



Origins

LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY

18 MAY - 17 AUGUST 2024

Curated by Lee Kinsella

Cruthers Collection of Women's Art

Origins



Katthy Cavaliere, *Afterlife*, 2011,
Chromogenic colour print on silver based
metallic paper, 125.8 x 93cm, Cruthers
Collection of Women's Art, The University
of Western Australia, Gift of the Estate of
Katthy Cavaliere, 2022

Origins



Dorothy Braund, *Mrs. John Brack and Freda*,
1956, oil on Masonite board, 87 x 61cm,
Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The
University of Western Australia



Images left-right

Helen Maudsley, *The Arrival*, 1965–67, oil on wood panel, 39.1 x 41.7cm, Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia

Helen Maudsley, *The Male. Solidity and Strength. In the Same Tasks Together with Women, He, so Firm, She, so Gliding.*, 2019, oil on canvas, 57 x 90cm, Image courtesy of the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne. © the artist. Photography is by: Mark Ashkanasy, Melbourne.

Jacquie Moran, *Birth: 3 Seconds Later* (details), 2005 (reprinted in 2008), series of 12 photographs, 11: 50.8 x 76.2cm each; 1: 76.2 x 50.8cm, edition of 10, Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia, Gift of the artist © the artist, photography of Robert Frith

Form and formlessness

Origins is a response to a provocation initiated by Gemma Weston, curator of *THE END OF HISTORY* exhibition (which is shown in the Gallery at the same time), when she refers to an essay by political philosopher Francis Fukuyama in which he famously declared humanity had reached the 'end of history'. Perhaps, perversely, I swung from discussion of the end of liberal democracy and the free market to consider the materiality of our bodies – the physical reality of humans as they begin and end. As I write this, I also recognise that Western notions of time, the past, endings and beginnings seem to skim across this Country, the lands of the Whadjuk Noongar people.

Central themes to the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art are 'the family' and 'the domestic environment'. The collection holds several remarkable portraits by Dorothy Braund, including the very beautiful portrait of her friend and fellow artist Helen Maudsley. The title of the painting, *Mrs John Brack and Freda*, acknowledges Maudsley as wife of the artist John Brack and mother to Freda. This is consistent with the prioritising of the husband's identity for the wife's name of the time – Mrs John Smith, for example. However, Helen Maudsley was a practicing artist and met John Brack while they were both students at The National Gallery Art School, Melbourne – she as a paying student and he as an ex-serviceman granted training under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRTS). Maudsley maintained her own name for her artistic practice



throughout her life.¹ Braund was likely to be honouring the many facets of Maudsley's identity as wife, mother, friend and artist, and the precarious balance that was the recognition of Brack and Maudsley as individuals in their respective roles in both public and private spheres.

The portrait hangs alongside a fantastic example of Helen Maudsley's work, the oil painting on wood panel called *The Arrival*, from 1965. A world within a world, Maudsley has painted a space inhabited by highly resonant objects that seem to have a life and bearing of their own. Finely controlled in their realisation, the forms operate as symbols or way finders, inviting viewers to step into the picture plane to attempt to make meaning and find logic in a space that is resolutely undefinable.

The artist continued to accrete meaning and enrich her visual vocabulary throughout her career. Later, related works (and titles) expand upon themes, one such example being a painting that was completed by Maudsley 54 years afterwards: *The Male. Solidity and Strength. In the Same Tasks Together with Women, He, so Firm, She, so Gliding*, 2019. In both paintings, visual codes refer to relationships between the sexes and perhaps provide some insight into that between Brack and Maudsley. It is valuable to see her personal iconography, including the elements recognised in *The Arrival* – pillars, stairs, iron shapes and letters – arranged in so many other permutations across her 70-year artistic practice.²



The exhibition operates in two halves – facing off in terms of the various insights available via the genres of photography and painting – and united by consideration of the narratives and mythologies that so readily tether themselves to figurative works of art. Perhaps we try to create a story around depictions of the human form to make sense of what we see, drawing upon our own experiences and expectations.

While, ostensibly, photography records a visual reality, Jacquie Moran's grainy, almost abstract, photographs manage to capture the shifting dynamics as a family gathers to support a mother during childbirth. Of *Birth: 3 Seconds Later*, 2005, Moran has said:

...the shoot was in the middle of the night as home births often are, over just seventeen minutes, (Kate's) partner, their children, and parents (from Melbourne) were present along with the midwife (Head, Community Midwifery Program, East Fremantle), as such I fought for space, and shot only one roll of film (24 images), making the (x12) almost consecutive, accentuating narrative in the series. The work is part of a larger project on birth and birthing procedures and has shown in Perth and Los Angeles.³

The visual shape shifting between abstraction and recognisable forms, seems to parallel the reconfiguration of relationships initiated by the birth of a child. The series was shot using a single 24 exposure roll of high-speed black and white photographic film, which permitted

use in low light (conscious of the distraction of flash photography during the birthing process). The results are images that feel very immediate. The shapes appear and dissolve simultaneously as a visual metaphor of the intangible networks of love, knowing and care that unite these figures.

Moran's larger series documenting births was informed by her understanding of Primal Therapy, which posits the events of early childhood, including birth, as being foundational to identity formation. From the artist, via email on 8 November, 2023:

'Birth: 3 Seconds Later' is part of a major, personal photo editorial project on birthing procedures created over seven years in Perth, and St. Louis, Missouri. Inspired by Dr Arthur Janov's Primal therapy of which birth (trauma) theory is key, I aimed to illustrate different births from the newborn's perspective but also the mother's, and those involved.

Primal therapy posits that problematic engagements between a child and their parents are held in the body and cause dysfunction – physical and mental – until attended to during therapy that often involves individuals releasing pain and blockages via a primal scream.

The haunting photographic work by Kathy Cavaliere, *Afterlife*, 2011 sits on the wall opposite Moran's series. Cavaliere's work is particularly enigmatic, as the artist's



profile appears as a shadow silhouette cast against a white wall, and looming in the foreground is an hourglass timer:

Nothing could have prepared me for the death of my mother. The moment she took her last breath it felt like time stood still. I have encased my mother's ashes in a hand-blown hourglass which refuses to run. Afterlife exposes the physical remains of being. Symbolising the hour of our passing. Her spiritual journey continues.

In loving memory of my mother, Mara Cavaliere

*1 May 1952 – 8 December 2008*⁴

The work exists as a homage to her mother, but also a testament to the artist's intense sense of loss and need to mourn. Rather than being enveloped within a network of connections, as documented within Moran's series, this work seems to register Cavaliere's sense of distance and dislocation as she re-frames her life following the loss of her mother to ovarian cancer in December 2008. Tragically, four years later the artist died from this same disease in January 2012. Created a year before the artist's untimely death, *Afterlife* was her final 'finished' work, but was not publicly exhibited until her posthumous survey exhibition *Loved*.⁵



Origins invites the viewer to oscillate between that which we think we know and the loose fitting but ever-evocative place of metaphor and symbol – to eventually understand that concepts of meaning, truth and reality are formless and shape-shifting. The exhibition also stands as an ode to the human passions and drives that fuel our lives while we occupy these fallible and fleshy forms.

Lee Kinsella

Curator, Cruthers Collection of Women's Art

1. See Kelly Gellatly's interview with Helen Maudsley, which took place at the artist's home in Melbourne on 17 March 2021, Interview with Helen Maudsley – Agency Untitled (agency-untitled.com.au), accessed 7 April 2024
2. Columns or classical pillars make visual reference to Ancient Greek and Roman foundations of Western philosophy, and often stand in for the authority and rigidity of the (masculine) canon and bodies of knowledge. This motif is repeated within the two exhibitions, with Rosalind Paterson Drake-Brockman's, *Body of Storm*, c1989 and Helen Maudsley's, *The Arrival*, 1965-67.
3. Via email 28 February 2024
4. <https://katthycavaliere.com.au/afterlife/> accessed 7 April 2024
5. *Katthy Cavaliere: Loved* exhibition curated by Daniel Mudie Cunningham: 5 August – 11 September 2016, Carriageworks, NSW; 28 November 2015 – 28 March 2016, Museum of Old and New Art, TAS

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Jacquie Moran, *Birth: 3 Seconds Later* (detail), 2005 (reprinted in 2008), series of 12 photographs, 11: 50.8 x 76.2cm each; 1: 76.2 x 50.8cm, edition of 10, Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia, Gift of the artist © the artist, photograph by Robert Frith

The University of Western Australia would like to acknowledge that this exhibition takes place on Noongar boodjar, and that Noongar people remain the spiritual and cultural custodians of their land, and continue to practice their values, languages, beliefs and knowledge.



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