

BEYOND MEASURE The Entanglement of Body and Object

A collaborative essay with Dr Ash Tower

Beyond Measure explores frailty, the often denied, perpetually feared, but often mis-understood aspect of human life. Frailty is understood as a state of vulnerability that increases a person's risk for poor health outcomes. Behind a clinical definition of frailty sits experiences that extend beyond standardised classifications. The interplay between materials and bodies present in *Beyond Measure* reflect and explore the manifold felt and lived elements of frailty, understood by way of research conducted with the Centre of Research Excellence in Frailty and Healthy Ageing by Dr. Mandy Archibald, and associated residencies within this Centre by John Blines and a residential aged care facility residency undertaken by Amber Cronin.

Many of these works are literally object lessons; materials that perform their own inherent fragilities. We are made to consider frailty as a state across time, reflecting gradual decline or instantaneous collapse, and varying degrees of improvement. In considering what frailty is in relation to these object metaphors, we inhabit a liminal space between metaphor and association where we oscillate between object and body, between classification and experience.



1. Mandy Archibald, Justin Broughton & Petra Szabo, 2019, *The Perfect Simple*, video still. Image courtesy Justin Broughton.
2. Mandy Archibald & John Blines, 2019, (*Dis*)repair, installation (detail), repaired ceramic, 10 x 14cm. Courtesy the artists.
3. Mandy Archibald, John Blines & Amber Cronin, 2019 *Conditional State* (work in progress), installation view. Photo by Sam Roberts.
4. Mandy Archibald & John Blines, 2019, *Not Me* (detail), screenprint monotype, 130 x 550cm. Courtesy the artists.
5. Opposite page background: Mandy Archibald & John Blines, 2019, (*Dis*)repair, installation view, repaired ceramic. Courtesy the artists.

In (*Dis*)repair, tea cups become metaphors for the body, suspended in perpetual fragmentation and reassembly. The work simultaneously presents multiple moments in time – frozen and suspended – an entropic pulling apart and meticulous reassembly of porcelain and ceramic. We are reminded of the inherent human presence of objects; objects designed to be held in hand, and often used for social purpose. This same presence is felt in the objects reassembly, and we contemplate the time difference between an instantaneous shatter and a lengthy piecing back together, mirroring temporal experiences of ageing, frailty and rehabilitation.

Kintsugi – the traditional Japanese method of mending broken ceramics with gold – provides a counterweight to (*Dis*)repair. The objects' histories and the beauty of the imperfect are highlighted, encouraging a social handling of cracks as something to be revered not discarded, and asking us to (re)consider ageing as a (beautiful) accumulation of experiences.

The delicate yet durable structure of *Conditional State* heightens our awareness of the relationship between matter and space, drawing parallels to the ageing body. Connections are only strengthened when tightened, each aspect reliant on the qualities of the next. Tension is offset by the delicate bowing of slackened rope; such constant downward pull goes largely unnoticed by the body until it becomes difficult to resist, and subsequently the rope draws a topography of gravity itself. Thus, the rope reflects a changing body that comprises interrelated areas of strength, deficiency and function.

In *It Called To Me*, we consider how people and objects co-construct the other through an anthology of images and artefacts inspired during Cronin's arts-residency in aged care. Here objects mediate meaning and trigger specific life memories held throughout one's life. In contrast, the various slip casts in *Untold* reflect those objects that we leave behind, their stories masked and re-attributed to the objects that remain in our lives.

In *Not Me*, we admire the coexistence of divergent and at times, competing narratives and experiences about frailty and ageing. Encompassing words and experiences shared by participants in Archibald's qualitative research, this work provides an alternative to a singular conception of truth and experience.

The Perfect Simple is an internal reflection on the impermanence, struggles, and beauty of life as we age. The fleeting imagery encourages reminiscence and awareness of our lives as perpetual change. The choreography and changing quality of movement reflects thematic content related to control and self-efficacy, isolation and loss of function, which progresses into reacquainting and strengthening of a changing body. This work reflects an ongoing collaboration with dancer and choreographer Petra Szabo with Potential Kinetics Theatre, and independent filmmaker Justin Broughton.

Throughout the exhibition, we encounter an endurance of process that suggests a sustained bodily engagement with material, motion, and a metaphorical building of material bodies. The care with which materials are handled, crafted, broken and repaired implores us to consider the recovery and repair of the bodies they stand in for. We are made aware of arts power to engage in modes of experience that extend beyond (yet compliment) scientific enquiry. A culmination of Archibald's sustained exploration of the arts as a necessary means of understanding and providing (alternative) representations in the health sciences and reflecting meaningful collaborative partnerships, *Beyond Measure* engages us in an empathic and bodily way, introducing ways of understanding ageing and frailty in a new light.