

## THINGS FALL DOWN: SOMETIMES WE LOOK UP

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Understanding or forecasting the future is an aim that unites many spiritual beliefs and scientific practices, and more broadly, this aspiration is an underlying trait of humanity. Sanné Mestrom's recent exhibition at Chalk Horse titled *Things Fall Down: Sometimes We Look Up*, presented several installations that strove to understand how the presence of the desire to predict future outcomes affects our emotional state. Her work is an expression and detailed exploration of these emotions, manifesting in the dynamics of our present existence.

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For some time Mestrom's practice has been defined by optical experimentations of text based works. *Will judgment hurt when it falls on me?* (2009), an orthographic wall painting depicting its title slogan, encompassed a large mass of wall in one corner of the gallery—consuming the viewer's gaze within a semi-immersive environment. The receding fonts that created pictorial and spatial illusion, challenged behaviours of perception and questioned the natural order of looking and pictorial depth—while the slogan itself aroused feelings of anticipation, imminence, impending actions, waiting, human expectations; and questioned future's indeterminacy with spiritual undertones. By questioning the act of perception and the physical and psychological position of the viewer, the artwork becomes performative and temporal, and evokes elements of uncertainty and unpredictably in the conscience of the viewer.

The exhibition as a whole witnessed a recent shift in Mestrom's work, which is increasingly concerned with the material properties of sculptural form. Through schematic spatial regimes, the three-dimensional objects that made up this series continue to generate the same questions related to surface flatness and materiality of her wall-based paintings. However the objects introduced a determined physicality to the themes of subtle variance or pending movements. The objects expressed what in physical terms the orthographic projections could not.

Mestrom's object and sculptural-based work appears deceptively simple, even benign, but it compels the audience to question themselves in relation to the work as they wait for some minute displacement to occur. In *Shelf With Masking Tape* (2009), a ball of masking tape's precariously hung at the precipice of a sloping acrylic shelf, suspended from a wall in the gallery space. Aware that human behaviour encompasses anticipation of the future, Mestrom manipulates the inconspicuous nature of the object to leave the viewer awaiting change, thinking of that future moment of difference or pending alteration. This anticipatory behaviour is the result of an innate psychological outlook toward the future and presents two alternate positions: optimism or pessimism, hope or despair, will it fall or will it stay? Hope, or the belief in a positive outcome also implies a certain amount of despair: the future action could go either way. However the belief that a better or positive outcome is possible, even when there is some evidence to the contrary, is the only conclusion of consequence as the object is destined to remain suspended upon the precipice.

Many of the objects within the exhibition offered a strange dichotomy between physical and future pluralities. At

first they are what they seem—a brick, a black plastic rubbish bag, a shelf, a ball of masking tape, a wooden panel—but at the last possible moment they become something entirely different. With *Brick* (2009), (a bronze cast was taken of an average brick and filled with lead—to become exactly its weight in gold—and then painted to replicate a brick’s regular appearance), Mestrom creates an ongoing paradox where the appearance of the object belies what it is while alluding the viewer to the same thing: hence becoming several things at once.



Sanné Mestrom, *Glass*, 2009, plastic, paint (foreground); *Will judgment hurt when it falls on me?*, 2008, wall work. Photo: Dougal Phillips.



*Glass* (2009), a large piece of black industrial plastic sprawled on the floor of the gallery space with the word ‘glass’ scrawled across it with spray paint, questioned both the current reality of its own materiality, but also its future and/or past manifestation. We try to define the objects that surround us, anchor them and compartmentalise them, but just as *Glass* may move and shift with a single gust of wind, our future may move, shift and renegotiate itself with every present action we take. Here, Mestrom stresses alternate or plural futures,

rather than a monolithic progression, sighting the limitations of prediction and human judgment versus the creation of possibilities and paradoxes; and seeking to understand what is likely to continue and what is likely to change. However, the search for a systematic and pattern-based understanding of past and present via the objects around us—in order to determine the likelihood of future trends—inevitably fails. We are always left with the present construction of (in this instance) that plastic tarp.

Mestrom's conceptual art practice addresses liminal spaces, transposing and transforming materials to explore themes of uncertainty and crisis. *Constellation of Kings Cross* (2009), an un-doctored photograph inverted and presented upside-down, depicts thousands of pieces of gum spat out and built up over a presumable period of many years on a footpath in Kings Cross. Depicting an array of cosmologically beautiful colours, reflecting the neon streetlights above, the image bizarrely appears like a retrieved photograph of dying stars, long dead, from an outgoing space telescope. As in *Brick* and *Shelf With Masking Tape*, here Mestrom offers the crux between Presentism, the belief that only the present exists and the future and the past are logical constructs or fictions, and Eternalism, that things in the past and things yet to come exist eternally. This philosophical knives edge lays dormant, idly, adjourned: her objects extending that liminal moment in time.

The exhibition becomes a series of experiments and questions about meaning and belief, evoking the uncertainty of loss and sorrow and the longing for something that cannot be attained, or will never be fulfilled. The future is presented not as a theme of human foresight, but of uncertainty, tackling the human preparation of this uncertainty and anticipation of the unknown. In so doing, Mestrom conceives an elegant and intelligible form to examine the underlying behaviours of humanity, challenging the assumptions behind dominant and contending views of the future: which is thus (either way) not empty, but fraught with hidden assumptions.

**Sanné Mestrom's solo exhibition *Things Fall Down: Sometimes We Look Up* was held at Chalk Horse Gallery, Sydney from the February 5 to 21, 2009.**

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