

Proposal for a Body

Proposal for a Body posits that sound and text-matter are mediums that can be regarded as inherently queer in their expansive and corporally liminal states. Jo Bragg and Georgina Brett present immaterial or bodiless practices focused on experimental process and experience rather than resolved closed-outcomes.

Documentation of sound and performance art is weak in general, however when accounting for women, trans and non-binary people this becomes even more obvious. In a recent publication collating interviews and texts from underground Aotearoa artists from 1991—1999, Noel Meek recognises that “men have dominated music histories for far too long”¹ despite the vital work of women in the industry. Bragg and Brett look further afield, towards pioneering noise artist Kim Gordon, who “continue[s] to transcend gender stereotypes over time.”² Gordon acknowledges the inherent power in documentation throughout her work by deconstructing male fantasies of youth, seduction and desire in her lyrics and music videos.³ In *Proposal for a Body*, Bragg and Brett follow this line of thought while suggesting that sound and text-matter are sculpturally-amorphous mediums, which have the unique ability to communicate complex ontological concepts within the duality of what constitutes a body vis à vis Being bodiless: the duality between flesh versus cerebral states of Beingness.

This exhibition functions as a form of institutional critique within the institution—challenging what is deemed acceptable mediums for the gallery space, while it denounces mainstream perceptions of what is considered tasteful and desirable. Three different recording devices have been placed in the gallery, with two speakers suspended from white chains (a nod to Julian Dashper) set at different heights and Brett’s electric guitar hanging in the centre. Wires spill out from amps and cords are haphazardly strewn about. Though the materials are encased within a rectangle in the centre of the gallery, the sound cannot be contained. Working at assorted volumes, these sounds reflect the various stages of Brett’s performance. The audio bounces around the entire space, making listeners move around in order to better hear the details hidden within the layers.

The more we move, the more we see. A range of found objects (misc-metal-hardware items: hex-nut, century spring corp, a copper rod, river-rock from Hauraki, hair-ribbon and goat-skin tail) indicate an intensely personal relationship to music, people and places. The girlish association many people have of hair-ribbon wars with darker connotations that goat-skin talismans come with. Whenua from Hauraki brings to mind family trips and days spent on the beach and in the river. These are pieces of Brett left behind for us to ponder.

Other materials belonging to the artists have been left in the space that also signal a representation of the body without the use of a bodily form. Jessica Jay has lovingly hand embroidered the garments that Bragg and Brett wore during their opening night

¹ Noel Meek, *archive fever: new zealand underground sound in fanzine interviews 1991—1999*, Oslo: Marhaug Forlag, 2023.

² Thomas S. Caw, “Gender Trouble: the disruptive work of Kim Gordon,” Master thesis (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2005), 3.

³ Caw, “Gender Trouble,” 68.

performance. Stitched into the fabric are working notes and poetry excerpts spoken by Bragg during the opening night performance.

**Dust along a dirt road / Lifted / Along the axis of desire / Along the axis of night
silence / A slow creeping curve / Strange weather / Split the body in two / Down the
side / Pull out the rocks and fill the body back up with light**

Bragg signalled the end of their component of the performance by removing his garment and placing it down in the gallery.