

Sea Lion Sisters / Bronwyn Kidd



Sea Lion Sisters/ Bronwyn Kidd in collaboration with Carol Brown

Sea Lion Sisters: Joy in Women's Vital Embrace

Sea Lion Sisters delves into essential womanhood to bring to the surface those profound strands of connection and interdependence between women, particularly sisters, as expressed through corporeal delight. Drawing on Luce Irigaray's insight that "woman is neither open nor closed. She is indefinite, in-finite, form is never complete in her", this project makes visible the dynamic, ever-evolving nature of female relationships.

Inspired by Irigaray's essay on mother-daughter relationships, which she describes as "essential in the history of women's culture", *Sea Lion Sisters* illuminates the profound bonds and shared experiences that shape women's lives. In threaded journeys sisters trustingly share mysteries, strength, and vulnerability to navigate the complexities of life together.

This collaboration with choreographer Carol Brown combines image-making, performance, and costume design, evolving from our previous works *Breath* (2021) and *Through Her Breath* (2022). After three years of intermittent collaboration, we debuted *Breath Trio*, a performance at Montsalvat Arts Centre, which responded to the exhibition, *Through Her Breath*, and the architecture of the venue to forge new dimensions that encompass women's ancestral breath and legacy. This project could not have expanded so far without collaboration.

Carol shared her paper "*Falling Together - Pleasure and Fear in Interdisciplinary Arts Practice*," discussing how collaborators find their paths in shared creative spaces through a process of 'attunement and letting dwell realised in the transitional spaces of interpractice environments.' For *Sea Lion Sisters*, the focus is on women, performance, and costume, blending analogue and digital photography techniques. The studio's rotating floor exerts a dynamism, realising sensations of breath and falling.

As Carol and I discussed the choreography and ideas of feminism, strength, and connection, we recruited dancer Karlia Cook, whose 'grounded' nature and qualification in Masters of Dance from VCA Carol valued, and her younger sister Danni, a recent Dance graduate of WAPA. The bond between these sisters, through which they embrace their Māori heritage, deeply enriches and personalises the project. This connection resonates deeply with me, especially after the recent loss of my mother, an experience that highlighted the importance of sisterhood.

In our dance and photographic collaboration, it was important to allow space for Carol's choreographic process. A turntable studio normally used in photographing cars, provided a unique setting for exploring themes of movement, falling, and being caught. Carol's ideas about the New Zealand Sea Lion, with its twisting and protective movements, inspired the choreography. This, combined with Nina Simone's "*Sealine Woman*", brought a gritty theatricality to our work, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of women.

As Irigaray suggests, "women's intersubjectivity is a source of strength and creativity," and this project embraces and honours the female spirit, lending power to the continuous unfolding of my creative practice. In a space that is symbolically and materially ours, we enable the articulation of our desires, languages, and representations, embodying Irigaray's vision that "women need a place that is theirs" to fully express and explore their identities.

Sea Lion Sisters captures movement, connections, and the intimate pleasures of being in sync with another, inspired by the fluid, protective movements of sea lion mothers amid the waving, rippling kelp. Together, we sought to epitomise the deep, kinaesthetic empathy and experiences shared between the dancers. Connected by Skinsphere ('inside the body') and Kinesphere ('around the body'), their paths cross and recross in a cyclic continuum of strength, power, warmth, and delight, flowing together and intimate even through distance.

Virginia Dowzer's costume design plays a crucial role. The envisioned darker puce undergarment represents inner strength, paired with a pinafore, beribboned to declare outer joy. The costumes, with their intertwining ribbons, represent the energetic fusion of duality. Dowzer's creation as realised by costumier Fiona Holley played with covering and revealing tuned skin and athletic musculature to emphasise the energetic push and pull of the choreography. The garments reclaim femininity and beauty as inherent strengths, the sister's hair and makeup asserts an earnest look, reminiscent of the suffragettes.

I fantasised about a translucent background and veils of colour, and I also wanted to return meaning to 'mother-of-pearl,' where 'mother' derives from the belief that the mother nacre shields and bears the pearl like a mother bearing her child; the nacre (mother of pearl) is actually the protective mechanism for oysters against intrusions and aberrations. The lined shells are the belly ("mother") in which pearls are produced. As a child I treasured a tiny love-heart with a marquisette bird on it given to me by an auntie. Lost, it was found again, glistening in a shaft of sunlight. I love iridescence. I love bright light.

How could I create this enticing feminine space, this home, or womb?

The studio space, a vast infinity cove, we transformed into a luminous environment inspired by nurturing mother-of-pearl. Amanda May's set design, evoking the nacre of a shell's interior, provided a perfect arena and backdrop for the dancers. Drapes of paper, tracing paper, rolls of photographic paper and the milky Mylar recycled from *Through Her Breath*, revived the historical use, by Horst P. Horst and others of the modernist era, of simple materials in photography. *Sea Lion Sisters* visibly blends past and present techniques.

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The photographic process merges digital and analogue methods. Digital files were retouched and converted to colour negatives for darkroom printing, allowing for hands-on experimentation and a return to the tactile, rudimentary qualities of traditional photography. This constrained and often unpredictable methodology excited risk-taking and heightened creative adaptation.

I worked with printer Sandra Barnard (*Sandy Prints, Sydney*) to embrace the unique qualities of analogue printing. The process, involving dodging, pre-flashing, burning, diffusing, and air-drying, offered freedom and resulted in prints rich in muted, vintage colouration and tactility. These prints, though originating from digital captures, evoke a pre-digital age, reminiscent of Polaroid Type 669 with its muted hues of green or magenta and colour bleeds. Professional Polaroids were primarily used to test light and composition before shooting on film, and then usually discarded. Some, like me, coveted their tactile imperfection, each one a unique image. The final prints are rich in their muted, vintage colouration, and tactility, and redolent of the magic of chance and the possible. In conversation with Sandy said that our choice of analogue meant “not giving in to modern colour,” which resonated with me.

Sea Lion Sisters reconnects me with the essence of photography and the joy of creating with my hands, celebrating the interdependence and strength of women. Through this project, I return to the ecstatic, often agonising adventure of photography.

Bronwyn Kidd

2024

Sea Lion Sisters / 2024

With gratitude:

Carol Brown - Choreography

Karlia Cook - Dance

Danni Cook - Dance

Virginia Dowzer - Costume Design and Direction

Fiona Holley - Costumier

Amanda May - Set Design and Construction

Bernadette Fisers - Hair and Makeup

Bridget Mac - Digital Operator

Dianna Spriggs - Photo Assistant

Rob Hay - Photo Assistant

Studio Revolution

Visual Thing - Retouching

Sandy Prints

Arten Framing

bronwynkidd.com

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Sea Lion Sisters_ Untitled No.1

2024

C-type hand print, Fuji Crystal Archival lustre

60cm x 79cm

edition of 6 + 2 AP

\$5500 / \$4700 unframed

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Bronwyn@BronwynKidd.com

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Sea Lion Sisters_ Untitled No.1

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Sea Lion Sisters_ Untitled No.2

2024

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Sea Lion Sisters_ Untitled No.3

2024

C-type hand print, Fuji Crystal Archival lustre

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Sea Lion Sisters_ Untitled No.4

2024

C-type hand print, Fuji Crystal Archival lustre

60cm x 79cm

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Sea Lion Sisters_ Untitled No.5

2024

C-type hand print, Fuji Crystal Archival lustre

60cm x 79cm

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Sea Lion Sisters_ Untitled No.6

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Sea Lion Sisters_ Untitled No.7

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Sea Lion Sisters_ Untitled No.9

2024

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Sea Lion Sisters_ Untitled No.10

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Sea Lion Sisters_ Untitled No.11

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Sea Lion Sisters_ Untitled No.12

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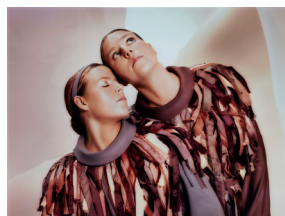
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Sea Lion Sisters_Untitled No.8
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Sea Lion Sisters_Untitled No.12
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