

teetering,
tittering,
tits Up.

Tiana Jefferies
Metro Arts

18 March - 15 April

teetering, tittering, tits up is an exhibition of sculptural works that imagine structures for queer and multispecies intimacies. Playful reconfigurations of outdoor equipment such as tarpaulin, tentpoles, and trampolines offer refuge in their corrugations and curvatures.

Developed in response to wetland bird hides and other cruising sites, the exhibition takes an irreverent, ironic, and absurd approach to ecological relationships.

Teetering, tittering, tits up: three adjectives that sound similar and suggest complementary conditions but are imperfectly matched. Only the final, low brow (and most calamitous) phrase explicitly uses the vulgar term for breasts, though they all sound sort of suggestive, containing the hard t up top. A tit is also the name given to a family of small birds found in the Northern hemisphere. Though the exhibition takes objects and thematic cues from many disparate sources, one is a knowledge of a regional bird sanctuary that doubles as a cruising site. It is a site that inadvertently raises a set of ironic slippages, of surveillance, exhibitionism, and the voyeuristic tendencies in the “wild”, so to speak.

Jefferies is invigorated by these slippages—the ironic, multifaceted life and libidinal energies conducted by spaces and the ambiguous structures that occupy them. The amorphous materials found in *teetering, tittering, tits up* are often of uncertain origin. An old tarp, a wind-ravaged umbrella, a dissembled tent, or weathered backyard dining canopy? These structures are composed primarily of the discarded detritus of what one might call BCF (Boating, Camping, Fishing) culture.¹ Often sourced from hard rubbish, it’s the stuff of suburban weekends away. They connote the activities, the lifestyle, the subjectivity that the repressed, nature-driven subject desires to embody—a proximity the purchase promises. Despite macho bravado, these rumpled plastic expanses offer a prophylactic barrier between the outside world and the “outdoorsy” subject, who often takes pleasure in the purchase and display of these elaborate accoutrements. Perforated and debased, they find new forms and aesthetic sensibilities in the gallery as assisted ready-mades with campy, though subtle, additions and twists. There’s a suggested sexuality to them, a glimmer of degeneracy in their withering condition and possibilities of their past and future: temporary shelters to hide, or to play with the pretence of hiding, slits to peep in or out of, or glory holes to glory through.

Though these objects may superficially recall upcycle culture, Jefferies is not interested in launching a critique of waste practices or posing a didactic message about climate change. There is a refreshing aesthetic ambiguity in Jefferies series that does not spoon-feed, exploring the nexus of nature, surveillance, and the breakdown of the binaries of nature/

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Essay by
Tara Heffernan

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¹BCF is a chain store that specialises in boating, camping, and fishing equipment. It is owned by Super Retail Group, a transnational company that owns other retail chain stores such as Rebel Sports, Super Cheap Auto and Macpac. “Super Retail Group: About Us”, *Super Retail Group*, n.d. URL: <https://www.superretailgroup.com.au>.

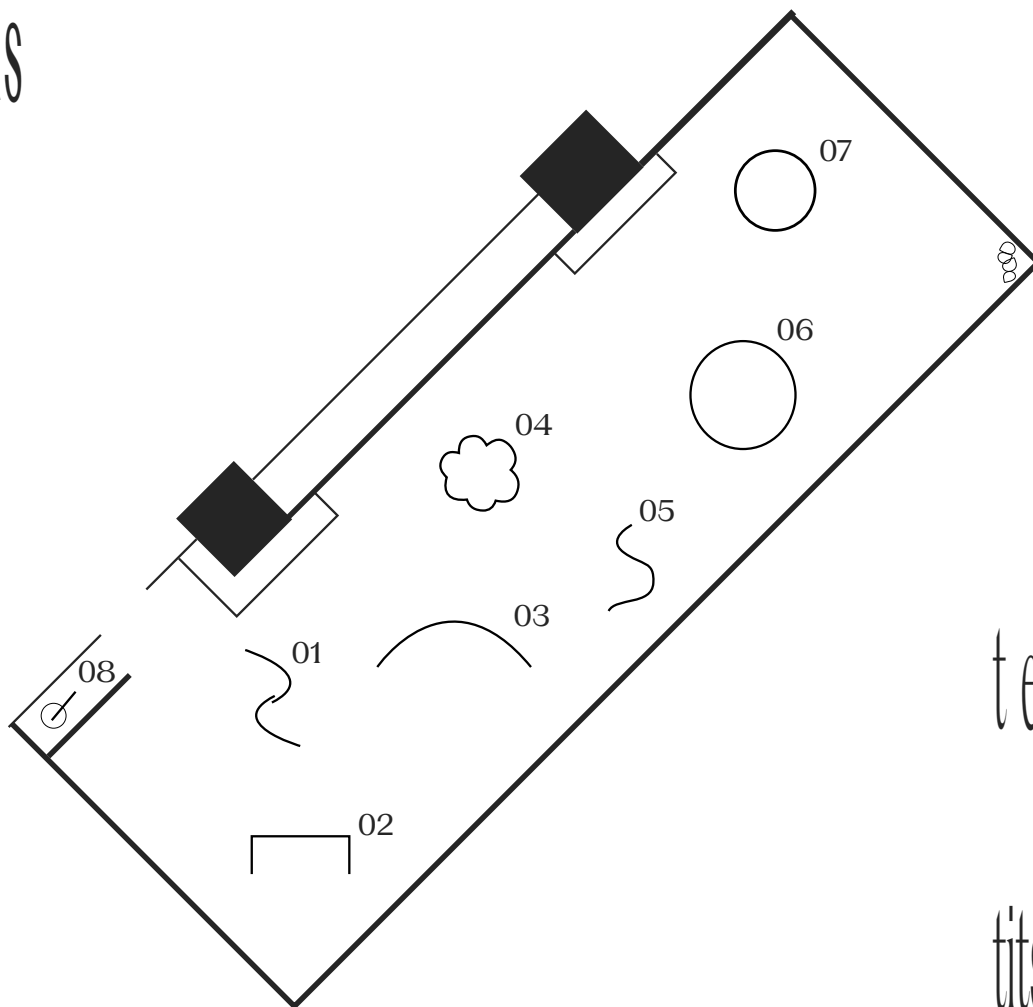
culture, inside/outside and public/private without collapsing these into a veneration of ambiguity itself, as is the fate of so much contemporary art. These punctured synthetic skins, moth-eaten or wild-weather casualties, become delicate, derelict ballet skirts performing a kind of pirouette on disjointed legs in the gallery. Or corrugated shells posed like flimsy Richard Serra's, or barely functional public bathroom privacy partitions. Responding involuntarily to air currents and motion around them, they almost parody kinetic art through dysfunction. Shaped by locality and specificity of place, though populated with imported objects, ideas and fantasies, the works channel the site specificity and relationality of minimal art, joyfully engaging with what Michael Fried fearfully called theatricality. (Compellingly, he referred to it as a "f*ggot sensibility" in personal correspondence.)²

The temporary host of Jefferies' works, Metro Arts, is a community-focused gallery housed alongside a perfectly groomed and sterile series of boutiques, restaurants, and cafes. This commercial complex services West Village, a recently built set of luxury apartment blocks. Green-washed promises artificially light the shadow it casts over the culturally diverse, bohemian hub of West End. Recycled plastic trolleys populate its grocery store. Nature is contained in aesthetically pleasing vessels: scattered pots filled with perfect greenery and well-groomed tufts of foliage poking from inbuilt recesses. It is another vision of nature contained in soothing symmetry of culture, though an elevated, Ballardian culture met with corporate minimalist utopian dreaming. Jefferies' campy readymades disrupt this unyielding geometry. To quote the late Phyllida Barlow speaking on her artistic interests, these objects seem "badly behaved", taking pleasure in occupying unlikely spaces.³

² Fried wrote this in a letter to Philip Leader, the then editor of *Artforum* in 1967. He was writing about the topic of his essay, now a canonical text, "Art and Objecthood". Christa Noel Robbins, "The Sensibility of Michael Fried", *Criticism* 60, no. 4 (2018), 429; Amelia Jones has extended on Robbins' research concerning Fried's letter, and the relationship between queerness and minimalism. She explains of teaching the text to undergrads: 'what's so threatening to him [Fried] is the opening of the work to the spectator. That's why I also have students read the minimalist artist Robert Morris's earlier series of articles titled "Notes on Sculpture"; also published in *Artforum*, starting in 1966.' Amelia Jones, "Interview with Amelia Jones", Paris Lettau and Amelia Winata, *Discipline*, 23 March 2018. URL: http://www.discipline.net.au/wp-content/uploads/Interview_with_Amelia_Jones_by_Paris_Lettau_Amelia-Winata.pdf

³ Phyllida Barlow, "Art in the 21st Century: Phyllida Barlow In 'London' (Season 10)", *Art21*, 18 September 2020. URL: <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s10/phyllida-barlow-in-london-segment/>.

List of Works



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01_ *deux me*, 2023

found polycarbonate sheeting, bolts

02_ *L as in walking*, 2023

found garden structure, plaster, pool noodle

03_ *soaked*, 2023.

tent materials, solar pool blanket

04_ *it gets wetter*, 2023

flower pool, mechanical toy, plaster

05_ *getting a grip*, 2023

hose, round bar

06_ *cool-de-sac*, 2023

umbrella, tent, round bar

07_ *high tide*, 2023

trampoline, tarpaulin, found poles

08_ *fishing (for Jack and Ennis)*, 2023.

fishing rod, textile scraps, plaster

The artist acknowledges that Metro Arts resides on Turrbal and Jagera country and that sovereignty was never ceded. I pay my respects to their Elders, lores, customs and creation spirits. I recognise that these lands have always been places of creativity, learning and wisdom.