

Duality

A pair of brooches designed for the *In Focus* exhibition, to raise themes of transphobia and the issue of safety for LGBTQIA+ communities.

Dr Karen Westland



Duality brooches, 2024

Photo credit: Stacey Bentley Photography

Project Details

Queer Metalsmiths partnered with SNAG (Society of North American Goldsmiths) for the 2024 *In Focus* exhibition, which was showcased digitally during the SNAG x San Diego conference and virtually both on the SNAG website and on the Queer Metalsmiths website.

This collaborative initiative aimed to spotlight BIPOC and/or 2SLGBTQIA+ artists from marginalized communities who represent the future of the metalsmithing and jewelry field, with submissions from artists working in all materials, aesthetics, levels of experience, and backgrounds.

The Duality brooches were made in response to the call for applications for the *'n Focus* exhibition. 76 BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+ artists participated in the exhibition.



In Focus, 2024 exhibition

Research Question

How can others be invited into conversations around the queer experience through jewellery?

How can privacy be respected?

How can empathy and boundaries be nurtured?

How can jewellery-prompted conversation support inclusivity?

Research Output

Artefact details: "Duality Brooches", Silver, gilt, steel pin, 1.6" x 1.4" x .3", 2024

The brooches were designed for the In Focus exhibition, to raise the issue of safety for the LGBTQIA+ community and specifically themes of transphobia. The 'duality' brooches advocate for community building in spite of social and cultural challenges. Karen's handwritten messages 'am I safe?' and 'are they safe?' externalize concerns over their and their partner's emotional and physical wellbeing. By asking these generalized questions, Karen hopes to nurture compassion.

There is a hidden message on the reverse of my 'am I safe?' brooch: a reminder to listen to and let the kindness of others in. The brooches are designed so others can relate to the brooches from their own perspectives: to open up conversations around the universal desire to feel safe.



Reverse-side of 'am I safe?' Duality brooch, 2024

Photo credit: Stacey Bentley Photography

Evidence

Is the work queer because the maker is queer, or is it queer because the subject matter is queer?

“I believe the brooches are queer, in that from a personal perspective they are engaging in themes of transphobia. The brooches are a catalyst for courage: to pay attention to a compromised sense of security and positively respond by seeking out empathy in others.

More generally as an educator, I am interested in universal learning practices; part of this is exploring creating a ‘safe’ environment for students to be their authentic selves. I hope the brooches can reach people at different levels to empower and build meaningful connections.”

Karen Westland



‘are they safe?’ Duality brooch, 2024

Photo credit: Stacey Bentley Photography

Evidence

Anything else you would like to share about this work? This can be an important part of the process, sourcing materials, or research.

“I have had the honour of listening to Karen Smith’s (Metal Artist, Founder and Executive Director of We Wield The Hammer) insightful contributions through online events in the last couple of years. Choosing to ‘represent’ has been something I have been reflecting on in my own context. I have explored my right to privacy and aspirations to take an activist approach to support the LGBTQIA+ community through representation. The ‘In Focus’ exhibition open call has been my first opportunity to engage in this topic publicly.”

Karen Westland



‘am I safe?’ Duality brooch, 2024

Photo credit: Stacey Bentley Photography

Contribution to the field

The Duality brooches made for the *In Focus* exhibition and were showcased to the attendees of the SNAG conference and continue to feature in the online exhibition platform. Three posts were created on Karen's Instagram account which collectively reached 1,685 accounts and 211 accounts engaged with the posts in the 6 months following the event.

This work contributed to international community building and discussion on queer expression and identity.

The brooches provoke personal reflection and contemplation and support the representation of Karen within the LGBTQIA+ community, which hadn't been shared publicly before.



'am I safe?' Duality brooch, detail 2024

Photo credit: Stacey Bentley Photography