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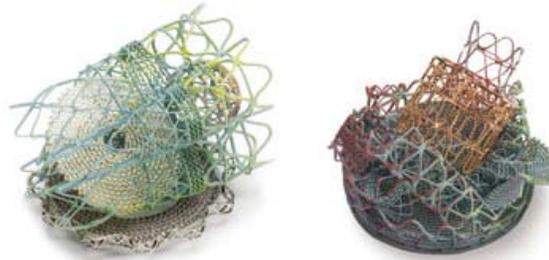


Robert Baines: Living Treasure

Posted: 28 Mar 2011 | By: [John McPhee](#)

Robert Baines, teacher, historian, jeweller and metalsmith extraordinaire, never ceases to astound. From the first time I saw his work in the 1970s it looked different from most contemporary Australian jewellery.

The 1975 necklace *The Book* made extravagant use of gold, silver, titanium and a cabochon ruby, in what at first appeared to be a modern equivalent of a nineteenth-century chatelaine but opened to reveal some of the earliest of Baines' highly personal iconography. Since then, over decades and through several series of works, Baines has refined his individual style to create some of the most idiosyncratic and exciting examples of the art of the modern jeweller and metalsmith. There are few who can compare with him. Being named as a Living Treasure and Master of Australian Craft is justly deserved. The book that documents his life and work is an excellent record.



In his exhibition, which goes on tour throughout 2011 and into 2013, there are three groups of works, *The Official History of the Compact Disc: The BC and the AD of the CD*, *Armbandits: How an 11th century Islamic armlet became an 'Iced Vovo'*, and *Collecting: An archaeology of the smallest collection of large jewellery in the world*. Evidence of the history and development of Baines' career and of his work can be seen in these recent works. They show him to be a master at the height of his powers, although I would never be surprised at what might happen next.

Throughout his career, Baines has been fascinated by antique jewellery - especially the gold of ancient Greece and Europe. Nineteenth-century jewellery inspired by, and imitating, Etruscan gold, such as that made by the famous Italian Pio Castellani, has also played a significant part in Baines' research into the past and the lost technology of ancient jewellery. He is regarded as one of the world's leading scholars in archaeo-metallurgy and the gold work of the Bronze Age. His knowledge, understanding of ancient techniques and skill as a contemporary metalsmith are all evident in this exhibition. So is his wit and humour.

While a master of working with gold and silver, from his earliest days Baines took pleasure in making use of the newest materials, such as titanium. Non-precious materials have never scared him and he has regularly made use of plastic and glass. In works from the 1994-95 series *The Entropy of Red*, such as *Crown*, silver-gilt was mixed with plastic and glass; in *Trumpet*, silver was painted with automotive lacquer: a virtuoso object in a precious material painted in 'lucky' look-at-me red and looking like a toy. The most recent jewellery incorporates found objects, including

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old keys, plastic reflectors and model cars, and CD discs. All materials are used with respect and a deep knowledge of the history of their use, while simultaneously poking fun at our reverence for the past. There are few contemporary Australian metalsmiths more worthy of being considered a Living Treasure and a Master of Australian Craft.

Image: Robert Baines, *Hey True Blue - Brooches*, 2010, silver, powdercoat, electroplate, paint, (left) 7.6 x 8.6 x 6.5 cm (right) 9.3 x 9.6 x 7 cm. Photograph Jeremy Dillon.

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 **Robert Baines** 1 month ago

Thanks John. I just noticed this review. I really appreciate you taking the time and considering the work with such care.
Best regards, Robert

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