

Toronto Exhibition

Vanessa Brown

PAGES FROM LATE NIGHT TRIP
TO THE JEWELLERS

Oct 26 – Dec 22, 2018

Opening:

Friday, Oct 26, 6 – 8 p.m.



Installation view

It can be posited that removing pages from a story would result in the deletion of pertinent information - plot turns and character backstory might disappear entirely. Yet, in reality, it makes a new story all together.

Arsenal Contemporary Toronto is proud to present the second iteration of Vanessa Brown's exhibition Late Night Trip to the Jewellers initially produced at Esker Foundation earlier this year. In this showing, works are presented both in a new environment and different formations in order to cultivate new readings of the works. Championing the power of narrative, the exhibition title abstractly hints at an unknown, unseen narrator. Envision a friend eager to tell you a story of an unexpected, midnight trip to a piercing parlour. In this story, listeners are regaled with dramatized objects and symbols that examine traditional associations with craft, jewellery-making, storytelling, and the gendered history of metal-working.

Amending the original title, Brown presents viewers with selected Pages from that story - a story that has been told before, and like fables passed down from elder family members, hyperbole can be expected. Moments and objects in this story are highly susceptible to exaggeration. And with exaggeration comes the corresponding augmentation of meaning. Through simple enlargement, viewers must reevaluate their relationship to ubiquitous objects that now seem foreign. If the body is our intrinsic instrument to understand depth and dimension, it also dictates the function of objects we encounter: things made too large or too small become novelty, decoration, or prop. In Susan Stewart's 'On Longing,' the author explores this relationship between scale and significance: "although the miniature makes the body gigantic, the gigantic transforms the body into miniature" - further highlighting the object-ness of the body itself. This type of abstraction present in Brown's new sculptural work, strips the original function of the jewelry, and offers other narratives and suggestions for use. The magnification of scale, while providing a type of comedic-relief, also hints at varying degrees of consciousness and emphasizes the dream-like quality of the artist's works.

Brown's imaginative installations challenge the perceived binaries of femininity and masculinity; fragility and stability; minuscule and monumental; and, fact and fiction. Her chosen material of steel lends its own history to the meaning of the work - steel being seemingly synonymous with male-dominated, military, or construction-based industries. Still jewelry-making seems to be dualistically gendered: rooted in masculine metal-work, but producing objects traditionally relegated to female consumption. Brown successfully establishes a fruitful middle ground to repurpose established stereotypes of these industries and materials. Shauna Thompson, curator of the Esker Foundation, writes: "For Brown, the allure of steel rests in its subtler qualities, such as its malleability, adaptability, and delicateness; attributes that allude to the rich territory of feminized narratives and material associations". In doing so, the artist underlines the absurd desire to create dichotomies as a way to better understand experiences that inherently do not adhere to absolute binaries.

Brown's exhibition at Arsenal Contemporary, acts as a playful reminder of the pitfalls of language, especially in the realm of storytelling. Our words cannot do justice to the myriad of sounds, smells, and textures that make up any given story. Exaggeration may then not be a lie, but simply a way to convey something that supersedes the language. It is further fitting that Brown uses the vessel of symbolic narrative to explore systemic hierarchies embedded in her stories and materials of choice.

Writing By Jenna Faye Powell

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