

Kate Just  
*Inward Gathering*

If...we admit, provisionally, that women do exist, then we must face the question: what is a woman? Simone de Beauvoir<sup>i</sup>

The works of Kate Just are about female intimacy: intimacy with others, with nature and with oneself. Past works have dealt with the relationship with family, individual struggle, awakening sexuality and the affinity of the female with nature. The title of this exhibition *Inward Gathering* is derived from a quote by French feminist theorist Luce Irigaray in which she comments on, '... the necessity of [the woman] returning to one's own world, into oneself for one to be capable or remain capable of approaching other...long enough for a pause: for a rest, for thought, for inward gathering.'<sup>ii</sup> This current work delves internal and looks into intimacy with oneself and the 'symbolic realm of private, female space and desire'<sup>iii</sup>

*Inward Gathering* examines both the physical and personal revealing of the woman by looking within. The artist presents her audience with a number of markers and devices to achieve this. A cluster of black organically shaped hanging keys work as totems from an old age. Over scaled and archaic looking, these keys represent the psychological unlocking of the female private and cultural sphere. Each key enacts a symbol or hieroglyph to read and reveal the female psyche, experience, meaning and necessity for inward gathering. As Virginia Woolf's character in *A Room of One's Own* comments, 'I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse, perhaps, to be locked in', Just's emblematic keys break open and liberate cultural idioms of female identities, self and desire.<sup>iv</sup>

The collage works likewise utilise an invented language of stylised shapes and forms, but this time of a current age. These shiny and metallic symbolic characters suggest a physical and material opening of the female body. Somewhat representative of medical apparatuses, these instruments indicate probing and investigating into the physicality of the female. Only suggestive of medical tools, these sleek and slender renditions seem akin to the curve and beauty of the female form. Just suggests, 'used privately, they might suggest a desire to understand one's own body, or bring pleasure to it'.<sup>v</sup> These tools open the body that naturally envelops, encloses and hold secure. This exploration into the female body as containing and enclosing is likewise continued through a current collaboration with a glassblower in creating large circular vessels for holding liquid. Whether used medically or in private, these fictitious instruments and experimental vessels explore the female form, displaying the essentiality of looking inwards, to be freed outwards.

De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* questions what it is to be a woman stating that the woman as 'Other' is defined and evaluated by its bodily shape, size and functions, being fenced in by the details of her biology.<sup>vi</sup> In *Inward Gathering* Kate Just's attempts to pry open the entrapped female body and mind by releasing the 'tension between women's lived bodily experiences and the cultural meanings inscribed on the female body that always mediate those experiences'.<sup>vii</sup>

Olivia Poloni

---

---

<sup>i</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1949

<sup>ii</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Key Writing*, p. 7

<sup>iii</sup> Artist statement, April 2010

<sup>iv</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of Ones Own*, p.24

<sup>v</sup> Artist statement, April 2010

<sup>vi</sup> op. cit. de Beauvoir

<sup>vii</sup> 'Writing on the Body: female embodiment and female theory' Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury (introduction)