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WHEN I GROW UP

ANTONIA WOOD, PHOEBE LYSBETH KAY MACKENZIE,
AND NYREE MCINALLY

CURATED BY BRIAR HOLT

EXHIBITION PREVIEW: WEDNESDAY 4 DECEMBER
EXHIBITION RUNS: 5 - 22 DECEMBER 2012



The three artists contributing to *When I Grow Up* are all 2011 graduates from the Dunedin School of Art. The curator has also recently graduated with an Honours degree in Art History from the University of Otago. For all involved, this exhibition was in a sense a rite of passage, a way of 'growing up' by working outside of the boundaries of an educational institution. It is in this way that the show is given a further dimension with regard to the idea of the vulnerability of the individual to our surrounding environments. The show represents a group of people from different disciplines trying to make their mark in the 'real world' with no safety net to fall back on.

When I Grow Up explores elements of protection and preciousness in society through art making. The exhibition magnifies two extremes of domestic life: idealised safety and security clashing with the desire to gain independence and grow in a potentially threatening environment. The exhibition also looks to feminist ideas in art and art practice: it has been 41 years since Linda Nochlin's canonical essay 'Why have there been no great women artists?'ⁱ And while *When I Grow Up* is not strictly feminist in nature it provides a starting point for looking at how the ideas and aims of female artists have changed in recent decades.

The framework of the exhibition has been interpreted in rather diverse ways and encompasses a wide range of media. Antonia Wood's textile sculptures explore the idea of nurturing through the use of woolen blankets and felt. With the construction of woolen dolls as a child's playhouse, Wood adopts a visual language common to childhood – an aesthetic that is intrinsically connected to a sense of comfort.

Wood's practice engages with Michel Foucault's theories on the history of medical perception that has seen medical practice move toward a patient-centred approach to treatment.ⁱⁱ Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy are explored in 'Creature Comforts' in terms of looking to theories of attachment. Wood explores the idea that the need for attachment that children require continues to be important in adult life. Soothing and comfort are necessary not only for children, but for human beings in general as the stresses of life increase as one grows up.

Mackenzie's video installation 'Walk' reveals a disturbing social commentary that explores messages heralded by the recent 'Slut Walk' movement. Notions of

victimization, freedom of expression, feminism and patriarchy are referenced in this laboured 'walk', resulting in the depiction of a tragic reality. The second video work 'Untitled' looks to a more idealistic and surrealistic view of the home as the heart of domestic life; a place of physical and mental protection. It is a romantic take on the concept of growing up in which Mackenzie moves away from the confines and semiotics of the traditional home and explores a wider set of domestic boundaries. This creates a broader concept of domesticity and the idea of nesting and creating a safe environment in which to live; concepts that are also clearly evident in the nurturing and protective elements of Wood's textile work.

Nyree McNally's ceramic installation 'Never Let Me Go' looks to childhood issues with regard to domestic life. McNally explores the idea that childhood experiences shape adult lives, and the fact that one can never fully overcome issues that stem from childhood experiences. In the work created for *When I Grow Up*, the artist looks at human evolutionary theory and how the human race has attempted to overcome evolutionary obstacles in order to create the perfect human form. McNally's baby/bird hybrids explore this socially constructed need for perfection, and its almost diametric opposite: entropy. The grotesque imagery is a visual depiction of the inescapable nature of a temporally and physically limited existence. McNally's work is an exploration of the entropic nature of domestic society and how the human race is in a constant struggle to overcome the natural decay of social structures.

Briar Holt, Dunedin, December 2012.

ⁱ 1 Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *ARTnews* January 1971: 22-39.

ⁱⁱ 2 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*, London: Taylor and Francis Group, 1976.