

top left: *Night paddling*, 2019, salvaged crutches, safety pants, reflective thread, blanket and lead, 154 x 23 x 20cm each.
 top right: *Play me, mend me*, 2019, unfinished violin, salvaged crutch, blanket, 159 x 28 x 10cm.
 above: *The cloud within me, suspended*, 2020, felted wool, salvaged ladder, toe-to-toe bed sheet and pillow cases, skipping ropes, cast beeswax, hot-water bottle stoppers and chairs, dimensions variable (ladder 301 x 40cm).
 front: *Beneath the weight of the sheets*, 2019, salvaged chairs, sheets, blanket, lead and beeswax, 85 x 125 x 45cm.

Anita Johnson Larkin: *Come To Me Without A Word*, 29 August - 11 October 2020, Wollongong Art Gallery

**WOLLONGONG
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ANITA JOHNSON LARKIN

COME TO ME WITHOUT A WORD



WOLLONGONG ART GALLERY

FOREWORD

Anita Johnson Larkin is an artist whose work is very much a personal journey, an extension of how she thinks, how she feels and who she is. While her practice is imbued with an impressive conceptual rigour there is also a visceral intimacy, a vulnerability that gives her work a raw emotional impact.

Anita works with domestic objects that become extensions of ourselves and with which we form intimate connections in our lives but once broken are discarded as no longer necessary to our needs. However, within these forgotten and discarded objects remains the emotional residue of shared experience, of the love and loss that life presents.

The artist transforms these cast-off objects into sculptures that expose the emotional and psychological wounds within and the pervasive need for human interconnection. Anita draws out of these objects a human narrative, revealing a strange beauty within.

It is Anita's gift as an artist to seamlessly bring together incongruous objects and have reason and mayhem collude to convince us that this illogical fusion is both plausible and real.

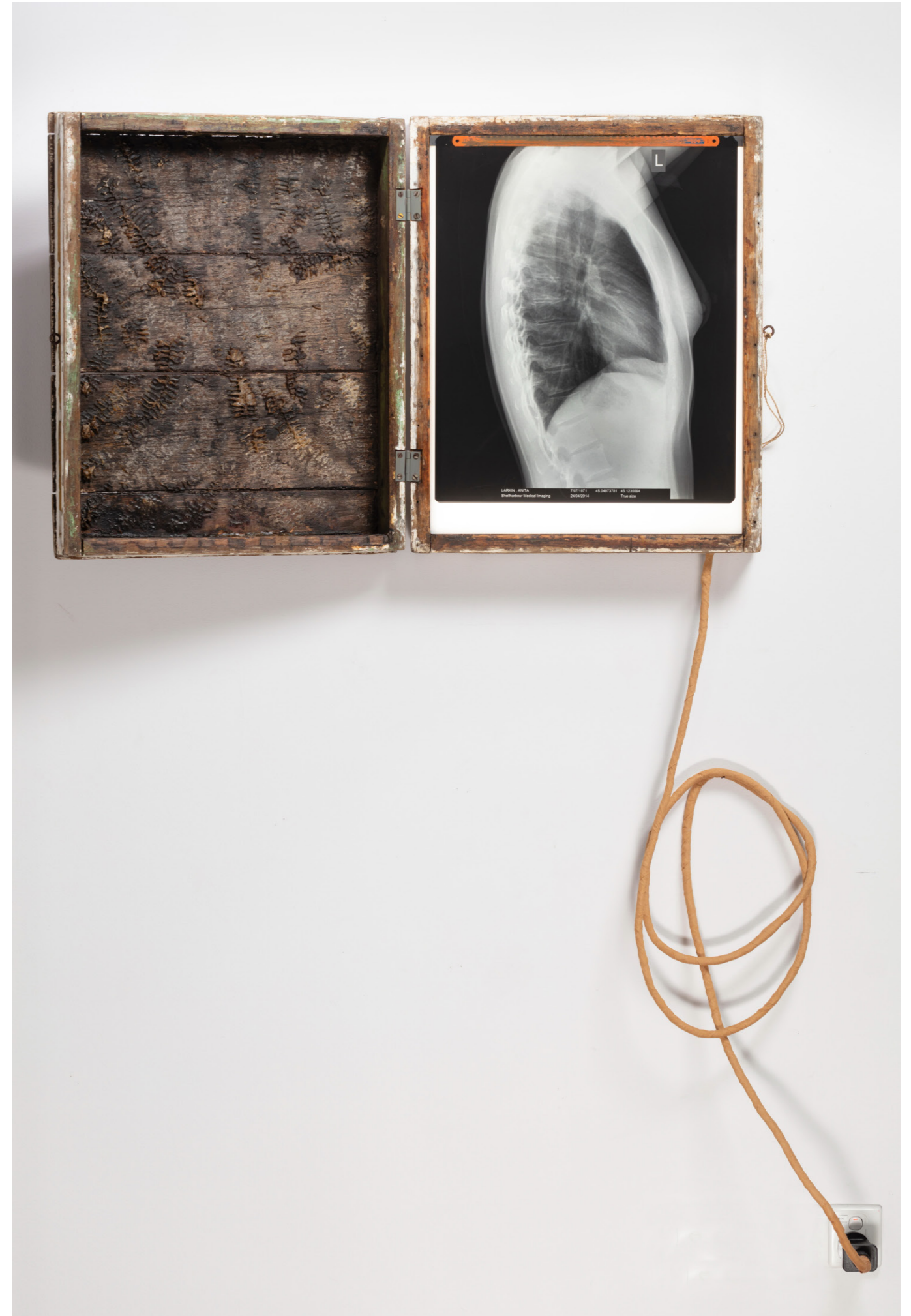
We would like to thank Anita for bringing her exhibition *Come to Me Without A Word* to Wollongong Art Gallery and sharing her original creations and poetic vision with us. We hope you find some inspiration and solace in this exhibition.

John Monteleone
Gallery Program Director

above: *As sweet as it is*, 2019, salvaged tennis racquet, blown glass, beeswax and honey, 80 x 23.5 x 11cm.

below: *Beneath the weight of the sheets (detail 1)*, 2019, salvaged chairs, sheets, blanket, lead and beeswax, 85 x 125 x 45cm.

opposite: *The world within*, 2019, salvaged beehive lids, light-box, leukoplast, and x-ray of artists chest, 85 x 51 x 8cm.





above: *Toe-to-toe*, 2020, salvaged bed, ladder, cricket pads and blankets, 384 x 126 x 92cm.
 top left: *Memories of wounds received and mended*, 2018, salvaged chair, gold leaf, artist's x-rays, silk organza, and bandaids 160 x 210 x 23cm.
 bottom left: *Comfort me, soothe me*, 2018, hot-water bottle, felted wool, my breath and cloves, 75 x 25 x 8cm.
 bottom right: *Longing*, 2018, salvaged child's cot, canvas tent remnants, 91 x 83 x 54cm.

COME TO ME WITHOUT A WORD

All things are prone to brokenness. It is perhaps the natural state of everything to be only fleetingly 'whole' and the rest of the time to be interrupted, fractured, in chaos or the slow process of decay. For this exhibition, I have salvaged broken refuse objects associated with the home. Re-associating them with the human body and using gestures of repair, I aim to embody the objects with new layers of personal meaning, extending them beyond their objecthood toward an affective poetics.

The home is a place of belongings as much as a place to belong within. The home should be a place of refuge, but sometimes it is not. This exhibition explores the home as a site of human brokenness and its repair. Home is where we convalesce during illness, where relationships fall apart and mend, and where our bodies physiologically restore themselves each night during sleep.

Beds, chairs, ladders, musical instruments, crutches and hot-water bottles share our lives intimately; they are held close to the human body. Susan Stewart (1984) describes in *On Longing* how objects can take the place of an interior self. I feel that used objects that have in the past supported a human body can hold particular resonance within our psyche. Palimpsests, broken used things can be seen as witnesses across time to events, to people and places. Objects can be storytellers.

Most people view broken things as something to be discarded. Brokenness does have value, though. I find broken objects to have a particularly evocative character; for me, they hold improvisational value, offering interstitial affordances that are non-existent in a whole. The fractured object's lacunae, its incompleteness and dysfunction directly engage my material imagination. I see brokenness not as a state of demise but a point of becoming. I encountered most of the object parts for this exhibition on the

street verge or at the refuse tip. Found within this liminal space, they are belongings of nowhere and no one. Un-belonging, they come to me without a word, their it-narrative unknown. They call out to me, not as belongings, but simply longings.

This exhibition also calls into question the notion of a repair. Repair is usually understood as a return of something broken to wholeness or former utility. The word also describes the action of retreating to a familiar place. Broadly suggesting a turning back in time and to place, repair can directly engage memory and longing. I find that repair can be enacted in more complex ways than the expected restoration of original utility. This exhibition employs actions of destruction as repair, object-prosthetics as a repair, enveloping the object as repair, and the negation of utility as a type of repair. I endeavour to give a voice to the object in the repair.

The labour and time invested in a repair can overlay the object with psychological or emotional significance. The embodied repair of objects in this exhibition has utilised materials that are typically associated with the human body and its repair such as blankets, band-aids, bandages, bedsheets, beeswax, felt, honey and cloves. Materials such as hair and wax have a kinship to the visceral and can loosen the division between subject and object, the animate and inanimate. This interplay with how materials affect objects intrigues me. When I form a felt membrane around an object, it is a transformative act of care. I massage the wool fibres by hand with warm soapy water until they intermingle in a second skin for the object. Insulating warmth and sound felt is a sensuous mammalian presence that serves to contain the object inside another 'body', and renders the objects' identity hidden, a secret. I have used beeswax in some artworks as a material that enacts the olfactory senses and as a substance that is responsive to the warmth of the human body.

Gestures of repair and the materials I choose for that repair can embed meaning and develop narratives within broken objects, explicating and ameliorating longing and giving a voice to human brokenness.

Every person, if you talk to them for a while will reveal a story of brokenness in their lives, it is one of the things that bind us together in being human.

Objects of the home "are hybrid objects, subject objects. Like us, through us and for us, they have a quality of intimacy" (Bachelard 1958, p. 78). This exhibition manifests such objects as a tacit lingua, able to bypass the brain and find a knowing directly within the sensing body where longing and loss are most deeply felt. Come to me without a word.

References

Bachelard, G and Jolas, M 1994, *The Poetics of Space / Gaston Bachelard 1958*; translated from the French by Maria Jolas; Beacon Press

Stewart, S 1984, *On longing: narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection*, John Hopkins University Press



left: *Holding breath, Sleeping breath (breath repair series)*, 2020, performance: the repair of my breath with felt, photographs by Bernhard Fischer.

right: *Come to me without a word*, 2019, unfinished violins, felted wool, 120 x 24 x 12cm

