

Sanné Mestrom
Weeping Women 2014
cast concrete, brass, internal irrigation system and water
Monash University Museum of Art
2014 Ian Potter Sculpture Court Commission

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Biography

Sanné Mestrom was born in the Netherlands in 1979, moved to New Zealand with her family in 1983 and has lived and worked between Melbourne and Gippsland since 1998.

Sanné Mestrom holds a PhD in Fine Art and a Graduate Certificate in Public Art both from RMIT University. Mestrom was a studio artist at Gertrude Contemporary and has held residencies in Mexico City and Seoul. Mestrom's recent solo exhibitions include: *Black Paintings*, Utopian Slumps, Melbourne, 2014; *The Internal Logic*, West Space, Melbourne and La Trobe Regional Gallery, Victoria, 2013; and *The Reclining Nude*, Chalk Horse, Sydney, 2012 and Studio 12, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne, 2011. Selected group exhibitions include: *Never Never Land*, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, 2014; *Assembly: Contemporary Ceramics*, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne, 2014; *Future Primitive*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, 2013; *NEW13*, ACCA, Melbourne, 2013; *Pretty Air & Useful Things*, MUMA, 2012; *Ode to Form*, West Space, 2012; *Figure & Ground*, Utopian Slumps, Melbourne, 2012; *OCTOPUS 11: The Matter of Air*, Gertrude Contemporary, 2011; and *Social Sculpture*, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Sydney, 2011. Mestrom is the recipient of an Australia Council for the Arts Grant, a City of Melbourne Grant, several Arts Victoria Creation Grants, the Siemens post graduate fine art scholarship award, winner of the 2011 John Fries Memorial Prize, an Australian Federation of University Women, Daphne Elliott Research Award and received the Australian Post Graduate Award for Phd research.

Mestrom is represented by Chalk Horse, Sydney





SANNÉ MESTROM
WEEPING WOMEN



WEEPING WOMEN

Geraldine Kirrihi Barlow

Standing, reclining and squatting – Sanné Mestrom's trio of monumental female forms have a powerful physical presence. Her *Weeping women* are deeply grounded; cast from solid concrete, they rest firm upon the earth, nourishing it.

The long curving planes of the reclining figure invite those walking by to rest a moment upon her belly or extended leg. This figure is the most hospitable; comfortably relaxed in the sun, she invites others to gather and add their own bodies to her own. In contrast to the languid reclining figure, Mestrom's standing woman stretches tall into the sky. Above our heads a stream of water arcs transparent from each nipple, catching the light. Of the three, the squatting figure is the most unusual representation of the female form. With one arm raised above her head, as if to protect herself from the harsh light of the sun, and her legs spread wide open in a series of U-shaped curves, she is at once vulnerable and powerful.

Against the reduced simplicity and surprising newness of these large forms, each pair of breasts – relatively small and refined – is much more familiar, a kind of archetype. The body, the breast, the nipple and the eye. The eyes of the women reinforce Mestrom's surprising capacity to describe with line: as if the women were resting deep within a heavy lidded eye. A kind of ever-seeing eye, within and beyond time.

The *Weeping women* draw on convention only to defy it. While the lactating breast is deeply associated with nurture, these female figures also have a strong sense of sexual power. Mestrom chooses to work with such forms and make them her own, in a search for emotional veracity. She brings together ancient representations of birth and fecundity, most notably

the Aztec statues of the goddess *Tlazolteotl* or *Ixcuinan*, modernist interpretations of a monumental 'femininity' familiar to us in the work of artists such as Henry Moore, and more recent neo-modernist complications of such inheritances, for instance in the work of Thomas Houseago. Mestrom's practice is distinctive in the way she draws energy from cultural artefacts spanning many places and periods in human history.

Mestrom draws from fine art, from her own experience as well as from a process deeply grounded in the studio, in drawing, and the process of constantly adapting form, line and volume. Working with the artist on the development of this project offered the opportunity to see elegant line drawings become small clay maquettes. Throughout the production process, Mestrom would continue to move between sketch and maquette, testing large line drawings on MDF to check the scale in relation to the site and trees, and further resolving the work as she carved the styrene forms from which the casts were made. The production of this work was as deeply physical as the forms themselves, and yet similarly always a dialogue between line and motion, deliberation and instinct.

Mestrom speaks of a desire to create transcendental forms with real power, both spiritual and metaphysical; of a desire to achieve works that are raw, immediate and open – to draw private experience and emotion into a shared public space as well as the continuing discourse of art history. Against the hard geometries of the courtyard and surrounding buildings, Mestrom's *Weeping women* are surprising. Their curves welcome the play of light as well as interaction with passersby. In this way, they are both a kind of stage set as well as witnesses to the activities of those around.





