

Hannah Valentine

Sensible instability

RM Gallery Hours
Thursday and Friday
1pm — 5pm

Saturday
12pm — 4pm

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“The handyman’s hand was more than just an explorer and discoverer of things in the objective world; it was a divider, a joiner, an enumerator, dissector, and an assembler. The handyman’s hand could be loving, aggressive, or playful. Eventually, it found in the intimate touch of grooming the secret to the power of healing. It may also have been the instigator of human language.

There is growing evidence that H. sapiens acquired in its new hand not simply the mechanical capacity for redefined manipulative and tool-using skills but, as time passed and events unfolded, an impetus to the redesign, or reallocation, of the brain’s circuitry.”

Frank R. Wilson, *The Hand: How Its Use Shapes the Brain, Language, and Human Culture*, Vintage, 1999. p.59

“From these predilections a rich range of sensitive effects opens up, stemming from the place where look meets touch; the point in which the two senses cooperate in grasping the form, the grain, the weight of an object. It is by way of these effects that Bock’s works challenge the exclusive privilege granted by our digital era to the faculty of vision. They serve to re-educate our atrophied sensorium, reacquainting our complex and complementary senses with the nuances erased by the smooth surfaces of our touchscreens.”

Simone Menegoi on Katinka Bock’s “Smog,” Meyer Riegger, Berlin, 2017. Art Agenda Online.

Text by Finn McCahon-Jones, September 2021

Recently, I taught my 11 year old son how to whittle a stick into a sharp point. I gave him an extremely sharp knife and a stick and stood back to watch. In a second of terror I watched as he nearly cut the tops of his fingers off. In my mind, the process of sharpening a stick was obvious – to remove small pieces of wood until it becomes a point. As I started to explain the process I realised it was more than just making a cut. To make a cut you need to know about knives and how to use one. You need to know about wood grain, the grip, angles of cut, and pressure of the blade; and to be very respectful of the knife, as it is designed to cut, and does not discriminate. I realised that even this simple task requires vast material and tacit knowledge.

When we make things, we gain far more knowledge than we could ever say. We learn things through touch and through playing; and especially learn things through working with a material to convey our ideas. When I look at Valentine’s work I realise I am seeing her tacit knowledge and material understanding as much as the work itself. There is a generosity in her objects where she invites us to see her process, nothing is concealed from view. In fact her process is so visible, literally cast into the surface of objects and evident all over her work, you could think of her *process* as a *material* applied to the object, rather than something that has happened. Hannah Valentine’s presence is thick on the surface of her objects.

Her bronze pieces are cast with her fingerprints, records of how she manipulated the original wax forms. Brass rods, cut, milled and ground reveal different properties of the same material. Cloth sewn together highlights the transparent and wafty properties of the fabric. The careful threading and binding of rope can only be executed by hand. All these works also invoke the properties of gravity, she does not create an illusion of something floating, we are always aware of how physical and present her works are in the moment of viewing.

At the time of writing this text, Valentine was undecided on how the show was going to look. Instead she has been making objects and collecting materials which will be used intuitively in the space. That part of her process is the tacit knowledge gained in installing the work, and the phenomenal interactions between the objects and the viewer.

Her exhibition *Interference* at Visions (September 2020), enabled Valentine to resolve a number of her works, or at least, bring strands of her practice to a point of conclusion. For this exhibition, Valentine has purposefully taken a step sideways, ignoring what she has recently learned, and re-introducing ideas and materials that had previously been set aside.

Valentine is responding to the inherent nature of RM, giving herself space to experiment with ideas and follow a different fork in the road, just to see where she ends up. I like that this show isn’t about refining ideas, but instead setting up a situation to create them.

Valentine lives and works in Tauranga, Aotearoa. Recent exhibitions include *Hand-held*, 2021, Page Galleries, Wellington; *Interference*, 2020, Visions, Auckland; *Something other, held in common*, 2019, Bowerbank Ninow, Auckland and *Looking in, breathing out*, 2018, Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington.