

This catalogue has been produced as part of the Gertrude Contemporary and Art & Australia Emerging Writers Program. The Emerging Writers Program pairs four young writers with an experienced mentor each, culminating in the production of a catalogue essay for Gertrude Contemporary's Studio 12 exhibition program and a review to be published in Art & Australia magazine.

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Text: Summar Hipworth  
Mentor: Tony Bond

Image Captions:  
Sanné Mestrom  
*Untitled*, 2011  
Unspun wool, twine, timber bell pull

Sanné Mestrom  
*Soft Kiss*, 2011  
Cast foam, found object, plinth

Sanné Mestrom  
(Left to right) *Henry Moore / Pélardon*, 2011  
Collage on found image

*Henri Matisse / Katenrauchwurst*, 2011  
Collage on found image

*Henry Moore / Norfolk Black*, 2011  
Collage on found image

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Gertrude Contemporary  
200 Gertrude Street  
Fitzroy VIC 3065 Australia  
Telephone +61 3 9419 3406  
Facsimile +61 3 9419 2519  
info@gertrude.org.au  
www.gertrude.org.au

“...just as you distort appearances to arrive at truth”  
Patrick White, *The Vivisector*

Standing in front of Sanné Mestrom's work evokes a strange uneasiness. As you grapple to recollect where you may have seen these forms before, your confidence in the reliability of perception undergoes a subtle shift. Through a seemingly simple arrangement of everyday objects, materials, or language, Mestrom uses triggers to activate our default expectations in order to subsequently undermine them, highlighting their presence and implications. Mestrom plays with visual language in order to create a space where the mind of the viewer takes over – extending the space beyond the object into the layered complexities of experience and memory.



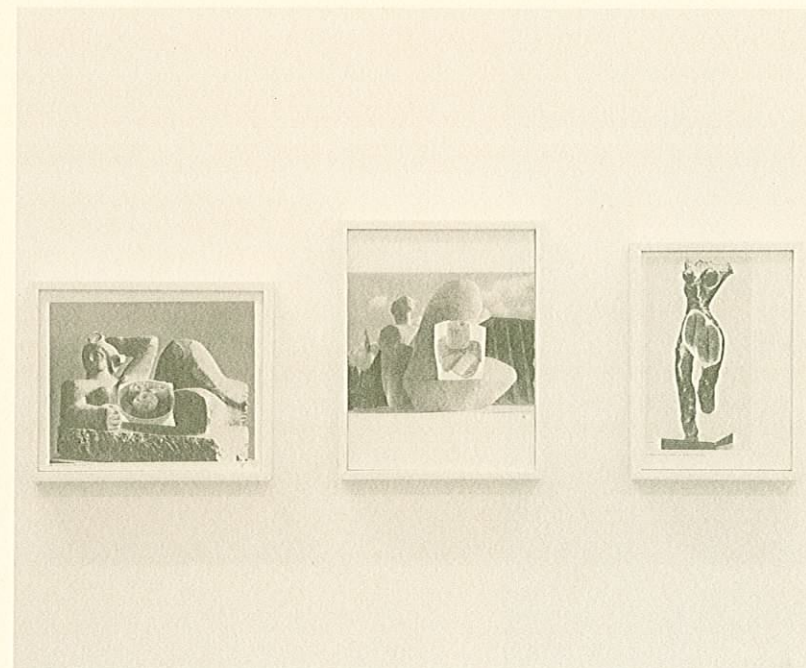
(cont...) In her new body of work, *The Reclining Nude*, Mestrom creates an installation of sculptural elements that explore a history of conditions imposed upon the representation of the female form. Cultural interpretations of our realities, over an accumulated history, affect a pattern of expectation that shape our subsequent encounter with space and the material world. Mestrom explores the impact of this through her own fractured engagement with the historical representation of the nude. Her process of arranging and adjusting found objects, by adding or subtracting materials, and the relationships and tensions created through placement within space, reflects a critical sculptural process intuitively guided by materials and form. Despite aesthetic precedents by artists such as Meret Oppenheim, and more recently Sarah Lucas, of arranging and manipulating everyday objects so they allude to the female form, Mestrom's works are not motivated by a shared feminist discourse of the body and sexuality. Instead, *The Reclining Nude* draws from a lifetime of looking and how this subtly informs our understanding of the world around us.

As the image of iconic artworks proliferate into our everyday lives outside of the usual spaces of authority, they become sites of memory and knowledge. Over time, these reoccurring encounters take shape in the mind as memory, experience and imagination. Mestrom's practice often translates this process, rendering the intangible. Despite Aldous Huxley's drug-induced state when he wrote *The Doors of Perception*, his summation of the inherent true qualities of things highlights how fraught our systems of perception are. Through his adventurous jaunts into the effects of mescaline, Huxley claimed that when our pre-conceived socialised concepts are put aside, we are left with reality as directly experienced instead of what the mind formulates.

Mestrom also raises the question of our ability to perceive truthfully by disrupting expectations of materiality. Disguising her materials through casting or meticulous replication, Mestrom playfully draws attention to their inherent qualities. This highlights, not the object itself, but the psychological constructs that inform our experiences.

Occupying the centre of the gallery space, Mestrom's nude is the height and proportions of a standard coffee table. The nude appears to recline as though in dream. She is simultaneously body and the bed she occupies. The sculptural works that surround her, such as *Soft Kiss* and *Reclining Lovers*, expose her dreams of love, erotic embrace, and even her own long and varied history. To stand inside the gallery space is therefore to be a privileged witness to a moment of suggested vulnerability and also seductive offering. Such was the fate of the revealed female form throughout its visual history. The title of the central work, *Nyotaimori Coffee Table (Feeding Off the Nude)*, refers to the Japanese tradition of eating food off the naked body of a beautiful woman. The duality of body as furniture and furniture as body reinforces Mestrom's relationship with objects as often having an inherent psychological quality – a space upon which to project, read, and understand the self.

It is within this anthropomorphic quality that Mestrom cites powerful psychological resonances implicit in sculptural forms. For Mestrom, the physical space becomes a projection of the internal state, mutable and in flux. Our experience of the object in front of us therefore, is dependent on the relationship between object, space, and the viewer – all under the weight of history and the systems by which we arrive at meaning.





What you see in Mestrom's series of sculptural works for *The Reclining Nude*, are the traces of her various encounters with a visual language that continues to define our understanding of the psychical and psychological qualities that have been ascribed to the female form. Through subtle distortions of materials and historical references, Mestrom's works emanate a strange familiarity, evoking a memory you can't quite place. As you undulate between recognition and uncertainty, the slippages between perception and knowledge may afford a fleeting moment to arrive at a personal truth.

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Quotation on front cover:  
White, P., *The Vivisector*, (London: Vintage, 1994), pp. 229

