

THE FEMINIST WELDING CLUB



The first time I entered a metal workshop in Vienna, the only representation of women I saw was in the form of topless photos. They were displayed on the wall as titty calendar models, looking down at me. In a workshop in London, metalworkers took their gender roles so seriously that men would grill steaks in a toasty maker during lunch breaks. The metal craft remains dominated by men.



A typical break room at a metal workshop in Austria.



At the Design Academy Eindhoven, where I completed my bachelor's degree, I received the worst grade in my metal course for my bent sheet coaster. I was intimidated by the machines, and welding felt completely out of reach for me, but I didn't know exactly why.

During my master's studies, I began to explore why so few women dare to weld. It leaves a mark when you grow up in a society that teaches you that technology and machines are only for boys and men. As a woman, you often search vainly for female role models in these fields and feel discouraged.

However, I didn't want to give up, because metal fascinated me. Instead, I walked into the metal workshop at the Royal College of Art, approached the five male technicians there, and asked if they could teach me aluminium welding — the most difficult kind of welding.

Over time, I learnt that welding is not about strength, but self-confidence and focus. Confidence in your abilities is key. It is doubt that leads to mistakes, not a lack of muscle mass. Welding is the most empowering thing I have learned in my life so far. Once you master this craft, it opens up the possibility to build or join almost anything. Two thin pieces of metal can be connected in a way that is strong enough to support your entire body weight.

When I told my friends about my work, many of them were excited and said, "Oh, I want to learn that too!" At that time, I was deeply engaged with feminist theory and thinking about how we can create our own communities, rather than seeking acceptance in existing spaces.

This is how the idea of founding the Feminist Welding Club came about, and it immediately received a surprising amount of support. I began teaching women in my class how to weld, and organised weekly club meetings to discuss the creative process, and the feeling of not belonging in workshop environments. The welding club gained momentum.

This year, I have taught welding to seventeen women, and in the process engaged critically with my own learning experience — wanting to pass on the skill in a supportive environment.

During my research, I looked for a place to host the club sessions. When a welder introduced me to another metalworker, he said, "This is Anna, she is a welder." For a moment, I was perplexed, but then I thought: Yes, that's right. I am a welder. I never thought it would become part of my identity so quickly, but it feels extremely good.



Above: I'm welding aluminum; Next page: First welding lines of club members. It is TIG (tungsten inert gas) welding, which is more difficult to learn than MIG (metal inert gas) welding. The club members learned both types.



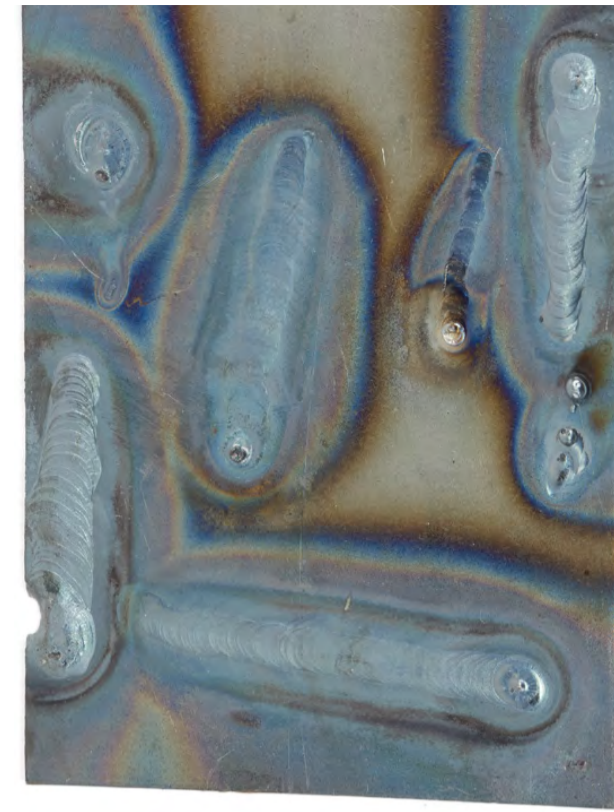
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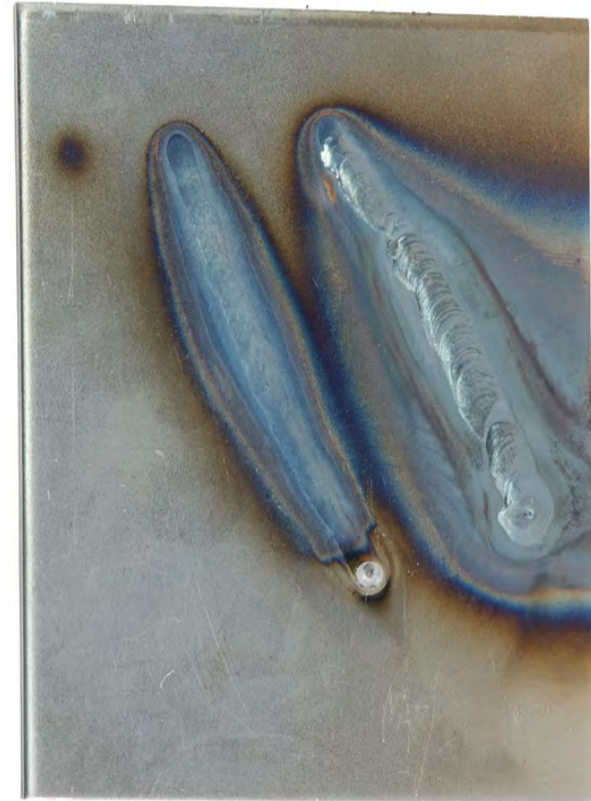
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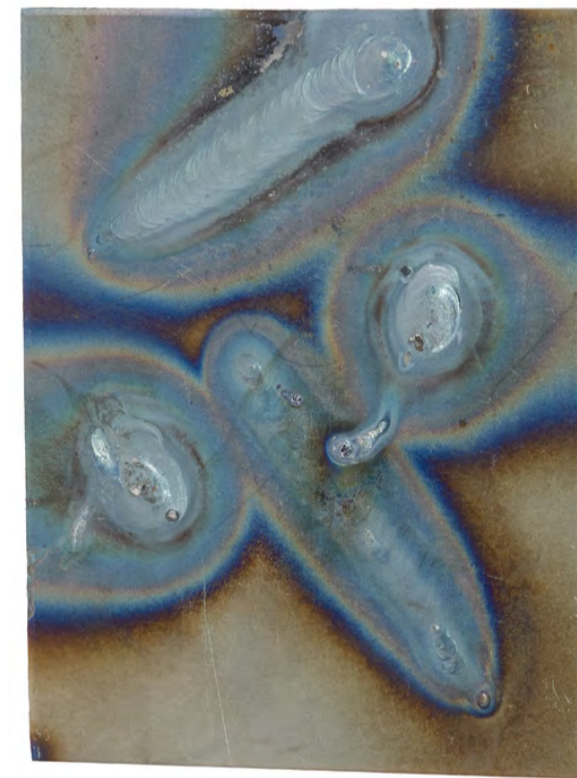
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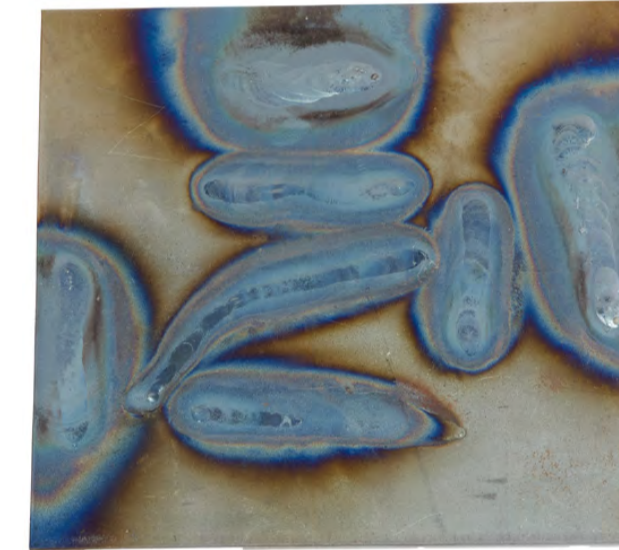
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SIRI



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ANNA



Welding symbolises a bigger challenge. It's about breaking down barriers and empowering oneself to pursue our passions and abilities without gender-specific limitations. For my final project, I designed a model break room for the Feminist Welding Club workshop. The furniture I made for it—table, clock, vase, and stool—are all welded aluminium. The women from the club welded stools and cups from steel. Here, welding joins people together, and creates a space for exchange and community.

It turns out that as a woman, I can feel comfortable in workshops, and create my own vision of the setting without titty calendars — but in case professional success does depend on a wall calendar, we did our own 'Calendar Girls' photoshoot.

Left: Ornamental MIG welding on a stool the club members have created.



Cups that we welded during the club welding sessions. Each member welded their own cup.



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