

FROM WILL TO FORM

Emily Cormack

In art, and in painting as in music, it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but of capturing forces.

— Gilles Deleuze¹

This exhibition tracks forces as they flow into and out of form. These forces are our will, and they flow like water, running always, soaking, seeping, respiring and perspiring. Will is our most important faculty: without its deliberate action and force our progress falters, and we become inert and unproductive. It is in and of us. It is at the heart of all things, and yet will, in itself, is fluid and formless.

This exhibition developed in response to my experience of the wilful properties within various artists' practices. I was drawn to art works that overflowed or expressed an idea or feeling that could not be contained, and that was in wilful rebellion against the constraints of more orthodox, static approaches to art. These works were driven by the processes of art-making, irrespective of medium or the anchoring attempts of art history. Writing on Friedrich Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, Gilles Deleuze states: '[T]he will to power is 'the primitive affective force' from which all other feelings derive.'² In my research I began to notice that what Deleuze understood in Nietzsche's writing as a dynamic 'affective force' was the same idea or feeling that overflowed from the art works I was drawn to. These works opened access to something innately generative that was in the process of becoming, something that was exchanging wilful energy or 'affective force' for form.

My understanding of this wilful energy was that it did not originate singularly in the artist's materials but was captured in them. I focused attention on that which lay below or within the process of art-making, rather than inscribing meaning onto the object, or harnessing the artwork to an external intellectual framework. I wanted to begin with the object's will, focusing on its force, and tracking its path to form.

In doing so, I realised that this wilful energy is in fact a coming together of many forces in the artworks, which swirl like small eddies within a larger, dynamic waterway. This exhibition, then, is an arrangement of eddies whose forces flow into and around each other, open to the viewer, to the architecture and to our present context.

As we move through an exhibition, sight-lines slide in and out of alignment, and materials appeal or repel. Our experience is contingent on the forces that dance in us, as well as in the works and their context—the forces of the building's architecture, the sensations in our body, the subjective forces of curiosity, hunger, distraction and illness that inform our connections within an exhibition.

But then, what of form? The exhibition is, after all, entitled *From Will to Form*. If will is the motivating factor within forces, what form might it take? What do these forms look like, and how do they manifest will?

Forms arise through our slowing down sufficiently to engage with a network of connections. Each encounter in the exhibition is as crucial as the next in this non-hierarchical process of formation. The content and the form of the works is indivisible, becoming so through connections between wilful forces.

In this exhibition and in these works, will is the cellular, self-generating force that extends out from an indefinite origin, perpetually seeking connection, interruption and release. As two or more forces of will meet, and meld or repel each other, they are captured in a moment of singularity when a form becomes. *From Will to Form* tells the story of the passage of will as it takes shape through the bodies of the artists, their materials and movements. The journey of will is told in five sections, with each section focusing on an area from which the artist drew their will. But, in the end, will is like water poured from a bowl back into a river.

From Will to Form is
in and of the body,
in and of the land/matter,
in and of the psyche,
in and of itself,
in and of states of release.

Isadora Vaughan Canker Sore 2018 (detail)

WILL IN AND OF THE BODY

'Skin is faster than the word,' Brian Massumi states. But what happens when our skin traps will in our body, when its role as a porous transmitter between ourselves and our world is compromised by the complications of self? We 'hold our tongue' or 'brace ourselves', thwarting the persistent flow of energy that tries to find an opening, a way out into the world. The body holds all our knowledge, our secrets. As a porous membrane it can open and release or harbour and conceal.

Hélène Cixous writes of an *écriture féminine* in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975) where 'woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement.'³ *Écriture féminine* suggests that the body, with its attempts at release and sexual expression, could be written into language to bring about 'the radical mutation of things . . . when every structure is for a moment thrown off balance and an ephemeral wilderness sweeps order away.'⁴ Inserting the body into language is a sculptural act, and the works in this section of the exhibition are sculptural interpretations of *écriture féminine*. Such a 'writing' expresses the frustrations and difficulties of the body, with each work revealing the complicated relations we have with the world around us. In this current moment, when the agency and materiality of the body is becoming supplanted by digital, post-human and surveillance forces, a sculptural *écriture féminine* reveals the persistence of the intimate, transgressive, contested and liberated body, which holds and releases will according to its own desires, its own forces.

The will in the body is unrestrained

Sometimes the maternal body seems too much. Flesh is open and obvious. Breasts, labia, lips and ears are our own, and yet for the mother they also belong to another. Their ownership is in dispute. Sanné Mestrom's works from her series *Hush Hush*, 2018, depict the mother's body, in this case her own, cast in bronze and concrete. These sculptures show bodies fragmented, with parts dispersed and isolated. In one work bent bronze knees emerge from the floor, and in another cast concrete legs emerge from the ground, with a bronze disc balanced between the thighs. Here the maternal form is exposed only in parts. There is no private realm; instead these fragmented bodies express the blurring of self and child as a mother's edges crack and become open and porous. This new pre-Oedipal space between mother and child is between signification. As Julia Kristeva

writes, it is a 'pre-symbolic' site, offering an alternate form of meaning-making. Mestrom distils these ideas, enlivened with the hot, sharp pain and pleasure of giving and sustaining life, into abbreviated forms whose simplicity and elegance belie the mess of love that pulls life from our own, and goes on giving.

Will is filtered through the body

A semi-permeable membrane, the body filters the world. At a moment of encounter the skin can bruise or open. Mike Parr's works in this exhibition reflect its role as a porous processor of the flow of will. The artist purges his body of milk, vomiting violently in *White*, 2004-08, rejecting the imposition of the White Australia Policy upon his identity, and symbolically evacuating whiteness from his own body. And in the companion piece *Whistle White*, 2018, six young artists whistle continuously for three days. This work releases will in a prelinguistic, interspecies mode of communication. The whistle is not coded by language, nor is it lumbered with a physical form. Instead it offers a direct path, transmitting breath from the stomach and lungs directly to the ear of the listener, to the spaces of the gallery. The whistle encounters the gallery's hard surfaces, the skin of other works, and rebounds or absorbs, filling the space with the most intimate of substances, breath, materialised as sound.

The body disobeys

Entering the gallery, the viewer encounters Rob McLeish's *Xenograft Couture (Rigged Composition in Black, 001)*, 2018, an almost-human form moulded from black molten epoxy. Thick and syrupy, this substance has a familiar texture that connects with the unconscious, bringing up emotions ordinarily reserved for quiet or dark moments. Hovering between figuration and abstraction, the indeterminate forms of this large-scale sculpture appear to push against their tarry entrapment. The work was moulded quickly, shaped in the moments before the epoxy set, with necessary and instinctive swiftness. With will struggling to come to recognisable form in this work, we confront in its congealed and concealing forms a reflection and an expression of something repressed and uncomfortably alluring.

The body plays with will

As if propelled by an internal lyricism, Fairy Turner's gestural sculptures saunter and then sway. Turner states that her found, readymade materials 'dictate their own use', and it is through her processes of 'tuning into sensation' that she is able to offer a communion between the object's will and her own. She claims that she shows 'tenderness' toward her materials, as she combines their will into her forms. Inherent in the forms is an instability, as if they express the fragility of the failing world. But Turner's steel, fibreglass and paper sculptures also capture a will that is free and open; as if dancing alone. Each seems imbued with an essential bodily flow, like a diagram of the feeling of dance, or of feeling free to fall.

The body protects and constrains will

Starlie Geikie stains the fabric of her large sculptural form *Abri*, 2018, then carefully stitches armour into it, constructing a trap ribbed with dowel. This body architecture, soft with its beautiful gradients of blues and greens and indigos, is initially designed to calm and protect. Yet it also constrains and restricts, thwarting the naturally generative will in the body. A series of photographs pictures Geikie in a mist-heavy landscape, gesturing, reaching and bending, awkwardly constricted by her sculptural frame. In the exhibition it is set high on the gallery wall, removed from the artist's body, and hangs soft and loose alongside the photographs, like a spent and beautiful skin—a redundant monument to the surfaces we construct to protect us from what we need to see.

The will of the body is in forms

John Meade's smooth family of aluminium and horsehair sculptures have personality. Meade speaks of his objects as 'phantom people' whose appearance comes suddenly into view, and which he works into form through a process of intensive modelling. They appear in the world as everyday objects that have fallen into character: a drooping restaurant umbrella or a moulded piece of foam rubber, for example, are startling for their sense of caricature and 'humanity'. Meade's forms encapsulate a jaunty, saucy will; the group brought

together as *Set Pieces*, 2014–18, is like a buoyant playground, a family album or bustling civic square. Each sculpture is humanised or 'feminised'—dressed in chains and beads that contrast with their smooth polished surfaces. Arranged on raw aluminium struts, this family of forms becomes a clamorous altarpiece, intently beckoning a narrative that is felt, but never found.

Will is in the fire that connects our bodies to the earth

The bagu are an enduring symbol of the rainforest people's cultural, spiritual and physical connections with country. Traditionally the bagu was a tool used to make fire, but it is also an object embedded with meanings that reflect family, community and belief systems. Alison Murray's contemporary ceramic works vary those stories to talk about trees and plants in the scrub and what they convey about the bush when they are fruiting or flowering, stories that have been passed down through many generations. As Murray explains:

My stories come from country and my experience of being a Girramay person on country. The connection between the lump of clay I start with, the earth, and the finished work is amazing. Knowing that the clay has come from the ground, using my hands to shape it, thinking about how I'm going to make it different and what I'm going to create on the surface. There is an element of chance when you do ceramics and see the colours come out. It's a bit like when you go fishing—you never know whether the fish are going to bite or what fish you might catch.⁹

SANNÉ **MESTROM**



Self Portrait (Sleeping Muse) 2018
concrete, bronze and steel
160 x 160 x 40 cm

OPPOSITE:
Self Portrait (Sub-Terrain) 2018
concrete, bronze and steel
life size, dimensions variable





Self Portrait (Sleeping Muse) 2018 (detail)

OPPOSITE:
Self Portrait as the Sun 2018
concrete, bronze and steel
life size, 140 x 40 x 40 cm

