

With and Within

Words by Jenna Green

As individuals, we choose to own, use, and make objects for many reasons. Sometimes we like them for their function, and at other times, because we find them beautiful. Regardless the reason, the objects we choose to surround ourselves with, influence the way we experience and understand the world. Some of them, those designed with an emphasis on function, may even dictate some of the ways we perform tasks.

In 1896 the phrase, 'form follows function' was made popular by architect Louis Sullivan. Demanding that an object's form be generated from the function it is intended to perform, this principle sought to prioritise an efficiency and economy of design over ornamentation. While today a lot of product design finds a balance between functional and aesthetic agendas, contemporary artists and designers continue to examine and critique this principle through experimenting with form.

In the spirit of this experimentation, *With and Within* tinkers with the aesthetics of functionality. An exhibition featuring the work of emerging Brisbane artists, Helen Bird and Susan Hawkins, *With and Within* uses form as a way to explore our relationship to everyday objects. An imaginative and playful approach to reimagining functionality, Bird and Hawkins' pieces celebrate curiosity, humour and inventiveness.

Inspired by the mechanism of the humble ballpoint pen, Helen Bird's *Drawing Devices* (2017) are a set of intricately assembled contraptions. Designed to create marks with ink, these small sculptures are at once both industrial and organic. A collection of solid components organised and held together through a system of delicate structural bracing, the repetitive elements suggest a machine-like aesthetic despite the fragility of some of the more organic components. Although small, the devices are reminiscent of contraptions engineered in medieval times, and as such have a strangely anthropomorphic quality. Designs that embody labour and movement, the repeated element of the ball evokes not only associations with the ballpoint mechanism, but the story of Sisyphus as well.

Much larger in scale, Hawkins' furniture bricolage straddles the disciplines of art and design. Constructed from disparate furniture components, Hawkins uses repetition to create order and logic in her composition, interrupting it only occasionally with quirky and unexpected placements. Working with retro pieces, her work connects viewers to a time when everyday objects had an integrity of materials and design. This choice suggests an appreciation for the balance between quality, functionality, and stylish design these relics represent. Like Bird's work, Hawkins' pieces are anthropomorphic, standing proud in their space. A trademark of her work, Hawkins pieces often read as a cheerful, motely crew of characters.

Prioritising play over practicality, *With and Within* provides a portal to memory, imagination, and ingenuity.