



Simona Chytil, *Shield Ring Series*, 1999, sterling silver, 18ct gold, monel, 30 x 14mm, 28 x 13mm, 27 x 12mm, 25 x 12.5mm. Photo: Babette Griep.



Simona Chytil, *Pod Ring*, 1996, sterling silver, 23mm diameter. Photo: Babette Griep.

## Tension and allure

**TATIANA PENTES** REPORTS ON A TRAINING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN **MARION MARSHALL** AND **SIMONA CHYTIL**, FOCUSING ON THE LATTER'S 'BODY CAVITY' IMBUED JEWELLERY

CZECH BORN CONTEMPORARY JEWELLER SIMONA CHYTIL'S DESIGNS HAVE ALL THE ALLURE AND INGENUITY OF A VENUS-FLY-TRAP. Inspired by the organic world and its forms and influenced by natural found objects: seedpods, feathers and bones, Chytil's jewellery entices one below the surface of reality into inner and outer spaces. New horizons are expanding in the miniature worlds of RMIT graduate Chytil, who was awarded a 'mentorship' by Object Studios (in metal & jewellery, from 19 July to 19 October 1999).

Chytil successfully enticed experienced and trusted professional jeweller Marion Marshall to be her

mentor. Marshall contributes over 22 years' experience as a gold and silversmith to the program, with academic and commercial expertise directing Melbourne based Marion Marshall Studios. In addition, she shares her previous encounters as mentor to a number of emerging jewellers and metalsmiths, and her substantial experience and reputation as an international exhibiting artist.

The Mentorship Program, initiated and funded through the Visual Arts/Craft Fund of the Australia Council, has been established for the past 15 years. This three-month program has opened up a dialogue between makers and their mentors in a



Simona Chytil, *Pod Ring Series*, 1996, sterling silver. Photo: Babette Griep.

Marion Marshall,  
*Mother Daughter ring*,  
silver, ivory, amber,  
mother of pearl,  
(moving details under  
watch glass).



supportive environment where discussion on all matters takes place, such as advice on appropriate methods of production. Mentor (Marshall) and maker (Chytil) are working together to isolate areas of potential technical concern and initiating problem solving techniques to increase productivity in new lines of work. Areas of concern have involved identifying the appropriateness of a particular design to a targeted marketplace, and Chytil's ability to achieve the highest quality of workmanship consistent with equivalent lines of precious jewellery in the marketplace. Marshall believes that funding these kinds of apprenticeship relationships not only creates a space for research and reflection, as in the case of Chytil's practice, but indeed, within this context, mentor can guide maker in a specific technical sense.

Chytil has used this dialogue to discuss with Marshall the viability of the new designs in her production range, and to discuss marketing and promotional strategies within the framework of tight budgetary constraints. In many ways this program is the incubator of small business in that the outcomes are both new ranges of work and the consolidation of Chytil's business practice. Through the Mentorship program Chytil is supported to achieve both creative and economic viability as a practising artist. Marshall has provided advice on small business procedures, good book-keeping habits, record keeping, realistic costing of work, advice regarding shop and gallery consignment agreements and other ways of generating income.

The Mentorship residency is housed in the new Object Studios, Pyrmont, Sydney. The Studios' Manager, Gráinne Brunson—in a curatorial statement for the

exhibition of *Incubation* (recent Studios' works) at Object galleries at Sydney's Customs House—writes that "the Studios were established to create opportunities for the professional development of contemporary jewellers. The studios, built in a group of five heritage cottages in Pyrmont, were renovated by the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority in 1998 and are managed by Object". She goes on to reflect that the exhibitors, all of whom have participated in residencies at Object Studios, "have either undertaken, or are presently involved in their own incubation process. Although the journey is a highly personal one and various outcomes absolutely individual, many of the concerns are common. Notions of vulnerability and the need for security and direction are tempered with excitement of discovery, the enthusiasm for new work and the joy of finding new audiences. Time spent at the studios is given to introspection, consolidation and the development of ideas, dreams and networks. It is always highly charged, frequently emotional, generally contemplative and full of surprises".

It is from within this highly nurturing culture of the workshops that Simona Chytil's Mentorship residency has been taking place. In the first month (July – August), Chytil has worked on an *Ellipse*, *Shield* and *Leaf* production range. It is precisely these themes of vulnerability, the need for protection and direction, outlined by Brunson, that are finding material and aesthetic form in Chytil's emerging production range. This enticing production range is fabricated in sterling silver, monel, and subtly employs 18ct yellow gold. Initially, one is struck by the exquisite and cruel beauty of these forms. The smooth surface of one line of rings appears cool, calm and elegant. In contrast to her

series of rings are small containers or pods with apertures through which a tangle of thorns is visible. Chytil, discussing her artistic intentions talks about her interest in "enticement", particularly in the organic world. She writes in a student sketchbook "Enticement... the lure of beauty, the power of seduction, hidden dangers... (in) plants in general... ways of luring insects in order for pollination to occur—carnivorous plants use of colour/scent, nectar to lure their prey... visually lure the viewer... to present beautiful/appealing forms, then to lure the viewer within/into the work... an interplay between the inner and outer spaces. I like the ambiguity of (the) thorns. Used naturally by plants to protect themselves, they are now semi-enclosed and protected themselves. I also like playing with notions of real and perceived space, of the work not divulging all its secrets at once. Through the aperture there is an invitation to explore further".

In many ways these forms are as much a kind of writing of the self as they are wearable art. They are highly crafted objects rendered with expertise, microcosmic sculptures for adornment. The ritualised adornment of the body is at once a making and unmaking of the modern self, psychologically and visceral, and in this sense a mode of autobiography. The contemporary jewellery of Simona Chytil is informed simultaneously by the personal and the social, visualised from inner microcosmic and the outer macrocosmic forms. The question of the influence of her origins upon her artistic creations is an interesting one. Born to émigré Czechoslovakian parents—her mother a dentist and father a metallurgist—her work is imbued with orifice/cavity metaphors that, combined with the thorn motif, create a particular tension within pieces.

The minimalism of the *Ellipse*, *Shield* and *Leaf* appears deceptively simple. With the forms seemingly floating above the hand the rings are a powerful statement when worn (on the hand) with nothing else. The calm surfaces of this range of rings are divided into two halves of gold and silver contrasting metals and others have segments inserted. A range of earrings complements these rings. Marshall has advised Chytil to 'play' with her wax casts—the master rings from which a mould is taken, therefore enabling multiple castings—of this adult range, and to develop a strong graphic element for a younger client. Chytil states that "...working with the waxes is a faster, more economical way of 'seeing' one's designs in a 3D form. Having previously worked on either single commissions or small limited series, it has been extremely useful to discuss with Marion important features of a production range".

Marshall is enthusiastic about her role as mentor. "I love teaching, imparting knowledge. I enjoy helping (to) direct emerging jewellers. In the relationship one can find friendship and the excitement in seeing someone launching



Simona Chytil at Object studios, 1999.

oneself". Marshall has already participated in three mentorship programs; with jewellers Miyuki Nakahara, Lindy Scarce, and Sarah Begbie. Chytil, working from the Object Studios at the western fringe of Sydney city, commutes to Melbourne for weekend mentor sessions. Marshall laughs, "Chytil has been incredibly infectious in my workshop. Everyone in the workshop is affected by what Simona is making... I find it to be a very reciprocal relationship". So far as this having been a mutually beneficial relationship, Chytil agrees, admiring Marion Marshall as a gold and silversmith for the honesty of her designs, her technical ability and willingness to share her skills and expertise both in jewellery and in her professional practise.

Chytil's plans to consolidate her mentorship with an *engagement and wedding ring* range and a *cast sterling silver* range. The betrothal ring range has a symbolic function that mimics the formal attributes suggested by her container and pod series. These are indeed a more abstract manifestation, a symbolic token, for similar preoccupations with security and protection metaphors. Gold and semi-precious stones will be incorporated into these designs, precious stones and metals that speak of longing, envy, privilege and commitment. The *cast sterling silver* range is aimed at a younger adult market and, acknowledging Marshall's advice, the emphasis is on a more playful approach, with a strong graphic element. Throughout this process Marion Marshall will continue to give guidance to Chytil particularly in things commercial and technical.

Simona Chytil's jewellery reflects her belief that jewellery can be innovative and contemporary, yet be comfortable and wearable.

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