

COOL CHANGE CONTEMPORARY

30 NOVEMBER - 21 DECEMBER, 2019

AMY MILLS

TARRYN GILL & THEA COSTANTINO

MARIAAN PUGH



AMY MILLS: CAN I PRAY FOR YOU? GALLERY 1

Rainbows, Hearts and Frills

Sparkly, frilly, stripy and bright.
Teardrops, rainbows and love hearts.

Laboured over for the past six months, Amy Mills painstakingly constructed this series of quilts in her home studio. They are adorned with unsettling phrases the artist has become accustomed to hearing over her lifetime.

*Drug companies invent new cures every day!
You're such an inspiration!*

The quilts continue a body of performance, installation and textile work that allows Mills to break-down and respond to reactions she faces from friends, colleagues and strangers when they find out she is living with a terminal illness. Overwhelmingly, the reactions are a repetitive constellation of cliché statements of sympathy, unsolicited advice and invasive questions about her illness. They are not ill-intended but cause great frustration and distress to the artist. The exchanges are usually awkward and uncomfortable for both parties, raising questions about responsibility and education. Why is mortality still such a taboo topic in Western society and who is responsible for changing this? Why do the general public and greater population need educating on how to interact with a person living with disability?

Delving into domesticity and femininity, quilts are inherently desirable objects of comfort, warmth and security. For Mills, they serve as a safe and passive medium to react within. The artist taught herself patchwork and ap-

plique techniques through a meticulous trial and error process. She was assisted by the mother of her partner, forming a homely and nurturing environment to work in. Her chosen fabrics and trims flaunt a multitude of bright colours, patterns, textures and sheen to appear cheerful and joyous. A love-heart shaped quilt is framed with pink and silver frills. A rainbow quilt is made with nine different patterned fabrics. It is not until reading the overlaid text that the weight of the pieces can be fully realised; they do not only carry the physical weight of the materials, but they are also seeped in the emotional weight of navigating pain and grief during the making. The materials themselves also carry their own untold stories as over sixty percent are recycled or reclaimed.

Can I pray for you? gently and warmly encourages the viewer to consider the consequences of their words before they are spoken.

Lilium Burrow



Amy Claire Mills, *Do I Need To Manage Your Grief*, 2019, Mixed Media Textiles, 142cm x 202cm. Image courtesy of the artist.



Amy Claire Mills, *Drug Companies Invent New Cures Every Day*, 2019 Mixed Media Textiles, 226cm x 165cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

Can I pray for you? is a body of work drawn from a lifetime of awkward and often, insensitive interactions with people who have just learnt that I am terminally ill. This text-based textile installation deconstructs these interactions, amplifying phrases, questions, and statements that I hear over and over, highlighting the absurdity of our reaction to mortality. Death and dying have always been taboo subjects. People living with terminal illnesses are automatically viewed through a binary lens: are you an inspiration or a tragedy? I am neither, existing somewhere in the liminal space in-between.

This means people asking if they can 'pray for me' and telling me that they 'knew someone who died of that'.

Snippets from these conversations, and how I really want to respond, 'Stop telling me about your dead friends!' have been sewn into large, colourful quilts that the audience is invited to interact with. These quilts reconceptualise one made and given to me in hospital by a women's auxiliary group. They are intended to make visible the way we emotionally engage with people who live with disabilities, highlighting the powerful and lasting effect these communications can have – even when we are too desensitised to truly comprehend.

Amy Claire Mills is a Sydney-based emerging artist, whose art practice explores identity and self preservation through immersive installations and performance, by which she becomes both the artist and subject.

Amy lives and works in Sydney, Australia. Graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Hons) from UNSW Art and Design in 2017. Amy is a Founding member of Show Us Your Teeth, the all-female feminist performance Art collective founded in 2014.

THEA COSTANTINO & TARRYN GILL: IN THERAPY GALLERY 2

This exhibition stages a conversation between two artists with a long history of friendship and collaboration. The title is a playful nod to our shared investment in mental health and the influence of psychoanalytic concepts in our art practices; using the framework of a therapeutic conversation we have been exploring autobiographical content such as dreams, memory, trauma, gender, relationships, existential issues and spirituality, but the works have also emerged through an experimental process of sharing and responding to the other's ideas.

In Therapy builds on the content and methodology of the 2013 group research residency led by Andrew Nicholls which resulted in the 2015 exhibition *An Internal Difficulty: Australian Artists at the Freud Museum, London*. In addition to the research undertaken into Freud's collection and archives, working side by side with other artists throughout the development of the exhibition led to cohesive and interconnected bodies of works, and the experience was one of the most rewarding group exhibitions we've taken part in. Taking this experience as a working model, we have used psychoanalytic ideas as a framework while exploring personal narratives and themes.

In the background to this show are some unstable dyads that leak and overlap, in particular, the apparently opposed rationalism of Freud with his disciple Jung's mysticism. For the exhibition, Thea has taken a Freudian path while Tarryn follows Jung's approach, and



Tarryn Gill, *Exhibit A* (detail); 2019; Mixed media including hand stitched fabrics, foam, artificial eyes, pipe cleaners, sequins, gemstones, feathers; Dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist.



Tarryn Gill, *Family Tree*, 2019, Mixed media (including EPE foam, hand-stitched fabrics, LED lights, sequins, gemstones, mirrors, Fimo, artificial eyes, synthetic hair, artificial nails, ladies gloves, tinsel). Image courtesy of Emma Buswell.

together their work conjures a gothic vision of childhood, monstrous and magical.

Thea's suite of leather figures, *Scumbag*, *Cherub* and *Abundance*, stages a triangular relationship suggestive of the violent passions of the Oedipal stage of childhood development. These works continue Thea's ongoing investigation of memory and history: the use and abuse of history, the continuing influence of the past on the present, and the ways in which repressed or forgotten material can resurface in daily experience. These raw, wrinkled bags of skin are summoned from childhood nightmares which encode the earliest traumas and invite equal parts repulsion and pity, unwelcome ghosts that refuse to leave.

Tarryn's *Family Tree* is part of an ongoing series of hand-stitched sculptural gods and monsters that are designed as uncanny talismans to protect the dead and also drive away evil. This particular work takes the form of a monstrous Christmas tree, conjuring familial bonds and ritual in a darkly humorous way.

For *Exhibit A* she has experimented with generating artwork using Active Imagination - a Jungian technique where the conscious mind engages with imagery and ideas generated by the unconscious. The collection of small studies presented, made with the materials of her dance school youth, appear almost as though Tarryn has tipped out the contents of her mind and laid them out for inspection - in the way one might interrogate the collection of items accrued in their handbag. Tarryn has attempted to make the unconscious visible and concrete as a means for better understanding the self and finding new ways forward.

At its heart this is an exhibition about the self and the

relationships that define it, and love, loss, ambivalence and projection play a role in the working dynamic as well as the content of works. We are grateful to Cool Change for providing an incubating space to explore this process.

Tarryn Gill is a WA based multidisciplinary artist who makes artworks spanning the mediums of sculpture, photography, film, drawing, set/costume design and performance. Psychoanalytic ideas have long played a role in her work and she is interested in exploring the space between the conscious and unconscious, personal and the collective, the contemporary and ancient. Through her solo and collaborative practices,

Tarryn has exhibited works and undertaken residency projects across Australia, in Argentina, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States. Notably, she has exhibited works in the 2016 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Magic Object; in the 17th Biennial of Sydney; at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; the Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane and Akademie der Künste, Berlin. Tarryn's works are held in numerous public and private collections nationally. She is represented by Gallery Sally Dan Cuthbert, Sydney.

Thea Costantino holds a PhD (2011) from Curtin University and undergraduate degrees in Fine Art and Literary Studies. Costantino received a 2015 Visual Arts and Craft Mid-Career Fellowship from the WA Department of Culture and the Arts, the 2013 Hutchins Art Prize, a 2011 Qantas Foundation Encouragement of Australian Contemporary Art Award and the 2012 Artsource/Gunnery Artist Exchange. The artist's work is held in collections including the Art Gallery of South Australia, Art Gallery of Western Australia, The Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, Murdoch University, John Curtin Gallery, City of Perth, and City of Joondalup.

Costantino's writing includes the chapter 'Ruination and Recollection: Plumbing the Colonial Archive' in *Visual Arts Practice and Affect: Place, Materiality, and Embodied Knowing*, edited by Ann Schilo for Rowman & Littlefield in 2016, and the short story 'Meniscus' in *Global Dystopias*, a special issue of *The Boston Review* edited by Junot Díaz in 2017.

MARIAAN PUGH: I MISS YOU STEPHEN, I KEEP WATCHING BARBARELLA GALLERY 3

Mariaan Pugh in conversation with Cool Change Contemporary.

Your exhibition focuses on the relationship you have to one person living far away. What is the significance of the film *Barbarella* to your friendship?

During our studies, Stephen introduced me to a lot of camp cinema, and we bonded over a love of tacky glamour and irreverent humour that exists in a lot of these classic films.

After lots of weekends spent together watching these films whilst studying fashion, both our work became heavily influenced by the costuming. *Barbarella* was a particular stand out to me, maybe because of the strong Jane Fonda playing this ultra-glam sex positive space cadet. But also the set designs and costuming definitely lured me in.

You speak about your interest in costuming, which then translates into the traditional textile form of a quilt. Do you see quilts as a form of costume or something entirely different?

I see costuming as something which needs a body to inhabit and then it comes alive. A quilt may exist purely by itself to share its own narrative. This quilt is derived from costuming, sharing techniques and materials but I think is something entirely different with its



Mariaan Pugh, *I Miss You Stephen, I Keep Watching Barbarella* (detail), 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.



Mariaan Pugh, *I Miss You Stephen, I Keep Watching Barbarella* (detail), 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

own preconceived notions.

What led you to develop the embroideries into a quilt? Was this always planned or did it develop more organically?

I started these embroideries over a year ago without a clear idea of the end result. I knew I was making these works that were influenced by our shared love for *Barbarella*, and I was making pink and sparkly works that made me think of Stephen all the time. That's when I started researching friendship quilts. It's a recognisable textile in popular culture that focuses on strong values of friendship and unity; think Marge Simpson's 'Bouvier Family Quilt'. Friendship quilts have often been made for loved ones moving away so it was to be the perfect vessel for my embroideries.

You note that these two aspects of the show, the film and the quilts, came from the same decade. Whilst the friendships quilts arose from an anti-materialist movement, *Barbarella* was extremely materialist - but ultimately both have become something that has lasted much longer than perhaps either expected. What relevance do you see in these things today?

Despite the opposing directions of what I'm appropriating and inspired by, I have managed to find success by practicing a conscientious process. The aesthetic of a traditional quilt made of scrap fabric was challenging as my imagery and aesthetic were being informed by a very plastic and glittery film. I overcame this by buying nearly all my beads, yarn and trims from swap meets and op shops. I repurposed old pieces of lace and bracelets and the embroideries were all stitched on surplus lining fabric. Bringing together *Barbarella* and

quilting felt like a statement that savviness through economy of means should not deter living a glitzy life of abundance.

I Miss You Stephen, I Keep Watching Barbarella is centred around a friendship quilt, an ode to a beloved friend who moved to New York to follow his fashion dreams.

Mariaan is an emerging textile artist and fashion designer based in Perth. Her practice is currently exploring heightened fondness for loved ones during long-distance relationships through traditional textile techniques

Mariaan has exhibited locally and in Iceland after completing a textile residency in Blönduós, Iceland.

Mariaan holds a Bachelor in Textiles from Curtin University (2013) and a Advanced Diploma in Fashion and Textiles from North Metropolitan Tafe (2016). She now teaches at The Children's School of Contemporary Art.

Cool Change Contemporary acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, the traditional and rightful custodians of the land on which we operate. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

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