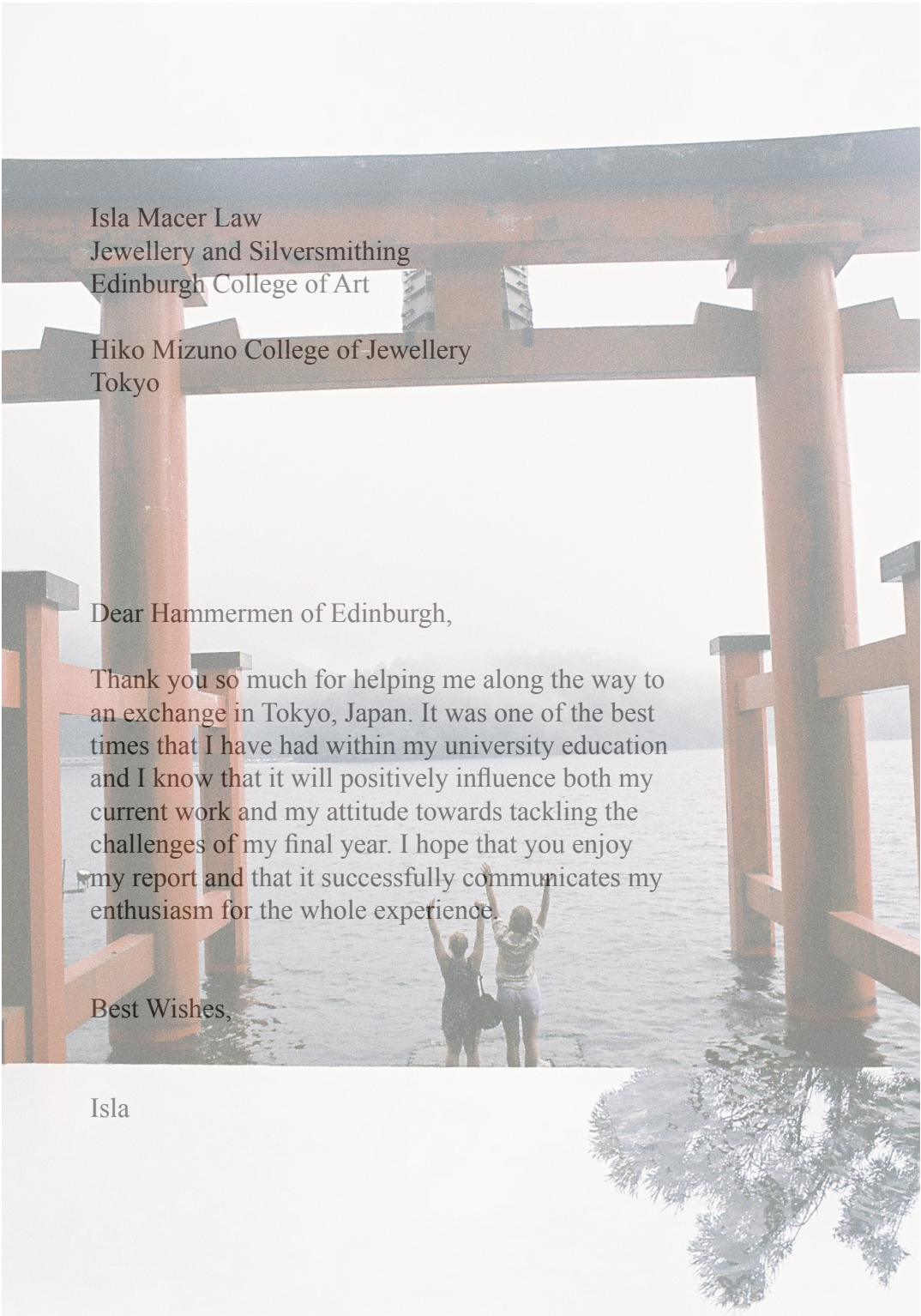




Isla Macer Law
Jewellery and Silversmithing
Edinburgh College of Art

Hiko Mizuno College of Jewellery
Tokyo

Dear Hammermen of Edinburgh,

Thank you so much for helping me along the way to an exchange in Tokyo, Japan. It was one of the best times that I have had within my university education and I know that it will positively influence both my current work and my attitude towards tackling the challenges of my final year. I hope that you enjoy my report and that it successfully communicates my enthusiasm for the whole experience.

Best Wishes,

Isla



'Welcome' was how I felt. I had an invaluable and extremely memorable experience on exchange at Hiko Mizuno College of Jewellery in Tokyo this summer, it's quite difficult to pin-point just a few to write down. Spending four months in Japan was not long enough for me and I felt that I had only just started to get my head round living in such an unusual and amazing place before I suddenly had to leave. Japan felt completely strange and new, with little or no obvious similarities between the two cultures and countries, but I loved this and once I began to embrace the strangeness and accept that I was pretty much always going to be a bit lost in some way, I learnt so much. Tokyo was an insane place and incredibly visually diverse city and I met so many amazing people both in the college and outside. I also managed to pack in a bit of travelling and made trips around Tokyo while I was there, seeing some of the beautiful countryside was a welcome contrast to hectic city life.

My first trip farther afield was to Matsumoto for a huge annual craft fair and was organised by the staff at Hiko Mizuno.





This was my first encounter with the Japanese approach to craft and material processes and was one of the biggest cultural differences that I noticed. Particularly the respect that they give to their craftsmen and women, perhaps due to the long and varied history of traditional craft practise evident in so much of Japan's history. The general aesthetic is also very different, very simple, paired down and minimal. This aesthetic filtered sub- consciously into my own work and has informed much of my subsequent research. The trip was also an opportunity to get to know the class and teachers a little bit better outside a working environment. We all stayed in a beautiful old ryokan, an old style guest house with an in house hot spring bath and onsen. And we spent the night in tatami matt rooms, sleeping on futons. The town itself had also managed to retain a lot of the ancient culture and tradition, evident in much of the architecture and prevalence of family run, small businesses. Tokyo seemed to me to be a place obsessed with newness and trends, constantly changing and evolving to cater to the latest craze, but Matsumoto was the complete opposite, it felt almost to be frozen in time, celebrating many old Japanese customs.





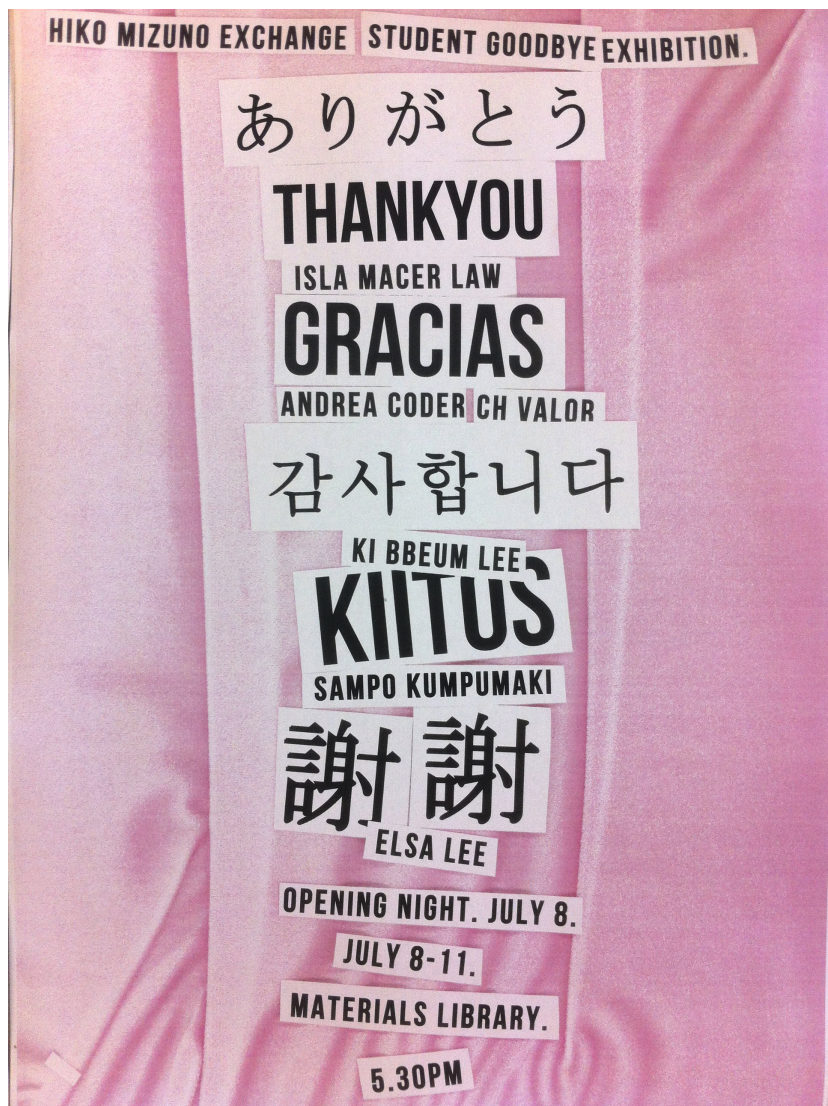
In addition to Matsumoto I also travelled to Kyoto, Gunma, Hakone and Fuji. All of these places offered different experiences, tied together with some sort of intangible similarity that I still can't quite describe. Part of it might have been the colours. I felt like Japan had a certain colour palette that was completely different from other countries. Everywhere you looked, the colours were pale pastel shades, pinks, purples, blues and greys. This extended from the landscape to the washing detergent to the advertising boards. Of course, the initial shock of Tokyo's bright neon and urban skyline contradicted this, but the longer I stayed in Japan the more I began to see passed this. This reference to a certain palette is also beginning to influence my design. Pairing this with a sense of simplicity and selection it is an influence that is beginning to effect most things I do, hopefully with positive results. I am beginning to form a better relationship with material, greatly influenced by my time in Tokyo, which felt like a place where you could buy anything you could think of and often things that you wouldn't have thought of. Being exposed to these new and 'every day', 'ordinary' materials greatly benefited my design work.





Our projects during my time on exchange were very free and open, where we pretty much made and developed our own briefs and organised our time independently. I enjoyed this freedom and new way of working and I re-learned to have fun when I am making things. The whole studio experience at Hiko made me feel much looser and relaxed, positively influencing my work and allowing me to reflect more constructively on my practise. The first part of the project was organised by Yoshikawa Yamagata, a Japanese fashion designer based in Tokyo. He encouraged conceptual thinking and material experimentation, also placing a lot of importance on presentation and design books, which was something that I had not had much experience with before. I made a series of pieces using plastic flowers, based around my initial reaction and subsequent reflection on my move from Scotland to Japan. I particularly enjoyed photographing them and publishing a small book which accompanied the presentation of the pieces because making it involved working with other people and collaborating. It made me realize how much we take for granted being able to simply communicate with our peers, to share ideas and talk through problems. This exchange taught me about other forms of communication, that don't rely on a shared language. While this was often much more challenging and complicated, you value the connection that it results in more, because it is harder to find and make.





This initial research project led very quickly onto preparing for our leaving exhibition. It went so fast, it felt like we had only just started and then suddenly we were near the end, but I loved the process of putting this exhibition together and, as with everything else, our class helped us, even making an amazing table of food and drinks for our opening night. I decided to focus my research for my final pieces on the idea of connection, as I felt that this was one of the most valuable things that I had gained from the experience. The pieces that I made were more like installations than conventional jewellery work and this sort of approach was encouraged all the way through the project. Reflecting on my time so far and making highly personal work, felt like the right way to end what had been a very warm experience for me. I feel that being away from home and friends and family in a way that I had never really been before, made me appreciate and look after the relationships that I made whilst in Japan, because it was these connections that really made the experience so fulfilling.





