

Palpable States & Malleable Actions

A written response of *Mucosa*, Outer Space, Brisbane, 2021.

Mucosa is a collaborative sculptural exhibition by long-time friends Kate Bohunnis and Kate Power that explores shared ideas of desire, queer identity, power, social relations, and how these are stored in the body. In emphasising touch, the artist's approach to these themes maintains a tension in the relationships between bodies and objects by encouraging movement, intimacy, distance, comfort, and discomfort. Effectively, what makes these works compelling is how Bohunnis and Power examine the physicality of bodies through their use of material, form, and space. *Mucosa* highlights the self and body as receptive, porous filters, stressing an embodied way of knowing rooted in the senses.



Mucosa, installation view, 2021, Outer Space, Brisbane. Image courtesy of Outer Space. Photo by Louis Lim.

Indeed, a visceral bodily response rang loudly upon entry into the gallery. For instance, the small, pink floor sculpture punched me in the gut. It could be the spill, the pointy lip end, or the flesh-like colour, almost monster-like form. Is it a tongue, a body part, or an alien?

Considering the relationship to bodies—hybrid, fluid, and mutable—one can envision the artists twisting the steel poles into shapes based on their physical bodies and actions. However, the artist body is less dominant or recognisable, and the spectator is kept at a distance. Perhaps this is due to a restricted sense of touch and handmade elements. While you observe the hand moulding the paper-mache tube of the work, *If you need I will be*, the over-coating of silicone and plaster hinders the effect and trace of the artists' hands. The steel remains cold in relationship to the spectator, generating an alienating effect common in the methods and materials used in Minimalist sculpture.



Kate Bohunnis and Kate Power, *If you need I will be* (detail), 2021, Outer Space, Brisbane. Image courtesy of Outer Space. Photo by Louis Lim.

In contrast, *How are you are you feeling* sees a marriage of Eva Hesse's 1970 untitled work, which features dangling creature-like cords made of fiberglass and wire, with Lynda Benglis's wax paintings. The softness of these fabric-hanging tubes calms the coldness of the steel and silicone used. However, the hand in this work is limited because the fabric tubes are machine sewn, and the wax appears as though it could have collapsed while melting. Nonetheless, the artists' consistent presence is felt.

The work's organic forms, life-size scale, and structure invite you to move around and even through them. The piece *Mucosa*, for example, evokes a desire in the viewer to lie within it, and in some way, it offers a sense of safety if you do. A distant hug, if you will. However, as with gallery guidelines, you are prohibited from doing so, creating conflict and unease as you encounter it. The flow of the shape directs you to keep moving; it almost feels as if you shouldn't rest or settle for too long. Even if my feet and body stop to examine a work, the eye doesn't stop, with each piece pointing and reaching toward another.

Referencing back to the artists' exhibition statement, the works encourage conversations between materials and different approaches to touch; as my experience shows, these dialogues are certainly present. The work, as the artists state, embodies a process of squirming free of power structures. Indeed, a strong sense of bodily movement is clear in the work.

This steering of the artist's motility alongside the spectator's heightened experience fosters an interactive and immersive relationship between bodies and artworks. Highlighting the work's bodily, tangible aesthetics, *Mucosa* presents the self/body as an active, dynamic system of sensory input and output. In summary, the work evokes emotional responses that serve as reminders of our corporeality, vulnerability, and a transformative, embodied state of being.

By Sharna Barker

Mucosa is by Adelaide-based artists Kate Bohunnis and Kate Power. *Mucosa* opened at Outer Space Brisbane on the 28th of August 2021.



Mucosa, installation view, 2021, Outer Space, Brisbane. Image courtesy of Outer Space. Photo by Louis Lim.