

How deep is your love?, Cooper Cole, Toronto

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← *How deep is your love?*, exhibition view, Cooper Cole, Toronto, 2017.
Photo : courtesy of the artists and Cooper Cole, Toronto

Laurie Kang

† *Worm*, 2017.

Photo : courtesy of the artist and Cooper Cole, Toronto

How deep is your love?

Organized by Jenine Marsh, with work by herself and eight other female-identified artists, *How deep is your love?* forms a collective organic nest of intertwined propositions, materials, expectations, and relationships. The exhibition is an aggregate portrayal of consciousness, performing as a living organism with an acute awareness of its internal and surrounding structures. It is a lesson in sensitivity and strength that reimagines the architectures of the living body and physical space.

Marsh's own body appears in a legion of handprints that punctuate the gypsum cement disks suspended within her ten-foot-tall steel archway *wastelanders*. These tangled clusters of positive and negative relief provide just enough mass to define a structure, while denying any real confidence of form. Somehow, despite its grandeur, this monumental work refuses to occupy any space at all.

The body, visible not only in form but thematically, is most present in the energy of the artists' labour. Thea Yabut pastes and pinches paper pulp into relief sculptures, forms graphite and pencil shavings into palm-sized objects, and draws spine-like daisy chains directly on walls. Her work clings to the gallery's architecture, softening its harsh flatness and sharp corners. Chloe Seibert's messy mural of paint and plaster—also applied by hand directly to the wall—forms an abstract expression of her body's capacity to reach, bend, and twist. Her brazen markings culminate in a crude portrait that reads like a retaliation against the historically male tradition of action painting.

With a decidedly more refined approach, but no less bodily in its expression, Beth Stuart endows the gallery with a velvety Venetian plaster second-skin. Although her work can be read as a celebration of surface, it also reaches far beyond, by paying close attention to the building's switch plates and sockets. Easy to overlook—and therefore even more affecting—these hand-worked zones of non-space act as reminders of the tangled inner workings behind the walls. With a similarly humanizing

effect, Laurie Kang's roughly stitched aluminum *Screen* acts as a tender shield for the gallery's ceiling fixtures. Doubling as a sling for a small handful of cast aluminum peach pits, this work further points towards the interior. Even further inside, and much more visceral, is *Worm*. Tucked away in a plastic bucket and partially submerged in its own juices, this deep crimson glistening mass reads as demonstrative evidence of what a woman is meant to keep inside. Initially repulsed, we are quickly drawn to it, challenged to view the grotesque as a thing of fascination, even beauty.

Such a formidable mess—an unapologetic display of female energy—is present in all the work. At their most vulnerable, these works are unafraid. Like Aline Bouvy's Jesmonite mongrel dogs, or the gaping mouths of Mindy Rose Schwartz's cast bronze baby birds, vulnerability is offered up as an antiphon to traditional perspectives on strength. Much of the work is removable only through its own destruction. Much of the work had to undergo forms of destruction in order to be made. There is nothing here that does not unabashedly claim a space for itself, while simultaneously allowing space for every other body around it.

Alex Bowron

Aline Bouvy, Laurie Kang, Jennie Jieun Lee, Candice Lin, Jenine Marsh, Mindy Rose Schwartz, Chloe Seibert, Beth Stuart, Thea Yabut
Cooper Cole, Toronto
September 16—October 21, 2017