Maria Militsi employs the potential of objects as echoes of experience, as fragments of memory and as markers of loss. She is drawn towards things that are ordinary and familiar, yet strange, and seeks to bring different objects and ideas into close relationship to form new meanings. This feature of her work has been described by Caroline Broadhead as ‘... a collision of opposites: complete and incomplete, faithful and mutinous, melancholic and humorous.’

A piece is often triggered by her emotional response to an unwanted item, one discovered in a flea market, purchased through eBay, or simply found on the street. She reclaims and rehabilitates such abandoned objects, filling their damaged surfaces or empty spaces with precious embellishments to give them new meanings and raison d’être.

The necklace titled Theodota Kirmakidou incorporates a fragment of an earlier jewellery piece, a brooch of roses, made by her mother from coloured bread dough. It memorialises her mother’s creativity and also speaks of her legacy in the way that her skilled modelling of flowers is emulated by her daughter’s carefully crafted additions in metal. Its 30 metre length of chain, falling into pools, signifies time – the 30 years since the bread flowers were made.

Theodota Kirmakidou was Militsi’s mother’s maiden name. Militsi explains that, whereas once her mother signed all her drawings, after she was married she no longer signed anything; recast by society as a wife and mother she appeared to lose her former sense of identity. But she recalls that her mother was still able to reclaim her sense of self when immersed in creative activities; her choice of Rose the Chair, a found personified item of furniture, provides an apt plinth for the work.

Militsi acknowledges that her works are often motivated by the need to make sense of her experiences and her immediate environment. Tribute to Agnes-Sina Inakoju 2010, a limb-like metal pole, and Tribute to Agnes-Sina Inakoju 2011, a cast iron industrial part, reminiscent of a torso, were both found on the street before being subject to her reverent attention. Both works were made as memorials to a local teenager who was the innocent victim of gang crime, tragically shot dead last year in a fast-food outlet just around the corner from the artist’s Hoxton studio. The golden ring apparent on each of her metal additions indicates the possibility of their removal to be worn independently as pendants, as portable items of jewellery whose forms retain an imprinted memory of the found object from which they come.

The title of the Lost in Florence Lego man refers to the city where she found the toy during a Royal College of Art field trip. Having promoted him to a position of uniqueness, by replacing his lost Lego man headdress with an elegant bespoke helmet, she subsequently noticed that she was not the first to display an impulse to rescue him. One of his legs had also been glued back and she found herself delighted that this miniature plaything had already been treated with such care - concluding that ‘it was obviously loved and probably missed’.

Halkidiki/Greece 1998 - Hoxton/London 2010 marks the rescue, by Militsi and friends, of a young dolphin that was accidently stranded in shallow water off a beach in Greece. She particularly recalls her sensations of close physical and psychological engagement with the unfortunate creature and the emotions reawakened in her by the discovery of this strange large-scale ornament. The void left by the missing tail of one of the entwined dolphins has been healed by a mass of tiny flowers.

Sweet Seventeen, an incomplete Royal Doulton figurine, is displayed on a revolving stage. The figurine’s missing features have, again, been replaced by an eruption of white metal roses (also a pendant that can be worn on a...
This intricate adornment, she points out, both protects the girl’s disadvantage and draws attention to that which she now lacks.

*Sandy the Dog* (in the gallery window) was once another broken ornament, one which captured Militsi’s attention due to its resemblance to a much loved childhood pet. The dog’s immaculately crafted crown transcends any idea of a mere repair and brings a level of aesthetic complexity. The preciousness of her adornment, raising the status of the artefact far beyond that it experienced in its original pristine state, can be likened to the practice of the Japanese masters of kintsugi or ‘golden joinery’ in their golden seam repairs, which similarly raise the hierarchical significance of ceramic vessels through their skilful interventions.

Self Portraits is a three-part installation. The first is comprised of 120 crucifixes that she collected through sources such as eBay from sellers across the world and is arranged in the shape of a cross. Together the crucifixes represent different stylistic and cultural expressions of ideas of Christianity. The work involved in their collection brought her into close communication with the sellers, making her aware of the different ideas and values that permeate these symbols. Even the idiosyncratic ways in which the items were packaged spoke volubly to her of the senders’ unique lives and experiences.

The second part presents ghost-like imprints of the original crucifix forms, cast in white metal. She likens the effect to the image of Christ that was revealed by amateur photographer Secondo Pia on taking the first picture of the Shroud of Turin in 1898. Seen together, Militsi notes how the two cross shapes ‘juxtapose positive with negative, colour with monochrome, a multiplicity of materials with a single metal, and tangible with absent form’. She also makes a connection with Aleksandr Sokurov’s Father and Son (2003), a film which explores the special character of this family tie, as well as its more pernicious nature, as expressed in: ‘A father’s love crucifies. A loving son lets himself be crucified.’

The third part of the installation is a contextualising series of black and white photographic portraits that include a found historic portrait of an unknown wearer of the symbol and many of Militsi’s friends and acquaintances who each wear one of the collection of 120 crucifixes.


Marsden Woo Project Space is curated by Tessa Peters

The Marsden Woo Project Space runs alongside our programme of solo and small group exhibitions by gallery artists. The Project Space allows us to respond quickly to significant bodies of innovative work and showcases the work of talented emerging artists and designers and fresh directions in the work of more established artists. The exhibitions are organized at short notice, so please check our website regularly for news on forthcoming shows and events.

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