

# Something Curated



Openings - 14 Sep 2018 - Share

Presented as a sculptural installation at Cob Gallery, Paloma Proudfoot's debut UK solo exhibition, *The Detachable Head Serves as a Cup*, running until 29 September, features a new series of ceramic works, many of which were created in direct response to the artist's encounters whilst on the Thun Ceramic Residency in Italy. Proudfoot's eloquent, enigmatic sculptures are propelled by an interest in incongruity. Her forms call into question the traditions, purpose, and material behaviours of clay as a medium, often by combining with natural materials such as hair, food and wax that offset the seemingly immaculate surfaces and static immutability of the glazed ceramics.

The show's curator, Cassie Beadle, told *Something Curated*: "I have admired Proudfoot's exceptional aesthetic for a number of years, excited and compelled by her unique application of the anthropomorphic and uncanny within her ceramic works, and marvelled at her satisfyingly elegant interference with the seemingly manufactured appearance of her sculptural forms. Her debut solo exhibition illustrates many of the tropes that distinguish Proudfoot's work, from creating works in paired doubles, exploring dualities in function and form, and her rendering of the animate/inanimate. The works that form *The Detachable Head Serves as a Cup* are a result of Proudfoot combining a wealth of sophisticated, intriguing and seemingly disparate visual references, from Clemente Susini's bizarrely (shocking in both their presentation and preservation) eroticised anatomical waxwork models, Elizabethan ornamental jugs, celebrating historical blood sports, and the trays and ramps of crazy golf courses."

Beadle continues: "They come together as an exploration of the corporeal in ceramic. Proudfoot has expertly distilled the strangeness of these morbid, ornate, overly stylised curio objects and forms and translated this absurdity across to the contemporary ceramic. Simultaneously, Proudfoot directly challenges the behavioural possibilities of her medium and its reception and presentation in a fine art context. Meanwhile the show includes a body of works, inspired by the maverick designer Martin Margiela, who questioned the very structure of traditional garments. Here Proudfoot's works combine a modular process akin to her formal training as a pattern cutter. Whilst this can be, in part, paralleled with anatomical dissection, Proudfoot explores the relationship between the modules of our bodies and the spaces they occupy or are cloaked with."

In their unsettling arrangement and tactile material juxtapositions, Proudfoot's works are unique testament to the uncanny. Compounding the artist's on-going fascination with the interchangeable or ambiguous function of objects, the aptly titled exhibition refers to the museum label description of an 18th century, salt glazed, chained bear figurine-cum-drinking vessel, discovered by the artist at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. The incongruity between the brutality of the bloodsport this ornament was intended to depict, and its trivialised light-hearted appearance and matter of fact label, echoed, for the artist, the dichotomous instincts in her own practice.

The exhibition features a series of fragmented figures, that propose themselves as vessels, yet whose function is unclear, even wilfully obscured. Figurative forms of smooth limbs and appendages are created in near mirror image of one another, and in their varying display, these works fluctuate between the static engineered object, the handcrafted, and the anthropomorphised. Proudfoot's ceramic open-faced reclining figures are arranged on tables designed to imitate the functional structure of mortuary tables seen by the artist on her visits to anatomical theatres across Italy. The flatness of the table surface is juxtaposed against the undulating leg structure beneath, that appear to echo the form of female reproductive anatomical diagrams, yet harness the decorative appeal of European Art Nouveau architecture.

Taking the modules of the human body as her building blocks, Proudfoot parallels the concepts behind clothes-making and civic architecture – seeing them both as containers and extensions of our bodies. A foot becomes a fir tree and vice versa, an arm becomes the beam of a shelter. Proudfoot's visual language is one of rhythm, regularity and subtle differentiation. In this sense, the works are developed from an aesthetic in which every whole can be endlessly anatomised and fragmented, forms occur and recur, suggesting the individuality of the human body while also following regular patterns in unpredictable ways.

Paloma Proudfoot: The Detachable Head Serves as a Cup | 6-29 Sep 2018 at The Cob Gallery, 205 Royal College St, London NW1 0SG

Images: Paloma Proudfoot: The Detachable Head Serves as a Cup. © The Artist Courtesy of The Cob Gallery, London