

Artefacts of the Future

Jen Bowmast

The National

10 April - 5 May 2018

Priscilla Howe

Jen Bowmast's *Artefacts of the Future* was a show that caught my attention this year due to its enquiry into the space between subject and object, and between the spiritual world and logical, pragmatic worlds. Bowmast recently completed their MFA at the University of Canterbury and the works for this show were made during this study. The National is a commercial contemporary art, jewellery, and object gallery in Ōtautahi.

Bowmast's process is fascinating. They seek encounters with psychics, clairvoyants, soothsayers, and oracles to aid and inform their art-making. Through this contact they open a portal: the spiritual world communicating through physical objects, bridging the tangible and the intangible through this contact. This process opens up a new ontology through making: the spiritual, metaphysical realm is revealed to us through this exchange; the intangible encased within a material manifestation.

Bowmast's responsive mark-making is evidence of a high level of respect and care. Each material, whether it be clay, the colour yellow, bronze, or perspex is crafted with intuition as Bowmast responds to the guidance delivered from another realm. The agency is in the object, not in the maker, nor the audience. Each work is inherently powerful and I could feel it upon entering the room. The otherworldly presence of the works gave me chills and I felt my body physically and spiritually navigating each work. Words aren't doing me justice here; it was so haptic and bodily.

Each of Bowmast's artefacts emanate a rich energy. The first piece I saw was *Psychopomp*. The large scale and the slick surface of the object commanded attention; I felt the sensory nature of the work and felt encouraged to feel the material's inherent spiritual energy, rather than to focus on the technical formal qualities. The smaller artefacts each radiated this spiritual knowledge also.

During these encounters, the participant is in a new physical space where the body must adjust to negotiate between the various scales, textures, and colours. Through this physical navigation, the audience is encouraged to rethink object-body relationships in a way that is spiritual and haptic.

Within a dominant Western narrative there is great importance placed on logic and reason, right and wrong. Bowmast's work is subversive in this sense. Through its emphasis on the unknown and use of psychics as inspiration rather than academics or philosophers, *Artefacts of the Future* challenges dominant knowledge structures. The rational lacks importance, the fluid and the tactile are leading the discussion here.

In the object-obsessed climate we currently live, Bowmast's practice is of particular significance. They describe the work as "learning to walk in the dark". Directing the viewer into the space between object and subject seamlessly, Bowmast gently guides us into this strange new world; spiritual, embodied, and sensory. This provides an important contrast to the dominant narratives surrounding body/object interrelations within Western culture to which we have become accustomed. This seems particularly valuable for Christchurch, a predominantly conservative city that values a very binary, logical ideology. Bowmast's work does not read as rebellious however, it is much more considered, offering a new way of seeing to their audience.

FFO: Jen Bowmast, sculpture, intuition, metaphysics, psychics, tactility.