

METRO ARTS // EXHIBITION PROGRAM



**UNTITLED #5**

**ZOE KNIGHT**

25 MAY - 11 JUNE 2016

## PRODUCTIVE FIDGETS

Luke Letourneau

Zoe Knight is a hunter-gatherer. Copper, wood, rope, foam; these are all collected from the world and repurposed within her exhibitions. The artist knots and bends these into new shapes and forms that are then placed across the gallery floor. Through this process, her practice draws attention to how we consider and ascribe value to materials and labour, as well as how this is navigated through space and time.

### ***The material's limits***

In Knight's practice, disparate materials collate as an exhibition. What you see would not seem foreign in a hardware store; however, here everything is in a frustratingly un-functional state. Across her exhibitions this undermining of usefulness has presented itself in a range of ways: copper wire squiggles in multiple directions, a roll of brown self-adhesive bandage is pounded into a ball, aluminium is folded into an underprepared bowl formation. The artist takes materials, which have obvious routes for function, and then redirects them.

In speaking to the artist she describes her attitude to her process as such:

*Playful, like a doodle through time. I look at the material as an invitation to push and pull. I think about what the material can do and I react to it. I try not to apply supports not found as part of the materials. I like to work with its length, and gravity.*

The artist builds a collection of off-cut, damaged or surplus hardware-store-esque materials; when inspiration hits, Knight will fiddle. This can lead to bending, folding, crushing, scrunching, knotting, or wrapping these materials into themselves. She'll return to the objects over time, discard them, shelve them, or continue to fiddle. In this way, the artist's process is one responding to the material's limits. However, while Knight stretches the structural integrity of a material she does not bastardise it.

"Material," in the context of this artist's practice, is not a word that can fully capture the potential for what say, copper or foam, can be. In describing her work, the term "materials" can easily interchange between "stuff," "object," "supply," "piece," "artefact," "product," or "commodity." When Knight is using these materials she is not only augmenting their appearance but also augmenting the perception of how they can be used. In writing about her work I have decided to use the term "material" as a way of identifying that the individual elements that make up the exhibition will always have a hyphenated relationship to our understandings of their original purpose. The artist's interruption of the material – her collecting, bending, and exhibiting it – is how these potentials are revealed. So while the material is malleable, it still requires an intervention to reveal it's physically and conceptual potentials. Knight is that intervention.

## ***Artist labour in the skip bin***

The ascription of value is an unstable measurement. Zoe Knight often sources her materials by diving into skip bins. Construction sites are now common to the artist. She reclaims the discarded. The aesthetics, the texture and the potentials of materials are what attract her, but it is only in the act of reprocessing these materials – which have had previous lives – that leads her to create works. The values of Knight's works are tethered to the material as construction resource but also to the artist's mode of acquisition.

Knight is on an unending scavenger hunt. At every moment she is an artist searching for materials. Her labour as an artist does not cease, potential works can be found anywhere. These materials reflect our society because they are what have built it. In a former state, they are what launch us above the ground, they keep us dry, they connect us to infinity, they patch our walls, they are the walls. Everything could have been something once, now it is something else. Bandage is a ball, foam is a knot and copper is a squiggle. Everything is recyclable. It should then be no surprise that the works continue to be re-cycled, re-fiddled, re-worked with more bends, twists and knots and ties from exhibition to exhibition. In Knight's practice, the material is never stable.

## ***The exhibition, and your backache***

Knight is an installation artist. Materials rest in small clusters along the gallery floor. Be careful where you step; always look down. Crouch for a closer look. Tippy-toe, tippy-toe. Don't knock anything over. Try not to breathe too hard, things look so gentle. Be conscious of your movement. Notice yourself. You are in Zoe Knight's exhibition and she knows how she wants you to move.

The materials in Knight's exhibition are around us every day. They hide in plain sight. In her exhibitions, the artist positions them as the display. They function as art objects, they function as receipts of an artist's ambiguous labour, and they function as navigational signs. The materials in the exhibition are all of these things but their value is infinitely re-ascribable. The material is one thing in one exhibition, but that is hardly all it will or could be.



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## CREDITS

**Cover** / Zoe Knight, *Untitled (slate, Silky Oak, Tasmanian rock)* 2016, slate, wood, rock, 5x10x5cm. Photo by Becky Strong.

**Inside** / Zoe Knight, *Untitled #4 (left side of room - SEVENTH Gallery)* 2016, various. Photo courtesy of the artist.

## VOTE OF THANKS

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