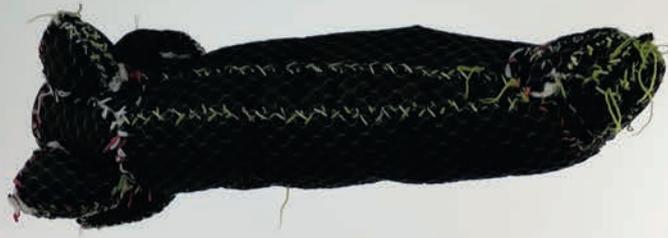


ARTS
PROJECT
AUSTRALIA



Faraway, so close



Faraway, so close

Featuring the work of seven artists across three shared spaces, *Faraway, so close* presents a series of creative exchanges, encounters and collaborations which explore the multiple ways in which we experience proximity and distance and the movements in between. Appropriated from the name of a 1993 film by Wim Wenders, the title of this exhibition juxtaposes two adjectives conventionally considered to be diametrically opposed in meaning. The close pairing of these contrary positions suggests that perhaps their relationship is more ambiguous and their differences are less definable than we might suppose.



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A ROOM OF HAPTIC KNOWLEDGE

In her ongoing series of durational performance drawings called *The Rooms*, Gosia Wlodarczak generates individual, large-scale and immersive installations which speak to the internal life of the body and, in particular, its organs. In seeking to understand ‘our most sacred “personal universe”’, the project intends to explore each organ in terms of both its symbolic and biological functions. For the latest iteration she invited Bronwyn Hack and Terry Williams to collaborate with her in the realisation of *A ROOM OF HAPTIC KNOWLEDGE*, an incarnation of the largest organ of the body – skin. As a powerful site of sensory contact which mediates between inside and outside, self and other, skin is a highly apposite metaphor for this negotiation between three artists drawn together physically and temporally in this intimate space. As Wlodarczak observes, each line, shape and form she describes with her pigment marker is made through a physical and mental attunement to her constantly changing surroundings:

All people and objects by being present in a particular space at the particular moment in time exchange energy and establish a state of in-betweenness – a shared space, which builds something else, a membrane, which holds all the activities within this moment.²

Like skin itself, Wlodarczak’s interweaving mesh of lines on the walls of the gallery have the quality of both



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containment and permeability, its accumulated layers recording the fleeting co-existence of people and things interacting; an inscribed registry of sensory impressions like notations on the nature of relativity.

Wrapped within this enveloping skein of lines, as expanses of tactile and textural substances which are both responsive and sensuous, the skin-like qualities of the fabric works of Hack and Williams are accentuated. In his quickly executed renditions of familiar objects, Williams's unrehearsed, unfussy and improvisational soft sculptures are imbued with a powerful presence, retaining a sense of the artist's physical and psychic investment in their making. Through the rapid movements of cutting, stitching and stuffing he uses to elaborate these idiosyncratic versions of everyday objects, Williams, in the words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, seems to 'recapture the feel of perceptual experience itself'.³ The slightly distorted or exaggerated features of his sculpted forms prompt us to look at these objects anew, to rediscover the distinctive thingness of each thing; what they mean to us; and how we relate to them.

Similarly, the soft, textile pieces of Bronwyn Hack are also highly tactile reinterpretations of familiar objects. However, for this artist, it is the intimate parts of the human body which are the subject of her ongoing constructions. Intended to eventually form part of full scale representations of a male and female figure, Hack's carefully crafted fabric models of a heart, brain,

liver and intestines, make powerfully explicit a sense of corporeality ordinarily hidden from view. Employing techniques of hand dyeing, cutting, assembling, and sewing, the artist chooses particular colours and textures to elaborate on the functions, drives and desires associated with each object/organ/part. For instance, as the most densely embroidered piece, the heart is adorned with a proliferation of colourful threads which are not only suggestive of its anatomical features, but also correspond to its symbolic role as the vessel of human emotion. However, it is perhaps the rawness of the stitches that bind each work which represents their most visceral quality. Resembling sutures, they call to mind Germano Celant's analysis of the textile works of Louise Bourgeois as a form of 'existential anatomy' in which the joining and sewing together of pieces of fabric represent a means of reparation.⁴ In Hack's case perhaps, it is more closely involved with the process of constructing identity.

As viewers entering this room, we too are invited to share this space and become part of this collaborative entanglement. In moving through and exploring its highly tactile objects and surfaces we may begin to apprehend, as Merleau-Ponty observes, that: 'Our relationship with things is not a distant one: each speaks to our body and to the way we live ... Humanity is invested in the things of the world and these are invested in it.'⁵



INTIMATE IMMENSITY

In one of the final chapters of his ground-breaking study in phenomenology, *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard brings to our awareness the notion that 'immensity is within ourselves ... attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests' but which if attended to can reveal to us 'the concordance of world immensity with intimate depth of being'.⁶ It is the kind of experience which might arise from staring at the sea or gazing into the night sky. As Bachelard further reveals, even 'in the presence of a perfectly familiar object, we experience an extension of our intimate space'.⁷ Encountering the ceramic telescope sculpted by Alan Constable for the first time we are initially drawn to its recognisable elements and their resemblance to the parts we are accustomed to finding in these instruments: tube, viewfinder, aperture, mount. However, as we move closer, it is the tactile, rather than optical, features of Constable's work that deepens this sense of familiarity. By substituting the precision and refinement of the manufactured prototype with imprecise construction, distinctive hand-modelling, and lustrous, wet-finish colour glazing, the artist takes the work beyond merely representational fidelity, embellishing it with attributes which are more personal in nature. In responding to these haptic qualities embodied in its form, we might perhaps recall a time when we have handled such a device ourselves and peered through into space, drawing remote objects into our purview, and expanding our point of view. Bachelard again: 'there is no greater value than intimacy – it has magnifying properties'.⁸

Robert Hollingworth once owned a Schmidt-Cassegrain catadioptric telescope which was powerful enough to see the rings of Saturn and count the moons of Neptune. However, after it was stolen, the artist turned his fascination with astronomy and astrophysics away from stargazing towards the potential of deep space as a subject for his artwork. One of the early examples of the resulting 'cosmos paintings', *270th Planet* (2009), depicts the marvellous spectacle of some far distant galaxy, vividly evoking both the sense of remoteness engendered by contemplating an unfathomable vastness, and familiarity at the sight of the ubiquitous starry canopy which envelops us every night. However, rather than use Hubble Space telescope images for source material in an attempt to produce photorealist representations, Hollingworth

envisages a 'hypothetical' universe in which the cosmos is considered as a 'metaphor for human longing'.⁹ Up close the work reveals its more painterly aspects, the splatters of paint or the areas which the artist has visibly rubbed and worked by hand, suggesting that our connection to the cosmos is not only an intellectual one, but also an embodied one which incorporates our sensory perceptions of touch and feel. On further inspection we also discover a small, solitary planetary body floating in this imaginary expanse of space – perhaps a symbol of our quest to discover that we are not alone in this infinitude? As the artist suggests, in gazing out into the cosmos we are really expressing some of our most pressing, innermost desires; to understand ourselves, our origins, and perhaps where we are going: 'For me, the real benefit in looking out is to reflect back [and wonder] what that enthralling firmament could tell us about life here on earth, about a primitive organism confounded by its own existence ...'¹⁰

In considering this speculative encounter between Constable's sculpture and Hollingworth's painting and the ways in which their works transform, expand, even invert, our conceptions of distance and proximity, perhaps we may begin to conceive of an in-between space in which the unknowable reaches of the infinitely remote and the secretive depths of intimate space become blurred or blended.

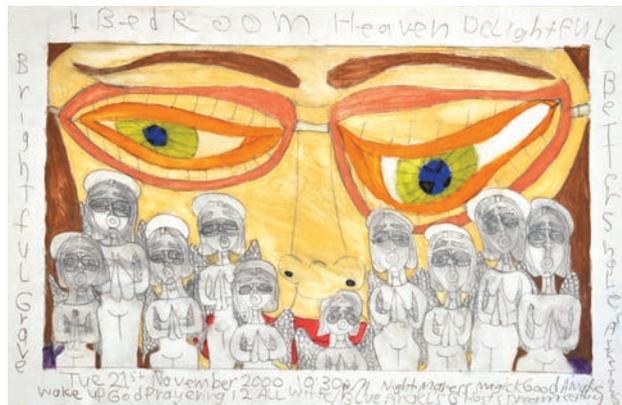




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KINDRED SPIRITS

States of in-betweenness and interconnectedness are also the subject of Kate Beynon's new series of paintings, works on paper and soft sculptures. Incorporating self-portrait references situated amongst a vibrant congregation of diverse characters, figures and imagery, these works not only speak to her ongoing exploration of mixed cultural identity and hybridity, but also to an expanded notion of kinship. Rather than defining kinship as an inheritance passed down through common lineage, Beynon proposes a more open and active conception which involves making connections and kinships 'beyond family, "blood", and human ties'.¹¹ In her large work on paper, *Kindred Spirits*, the artist includes several self-references, including steely-gazed, snake-haired gorgons and hybrid goddesses with elaborate headdresses. These figures, re-imagined from the mythic past to represent the power and possibility of transformation, are closely surrounded by a motley alliance of otherworldly figures; monstrous creatures, horned beasts and ghoulish apparitions who form a kind of personal pantheon. Derived from both her own experiences and mythical stories from a multiplicity of different periods and places, Beynon animates each of these characters with subjective potential by drawing them into her familial network. By summoning this mixture of multi-species and multicultural companions together and bringing them into proximity and visibility, Beynon challenges our customary discriminations between self and other, natural and supernatural,



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familiar and strange, the living and the dead. Presented as a seething assemblage of overlapping, hybrid beings, a new conception of cultural and personal identity emerges, one which is no longer strictly defined by the human subject.

The vivid and graphic paintings and drawings of Cathy Staughton also posit a notion of personal identity which is fluid and unbounded by habitual categorisation. For over 30 years, she has explored a range of themes and narratives which interweave autobiographical references with fantastical imagery often drawn from her dreams. Having grown up in St Kilda with a view of Luna Park through the windows of her home, this iconic landmark represents an intimate subject and site for many of Staughton's works. At times the artist has appropriated its familiar façade and substituted the visage of Mr Moon with her own self portrait, wittily usurping the persona of the amusement park. In other works, the entranceway is envisaged as a kind of threshold between the real world and a supernatural realm which can be alternately benevolent and 'Just for Fun', or unsettlingly sinister and populated with devils and ghosts. In more recent works, Staughton has turned to her treasured collection of robots as source material, portraying them with a sense of familial connection and as subjects with agency. As James McDonald observes, these companions 'have personalities and opinions ... sometimes her 'children', sometimes her servants, always her allies. Sometimes she will present her angels as robots or her robots as angels, seamlessly integrating the supernatural with



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the high-tech.¹² This process of inventing hybrid identities takes a further twist in her striking self-portrait of the artist as a 'Robosapien', a compelling vision of posthuman selfhood in which the animate and inanimate, the human and the machine are merged.

In exploring the works of Beynon and Staughton, a number of shared concerns emerge in regard to their construction of identity and how it is shaped and transformed through a mesh of interrelationships between divergent forms and objects, both human and non-human alike. An imaginative worldview which corresponds closely with Merleau-Ponty's proposition that: 'the relationship between human beings and things is no longer one of distance and mastery ... vertiginous proximity prevents us both from apprehending ourselves as a pure intellect separate from things and from defining things as pure objects lacking in all human attributes.'¹³

Employing a range of media and processes, including ceramics, installation, performance, soft sculpture, drawing, and painting, the highly tactile and evocative works in this exhibition provoke a range of responses and interactions which reveal the multiple ways in which, as embodied beings, we are intimately entangled with the things of the world. In foregrounding this web of exchanges, correspondences and interconnections, each encounter calls into question the habitual binaries of proximity and distance, intimacy and remoteness, internal and external, real and imaginary, visible and invisible. In its place, a more fluid and dynamic interplay

between subject and object emerges, one in which the lines between self and other, near and far, and here and there, become increasingly blurred.

ANTHONY FITZPATRICK / 2017
Curator, TarraWarra Museum of Art

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- 1. Gosia Wlodarczak, 'The Rooms', unpublished Artist Statement, p. 2.
- 2. Jane Somerville, 'Gosia Wlodarczak', *Artist Profile*, issue 29, February 2015.
- 3. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception* [1948], (trans. by Oliver Davis), London and New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 53.
- 4. Germano Celant, 'Dressing Louise Bourgeois' in *Louise Bourgeois: The Fabric Works*, Milan: Italy, 2010, p. 19.
- 5. Merleau-Ponty, p. 63.
- 6. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* [1958], (trans. by Maria Jolas), Boston: Beacon Press, 1994, pp. 184 and 189.
- 7. *ibid.*, p. 199.
- 8. *ibid.*, p. 202.
- 9. Robert Hollingworth, 'Out there, somewhere', Artist Statement, 2010.
- 10. *ibid.*
- 11. Kate Beynon, 'Kindred Spirits', unpublished notes, 2017.
- 12. Dr Cheryl Daye & James McDonald, 'Cathy Staughton's *Wondrous Imaginarium*', Melbourne: Arts Project Australia, 2013, p. 14.
- 13. Merleau-Ponty, p. 66.



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ARTISTS

Kate Beynon &
Cathy Staughton

Alan Constable &
Robert Hollingworth

Bronwyn Hack,
Terry Williams &
Gosia Wlodarczak

Faraway, so close

4 November –
2 December 2017

CURATED BY

Anthony Fitzpatrick,
Curator, TarraWarra
Museum of Art

LIST OF WORKS

COVER: Gosia Wlodarczak
A Room of Haptic Knowledge 2017
pigment pen on wall
dimensions variable
Five-day drawing performance
and installation. Creative situation
in collaboration with Bronwyn
Hack and Terry Williams, objects
and soft sculpture.
Courtesy of the artists
Image: Longin Sarnecki

1. Gosia Wlodarczak
A Room of Haptic Knowledge
2017 (detail)

pigment pen on wall
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist
Image: Longin Sarnecki

2. Bronwyn Hack
Heart 2015
cotton, material, wool and stuffing
26 × 22.5 × 10 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Arts
Project Australia, Melbourne

3. Terry Williams
Not titled 2011
vinyl, cotton, texta and stuffing
21 × 43 × 14 cm
Courtesy of Norman Rosenblatt

4. Robert Hollingworth
270th Planet 2009
acrylic on canvas
122 × 168 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
NKN Gallery, Melbourne

5. Alan Constable
Not titled 2017
glazed earthenware
35.5 × 47 × 25 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Arts
Project Australia, Melbourne

6. Cathy Staughton
*Not titled (Luna Park Land
Mark St Kilda Beach)* 2001
watercolour and pencil on paper
33 × 50 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Arts
Project Australia, Melbourne

7. Cathy Staughton
*Not titled (4 Bedroom
Heaven Delightful)* 2000
watercolour and pencil on paper
33 × 50 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Arts
Project Australia, Melbourne

8. Kate Beynon
Kindred Spirits 2017 (detail)
gouache, pencil and
watercolour on cotton rag
102 × 66.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

9. Terry Williams
Not titled (TV) 2015
mixed media, wool and stuffing
70 × 76 × 24 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Arts
Project Australia, Melbourne

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