



***SOCIAL STRUCTURES***

KINLY GREY, TAYLA HAGGARTY, ANNA MCMAHON  
CURATED BY AMY-CLARE MCCARTHY

7 - 24 JUNE 2017

# SOCIAL STRUCTURES

By Amy-Clare McCarthy

Relationships and intimacy are at the core of this exhibition, and are explored in different ways in the works by Kinly Grey, Tayla Haggarty and Anna McMahon. Formally, the works are united by the artists' use of industrial materials and found objects. While these materials could otherwise be considered utilitarian or cold, here they are used to suggest the autobiographic and intensely personal. Central to the works is the exploration of personal narrative, but the works do not reveal specific stories, rather they present a feeling or experience. The works also share an inherent duality, where the meeting of disparate elements create something new.

In *between us*, Kinly Grey creates interplay between light, reflection and visitors. Grey points a spotlight directly at a mirror; depending on your position and perspective within the exhibition space this beam of light is blinding or nearly invisible. There is a connection and disconnection within the work, a play of power between the two objects as giver and receiver, which is further emphasised by our relation to them. Stepping into the beam, a viewer is caught in this flow between the two elements; potentially disrupting the equilibrium or creating a new balance that includes their body within it.

The moments of invisibility and presence within the work dramatically shifts depending not only on where you are in the gallery but at what time of day you visit. At night this relationship is visibly striking, but through the afternoon – placed next to windows with sunlight streaming through - the spotlight strains against the wash of light, only faintly visible on the mirror. Clearer at different times is the way the mirror reflects and illuminates the original source of light, the very heat of the bulb is made visible by the shadows cast on the wall of the otherwise nearly imperceptible steam. This courage to defy the mutable surrounds is powerful in its hopelessness.

Anna McMahon's work *Untitled #1* from the series 'Holding my breath' is also predicated around the meeting of two objects and the moment shared between them; for her it's when two objects are held together and "transformed in their holding".<sup>1</sup> The starting point for McMahon is often the re-examining of her own queer life experiences; with the autobiographic reconstructed through objects composed in a tableaux.

Suspended between two walls across the gallery, her work in the exhibition creates a sling that cradles an object at its centre. What in a quick glance could be mistaken for a ball rolled onto the hanging carpet, on closer investigation is revealed to be a glass dildo penetrating the expansive blue

surface; the bulk of which hangs hidden, with its whip attachment curled gingerly on the ground. The dildo and carpet share a sturdy, durable quality. The glass of the dildo is rigid and firm, at the same time it's delicate and easy to smash. Partly hidden by its cradle, the dildo is tucked out of sight, like our private sexual lives. The way the carpet falls away from the walls it also creates a space where viewers can share in being underneath it, to be similarly hidden. There is a latent possibility in the suspension of the work; the sense that something is about to happen.

Tayla Haggarty's work aims to archive queer experience, specifically lesbian experience and sexuality. For Haggarty this means an exploration of the duality or sameness within lesbian relationships. Maggie Nelson writes about this as perhaps not only the sameness of physicality but the sameness of "the shared, crushing understanding of what it means to live in a patriarchy".<sup>2</sup> For *Well Hung*, Haggarty takes as a starting point the experience of menstrual synchrony.

The work uses scaffolding that has come from a construction site, a site typically associated with the masculine, and after the exhibition it will be returned there. For the duration of the show Haggarty has claimed this object for the representing of lesbian experience. Balancing on a plank suspended within the structure are two women who face away from each other, looking out to viewers. With no visibility to the other, the work requires each to have an implicit trust, not to move suddenly or upend the balance. Watching the performers over time, the intensity of this action becomes more obvious in their twitching muscles, the subtle adjustment of weight.

The position of the women is intentionally powerful; they sit above us, looking down at the viewers. The scaffolding itself is large and dominant in the space, it affirms the presence of the women. All of the works have this grandness of scale and large presence within the gallery; the mass of blue carpet, the blinding light, but this sense of the monumental is belied by the fragility and tenuous suspension of the objects themselves. The slight shuffling of performers bodies moves and readjusts Haggarty's plank; the carpet in McMahon's work sways and looks to be breathing in the breeze of the air conditioner. A slight change could bring these structures crashing down. They are not static moments. They are precarious. This balance and tension is integral to all of the works.

The inherent risk of failure, but importance of the action itself, returns me to the starting point of the exhibition; relationships – the trust we put in other people is the biggest but most necessary risk of all.

1. Anna McMahon in email contact, May 2017.
2. The Argonauts, 2015.

# Metro Arts

## IMAGE CREDIT

Cover / Tayla Haggarty, *Balance 8000*, 2015. Sculpture, buckets, wood chips, rope, rock, bessa block. Photograph by Katelyn Jane Dunn.

## LIST OF WORKS

Kinly Grey, *between us*, 2017.

Anna McMahon, *untitled #1*, from the series 'holding my breath', 2017.

Tayla Haggarty, *Well Hung*, 2017.

## VOTE OF THANKS

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