

Aches & Pains

Nicky May Bolland

Aches & Pains / Selected works 2021 - 2025

First exhibited Birnam Arts 2025

Through sculpture, multimedia and printmaking, Aches & Pains investigates how the human body acts as a vessel through which to navigate and confront patriarchy. The exhibition poses questions about the physical and psychological contortions involved in responding to and resisting societal forces in our daily lives.

The artwork examines how bodies and relationships become sites where the intimate and political intersect. Observant of intergenerational experience, Nicky considers how our individual and collective perspectives have the power to interrogate and disrupt established patterns within society. This body of work was informed by a research and development residency at Birnam Arts undertaken in the summer of 2024.



All image credits: Marion McKinnon

Bio



Nicky May Bolland is an inter-disciplinary artist based in Perthshire, with an established visual arts practice combining sculptural and print-making techniques in novel ways. Alongside this practice Nicky works in community arts, research and activism. All of her work is concerned with relationships and entanglements: inter-species, inter-generational, inter-cultural. She is curious about how we relate to our worlds and each other. How can our interactions disrupt the stories we tell? What can different ways of being tell us about the intimate and political ecosystems we inhabit?

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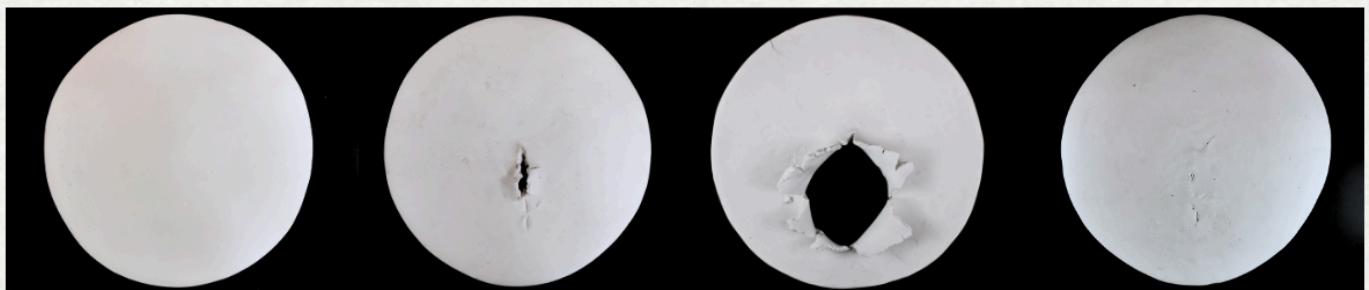
Works

Summer
snow,winter
riddles 1 & 2.
2022.
Stoneware,
photo-
lithography.



These works are inspired by Scotland's snow patches - remnants of winter snow that linger long into summer on remote mountain-sides and represent a harbinger of climate change. These natural sculptural forms which are relatively blank above, but luminescent in colour and texture below and have historically been layered with decades of snow fall. Now they rarely live beyond a season. In response to this I began unearthing my own weathered memories of snow, motherhood and loss. This work was commissioned for a group exhibition with Birch Tree Gallery, Edinburgh inspired by the poem Snow by Antanas Škema.

Hiatus. 2023. Porcelain.



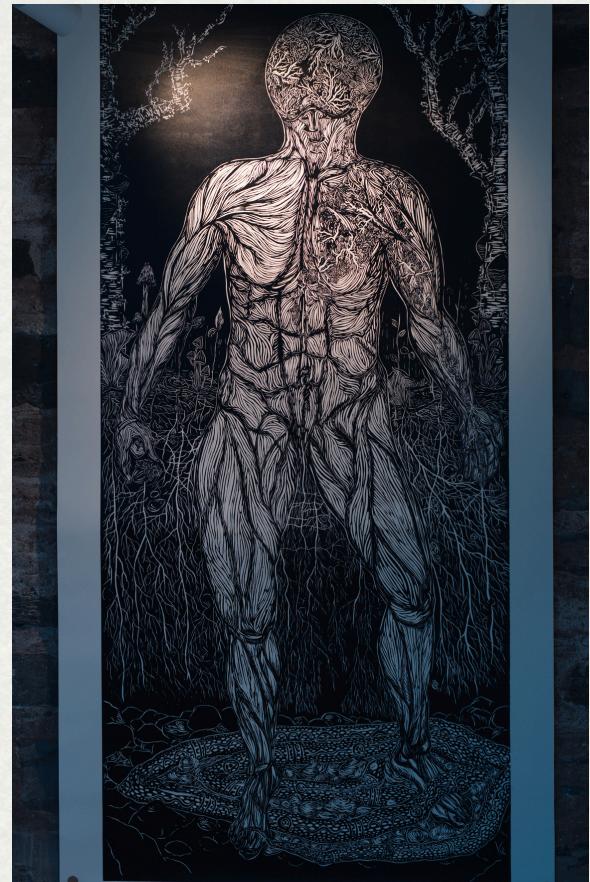
The word 'Hiatus' comes from the latin *Hiare* - to yawn, to gape. This piece explores the tensions between visibility and concealment. It plays with the contemporary and original uses of 'hiatus' to interrogate what happens when that which is ordinarily hidden is made visible - a temporary, exposing disruption to the status quo. What are the possibilities in this space? What are the risks? And what is left when the hiatus ends - when the opening is concealed once again? What scars are left?



Muscles for the Apocalypse. 2024.

Lino print on paper

In making this piece I was curious about what other 'muscles' we might need to strengthen for the coming times. I wanted to disrupt and distort the cultural and physical anatomy which is so deeply ingrained in our ways of thinking about and interacting with the world - ingrained in the ways we try to think our way out of the crises we find ourselves in. Whilst making this piece, I was navigating chronic pain in the left side of my body. I became fascinated with musculature and curious about how I could re-story my relationship with the glitches that have been part of my story throughout my adult life. Could I come at my body, at my environment, from a place of connection and curiosity?



Mixed Signals/Points of contact. 2024.

Digital collage/light box



The digital collage uses an image taken by Nicky whilst doing journalism in the West Bank, Palestine. The photo captures an interaction between Palestinian farmers and workers involved in the construction of the separation wall through their land. During the current genocide, Nicky has been revisiting images and materials from her time there and thinking about the role of art in the struggle for Palestinian Liberation - see the library for examples of literature doing this work. In both our own local context and that which is geographically distanced how will we show up today? With our hands, with our bodies. with our hearts?

I could marry a hurt like that.

2025. Sculpture/installation.

Titled after a line from the Sylvia Plath poem 'Poppies in July', this piece explores the ways in which 'poor mental health' is romanticised and sexualised - underpinned by patriarchal notions of "the right kind of vulnerability". This piece speaks with and back to a number of cultural works and motifs from Sylvia Plath, to Lewis Carroll to singer-songwriters such as Bob Dylan and Ryan Adams. The work plays with ideas of fragility, agency and unpredictability and invites you to participate. Visitors are encouraged to push and pull the contraption - using the handle - playing with how the butterflies rise, fall and flutter in the jars.



A Long Line of Anxious Women.

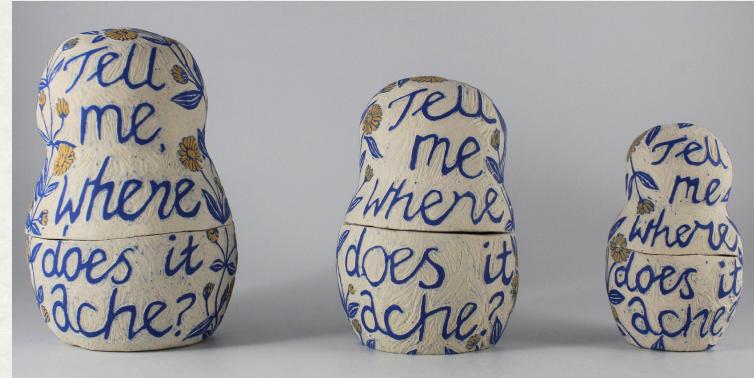
2024. Sculpture/installation.

'A long line of anxious women' returns to my exploration of matriarchal relationships to explore how women's bodies are passed down the generations - replicated, distorted, transformed. In a family where anxiety manifests in every 'body' in ways which are different but similar, chronic but (mostly) 'managed', I felt drawn to explore themes of fragility and robustness, wholeness and leakiness. How might we disrupt some of our more constricting inheritances? How do our physical inheritances disrupt the impact of patriarchal forces? Using natural materials the piece asks: where are we most fragile? what is ours and what has been handed down? what do our differences say?



Tell me, where does it ache? 2021. White stoneware, coloured underglaze.

Civil Rights Activist Ruby Sales speaks of the power in asking 'where does it hurt?'. Made in 2021 following the birth of my second child during the pandemic, this piece seeks to celebrate the power of witnessing. Seeing each other with compassion and curiosity feels fundamental to surviving these times and to creating a more just society.



Danced myself right out the womb. 3d Collage 2022

This work continues my interest in inheritance, generational relationships, experience and joy. It captures four generations of dancers in my family - my great-aunt, my mother, myself and my daughter - as well as archive images from the renowned Margaret Morris School of Dance where my great aunt danced.

I wanted to create something exuberant and playful, reflecting the multiplicity of memories and possible moves we might make. Family memory and artifacts which centre the expressive joy of women can seem momentary and retrospective. Fleeting or lingering, I wanted to bring these experiences more fully into the orbit of our (her)stories.



Rogue-ing the barley Moving image, installation 2025



This project started as a ritual - a way to ground myself and learn from my daughter whilst navigating my own 'diagnosis' of neuro-divergence. I wanted to "exfoliate the shame" (as Hannah Gadsby puts it), and build up new neural pathways motivated by play and presence. In late spring, we danced and marked a path through the field behind my house (with care). Through summer we walked that path as regularly as we could. My daughter led me through her senses, taught me how to feel and know the field. I recited the poem over and over. By august, everything had changed. And we were all still the same - still at the beginning.

The poem is by poet Hannah Emerson from her book 'The Kissing Kissing' (Milkweed Editions, 2022). Hannah is a non-speaking autistic poet from New York.
you can view the film in draft form here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/12jhsvugYRvE2mEp8Vw5hCqrCyrZ0p-4/view?usp=sharing>

If the point is joy. 2023. Moving image/spoken word.

This film explores the tensions inherent in the moment we inhabit, where both hope and anxiety colour everything, from wild walks to parenting. As we travel through our intertwined lives, we hold both these feelings simultaneously. The words for this piece were initially written as a way of processing the challenges of navigating the world with my disabled daughter. The footage has been gathered over the years, watching and delighting in her interactions - intuitive, joyful, sensory - with the world around her.



Full length film:

[CLICK HERE](#)

For excerpt:

[CLICK HERE](#)

