



In the summer of early 2015, my abandoned dressing table was claimed by bees. The drawers were filled with honeycomb, becoming seething containers of honey, and the hum of hundreds of bees filled our back veranda. I bought the dresser from a vintage store 20 years ago when broke and living in Sydney as a recent arts graduate. For over a decade it held my most intimate possessions: precious trinkets, love letters and underwear. This dresser has a long history and its past life far pre-dates my own. In the period of my mother's early childhood it was a site of feminine ritual: most women in at least the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century owned a dresser, complete with a brush and mirror set placed on top. This specific history is less significant than the fact the viewer will transcribe their own imaginative story upon it (albeit subconsciously). But, for this dresser to be eventually taken back by nature was a wholly satisfying outcome for me. Intrigued by the idea of secret worlds pulsing and thriving beyond our awareness, the drawings and sculptures that have increasingly comprised my art practice over the last 5 years reveal a sense of magic in the natural world. Immersed in nature, I find my way back home.

Exploring domestic spaces and the subconscious, *Homely* takes the form of a disquieting diorama in which material space and form intersect with immaterial time and memory. The 1940s vintage dresser is central to this scene, reworked with cabriole legs, upwards seeping ink stain and ghostly copy in silk organza. Before this uncannily tall and gendered object (and its double) the viewer is repositioned as a child. The use of reflection, inversion, and mirror-image are familiar visual elements to my practice, revealing an ongoing interest in dualities and the connectivity of opposites. Here, this eerie scene recalls the *doppelgänger* and its associations of horror, personal identity and the human psyche<sup>i</sup> described in Freud's theory of 'The Uncanny'. The uncanny

is a tool I am consistently drawn to. Catching us off guard, it can allow an experience to occur which can't immediately be understood or categorised by the mind. Freud's use of the phrase 'unheimlich', translating as 'unhomely', has strong associations with the domestic, and it is from this term I derive the exhibition title. Collectively, the works presented in *Homely* question notions of (feminine) beauty, the 'gaze', and paradoxical experiences of comfort/and terror within the home. Acknowledging that all suffering contains a transformative potential for growth, the themes of this body of work align with my core interests: transformation and the interconnectedness of all things.



Over the strange year of 2020, I began to create small 'ritualistic' objects, using among other things, feathers, balga resin, vintage jet beads and banksia nuts: these enigmatic and endlessly fascinating objects that have become a personal 'totem' of sorts in my work of the last five years. I have been placing these small objects on the dresser in my studio and, like the precious personal trinkets that have traditionally found their place in women's bedrooms, they feel at home together. The drawings that accompany them are intentionally abstract and I have allowed them to unfold without a prescribed idea of what they are or may become. Unlike the dresser/s, the small objects and drawings are playful and instinctive like a visual stream of consciousness: mental maps to a strange and erotic terrain where suppressed desires and fears emerge as eerie dreamscapes.

Within developed countries, free from war, the domestic space is where our best and worst experiences often unfold. This observation seems even more pertinent in the midst of a global pandemic, as communities worldwide are subject to varying degrees of isolation within the home. Now more than ever it is the place where nightmares, pleasures and mundanity meet.

Lia McKnight, 2020

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<sup>i</sup> Faurholt, Gry, 2009, "Self as Other: The Doppelgänger", *Double Dialogues, Approaching Otherness*, Issue 10, Summer 2009. Retrieved 24/10/2020 from: <https://www.doubledialogues.com/article/self-as-other-the-doppelganger/>