

Reassembled, Karryn Argus, 2022,
crochet and coiling yarn, wire, found objects, 1350 x 750
mm

Removed, Karryn Argus, 2022,
crochet, coiling yarn, wire, found objects, size variable

Reappeared, Karryn Argus, 2022,
crochet, coiling yarn, wire, 500 x 450 mm

Force Field, Caroline Phillips, 2022,
recycled cardboard, polyester wadding, cotton, recycled
cotton, printed neoprene, corduroy, cotton jersey, neon
polyester, stretched printed mesh, panne velvet, faux fur,
stretch velour, cosplay waffle fabric, textured pleather,
printed Sherpa fabric, puffer fabric, acrylic tape, dimen-
sions variable

Modular Options, Caroline Phillips, 2022,
recycled cotton, polyester wadding, textured polyure-
thane, cotton, dimensions variable

Woman, Chair & Plate, Stephania Windholz Leigh, 2022,
acrylic paint on timber canvas, MEASUREMENT

Woman, Chair & Plate, Stephania Windholz Leigh, 2022,
laser cut acrylic, dimensions variable

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boobins

More Bias Objects
Objective Bodies

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During the 1960s and 70s feminist artists drew on the history of collaborative practices to fundamentally change our notions of art. Some of these feminist interventions utilised the age-old materials of weaving, spinning, embroidery and stitching, using the language of craft and its associations with feminine domesticity to create subversive new stories of female experience. Other interventions sought to tackle the hard-edged, deliberately dispassionate language of minimalist abstraction to reintroduce a formal language redolent with bodily imagery that bulged, bristled or folded with an enigmatic, haptic sensibility. Differences in methodologies, materials and approaches aside, at the core of feminist practice then and now in this show BOOBING, a collaboration between Melbourne artists Karryn Argus, Caroline Phillips and Stephania Windholz Leigh, was the desire to explore all aspects of female and feminine experience. This interconnectedness encompasses our physical, emotional and psychological inner landscapes but also looks outward with a kind of 'inclusivity' which has the potential to bind and connect people and communities. This kind of collaborative instinct is often

embedded in women's histories at a deeper level than just a tendency to communal (familial, domestic) ways of doing things. For women in the 1970s, collaboration was an antidote to both the archetype of the solitary, genius artist and a way of accessing public space to which women have been denied access. Arguably, as artist Miriam Shapiro noted, collaboration is an approach that takes place in the mind well before the act of making begins: it is a process between artist/s, viewer/s and the wider community.

This approach to collaboration, this openness and generosity is a central tenet of art making for the artists who make up the BOOB collective. Originally started in 2014, Argus, Phillips and Windholz Leigh have very different individual practices and yet according to Phillips, when the works are finished and assembled together, they seem to gravitate towards each other creating a kind of constellular synergy, unplanned and surprising, even to the artists themselves. The works connect with each other, creating a larger narrative, beyond the sum of the individual parts. This is very evident in their second show in 2020, entitled BOOB, in which the works were made independently, but curated in groups in separate vitrines according to the shape, colour and associations suggested by their materials (wool, stuffing, removalist blankets, coloured Perspex). The result is a 'conversation' of works that unifies and enlivens an otherwise unremarkable urban thoroughfare in Melbourne's Southbank.

Collectively, these artists play with the associations of the feminine in craft or the visual language of abstraction, in particular minimalist aesthetics, to explore feminist narratives. They also critique the continued dominance of entrenched patriarchal attitudes that continue to shape contemporary private

and political life. The collaboration calls itself BOOB, an obvious play on the feminine, but it is also an acronym for Bias Objects Objective Bodies. Whilst referencing the history of female objectification, the word 'bias' indicates a rich seam of associations that lends itself well to the works on display in this show. In sewing the word refers to being in some way, off-centre, spiralled or against the grain. Bias binding is edging used to 'finish' garments. It is woven on a 45-degree angle making it pliable and stretchy enough to accommodate the folds and textures of the fabric it is covering. Bias seams and fabrics are well suited to drape around the curves of a body, thus concealing and revealing only what the maker intends.

The works in this show are concerned with the slippage between interior and exterior, between what is revealed and what is concealed. By creating works that are 'off-centre' in some way, the artists are challenging us to question our own entrenched biases and assumptions and develop a fresh viewpoint. Windholz Leigh's works establish a relationship between two and three dimensions in her painting and its expanded 'other' in hanging form. The brightly coloured work liberates the painted abstractions from the confines of the frame. The fact that this large form is suspended from the ceiling offers the viewer a different awareness of bodily and spatial experience: one that is shifting and unexpected. This movement of expansion and contraction reminds us of the potential problems inherent in our attempts to reconcile our inner life with outer reality. There is a dangerous edge, a lack of certainty, we experience in these spaces in which many realities coexist. At the entrance to the gallery, Phillips has placed her version of military 'hedgehogs.' Usually used as a line of defence to stop the incursion of tanks, her large objects are covered with fabric surfaces redolent with associations - removalist blankets, reflective silver material and brightly

coloured camouflage prints. Inspired by images of the war in Ukraine, Phillips has collapsed the boundary between playful interrogation and the serious brutality of the world from the outset.

Argus' work also plays on the slippage between interior and exterior using the visual vocabularies of craft in her crocheted pieces. At first glance, we see an image of a breast in pink-coloured wool tightly coiled into a conical shape. Around the outer edges the wool trails away so that we are unsure whether the object is becoming or unravelling. This archetypal image of nurture is more disconcerting given that the 'nipple' is in fact an open void. Far from being a reference to the core imagery of the 1970s, this open space invites the viewer to look inside the contained darkened space. The overwhelming association then is with the eye, the viewer looking in and, by extension, the possibility of the object itself looking back with its central 'eye.'

The works in this show interact with one another in metaphorical, visceral and formal ways which I would suggest are key to understanding the feminist politics at play. They invite the viewer to appreciate the very different approaches of each artist and the surprising intersections and interconnectedness revealed in the act of collaboration. By using the language of abstraction, the viewer is asked to make meaning from their own experience, both lived and imagined, whilst experiencing a visceral charge from each work. Together, in the space, the artists and the works speak to each other and in so doing create a welcome dialogue in which we can all share. In this way, collaboration is an ethics of connection which attempts to change our perspective and underlines our shared humanity.