# Melbourne’s feminist mini-golf exhibition reimagines playful protest and artistic expression



In a cleverly subversive twist on a childhood favourite, the interactive exhibition "Swingers" at Melbourne's Rising festival breathes new life into mini-golf, celebrating its overlooked feminist roots. The exhibition features nine thoughtfully crafted holes, each designed by a different female artist, and pays homage to the sport's origins dating back to 1867, when women were barred from participating in golf at St Andrews Links in Scotland. As curator Grace Herbert pointed out during the exhibition's preview, mini-golf is often dismissed as trivial, yet it holds a rich and rebellious history.

Housed in the Flinders Street ballroom—a reimagined space that had remained dormant for decades—the exhibition transforms the venue's peeling walls and dimly lit corridors into a whimsical playground. Attendees navigate through various doorways, each leading to unique artistic interpretations, inviting moments of playful exploration. The setting itself seems to enhance the surreal experience, as players engage with each hole, crafted not just for competition but for immersion in different fantastical realms.

The works on display are as diverse as they are imaginative. Kaylene Whiskey, an artist of Yankunytjatjara descent, kicks off the course with a vibrantly nostalgic homage to her childhood intersected with pop culture, featuring both Dolly Parton and Cathy Freeman in a representation that draws from her own experiences travelling to golf tournaments. Other holes present a quirky challenge—like Natasha Tontey’s playful Devo hat hole, where external forces can unexpectedly alter one's game. It quickly becomes clear that success isn’t just about sinking the putt; it’s about enjoying the absurdity of the experience.

From a dark carnival aesthetic designed by Pat Brassington to an unsettling depiction of Teletubbies by film duo Soda Jerk, each hole invites players into a distinct world that often prioritises artistic expression over traditional competitiveness. This is reinforced by Nabilah Nordin's innovate use of bread to sculpt her hole, which adds a tactile experience that complicates the game's mechanics. The emphasis on creativity reflects a broader movement within the arts to use light-hearted formats like mini-golf to tackle deeper issues.

One particularly whimsical installation challenges players to think beyond conventional game strategies. Bktherula's hole encourages experimentation with sound rather than merely aiming for the hole, illustrating that sometimes, the joy is found not in winning but in engaging with your surroundings differently. The concluding challenge, orchestrated by Miranda July, features a wave that offers advice instead of merely serving as an endpoint. Messages like “Today you stop” resonate with sweetness, reminding patrons of the often unspoken power of self-acceptance and reflection amidst the play.

This exhibition not only revitalises the art of mini-golf but also injects it with a dialogue about feminism, community, and fun. As visitors emerge from Flinders Street ballroom, they carry with them not only the echoes of laughter and competition but also an understanding that art can, and perhaps should, be a vibrant and joyous experience. The narratives sewn into each play area invite everyone to reconsider what games, especially those that may seem trivial, can signify in a broader cultural context. Ultimately, "Swingers" stands as a testament to the notion that embracing whimsy and weirdness is indeed a profound way to engage with both art and history.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/jun/06/latex-teletubbies-and-miranda-july-putting-my-way-through-feminist-mini-golf-course-swingers), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/jun/06/latex-teletubbies-and-miranda-july-putting-my-way-through-feminist-mini-golf-course-swingers)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/jun/06/latex-teletubbies-and-miranda-july-putting-my-way-through-feminist-mini-golf-course-swingers), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/feb/19/feminist-mini-golf-course-flinders-street-station-rising-festival-melbourne-australia), [[4]](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/mini-golf-history)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/jun/06/latex-teletubbies-and-miranda-july-putting-my-way-through-feminist-mini-golf-course-swingers), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/jun/06/latex-teletubbies-and-miranda-july-putting-my-way-through-feminist-mini-golf-course-swingers), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/feb/19/feminist-mini-golf-course-flinders-street-station-rising-festival-melbourne-australia)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.npr.org/2018/05/28/613412280/how-mini-golf-played-a-big-role-in-desegregating-public-rec-spaces)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/jun/06/latex-teletubbies-and-miranda-july-putting-my-way-through-feminist-mini-golf-course-swingers), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/jun/06/latex-teletubbies-and-miranda-july-putting-my-way-through-feminist-mini-golf-course-swingers)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/jun/06/latex-teletubbies-and-miranda-july-putting-my-way-through-feminist-mini-golf-course-swingers), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/feb/19/feminist-mini-golf-course-flinders-street-station-rising-festival-melbourne-australia)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/jun/06/latex-teletubbies-and-miranda-july-putting-my-way-through-feminist-mini-golf-course-swingers> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/jun/06/latex-teletubbies-and-miranda-july-putting-my-way-through-feminist-mini-golf-course-swingers> - An article from The Guardian detailing the 'Swingers' exhibition at Melbourne's Rising festival, where nine female artists, including Miranda July, Kaylene Whiskey, and Saeborg, designed a nine-hole mini-golf course celebrating the sport's feminist history. The exhibition took place in the Flinders Street ballroom, a previously unused space in Melbourne's train station, and aimed to highlight mini-golf's subversive origins in 1867 when women were excluded from playing the main game at St Andrews Links in Scotland.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/feb/19/feminist-mini-golf-course-flinders-street-station-rising-festival-melbourne-australia> - An article from The Guardian announcing the creation of a feminist mini-golf course in Melbourne, Australia, as part of the Rising festival. The course, titled 'Swingers: The Art of Mini Golf,' features nine holes designed by various artists, including Miranda July, Kaylene Whiskey, and Saeborg. The exhibition aims to celebrate the sport's feminist history and is set in the Flinders Street station ballroom, a previously unused space in Melbourne's train station.
4. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/mini-golf-history> - An article from National Geographic exploring the surprisingly subversive history of mini-golf. It discusses how the sport originated as a way to make golfing accessible to everyone, regardless of sex, race, or class. The article highlights the role of women in the development of mini-golf, particularly focusing on the St Andrews Ladies' Putting Club in Scotland, established in 1867, which is considered the world's oldest ladies' golf club.
5. <https://www.npr.org/2018/05/28/613412280/how-mini-golf-played-a-big-role-in-desegregating-public-rec-spaces> - An article from NPR discussing how mini-golf played a significant role in desegregating public recreation spaces. It highlights the history of mini-golf courses in Washington, D.C., and their role in providing accessible recreation for all, including marginalized communities. The article emphasizes the sport's role in promoting inclusivity and social change.
6. <https://www.middleburycampus.com/article/2023/09/middlebury-students-create-reproductive-justice-mini-golf-course> - An article from The Middlebury Campus detailing how Middlebury College students created a reproductive justice-themed mini-golf course. The course, consisting of 11 holes, each focused on a different topic related to reproductive justice, was designed and built by students from various classes, including Gender, Sexuality, & Feminist Studies and Politics of Reproduction. The project aimed to make academic content accessible and engaging to the public.
7. <https://www.addisonindependent.com/2023/04/27/feminist-golf-course-aims-to-start-conversations/> - An article from the Addison Independent discussing the creation of a feminist mini-golf course at Middlebury College. The course, designed and built by students from the college's Feminist Building class and other collaborators, features holes that address various themes related to reproductive justice. The project aims to use art and playfulness to engage the community in conversations about social justice.