

CAROLYN V WATSON

Ambience Store Project #9: Inbloom (2016)

Searching for Beauty in the Grotesque

By Dr Julie Rees

Multidisciplinary artist, Carolyn V Watson (b. 1977) is best described as a sculptor who paints and a painter who sculpts. Her recent exhibition, *Inbloom* at the Ambience Store in Fortitude Valley, Queensland, displayed a survey of seven sculptures and eight water-based drawings on board that embodies her overall art practice.

At first encounter, the audience is confronted with an array of creatures. Intricately detailed, Carolyn's handcrafted sculptures draw inspiration from the peculiar and the imagined. These fictional pieces provide an intimate experience for the audience, serving as a portal into an alternate world, where one can interact with strange beings, organic and log-like forms. These creatures are neither animal, botanical nor human but instead occupy a state of the in-between. What is apparent in these works, and her overall practice is Carolyn's steadfast search for beauty in the grotesque. Which in turn, begins to address evident elements of *memento mori*, abstraction and the abject. By using remnants such as wire, bone, leather, wood, thread, and fabric to create her pieces, the interplay between the real and the artificial becomes a crucial aspect. One of Carolyn's works is titled *Sleeper* (2016). Hand-stitched and covered in lace, this piece is poised as if just about to take flight. It is contemporary and primal—a work she hopes will incite discussions. The exhibited sculptures provide an opportunity for audience members to consider their own vulnerabilities and imperfections.

Carolyn's pastel coloured water-based drawings are equally compelling. *Allshinyandnew* (2016) is one drawing in the exhibition that is representative of her style. Her subject is contoured and overlaid with colour-blocked sections, a method she uses to highlight, fade or remove parts of her subject. She renders each piece with willow charcoal, white conte, and watered down pastel primer.

Carolyn's two-dimensional works have a sense of nostalgia, creating a space for viewers to draw from their childhood memories and project their own thoughts. This makes her water-based drawings just as interactive as her sculptures.



Carolyn's work blends multiple associations and meanings in a manner that makes them simultaneously familiar and foreign. Although her work is an open-ended encounter, one possible reading of her work is that the drawings highlight the existence of life's processes of decay (the fading and removing of specific areas of the subject) whereas



her sculptures are the birth of something new (constructing and refiguring sculptural forms). Therefore, Carolyn's art practice perfectly demonstrates that where there is an ending, there is also a new beginning.

Carolyn completed her studies at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University in the late nineties. In 2005, she re-established her studio practice. Since then Carolyn has exhibited in Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Adelaide, Mel-

bourne, and Sydney, and, more recently, she was invited by the Bundaberg Regional Art Gallery to exhibit her first solo show in a regional gallery. Furthermore, she has received multiple awards for both her sculpture and drawings and in 2013 she secured a first prize of \$15,000 at the inaugural Life Art Worldwide International. Carolyn is a tutor at the Brisbane Institute of Art and is currently represented by Anthea Polson Art on the Gold Coast.

On this page, *Sleeper* (2016), wax, thread, felt, sheep leather, antler, found timber, taxidermy form. *Allshinyandnew* (2016), pastel primer, watercolour, ink, willow charcoal on board, 60 x50cm

Photo credit: Matthew Cheras

Carolyn V Watson's artwork can be viewed at:

<http://www.carolynwatson-artist.com>