

The Belly and the Members

Opening: 3 February 2024, 5–7pm
On view until: 24 February 2024
Location: Ground Floor, 69 Reservoir Street, Surry Hills, NSW 2010

Yavuz Gallery is pleased to present *The Belly and the Members*, a group exhibition of works by Karen Black, Cybele Cox, Sarah Drinan, Mehwish Iqbal, Solomon Kammer, Juz Kitson, Caroline Rothwell and Grace Wright.

The exhibition takes its title from Aesop’s fable, in which the members of the body rebel against the belly, believing her idle and self-indulgent. The feet stand still, the hands won’t lift a finger, and the mouth refuses food. The members soon find that they can’t survive without the belly and repent their folly, acknowledging that each part of the body sustains the rest. The artists in this exhibition reimagine this figure as flesh, myth and landscape, embracing her as a container of multitudes. They shift well-worn perspectives on the body politic to reclaim the belly as a symbol of resilience and a seat of feminine power.

In her accompanying essay, celebrated playwright, novelist and screenwriter Suzie Miller — the author of *Prima Facie* (2019) and *Jailbaby* (2023) — reflects on *The Belly and the Members* as “a courageous and form-bending exploration of the human body. The body has been co-opted, admired, sold, touched, tasted, beaten, imprinted, raped, medicalised, spiritualised, colonised, traded, desired, used, killed, legislated against, denigrated, objectified, sexualised and de-sexualised. [...] We are confronted by the unexamined sense of our own form, made aware of how we have been trained to accept control and definition. This exhibition is a lens through which we see an exquisite new mode of self-determination.”

Karen Black’s paintings relish the ways the body can bend and unspool through passages of paint, gently tracing the sometimes inelegant movements of our limbs through cloaks of abstraction. Figures climb the surface of the skin like a gentle landscape, emerging and receding into one another in a constant yet unpredictable rhythm.

Cybele Cox’s hand-built ceramic figures depict noble crones and bawdy goddesses, setting the stage for a new feminist religion that builds on a reverence for hybrid bodies. Towering over the space, the goddess Baubo’s eyes blink over her belly and her mouth doubles as the pubis, said to have been so lewd and joyful as to break Demeter’s deep melancholy.

Sarah Drinan’s paintings are glowing echoes of personal snapshots, internet archives, and the vast history of figurative art, melding the deeply private and the infinitely shared. Her fleshy compositions are celebrations of labour and sex, anonymity and community, highlighting the female body’s adaptability and soft power.

Mehwish Iqbal pierces, stitches and re-maps vivid imagery onto clothing pattern paper, placing heavenly bodies shoulder-to-shoulder with contemporary routes of diaspora, women’s labour and neo-imperialism. *Arz-e-Pak* is a work interlaced with the idea of land as a maternal figure that nurtures flora and fauna within spaces of human violence as an act of resistance and consecration.

Juz Kitson presents a sumptuous ceramic creature that bristles with a thousands folds and an ambiguous air of threat and desire. These tongues and petals evoke the monstrous feminine

through a triffid-like traversing of the boundaries between science fiction and social reality, where seduction, adaptation and survival meet.

Solomon Kammer's most significant work to date, *Proprietary Limited*, is a monumental tableau that speaks to the loss of dignity and the capitalist debasements of the body in medical diagnoses. This work was influenced by two pivotal events: the seismic overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 and the artist's personal confrontations with gender role bias within the healthcare system.

Caroline Rothwell reimagines the botanical body and its historical entanglements through works that allude to broader regimes of classification, germination and consumption. A coppery tongue twists out of the wall above silhouettes of 19th century specimens collected by Darwin, Banks and Vavilov. With a hand poised to extract, the specimens mutate out of the archive, sprouting barcodes and plastic lashes.

Grace Wright's abstract paintings record the sweeping choreographies of her body, dancing and muscular. At the same time, they recall those throngs of mythological beings in Rococo painting cycles that fuse flesh and light. Wright's works are twin flames, celebrating both the earth-bound body that is tied to reality and the astral body that soars through self-inventions and reveries.

Miller continues, "where words arch and stretch to explain, these visual forms allow a deep contemplation of how we reimagine, how we experience, and how we free the body from the constraints and definitions visited upon it. ... There is a physicality to each work that speaks to the viewer in a language that is without words and takes us on a path that has no final destination. Perhaps that is the point, the human body is boldly defying categorisation, is merging with nature, with the unseen, with the matter that makes us part of something bigger than the mere flesh we assume."

Selected Works



Cybele Cox, *Baubo Sacred Fool*, 2016, hand built buff raku, porcelain slip, glaze, gold lustre



Solomon Kammer, *Proprietary Limited*, 2023, oil and acrylic on aluminium, 150 x 400 cm

YAVUZ GALLERY



Caroline Rothwell, *Metamorphosis of Plants 3 (Arrangement for Vavilov (Triticum vulgare))*, 2018, raw Belgian linen, structural PVC, metal leaf, hydrostone



Sarah Drinan, *Four women*, 2023, oil and acrylic on canvas, 100 x 120 cm

YAVUZ GALLERY

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Karen Black's (b.1961, Australia) practice slips between abstraction and figuration to explore feelings within the full scope of human relations. Her practice engages with the tensions and contradictions of desire, emotion and the self, working across painting, drawing, ceramics and sculpture to transform traditional representations of the body. Often ambiguous and always charged with psychological nuance, Black's work contains an intimacy and vulnerability that springs from her interest in radical care and gentleness. Black's work has been exhibited in major institutions including the Art Gallery of NSW, National Gallery of Victoria, Newcastle Art Gallery, Gertrude Contemporary, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Griffith University Art Museum, Ngununggula Southern Highlands Regional Art Gallery, and Monash University Museum of Art. Black was a recipient of the 2017 Artspace One Year Studio Program, Sydney, and the 2019 Glasshouse/Stonehouse Residency, Chenaud, France. She has worked with Flack Studio to deliver collaborative community projects, including *We need to hang out more* for 2023 Melbourne Design Week in conjunction with the National Gallery of Victoria, bringing together over 400 people across three days for the drawing project.

Cybele Cox (b.1971, Australia) is an artist whose practice explores representations of women in the Western art canon through motifs drawn from ancient feminine symbols and occult mysticism. Using hand built ceramic figures, painting, performance and costume, Cox hybridises the human-body-animal, fusing symbols from the mythic world with fantasies. In doing so, she reconstructs a new belief system from the remnants of old ones, discarding the broken hegemonic narratives of the present day to elevate those which were previously underestimated or hidden. Cox's work has been part of curated exhibitions across Australia, including *From the other side*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (2023), *Once More With Feeling*, Ngununggula Southern Highlands Regional Art Gallery (2023), the 2022 Australian Ceramics Triennale, and *Nothing Human is Alien to Me*, Ideas Platform, Artspace Sydney (2019). In 2017, Cox presented *Ornamental Hallucination*, a significant solo exhibition at Firstdraft, Sydney.

Sarah Drinan (b.1994, Australia) creates paintings that express a tender awareness of current discourses around the body, embracing the absurdity of living in an often destabilising and perverted world. Drinan's fleshy compositions are informed by her background in mental health occupational therapy as well as a diverse image bank of personal snapshots, internet archives, and the vast history of figurative art. Her anonymous figures merge and detach into ambiguous scenarios, first rendered and manipulated with digital media and 3D modelling apps, before being translated into the glowing physicality of paint. Through this, she honours the complexity of the body and human experiences of vulnerability, pleasure, perversion and pain. Drinan was selected as a finalist for the 2023 Ramsay Art Prize at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Australia's most generous prize for artists under 40, and as a two-time finalist for the Brett Whitley Travelling Art Scholarship in 2022 and 2021. In 2022, she was awarded the Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship Residency at Shark Island Kangaroo Valley. Her work is held in private and public collections, including Artbank, Australia.

Mehwish Iqbal (b.1981, Pakistan) examines the geo-political scenarios that give rise to the refugee and migrant diaspora, rigorously explored through embroidery, printmaking, painting, and textiles. She explores the commodification of human agency, hybrid identities, and the complex relationships between individuals and alien surroundings, creating poetically charged works that interrogate the acceptance and rejection of new members in foreign territories. Iqbal's works respond to the vulnerabilities and survival strategies of marginalized people, unravelling the entwined relationship between feminism, labour, imperialism, mythologies, and power. Iqbal has undertaken residencies at the New York Artist League, USA (2011); Megalo Print Studio, Australia (2013); Halka Arts Projects, Turkey (2014); Bundanon Trust, Australia (2014); and Blacktown Art Centre Residency, Australia (2015). Recent curated exhibitions include *A Soft Touch*, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art (2023); *The National*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia (2021); *Soul Fury*, Bendigo Art Gallery, Australia (2021); and *New Sacred*, Mosman Art Gallery, Australia (2018), amongst many others.

Solomon Kammer (b.1991, Australia) is a Tarndanya/Adelaide-based emerging visual artist who draws on their own experiences of living with disability and gender biases to expose prejudices and abuses still

YAVUZ GALLERY

prevalent in today's medical complex. Kammer's confronting portraits deploy art as a form of protest and advocacy, examining culturally embedded notions of 'womanhood', well-being, value, and the way that bodies are seen and fought over. Kammer's painting practice shares a rare and stark vision of bodies ordinarily marginalised and rendered invisible, championing those living with disability, illness, and trauma. They have received recognition for their practice by being selected as a finalist in numerous awards, including the Archibald Prize, Ramsay Art Prize, Doug Moran National Portrait Award, Shirley Hannan National Portrait Award, Kennedy Art Prize, Wyndham Art Prize, and Mosman Art Prize. In 2023, Kammer was awarded the National Arts and Disability Award (Early Career Artist) by Creative Australia.

Juz Kitson's (b.1987, Australia) artworks are both monstrous and tender, combining abject seduction and chimera-like material play. Her corporeal installations teeter between the human and animal conditions, pushing the boundaries of clay through intricate hand-building and slip casting. Kitson incorporates these ceramic elements with hot and flameworked glass and natural materials, such as reclaimed animal pelts and tusks, creating unsettling, evocative morphologies that are at once beautiful and grotesque. While completing her Honours at the National Art School, Kitson's entire body of work *Formations of Silence* was acquired by the Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania. Her work is held in significant public collections, including the National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of South Australia, Artbank, and Shepparton Art Museum, as well as in private collections in Australia, Germany, Switzerland, and the UK. She has been curated into exhibitions that recognise leading Australian artists, including the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia's *Primavera* (2013), the Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: *Magic Object* (2016), the Wynne Prize (2017 and 2022), the Sidney Myer Fund Australian Ceramic Award (2019), and *40 acquisitions for 40 years* at the National Gallery of Australia (2022).

Caroline Rothwell's (b.1967, England) research-based practice traverses the sculptural and two-dimensional, often using unique self-devised fabrication methods to create speculative worlds out of the systems that underpin our lives. Her practice dissects and reconstructs human interactions with nature through history and its lasting effects, manipulating representations of living anatomies alongside domestic and industrial forms. Alluding to the skeletal, respiratory and reproductive systems, what may at first appear playful or innocent are typically decoys for more ominous or unsettling subjects. Rothwell has been curated extensively into institutional exhibitions, with projects including *The National 2021: New Australian Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia (2021); *Infinite Herbarium*, a participatory artwork made in collaboration with Google Creative Lab, using generative AI and open source data (2021); *Horizon*, a solo exhibition at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre (2021); *Know My Name: Australian Women Artists 1900 to Now*, National Gallery of Australia (2021); *Frágil*, XIII Biennale of Cuenca, Ecuador (2016); and *Antipodes: cut apart*, Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Cambridge, UK (2016).

Grace Wright's (b. 1992, New Zealand) paintings are all-consuming, inviting the viewer into a baroque world of tangled gestures. Markings on the canvas twist and convulse about themselves to build an anarchic structure before unravelling to moments of repose. While Wright's surfaces may appear abstract, she views her paintings as representational, evoking the tempestuous rhythms of the natural world and the female-identifying body. Drawing on 17th-century mythological painting, she often captures a frozen moment of ecstasy, equally liberating as it is grotesque. Through the delicate tension and release of her physical process and the labour of producing work to a scale that overwhelms the body, she elevates the feminine to monumental standing. Wright holds an MFA and BFA from the University of Auckland, Elam School of Fine Arts. She has exhibited her works across New Zealand, Australia and Singapore. In 2019, Wright was awarded Second Runner Up at the Wallace Art Awards, one of the top art prizes in New Zealand. She has also been a finalist in the New Zealand Painting and Printmaking Award (2015, 2016) and Molly Morpeth Canaday Art Award, New Zealand (2015). Wright has been profiled by publications such as *Ocula* (2022), *Art Collector* (2021), and *Art News*, New Zealand (2020).

For further information on the artist and the works, please contact:

Dharshini Kannan, dharshini@yavuzgallery.com

All images are copyright protected © 2024 Yavuz Gallery

YAVUZ GALLERY