

Eugenia Raskopoulos

embedded bones/embedded words

*I use my own body, a material element, as means of being spontaneous, volatile and confrontational.*¹

The art of Eugenia Raskopoulos inhabits the slippery space of language, identity, eroticism and power. Her attentions inhabit the impossibility of translation, the shiftiness of cultural identity, and the chimeric illusion of democracy, state control and surveillance, consistently informed by a wilful and wry defiance of gender-based protocols of bodily behaviour. An aura of mystery prevails.

I vividly recall conversations with Raskopoulos as she was gathering the heartbeats of Australian women artists. These 96 recordings, made over some years, coalesced into her vast and breathtaking work, 'and the beat goes on ...' 2022-24, in neon Murano glass, sound and bronze.² A sonic archive of presence, a visual library of living souls, the work is both an honouring of the female artists the artist admires, and an acute recognition of her own (and their) mortality. Other artists—including Christian Boltanski and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer—have incorporated heartbeats in an accumulative way in their practice, however Raskopoulos' approach differs markedly in its translation of the soundwave to fixed form—creating a pulsing yet held, cardiographic signature in neon—and in the work's own finitude. This aching, crimson-gridded wall hovers in my mind as I consider the exhibition 'embedded bones/embedded words'.

*The body is not presented as a stable image to be mastered, but as a living, contested surface—one that insists on complexity and refuses historical containment.*³

In her series 'embedded bones' 2024, three images incorporate X-rays of the human body, specifically the artist's spine and pelvis. In two images the ghost of the X-ray is superimposed on images of ancient Greek marble statues, the head and torso of Aphrodite, photographed by the artist in Athens. The third image is of a supine spine, superimposed with a fallen Athenian marble column. Both the X-rays and the statues are in themselves fragments formed and found, of bones and marble. These two modes of mismatched imaging (high energy electromagnetic radiation and monochromatic museum photography) try to make intimate sense of each other, their entwining is unsettling. The faux revelations askew the logic of viewing: we know the marble is solid, and the skeleton redundant, hence the juxtaposition remains tautological and fugitive, what is perhaps suggested is a performative bringing forth of ancient bodily knowledge.

Raskopoulos first incorporated images of archaic Greek statuary in her 1991 installation entitled 'in-between' at Performance Space, Sydney, and again in 1998 in 'with(out) voice' 1998, with its juxtaposition of monochromatic images of a fractured kouros (an idealised youth carved in marble) and the decisively closed mouth of a woman (the artist's grandmother). Photography captures the disappearance of light, while electromagnetic radiation exposes secrets as reverse shadows hidden within the body's visceral wetness. In Raskopoulos' hands photography exists as an eloquent construction of an idea, recalling Chilean-North American artist Alfredo Jaar quoting North American photographer and environmentalist Ansel Adams' dictum, "You don't take a photograph, you make it".

In a separate space is the intimately scaled 'embedded bones #4' 2024, which presents a visual conversation between the artist's own internal scaffolding and Greek architecture, a quiet yet potent referencing of the artist's history.

Born in Greece, Raskopoulos' parents were both extracted from their home country during the Greek Civil War (1944-49). They met in Czechoslovakia where the artist was born. The artist's parents spoke five languages between them; the first words she heard were Czech yet her mother tongue is Greek. Being part of the Resistance movement, her parents were under surveillance after they moved back to Greece the year Raskopoulos was born. Raskopoulos then migrated to Australia as an almost five-year-old with her family, and she describes her childhood as growing up 'in an environment between languages', she notes, 'Let's face it, English is not the only colour'.⁴

Accompanying 'embedded bones' is 'self-portrait #5' and '#6' 2026, comprised of two, blue neon sculptures written in Greek and English and articulating the words "longing to belong". The immutable presence of light, shadows and gases are ever present in Raskopoulos' work, the colourless, odourless, and inert noble gas within neon is recast by the artist as text in circular form as both light and shadow. Rife with the instability of language and the uneasiness of identity, she writes ... 'I am interested in the space where meaning slips away.' ... 'What matters is the space where the two wor(l)ds connect.' ... 'Words are not hard, but understanding can be.'⁵

*Writing in light is impermanent, and even though the result is a photograph, we know nothing lasts forever.*⁶

Raskopoulos draws much from the French second wave Feminists Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, her work is literally 'Written on the body'. It was after the artist's first trip to Japan in 1986 that words appeared in her practice with 'untitled' 1987, and later after a residency in Beijing when she incorporated a Czech communist ideological slogan translated into Mandarin into neon script, reassembling the ideographs to further diffuse meaning.

*To me as an artist, language is a material entity, neither a literary symbol nor a functional tool of communication but a material to be used against language itself, forcing language to lose its power of domination.*⁷

Nikos Papastergiadis has noted that within the state of translation, '...there is not just an impossible nostalgia for clarity and certainty, but a recognition that the replicant in translation continually morphs anew and never dies.'⁸

*We are looking at images of a ruptured body—one that is not easily stabilised, categorised, or made fluent within dominant visual or linguistic systems. This is a body that resists seamless translation. It stutters. It withholds. It fractures the very frameworks that attempt to define it. In doing so, it unsettles the long history of expectations imposed upon the female form: expectations of coherence, beauty, passivity, containment, and availability.*⁹

Located in the Mais Wright's lower gallery, 'embedded bones' is in dialogue with the artist's 'raskographs' 2023-24, in the upper gallery. The 'raskographs' incorporate the six words "to touch is not to destroy", each superimposed, in English and Greek, onto X-rays of the artist's body. The raw exposure of skeletal structure—devoid of distracting flesh, muscle and colour—upon deeper viewing reveals the inscriptions that exist like a hidden mantra: a secret embodied coda, a plea to humanity to shun the violation of others. With the addition of inscribed words, the artist's 'raskographs' cast entirely new imagery with chilling power. The artist is acutely aware that violence and violation assume many forms, she has previously incorporated the term 'soft violence' in her work, and discussions about her practice reference the term's encapsulation of insidious and invisible forms of control.¹⁰

The 'raskographs' are accompanied by two sculptural pairs in bronze entitled 'to touch is not to destroy' 2026. Grasping an egg (or a world in miniature) these four hands are cast from the hands of the artist's grandchildren, and in their transverse materiality—the solidity of bronze / the fragility of an eggshell—expand our consideration of the frailty of justice and human rights within hegemonic power structures.

*What emerges from the images is a corporeal presence that exists in tension: between visibility and obscurity, language and silence, desire and refusal.*¹¹

Moving eloquently across bronze, neon and photography, Raskopoulos furthers her urgent inquiry into the contested space of the body and self in a restless observance of wider realms of power.

– Rhana Devenport, ONZM, March 2026

Endnotes

- 1 'Eugenia Raskopoulos in Conversation with Nicholas Tsoutas' in 'Vestiges of the Tongue', Formist Editions 17, Power Publications, Sydney, 2019, p. 214.
- 2 The work premiered in '(SC)OOT(ER)ING around: Su san Cohn' and Eugenia Raskopoulos', TarraWarra Museum of Art, 3 Aug – 10 Nov 2024, curated by Victoria Lynn.
- 3 Eugenia Raskopoulos, email with author, 18 Feb 2026.
- 4 'Eugenia Raskopoulos in Conversation with Nicholas Tsoutas', 2019, p. 211.
- 5 Ibid. p. 212.
- 6 Ibid. p. 212.
- 7 Eugenia Raskopoulos, 2026.
- 8 Nikos Papastergiadis 'Gaps into Creation', 2019, p. 35.
- 9 Eugenia Raskopoulos, 2026.
- 10 The term has been attributed to Marcel Mauss, Roland Barthes and Pierre Bourdieu, see Huang Du, 'Afterword', 2019, p. 217, and Anneke Jaspers, 'Read Your Lips', 2019, p. 164.
- 11 Eugenia Raskopoulos, 2026.