

September 29, 2023
For Immediate Release:

FEI DISBROW: *THRESHOLD & THE GUT*

Opening Reception: Thursday, Oct. 12, 5 – 8 pm.

Exhibition Dates: Oct. 12 – Nov. 10, 2023



Exhibition statement by Kate Henderson:

“Threshold” can be defined both as a feature of an entranceway in architecture and as a point of beginning, often accompanied by a physiological or psychological effect. This sensation, whether intuition, fear, love, or one of a plethora of other human feelings, can be resistant to language; it is found deep in the body and is sometimes referred to as a *gut feeling* or a knowing that is *felt in the bones*. This liminal space between transitional experiences and body intelligence—between the threshold and the gut—is where multidisciplinary artist Fei Disbrow locates her intuitive, materially-based practice.

Threshold and the Gut, an exhibition of new work by Disbrow, brings together three distinct material groupings that overlap and intertwine. Textile and soft sculpture, plaster-based sculpture, and three-dimensional photographic work converse with one another, evoking shared embodiment, intuition, change, and healing as expressed through the haptic space of the body—both the artist’s and the viewer’s. As Disbrow states, “The work is made from the gut and felt in the gut”.

In 2023, Disbrow experienced life-changing physical traumas. Two separate accidents, one resulting in a concussion and another in a broken tibia and fibula—the latter requiring surgery—led to months of recovery and new cognitive and physical adaptations. When Disbrow described her accidents, I felt the unique phenomenon of pain empathy: the sensation of feeling someone else's pain as your own. This sensation lingered in my body as I continued to familiarize myself with her work, as if the works themselves were an extension of what her body endured.

While healing in a horizontal position for an extended period, Disbrow produced *Discomfort in Black and Blue*, an arterial work made using a humble finger-weaving technique taught to the artist by her daughter many years before. This rudimentary process, along with weaving and sewing, is now used as a way to make work while healing from major trauma. This beautiful nod to the adaptability and resiliency of our bodies—from motherhood to physical trauma and everything in between—is woven throughout the work. The resulting soft sculptures are slippery and fibrous, akin to innards that loop and fold. The works have an honest rawness that is visceral and grotesque yet comforting and familiar.

Fei's plaster-based sculptures, too, have a familiar quality, recalling the soft bodies and voluptuous forms of Italian Renaissance sculpture while at the same time bearing a surface texture similar to a rustic wall in a farmhouse kitchen. A duo titled *Thwarted Potential i and ii*, presents itself like the cross-section of a bone, revealing an internal landscape that is at once mysterious and intimately understood. Disbrow sets out with an understanding of the form, but the material is built up and chipped away, abandoned and then eventually resurfaced as evidence of the artist's hand, reframing failure as a crucial part of the process.

Fei's photographic wall sculptures also seek to understand unfamiliar territory. Close-up vignettes from photographs of lichen taken in the Faroe Islands and the Coastal BC mountains become microscopic surfaces of cells, skin, and bone—they are otherworldly yet deeply rooted in the body. Eschewing photography's prescriptive and distinctly masculine rectilinear format by adopting organic shapes, her *Elemental Murmur (Chrysothrix Chlorina)* series' edges are bent away from the wall, while her *Primordial Duo (Ochrolechia)* series is puzzle-pieced together to create soft, radical forms that resist containment.

Body intelligence, intuition, and somatic knowledge play a pivotal role in Disbrow's recent sculpture and photography. She notes that she has inadvertently foreshadowed her own bodily trauma through her work, that the works have a pre-existing knowing and intelligence within them. Disbrow seeks to know a work of art from inside the body, to build a practice and way of being between threshold and the gut.