



## Performance Pieces

Jewellery and Yahtzee don't go together – unless you're wearing Emil Gustafsson's work. To make *Screw This! The Ornament Game* (2014), the artist invited participants to play the dice game, only to calculate their scores in his production process. The resulting pieces are custom-made products of chance: highly individualised and totally random. Such interactive and often playful interventions – games, questionnaires, pull rings, messages – are used alongside Gustafsson's standard calipers, loupes and tweezers. Although trained in silversmithing, the artist was influenced by the anthropologist Edward T. Hall's *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), a study of the physical distance people maintain between each other in different contexts and cultures. Gustafsson considers jewellery to be objects of communication, closer to dynamic functional machinery than to static symbolic ornament; they are active means of navigating social space rather than fixed signs of established social roles and relations. Due to the role that social media plays, his works combine the older and the newer senses of digital: handwork and computers. A brooch – *This is the approximate size of an iPhone screen* (2014) – sported precisely this message in black lettering on a white rectangle, smart phone-size. Wearing it on a bus, the artist managed to get more than a few commuters to look up from their own mobile screens. He also fabricates keyboards and machines to mimic larger digital forces, from Twitter to the NSA. When he invited participants to fill out a questionnaire to produce *Snowflakes* (2012), he also informed them that he would be storing all of their answers as data, from their favourite shapes to their fingerprints. Far from a techie, the artist believes that technology should not get in the way of his jewellery, which also include implied products because they are interactive not only in production but also in post-production. Take his wearable *Relationship Starter Kits* (2015) or mini-machines that react if someone comes physically too close to you. While traditional rings were used to seal relations – whether marriage, leadership, alliance – Gustafsson's pieces are ways to generate them. *Jennifer Allen*



**This is the approximate size of an iPhone screen** 2015, brooch, acrylic, steel, silver, rubber, aluminium, 5 × 8.9 × 1.6 cm. All images courtesy: the artist.

Human social communication constitutes the requisite for collecting and preserving knowledge and for founding of any kind of society. Each culture or subculture has its own unwritten rules which define how its members interact with each other. As we move around in public space, our different patterns, distances and behavioural tendencies distinguish us from each other. Objects that can be carried are more likely to influence an everyday situation than an object that is statically mounted in one place or too cumbersome to be considered portable. The hand-held object or the worn jewellery piece are more socially flexible objects because they are connected to the owner's body in one way or another. Communication via eye-to-eye exchanges might be taken for granted to some extent because it is the oldest means of communicating that we have as a species. The physical distance you keep with respect to your conversation partner, a person's posture or the time it takes before you avert your gaze from another person's eyes are all examples of triggers that shape and inform our interactions in a way that virtual communication does not. Being aware of the unwritten rules of physical communication opens up a place for reflection of everyday life and might present itself as a tool to improve a personal life or society at large. This awareness makes it possible to use art as a socially progressive tool, not in the sense dreaming about changing the entire world, but rather changing a social situation, informing or derailing a personal decision. Getting lost, measuring conversation distances, offering a stranger a napkin or pointing out behavioural patterns are all ways that we learn about the social public space and the people inside it. *Emil Gustafsson*

## Emil Gustafsson

Emil Gustafsson (1987, Skara, Sweden) is an Oslo-based artist working with art as a means of conveying and exploring social interaction. His practice includes jewellery, machinery and social experiments. Gustafsson earned his BA at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts in 2013 and completed his MFA studies at the same academy in 2015. The artist has exhibited at the Galleri Seilduken in Oslo and at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. He has done performances and social projects at the National Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in Oslo and at the International Crafts Fair in Munich.



**Conversation Distance Meter** 2015, electronics case, battery, LEDs, ultrasonic range finder, microchip, steel, 8 × 12 × 5 cm.