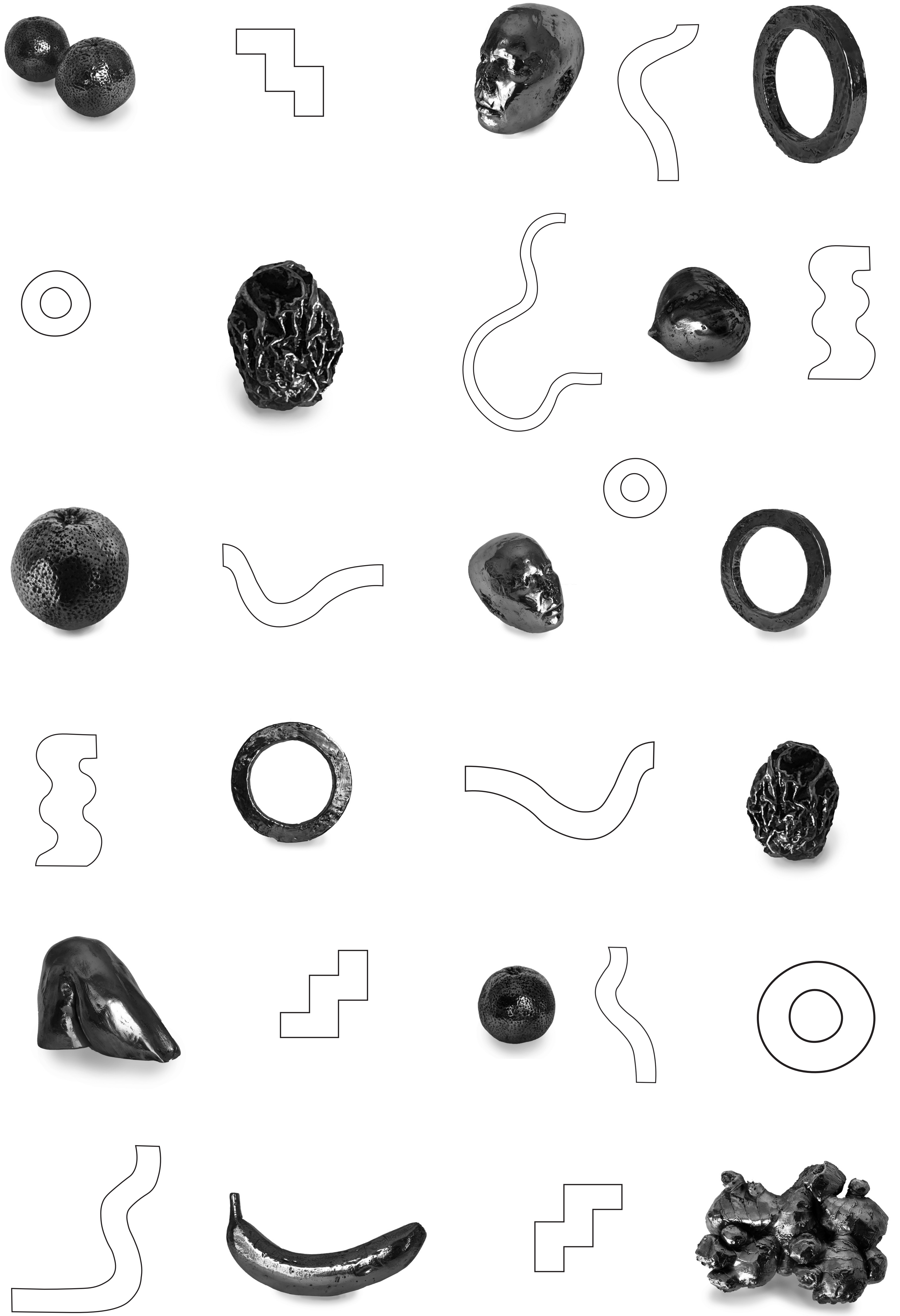

CORRECTIONS
Sanné Mestrom

With all the bewildering possibilities open to artists, how does an artwork find its place in the world? For Sanné Mestrom, the answer lies in acknowledging that one's art lies within a vast and complex trajectory of global art production, and secondly, in encouraging one's own art to form some kind dialogue with that lineage. Hers is an art of echoes and whispers. It raises the possibility that art does not spontaneously appear from nowhere, but it is the progeny of other artworks, through their interactions and encounters. Thus Mestrom, in a way, is a practitioner of artistic husbandry. Her studio is the laboratory where artworks mate and create offspring.

The forms that emerge from this nursery for art are original but they wear the clearly discernible characteristics of their parentage, which in many cases are among the masters of twentieth century art. So it is that we find the love children of Picasso and Matisse, of Morandi and Moore.

Mestrom's most recent sculptures represent extensions of the body, like props that compensate for the body's shortcomings. They allow the artist to jump and float and move through space as she might in a dream. They are the wings to her Nike of Samothrace, that give flight to her ambitions of mobility. In their unboundedness, the works seem to flit amongst the ruins of modernism, alighting on various forms that we might identify with other periods and other sculptures, but Mestrom is increasingly writing her own language of forms; each shape here is another hieroglyph of this ever-expanding universe of symbols.

A surprising aspect of Mestrom's practice is the wide berth she allows for imperfections and the marks of creation. Her works retain the foibles that make them seem real, and somehow human. These slightly rough finishes and somewhat crooked forms liberate the works from the canon of absolute modernism—of the unblemished complexion of Brancusi—and give them a voice to speak of sculpture's plight in the twenty-first century, in a world that has gone bewilderingly digital. As our lives move increasingly into non-physical realms, the physical presence of Mestrom's forms hit us like an electric shock. The tactile replaces the virtual and we are reminded, in a flash, that we are flesh and blood beings that exist in time and space.

These 'corrections', therefore, occur on many levels and in many ways. Any gestures toward theory and intellectualism are forgotten as we dance into the future with these glorious ghosts of sculpture's past, hand in hand with forms that seem to beckon us to tango. As sculptures they have a fundamental relationship with our bodies, imploring us to move around them as we look. But more than most human artifice the relationship goes two ways; the planes, pockets, volumes and recessions become a template for movement—a code that can only be cracked by acting out the signals we are given.

Mestrom herself notes: 'As a 'sculptor', the one material I am coerced to work with everyday is gravity: the weight of things defines the limitations and the potential of any sculptural practice'. The way that Mestrom negotiates this underlying facet of her work is revealing of her intentions. She neither fights nor ignores gravity; for Mestrom gravity is a means of giving her work lightness and weight. It is a substance as malleable as pine or clay. She moulds it and shapes it until it resembles a kind of prosthetic—not just physical but also related to her non-physical being. The pieces are, in every way, the means by which the artist's dreams can take flight.

Another striking aspect of Mestrom's practice is her desire to recalibrate twentieth century art history from a female perspective. The history of art is littered with images of females depicted by men, quite often without their clothes on. This leaves a twenty-first century feminist sculptor drawing influences from early twentieth century sculpture in a tricky position. Mestrom's 'corrections' are therefore ideological as well as material. Without undermining the great male sculptors who have preceded her, Mestrom forges a new vocabulary for figurative sculpture, which takes the female perspective into account. The female nude is thus seen in somewhat less than ideal terms; the bumps and abrasions and sometimes awkward posturing is all as it should be.

In straddling the historic and the contemporary, the two and three-dimensional, and the masculine and the feminine, Sanné Mestrom provides an endlessly inventive contribution to the sculptural lexicon. The genetic code of artworks past may still be discernible, but as any parent knows, children can be full of surprises.

Simon Gregg
Curator, Gippsland Art Gallery, 2017

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