

## Constantin Brancusi's Kiss inspires Sanne Mestrom's sculpture at MCA

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The Australian | 12:00AM September 2, 2017



*Soft Kiss by Sanne Mestrom*

Since the end of the 19th century, the kiss has been the subject of numerous modernist artworks ranging from Auguste Rodin's sensual and illicit embrace, to Gustav Klimt's golden caress, to Roy Lichtenstein's pop smooch, and Banksy's two policemen kissing, spray-painted on the wall of an English pub.

Another famous kiss was created by Constantin Brancusi, whose work is so desired that earlier this year one of his egg-shaped bronze sculptures caused a flurry of excitement when it sold at auction in New York for more than \$US57 million (\$72m).

Brancusi produced numerous versions of his eloquent kiss sculpture and now, more than 100 years on, it has been reinterpreted by Melbourne-based artist Sanne Mestrom. Her version, *Soft Kiss*, is on display at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, in the exhibition *Today Tomorrow Yesterday*.

*Soft Kiss* is based on a headpiece Mestrom found in a second-hand junk shop in Melbourne. "It really captivated me because it reminded me of a Brancusi headpiece and I love Brancusi's sculptures," she has said.

“I bought it and took it home because of this loose link between the highly revered, beautiful stone carving by Brancusi, and this somewhat tacky, kitsch and junky plaster reproduction of the original.”

*Soft Kiss* is more restrained than Brancusi’s all-encompassing kiss. In *Soft Kiss* contact is restricted to a slight touch of lips on cheek and there is a barrier between the two heads. Also, rather than Brancusi’s use of stone, *Soft Kiss* consists of a smooth rubber cast that is intentionally left unfinished so the seams produced by the moulding process are clearly visible.

Mestrom’s production of an imperfect copy is a deliberate approach and she mentions John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* as an influence.

For instance, when once asked why she was interested in these iconic works, such as Brancusi’s kiss, she explained: “I draw on 20th-century iconic modernist works to explore the psychological, emotional and cultural significance attached to them.

“I like that we absorb all these monumental and seminal artworks through our lifetime of looking at artwork,” she said. “We almost absorb these works unconsciously into our psyche because they are such big players in my mind.

“I like drawing on the vibe of the original and that’s enough of a link for me to feel like I’m close to greatness. And when I found this Brancusi-esque work I thought, ‘I love it’, and it is that sliding away from the original that I like.”

MCA senior curator Natasha Bullock says Mestrom ostensibly makes art about art from a feminist and contemporary perspective by taking a work such as Brancusi’s *The Kiss* and giving it a different sensibility.

“Brancusi made a work where two abstract forms were leaning in towards each other but for *Soft Kiss* it is made out of plaster and rubber. It is not finished, it is not perfect, it is actually messy,” Bullock says. “You can see the lines around where the sculpture is made.”

Bullock says she “fell in love with this work” the first time she saw it. “I love that it is called *Soft Kiss* as there is the juxtaposition of the very soft heads touching against this raw metal base.

“What I also love about this work is this beautiful sense of intimacy. She has chosen these very ephemeral materials that might break down over time. So, it is not about solidity, it is about something passing through time, which I think is what love is anyway.”

***Sanne Mestrom, Soft Kiss (2011). Collection Museum of Contemporary Art. Purchased with funds provided by the MCA Foundation, 2016. On display in the exhibition Today Tomorrow Yesterday at MCA, Sydney.***

***Sanne Mestrom** is also showing new work in Corrections at Sullivan+Strumpf gallery, Sydney, until September 9.*