

From the outside in, and from the inside out
By Taylor Hall

What does it mean to exist in a body amongst other bodies? After we surpass the threshold of touch, connection, and interaction, what do we become? When does an artistic collaboration begin to dissolve two previously separate entities and start to become something else entirely? This new thing may escape our immediate understanding; it's an elusive, slippery manifestation of mutuality, yearning to be embraced.

Emerging in vulnerable encounters and intimate exchanges, Sharna Barker and Ruby Donohoe's collaborative exhibition *Porous* embraces this undefined residue of connection. Embedded in forms of interconnectivity, the exhibition presents a meeting place to interrogate ambiguous and entangled corporeality and the undefinable experience of existing within a body.

Forgoing the harsh and cold aesthetics that come with more durable materials, Barker offers soft, translucent tracing paper to Ruby's tender process of enmeshing her body with each malleable form. Introducing the physical palette into a cohort of forms awaiting interaction, Donohoe and Barker blur distinctions of self and other. When pondering the artists' interwoven mode of collaboration, it becomes fruitless to consider disguisable agents of material intervention. Spontaneous paper tears, effaced bodies, and uncontrollable possibilities emerge as the surplus of transformation and mutual exchange. *Porous* asks us to consider ourselves as a porous sieve,

to allow watery ambiguities to flow freely through our mind and body.

In its stabilised form, paintings such as *maybe I hold the height* exist in the exhibition space as a sign of past, as well as future, change. Its crushed demeanour suggests its use as a time-based sculpture through the instinctual process of folding, crunching, and wrapping the material around Barker's hands, as well as around Donohoe's entire body. Sliding from the artists' touch to the gallery floor, the work both extends towards and obscures the body. The crevices of a crumple may suggest ephemerality; the fragile paper's familiar tactility can be recalled on the tips of your fingers and a loose drape mimes a surrendered and relaxed body. Remoulded and reformed time and time again, the tenuous nature of each papery artwork urges us to savour fleeting moments of connection in the face of rapid change.

When encountering the exhibition, one might stand at the centre of *thresh's* cubed, luminous glow. Once you are inside, the LED outline echoes in the reflections of the windowed gallery space around you. You are at once inside and outside. This transcendence reminds us that all objects are not stable but are in constant fluctuation. They can be neither here, nor there, as much as they can be unequivocally present and permeable.

When witnessing Donohoe's performative activation, the viewer may question; what part of the body is this? Where are your beginnings and endings? The hushed sound of *maybe I hold the height's* papery crinkles trace the artist's movement as the artwork's material becomes increasingly entangled with her own. The material form inhales and exhales, twists, and turns in

the organic tensility of movement. The very act beckons the audience back into their own bodies, in an immediate and transient durational experience. As the artist writhes and wraps herself, the visual legibility of the performing human 'form' is obscured, and ordinary logics and behaviours of the body disrupted. Through this delayed recognition, a new material arises to the surface. It emerges from betwixt sculpture, body, and beyond the sum of their parts.

Employing both sensuous materials and the physical body in various stages of enmeshment, *Porous* questions and unfolds the bodily form. Barker and Donohoe tenderly explore interacting bodies from the outside in, and from the inside out to arrive at a point of flux beyond their physical selves. The exhibition reminds us that (like all things that exist in its space), art is a porous practice; constantly absorbing in and leaking into the world around it, never ceasing to proliferate.

Exhibition Review: *Porous* by Sharna Barker x Ruby Donohoe

Porous | Sharna Barker x Ruby Donohoe | 10-21st May 2022 | Grey Street Gallery, Southbank