

Measured #2



Sue Lorraine

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Sue Lorraine has an almost tender predilection for the modest objects that inhabit our lives, especially things that have become hostages to time – things that have been forgotten, or damaged or that have lived beyond their usefulness. Since 2019 she has used her collections of objects to meditate on the futility of measuring the lived experience of time, which can appear endlessly expansive at one moment, terrifyingly compressed at another. She manipulates and augments her collection of vintage measuring tools – rulers, T-squares, protractors, calipers, spirit levels – endowing them with animal attributes and waiting to see what happens next. The zoomorphic qualities of her objects set our aspiration for precision and order against the unpredictable, the chaotic, the anarchic – a reminder that however much we try to order time, it eventually runs away with us.

In the years between her exhibition *Measured* in 2019 and *Measured #2*, the pandemic has compelled the entire world to think about how grief and frustration and loss work upon our sense of time. Grief has always carried with it a kind of contradiction: it simultaneously draws us into the great flow of human experience in ways that are both searing and strangely exalting. At the same time, we must endure it alongside the pricks delivered by the constant mundane intrusions of our everyday lives. This paradoxical tension between the universal and the subjective experience of pandemic time lies at the heart of *Measured #2*.

Some of the work from *Measured* returns in *Measured #2*. In the intervening three years, the pandemic and successive lockdowns have lent a retrospective reading to the earlier works in the exhibition. For example, in *Last Days of the Empire*, Sue presents a fragile necklace of abject, perished rubber bands tenuously linked with discreet gold jump rings which she shows alongside a group of rubber band balls cast in bronze. In 2019 I wrote about the different registers of working time embedded in these objects. The necklace's fleeting and contingent qualities appeared to have been brought together in the temporal space of a human thought. By contrast, the rubber band balls seemed ponderous and weighty, as though the unremarked, unconsidered and slowly cumulative time taken to make them had ossified and expressed itself in material form. In 2019 I read the necklace and the rubber band balls as material traces of the expansive time of reverie. In 2022 they might just as readily be read as analogies for the burden of the unrelieved and undifferentiated time of lockdown.

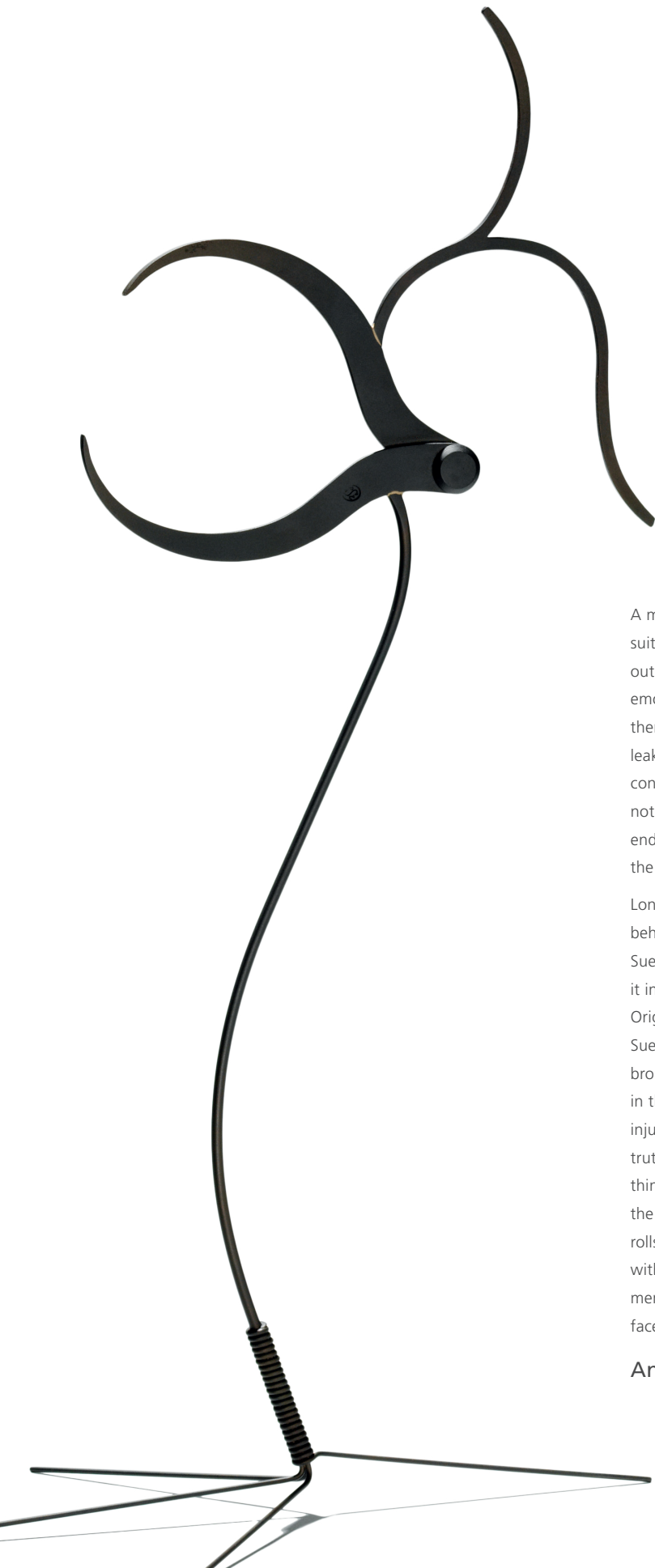
In *Mother*, another work from 2019, Sue constructs a large spider out of wooden folding carpenter's rulers. The titular reference is to Louise Bourgeois' *Maman*, the series of enormous bronze spider sculptures that grace the entrances of major museums from London to Doha. Bourgeois spoke of the work as a tribute to her

mother, who like the spider was a weaver. At once looming and majestic, she saw *Maman* as a sort of archetypal guardian. Sue's spider has none of *Maman*'s intimidating attributes: its scale and the way in which it wears its previous life as a measuring tool ensure it veers towards the domestic and the endearingly comic. Nevertheless, when Sue originally made *Mother*, she was interested in the way in which it seemed to tap into an almost universal fear of spiders (a fear she doesn't share) and she saw it as a work about the irrationalities of anxiety. In 2022, it is the shadow *Mother* casts that compels me most, a literal foreshadowing of the global anxiety that has gripped the world in the face of the pandemic.

Shadows are intrinsic to other works in *Measured #2*. Sue mines their metaphorical resonance to suggest the presence of something unseen or yet to come, treading a deft path between the playful and the unsettling. As part of the *Unstable Series*, she endows a flock of calipers and compasses with jaunty wire legs terminating in stork-like feet so that what was the business-end in their previous lives as a measuring tool become open, gaping bird bills. Deprived of their original functions they become a little unhinged, material metaphors for the irrational so that, as light plays across them, their shadows leap and bob in an eerie danse macabre.

The natural companion piece to these works is the series *Soft Boiled Screams*. Small bronze ovoid shapes have been distorted into faces with gaping mouths that are a little like the nightmare faces we see in the shadows as children. They are also the distant cousins of Munch's cliché of existential angst, domesticated by their scale and the fact that Sue has made them spill out of carved mulga wood egg cups, literally serving up angst for breakfast.

Both groups of work are invested with a kind of gallows humour in which wit and anxiety play off against each other, their dream-like quality testimony to the irrationality that has characterised aspects of public discourse in recent times. A counterpoint to this is offered in *Daily Tally*, in which Sue loads a cluster of compasses with pencils that have been cut and reassembled to look like the jittery lines of a graph. Neither pencils nor compasses can fulfil their original function and viewed together they become a kind of meaningless visual clamour that recalls the anxious attempts we have all made to assimilate the endless pandemic-related numbers and statistics that have been such a feature of our daily news.



A more elegiac tone is struck in *Semaphore*, when Sue takes up her needle in a suite of embroidered terms that use the word “hold”: hold up, keep hold, hold out, hold still, on hold ... In that small word is embedded all the complexity of our emotional experience of the pandemic. Longing to hold others but separated from them, we have all been held in the stilled time of lockdown. The spidery words leak long threads that trail into the surrounding space, carrying with them all the connotations of inconclusiveness, of unravelling. But they also suggest resilience: not just in the sense that all those “hold” expressions suggest, but in their open-endedness, the way they invade the space of the viewer, inviting them to take up the threads of life again in our irretrievably altered world.

Long before the pandemic, Sue’s nonagenarian stepmother Margaret died, leaving behind all the predictable material clutter of a long life. Amongst her possessions Sue salvaged a small plastic hand, forefinger upraised to show a string tied around it in a bow, the back of the hand emblazoned with the phrase “Don’t Forget”. Originally designed to carry small notes and lists, the hand became a fixture on Sue’s workbench until the events of the last few years compelled her to cast it in bronze and turn it into a tongue-in-cheek memorial for the times. It is anchored in the mundane world of domestic tasks yet wryly echoes the great post-War injunction to “Never Forget”. These two seemingly irreconcilable positions speak a truth about the experiences of the last few years. We have lived the big universal things – grief, fear and loss – alongside the mundane inevitabilities of our lives – the need to compose shopping lists, decide what to eat for dinner, hunt for elusive rolls of toilet paper, educate our children. No doubt in time the world will fill with monuments to the pandemic, but with ironic pragmatism, Sue has crafted a memorial for this particular moment, where individual memory is still fresh but our faces are turned once again to the world outside.

Anne Brennan, Canberra, 2022



List of works

Mother, 2019, carpenter's rulers, 230mm (h)

Longer Than Expected #1 and #2, 2019, Kent Triscale Rulers no. 402, 60 x 305 x 140mm and 120 x 505 x 160mm

Last Days of the Empire, 2019, perished rubber bands, oxidised 22ct yellow gold links, 280mm (d)

Rubber Band Balls, 2019, oxidised cast bronze, large 64mm (d), small 50mm (d)

Starter Ball pendants, 2019-2022, oxidised cast bronze, heat shrink, rubberbands, waxed thread, all 17mm (d), length variable

Legs (set of 7), 2019, table leg templates (estate of G Moretti), plywood, water colour paint, longest piece 750mm

Protractor, 2022, protractor, plywood, water colour paint, shellac, 350 x 350 x 27mm

Making a Dash For It, 2022, wooden T-square, 580 x 250 x 15mm

CR15 and CR15 (election results), 2021, inside-outside calipers, heat coloured mild steel, 130 x 70 x 25mm and 125 x 70 x 10mm

Unstable Series - Clutch, Flourish, Pivot and Arc, 2022, calipers and dividers, heat coloured mild steel and one ping pong ball, tallest 475 x 255 x 170mm

Twitter and Tweet, 2022, spirit levels, heat coloured mild steel, 100 x 230 x 95mm and 155 x 250 x 140mm

Semaphore Series - hold off, up hold, hold up, with hold, hold still, hold all, on hold, keep hold, hold in, hold on, hold back, hold out, hold down, 2022, cotton handkerchief, thread, 405 x 405mm

Soft Boiled Screams 1, 2, 3 and 4, 2022, oxidised cast bronze, mulga wood egg cups, tallest 115 x 63 x 60mm

Daily Tally Series, 2022, brass compasses, heart coloured mild steel, Staedtler HB pencils, tallest brass compass 355mm

Drawn Out Series - pencil pendants, 2022, oxidized cast bronze pencil, mild steel, 9ct pink gold or 22ct yellow gold leads, enamel paint, waxed thread, variable lengths

Don't Forget (set of 3), 2022, oxidised cast bronze, oil paint, 124 x 67 x 56mm each

cover: *Soft Boiled Screams 1, 2, 3 and 4*, 2022, oxidised cast bronze, mulga wood egg cups, tallest 115 x 63 x 60mm

above: *Mother*, 2019, carpenter's rulers, 230mm (h)

My creative process is rather fluid, where I start and where I end up is not always an obvious trajectory; it's more a journey, straying and meandering along a curious and winding path. Sometimes I start with an idea, sometimes I start with an object or artifact...sometimes the starting point is just a doodle, other times it's a fully formed vision of the piece.

The bottom line is that I just love making things...objects, artifacts and jewellery. I enjoy the stories they hold and the stories they can tell, the stories they evoke and the stories they conceal.

The work in this show is a continuum and an extension of the ideas and concepts I have been exploring for the past five years.

After the death of my father, I began to look at objects more intimately, specifically the modest things that he owned and held. From there my work took on a more personal and familiar approach and embraced the use of objects, found, bequeathed, unearthed and gifted.

One of the things that was particular about my father was his relationship to time, his anxiety about time, being on time, having enough time, marking time.

I began to ponder the way we measure time, the past, present and future and how we also measure more intangible feelings and emotions. This resulted in the creation of a body of work titled *Measured*, which was shown at Funaki, Melbourne in 2019.

In *Measured #2* I build on this earlier collection and reflect on the last three years of pandemic life and our ever-changing relationship to the measurable and unmeasurable aspects of time, distance and safety.

I have chosen to use a variety of materials and found objects to create a cacophony of works that act as a witness to the new not so normal world we now find ourselves in, to create a library of artifacts for the archives of the future.

A solo show is only possible with the help of many others, I would like to thank Anne Brennan for the thoughtful essay, Grant Hancock for the photography and Rachel Harris for the graphic design of this catalogue.

Thank you, Gray Street Workshop partners, Catherine Truman, Jess Dare and Lisa Furno for your support and advice in the lead up to the exhibition, the Thursday mentoring sessions kept me focused and on track.

However none of this would be possible without the love and support of my life partner Catherine, to whom I extend my heartfelt thanks, we are an awesome team.

Sue Lorraine, August 2022



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