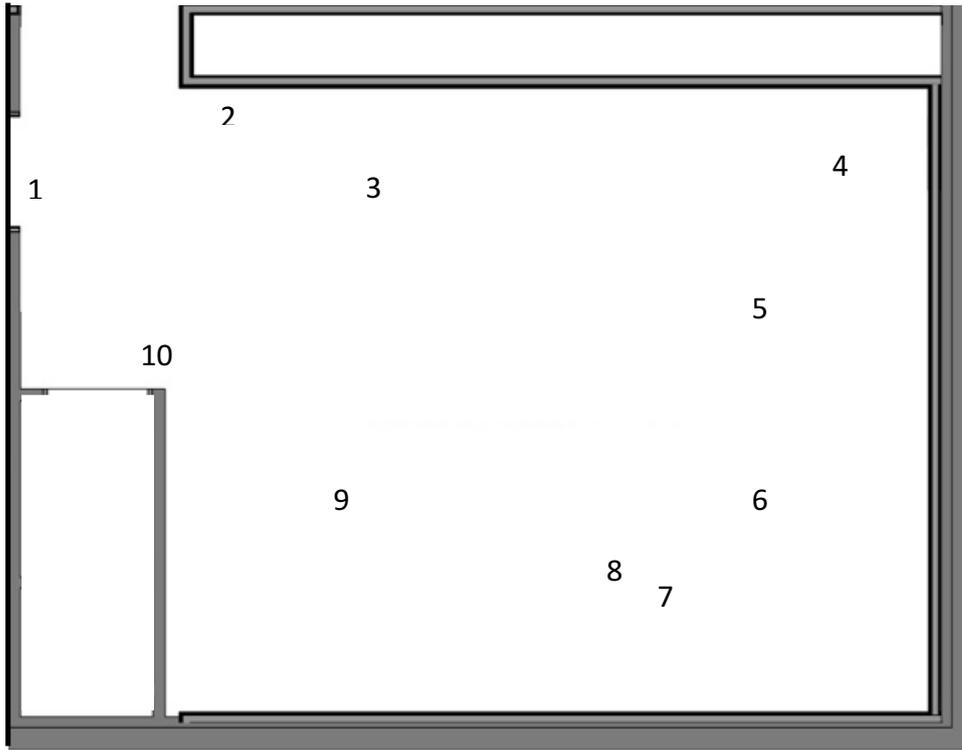


*WHAT'S GOOD
FOR YOU*



HAILEY ATKINS

~OUTER SPACE~



1	BAD CATCHER	2018	PAPIER MACHE COMPOUND, ACRYLIC, TIMBER (EXC. POLE)	34CM X 6.5CM X 53CM	POA
2	HARD PLACE AND A HARD PLACE	2018	PAINTED GARDEN BRICK, WIRE, PLASTER, ACRYLIC, WAX PASTELS	44CM X 11CM X 7CM	POA
3	PICK UP PUT DOWN	2018	PAPIER MACHE COMPOUND, ACRYLIC, WAX PASTELS	52CM X 28CM X 33CM	POA
4	A NICE HAT	2018	CARD, HESSIAN, PLASTER, ACRYLIC	24CM X 26CM X 36CM	POA
5	STAND IN	2018	WIRE, PAPIER MACHE COMPOUND, ACRYLIC, PLASTER ALUMINIUM FOIL	170CM X 50CM X 70CM	POA
6	D	2018	PLASTER, ACRYLIC, ALUMINIUM FOIL	14CM X 12CM X 7.5CM	POA
7	DOING PRETTY WELL, ACTUALLY	2018	WIRE, PAPIER MACHE COMPOUND, TIMBER, ACRYLIC.	35CM X 8CM X 62CM	POA
8	LOOSEN UP	2018	PAPIER MACHE COMPOUND, WIRE	DIMENSIONS VARIABLE	POA
9	SCRATCH THAT (DRAMATIC SENTIMENT)	2018	TIMBER, PAPIER MACHE COMPOUND, ACRYLIC, WAXED FABRIC	140CM X 190CM X 70CM	POA
10	TROPHY	2018	DISCARDED SHOULDER PADS, PLASTER, ACRYLIC	13CM X 20CM X 8CM (EA)	POA

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C.B: This year I researched Modernism from a sculptural perspective to develop a 2nd year course for a tertiary institution. I became re-acquainted with the work of Auguste Rodin and was impressed by his ability to express pathos through purposeful gestures and the manipulation of clay. This is observable in *Balzac's* (1897) dynamic cloaked torso, or the twisting stance and elongated necks of each figure in *The Three Shades* (1886).

While it is primarily concerned with Land Art, Rosalind Krauss' *Sculpture In The Expanded Field* (1979) equates these gestures as the first sign of Modernism's move from enlightenment rationality (representation) toward abstraction and form-less-ness.² An idea that manifest during the minimalist movement of the 1960s.

The roughness of your work reminds me of early modernist gestures with the addition of humorous absurdity (a somewhat relevant expression of our contemporary experience I would assume). Combined with their anthropomorphic quality, your work aligns with Krauss' conceptions of sculpture, but lead us from the Expanded Field to a fractured, personalised representation of contemporary existence. Does authorship play an important role in how a viewer will read your work, and to what degree does texture contribute to that?

H.A: The rough, handmade nature of my work is deliberate yet unplanned, and partly coincidental. It's an aesthetic that exists at the intersection of failure and humour and the personal. The simple, pathetic construction of a lot of my work is admittedly often the result of quick labour with messy materials. It's intuitive, fun and the accidents and surprises it invites avoid the pitfalls of being too didactic. It's also designed to go hand in hand with notions of failure and vulnerability, while conveying a certain amount of modesty, sincerity and openness. By comparison, the cool geometry of Minimalism (the antithesis of the handmade) sought/ seeks to suppress this, and in my opinion falls flat as it moves away from the viewer. Obviously there are varying degrees of bluntness and no one's brain works the same, but I generally find the questions Minimalist art poses too difficult, and there isn't anything comforting there to keep me pondering. As for the role of the individual artist in society – I don't really know. I suppose in striving for originality all artists (even if only subconsciously) recognise that there is value in the expression of the individual. But capital m 'Me' is present in my work simply because it feels honest. I can only communicate what I know, in a way that I know. The general rhetoric is: 'as artists we play different and necessary parts in contributing to the overall health, development, and well being of our society.' But that's about artists as a collective, and doesn't really speak to the artist as an individual. The other thing to keep in mind, as I mentioned before, is that each viewer's experience of a work is unique and in this way, the role of the individual artist is somewhat diluted. So, I don't know. I'm okay with that. I'll just keep plodding along.

² Rosalind Krauss, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, (October, Vol. 8. Spring, 1979), 30-44

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C.B: Hailey, we've known each other for 5 years through the Queensland College of Art. I taught in the sculpture department during your undergraduate degree and supervised the second half of your honours degree. During that time we talked a lot about humour, absurdity, and pointlessness. I observed how those things operate in your studio practice and how they motivate or destabilise you in your everyday experience. I also observed how these qualities translate into sculpture. Through my questioning, I've tried to infer that your work has anthropomorphic, or human-like qualities. In doing so I think it redresses Modernism with a humour and an absurdity that is distinctly autobiographical. This is interesting to me. Authorship in a time of social and political tension seems like an important project to pursue. So, at this point, I'm interested in learning about your specific conception of humour and its relevance to your life and work.

H.A: Right at the bottom of it, humour and absurdity make us feel better. However, when utilised as a tool for critique and subversion, or as way to diffuse and distance, their role has the capacity to extend far beyond simply 'cheering up'. Humour, or at least a lighthearted playfulness, is an inescapable part of my life. I'm a big, walking, talking, slapstick routine. I'm clumsy, I mince my words, I don't mind making a fool of myself (especially if it lightens the mood) and I tend toward a lens of absurdity, rather than focusing on the grim. On the one hand, this approach is probably a pretty normal coping mechanism, on the other however, it's criticised for it's potential to trivialise and even avoid the issue (whatever it is) altogether. I've also considered the notion that perhaps I've adopted this approach because it's unthreatening, and therefore makes me easier to approach and in turn decreases resistance in whatever realm I'm occupying (there's a whole Feminist thread I could branch off on here, but I'm not particularly interested in addressing that directly these days). As previously mentioned, contemporary sculpture has a tendency to be alienating, especially if you have a serious message to deliver. Directly conveying criticism can put people on the back foot and impede an open, constructive dialogue. A joke is an opening. It's a fun way to deal with not so fun things. That's not to say I'm trying to deliver veiled criticisms every time I make a sculpture. I'm just trying to take the edge off. Absurdity is inherently humorous. Embracing the absurd is accepting that not everything has to make sense and that everything doesn't have to be so serious.

Chris Bennie

WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU

HAILEY ATKINS

5.10.18 – 20.10.18

For this interview I provided Hailey with shortened versions of the following questions. For the purpose of contextual clarity I have embellished them into paragraphs.

1

CB: *Sculpture is Everything* (2012) is a contemporary sculpture exhibition and publication curated by Kathryn Weir at Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane showcasing a diverse collection of mediums and forms including film, photography, painting, performance and three-dimensional objects.¹ Personally, this rationale is appealing because, as someone seduced by moving image artworks, I consider the spatial and temporal aspect of video and sound to go beyond traditional sculpture limitations. Typically, audiences consider painting and sculpture to have distinct and definable qualities. In my estimation, artists like Jessica Stockholder, Sara Sze, Karla Black and Phoebe Washburn, successfully reconcile the spatial (form) with the pictorial (colour) in ways that happily problematise the sculptural form.

Colour and form are implicit aspects of your work. An interesting polemic arises in contemporary art discourse when discussing the relationship between painting and sculpture. I think your work aligns with a national trend of sculptural practice, championed successfully by a number of your peers including Sarah Poulgrain, Anya Swan and Ree Hegh. Without labouring on the philosophical relevance for painting to reconcile with sculpture, what are your thoughts regarding audience experience when viewing your work?

H.A: I think I can't paint. I say I 'think', because deep down I know that's a silly thing to say (what's a painting anyway?). When I think of Painting I think of the pictorial – an image that sums everything up within a frame. A singular something that speaks for itself. I find painting daunting and I've struggled to develop an approach that suits the way I think and make. I don't hold any expectations for complete comprehension and clarity within sculpture, so I'm not sure why I expect that painting should achieve those things alone. The problem is a strange one because, in contemporary art, sculpture and painting certainly aren't thought of in isolation. And yet, I still haven't been able to un-train my brain from thinking of them

as though they are. There are obviously painterly elements to my sculptures (most are hand painted after construction) and perhaps from the outside there is a more direct relationship between the two, but I definitely don't think of that process as 'painting' per say – it's more like giving the work a skin. I feel that whatever it is has to do with intent. It is my intent to make sculptures. I'm not concerned with consciously blurring the lines between sculpture and painting. I just like making things that have presence, that exist in the space with you. Having said that, I do value what an image can do. I've been making a conscious effort to experiment more with image making and am slowly becoming more comfortable working in that plane. I'm starting to see that it too can be something that contributes a little something to the whole.

2

C.B: Your work is human scaled. I find this interesting because, as you mention in your previous response, your desire to construct objects that accede presence, translates as a strange and unlikely anthropomorphism. Your sculptures appear to share human-like traits or bear a resemblance to human forms. I perceive a compelling and humorous bodily aspect in the intestinal, ventricular and cavity motifs of your work. Leading on from my previous question, what do you think is relevant to your audience about the inclusion, or reference to, the body in contemporary sculpture?

H.A: I think it's about creating something that's recognisable and relatable. Without anything to relate to, art can easily alienate. Referencing the body in my work is sort of a twisty, intertwined two-pronged tool. On the one prong, it has to do simply with the familiar. Something recognisable that you can grab hold of and run with. There may not always be a clear connection between it (the familiar, which encompasses a broad range of references and is not always bodily) and the overarching themes of my practice, but it operates as an invitation. On the other prong, it's linked much more directly to what I'm trying to say or do (whatever that is). What's more familiar than your own body? And it's a great communicator! In this way, it's about creating a gesture – something that pulls at your gut. The impetus behind a lot of my work is a feeling of awkwardness or inadequacy or failure – emotional experiences that can be 'worn' on the body by way of slouch or slump. No matter how absurd, when you see an object behaving in this way, your brain automatically connects it to a body...or at least the body part it most closely resembles. I guess this is intertwined with the aspect of familiarity, but works much more closely on stirring something specific. Of course, I lose quite a bit of control over all this once someone engages with a work. What one person sees depends on his or her own experiences, and may differ completely from the next person. (I really love hearing about all the different things people are reminded of when they look at something I've made. Humans are bizarre.) There's also the fine line between getting someone's synapses going and banging them over the head. It is my intention that there's a big blanket of ambiguity over a lot of my work. I want people to relate to it in their own way, to fill in the gaps themselves – not be told what to think and be done with it. That's what I love about abstraction and the absurd, there is plenty of room to play around.

¹ Tony Elwood, *Sculpture is Everything: an introduction*, (Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2012), 13