago Museum Collections F54.32 (photo: Lindsay McLeod).

in fact, a function of vitality. It is admirable in proportion to the amount and intensity of that vitality.'

More broadly, Morris's correspondence with Charles Brasch – although primarily focused on purchases or commissions of her work – contains substance of wider matter. From it we learn that prior to a trip to Auckland, Brasch had apparently offered her an introduction to staff at the art gallery – 'I wired Mr Westbrook for an appointment, but I did not see Mr. McCahon'[7] (Morris to Brasch, 18 December 1954); that she subscribed to *Landfall*[8] (Morris to Brasch, 16 October 1954); that she read *Parson's Packet*[9] (Morris to Brasch, 9 January 1955); that she had planned a return visit to England in the mid-1950s and a stay in Australia en route but did not, in the end, go (Morris to Brasch, 27 December 1955); and that she intended to 'read Burnets Early Greek Philosophy[10] very soon, & thank you for the suggestion. My reading in that direction has not gone far beyond the Socratic Dialogues (well worn & thumbed) & Matthew Arnold' (Morris to Brasch, 19 January 1959).

Output

Edith Morris made most of the standard forms of jewellery. Her rings – primarily for women but also, on occasion, for men – were almost always gem-set and tended to use coloured solitaires, although not precious stones. The increase in size and boldness of dress or cocktail rings in the years between the two world wars suited her own changing personal style.

Morris's earrings also fitted within the general parameters of styles worn mid-century. She frequently used commercial screw fittings and produced a number of pairs of the compact ear clips fashionable during the 1940s (Figs 3, 4, 5). Possibilities were expanded by the 1950s fashion for pendant earrings worn in the evening (Fig. 6). In 1956, Morris made at least one outré pair of earrings with pendant concentric circles for a young friend going to the School of Art at Ilam, Christchurch, which were considered gigantic at the time. They had a thin wire curving upwards from the

Fig. 13 Silver bow brooch made by Edith Morris (1940s). Private collection (photo: Scott Reeves).

Fig. 14 Silver tuatara brooch made by Edith Morris (date unknown). Private collection (photo: Scott Reeves).

Fig. 15 Silver winged horse brooch made by Edith Morris (date unknown). Private collection (photo: Scott Reeves).

Fig. 16 Diamond-shaped brooch set with New Zealand nephrite (date unknown). Otago Museum Collections F95.22 (photo: Scott Reeves).

Fig. 17 Reverse of silver Edith Morris brooch showing catch (date unknown). Private collection (photo: Scott Reeves).

back of the screw fitting that needed to be worn over the top of the ear as a safety catch (Karin Walker, pers. comm. 1994). Many of Morris's bracelets were rigid cuff forms (Fig. 7), while some were designed to be paired with other jewellery items (Figs 8, 9, 10).

Morris made pendants and necklaces, the latter sometimes as part of parure or demi-parure (Fig. 11). Styles varied, from pendant forms reminiscent of the Arts and Crafts aesthetic, to short, more streamlined necklaces of the style in vogue in the 1950s, suitable for wearing with fashionable afternoon dress or décolleté evening gowns (Triossi & Mascetti 1997). She seems to have used only a simple bar catch on these pieces (Fig. 12).

Her brooches ranged from traditional and relatively restrained forms (Fig. 13) to more naturalistic designs (Fig. 14). The brooch was the form in which she was most able to employ designs for creative figurative work (Fig. 15). Some pieces were set with stones (Fig. 16), but many others used metal only. As with her necklaces, the catches were of relatively simple construction (Fig. 17).

Spoons were an important part of Morris's output (Figs 18, 19) and she made a great variety: grapefruit spoons,

Fig. 18 Silver spoons made by Edith Morris (early 1950s). Otago Museum Collections F54.30-31 (photo: Lindsay McLeod).
Fig. 19 Silver spoon made by Edith Morris (early 1950s). Otago Museum Collections F54.151 (photo: Scott Reeves).

dessertspoons, coffee spoons, mustard spoons, salt spoons, jam spoons, a 'marmalade' spoon, a spoon for a christening gift, and even – an extended definition – a cake lift, although none of the examples in the Otago Museum collections is described by its purpose. Many spoons were described, presumably according to the decoration. These included New Zealand birds, sea horses, ship galleon, pansies, violets, peacocks, leaf, yacht, 'Pear', 'Squirrels', 'Daisy' and 'Scimitar'. Late in her career, Morris wrote: 'I have quite a large collection of spoons now, & I think I shall not be making any more, I find the heavy filing rather gruelling compared with jewellery. The Swedish cutlery is just about as expensive as mine & all the "grind" is done mechanically in mass production, & life is getting shorter!' (Morris to Brasch, 6 April 1959). Morris also made miscellaneous items such as paperweights, bookmarks, a large belt buckle with dagger 'fixer', a fork and hair-pins. On at least one occasion she made a pair of cuff-links (Morris to Brasch, 3 July 1954).

Techniques and materials

Edith Morris worked predominantly in silver, generally using soldered sections or lines of metal to delineate an image or build up a design. She also used silver-working techniques such as repoussé to produce relief effects in her designs (Fig. 20). The finish was usually a plain polished surface, but sometimes an artificially 'antiqued' finish was applied for contrast and emphasis. She used gold occasionally – typically for details or gilding (Fig. 21). She described herself as having a 'peculiar interest in metals' and noted the 'rather alchemistic nature' of her work (Morris to Brasch, 2 January 1959).

There are hints that on occasion Morris used the technical skills of ancillary workers to achieve particular effects. She wrote, for example, 'I am inspired to set my larger piece of jade in green gold, for which I have the recipe so as soon as Mr Gittos[11] returns from the Games he can get on & make it for me' (Morris to Brasch, 14 August 1954); and that the 'ring fittings will not be ready for several weeks as Mr Bul [?] is now very busy' (Morris to Brasch, 15 September 1954).

Semi-precious stones, often sizeable, featured in many of Morris's pieces. She used opals, topaz, jade, lapis lazuli, cornelian, turquoise, garnets, onyx, nephrite, agate, coral, obsidian, ivory, sapphires and – at least once as a commission – a pearl (Richard Skinner, pers. comm. 2007). The individual nature of the stones was at the heart of many of her pieces – an essentially Arts and Crafts concept – and inspired or drove the design. Indeed, she often identified individual pieces by a description of the stone.

A Mrs Caughley cut and/or polished many of the stones Morris set in her work, including New Zealand agate and 'some almost white N.Z. jade'.[12] When Mrs Caughley ceased work with semi-precious stones owing to difficulty of access in the mid-1950s, Morris bought up a supply of 'all she had that I liked' for use in the future, describing her action as 'thereby piling up years of work for myself' (Morris to Brasch, 18 December 1954). She told Brasch that she had 'learnt a lot about jade recently from a Mr. Yen who once worked in a jade mine' and, in 1959, that she had located a private collection of opals, which had then 'become very valuable for two reasons, & I am able to buy at below current market prices, which will, of course be to the advantage of my clients!' (Morris to Brasch, 21 April 1959).

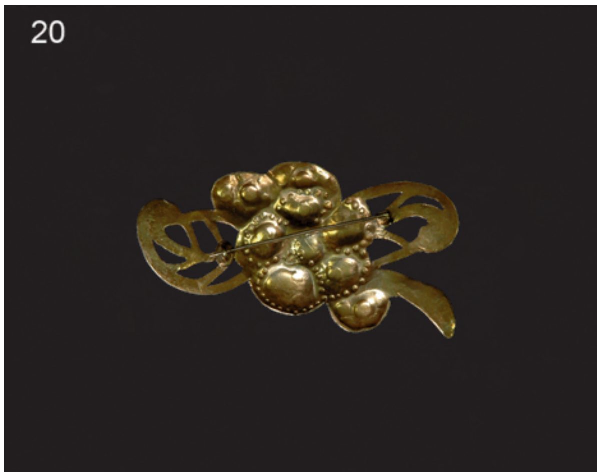

Fig. 20 Reverse of silver brooch made by Edith Morris showing relief shaping (date unknown). Private collection (photo: Scott Reeves).

Fig. 21 Loving cup with gilded interior made by Edith Morris (late 1950s). She wrote to Charles Brasch (8 December 1958): 'Unlike jewellery, there is no demand for loving cups'. Otago Museum Collections F2000.28 (photo: Lindsay McLeod).

Fig. 22 Silver ring made by Edith Morris, set with antique seal stone (early 1950s). Otago Museum Collections F54.150 (photo: Scott Reeves).

Fig. 23 Silver ring set made by Edith Morris, with antique Chinese carved jade (early 1950s). Otago Museum Collections F54.29 (photo: Scott Reeves).

An interest in astrology sometimes added meaning to Morris's use of gemstones. She nearly refused to make an engagement ring for a young friend because the chosen stone was a garnet, not the relevant birthstone – a diamond. When she made the couple's wedding rings, she decorated each with the symbol for their partner's astrological sign (Karin Walker, pers. comm. 1994). To Charles Brasch, a Leo, she wrote: 'for your own intimate wear – on a chain the stone should be a garnet – or better still a Ruby & – dare I say it? the metal GOLD. That is for the Positive-Fiery-Sun-Leo-Heart native' (Morris to Brasch, June 1964).

Another facet of Morris's work is the recycling of older elements. She restrung antique Venetian glass beads with contemporary gold nugget beads of her own making in a necklace; set an antique seal stone in one ring (Fig. 22); and set an old piece of carved Chinese jade acquired in Wellington in another (Fig. 23). About this last stone, she wrote to Brasch (14 August 1954):

> Sorry I can say no more of the jade than that it came from China & is old. After combing Chinatown last week & being told by all that there is no more good jade to be had, I remembered a man who offered me two pieces about five

> years ago, but I could not afford to buy them. I popped into his office & he too, told me he can get no more, but added, with a cheerful grin – 'Those two pieces are still waiting for you – I knew they were for you.' Wasn't that wonderful. Still wrapped in their old bit of magenta silk too.

Display and marketing

Edith Morris exhibited her work as well as selling directly to clients. She was a regular contributor to the annual exhibitions of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts[13] from 1937 until 1955. In that first year – its 49th Annual Exhibition – she exhibited a German silver teapot stand, a spoon, a vine-pattern serviette ring and a silver wire ring (Kay & Eden, 1983). Jewellery by Edith Morris and Eileen Rose, displayed in the craft exhibition staged by the New Zealand Academy of Fine Art in August 1950, was described as a highlight by a reviewer (Mallet 1950). Four years later, Morris wrote: 'I do not need the spoon. I have made another & some coffee spoons to match which have all gone into the Arts & Crafts exhibition for next month' (Morris to Brasch, 27 July 1954). On the subject of display furniture for her work, she wrote: 'you may like to know that I can have a few things specially made. This man could make a rigid velvet covered tray to fit your showcase. For the ring I suggest a 2" square velvet base with a fitting in the centre … or a real leather case to fit could be made' (Morris to Brasch, 2 August 1954).

Nor did Morris's interest diminish after pieces left her care. 'I have been thinking too, about the upkeep. I think a rub-up with a leather about once a month would do. Or I will enquire from the Melbourne Museum how they manage their silver collection' (Morris to Brasch, 27 July 1954). Later, she wrote: 'When talking to Mr. Gathercole[14] about cleaning the silver, I wish I had mentioned that it would be a good thing not to touch the turquoise necklace & earrings. If no one disagrees & you think the request in order, may I ask you to mention it to him?' (Morris to Brasch, 8 December 1958).

A sign advertising Morris's work (shown to the author in the 1990s) read 'Handwrought Silver, Art Jewellery, Greenstone and Semi-Precious Stones', but its date and the context in which it was displayed are unknown. She built up a list of personal contacts to whom she sold work (Pat O'Brien, pers. comm. 1995), including Wellington-based members of the diplomatic community. She wrote to Charles Brasch (27 December 1955): 'really I have made a few things lately that have pleased me very much. They have all gone overseas, except one piece which will go eventually to Canada. It irks horribly at times that I have to stay static & almost rigid while my work has all the fun of travel.' And: 'I am so glad you are going to have the garnet necklace & that it will stay in N.Z. It could have gone to Paris last week – but it seemed so nearly yours that the jet one went instead' (Morris to Brasch, 23 July 1954). It seems that she did not sell through an agent or other third party and, from a comment to Charles Brasch, it appears that clients travelled to her home to purchase: 'No, there has been little urgency about my work lately. Plenty of appreciation – & there the matter ends! That state – I am told is pretty general, and too, I am rather off the beaten track over here' (Morris to Brasch, 23 August 1956).

A photograph of a 'handwrought' silver and cornelian necklace by Edith Morris was published on the same page of the 1950 *Arts year book* as one of a handwoven dinner mats and napkins by R.R. Laszkiewicz from Helen Hitchings' gallery in Wellington (Lee-Johnson 1950); the loose page of that book was found among Helen Hitchings' files. Given Charles Brasch's interest in the work of both Morris and Hitchings, and that they both had a market among members of Wellington's diplomatic community (Vial 2008), it seems hard to imagine that they were not known to one another. This is, however, only conjecture and there is no record of Morris selling work through that gallery (Jane Vial, pers. comm. 2008).

Edith Morris's hallmark was a feathered arrow enclosed in an oval (Figs 17, 24); further than that she chose to add nothing else: 'I would rather not put my initials on them, but could have plain ones engraved on the back. But, like you, I now prefer none at all' (Morris to Brasch, 6 April 1959).

Prices

Although on occasion Morris set the prices for her work, taking into account her assessment of the client's character and appreciation of her craft (Pat O'Brien, pers. comm. 1995), in general it was priced appropriately for an artist working with valuable materials. On one occasion, she wrote to Brasch (12 July 1954): 'With reference to the prices I will borrow from Denis Glover and say that I am open to "an agreeable exchange of courtesies over the fee" as everything was left "unspecified".' In the same letter she replied to a question from him: 'I cannot say how much a bowl would be. It would be according to size and decoration – if any.' On other occasions she was more specific: 'I am quite happy for you to have the twist spoon … What a collection you will

have or do you give them away. I hope you think £8 for any of them is not too much?' (Morris to Brasch, 5 March 1959). 'In the light of your reference to the price of the cup I have gone into it more carefully. So if you will make it 55 guineas – thanks very much' (Morris to Brasch, 2 January 1959). 'These spoons are £2.10.0 each up to ½ doz – but with most plain patterns – the larger quantity enables me to manipulate the silver more economically (like a dress maker) and I charge accordingly' (Morris to Brasch, between 27 July 1954 and 2 August 1954). Speaking of a particular opal, she wrote: 'One large piece, blue & green … is really a museum piece. I have not yet bought it, as mounted it would cost approx: £150–175 & I am, shall I say taking a few soundings!' (Morris to Brasch, 21 April 1959).

In general, it would seem that Morris's work occupied a similar place in the market to that of work sold through such contemporary New Zealand craft-dealer galleries as Fingers, Avid or Fluxus,[15] and for similar reasons. The prices for her work reflected her professional identity, time, unique designs and the intrinsic value of the materials used.

Legacy

Edith Morris had a great impact on former Wellington jeweller (now author) Jenny Pattrick, OBE, who never met Morris but became familiar with her work when she had a stall at New Zealand's first craft market, the Victoria Market in Wellington. Customers brought pieces of Edith Morris's jewellery to her to be fixed (Jenny Pattrick, pers. comm. 2008). However, the way of the future was perhaps more influenced by jewellers such as Danish-born Jens Hansen (who established what was to become a very influential business in Nelson in 1968 (Shepherd 1995: 170)), and Swiss-born and trained Kobi Bosshard (who moved to New Zealand in 1966), both of whom evidenced a more European modernist approach to jewellery practice.

Conclusions

Edith Morris was an important jewellery designer and silversmith, and one of a relatively small number of women who earned a living as a practising craftsperson in New Zealand during the middle decades of the twentieth century. The general context for her opportunities for training, business style and audience seems to have its roots in the Arts and Crafts tradition, and there are many parallels internationally. In a number of respects, her situation in New Zealand mirrors the experience of women jewellers working in other countries in the first half of the twentieth century.

Morris was educated through a course at an institution where at least some members of the staff were well versed in the Arts and Crafts philosophy. She was essentially middle class, worked from her home and sold to an artistically aware clientele. In a number of aspects, her work and work style seem to reflect Arts and Crafts movement concerns rather than those more closely associated with the decades in which she was working, such as art deco and modernism. She could be described as part of the trend that looked at 'reviving and reworking earlier design traditions, particularly those of "preindustrial" societies' (Greenbaum & Kirkham 2000: 210). Despite her apparent use of skilled labour on occasion for specific tasks, Morris followed the Arts and Crafts movement's argument for the inseparability of design and execution. She was self-employed, maintained an independent workshop, and identified herself as a designer as well as a silversmith. However, she does not seem to have felt driven to attempt limited production runs of her designs, although she may have experienced frustration at the lack of public education about the cost of handmade work.

Although Morris did undertake some work on commission – particularly setting individual stones already in a client's possession – most of her work was made to suit her own style and ideas, and it accumulated in what she described as her 'collection' until the right purchaser was found. It could be argued that she fits Dormer's (1990: 142) description of the 'thoroughly 20th century invention [of] … the middle-class artist or designer craftsperson, sometimes called the studio craftsperson … [where] the starting point is with the creative fulfilment and self expression of the individual craftsperson who works first to his or her designs, not those of the client or an overseeing artist or designer'.

Morris was not rebelling against the conventions of jewellery. Although she used little gold and few precious stones, her materials were not novel. She did not reject the use of traditional materials or incorporate plastics or other examples of new technologies, as did the young artist jewellers of the 1960s and 1970s. Nor did she disregard functionality. Her work was designed to have a traditional relationship to the human body and its clothing. Its structure, volume and scale worked within that defining space, although she seems occasionally to have played with ideas of movement and sensuality in pieces destined to go outside her regular clientele.

Fig. 24 Introductory panel for the 1994 Edith Morris retrospective exhibition at the Otago Museum.

Jewellery is traditionally a symbol of power, wealth and sexuality, and the style of jewellery one wears implies alliance with certain social conventions. What did a person wearing a piece of Edith Morris's jewellery want to say to the world or have the world think about them? Morris did not, as Osborn (1982: 9) framed her question for jewellery-makers, debate the 'idea that jewellery has to make you more pleasing'. Nor does she seem to have expected that her clients would ignore the question 'Does it suit me?' (Osborn 1982), and use her work to show social or political allegiances. Despite her allusions to New Zealand indigenous fauna and occasional use of New Zealand materials, her work was not really concerned with cultural identity. Her designs were, however, unique. Many jewellers make work to establish their identity as creative persons, and Edith Morris's eclectic output was essentially about individuality – her own and the wearer's.

Morris's work received a certain amount of critical notice in her lifetime (Gillies 1945; Wadman 1945: 99; Lee-Johnson 1950: 38; Mallet 1950), but there was relatively little written about craft in mid-twentieth-century New Zealand, and what there was emphasised ceramics and weaving. There was perhaps something approaching the nature of patronage from the influential figure of Charles Brasch,[16] who purchased work for himself and his family, friends and the Otago Museum. However, when the role and visible presence of contemporary studio jewellers and outlets developed in New Zealand in the 1970s, as they did overseas, Edith Morris was rarely cited by any of that younger generation as an influence. In fact, her work seemed to have been largely forgotten except by those who knew her and/or owned examples. Perhaps this was in part because she worked in Wellington while the first centres of the jewellery revival were Auckland, Nelson and Dunedin. More likely, however, is the fact that she did not teach. Towards the end of her life, she wrote to Charles Brasch (27 May 1960): 'Yes, I have added to my collection this year & still a few pieces planned to do before the end of the year, when I really must stop & consider how to dispose of it all. The demand here seems to be lessening rather than increasing so my thoughts are again directed towards Home.'

Edith Morris died aged 70 in Wellington Hospital on 28 December 1965 (Anonymous 1966; White 2000), and was buried at Makara. A retrospective exhibition, 'Edith Morris, Silversmith' (Fig. 24), was held at the Otago Museum in 1994 (Anonymous 1994).

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Notes

1 Born in Australia, Nelson Isaac (1893–1972) was an arts and crafts student at Wellington Technical College before taking up a teaching role at the Dunedin School of Art in 1913. After the First World War he became an Associate of the Royal College of Art (ARCA), London, and he was appointed head of the Wellington Technical College Art School in 1925. He specialised in jewellery, enamelling and metalwork (Shepherd 1995: 172). Through his teaching he popularised the Arts and Crafts style in New Zealand.

2 Born in England, Roland Hipkins (1895–1951) moved to New Zealand in 1922, settling first in Napier before transferring to Wellington in 1930 (Tomory 1956).

3 Lipscombe, ARCA, taught at the Southland Technical College before taking the Wellington position in 1931 (Calhoun 2000).

4 Vincent Ellis (1892–1961) was born in England but moved to New Zealand in 1922 for health reasons. He taught evening classes in life drawing and design at the Wellington Technical College School of Art from 1927 to 1930, when he became a full-time tutor. From 1939 until his retirement in 1959, he was Head of Department.

5 Charles Brasch (1909–73) was a Dunedin-based poet,

literary editor and arts patron. All correspondence quoted here between Edith Morris and Charles Brasch is held in the Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, MS-0996-003.

6 This seems likely to be a reference to *Early Christian Irish art*, by Francoise Henry, published in 1954, a copy of which is in the Brasch Collection at the University of Otago Library.

7 The Auckland Art Gallery Director Eric Westbrook (1915–2005) and New Zealand artist Colin McCahon (1919–87), who himself made some jewellery in the early 1950s.

8 A New Zealand literary magazine, of which Charles Brasch was the founding editor.

9 A small periodical of extracts, reviews and comment produced for New Zealand readers (with contributions from local writers), posted from Wellington by Roy Parsons (1901–91) between 1947 and 1955 (Williams 2000).

10 Probably *Early Greek philosophy* by John Burnet. A fourth edition, published 1930 by A&C Black, London, is in the Brasch Collection at the University of Otago Library.

11 Possibly Austin Gittos, a member of the New Zealand fencing team at the 1954 British Empire and Commonwealth Games in Vancouver.

12 Probably the inanga variety of pounamu.

13 The New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts was founded in 1889, having taken over the property and effects of the Fine Arts Society, which began in 1882. During Edith Morris's career from 1936, when the academy was granted accommodation within the then National Art Gallery, it conducted two major exhibitions of New Zealand art a year – in spring and autumn – and staged crafts exhibitions from time to time (Te Ara 2007).

14 Peter Gathercole succeeded H.D. Skinner as the anthropologist at the Otago Museum from 1960 to 1962.

15 Fingers is an Auckland-based gallery, established in 1974. It has consistently showcased this country's developing contemporary jewellery scene: 48 New Zealand makers are currently represented. Fluxus was established in Dunedin by Kobi Bosshard and Stephen Mulqueen in 1983, and included both workshop and display space. Later partners included Lynn Kelly and Georg Beer. It sold work from many contemporary New Zealand jewellers. Avid is a Wellington gallery, established in 1992. It presents pieces made by many of New Zealand's leading ceramic and glass artists, as well as jewellers.

16 In this context, it is interesting to note that Brasch was a member of the Visual Arts Association, formed in 1952 'to promote the appreciation of the visual arts'.

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