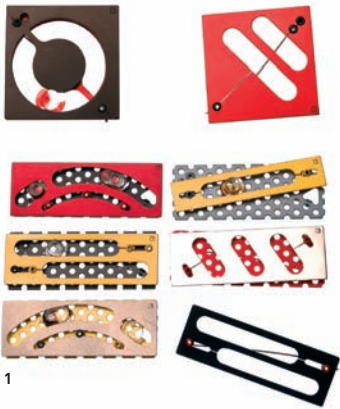


# STUDIO HAÇIENDA

BLANCHE TILDEN AND PHOEBE PORTER INTRODUCE THE INDIVIDUAL TO MASS PRODUCTION.

words  
MELANIE JOOSTEN



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<sup>1</sup>/ GENERAL ASSEMBLY BROOCHES FROM THE CANBERRA SERIES (TOP) AND MELBOURNE SERIES (BOTTOM), 2007.

<sup>2</sup>/ AUDIENCE MEMBERS CHOOSE COMPONENTS FOR THEIR BROOCHES AT THE OPENING NIGHT OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN MELBOURNE.

<sup>3</sup>/ GLASS PIECES COULD BE INCORPORATED INTO THE BROOCHES AS MOVING PARTS.

<sup>4</sup>/ EACH GENERATION OF THE PROJECT HAS BEEN INSPIRED BY THE CITY IN WHICH IT IS PRESENTED.

<sup>5</sup>/ BLANCHE TILDEN AND PHOEBE PORTER ASSEMBLE THE BROOCHES AND STAMP EACH WITH A UNIQUE SERIAL NUMBER.

PHOTOGRAPHY:  
IMAGE 1: JOHANNES KUHNEN  
IMAGES 2, 4 + 5:  
RHIANNON SLATTER  
IMAGE 3: ANDREW SIKORSKI

Making is something we do when we're young. Robots from discarded toilet rolls and egg cartons, summer dresses cut from Butterick patterns, pendants made from chip packets shrunk in the oven. Making is what we do before we realize that we can pay someone to make for us – someone who is more skilled, or someone whose time is less precious to us?

Studio Haçienda, a collaboration between jewellers Blanche Tilden and Phoebe Porter, is housed within a boot factory – but not for much longer. The factory is closing down, the people that make boots have long gone, and the machines that they used to cut and shape and sew have been shipped offshore. Kevin Rudd recently said, "I don't want to be a prime minister of a country that doesn't make things any more," but it seems that not everyone gets what they want. In 2007, Studio Haçienda presented General Assembly at Craft Victoria. Exhibition visitors were invited to choose from a series of components that Tilden and Porter then assembled into a brooch on the spot. Playing with ideas of mass production and consumer choice, General Assembly brings the end user (the wearer, the customer, the gallery patron, the audience, the viewer) back into the making process. It is a bit part, admittedly – Tilden and Porter have already designed and manufactured the pieces and they fit the brooch together, stamping it with a unique number – but it does play into our nostalgia for making and allow an insight into the collaboration process.

Tilden and Porter solo work and methods are very different, making theirs a true collaboration rather than a partnership. Each piece in General Assembly had to be designed to work with all the other pieces, which meant long hours and a lot of discussion. Collaboration gives voice to the decision making

process of solo work, "Phoebe would draw something on the computer and print it out. I would make it and then we would discuss. You do one thing and then you make a decision, you decide which way to go," explains Tilden.

General Assembly has been brought into existence three times – twice in Canberra, once in Melbourne. The respective cities influenced the design of the pieces as it was important that the project spoke of location – another step away from mass-produced items made elsewhere. The Melbourne parts include a mesh backing, a recurring motif of inner city architecture and Federation Square. Studio Haçienda literally scrapped mesh from the Canberra version, after realizing the city didn't have an affinity with it. Canberra is about open spaces, big skies and fluidity – it's not constrained by the same urban grid as Melbourne. Instead, the Canberra pieces are based on the city's plans, as drawn by Marion Mahoney Griffin. The ubiquitous roundabout is featured, as is the National Carillon.

For Porter and Tilden, collaboration has provided the discipline to interrogate ideas and increase momentum. "It's more than a division of labour," explains Tilden, "Your idea zigzags up as you bounce off one another." In the case of General Assembly, collaboration extends to the end user. The handmade components were designed in such a way that they can fit together in seemingly infinite options. There are parameters but, as Porter reiterates, the project is a "conversation with the wearer." With other collections, Tilden and Porter make the jewellery, box it up and send it off. They never hear from the people that actually take possession. General Assembly was a unique way to get direct response to, and feedback about, their work.

Like flat-packed Ikea furniture, General Assembly plays on our want for the bright and shiny coupled with the DIY resurgence, the feeling of "I made it myself." Porter noticed each wearer reacted differently to the exhibition. Some were able to choose their pieces without pause, the end product in sight. Others took their time, went up and down the assembly line, making sure they got it "right." As consumers, the idea of making has become so foreign that many wearers were amazed that Tilden and Porter had actually made all the components. Despite glass being used in exact ways in scientific and medical realms, in craft it is often seen as something organic, relying on chance to bestow it with beauty. In General Assembly, the glass pieces within the brooch are moving parts, another nod to machinery. Porter even made the tools used to put the brooches together – their tapping and stamping and compressing of the rivets add to the "theatre of making," as Tilden dubs it, well-versed in the art from her years as a glass blower.

In 2008, Studio Haçienda was awarded a Premier's Design Mark for General Assembly. The well-deserved recognition enables Tilden and Porter to end this chapter. When the boot factory closes they must vacate the premises. Both are looking forward to solo projects, though are slightly trepidatious about the process, "creating new work is like catching smoke," says Tilden, ruefully. But General Assembly will surface again – Studio Haçienda is planning on creating a new generation of brooches to commemorate Canberra's centenary in 2013. Until then, I can proudly wear my own little bit of Melbourne, my carefully considered brooch. Tilden and Porter are the true makers but by allowing me a part in the process they have reminded me of all the things I can do with my hands.



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PLAYING WITH  
IDEAS OF MASS  
PRODUCTION AND  
CONSUMER CHOICE,  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
BRINGS THE END  
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MAKING PROCESS.



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