

Buried Relations: Clementine Belle McIntosh's Muck Around and Kate Brown's No Strings

In the midst of environmental collapse and political division, it's the little revelations that leave the deepest impression. With so many momentous efforts to thrust things apart, it's worth celebrating the gentle insistent urge that pulls things together. Work that speaks softly (but forcefully) of subtle relations and transformative everyday experiences, wafting spices and slightly skewed perspectives. Work that enshrines the local and the personal as the site of engagement, not the barren global village.

Kate Brown and Clementine Belle McIntosh's work, while distinct in many respects, shares this concern for the microcosm. There is a predilection and a preoccupation with the magical, the tendrils of the unexpected stretching into our lives. Stories that play out on small stages are no less intriguing.

Brown's contribution is called No Strings, which signifies her laissez-faire approach to this group of works. These are the outcomes of experiments with expanded parameters, leaps with neither ceiling nor safety net. Brown isn't seeking to emerge with an armful of polished works but an ecosystem of unanticipated organisms which might flourish in the gallery setting, or crumple into a different form. By deliberately adopting an open stance, she furnishes her creations with the adaptability and whimsical humour they need to survive. In this instance, that means a disparate but hardy assembly of impromptu sculptures, videos and sound. Bricolage meets improvisation.

As a performance and sound artist, Brown's practice is first and foremost an embodied one. That remains true of these works, which plunge directly into the weirdness and wonder of having a body, re-imbuing everyday experience with inexpressible magic. Dazzling moiré effects are there to be found in a scrap of flyscreen in 'Hypnotic Chain'. Lengths of decorative chain bind a plank of wood. The deceptive but whimsical logic of Pipilotti Rist's video works seems also to apply here, like a trick of perspective that assigns unexpected qualities to inert materials. The world hinges open, teeming with processes and phenomena that beg to be explored.

In her video works 'Human Level' and 'Interference Blue', Brown spoofs this ecstatic communion with the world, introducing a pair of latex gloves as a sensory block or intermediary through which the protagonist must probe the eggshells and spirit level. It's a retreat to feeling first principles but also a joyous encounter

with the real and its scruffier cousin, the absurd. The latter intrudes in the guise of sequins, painted eggs, scientific beakers - the physical world as an agglomeration of colours and fractals that invite playful fingers. Like Francis Alÿs' work, this is an encounter with everyday phenomena at a remove, perceiving oneself perceiving.

Clementine Belle McIntosh's own work deals with the 'muck' of the universe - the base materials that accrete under the edges of our lives, the unvalued scraps and raw unshaped stuff that returns to the great inchoate sinkhole at the bottom of our lives. Like Beuys' felt and fat, this is a materiality that seems somehow to preexist our involvement and yet welcomes it, preserved in the warp and weft of the cloth.

McIntosh liberates scraps of cloth, dregs of paint tins and plant cuttings, setting them in motion within a circular economy of use value and graceful decomposition. These are objects that evade the notion of worth - their value consists in the meanings embedded within them and the air of openness and collaboration they accrue. In an echo of Arte Povera, McIntosh affixes meaning to 'poor' materials and grand accommodating gestures, making a communion with country.

Crucially, McIntosh doesn't stake a claim to this earthy ephemera, simply staging one act in a slow and deliberate dance of decomposition. She bequeaths them to the ground or gifts them to community members in a simple gesture of release. Reification doesn't get a look in here - to insist on interpreting them as an artwork frozen in time is to lose track of their physical and social dimension. These objects don't cling to objecthood. Like Lynda Benglis' melting assemblages, they aspire to dissolution.

Having moved from Sydney's inner west, McIntosh maintained a connection by burying her works in friends' yards. In a neat contraction that recognises community and place as interwoven entities, these scraps become her proxies, a representation while she is elsewhere. It's the most complete definition of 'earthing' we possess.

Brown also mounts a complex interrogation of place in her sound work 'Naval' for Tiles. Her site specific encounter with the meat locker space is like the return of the voiceless, contingent edges of lives given expression. It's a direct acknowledgement of the history of the space but also an abstraction, like a blurred superimposition.

Imprinted within these works is a sense of embeddedness within biospheres that, unnoticed, conditions our lives and impregnates the fibres of these everyday objects, like a natural terroir that produces not only art but social relations. Both artists seem to move untethered, no strings, in a space where complex associations are rendered as simple as speech. Instinctively, they breathe the impassive air.

**Muck Around
Clementine Belle**

&

**No Strings
Kate Brown**

1. Clementine Belle, *Tilda's Backyard*, 2023, Dimensions variable, Indigo's scrap fabric buried in Tilda's Hurlstone Park backyard. NFS
2. Kate Brown, *interference blue*, 2023, Video. \$1500
3. Clementine Belle, *Eddie, Hugh and Walton's Driveway*, 2023, Dimensions variable, Alice's leftover house paint and thread on Indigo's scrap fabric. NFS
4. Kate Brown, *vocal fold scale*, 2023, Dimensions variable, Glass tiles, copper tint pigment, horseshoe magnets + plates, L hook. \$300 each
5. Kate Brown, *Hypnotic Chain*, 2023, Dimensions variable, Fly screen, red plastic chain, Plywood, matte black spray paint. \$400
6. Clementine Belle, *Gutter*, 2023, Dimensions variable, Leftover acrylic paint, back nightshade found in the alleyway and thread on Emily's studio scrap fabric. \$1200
7. Kate Brown, *Oddities*, 2023, Dimensions variable, Marble, copper wire, brass tube, Guedel Airway apparatus. NFS
8. Kate Brown, *Naval*, 2023, Sound piece. \$1300
9. Clementine Belle, *Julia and Rebecca's Backyard*, 2023, Dimensions variable, Indigo's scrap fabric buried in Julia and Rebecca's Marrickville backyard with found pole and Alice's leftover house paint. NFS
10. Clementine Belle, *Lauren's Backyard*, 2023, Dimensions variable, Indigo and Julia's scrap fabric buried in Lauren's Enfield backyard. NFS
11. Clementine Belle, *Catherine's Backyard*, 2023, Dimensions variable, Emily and Lauren's scrap fabric buried in Catherine's Leichardt backyard. NFS
12. Kate Brown, *Orbital*, 2023, 20 x 20cm, Copper sheet tile. \$400
13. Clementine Belle, *Window*, 2023, Dimensions variable, Leftover acrylic paint and thread on Emily's studio scraps, Indigo's fabric scraps and Julia's fabric scraps. \$1200
14. Kate Brown, *Long Tongues*, 2023, Dimensions variable, Nasopharyngeal Airway implement, embroidery thread, pins. \$150
15. Kate Brown, *Human Level*, 2023, Video. \$1500
16. Kate Brown, *Ocular Landing*, 2023, Dimensions variable, Assorted medical and domestic glass. \$750
17. Clementine Belle, *Tree Work*, 2023, Dimensions variable, Indigo's fabric scraps and thread. NFS

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