

Nothing;



The premise for this show: about nothing, is conceptually, a tall order. However, the exhibiting artists Natalie Lavelle and Pippa Makgill have never shied away from tackling difficult theoretical propositions. Matter of fact, within their respective practices, both artists rigorously chase complexity through multiplicities of meaning, pursue open-endedness and I wager, share a complimentary endgame: no closures.

About nothing: no-thing [object] through extrapolation also signifies no-being [subject]. Therefore-to, non-being diametrically encapsulates the ontology of being. In Heideggerian parlance, this results in: “the Being of this being”.

This way of thinking about being and about nothing, from the mid twentieth-century onward, as today, applies to certain aesthetics pertaining to perception. Heavily indebted to a philosophical, existential phenomenological approach to painting and sculpture, this is where, in my estimation, Lavelle and Makgill come into their own - actuating a level of situational presence in the space between the viewer’s body, the artwork(s) and the site itself. Through their separate specificities, it appears both artists excel at evoking this type of intensified awareness in the viewer: embodied perception. This resulting body centrality or affect - where the body of the viewer becomes a locus of living meanings, is where sensation [emanating from reception of the artworks] is translated to knowledge *through the flesh*. This form of perception in which both artists excel in propagating, operates well beneath the rational and cognitive - as *a priori*, a prelinguistic proposition.

Initial genesis for the project stemmed from Natalie’s musings on the reductive tendencies in mid-century post-painterly, formalist, colour-field, geometric abstraction – her idiom, according to American art historian Kirk Varnedoe - in his influential tome: *Pictures of Nothing* (2006). For, in regards to materiality, in Natalie’s case, one can detect a nod in the direction of Greenbergian American painters such as Helen Frankenthaler [1928-2011], Morris Louis [1912-1962] and the minimal tendencies of Agnes Martin [1912-2004]. Their maxim was opticality – get to the colour, sacrifice gesture. Talking with Natalie the other day, regarding her staining technique, she mentioned: “I have been using dioxazine [purple] in the works lately - it’s a high quality pigment that can stretch a long way without becoming diluted/desaturated”. This was an approach then, as it is today, that elevates reflexivity in painting, expels mimetic illusion, and which opens up/disperses the pictorial space beyond the edge of the canvas.

Today, due to accusations of dogmatism, Greenberg and his criticism is considered a bit of an anachronism. Masterfully however, Lavelle uses these modernist propositions as a starting point only to open up the works to include further interstices of meaning. Just to prove the point, Natalie presents us with arresting suspended pieces: fields of nothing - subtle iridescence and ochre *in raw linen*. A beguiling meticulousness is achieved.

Concomitantly she extends these formal approaches - turns them on their head - and presents us with an expanded hybrid: painted canvas resembling a cadaver that 'worms' it's wrinkled/stressed form across the cell floor.

It is at this locus, where Pippa with her extra-intuitive, exacting, responsive instinct comes to the fore, mentioning the other day: "The stick and bag were plotted when I was looking at air flow and natural light sources. It is often my first instinct ... to look for these... [and] in this work [with coke bottles] the larger bottle cradles the smaller and it is balanced by water on the double bricks in a precarious way ... a body of a body".

Well, if these cell walls could talk of vacated bodies, for remember, spatiality is also inherently temporal, occupying this place in the present but stretching back into the spectral past. At this haunting nexus of presence and absence, Natalie and Pippa both highlight their adept handling of materiality and intersubjectivity, drawing our attention to the myriad remnant indexical traces, the palimpsest, all still visible on the former goal cells' concrete surfaces: the stains, the burns, the scars, the neutral hues, psychic traces, all these *extend into* the materiality of Lavelle and Makgill's respective forms – just as they transmute back circuitously - back into the site. As Pippa recently mentioned: "I find the Lock Up such a loaded space. An incredible depth of history is scratched into the walls". Both artists emphatically alerting us to the fact: where do the works begin and end? Remember: no closures.

Last mention lies with Makgill, her remarkable honed ability to harness and present transitional dispossessed objects. These extra-ordinary composites appear to carry traces of urban uncertainty or a kind of prior trauma for our apprehension. They are decidedly unheroic forms suggesting the paranoiac desire to dissolve into their surrounds. Yet somehow these forms also display a need to re-affirm and sustain their afflicted boundaries. Pippa: "It is quietly enraging, but also very motivating wanting to ruin luxury surfaces". This degradation/ agitation evidenced is all attitude - *about nothing*. The celebrated Austrian artist Franz West [1947-2012] and his un-monumental 'adaptives' leap to mind.

This exhibition is testament to the curatorial team at IN | artist run initiative, nothing short of excellence.

Dr Camilla Cassidy, July, 2024

About Nothing

Natalie Lavelle and Pippa Makgill

9-11 August 2024

IN | artist run initiative, The Old Lock Up | 4 First Ave. Maroochydore, Kabi Kabi Country (Sunshine Coast), QLD

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This project is part of IN | artist run initiative's 2024 INSITE Destabilise Program and is supported through the Creative Industries Investment Program and is jointly funded by Sunshine Coast Council's Arts and Heritage Levy and the Regional Arts Development Fund in partnership with the Queensland Government.