

GARAGE MAGAZINE | SANNE MESTROM'S RECLINING NUDES

By Sarah L Clark , January 4, 2014



Melbourne artist Sanne Mestrom opened *The Reclining Nude*, a sculptural installation of works created during her two-year residency at Gertrude Contemporary, on Thursday evening at Sydney's Chalk Horse gallery.

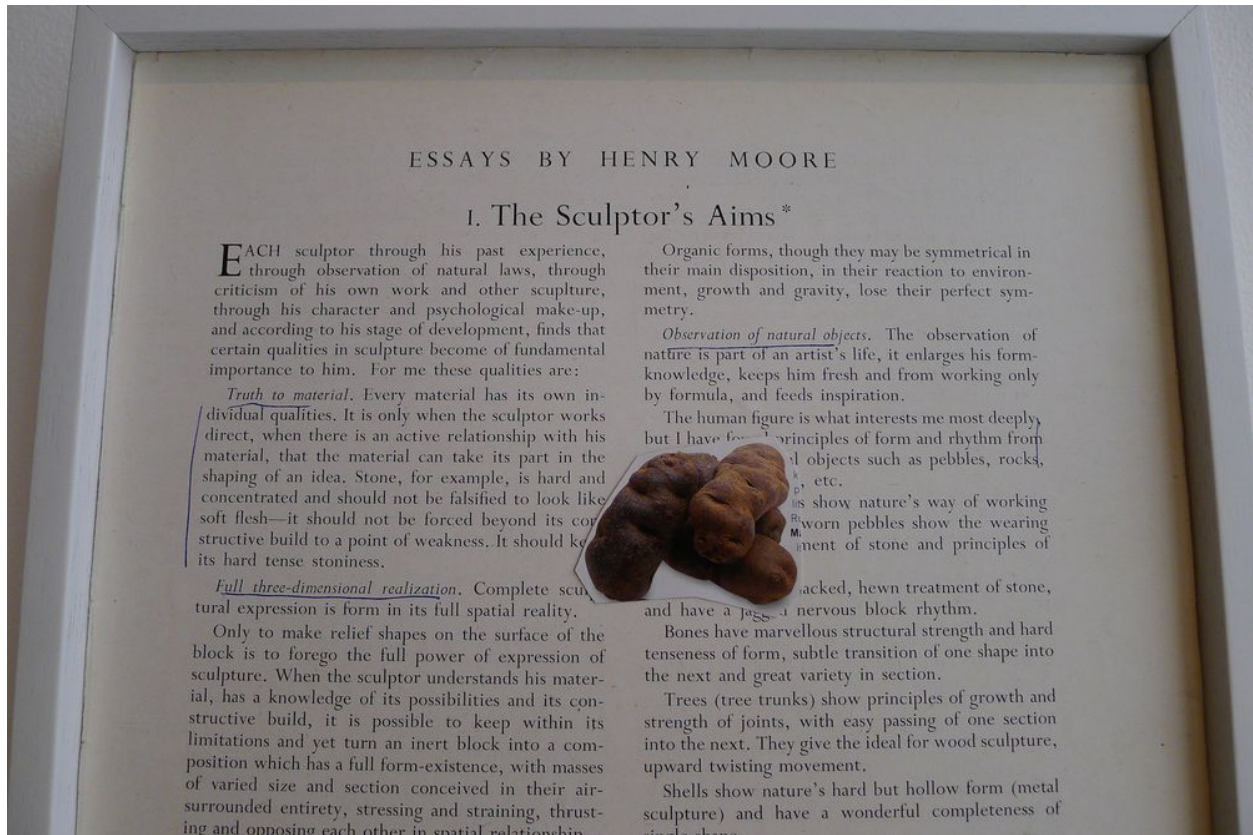
Mestrom is interested in the reclining nude as an enduring theme in art history, particularly in the period of modernism, and describes the collection as an exploration of process and materiality.



Taking the themes and composition of works by modernist artists such as Picasso and Brancusi, Mestrom has used ceramics, cast foam, vinyl, steel and found objects, as well as more traditional materials such as marble and bronze, and has assembled them in ways which are precarious and vulnerable.

“Modernism is the period of absolutes in history. A period of ownership, of authority, of heroic male artists making enormous solid material works. The reclining nude is about the male gaze taking ownership over a very intimate, private scenario and I’m interested in inverting that. I think the work is a feminist re-writing of the modernist aesthetics and language.”

Garage was invited to discuss *The Reclining Nude* with Chalk Horse Gallery Director Oliver Watts and the 2011 John Fries Memorial Prize winner. Here’s what they had to say.



Garage: You work with many different forms of sculpture. Is there a medium you prefer to work with?

Sanne Mestrom: I like using everything at my fingertips and sliding across media and processes in a very ad-hock ad-lib way. I want to avoid the mastery of a material and process. I want to slip through the cracks and be a guest in the terrain of that process. I want to stay as amateur as possible.

Oliver Watts: Why would you want to be amateur? Is it a feminist thing?

SM: No. It's about a discovery of a material and a process that is unconditioned. It's unlearnt. Certainly everything I've done in the last few years has been about getting better and better at doing something until you loose, I loose, all the freshness and all the discovery.

Garage: So it's quite an experimental and organic process?

SM: I can't say it's primitive, because I'm still too learnt, but I'm trying to un-learn I suppose. And while that's a paradox, it's at the core of this material inspiration. This unlearning.

OW: The tapestry is the newest medium for you. How is that going?

SM: I loved doing that because I had to join the women's tapestry guild in Victoria to do it. The members were about two generations older than me and each person in the guild was either a weaver or a spinner. No single person harbors both skills. I'm a one-man band, I do absolutely everything, perhaps poorly, but I loved that they were so contained in their skill set and masterful at it.

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OW: A lot of contemporary artists use master craftsman to make their work. Why is it important that you make your works yourself?

SM: It's being at the mercy of the material rather than dominating or exerting authority over it. It's letting the material guide me and it's very humbling.

OW: You were talking about modernist male artists earlier. Your work represents a lot of good discussion with their work. How do you feel you've commented on that male desire? What's the effect or purpose of it?

SM: I'm particularly interested in the ancient explorations of eroticism in art. I have always been interested in that because it's such an enduring theme and it's the thing that we all know and experience at many points in life. It's not only a theme through history but it's personally something that is lived and encountered.

OW: You've used found objects in the works. For example in the erotic work *Temple*.



SM: Yes, I cast that, but it's based on a found object. I do a lot of casting and assemblage and working with found objects and I'm interested in how the readings of these elements shift with every degree of deferral.

The bronze *Temple* piece I found at a market and it was a b-grade quality hand-cast plaster. The chap who was running the stall had found the original years ago and he kept casting it because he loved it so much. The version he had is obviously a small version of a big sculpture somewhere in a museum. There's a sense that the origin is lost and yet it resembles something almost familiar. It's a kind of elusive original but because it's severed all actual threads to that original artwork it has now taken ownership of itself as a unique object in the world.

OW: There are different kinds of found. There's Arte Povera, the art of the every day, and then Surreal found objects are fantastical, sort of magical way - as if you are supposed to have found it - a dreamy thing. Is the found object in your work Surreal?

SM: I think the found object to me is that idea of taking the authorship out of the hands of the artist, in the same way that I relate to process, I am trying to not have authority.

The Reclining Nude is exhibiting at [Chalk Horse](#) gallery until May 26.