

MAKE OF ME

29 JUNE – 16 JULY 2016

SUSAN HAWKINS



Appropriating familial ephemera to create abstract experiences, Brisbane artist Susan Hawkins physically ‘regrams’ the past into something vaguely familiar and yet singular.

SUSAN HAWKINS | *I Want You*, 2016 | Woven mesh, gold powder coated parabolic antennas, speakers. The Beatles’ song remixed by Murray Johnstone. Photograph by Christopher Saunders

Human experience and connection permeates the work of Susan Hawkins, from the nature of each material she uses, to the role they have played in her own personal life. *Make of Me* explores these connections through sculptural assemblages created from cultural debris – objects once integral to communication, which now, due to the rapid development of technology, have become obsolete. Hawkins aims to honour these past connections by enabling them to create relationships of their own. *Make of Me* is a mapping of interwoven personal histories, creating new connections through repurposing and anthropomorphising items that were, at one point, integral to daily life.

The nature of communication is constantly changing and evolving. The invention of technology to ‘enhance’ our ability to communicate introduced a physical element to human correspondence. We have influenced this development by continually looking for new means of communication, from the personal histories created online¹ and through the evolution of devices created for the purpose of communication.² Culture itself transforms these objects by either rendering them obsolete or, as is the case in *Make of Me*, repurposing them. Our inability to physically see the

SUSAN HAWKINS | *A Gathering*, 2016 (detail) | Car Tyre, bike tyre, heat shrink, tube, electrical tape, metal stands, metal chair bases, vinyl, copper rings, timber legs, parabolic dishes. Photograph by Christopher Saunders

personal histories imbued in these objects juxtaposes our understanding of the role they played in daily life. Mimicking the nature of connectivity today by making reference to 'regramming' and 'reblogging,' Hawkins aims to present a physical presentation of collected social and personal relations. Thus creating a 'profile' unique to the individual histories of each component, comparable to how we portray ourselves online.

Today, experience is collected in the intangible space of the Internet, mirroring the physical nature of each item selected by Hawkins. By employing New Materialism's emphasis on the preceding histories of an object, she questions how these objects effect the audience's interpretation when responding to familiar imagery. Hawkins assembles parts of old telecommunication devices and household elements - items all innately tied to social intercourse; kitchen chairs bear witness to an ongoing ritual of not only meals but also conversations shared, while tyres enable us to move from place to place, closing the physical distance between people and place. Much like the nature of the artist's day-to-day existence (moving continually between Brisbane and Melbourne), Hawkins is reliant on all of these technologies, thus adding a further layer of physicality to connection.

Hawkins sources many items from her family's business installing telecom infrastructure. In her previous work she felt as though the items she used weren't treated with enough appreciation for where they came from and aimed to rectify this by giving each a new life and value. By paying respect to an object's history, she highlights the contemporary tendency to recycle without consideration or appreciation for where things originated. This exhibition is a conversation between past and present, as well as the invisible essence that permeates history. Hawkins acknowledges the roles each element of assemblage has played in daily life, and joins these together to create a new conversation.

By bringing the ephemeral into materiality, Hawkins highlights the distance generated by the perpetual advancement of technology. Ironically, in an attempt to bring us closer it has pushed us physically further apart. We communicate through recycled imagery, sharing information via the Internet; having numerous *followers* and gaining *likes* are a form of validation,



affirming our position and connectedness in the world despite dwindling face-to-face interaction. Is it the ability to revisit our correspondence or possess evidence of a conversation the reason why we turn to technology in order to communicate with one another? Like Hawkins' works, we too are longing to form meaningful connections. Haunted by the echoing sound of "I want you so bad," we feel lost in our own desire. Rendering us and these objects obsolete in search of an intangible connection, one that cannot be emulated or replaced by technology, despite seemingly endless attempts to do so.

Hawkins' sculptures themselves are quite anthropomorphic, appearing as if they are seemingly as eager to connect as we are. Her artworks both physically move and imply movement with bodily forms and limbs draped across one another. Hawkins recognises that communication is enabled by a connection between human *and* object, each is as integral as the other within this process. Yet in assembling items imbued with histories of human interaction, Hawkins finally gives them the autonomy to create conversations of their own. Highlighting the other side of this codependent relationship and portraying the desire artists, humans and even objects have to connect with one another, to share past experience and tell a story. This exhibition highlights that perhaps, the debris created by this longing is more interesting than the desire itself.

ALEXANDRA WALKER

¹ Profiles on pages such as Myspace, Instagram, Facebook, etc.

² Such as the annual update and release of a new iPhone and/or Apple product causing the previous one to immediately become dated and quickly be replaced

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