

wyndham art gallery

STRANGEFELLOWS

A collaboration between
Claire Lambe and Lisa Young



March 18 to May 3 2015

Strangefellows is a collaboration between Claire Lambe and Lisa Young.

Collaboration can take many forms. In this case Young and Lambe's work is quite different in form and content. The idea to take a trip to Europe together and make some work influenced by that trip formed in their minds and became the starting point of a collaborative project. They were both interested in the broader scope of art, taking in architecture, interior design and the decorative arts and their trip took them from Paris to Istanbul via Berlin, Venice and Croatia so many different cultural influences have informed this work.

The collaboration is a response and consequence of an art trawl through galleries both contemporary and traditional, a privileged chance to experience something generally seen only through books, magazines and websites.

A particular highlight was the Paris Musee des Arts Decoratifs. At the museum the artists saw the whole room reinstallation of the study designed by architect Pierre Chareau.

'Designed by Pierre for his own use, this sensuous and brooding space became a defining moment.'

Both artists saw the possibilities of incorporating multiple elements – sculpture, drawing, painting into a deliberated master / host structure or room. This was a return for both artists to previous work involving rooms, interiors and furniture, and also a chance to incorporate recent art concerns.

Pierre Chareau is credited with creating the first house in France made of glass and steel. His study is a circular room lined with dark wood in which sections pivot to catch the best light. Claire and Lisa describe the embodied experience of this kind of architecture. It held them in a way that is reflected in the



construction in STRANGEFELLOWS. A work that is the antithesis of the modernist mantra, form follows function.

Form follows function is a principle associated with modernist architecture and industrial design in the 20th century. The principle is that the shape of a building or object should be primarily based upon its intended function or purpose.





Designed by Lisa Young and constructed by both artists with collaborative decisions made along the way, this work, which dominates size wise in the space, is functionless in every way other than as an art work. It could be a beautiful piece of furniture, echoing a central room divider or a wardrobe, however it has no draws and no flat surface to fit against the wall. You can't put anything substantial inside it except a small but very powerful sculpture which surprises and delights on discovery. In this case as the artists said, 'form follows itself'.



Similarly to the work of Japanese artist Kishio who belongs to the Mono-ha (School of Things) this work represents a departure from ideas of art as representation and the artist's intention and instead allows the material to speak for itself. This movement which began in the late 1960's was a movement away from subject to substance, from subjectivity to objectivity. Arte Povera, Supports/Surfaces, and Earthworks are examples of similar movements that emerged at around the same time, in which ideas around subjective knowledge and perspective were reexamined.



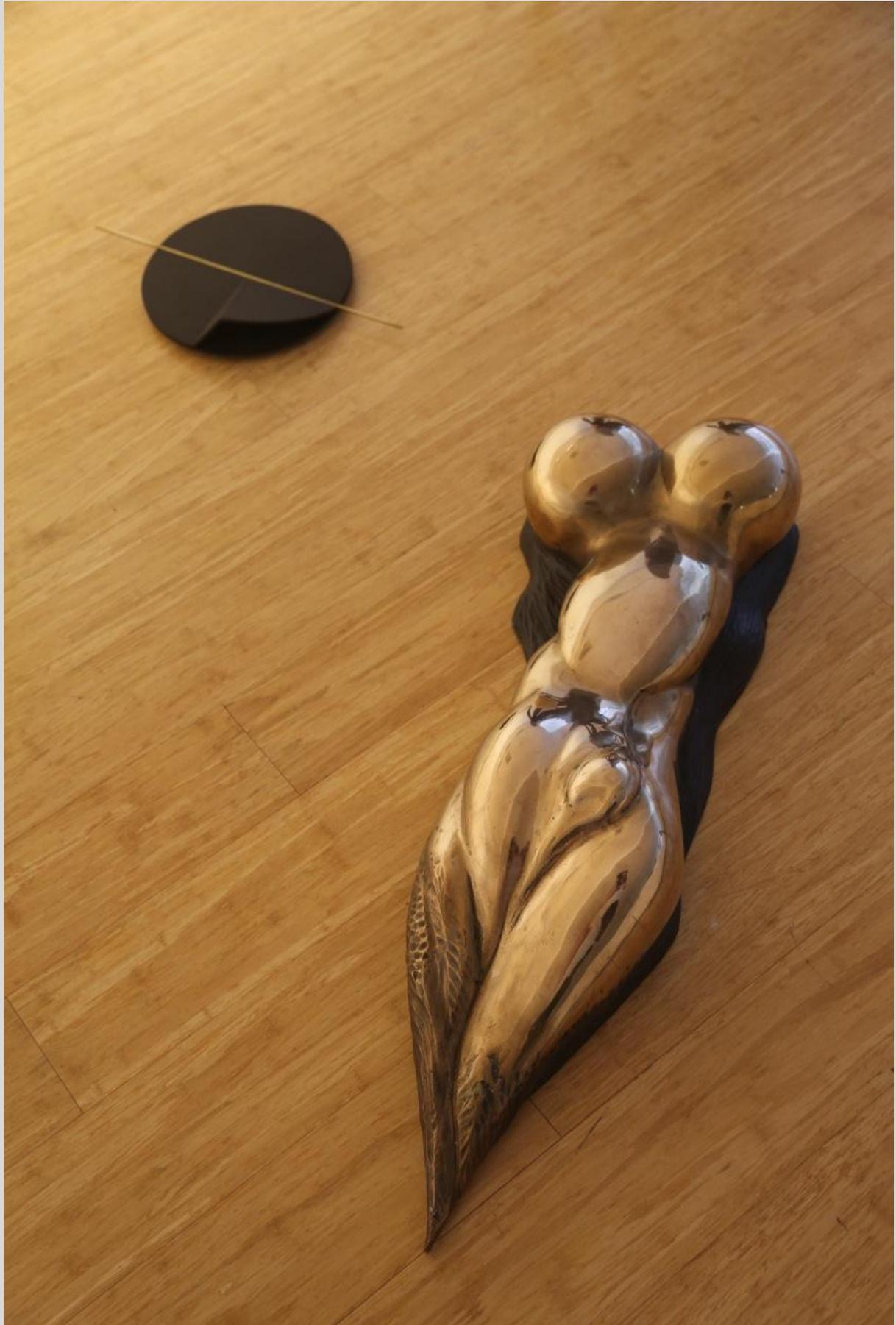
However there are many layers to be explored in this work. The female is ever present and celebrated in curious ways that subvert the masculine. The banana which can be seen as a masculine form is transparent and half peeled with the contact paper that covers and protects the perspex, with which it is made, hanging limply. Inside the cabinet sculpture is the ultimate female form of the vulva made out of the most permanent of materials, bronze, yet it is hidden in the cupboard, not yet allowed out in the bright stare of the public gaze for fear that it is too shocking.





Another image that is to be discovered is the painting which can only be seen in reflection on the underside of the cabinet, creating the slightly eerie effect of a hole in the floor.

The striking image by Claire Lambe, of a young woman leaning over the Venus-like sculpture in an embrace, somehow evokes in me an image of the iron board being fondled. This work lies on the floor, an affront to the curator who is meant to handle such things with white gloves, however it works more like a carpet and again subverts the history of European art which is so steeped in male domination. Venus herself lies in relation to the banana and is influenced by the work of Hans Bellmer, the German surrealist who photographed his sculptures of pre-pubescent female dolls. Claire Lambe's work is closer in my mind to Louise Bourgeois's feminine forms and much kinder to the image of woman.





Interestingly the phallic shape of the banana is invisible on entering the gallery and only become visible as one walks further into the space.

This exhibition is best viewed as a whole rather than in parts. It is after all an installation which works on the viewer in a different way to individual works in a space. Even though it involves works from each artist's genre, the ideas encountered in the development of the body of work are aligned and the works speak to each other. This is evident in the large black metal work which was made by Lisa Young, pursuing her interest in architectural forms, but made as a structure to hold Claire's very organic sculpture.

As the viewer moves through this exhibition the various meanings and relationships become evident so that by the end of this small walk through the space they are clued in to a set of ideas which would not come from one of the works in isolation.



The nature of installation is sometimes a challenge for art lovers who are used to paintings on walls or sculptures on plinths. However if the expectation of traditional art can be extended to installation it can open up a world to viewers. For example, if one is to look at the detail in the large object which most probably should be a wardrobe, the art emerges in the looking. Notice the mirror reflection of the small piece of floor and the shapes surrounding it, which could be an abstract painting popped into 3D.

This entices the viewer to notice such things in the everyday rather than waiting for an art experience, only when inside the walls of a gallery.



Many people have worked on the production of this exhibition including Young's son who runs a business assisting artists and the young photographer who works with Lambe. They are also collaborators in the minds of these artists, generously extending their ideas to include those of others. The practice of sharing and embracing other artists, architects, designers, decorative artist's works is an imperative for Claire and Lisa whose ideas flourish as a result. One wonders if this is also the result of the feminine that is so beautifully and subtly expressed in STRANGEFELLOWS.

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