

A look into, around, and within Circular Dimensions Heidi McKenzie & Maya Foltyn

by Agnieszka Foltyn



“Everything is a balance between control and gesture,” Maya starts. This simple statement echoes a conscious act of negotiation of the stimuli of phenomena that makes up our understanding of the world around us: its politics, its people, where we are, who we are, but importantly, how we are together.

The practices of Heidi McKenzie and Maya Foltyn touch and separate, intersect and cross over, flow in parallel and divide in separate directions. These are not linear trajectories but rather circular or cyclical meanderings, stimulated and affected by the machinations of society throughout time. They are dreams, thoughts, extensions of a willingness to understand or to come into contact with the unknown.

“Everything is in flux. That we see something as static is a form of abstraction,” Foltyn states. And in this exhibition, abstraction is key. What abstraction does is make space. It makes room for the

viewer to exercise their agency, their will to decide or not to decide, to look, to question, to relate, to feel wonder. Making room for agency is a powerful political act. It creates space for a diversity of voices to be heard. The artists make space through the use of a minimal visual language, the round shape, a circular trajectory becoming a symbol of a journey – their own intersecting with many others.

Heidi McKenzie’s ceramic sculptures flow, grow, shape, twist, and turn as “soul sketches,” moments of her personal journey capturing a specific moment of her own development but at the same time resonating within the entire sum of her experiences. McKenzie’s practice brings her all over the world, connecting to people, places, skills, and techniques. Her background traces its roots across continents and her inspirations delve even further. “As an artist, it’s important to speak in your own voice – play in your own sandbox,” she begins. “Speaking in my own voice speaks to a lot of people.” The global movements of humanity over time have shaped our cultures and our viewpoints. Values

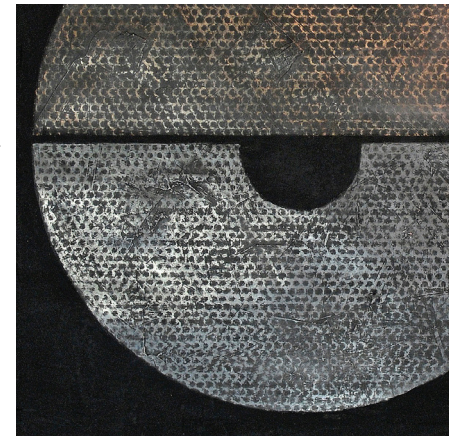


and meanings have risen and changed. These intersections, moments of meeting, create a certain effect that resonates in other people’s lives. While at a residency in Australia, she found herself exploring a particular shape. “That form came out of me in Australia,” she states, her arms outstretched. “There is a humanity that is connected to this shape.” The word excavate appears several times. To excavate: to dig something out, to expose something that is made meaningful in a new time. These works trace stories, identities through time and place, affected by meetings with other people, their cultures, and their traditions. These narratives are assertions of identity. But they stay away from appropriation, rather they comment on how interconnections with the

unknown or the Other impact the ways we live now – and also how we move into the future.

Aesthetics are visual languages laden with symbols and meanings from the past and the present. They push certain ideas, certain markings through moments in time and history. These languages have been used, appropriated, and redefined. “And why shouldn’t I?” McKenzie counters, when asked about this choice of visual language. Specifically the languages of minimalism and modernism have historically championed the division of the sexes and a Eurocentric viewpoint, erasing particularly women and people of colour from the annals of art history. “The fact that I am a woman of colour, begs the question, how am I going to invite a broader more pluralist audience to engage with these genres?”

A position is easy to betray or contradict. But a presence brings something completely different to the table – a seat. If we see the table as a place in which dialogue, community or exchange can happen, then taking a seat at this table is the most important act of all. It is a willingness to meet with the Other, a gift in a way, where the artist takes the first steps in reaching out, saying something of themselves with the hope of a response, a beginning. Being visible is important. Being visible together is an act of solidarity.



continued other side



“It’s important to have ideas and to make artwork,” Foltyn states. Art is a dynamic bodily happening. It is an expression of a specific spatio-temporal context. The phenomena of the surrounding environment, the thoughts and dreams and lived or imagined experiences are understood and come out through the actions of the body. Foltyn describes her work as a combination of interior and exterior landscapes, stemming from the junction of the mind and the body. It is a blend of memories and experiences, reacting into the moment through bursts of gestural movement and controlled, skilled technique. “Sometimes a mistake brings forth a new experiment.” She continues, “Art speaks to your perspective and point of view. It is what draws people in and what pushes them away. Those who are left are to be nurtured and grown from.”



Working across multiple pieces and compositions at once is an approach Foltyn uses to moderate between these two elements. “What is most important are the ideas that rise to the surface, that come out.,” she states. Intensity and repose is also a rhythm. “It is the collection of different elements coming together,” she continues. Abstractions don’t come from nowhere. She describes an intensification of many stimuli, phenomena, and emotions that are processed during moments of rest. The movement of the body takes internalized forms of being and translates it into visual forms of articulation. They say something. These are wishes, not only coming to the artist from the outside but also hopes for something else. Musing is an important process of understanding.



The artworks seem to be landing points for both artists – acts of making that serve as temporal reference points in the development of ideas, echoing the rhythms of control and gesture. Alternate and embodied forms of articulation engage different types of knowledge. This process underlines the importance of making as a method of learning, sorting



through information in an embodied way – taking part in the world, physically, emotionally, and mentally. We are corporeal beings. Through the act of making we come to a fuller understanding of being in the world. We also cement our presence – within the canons of history, in art, in daily life, situating ourselves within histories in which many narratives have been omitted or made invisible.

The works in this exhibition convey very clearly the artists behind them, in a firm but accessible way. This exhibition is full of contrasts, brimming with nuance, time, and change. The viewer has room to feel it out on their own but always in relation to something there – the wondering of time immemorial, the cultures and roles of the people within history, the space we inhabit, and how we navigate our societies, perhaps our society as a whole.

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10 King St W, Dundas, Ontario, L9H 1T7, Canada
Vernissage on Friday, Feb. 7th from 7–9:30pm
Artists' Walk-through on Sunday, Feb. 23rd at 2pm**

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