

The Teapot Project

Australian Design Centre, Sydney
11 April – 5 June 2019



Hendrik Forster

Kenny Yong-soo Son

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Lisa Cahill

*CEO and Artistic Director
Australian Design Centre*

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Oliver Smith

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Sydney College of the Arts
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Welcome

Lisa Cahill

CEO and Artistic Director
Australian Design Centre



No. 3 Teapot
Linished 24 ct. gold
plating with clear
acrylic handles

The Teapot Project encapsulates what Australian Design Centre is about – a collision of craft and design; and the innovation and industry that is created when collaboration is central to the process.

This partnership between Hendrik Forster, Kenny Son and their collaborators fuses craftsmanship, engineering, ingenuity and creativity creating a ubiquitous domestic item that is at once functional, beautiful and completely unique.

When Kenny first introduced the project, I was struck by the opportunity that it presents to give our audiences a deep understanding of design process. Hendrik Forster is a master gold and silversmith and in combination with Kenny Son's skills and a shared design philosophy to make objects that elevate the everyday they uncover fabrication capabilities that we still have in abundance in this country – who said manufacture was dead!

Tea is universal yet there are specific cultural interests that both Hendrik and Kenny from their respective German and Korean backgrounds bring to their work that add further depth and flavour to the story. In production drawings, prototypes, documentation of process and the final objects, we hope to deepen people's understanding of the power of good design through this exhibition.

What a collaboration! However did two independent metalsmiths from such different cultural and generational backgrounds come together to agree on a shared design for a teapot – and then produce over 30 different variations in finish and appearance?

Hendrik Forster (b.1947) was born in Germany and trained in Munich, and has worked in Australia since migrating in 1974. He has developed his own distinctive style and working practice and has established an identity and reputation as one of Australia's most significant gold and silversmiths, and who has undertaken some outstanding commissions. Kenny Yong-soo Son (b.1987) was born in South Korea and migrated to Australia in 1996. He studied metalsmithing and design in Sydney and has already established a reputation for the quality of his work, mainly making desk tools, with some significant exhibitions and projects behind him.



Linking the two is maker and tutor Oliver Smith who, after his own training in Sydney and Canberra, undertook a crucial internship with Forster, and later taught Son in Sydney. In turn, this experience was followed up by Son through a valuable mentorship with Korean master, Sung-joon Cho. When Forster enquired of Smith if he knew someone who could use some old tools, Smith recommended Son, who travelled to rural Victoria to see him. One thing led to another and they realised they shared many values: a pleasure in working with metals; a compatible visual aesthetic; interest in the interplay between the traditional and modern; a commitment to balancing and integrating handcrafts with industry; and valuing the use of new technologies alongside older traditions.

So it evolved that two people who represented different cultures with long and highly-regarded metalworking histories, each with rigorous cross-cultural training and experiences, decided they would like to work together on a shared project. They eventually agreed on a teapot form because it had a cultural history in both East and West, was the right scale for both to work on and where they could share aesthetic choices as well as necessary technical work. As Forster had said earlier: 'For me the essence ... lies not in the pursuit of technical perfection or worse still, in the pursuit of technology. It lies in the synthesis of the technical and the artistic.'¹ Son had come to a similar conclusion, being interested in 'producing work that has the ability to interact with

the user and its surroundings, allowing a trigger of emotions and senses...'.²

From early 2016, they spent several extended sessions working together in Victoria, as well as one occasion in Canberra where Forster joined Son during a residency there. They brought together their knowledge of materials and processes as well as understandings of tea-drinking customs to discuss design options, before making cardboard models and metal prototypes. Both agreeing on the value of collaboration with local industry, they contracted out the initial CNC laser-cutting and routing of brass sheets into 'flat-pack' shapes before assembling them by hand into each nine-sided vessel. A range of different coloured metallic surfaces was then also applied through plating and polishing by an outsourced specialist industry, while variations across the teapot range include handles and knobs in different acrylics and timbers. The overall result is not only spectacular to see as an installation, but also represents a very successful shared bringing together of past and present ideas and practices to the making of vessels which also offer potential for personal physical engagement through the continuing custom of making tea.

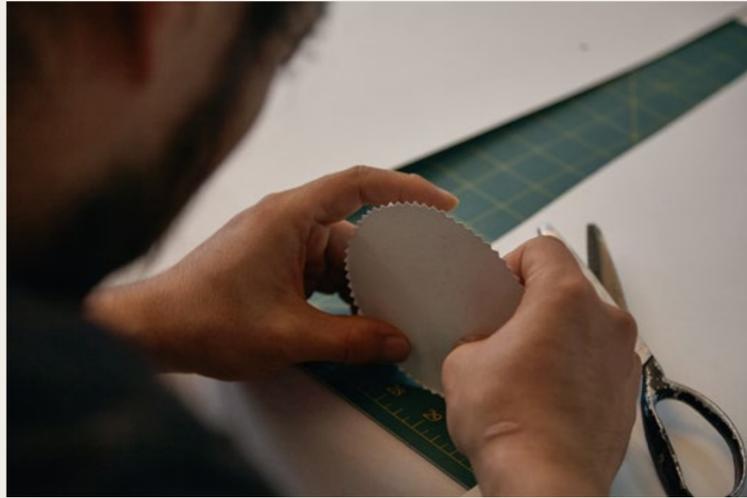
¹ Hendrik Forster, paper for public seminar, *Jewellery Philosophies 4*, Contexts of Working, (Craft Victoria) June 1992

² Kenny Yong-soo Son, in catalogue, *The Study*, 2016

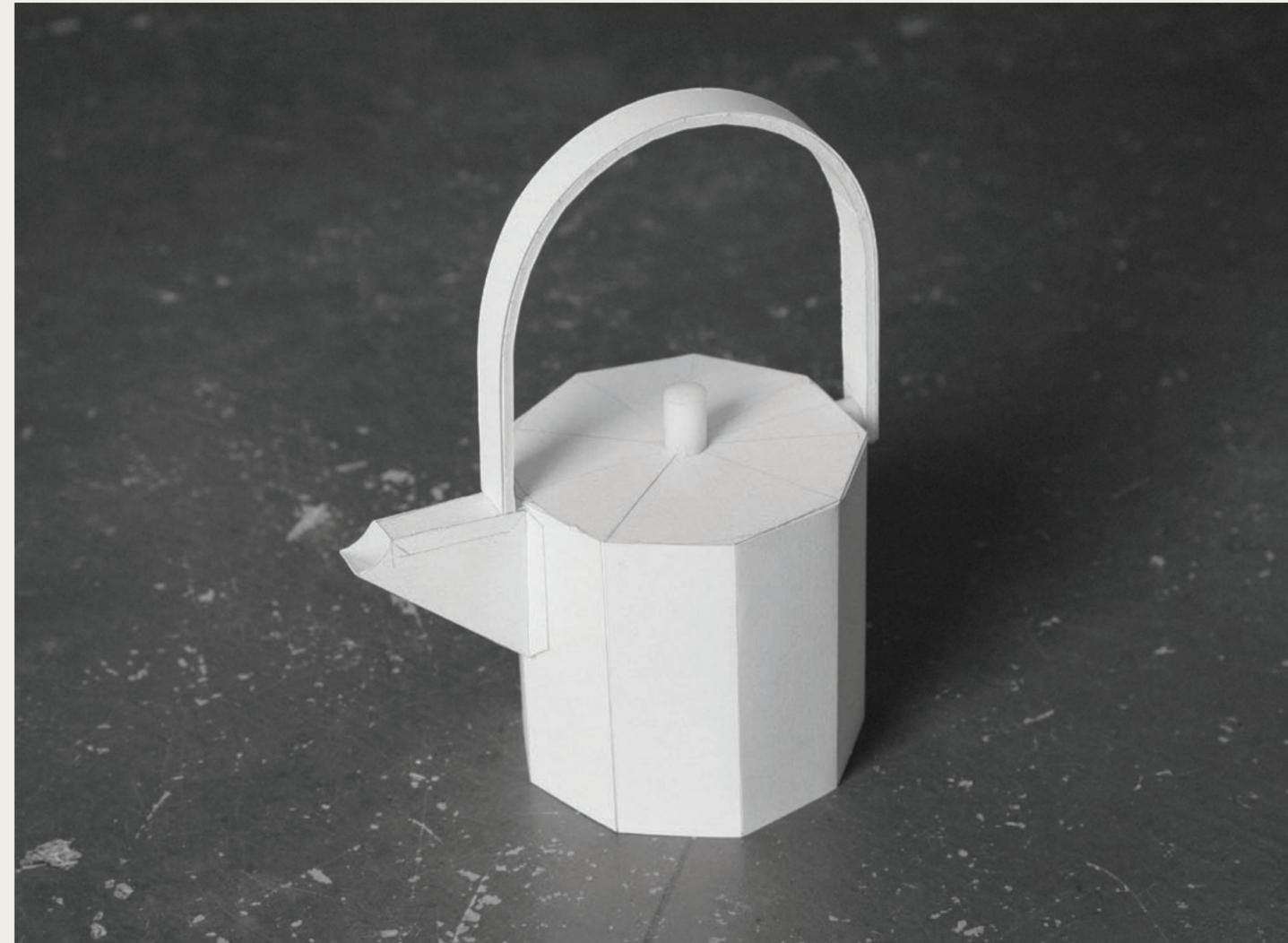


The first batch of 30 teapots from Hendrik Forster and Kenny Yoo-soo Son's *The Teapot Project* were designed and crafted between March 2016 and March 2019. Six intensive 3–5 day sessions were held at Hendrik's studio in Calulu, Victoria and ANU's Gold & Silversmithing department, Canberra.



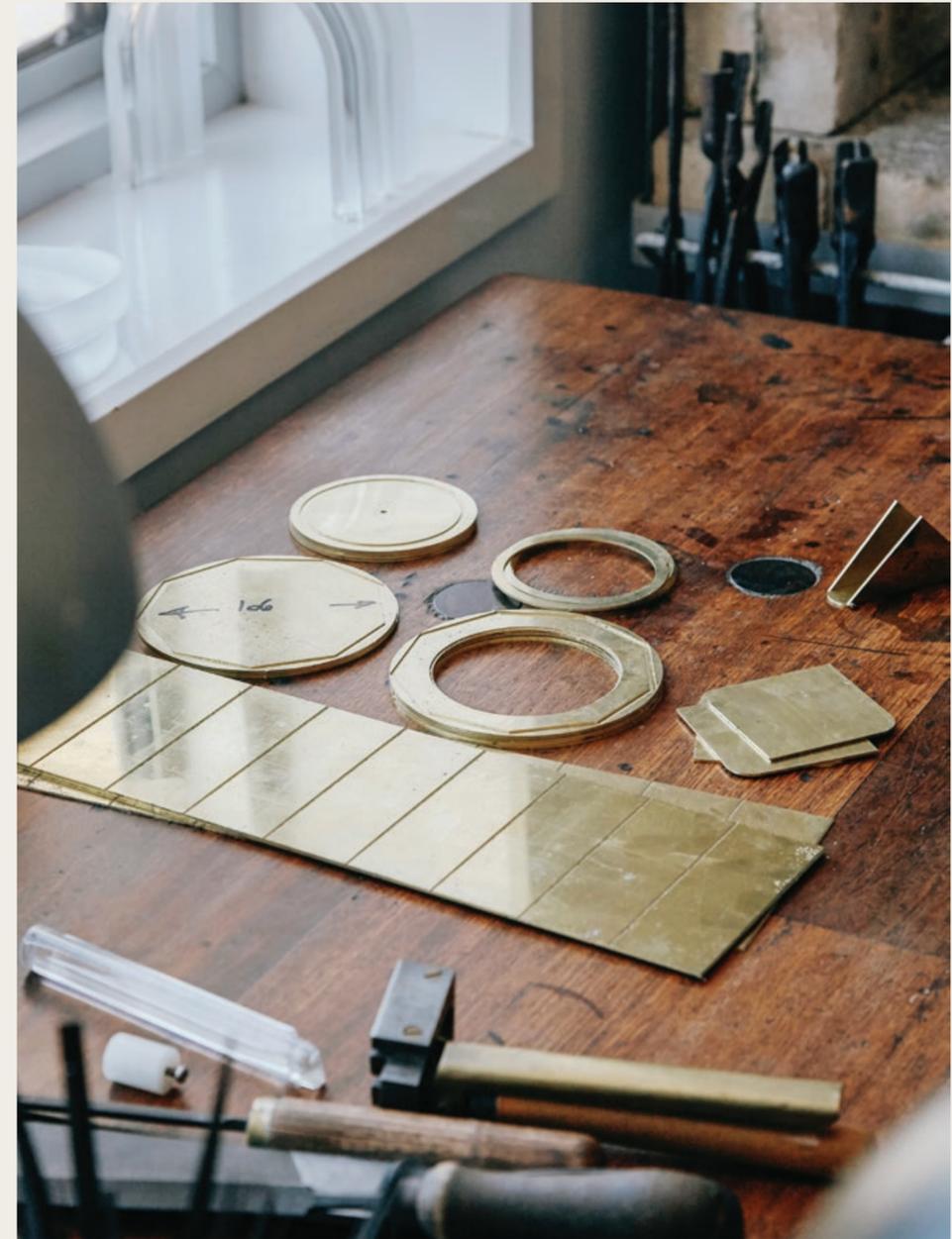


In the initial design stages, the nonagonal prism body design was agreed upon while variations of the spout, handle and knob were explored. Both designers narrowed their combined sketches to four designs that were then produced into cardboard models.





Further refinements of form were carried out utilising metal as the prototyping material. Possible solutions to technical challenges were also developed at this stage.



Once the design was finalised, the teapot body, spout, handle, lid and base were precisely prepared from sheets of brass using a CNC cutting machine.



Although the teapot components were cut via precise production methods, many crucial elements of the manufacturing process – including forming, joining and finishing – relied upon the craftsmen’s hands and intuition for completion. This is evident in the details of the finished object.





List of works

The Teapot Project
by Hendrik Forster & Kenny Yong-soo Son

All teapots:
220 x 175 x 105mm, brass body with silver and gold internal plating.





No. 1 Teapot
Bright polished
rhodium plating with
clear acrylic handles



No. 2 Teapot
Bright polished 24 ct.
gold plating with red
gum handles



No. 3 Teapot
Linished 24 ct. gold
plating with clear
acrylic handles



No. 4 Teapot
Bright polished bright
nickel plating with
black acrylic handles



No. 5 Teapot
Linished bright nickel
plating with black
acrylic handles



No. 6 Teapot
Linished copper
patination plating
with black acrylic
handles



No. 7 Teapot
Linished black nickel plating with black acrylic handles



No. 8 Teapot
Linished black nickel plating with liquorice acrylic handles



No. 9 Teapot
Bright polished surface finish with black acrylic handles



No. 10 Teapot
Filed rhodium plating with clear acrylic handles



No. 11 Teapot
Linished black nickel plating with black acrylic handles



No. 12 Teapot
Linished surface finish with black acrylic handles



No. 13 Teapot
Bright polished 24
ct. gold plating with
black acrylic handles

No. 14 Teapot
Bright polished 24
ct. gold plating with
black acrylic handles

No. 15 Teapot
Bright polished 24 ct.
gold plating with red
gum handles



No. 16 Teapot
Bright polished
rhodium plating with
red gum handles

No. 17 Teapot
Bright polished
rhodium plating with
black acrylic handles

No. 18 Teapot
Copper patination
plating with clear
acrylic handles



No. 19 Teapot
Copper patination
plating with clear
acrylic handles



No. 20 Teapot
Copper patination
plating with black
acrylic handles



No. 21 Teapot
Bright polished
surface finish with red
gum handles



No. 22 Teapot
Bright polished bright
nickel plating with red
gum handles



No. 23 Teapot
Filed surface finish
with liquorice acrylic
handles



No. 24 Teapot
Filed black nickel
plating with black
acrylic handles



No. 25 Teapot
Filed black nickel plating with black acrylic handles



No. 26 Teapot
Filed black nickel plating with clear acrylic handles



No. 27 Teapot
Filed black nickel plating with bamboo handles



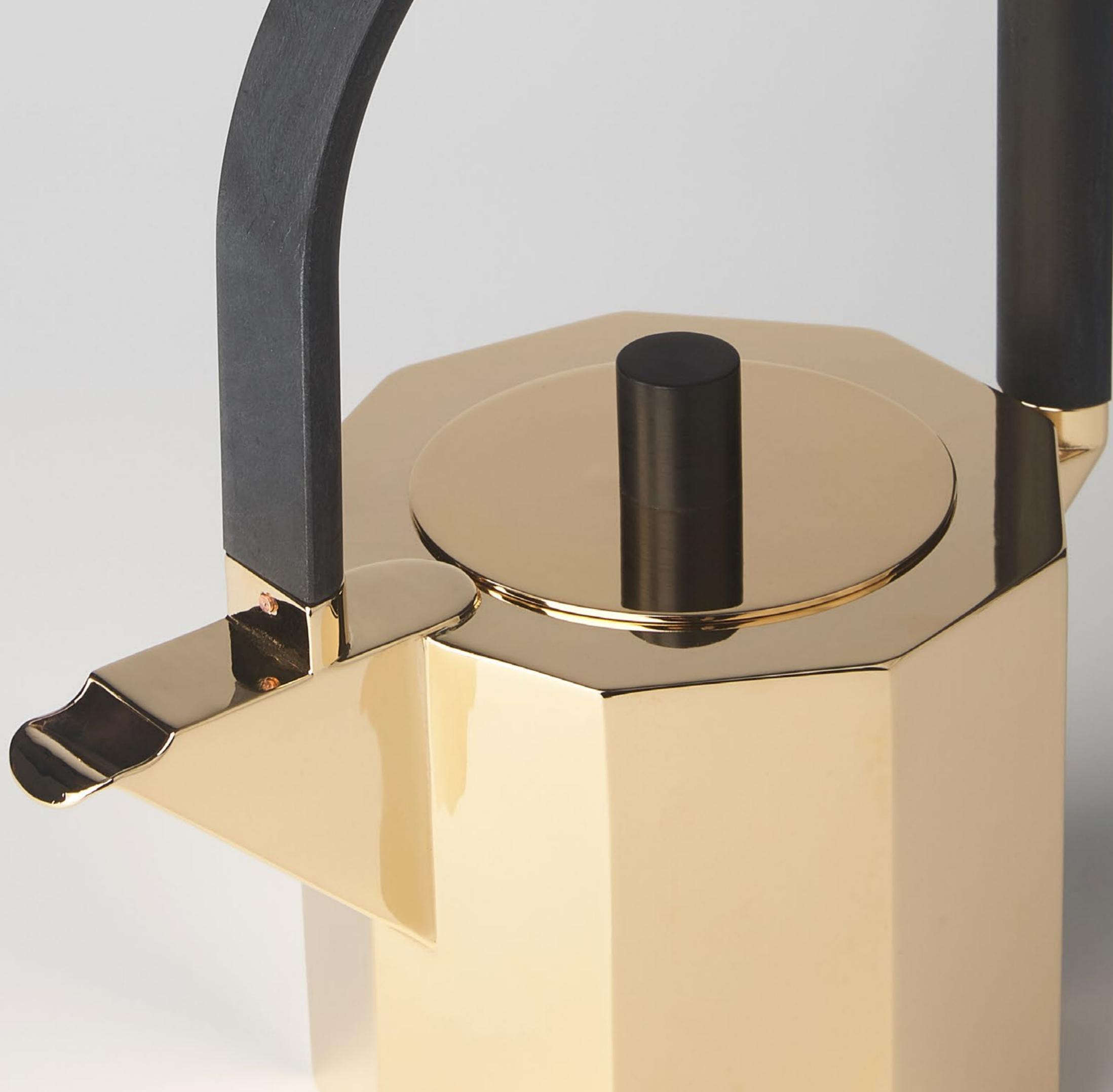
No. 28 Teapot
Filed black nickel plating with clear acrylic handles



No. 29 Teapot
Copper patination plating with red gum handles



No. 30 Teapot
Raw finish with red gum handles



Infusion

Oliver Smith

Senior Lecturer

Sydney College of the Arts

The University of Sydney

Each beautiful teapot is the result of the collaborative endeavour of silversmiths Kenny Son and Hendrik Forster. Stately, elegant, handsome, each vessel is made up of a crisp nine-sided brass body, a distinctive, forthright spout extending from this reservoir, an arching crest-like handle above, all coalescing in an object that is perfectly fit for purpose. Indeed, this teapot design is as superbly functional as it is aesthetically distinguished. The lid, whose circular form with cylindrical knob visually creates a harmonious whole from the constituent elements, lifts to reveal a convenient stainless steel mesh tea filter. Simply add leaves and boiling water. The liquid volume of 750 millilitres, sufficient for two generous cups, is itself an expression of considered design thinking.

In terms of the actual fabrication this teapot is the verification of a design and production sequence that embraces both the hand crafted and the engineered, unifying artisan skill and digital precision. In relation to finish, this design is produced in a numbered edition, and across the range a variety of surface treatments have been applied to the solid brass construction and a number of handle materials have been employed. Each design variation and each individual unit has

been subtly refined, receiving the finishing touches in the hands of masters. Beyond pragmatics and attention to detail this is an object that satisfies loftier wishes. It is as poetic as it is practical, offering a shared social experience or the meditative solo restorative, and in both instances feeding the spirit whilst nourishing the body. And yet this description and the many superlatives are unnecessary. Timeless and contemporary, the vessel speaks for itself. The epitome of the teapot, it is an instant classic!

The collection of teapots on display and the accompanying material in this exhibition are the result of a shared vision. The warmth of friendship is imbued in all elements of the project. Like tea for two, Kenny and Hendrik have carried forth a conversation, inspired by their mutual commitment to creativity and culture. It is this purposeful, altruistic exchange of ideas, the subsequent work in the studio, and the outsourcing to industry, that has led to this first edition.

Hendrik draws upon an illustrious career as an eminent silversmith, and his creative process is informed by a confidence born of experience. His celebrated achievements, testament to many ambitious and successful projects, are the result of great focus and discipline. The silversmithing studio is truly Hendrik's milieu. In this environment his carefully honed method comes alive as he forms precious metal by hand. The very same clarity of vision can be observed when Hendrik operates as project manager, overseeing

a sequential production process involving input from multiple skilled technicians and incorporating specialised manufacturing processes. This is apparent in Hendrik's much appreciated, and longstanding contribution to the live performing arts in Australia as designer and producer of the trophies for the Annual Helpmann Awards. This regular, high profile commission has served as a technical foundation for the Teapot project, for the allied industries and specific processes employed in the creation of the trophies has been employed again in this project. Hendrik states that "There is great potential in blending industrial production and hand making." This is a potential that Kenny has also actively engaged with. Kenny too is a celebrated silversmith and likewise approaches the production of objects with the sensibilities of an artisan and the problem-solving abilities of a designer. Kenny has already achieved much in his career, and at the present moment is well positioned to continue his upward trajectory and realise further accomplishments in the future.

Both Kenny and Hendrik are charismatic and exhibit a flair for positive, inclusive networking. Hendrik speaks admiringly of his collaborator "Kenny is a most energetic and positive person, he is focussed and shows a maturity beyond his age. He is also able to bring together his Korean background with the contemporary Australian context in a harmonious way." Hendrik himself embodies a multi-cultural world view, informed by his German background and training

whilst simultaneously representative of a uniquely Australian perspective and creative practice. Kenny returns the compliment, adding that "Hendrik has the experience and work ethic I aspire to. Hendrik is also extremely thoughtful. Every single decision is carefully considered. All of Hendrik's work speaks of his colour, his witty personality and demonstrates his German training, clever thinking and careful decision making." As these comments demonstrate there is great goodwill between these two silversmiths, and plenty of humour. Hendrik jokes "When it came to decisions regarding design aspects, there was a surprising degree of agreement. And I don't think it was just Kenny being polite!". Kenny responds "This project has taught me a lot about process. Not just the making process, also the design process. This is due to the thorough method of Hendrik's working process."

Kenny and Hendrik have known from the outset that this collaboration was special, and therefore worthy of documentation. The project advanced through a series of intense episodes designing, prototyping and then producing the inaugural batch. We can see a record of this process in the material contained in this exhibition. These images, objects and text are windows through which we can see the way a creative exchange gathers momentum and culminates. This offers us a genuine understanding of the journey from idea to actual object. There are things that the documentation cannot capture, particularly once the design is resolved. Part of the dynamism of any project



is the possibility of things not working, and of mistakes and unforeseen compromises. These risks are real and must be recognised and addressed. Some courage is needed when facing these challenges and doing this as a team requires real honesty and trust as you move through the steps and stages, from drawing to model making, then onto to handmaking and prototyping, followed by outsourcing and through to fabricating and finishing. Then there are the periods of reflection and time away from a project within which ideas develop and alternatives may come to mind. These intervals and the inherent personal space help to make the moments of sharing even more exciting. And this sharing involves others, with both Kenny and Hendrik talking warmly of the support and constructive criticism provided by their partners. For Kerryn and Youmee, both of whom are artists in their own right, have also had a hand in this. This is perhaps best encapsulated in the conversations that accompanied the communal meal at the end of the working day when the outcomes produced that day were discussed amongst these four kindred spirits. This ritual can be seen as a celebration of making.

The Teapot Project has required a great deal of planning and meticulous time management. It also has involved a lot of handwork, including some hard, physical graft. Equal to this Kenny and Hendrik as men of action both possess great physical strength and determination and are capable of intensive activity, sustained effort and thus able to generate a prodigious creative output. The counterpoint is also true, Kenny and Hendrik are

thoughtful and reflective, able to sensitively consider and balance the many points requiring attention. These two extremes inform a process of learning. It is accurate to see this learning involving both mentor and mentee. Hendrik comes to the table as a prominent figure within Australian craft, and is adept at applying his firmly established methodology, whereas Kenny can perhaps be seen as an emergent creative force striving to establish himself further, and in doing so he is proactively seeking opportunities to observe and test a range of approaches. And yet this collaboration transcends such hierarchical conventions. It is much more an expression of mutual respect, admiration for creativity and an appreciation of idiosyncrasies. It can thus be seen to be the union of different yet complementary contributions, that are all mindfully integrated to enhance the outcome.

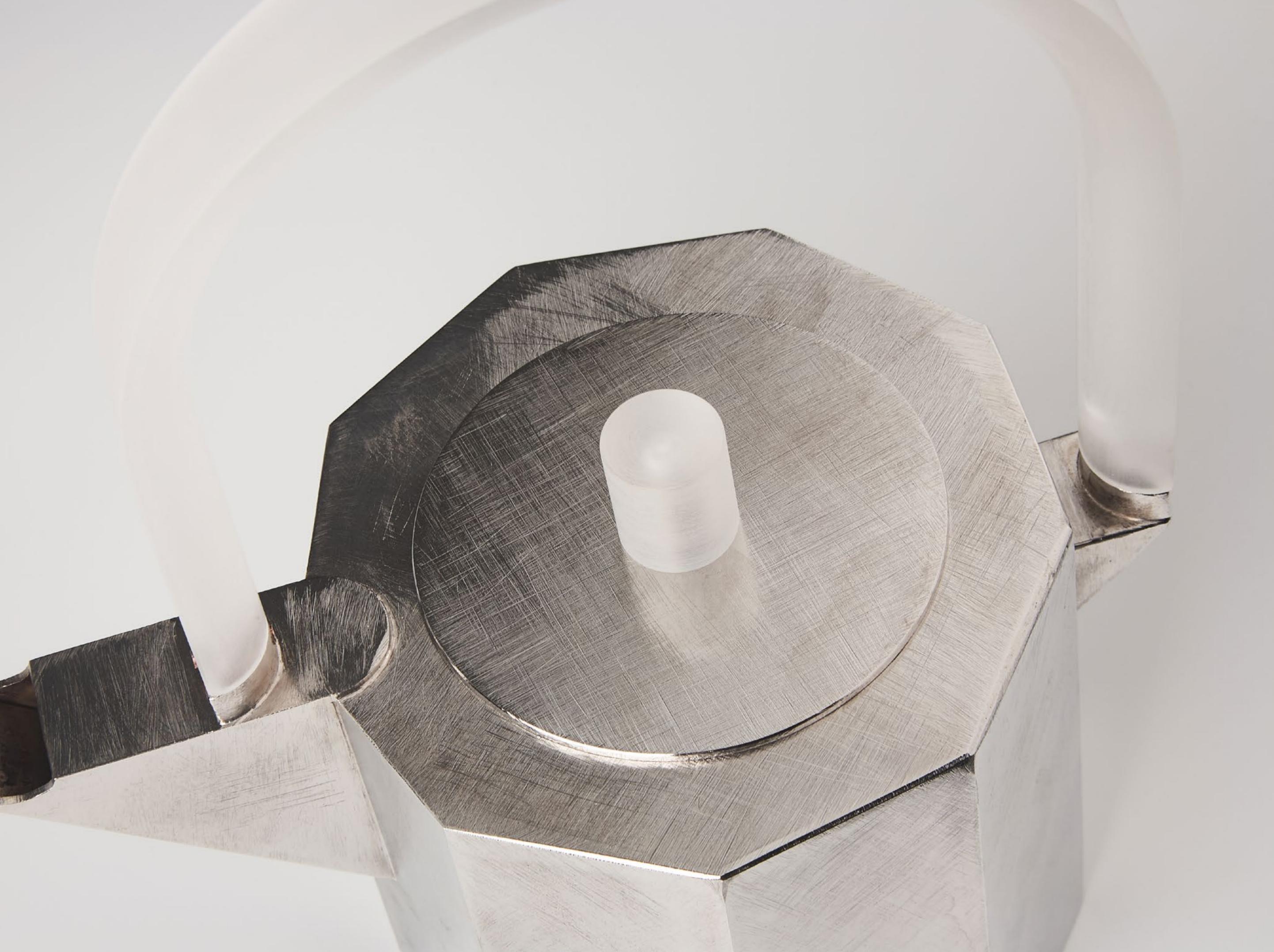
Designing the teapot has been a balancing act, and the key elements all speak to the subtlety of the choices made. The number of sides of the main body characterise the nuances extant in each decision. Hendrik explains “On a nine-sided vessel you have no parallels, which are always a challenge in hand-making. It was the result of an intensive session of model making looking at 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 sides and we agreed on this number. I think it is reflective of an Asian influence rather than European.” Kenny replies “Hendrik’s suggestion that this was perhaps influenced by a Korean aesthetic is an interesting observation, as there are examples of faceted metal forms in the Korean

metalsmithing tradition, but in terms of convention, most shapes were evenly sided, and it is rare to see odd sided shapes. I think it may be more related to personal choice during the design period. I am usually more drawn to odd sided shapes and in this case, I think it also worked well, enhancing the structure and logic in terms of the location of the spout and handle.”

Kenny has made the faceted form a personal signature in his work, often creating visually pure vessels that are unflinchingly fundamental yet delicately proportioned. Hendrik too plays with geometry in a manner that over the years has developed into an instantly recognisable form language that is both functional and sculptural. The detail of the spout emerging from a corner of the main vessel is noteworthy. This design element provides a forward movement that correlates with the liquid contents being poured and in it can be observed Kenny and Hendrik working together harmoniously. The spout itself is representative of Hendrik’s approach and is reflective of his training. As he outlines “My first Professor, Franz Rickert, insisted that a spout should have a short downward end that allows the tea flow to break on the highest point without enough liquid to have gone over it to form a drop at the end.” Supremely practical this termination of the spout provides some sculptural flair moving beyond the mathematically influenced form language of reservoir and spout channel. Kenny sees this visual element as reflective of Hendrik’s verve and flair. The handle solution evolved through discussion and experimentation. This may again appear

to exhibit an Asian design lineage, and yet Hendrik points out that “There are a number of examples of European teapots with handles over the top, making it more of a relative to the kettle. The handle takes the eye away from the squat rounded kettle form. In this application the handle delivers a visual lift that makes the overall design more statuesque I think.” This design dialogue exemplifies the depth of knowledge and the rich cross-cultural references that both silversmiths bring to the conversation. Kenny sums this up “In the early stages, we looked at a whole range of teapots, both traditional and contemporary, from all parts of the world. We were both certain that our teapot creation would be for the present day and perhaps exist beyond our lifetime. We wanted something that spoke of traditional skill-sets and detail, but to remain minimal and almost timeless in regard to aesthetics. Perhaps these ideas steered the design choices that we made.” Hendrik continues “We have endeavoured to produce an object that is beautiful and fulfils its function, but also fits into a contemporary setting. The choice of production methods and material make it more accessible to the public.”

These two silversmiths are rare individuals who can make anything. This is a bold claim, yet a survey of their impressive portfolios substantiates this statement. Amongst this multitude of creative precedents clear precursors to the Teapot are abundant. This speaks to their individual creative language and their common ground. This creative wellspring has flowed into the dialogue in which they have engaged, as they worked



through the many and varied options to arrive at a beautifully successful resolution. This is expressive of a spirit of generosity. This munificence is at the heart of the project. It started with a gift. John Embling had inherited a set of metalsmithing tools and sought a worthy recipient for these items with the desire to see the equipment used. He contacted Kerry in this regard. Later in conversation Hendrik asked me if I knew of anyone who could use the tools and Kenny immediately sprang to mind. It is through this serendipitous chain of events that Kenny and Hendrik came to meet.

Running through these human relationships is a sense of community and a commitment to craft and cultural custodianship. It is all about sharing. Hendrik speaks with great veneration of his two key teachers Franz Rickert and Hermann Jünger, and expresses his commitment to passing on his skills and knowledge. Hendrik reflects “The whole project was about the process of sharing. After Kenny had come down to Calulu to pick up the equipment that we were given by one of Kerry’s clients, both Kenny and I agreed that it would be fun to work on a project together. We chose the teapot because it is used in both cultures as well as Australia, it would be substantial and challenging. So the journey was enjoyable and enlightening. I think we both learnt a lot.” Kenny expands further “This particular project raises the importance and value of craft, and how much benefit it offers a community. Craft reminds us to consider what is really important and to value humanity, intimacy and quality. This reminds all

makers to strive to create work to satisfy both aesthetic and functional needs.” To fulfil this aim Kenny and Hendrik have worked with a community of collaborators and benefitted from contributions of this broader team.

It is essential to emphasise that this is not only an exhibition celebrating a fascinating creative collaboration. This is also a product launch. Indeed, the entire collective undertaking is a generous gift to us all in the sense that the efficiencies granted by batch production and the successful union of hand and machine enable the warmth of the expertly crafted object to enter a more approachable price bracket. The exclusivity thus shifts from issues of price point and resides in the excellence of the design and quality and volume of manufacture. In this way the rigour and integrity of their design thinking in combination with their skill and expertise of their hands-on engagement in the making process bears fruit in these teapots that are a tour de force of both craft and industrial design simultaneously. Ideally at the conclusion of the exhibition tour all of these teapots will be out in the world being used daily, fulfilling their purpose, bringing joy. Beyond this the future potential of the collaboration will be demonstrated by subsequent editions, adaptations for particular culinary contexts and related custom commissions. Through this longer story the vessel will generate a wider diaspora and enrich the lives of many. This then will be the journey in which this beautiful teapot is elevated from the level of classic to achieve iconic status.

Acknowledgements

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