

Superficial opening

We were sitting in Tyza's kitchen, and I asked about their doctoral thesis because they're planning to submit it soon. They mention writing about rhizomatic structures as explained by Deleuze and Guattari. I know about rhizomes because I observed a lot of them while digging up an eternity of canna lilies in the backyard of a house where I used to live. The root system is very frustrating when you're trying to weed because when you pull it out it will snap, leaving part of the root in the ground, and a new shoot will grow from the remaining root. The roots circumnavigate the surface world by growing horizontally underground, forming knobbly, bulging, fibrous masses, like fresh ginger, so I'm guessing Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome theories are somewhat like that. The rhizome sits a few inches down in the dirt, the foliage above the surface can get snapped off, the root system can get broken too, yet it finds a way to grow by spreading out underground to find a promising location, and then sending up new leaves and flowers above the surface. A rhizome takes a seemingly indirect path.

Sitting across from Tyza, they talk about rhizomatic structures as part of their methodology, as a metaphor for getting around the issue of transgender representation in self-portraiture. A non-representational abstract portrait of trans experience is a work about a body that feels and navigates imminently, around whatever physiological predicaments an audience may expect to see. Tyza's interest in plants, root systems, organic structures, and creatures that live and thrive in places of decomposition, decay and disuse inform their approach.

I've enjoyed hearing about Tyza's interests, like letting sweet potatoes grow long tendrils, sprouting mangrove seeds, feeding rat-tailed maggots, and poetry written during contemplations on the muddy banks of Maiwar ~~Brisbane River~~. These things that some might find tangential to an art practice are purposeful inquiries Tyza has undertaken to get to know relationships between themselves and their worlds. Tyza's growing enjoyment for ceramics makes sense to me because they're forming shapes with clay, a form of dirt, something else from below a surface. What they have made for *Opening* resemble conventional household vessels, but their use is called into question as they protrude, intrude, curtail, lean, or flop. I could say that most of these forms are rendered unusable because their practical potential has been breached, however, I believe the intended use of these forms has always been an exploration of surface, and how a surface can be pushed, stretched or cut open, enclosed, or turned about. Interpretation is limited by a viewer's ability to speculate how these objects came to be and how they could be held, manoeuvred, or placed. We did exactly this when I visited Tyza. I found that aspects of the different forms could become handles, props or hooks, or could be balanced within or on top of each other, bringing new expressions to their forms, and drawing attention to the relationships between the objects. The glazes on these are often vivid matte colours thickly applied, with gloppy, uneven splattered surfaces. They become textures, as if the objects were heavily used, grotty, rusted, or rotten. The movement of the thrown clay is rendered somewhat stationary by these glazes, further transforming the surfaces of the vessels into forms made for exploration.

Tyza has often used surfaces as a metaphor for representation. When I was sitting in the kitchen with them, chatting about rhizomes, there were two of their large bent board sculptures from their exhibition *Assuming A Surface* on display behind me. Some of the boards are similar dimensions to the ones they paint life-sized self-portraits on, and others are elongated, almost like an overextension of a portrait. They've got bracing on the back like those portraiture boards, too. But these boards are bent in different ways. One is bent backwards into an archway that can stand in the middle of the floor, and another is bent forwards from one corner, which means that when it is installed on the wall, it looks as though the corner is peeling off the wall. The front surface of the boards is primed as if ready to be painted on, but they're left blank. I like that the boards, the very foundations on which representation is projected, manipulated, and called into question, become embodiments themselves. As part of a rhizomatic way of looking at self-portraiture, in these works Tyza conveys their own bodily expression and experience using minimalist strategies that draw attention to relationships between artworks, architecture, and audiences. The dyed fabric *Opening* series of works speaks to this strategy. They were dyed by being carefully laid into a bathtub, and for this reason they evidence some of the proportions of a human form. The colours radiating from central points on the fabric have a corporeal sensibility, as if the colour was an apparition of a body that had been laying in the bathtub or, when hung vertically, standing in the gallery. They are an indirect path to a body.

There are two figurative ceramics that can help us navigate this path between the works on fabric and ceramics. These are catfish-like creatures, bottom dwellers, who often live in watery sediment. Their eyes are painted as human eyes, inviting us to interpret their expressions and consider what it is they are doing here amongst these other, more ambiguous forms. Their bodies are connected to tubes and openings that become pathways they appear to swim along. As fish, the scale and trajectory of their movement is very different compared with our bodies. They are an entryway into floating around, or diving into the openings, protrusions, enclosures, and surfaces of the other forms in this exhibition.

Tyza's navigation around representation, their warped and distorted surfaces, and preference for what grows or lives beneath the surface, invite us to consider how we physically situate ourselves, and how we may bend and stretch, intrude or collapse amongst what is around us. They remind me that I have opportunities to experiment with my perception however I want to, and that this can happen in a gallery, at a potter's wheel, or in the kitchen of a friend.

Leen Rieth, January 2024

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I acknowledge the Bidjigal and Gadigal peoples of the Eora nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which I live and work. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Sovereignty never ceded.

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