

OBJECT SANNÉ MESTROM A BODY IS A BANQUET

VAULT talks to Sanné Mestrom, a Netherlands-born artist based in the Blue Mountains. Known for sensuous sculptures of the female body that wink back at the Modernists, she defies their single-minded gaze by creating nudes that are at once playful, practical, tender and gravitational.

WRITTEN *by* ALANNA IRWIN

Sanné Mestrom doesn't want you to simply look at her art; she wants you to embody the work and be embodied by it. Her human-scale sculpture *Nyotaimori (Reclining Nude)* (2021) beckons to us through abstracted curving forms that imply outspread legs, a powerful torso and mounded breasts. The brutalist concrete surface has a rough-hewn monumentality, as though smoothed by the touch of many hands. This figure was the centrepiece of Mestrom's exhibition *Body as Verb* at Sydney's Sullivan+Strumpf in 2021 and has a horizontal thrust that allows her to double as a dining table, inviting people to sit down, to touch, to eat.

At first, *Nyotaimori* seems to fill the mould of Modernist reclining nudes: sexually available for Modigliani and Picasso, abstracted to anonymity for Brancusi and Moore – a lightning rod for the libidinous gaze. And yet, Mestrom disrupts the assumption that the combination of furniture and female body is an objectifying metamorphosis. "For me, that reclining nude body, that's a gift. She's not submissive, she's not being objectified by men. She's sharing herself with women, with children, with partners, with lovers – she's giving and hopefully being given to. Why do we assume that it's a one-way stream?"

For Mestrom, this generosity and openness is not just an erotic offering. She holds in dialogue the sexual, the maternal and the creative, noting that since becoming a mother, "my body is always in servitude to the people I love and to the world actually, and that doesn't need to be perverse. I think we're all in servitude to each other, and I think that [realisation] has just come with age and with inhabiting my body much more intentionally." Named after the Japanese practice of eating off a woman's body, *Nyotaimori* invites us to see multiplicity in the female figure and our relationships with her. She slips between delicate fantasies of nibbling nigiri off warm skin and the more prosaic activity of accidentally leaving your coffee on the table until it gets cold.

Top to bottom
Installation view
SANNÉ MESTROM
Body as Verb, 2021
Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney

SANNÉ MESTROM
Nyotaimori (Reclining Nude), 2021
concrete and/or bronze
65 x 170 x 115 cm
(overall), edition of 3 plus
2 artist's proofs

Photos: Mark Pokorny
Courtesy the artist and
Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney

The sculpture is also a personal touchpoint for the artist who, 10 years earlier, created *Nyotaimori Coffee Table (Feeding off the Nude)* (2011) during a residency at Gertrude Contemporary in Melbourne. Combining the reclining nude and an austere Modernist table set, this earlier work has the recognisable elements of a body in the same way that the front of your car appears to





have a face. Impersonal, modular and restrained, it is anchored in Mestrom “using the tools of Modernism more explicitly – the shapes, the geometry, the architecture, the furniture” to dismantle persistent legacies. These two *Nyotaimori* works mark significant points on the map in Mestrom’s journey towards a more subjective, intuitive engagement with the body and its exchanges with history, the built environment and other bodies. Mestrom reflects that the Modernist critique still bristles under the skin, because her work now is more ambiguous and subtle, coaxing us from passive viewership to clamber on top of and nestle into the sensuous lumps and bumps of the body.

The material pleasures of concrete, bronze and skin are at the heart of Mestrom’s “inversion of tradition and

of things being rarefied and precious. ... Instead, they’re here cradling one another.” There is an intimacy in the way her works carry us, moving us from viewer to sitter to become part of the artwork – and ultimately to become the offering on the pedestal. Neither of Mestrom’s main materials are particularly intimate to begin with. She notes that concrete is a utilitarian and familiar material; we walk on it. But, when coupled with bronze and “polished to within an inch of its life,” there’s an exchange and a swapping of sensibilities, whereby concrete is softened and bronze toughens.

Whether she’s lugging around a 20-kilogram bag of concrete or her four-year-old son, Mestrom is “always lifting and hauling and carrying.” She unapologetically embraces this utility, where sexuality and sex are not at odds with a body that is sometimes athletic, sometimes vulnerable, sometimes a child’s plaything and at other times just handles for shopping bags. “Half an hour apart – or even just moment to moment – my body can go from being really sexually engaged to being utterly pedestrian,” chuckles Mestrom. And in her practice, this approach transforms the reclining nude from a passive archetype into a sultry, muscular proposition. On any given day, she is offering pleasure, lying down exhausted, giving birth, at rest, or herself seduced. Mestrom’s work revels in the power of the female body as a gathering place for the erotic and the functional. **V**

Sanné Mestrom is represented by Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney.
sullivanstrumpf.com
mestrom.org

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 Sanné Mestrom with her work
Nyatamori (Reclining Nude), 2021
 concrete and/or bronze
 65 x 170 x 115 cm (overall),
 edition of 3 plus
 2 artist's proofs

Photo: Mark Pokorny
 Courtesy the artist and
 Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney.

SANNÉ MESTROM
 cast bronze stools
 (from left to right):
You Rush / I Fall, 2021
 bronze or concrete
 55 x 41.5 x 40 cm;
She Seeps / You Ripple, 2021
 bronze or concrete, 57 x 43 x
 41 cm;
To Trickle / We Drift, 2021
 58.5 x 41.5 x 40 cm
 All editions of 3 plus
 2 artist's proofs

SANNÉ MESTROM
Nyotaimori Coffee Table
(Feeding Off the Nude), 2011
 marble, bronze, plywood, acrylic,
 terracotta, ceramic tiles, resin

Courtesy the artist and Gertrude
 Contemporary, Melbourne

