

# KYLIE STILLMAN

## THE OPPOSITE OF WILD



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Kylie Stillman

*The Opposite of Wild*

At the heart of Kylie Stillman's most recent exhibition *The Opposite of Wild* is a consideration of the nature of things and how we navigate and articulate the world around us. Making use of the overlooked and discarded, her work responds to the physical parameters and possibilities embedded in everyday objects. Rather than reinterpret these, Stillman uses a seamstress's sensibility to unravel and remake, something she inherited from her mother's aptitude for resourcefully uniting fabric off-cuts into unique wearable items.

## INTRODUCTION

Stillman describes this transformation in the materiality of commonplace objects as akin to alchemy, created through the interaction between artist, material and object. While on one level her book carvings and found sculptural forms comment upon the impact of consumer culture, they are also a nod to nature itself, reflecting upon the origins of the book, and the course a tree has undergone from seedling to pulp. The cyclical nature of life is further exploited through the process of making itself. Stillman takes a period of months, meticulously slicing each page with a scalpel in a kind of excavation whereby the strata of paper slowly reveal the final form.

The artist's interest in the natural and constructed world focuses on the intricate patterns that surround us. Stillman views our relationship to nature, its aesthetic forms and complex systems, as a common human interest and lived experience. The three installations composing *The Opposite of Wild* explore the cultivated methodologies used to document and understand our natural world.

These observations and teaching aids, spanning illustrations, diagrams and instructions, are presented with a twist in the two works *Masking the Seam* 2017 and *Morning Pages* 2017. Stillman's compelling reincarnation of a Spirograph emerges from within the multilayered book foundation of *Masking the Seam* 2017. The spiral's parabolic curves playfully allude to string art and the notion of the hand-made, whilst the graphic vortex references natural systems and sequences made visible through geometric patterns, as an aid in predicting the regularities in the world.

Extending these ideas is the multifaceted installation *Morning Pages* 2017, which has its origins in a series of fifty thread drawings produced for Stillman's exhibition *Over, under, around and through* at Utopia Art Sydney in 2015. These works mark a transition from predominantly three-dimensional forms to wall-based, hand-sewn images on paper that reconsidered sculptural ideas in a two-dimensional format. Similarly, *Morning Pages* 2017, comprises a number of musical stands holding paperback books, which bear hand-sewn drawings that span the external and internal covers. The artist draws upon a vast repertoire of sources from the literal to the poetic, actively tracing the trajectory of her ideas through science, art and nature. Collectively these works allude through drawn forms to the relations between the whole and its constitutive parts.

Stillman's third installation *Local Branch* 2016, was initially created for Hawkesbury Regional Gallery from books de-commissioned from the Hawkesbury Library collection. Here we see the sinuous form of a branch carved across a great expanse of books. For Stillman, the intricate deviations of knots and twists found along the lengths of its extremities evidence the tree's 'necessity of life', of subtle shifts and growths that chronicle daily experiences, from its consumption of sunlight and rain, through to its self-preservation against wind and drought. As with all of Kylie Stillman's work, the apparent simplicity and immediacy of the installations presented in *The Opposite of Wild* are underpinned by keen observation, a deep understanding of the interplay of two and three-dimensional space and a belief in the role of the artist as witness and narrator.

Penny Teale  
2017







Kylie Stillman, *The Opposite of Wild*, 2017, installation view, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney.  
Photograph: David Marks Photography.



Kylie Stillman, *Local Branch*, 2016, installation view, hand-cut paperback books, timber, saw horses, 161 x 245 x 123 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney. Commissioned and created with assistance by Hawkesbury Regional Gallery. Photograph: David Marks Photography.



Kylie Stillman, *Masking the Seam*, 2017, hand-cut paperback books, timber, saw horse, ladder, 182 x 144 x 80 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney.  
Photograph: David Marks Photography.





Kylie Stillman, *Morning Pages*, 2017, installation view, installation of ten embroidered books on timber bases and music stands. Cotton thread, paperback book, 15 x 12 x 19 cm each. Image courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney. Supported by the City of Melbourne Arts Grants Program. Photograph: David Marks Photography.





Kylie Stillman, *The Opposite of Wild*, 2017, installation view, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney.  
Photograph: David Marks Photography.



Kylie Stillman. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

As a painting student at RMIT during the 90's Stillman struggled to be inspired by paint found in a tube, she preferred the challenge of finding materials and pigments from the 'real world' to create an artwork. Best known for her book sculptures and woodcarvings, Stillman uses scalpel blades, jigsaws, sewing materials and drills to alter objects and create negative spaces that depict 'signs of life'. Birds, plant life and the artist's own scribbles are frequently used as subject matter. Her inventive artworks draw from both modern art and craft traditions to transform ordinary materials into works of art. The artist says 'it's my own form of alchemy - taking something very common and then giving it nobility.

## KYLIE STILLMAN

Kylie Stillman completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts with honours at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in 1999. She has since held several solo exhibitions and participated in numerous group shows, including *Wonderland*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei (2012), *Size of Life*, Gippsland Art Gallery (2010), Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia (2008), *Little Room*, Utopia Art Sydney (2007), *Snap Freeze: Still Life Now*, Tarrawarra Museum of Art (2007), *The Informal Garden*, Gertrude Contemporary (2005) and *Uncanny: The Unnaturally Strange*, Artspace, Auckland (2005). Stillman has been awarded Australia Council for the Arts studio residencies in New York (2009) and Milan (2006) and has been commissioned to create large-scale artworks for Hermés Australia (2011) and Westpac Banking Group (2010). Stillman is represented by Utopia Art Sydney.



Kylie Stillman, *Local Branch*, 2016, hand-cut paperback books, timber, saw horses, 161 x 245 x 123 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney. Commissioned and created with assistance by Hawkesbury Regional Gallery

Kylie Stillman, *Masking the Seam*, 2017, hand-cut paperback books, timber, saw horse, ladder, 182 x 144 x 80 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney.

## LIST OF WORKS

Kylie Stillman, *Morning Pages*, 2017, Installation of ten embroidered books on timber bases and music stands. Cotton thread, paperback book, 15 x 12 x 19 cm each. Image courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney. Supported by the City of Melbourne Arts Grants Program

*Supernature*

*The Death of the family*

*The Principles of Art*

*Know your own I.Q.*

*Read Well and Remember*

*Arma.geddon*

*Use and Abuse of Statistics*

*Kinship*

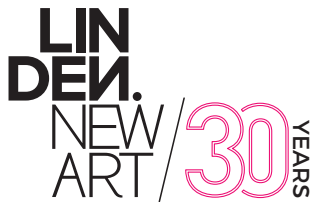
*Language in the Modern World*

*Tropic of Cancer*



Kylie Stillman, *Morning Pages*, 2017, installation view, installation of ten embroidered books on timber bases and music stands. Cotton thread, paperback book, 15 x 12 x 19 cm each. Image courtesy of the artist and Utopia Art Sydney. Supported by the City of Melbourne Arts Grants Program. Photograph: David Marks Photography.

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