I am German.

On second thoughts, am I? In New Zealand, my current country of residence, I must declare if I am:

- [ ] New Zealander. This makes me rather
- [ ] New Zealand European as well as
- [ ] Pakeha or I might elect to choose
- [ ] Other.
This is not the first time I have been Other. When I was small, I looked different enough to feel and experience this notion; my hair was too dark to be German, my skin too olive. It was something I was teased about; children can be cruel...

It is interesting for me, as a German, to tick the box Other. Germans have, since the Second World War, been thought of as those who took otherness to an extreme. As a result, Germans have felt it tremendously important to educate young people about their nation having done wrong. We learned about the Second World War inside-out through history, sociology, political studies and geography classes; in fact, we learned nothing else.

We knew (nothing?) about ourselves.
Nearly sixty years after the conclusion of the Second World War, it is standard practice in the Gymnasium, the German equivalent of high school, for students to be taught about the rise of Nazism, the horrors it unleashed, and its consequences for postwar Europe. The genocide of European Jews is a central chapter in this instruction. Every year, thousands of teenagers visit former concentration camps like Dachau or Buchenwald, watch films of Hitler’s adoring crowds and of cities in flames, participate in intense group discussions about moral responsibility, and come face to face with the historical burdens of their grandfathers. The process is disturbing for most, and unfailingly influences their political outlook. The majority of young Germans accept the necessity of remembrance.\(^1\)

In this context, it felt good to look *Other*. It provided a sense of freedom from the necessity to carry a historical burden that didn’t feel like mine. I was grateful for not being blond and blue-eyed, without ever associating myself with the possibility of being Jewish either. I just looked ‘normal’, able to fit in anywhere like others who did not appear to be branded.

Since leaving my home country, I still am just that: *Other*. However, living and studying in colonised countries and being immersed in visual arts practices bring new awareness. It became, for example, very popular in the arts towards the end of the 20th century to address colonisation, immigration and identity issues in one’s work.

At this point, I may need to elaborate: I am German (at least on paper), but my second language is *Jewellery & Metalsmithing*, unusual perhaps, but a language nonetheless.
In the use of language – visual, spoken or written – fluency appears at unguarded moments; moments outside of control, when one is at ease.

These can be unexpected simple moments; such as when

- catching oneself stringing words together which don’t exist in order to make sense or
- choosing to employ the most basic skills within a discipline that becomes too easily subsumed in technicality.

I’ll explain in a moment, but would like to talk about the peculiarity of fluency first.

Choosing to learn a second language always brings about the relentless challenge of fluency. Yet, fluency is indeed not something one can achieve purely by studying more and more extensively.

Naturally, good comprehension, good technical skills and good communication skills are achieved only through great commitment, immersion and a significant measure of control. But fluency is as much about letting go as it is about immersion and commitment; it needs a kind of juxtaposing between extremes of control and freedom.
The processes that these coins undergo create a constant dialogue between control – via precise sawing – and very entertaining unpredictability, as the material unfolds into a stretch. Like in the use of language, control and freedom are juxtaposed. But, employing such ‘de-constructive’ and liberating processes was only possible through my immersion into Otherness, away from my country of origin and its long-standing craft traditions. Distance revealed the coin’s potential as a means for freedom of expression.
The embossed text on the coin’s rim alone remains untouched. It reappears in and on the open solander box:

Inevitably I find myself using both my second language(s) – Jewellery & Metalsmithing and English as well as my Otherness to try and make sense; sense of my country of origin, and of my living abroad here in New Zealand; sense also of my use of these second languages.

All the while and alongside others, I remain in search of moments beyond control.

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① Commemorative Coin: 10 Years of German Unity (BRD 10DM Gedenkmünze 10 Jahre Deutsche Einheit, WIR SIND DAS VOLK-WIR SIND EIN VOLK; 28 Sept. 2000) showing reverse.


④ The artist at work in her studio, January 2007: checking the level of a coinscape.

⑤ Commemorative Coins: 15 Eagles (BRD 10DM Gedenkmünzen, showing reverse (the back of the eagle image) or respectively averse (the remains of the readable front of the coin).


⑧ Twelve Commemorative Coinscapes (out of a total of 43; BRD 10DM Gedenkmünzen minted from 1972-2001).


**Johanna Zellmer** completed a master’s degree at the Australian National University Canberra School of Art and a formal apprenticeship as a goldsmith in Germany. She currently holds a lecturing position in the School of Art at Otago Polytechnic School/The Kura Matatini ki Otago and engages with research on cross-cultural matters within contemporary Jewellery and Metalsmithing.