

Neon Parc

Rob McLeish *SNARES*



Rob McLeish
SNARE (1), 2025
 Stainless steel, oil, bronze, patina
 208 x 50 x 13.5 cm



Rob McLeish
SNARE (2), 2025
 Stainless steel, oil, bronze, patina
 211 x 50 x 13.5 cm



Rob McLeish
SNARE (3), 2025
 Stainless steel, oil, bronze, patina
 221 x 50 x 13.5 cm



Rob McLeish
SNARE (4), 2025
 Stainless steel, oil, bronze
 219 x 50 x 13.5 cm



Rob McLeish
SNARE (5), 2025
 Stainless steel, oil, bronze, patina
 263 x 50 x 13.5 cm



Rob McLeish
SNARE (6), 2025
 Stainless steel, oil, bronze, patina
 208 x 50 x 13.5 cm



Rob McLeish
SNARE (7), 2025
 Stainless steel, oil, bronze, patina
 206 x 50 x 13.5 cm



Rob McLeish
SNARE (8), 2025
 Stainless steel, oil, bronze, patina
 203 x 50 x 13.5 cm



Rob McLeish
SNARE (9), 2025
Stainless steel, oil, bronze, patina
237 x 50 x 13.5 cm



Rob McLeish
SNARE (10), 2025
Stainless steel, oil, bronze
239 x 50 x 13.5 cm



Every work of art is an uncommitted crime.
—Theodor W. Adorno, 1949.

Rob McLeish's *SNARES* is a compelling continuation of the artists' ongoing exploration of visual history, entropy, iconography and base urges. The new series features ten stainless steel panels sparingly festooned with vertically suspended chains, chaotically welded to heavy, detailed casts of wilting roses. In a gesture of austere industrial origami, each gleaming panel is layered with overlapping, cleanly folded planes, their outer sheet perforated with a hole (or holes) through which the chains neatly pass, perfectly centred. Providing a rustic tether between wall-mounted art and its mimetic space, and the real space of the gallery, a few extend to coil on the ground below.

Like the post-war minimalists, McLeish is clearly captivated by the seductive quality of industrial materials. This reverence is manifest in the unyielding preservation of flat surfaces and precise, laser-cut forms which bear no visible fixtures or connection points.¹ This almost autistic attraction to the aggressively inorganic geometry of the factory produced reveals a heightened libidinal dimension. Indeed, the amalgam of steel, chains, bronze casts of wilting, abundantly thorned roses (an obvious allusion to waning desire and death) inevitably reminds one of bondage and restraint.

In *SNARES* we might discern a Ballardian appreciation of the complexities of desire. Recently, bespeckled pop psychologists with the cadence of kindergarten teachers enjoyed a humble media frenzy by promoting a phenomenon dubbed "cute aggression", describing the urge to squeeze or bite something that elicits extreme positive emotions such as a puppy or soft toy.² The enthusiastic uptake of this theory by masses of mid-wit "fun facts" lovers not only evidences our culture's debilitating allergy to nuance, but also the sanitisation of our understanding of desire and the troubling proximity of extreme emotions.³ *SNARES* confronts this proximity, and unravels its precedents.

We should note that, despite its geometric refinement and austerity, minimalism has always been horny. After all, one of the movement's most celebrated artists, Robert Morris, appeared in an iconic promotional photograph donning a dog collar, Nazi helmet and shackles. Yet McLeish's *SNARES* push this association into new territory.

Encouraging affective engagement, *SNARES* is scaled to obliquely reflect human proportions.⁴ Among less ominous resemblances to architectural features like mirrors or windows, these narrow bodies of compactly folded steel, sporadically pattered with monochromatic fluidic markings (a patina of violence and spent energies) might evoke morbid or messy associations. For example, the surface of a mortuary gurney, the glimmering expanse of a guillotine, or perhaps the ubiquitous public urinal.

The holes cut in their lower protruding panels might recall a drain, an eye, or an orifice. This conflation is more significant than it might initially appear. The infamous shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) ends with a shot of blood and water merging as they swirl down the shower drain. This image then dissolves into a shot of the victim's pupil. Indeed, the eye and the drain are significant: they are both witnesses to the perverse crime. The viewer perceives the murder only via fragments. In this "vortex of violence" Hitchcock demonstrates the potency of art and fiction's indirect confrontation with the real. *SNARES* suspends this vortex. Fluidic impressions of oil paint, in spatters or downward oriented gestural strokes, threaten to slide off and disappear.

Aside from the detailed roses, McLeish offers little concession to figurative representation. The jarring exception is Caravaggio's self-portrait *Young Sick Bacchus* (c. 1593) which features only in sporadic fragments (a bicep here, a hand there). An aggressive slither of the painting, shaped like an errant mirror shard, displays the sick youth's hand and a glimmering mass of grapes. The roundness of the fleshy thumb and curled fingers compliment the bulbous orbs of the fruit. An aesthetic echo of this arrangement manifests in polyps of bronze blossoming from the rose stems, a result of the welding process.

Spontaneity and the organic flow of mediums are honoured elsewhere in *SNARES*, such as in the monochromatic dashes of oil paint that stain its surface. But McLeish plays upon these representational cues. Closer inspection reveals the farce to the trained eye. Some of these abstract, fluidic forms are the direct result of the artist's hand, but others are screen-printed.

In a nineteenth century study of the hand, French writer Casimir Stanislas Arpentigny argued that the thumb "represents only the will of reason". Without it, he claimed, "the most fertile and brilliant spirit would be a gift entirely without value ... defective and incomplete ... without moral force, logic, and decision [faculties of which the thumb in different degrees affords the indications]."⁵ Indeed, the thumb facilitates creative capacities; the translation of thought into art rather than an untempered expression of the id. Its appearance in *SNARES* via Caravaggio seems pertinent: a poetic sign of McLeish's multifaceted acknowledgement of the intense calamity of representational, symbolic and suggestive potentials within art.

A *snare* refers to a trap, but also to a drum traditionally made from animal skin and intestine. Art and music are a kind of trap. We are often dismissively told that museums contain "dead things" as though art should be alive. Though it has been sacrificed for the didactic and philistine veneration of "the real", art remains the realm in which we might make intolerable things tolerable, and perhaps preserve the immediate aftermath of climax, calamity, or bloom.

— Tara Heffernan, 2025

1 This satisfaction in balance and symmetry is comparable to that provided by magnetic levitation ornaments, or Isaac Newton's cradles—gimmicky contraptions that might suffice as the autistic male equivalent of a vase of flowers. Though the former is unyielding, demonstrative of the principles of motion and the power of unseen forces, while the latter is cyclical and ephemeral, both provide a sense of harmony and remind the observer—in their arrested, aestheticised state—of natural phenomena.

2 Yale psychologist Oriana Aragon coined this, but it has been shared by many.

3 In David Cronenberg's film *Videodrome* (1983) when Debbie Harry's character finds "Videodrome" in the protagonist's home VHS collection and asks what it contains, he replies: "Torture and murder". "Sounds great", she replies. "Ain't exactly sex", he retorts, "Says who?" The scene acknowledges the heightened hungers produced by sexual permissibility and the over-exposure to pornography. However, it is not simply a critique, but a darkly comedic (albeit heavy handed) comment on the inextricable connection between sex and violence.

4 This gesture echoes the famed minimalist Tony Smith's six-foot-tall black steel cube *Die* (1968) whose dimensions the artist likened to a coffin. "Six feet", Smith asserted, "has the suggestion of being cooked. Six foot box. Six foot under." Tony Smith quoted in Eleanor Green, "The Morphology of Tony Smith's Work", *Artforum* 12, no. 8 (April 1974), 55.

5 Casimir Stanislas Arpentigny, *The Science of the Hand, Or, The Art of Recognising the Tendencies of the Human Mind by the Observation of the Formations of the Hands* (Ward, Lock & Company, 1886), 138-139.

Rob McLeish
SNARES

Neon Parc Brunswick
31 Jan.–1 Mar. 2025

Rob McLeish (b. Melbourne, 1976) is known for his visceral works in a range of mediums, including sculpture, installation, drawing and printmaking. McLeish has described his working methodology as a form of distillation, where intuitive drives, compulsions and obsessions are filtered through a rigorous formalism. Exploring the overarching themes of desire and decay, McLeish has meticulously crafted a visual language that is simultaneously seductive and discordant. McLeish utilizes obscure cultural appropriation, art historical references and abstraction to create challenging works that prioritize psychological impression.

McLeish has exhibited extensively in institutions throughout Australia and the USA. Recent exhibitions include 'HEADLESS: The River Capital Commission', Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne (2021); 'Distortions', Neon Parc Brunswick, Melbourne (2021); 'From Will To Form', Tarrawarra Biennial, Tarrawarra Museum, Melbourne, (2018); 'Verus Rodin: Bodies Across Space And Time', Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (2017); and 'Thanks Criticism!' Kansas, New York, New York (2016).

McLeish's work is held in prominent public and private collections, including the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Art Gallery of Ballarat; Victoria; Monash University, Melbourne; and Artbank Australia.