

ARTS  
PROJECT  
AUSTRALIA



**AUTO BODY WORKS**



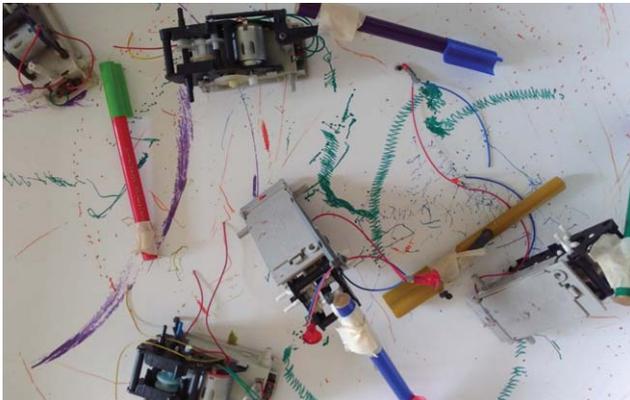




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## AUTO BODY WORKS

The human figure has always been a common subject of visual art. From prehistoric line drawings to early figurative images that served storytelling, spiritual and ceremonial purposes, to portraits that capture the living, representations of humans have marked the history of art perhaps more than any other form or subject.

Now, in the twenty-first century, it is possible to imagine a new type of human subject—one that responds to a moment where our sense of reality is heavily mediated, virtual and not private (think: robotics, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, cosmetic surgery, consumer advertising, digital technology and social media). The boundaries of the body have become more porous, and definitions of what constitutes the body have been thoroughly expanded.

Along these lines, the term ‘auto body works’ (from which this exhibition takes its title) refers to the automotive repairs that are undertaken on the bodies of vehicles damaged by collisions and other types of accidents. An auto body technician uses a wide array of tools to cut off old parts, connect new parts, fill holes, repair scratches, dents and dings, and make a car look as good as new.

The auto body technician’s role in repairing damages to a car’s shell is relevant to this exhibition in that it not only serves as a metaphor for the way human bodies are malleable and in need of ongoing maintenance; it also suggests that modifications and substitutions are an ordinary part of how we endure. The works presented in *Auto Body Works* variously explore how figurative and representative forms of the human body as a contemporary being can be challenged and broken down in surprising ways.

A clear starting point for the exhibition is the visual study of the human body. Bronwyn Hack’s soft sculptures of female and male genitalia are detailed

and explicit, as well as exaggerated and larger than life. They are presented as anatomical studies, isolated from the rest of the body. The human form as something to be objectified is also apparent in Lillian Palser Barto’s video *Bodybuilder 2015*, which documents a male bodybuilder actively posing to show off his highly toned muscles.

Chris Mason also has an interest in the specificities of the human form and has been making models of voluptuously large women for a significant number of years. Featured in *Auto Body Works* is a series of reclining female nudes in miniature, in all their fleshy glory. What I find most touching and notable about this part of Mason’s practice is that it comes from a place of desire for what is often understood as an imperfect form. Ander Rennick’s practice investigates the role of aesthetics in the contemporary gay imaginary and his text-based work, *A New Scenario (reissue) 2018*, similarly describes a sexual encounter that is specific and out of the ordinary.

Another type of figurative re-imagining takes place in the work of Lisa Reid, Georgina Cue and Terry Williams. Reid is predominantly known for her portraits of well-known icons however, for this exhibition, I have selected a series of works on paper she produced while undertaking life-drawing classes. Reid gently depicts the nude body in many different poses, from many different angles—often as incomplete or disembodied. In contrast, Cue abstracts from the real via costuming, masking and staging. Cue constructs facades that present the artist as female archetypes from the twentieth century (for example, the femme fatale). The resultant photographs, such as *Miller 2017*—which features Cue’s head and décolletage disguised by bold black and white makeup, flatten her features and fracture the total image. Williams is known for making soft sculptures from varied origins and, featured here,



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are three large-scale figures whose proportions have been outrageously skewed.

There are a number of artists included in *Auto Body Works* who forgo directly depicting the human form in favour of thinking through its materiality. Fiona Abicare and Spencer Lai explore what sits between the body's skin and the outside world. Abicare has a long-standing interest in art history's intersection with fashion, and *Trench 2017* is a ghostly reminder of the absent body; while Spencer Lai's sculptural assemblage, *untitled 2016*, incorporates ice skate blades and Prada Amber *pour homme* bottles—with perfume being especially evocative in this context, given the way our body chemistry has a major effect on fragrances.

Illusions to organic matter are also relevant: Lewis Fidock and Joshua Petherick make unstable objects or “future relics” that suggest decomposition; while *Clear sweet 2017* and *Crocodile smile 2017* by Saskia Doherty are process-driven and involve the delicate preservation of natural materials, namely applewood branches and a sliver of prickly pear. If we think about our bodily systems, Miles Howard-Wilks collection of ceramic seashells with pearls can be highlighted for their associations to interiority and incubation. Jason Phu often draws upon his Chinese heritage when speaking about the gut and digestion (“In my culture the belly speaks the truth”) and, for *Auto Body Works*, has contributed a cartoon-like depiction of a man with a snake emerging from both his belly and his anus.

Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human traits, emotions or intentions to non-human entities. Tim Noble's twelve drawings of fish with human-like facial features are a prime example, while Emily Dober's homage to the Japanese manga character Sailor Moon functions like an avatar. Furthermore, if anthropomorphism is considered to be an innate

tendency of human psychology, then Tully Arnot's “nervous plants”, which involve hooking fake plants up to motors that make their leaves move, can be understood as emotionally charged (albeit inanimate) objects. Such projection is interesting in comparison to the lack in Chris O'Brien's ceramic forms, which are rudimentarily human but *without* faces, or any other distinguishing features or personalities.

Finally, our relationship to machinery and automation needs to be addressed. Devoid of people but filled with a sense of kinetic energy, Steven Perrette's drawings of various forms of human transportation (trains, cars and trucks) have been included for their association to the recent phenomenon of the “autonomous car” that is capable of sensing its environment and navigating without human input. This links to Kara Baldwin's *Drawing Robots 2018*, which slowly create a drawing all on their own accord until their AA batteries wear out and they break down. As Baldwin describes, they are “little robots that seem to be playing and interacting.”

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Recently I came across a somewhat aberrant cartoon by Zachary Kanin.<sup>1</sup> It depicts two horses facing each other. One is wearing a saddle, the other isn't. The punch line is: ‘It's not a sex thing’. While this drawing could be understood as a simple one-liner, for me it encapsulates many of the ideas central to *Auto Body Works*. A horse is a horse of course of course... unless it's acting as a surrogate for the expanded boundaries and contours of the human body as it can be understood today.

PATRICE SHARKEY, JUNE 2018  
Director, West Space

1. “No, It's Not A Sex Thing” by Zachary Kanin, *New Yorker*, 21 September 2009.



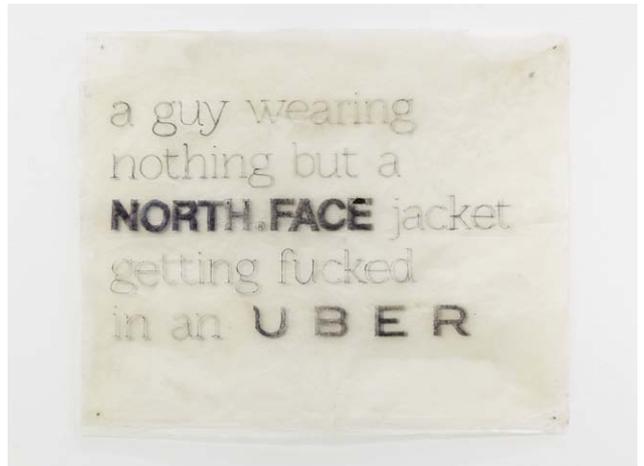
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**ARTISTS**

**LIST OF WORKS**

Fiona Abicare  
Tully Arnot  
Kara Baldwin  
Georgina Cue  
Emily Dober  
Saskia Doherty  
Lewis Fidock &  
Joshua Petherick  
Bronwyn Hack  
Miles Howard-Wilks  
Spencer Lai  
Chris Mason  
Tim Noble  
Chris O'Brien  
Lillian Palser Barto  
Steven Perrette  
Jason Phu  
Lisa Reid  
Ander Rennick  
Terry Williams

COVER: Chris Mason  
*Reclining Nude* 2013  
earthenware  
19.5 × 35.5 × 42 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Arts  
Project Australia, Melbourne  
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1. Bronwyn Hack  
*The Body Piece (Vagina)* 2017  
calico, material, mixed media,  
stuffing and thread  
48 × 35 × 5 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Arts  
Project Australia, Melbourne  
–  
2. Lillian Palser Barto  
*Bodybuilder* 2015  
video  
10 mins (looped)  
Courtesy of the artist  
–  
3. Saskia Doherty  
*Crocodile smile* 2017  
dried ballistics gelatine,  
Prickly Pear (*Opuntia Stricta*),  
cinnamon leaf oil  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist  
–  
4. Lewis Fidock & Joshua Petherick  
*Wreath* 2016  
cast pigmented silicone, steel,  
synthetic polymer paint, raw  
pigment, synthetic flock,  
archival satin, natural cobwebs,  
resin, plastic, silicone and  
carbon powder

120 × 80 × 15 cm  
Courtesy of the artists  
Lewis Fidock is represented by  
Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne  
Joshua Petherick is represented  
by STATION, Melbourne;  
Robert Heald, Wellington;  
Croy Nielsen, Vienna  
–  
5. Kara Baldwin  
*Drawing Robots (detail)* 2018  
robots, AA batteries, pens and tape  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist  
–  
6. Terry Williams  
*Not titled* 2015  
mixed media, stuffing and wool  
45 × 30 × 10 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Arts  
Project Australia, Melbourne  
–  
7. Miles Howard-Wilks  
*Seashell with pearls* 2017  
glazed earthenware  
3 × 4.5 × 3 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Arts  
Project Australia, Melbourne  
–  
8. Fiona Abicare  
*Trench* 2014  
cotton, brass, steel and padding  
144.7 × 66 × 24 cm  
Courtesy of the artist  
Represented by Sarah Scout  
Presents, Melbourne

9. Tim Noble  
*Not titled* 2013  
ink, pastel and pencil  
14 × 12 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Arts  
Project Australia, Melbourne  
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10. Georgina Cue  
*Miller* 2017  
archival inkjet print  
104 × 148.7 cm  
Edition 1 of 3 + 2 AP  
Courtesy of the artist  
–  
11. Ander Rennick  
*A New Scenario (reissue)* 2018  
permanent marker and  
baby oil on paper  
40 × 33 cm  
Courtesy of the artist  
Suicidal Oil Piglet, Melbourne  
–  
12. Lisa Reid  
*Life Drawing (five poses)* 2002  
pencil on paper  
66 × 50 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Arts  
Project Australia, Melbourne

**AUTO BODY WORKS**

16 June – 21 July 2018

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