

Sarah Contos

In the Belly of Mary Shelley

Gertrude Contemporary
 Saturday 16 September – Sunday 29 October 2023

In the Belly of Mary Shelley is the first institutional solo exhibition in Melbourne by Sydney-based artist Sarah Contos.

Drawing upon the set design and psychological impact of German expressionist theatre and film, the environment creates an armature for the presentation of three interrelated filmic works. Across this trio of animations, the narrative arc unfolds to imagine periods of a fictional protagonist's life cycle: from a period of play and innocence; coming of age; and in the third, a transition from care, to shell, to memory. At play is a reflection on a consciousness of the body, evolving a sense of self, to naïve sense of care, to anxieties about the body, to the potential (and indeed, option) to create life. Contos has long employed collage and assemblage to draw on existing imagery, and to collapse, reorder and reimagine representations of female figures to create layered tapestries of strength, resilience, and emotional complexity. Through the use of emerging artificial intelligence technologies, she opens up new methodologies for narrative construction, evolving the possibility of temporal progression within these moving image works.

In referencing author Mary Shelley, the project connotes her seminal work *Frankenstein*; or, *The Modern Prometheus* and its cautions around humankind's interest in experimenting with the creation of new life forms, and the ethical quandaries and existential threats that might arise out of such. But so too does it pay homage to the author of the proto science fiction novel, acknowledge her youth at the time of this accomplishment, and remind us that the work was, at least in its first edition, published anonymously.

Contos' practice frequently creates works that are highly personal, pays tribute to strong female figures and their legacies, and creates space to reflect on the complexities of desire, longing, uncertainty and vulnerability.

Sarah Contos was born in Perth and lives and works in Sydney. Selected recent solo exhibitions include: *Death of a New Romantic*, STATION, Naarm Melbourne (2022); *The Bite Mark of a Butterfly*, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney (1999); *Nikola Tesla Sends Theda Bara to Mars*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2018); *The Revenge of Alexis Colby*, Australian Experimental Arts Foundation, Adelaide (2016); and *Ladies and Gentlemen Sarah Contos Presents: The Muses and the Folly*, Heide Museum of Modern Art Project Space (as part of Future Primitive), Melbourne (2013). Selected group exhibitions include: *Pliable Planes: Expanded Textiles & Fibre Practices*, University of New South Wales Galleries, Sydney (2022); *Know My Name: Australian Women Artists 1900 to Now*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2020); *Mine*, Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania (2019); *Femmage*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (2019); *This is not a love song*, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne (2017); *The Great Strike, 1917*, Carriageworks, Sydney (2017); and *21st Century Heide*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne (2015). In 2018 she was awarded the 2018 Ramsay Art Prize at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

Sarah Contos is represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Gadigal Sydney; and STATION, Naarm Melbourne.

This project has been supported by David Clouston and Michael Schwarz.

Gertrude acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners and custodians of the land and waters on which we operate and pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

List of works

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| <p>1. <i>Moth Catcher 1 (Brother)</i>, 2023
Hand cast aluminium, mild steel, cane, electrics, cable ties, stainless hardwares
Dimensions variable</p> | <p>8. <i>Moth Catcher 4</i>, 2023
Cane, calico, poly-fil, cable ties, electrics, oil on calico, poly-fil, artist's table
Dimensions variable</p> | <p><i>New Doll</i>, 2023
Hand tufted textile, Australian wool, oil on calico and canvas, poly-fil, screen print on cotton, plastic, stainless steel hardware</p> |
| <p>2. <i>Moth-eRR (Chapter 1)</i>, 2023
Film in three chapters
Digital video
6 minutes</p> | <p>9. <i>Big Wide World</i>, 2023
Digital video (projection)
20 minutes</p> | <p><i>Picasso Covergirl</i>, 2023
Hand tufted textile, Australian wool, oil on calico, screen print on cotton, plastic, stainless steel hardware</p> |
| <p>3. <i>Moth Catcher 2 (Sister)</i>, 2023
Hand cast aluminium, mild steel, cane, electrics, cable ties, found tables, stainless hardwares
Dimensions variable</p> | <p>10. <i>Moth Catcher 5</i>, 2023
Cane, calico, poly-fil, cable ties, electrics
Dimensions variable</p> | <p><i>Bosums, Feelings and Laura Palmer</i>, 2023
Oil on canvas, plastic, stainless steel hardware</p> |
| <p>4. <i>Moth Catcher 3</i>, 2023
Wood, electrics, oil on calico, plastic, buttons, stainless hardwares
Dimensions variable</p> | <p>11. <i>Protagonist's Breath</i>, 2023
Digital video, 1 minute 30 seconds</p> | <p><i>Sex on the Internet</i>, 2023
Hand tufted textile, wool, oil on calico and canvas, poly-fil, screen print on cotton, plastic, stainless steel hardware</p> |
| <p>5. <i>Untitled, (solitude)</i>, 2023
Oil on canvas, screen print on cotton, polyfil
1650 mm (h) x 1400 mm (w)</p> | <p>12. <i>Ecdysis (Moult of Desire)</i>, 2023
Soft sculpture on steel hardware
Dimensions variable</p> | <p><i>Cat Tails</i>, 2023
Oil on canvas, plastic, wool, stainless steel hardware</p> |
| <p>6. <i>Moth-eRR (Chapter 2)</i>, 2023
Film in three chapters
Digital video
6 minutes</p> | <p><i>Pierrot on Pierrot</i>, 2023
Hand tufted textile, Australian wool, oil on canvas, stainless hardwares</p> | <p><i>Cleopatra</i>, 2023
Oil on canvas, plastic, wool, stainless steel hardware</p> |
| <p>7. <i>Moth-eRR (Chapter 3)</i>, 2023
Film in three chapters
Digital video
6 minutes</p> | <p><i>Morten Harket Pillow</i>, 2023
Oil on canvas, poly-fil, handcast aluminium, plastic, stainless steel hardware</p> | <p><i>My Friend is a Statue</i>, 2023
Oil on canvas, hand tufted textile plastic, wool, leather, stainless steel hardware</p> |
| | <p><i>Pierced Ears</i>, 2023
Hand tufted textile, oil on calico and canvas, poly-fil, screen print on cotton, plastic, stainless steel hardware</p> | <p>13. <i>Morning</i>, 2023
Digital audio composition
6 minutes 13 seconds</p> |

All works courtesy of the artist, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Gadigal Sydney, and STATION, Naarm Melbourne.

