

EXCELSIOR

Excelsior references the Latin phrase which translates to ‘higher,’ or to strive beyond, always pushing forward, ‘ever upward.’ Using fashion and sculpture as vessels, *Excelsior* pieces together threads of mythology, literature and process to subvert traditions of artistic work.

An extension of a previous one-object curatorial paradigm, *(Re)Contextualised Châtelaine*, the exhibition *Excelsior* is a collection of work by artists and practitioners in Naarm / Melbourne. Considering the urgency placed on ‘emerging’ creatives for continuous production, *Excelsior* showcases upcoming works while simultaneously critiquing the pressure to strive for excellence.

Use of the phrase *excelsior* has been continual through art, literature and theatre. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1841 poem *Excelsior* describes a young man’s pursuit of greatness. Walt Whitman’s poem of the same title, first included in his 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass* begins with the challenge – ‘*Who has gone farthest? for I would go farther.*’

Drawing on threads of contemporary work by recent graduates, *Excelsior* includes fashion objects, sculptural forms and photographic responses. Through a confluence of chain, metal and texture, the works in this exhibition consider the objecthood of creative practice, questioning the constructed divides between artistic disciplines.

Enthusiasm, exuberance, excellence in one’s chosen field. Our city is fast-paced and network-reliant. It’s who you know and how you know them – and how you can market yourself to be someone they want to know. Everyone is an artist; no one is serious enough to call themselves one. One exhibition space dies due to lack of funding and another arises from its ashes. We study and work, grasp at pay-slips and try to stick our

foot in the revolving door of funding, space and power. Always there is the question on the tip of our tongues, begging to be answered with a new project. *What’s next?*

Striving requires hard work – rather than waiting to fulfil the myth of the ‘artistic genius’ figure, we must each push ourselves to the point of establishment. Through an etymological connection to Excalibur, the power-granting sword of Arthurian myth, *Excelsior* reminds us that we cannot wait around for so-called true power to seize the blade. Instead we must keep grinding away; we must work harder. Onwards and upwards.

What do you call yourself? What are you interested in? I once told a gallery director that I was an ‘emerging’ curator. ‘Emerging from what?’ He asked – ‘sounds like you’re coming out of a gross cocoon.’

Trapped in this limbo – not quite ‘established’ enough to hold the power of a true title, but still emerging, always emerging. How much harder do we need to work? When do we achieve our ‘true power’ and who decides this for us?

Whitman changed his original line in 1871 when the poem was re-published in *Passage to India*. From the challenge of ‘I will go farther’ to the tired call: ‘For lo! have not I gone farther?’

– Audrey Merton

EMBERS

Jedda Bahloo

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Jedda Bahloo is a Naarm based multidisciplinary artist and designer who is passionate about creating social change through fashion, art and textiles. She aims to incorporate elements of waste, modularity, functionality, emotional durability and mending within her work to critique how fashion (the entire industry & mode of production) impacts the world around us. With this in mind, Jedda explores ways in which “sustainability” can be defined, questioning the capacity for ‘sustainability’ to exist within the fashion industry’s current production model. Jedda prefers to utilise scraps and materials that would otherwise be discarded and transforms them into well made wearable garments and pieces of art.

Quilted Puffer Jacket and Trolley

Deadstock lace, scrap fabrics, polyester thread, mixed dimensions, secondhand trolley frame

Houndstooth Material

Secondhand fabrics & scraps, mixed dimensions

The pieces within this series explores the future of the world, where production cycles within the fashion industry have wrought environmental destruction. Despite this, within the fictional world of *The Isle of Passé* the fashion industry rolls on, extracting and repurposing all that is left: waste. Scraps and junk materials are used to create fashion pieces and objects which play on the absurdity of trends relative to the material and social resource value of “waste”. Through this reproduction of contemporary production cycles, fashions and identities in a world which has already been destroyed, the work urges systemic change over illusions of reform.

Gabrielle Sharkey

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Gabrielle Sharkey studies and practises fashion design in Naarm. Focussed on the underlying magical properties embalmed into fashion through its experiential and intimate relationship to the body, she endeavours to promote emotional durability through the exploration of adaptable and sensorial wear. Sharkey provides opportunities for stylistic play and longevity while honouring the effect of the hand in her fabrications. This is in hopes of creating an overall embellished and personalised feeling for those who wear her designs.

Chain

Stainless steel chain and findings, sterling silver clasps and rings, varied size

Designing for a garment’s durability, Sharkey considered jewellery and its links to adorning the everyday. Often worn habitually and passed onto one another, our relationship with jewellery is one of strength and adoration. This informed Sharkey’s approach to this adaptable, “thneed” like garment.

Intended to be worn in a variety of styles, stainless steel and silver were chosen for their association to adornment and overt permanence. Stainless steel chain was hand knitted to make a flexible fitting, size-less garment, neither a skirt nor a top. Sterling silver rings and clasps were affixed to further *Chain* adaptability. Rings, clasps, and adjoining silver chain were made by local jeweller Raphy Weir.

ARTIST

Hanako Müller

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Hanako Muller is a female photographic artist currently residing and studying in Naarm / Melbourne. Hanako's art considers notions of personal placement within physical and social spaces, and explores ways in which still imagery can be used to navigate non-linear and ever-evolving concepts such as memory, influence, identity, and connection. She utilises analogue photographic processes to capture the tactile nature of the medium.

***Pearl*, 2023**

Gelatin Silver archival print

\$350

***Untitled*, 2024**

Gelatin silver archival fibre rag print

\$120

***Eyes Up*, 2023**

Gelatin silver archival fibre print

\$120

***Keep Moving*, 2023**

Gelatin silver archival fibre print

\$120

Through these works, Hanako explores the body as a figure, form, and as a method for motion and movement. She uses the body as a foundation – a subject that is familiar and known, yet changeable through material and surrounding. By photographing people in a way where their bodies become amorphous, Hanako challenges the notion of portraiture in photography, questioning what makes a portrait – whether it is the presence of an individual, or our own connotative understandings.

William Christensen

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William Magnus Christensen is a sculptor who grew up in the coastal town of Walyalup, Western Australia. Corrosive salt spray reduced industrial monuments to skeletal forms and beds of limestone are the foundations and the walls of the architecture that surrounded him. He inverts these landscapes; mooring lines hanging from a foundation as if captured in free-fall; chains, both literal and remembered, shackling its histories and its ports. From these material roots, his current work revolves around cognition: memories, created realities and modes of perception. A tenuous balance: solidity; fragility.

***Falling Still*, 2024**

Stainless Steel

Creating a simulacrum of fabric, draped and knotted, William Christensen treats stainless steel as a fabric. He manipulates the chains as loose weaved strands, curating them into forms: a balancing act between the familiar and the abstract. After the form is finalised each chain link is welded together to create solidity out of suspension.

Audrey Merton

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Audrey Merton is an emerging curator, writer and arts practitioner based in Naarm / Melbourne. Her curatorial practice is focused on making connections between processes, practices and people.

She is the Executive Producer of Art Smitten on Syn 90.7 FM. She has worked at 99% Gallery, VOID Gallery for Spring 1883, Neon Parc Gallery and currently works across RMIT Galleries.

EXCELSIOR

Green Floor Gallery recognise that we operate our business on the land of the Kulin Nations. We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live. We pay our deep respects to their Elders, past and present.

Excelsior exhibition would like to expand that respect to Bunjil, the great creator ancestor of the Kulin nations. Land back to those who care for it.

Sovereignty was never ceded.

It was, and always will be Aboriginal land.



Exhibitions at Green Floor Gallery are thoughtfully curated to showcase a diversity of artistic styles, mediums, and perspectives. Green Floor Gallery is committed to promoting emerging talent and underrepresented voices. Through special exhibitions, collaborations, and initiatives, we aim to shine a spotlight on artists whose work challenges conventions and enriches our collective cultural landscape.

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