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## Career:

# The work of Robert Baines

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Robert Baines is one of Australia's foremost artist goldsmiths and a researcher of archaeometallurgy and Bronze Age gold works. With a career spanning more than 30 years his work is based around the historical context of jewellery; often referencing the notions of the fake, the phony, the copy that have been part of jewellery making and collecting throughout the ages.

Baines creates jewellery and large, complex wire works often combining precious metals of gold and silver with plastic and powder coated elements. These works frequently reference archaeology and draw on abstract forms and ideas.

Originally trained in gold and silversmithing at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (now RMIT University) during the 1960's, Baines has excelled as both an academic and maker. In the late 70's, Baines studied Greek and Etruscan goldwork in major European and American collections, courtesy of a Winston Churchill Fellowship, and has run the Gold and Silversmithing postgraduate program at RMIT University since 1999. His work has been exhibited widely, and is collected within many major national and international collections.

In this exhibition Baines places the object in a state of limbo whereby the date of its making, and its authenticity, are questionable.

Nothing is quite what it might initially seem to the viewer.



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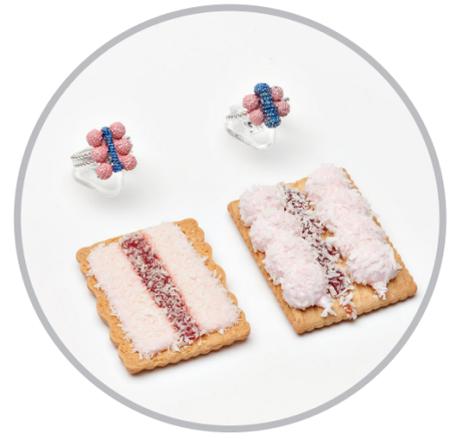
## Collecting:

# An archaeology of the smallest collection of large jewellery in the world

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Reputation for luxury living by Etruscans is identified through the furnishings found in tombs of the first millennium BC. Tomb furnishings were designed for the daily use of private individuals. Rich and powerful, with aristocratic sophisticated taste, these individuals commissioned splendid gold, silver, and amber jewellery, luxurious silver or bronze plate, and magnificently decorated vases. In the Etruscan Regolini-Galassi tomb of the 7th Century BC was found a gold fibula (clasp, brooch) as large as a torso.

Historically people have collected sumptuous goods while others have focused on the banal. On viewing private collections there is a tendency for idiosyncratic and sometimes quirky preferences, while public collections appear more considered and a result of scholarship. The link between collectors and their memories materialises in things quite unexpected and often eccentric. The dominant force in most markets is the prosperous middle -aged man or woman attempting to acquire the dreams of their youth.



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## Armbandits:

# How an 11th Century Islamic armlet became an 'Iced Vovo'

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The mistakes that fakers make abound and the first mistake is not having access to the original from which the copy is to be made. How have copiers through the ages been disadvantaged by relying on a pictorial image which has been lithographed, faxed or even photographed, devoid of measurement, scale and material description?

This group of artefacts commences with a postcard purchased from the bookshop of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It is of a beautiful 11th Century Islamic gold armlet. The postcard appears to be the primary reference for a copy made by the Goldsmith; but it seems that the copier did not have access to the back of the postcard which discloses the measurements.

Further interpretations of designs follow and we see new histories evolve where an Islamic armlet becomes an armband, bracelets, rings, hair clip and buttons.

Perhaps the design of the marshmallow biscuit was the result of a series of misinterpretations of an 11th Century armlet?



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## The Official History of the Compact Disc: The BC and the AD of the CD

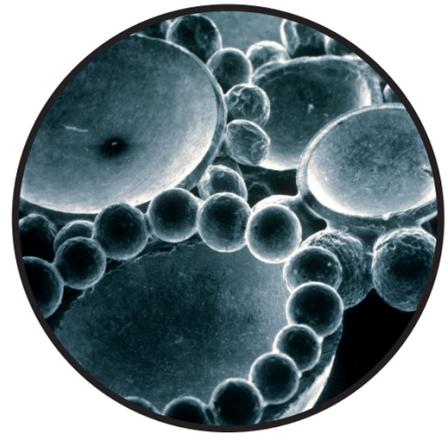
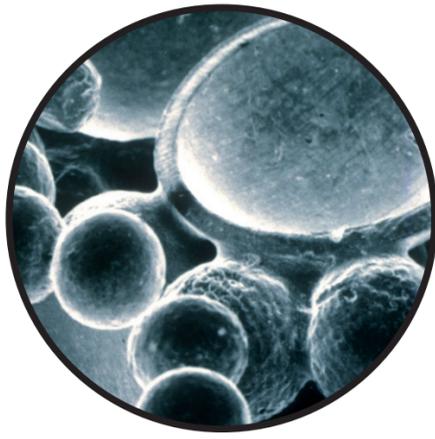
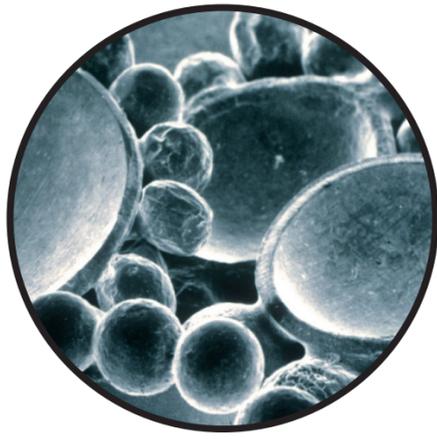
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The modern compact disc (CD), with which we are all familiar, has an unexpected history and the following examples track the historical features and locations for CDs.

The earliest CD in this exhibition is a 7th Century BC Etruscan disc said to be from Marsiliana D'Albegna. This disc, consisting of complex wire and granulation configurations, is made from Electrum (a silver and gold alloy). Other small discs are gold sheet appliqué with granulation and enamel. There is also a complex Greek gold disc with granulation and part of a Coke can, said to be from Madytos in the 3rd Century BC. Later examples of CDs are 11th Century Islamic jewellery with typical wire and granulation systems.

Moving on to AD, also known as CE (Common Era), granulation was unknown to the 15th Century goldsmiths who used delicate decorative work. Distinctly different forms were developed showing classical influence; in particular the sculptural quality of classical decorative motifs such as nymphs, satyrs and putti. Birds, baskets of fruit and possibly giraffes, dogs, unicorns, lions, koalas and bandicoots are motifs discovered in these fictitious 16th Century Flemish brooches.

The revisiting of earlier antiquities is identifiable in the 19th Century gold Archaeological Revival CDs. A striking red disc, *Oz Brooch*, sits alongside other more recent examples of CDs including *Meaner than Yellow* (2008) and *Hey True Blue*, influenced by the line from the John Williamson song, "Are you really disappearing, Just another dying race, Hey True Blue".



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## Granulation:

### A lost goldsmithing technique rediscovered

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Baines was still completing his undergraduate studies when he became interested in the technique of Granulation, in which small to minute balls or 'grains' of precious metal are fused to precious metal sheet to texturally enrich objects, and sometimes also to conceal joins. Although practised in many ancient metalworking cultures worldwide, granulation reached its culmination in the work of the mysterious Etruscan goldsmiths, who produced work of astonishing sophistication between the 8th and 5th Centuries BC. In these objects the tiny gold grains were used to form both abstract and figurative patterns as well as following structural lines.

The grains of gold/silver/copper alloy are formed by cutting small pieces of the precious wire, and then heating them in charcoal dust until they melt into fine round balls. Baines then positions and solders these to the flat surface using powdered solder, similar to the 19th Century copiers. This is a difficult process because the flame has to be hot enough to fuse the gold ball to the surface, but not so much as to melt the ball into a puddle. Baines has mastered this technique to the point where he is one of the leading experts in this field.