

There is a crack in everything. **That's how the light gets in.**

- Leonard Cohen

I've seen Michelle Cawthorn's work before. Although I can't quite pinpoint when, somewhere in the back of my mind I faintly recall having seen these images before. It's not so much in the sense that Cawthorn is appropriating other artists' work or drawing from popular culture, rather it's as though I am somehow intimately connected to the objects and people before me.

Cawthorn, a multi disciplinary artist working across collage, sculpture, drawing and video, is interested in the neuroscientific influences on art making. Investigating the principles of free association, critical pathways in childhood development and experiential happenings, Cawthorn creates delicate and gentle works that awaken personal and familial memories and appeal to our sense of nostalgia.

Unlike many of her contemporaries Cawthorn's work does not attack its viewers, nor does it offend or shock. Rather she creates quiet and emotive works that slowly draw the audience in. Cawthorn herself has described enjoying artwork that rewards those who invest time in it and in a sense her artwork demands the same of her audience. The more time spent ruminating over Cawthorn's work, the more we begin to identify our own similar childhood memories; wooden toys, Sunday dresses, and the like. Offsetting these figurative elements are abstract and fluid shapes made with ink and origami paper. Largely determined by intuition, Cawthorn focuses her attention on the object, allowing medium and extrasensory perception to dictate form. It's as though these abstractions are her brain's attempt to translate memories and objects.

Cawthorn has expanded her collage work, creating sculptures that resemble the shape sorter toys from her childhood and draw upon architectural studies. Plastered in vintage floral wallpaper inspired by her family home, these geometric structures are (as the title alludes to) an experiential expression of a childhood cubby house. Evolving from earlier collages, all of Cawthorn's work is interrelated.

Perhaps the most revealing and emotive work in this exhibition is *Still*, Cawthorn's first experimentation with video. Split over two screens the video depicts Cawthorn and her mother separated and placed behind a fragmented aperture, echoing shapes found in the collage and sculptural works. Like the lyrics from Leonard Cohen's *Anthem*, *Still* is both melancholic and beautiful at the same time. Although both subjects look sorrowful, the light leaking through the filter provides both artist and audience with a sense of hope and redemption. Cawthorn is very close to her mother and watching this video is like peering into a very private moment between two people; one cannot help but feel both privileged and humbled witnessing such an intimate moment.

Poetic and somehow familiar, *Memorophilia* appeals to our sentimental nature and tendency to romanticise childhood. Examining the power of memory and experiential happenings, Cawthorn's work highlights the undeniable influence the past has over shaping our present lives.

Liz Nowell - Independent Curator