

# FRAGILITY

A group exhibition exploring the ephemeral, precarious, delicate  
and un-monumental aspects of life, art and identity

Upstairs at the Napier  
5 – 27 June 2015

## Handle with care

*Most art is fragile and some should be placed and never moved again.*

*Donald Judd*

Critical thinkers questioned the notion of truth and permanence in the twentieth century; visual artists began eschewing traditional materials associated with perpetuity and durability and embraced the temporal and ephemeral. Strength of idea was prioritised over strength of medium. The anti-form works of the 1960s and 1970s have had a lasting legacy; no material or process is now strange or off-limits. Despite this, the art market and art institutions continue to demand durability. Public art needs to 'withstand the elements' and galleries and collectors invest in works with longevity for economic and practical reasons. Even ephemeral and performance art is preserved through conservation and documentation.

Monumental works in solid and classical materials continue to populate our streets, buildings and freeways. Yet transient, delicate and small-scale art has the capacity to speak more directly to the contemporary condition: the fragility of our natural environment, the vulnerability of marginalised people, the precarious nature of our material world, culture and the human psyche.

*Fragility* includes the work of eighteen artists who engage with fragile elements in their practice, either in form, medium or concept. It gives space to artists who use delicate and ephemeral materials, engage with ideas around vulnerability and create forms that threaten to change, rupture or break.

Fragility is a term that implies risk, not just weakness. While it asks us to handle things with care, lest they be damaged or altered, it also draws attention to preciousness, subtlety and nuance. The works in this exhibition are reminders of the emotive, yielding aspects of art and the human condition, as well as the liminal spaces between and within forms and ideas.

Perhaps it is not surprising that many of the artists in *Fragility* use objects and materials from the domestic sphere, a place associated with fluidity and fissure – that precarious balance between love and anxiety, comfort and claustrophobia, work and rest, safety and violence. Delicate and transparent materials – glass, handkerchiefs, lace and ceramics – are used to communicate vulnerability, intimacy and femininity, whilst household objects reference the real and symbolic interior.

Containment is another recurring theme and can be read as a metaphor for protection, absence, loss and discovery: a space where inside and outside meet. Vessels, vitrines, bottles, cases and cages are unreliable vessels; they promise safety and confinement but can easily open, break or leak. And within the gallery context, their precarious state is heightened.

Nature and the duality of its vulnerability and strength is referenced in many works. Flora is used as medium, subject and symbol, signifying the damage caused to the natural environment as well as conveying the inherent transience, refinement and resilience of plants. Decay is inevitable in the natural world, but so is the possibility of transformation and regeneration. Flowers may seem vulnerable, but they have an evolutionary impetus to adapt and revive. Similarly, the dichotomy between fragility and power in relation to animals, the human psyche and the marginalised in our society is central to several pieces.

The works in *Fragility* are also largely un-monumental; they refuse spectacle and are made on a human-scale from un-precious materials and modest means of production. Ephemera is embraced by many of the artists, and most of the mediums or processes used are vulnerable in quality. The artists have chosen materials that will inherently disintegrate or are easily deconstructed, abandoned or broken: mud will be washed away, ceramics and glass is easily smashed, wax may melt or mark, weavings can unravel, and organic matter may die and decompose. Books, cardboard and domestic objects are regularly discarded in our world of over-consumption. Even paper is easily torn and susceptible to damage through light and fluctuations in temperature. The hand of the artist is ever-present; embroidery, weaving, handwriting, frottage, hand-building, assemblage and mark-making. Even those works that are simulacra of identifiable objects don't disguise the ways in which they are created. The inherently irregular nature of works made this way speaks to the personal and the fragmented qualities of life. We, like the works, are not impervious to fluctuation and disruption.

Perhaps there is strength in numbers? Some artists have created ephemeral and site-specific installations using repetition. With slight variations on a form, multiples create a fallacious sense of solidarity and the whole is definitely greater than the sum of its parts. The scattering, stacking and ordering of similar objects creates a tension between unity and fragmentation. Fragility is both eschewed and embraced as objects threaten to collapse, fall and break.

Vulnerability is a fundamental human state. While some artists try to compensate for this with grandiose imagery and monumental structures that have solidity, strength and permanence, the artists in *Fragility* embrace the precarious aspects of life and art, creating works that remind us of the transient nature of our material and psychological worlds.

By Stephanie Karavasilis  
Artist and curator  
2015

# LIST OF WORKS and ARTISTS' STATEMENTS

## Gallery 1

### 1. HELEN BRAUN

*Forest, an Imperfect Imprint*

2015

Perspex, paper, acrylic paint and ink

POA

seeming fragility + insistence + persistence

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over human existence

= survival of the natural world, every time \*

\* outcome will include extinction of some species

As the nature of scientific endeavour progresses with double linear connections of both destroyer and saviour, I become the artist observer. This involves the appreciation of what I see as ever converging lines of rescue. From here I work to draw together the micro and macro of science and nature by creating intricate mini installations. The inclusion of real but imperfect prints from nature form small statements regarding endless and always possible, evolutionary transience and sustainability of all life on planet earth.

### 2. DAVID WATERS

*Fragility*

2010

Suitcase and bandages

\$900.00 (to be donated to the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre)

### 3. KERRY STRAUSS

*Vortex*

2013

Recycled glass and copper wire

\$750

### 4. TRUDY MOORE

*Untitled (Drawing of Chair #8)*

2014

Charcoal on paper

\$2000 (unframed)

I use paper and charcoal to take large-scale sculptural rubbings of objects and architecture. These works explore a space between drawing and sculpture and consider notions of artifice, change, fragility and memory in relation to personal human experience.

This work is a 1:1 scale drawing of a sculptural rubbing of a chair.

Through this project I am playfully challenging my previous investigations of change and fragility, while also considering ideas of framing and image. The once temporary, three-dimensional work is now contained in a fixed, two-dimensional field; exploring a space between movement and stasis, form and image, illusion and actuality.

## 5. ALEX CARROLL

*The Death of the Moth; Small Emperor Moth*  
2014  
Graphite and watercolor on handmade paper  
NFS

## 6. LIZ WALKER

*Out of Circulation*  
2015  
Found objects, books and cotton thread  
\$1000

*Out of Circulation* (a work in progress) considers the hardship and perils of asylum seekers; from leaving behind loved ones to landing in an unfamiliar place with all the terrors and uncertainties in between and beyond.

## 7. BETH CROCE

*Perforated Eggshell II*  
2015  
Glazed porcelain  
\$45

*Perforated Eggshell III*  
2015  
Porcelain with bronze patina  
\$45

*Surgical Repair*  
2015  
Unglazed porcelain and surgical suture with needle  
\$45

*All the King's Horses*  
2015  
Glazed porcelain and surgical suture with needle  
\$45

*Perforated Eggshell I*

2015  
Glazed porcelain  
\$45

*Sutured Bottle I*

2015  
Porcelain and surgical suture and needle  
\$65

*Vessel*

2015  
Porcelain with bronze patina  
\$65 (dome not included)

*Sutured Bottle II*

2015  
Porcelain and surgical suture and needle  
\$65

As an illustrator of surgical textbooks, I'm confronted with the deconstruction and repair of the human body in the name of healing by means of surgical intervention. Our tissues and bones are knowingly broken and bodies sewn back together, perhaps with some pieces missing or added, as a matter of course. It makes me wonder: are we different after the surgeon's hands have rearranged? After hearts or hips are replaced? And I question the idea of the fragility of life when I see how torn we must become to be made whole again.

These works explore two cast porcelain forms as they are bent, reshaped, added to and broken in the journey to their final form.

**8. ANNE-MARIE KUTER**

*Fragment*

2015  
Tissue paper and PVA  
POA

**9. SONIA DONNELLAN**

*Every Fragile Beauty*

2015  
Paint skins and mixed media  
\$250

My installation practice explores themes of uncertainty and love. During an artist-in-residency last year I contemplated Buddhist teachings of non-attachment, non-judgement and non-resistance as a way to manage anxiety that can sometimes arise due to uncertainty and change. The resulting work was ephemeral and strongly evoked the fragility of matter. I found myself wondering: if matter is impermanent then what is lasting? The work titled *Every Fragile Beauty* is made of thin paint skins which have been cast from sauce bottles. The theme of the work contemplates an everyday, banal

object such as a soy sauce bottle in terms of constancy. Greek philosopher Heraclitus famously considers the paradox of constancy and flux when he says that we cannot step into the same river twice. This was originally thought to mean that all things are constantly changing so that we can only meet them once. Scholars now believe that Heraclitus is suggesting that a river can only be constant because it is always changing what it contains. He sees change not as opposed to but as inextricably linked to constancy. Perhaps psychic and physical fragility arises if we are unable to learn how to manage uncertainty and remain rigidly inflexible to change? The theme of love provides another insight into fragility. Our vulnerability when we surrender to our lover annihilates us: "Dance when you're broken open..." (Rumi, J., 2003, *The Book of Love: poems of ecstasy and longing*).

## 10. TRACY MUIRHEAD

*Tills on 'Sills 1*

2015

Tillandsias (air plants), grasses, stoneware and terracotta clays

\$25 each cone

Born in South Africa, Tracy now lives in the leafy, outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne. She is passionate about clay, but tries to manipulate it as little as possible, allowing it to find its own expression. Hand building allows her to explore and experiment with the endless possibilities of clay being stretched and torn, or squished and pierced. Many of her pieces are the result of this playful process of discovery.

In this body of work, she explores the concept of perceived fragility. The clay cones are seemingly fine and flimsy, but are in fact fired to a high temperature, resulting in a stone-like quality, with a less than fragile result. The plants and wispy grasses are exquisitely delicate looking, but in fact are self-sufficient and need only moisture in a humid environment to not only survive, but thrive. In their natural environment they are independent and strong – fragile, I think not.

## 11. KERRY BUCKLAND

*Constructed Flora*

2015

Digital print on tracing paper

\$165

## 12. ANNEE MIRON

*Fractions of Time borrowed*

2015

Found cardboard and milk paint

\$300 (installation)

My consumption, wastes and production wear pathways around the earth through a heavy dependence on international trade.

Used cardboard boxes map the empire of my consumption and unseen waste so I collect samples from the streets around my studio and along my way. I have hand-cut

and woven them into hummock and hollow-like forms inspired by a research residency in the fragile alpine bogs and fens of the A.C.T. National Parks. Each is underpainted with the colours drawn from an already depleting inventory of indigenous plants and animals found there. They draw attention to the intricate chaotic beauty beneath our feet and how heavily we now tread. Across country. Across the world. Into destruction.

### 13. ALEX CARROLL

*The Death of the Moth; Oleander Hawk Moth*  
2015  
Graphite and watercolor on handmade paper  
NFS

*The Death of the Moth; Cecropia Moth*  
2015  
Graphite and watercolor on handmade paper  
NFS

*Yet, because he was so small, and so simple a form of the energy that was rolling in at the open window and driving its way through so many narrow and intricate corridors in my own brain and in those of other human beings, there was something marvellous as well as pathetic about him. It was as if someone had taken a tiny bead of pure life and decking it as lightly as possible with down and feathers, had set it dancing and zig-zagging to show us the true nature of life.*

Virginia Woolf, *The Death of the Moth*, 1942

All moths drawn for this series are moths that have been encountered during the artist's travels.

The paper used for this series originates from a small Yao minority village in China's southern Guangxi province. The material is comprised of fibres from trees and is laboriously boiled down and mixed into a pulp. The pulp is ladled onto screens and left to dry under the sun. Weather conditions in that area only allow for the paper-making to occur once a year. The craft is mainly carried out by women in the village, most of whom are in their 70s. As the youth leave the village to find jobs in the city, few are left to carry on the tradition.

### 14. STEPHANIE KARAVASILIS

*Remnant*  
2015  
Vintage ironing board, second-hand dictionaries and stoneware clay  
POA

*Remnant* is part of a series that explores ideas around memory, loss and nostalgia, using materials and objects that reference domesticity, the human body and the passing of time. Ceramics makes hard that which is usually soft, calcifying ephemeral and fragile materials whilst suggesting rubble, bones and decay. The dictionaries, symbols of language, order and certainty, are juxtaposed with fragments of the body which, like memory itself, are selective, fragmented and elusive. By juxtaposing found objects and furniture with hand-crafted sculptures, I allude to personal histories both ordinary and mysterious, with the remnants suggesting absence and presence, loss and discovery, masculinity and femininity.

## 15. TRACY MUIRHEAD

*Tills on 'Sills 2*

2015

Tillandsias (air plants), stoneware clay and timber

\$290

## Gallery 2

### 1. TERESA BENNETT

*Palace*

2015

Knit nylon wire and paper

\$485

*Palace* was created as part of a series of works referencing nest building, with a nod to 'The Emperor's new clothes' also influencing its direction. Beautiful and opulent, clearly fragile and on show.

Making 'homes', that's what birds do, that's what we all do. Migration means creating new homes and underscores feelings of impermanence. These feelings are worked through as I explore my migrant background and sense of place, a difficult process with feelings of regret, possibilities and opportunities and family.

We build our Palaces, however, without the relentless maintenance we need to keep our home as 'palaces' nature very quickly reclaims them, even the grandest. The work is fragile, we are fragile, that's all there is, in the end.

### 2. PAUL GORMAN

*Wild Iris*

2015

Mud wash stencil on wall (site-specific installation)

POA (for documentation of the work and/or commissions)

*Wild Iris* is an extension from my previous floral photography show, *Cura Articulii* at iArt Studios in 2013, and *Flower Wall*, 2014, which was part of *FLOWER* at Yarra Sculpture Gallery (curated by David Waters).

*Wild Iris* is an imprint of temporal beauty. The African Wild Iris is a resilient, hardy, grassy-like rhizome, which in Melbourne produces brief waves of temporal, delicate, butterfly-like flowers, just before rain during the warmer months.

I convey flowers as wondrous symbol of renewal. Since the early 1990s, I have explored mud stencils on walls and floors as a ritual of place-making; an earthy tactile mode of recording attachment to our local geography.

### 3. AKIKO NAGINO

*A clock I*  
2014  
Embossed paper  
\$350

*A clock II*  
2014  
Hand-cut paper  
\$650

I have been really interested in patterns such as the sky, walls, roads, leaves and insects. And also those patterns that scare me sometimes, especially that of butterfly.

In my arts practice I question the definition and foundation of what a pattern is - beautiful, intimidating, absolute and distorted. The power of a pattern can draw the observer in, captivate and fascinate them.

I love the Japanese culture and in the course of learning Japanese lacquer I have developed a traditional style, and have learned to apply a range of different techniques. Currently I am experimenting with more primitive expressions.

### 4. JACKIE RALPH

*One Hot Day*  
2015  
Wax  
NFS

As the human population increases so does its need for resources. Sentient (non-human) beings, viewed as product, are seen only as an extension of man, not as beings in their own right. As the economy becomes, for many people, a single driving factor, ethics are marginalised. *One Hot Day* is a sculpture about loss. The horse is representative of man's dominance as it is a subjugated vehicle for people's desires. Emotional expression is explained through the horse's stance – in this case a sense of vulnerability and fragility is explored. The medium, wax, makes a direct reference to a changing planet.

### 5. KATY BOWMAN

*Text Fragments* series:

*Out of Order*  
2015  
Second-hand cotton handkerchiefs and cotton embroidery thread  
\$120

*Them*  
2015  
Second-hand cotton handkerchiefs and cotton embroidery thread  
\$120

*Baby I still love u*

2015

Second-hand cotton handkerchiefs and cotton embroidery thread

\$150

*God Seems Sus*

2015

Second-hand cotton handkerchiefs and cotton embroidery thread

\$120

In this series of works I have responded to the idea of fragility from a number of perspectives including the psychological and the material. I have used several pieces of found text that are in themselves fragile by virtue of their fragmentary and ephemeral nature, which I have transposed and embroidered onto second-hand handkerchiefs.

Each text fragment suggests to me a particular quality of fragility: the existential “God seems sus” articulates the frailty of uncertainty whereas “Baby, I still love u...” conveys the vulnerability and fragility of human relationships. I found the word “THEM” scratched onto the interior panel of a train carriage. This single word brings to mind ideas of the ‘Other’ and separateness and at its extreme a paranoid fear of others by a fragile psyche. “Out of Order” could equally be a statement about a faulty machine or the frailty of the human body and mind.

My particular interest in these found texts is in the actual handwriting, which is both expressive and personal, and they remind me of haiku and concrete poems, and just like the handkerchiefs, they are fragile and ephemeral and destined to be scrunched up in a pocket and lost or discarded.

I choose to work with domestic recycled and light industrial materials for their accessibility and as a means to locate the work in the everyday. I have chosen to embroider this text on second-hand handkerchiefs to emphasise the personal nature of the text and because embroidery is associated with the delicate and refined.