



Michelle NIKOU, *Sylvia's Jumper*, 2013-16, wool, cement, sand, plaster, Boncrete, wood, 20.0 x 120.0 x 850.0 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.

Michelle Nikou: a e i o u

Curated by Melissa Keys and Kendrah Morgan

Over the past twenty-five years Adelaide-based artist Michelle Nikou has developed a highly distinctive practice in which commonplace items are re-invented as objects of humour, poignancy and marvel. In this exhibition of new and recent work, the humble potato, spoon and tissue-box, for instance, are imaginatively transformed and invested with unexpected significance. Occasionally Nikou uses poetic language to extend the suggestive possibilities of her imagery; a single word or phrase may conjure a psychological state, family dynamics or our complex relationship with food. Emotional metaphor is at the heart of Nikou's art, which is often autobiographical and firmly grounded in the domestic realm.

Nikou works across disciplines and intentionally blurs and extends the boundaries between art and craft traditions. Her expressive and tactile three-dimensional work reflects her early training in ceramics. She is especially drawn to industrial metals, though she is also adept with more unlikely source material, such as pulped diaries, Fimo and human hair. Using hands-on processes she has evolved a seemingly anti-aesthetic approach that leaves visible the marks of production and chance. The metallic leakages and blistered surfaces of her sculptures evoke her attempts to express emotions that are difficult to put into words.

Stylistically, Nikou's work resists easy definition. While her instinctive methods and incongruous combinations of materials, forms and concepts point to Surrealism, connections can be made to Dada, Pop art and arte povera. Yet her work remains enigmatic, and deliberately left open to multiple interpretations—all of which are equally valid. The viewer is thus encouraged to make associations, heed their sensory responses, and come to their own conclusions. In this sense Nikou is affirming her belief that art can 'show us who we really are'.

- Melissa Keys and Kendrah Morgan

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