

Megan Hansen-Knarhoi

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Art demands you look at it. Sometimes it shows you things you'd rather not see or reveals something that's hidden. *White Boob/Black Boob* by Megan Hansen-Knarhoi falls into the latter category. This bunch of boobs is both vulnerable and desirable, but also thrilling fun – like joyous little cupcakes that wink as you walk past. Small, colourful, and crocheted, they talk about art, gender, obsession and looking. They are playful examples of reinvigorated contemporary sculpture.

Hansen-Knarhoi is part of a generation of younger artists who have a "radical interest in the role of the object".¹ Objects of all shapes, sizes and media have become an important component of contemporary art practice. They are favoured as a means of expressing ideas, but also of destabilising associations with particular shapes and things. They prompt the question: what should and could sculpture be today?

Hansen-Knarhoi is interested in testing ideas about sculpture and making objects that provoke and thrill. Her chosen technique for making sculpture is crochet. Historically, crochet is a traditional female 'craft' – like knitting, and sewing. This is important because feminine craft techniques are not usually used for making sculpture – historically a male bastion.

Hansen-Knarhoi wants to make objects that challenge the 'norm' – objects like a crocheted roast chicken, flaming and frozen crosses, chick egg cups, and a 'happy' poo.

Crochet is a labour-intensive technique done with a small hook. As a technique it carries associated ideas of obsession – it is time-consuming, and repetitive. Hansen-Knarhoi enjoys these ideas of obsession. They characterise her practice as an artist, and her obsessive crocheting of thirty-one boobs, each with different delicate edging, echoes a societal preoccupation with the size and shape of women's bodies. She 'outs' this preoccupation by presenting it. You, the viewer, don't have to pretend not to be interested – you are given full permission to look, to enjoy unadulterated looking.

Hansen-Knarhoi also wants you to think – about the role of language in this preoccupation. Using 'boob' in the title is provocative. It evokes associations and meanings – slang for breast primarily – but also 'to make a boob', the 'booby prize' and the 'boob tube' (television, but also an item of women's clothing). And then there are the word associations of the objects themselves – tit-bits, titillate, titivate, etc.

And a final thought: when the 'boobs' were first shown in a gallery, a visitor wanted to have one to keep in his pocket. When he was having a bad day, he thought he could reach in and give it a little squeeze, and all would be well.

Mary-Jane Duffy

¹ Conland, N. (2004). *Judy Darragh So... You Made It*, Te Papa Press, p. 74.

Artist website:

www.mrhk.co.nz

Galleries and museums:

www.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz

www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz

www.dunedin.art.museum/collection.asp

www.govettbrewster.com

www.marynewtongallery.com

