

ZABLUDOWICZ
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Invites Focus

ATHENA PAPADOPOULOS

Athena Papadopoulou & Elizabeth Neilson
Phone call, 27 April, 5pm

EN: Invites Focus is a way for us to follow up with a number of the artists we have shown in our Invites programme and think about how ideas and a career develop. Because of the pandemic your show *Cain and Abel Can't and Able*, at MOSTYN in Wales opened and then shut again a few days later. I was so sad not to be able to get to the opening as we had our opera season starting the same night. But we have some images here and I thought we could talk about them a little. The first thing I notice is that everything is symmetrical. Can you tell me about how the room is divided, and why?



AP: The architecture of show is conceptually tied to theme of rivalry using the biblical tale of Cain and Abel. There are two sides, one of black-frames and the other white-framed paintings. I was thinking about Cain and Abel - the two brothers from the bible - facing each other in the space. I was thinking of the paintings as pairs of twins, there is a battle between them which is reflected in the dialogues I wrote which paper the floor and originate in the hand-made book sculpture. The series of Cain paintings (black-framed paintings) are installed like a staircase that is descending and the Able (white-framed paintings) mirror that of Cain's arrangement but when read from left to right read as ascending. Able is the favourite of God - the shining star - but I also think there is something perverse about this as favouritism causes inherent jealousy and therefore resentment - resentment breeds anger and if there is enough of this, it often leads to violence. So the story is kind of just about being human and transcending these behaviours. It's hard to be humble and generous all the time. We are only human and there is a complexity to each one of us, between good and evil and how we all have both in us. I like The I Ching idea that true power is having the ability to do evil but choosing not to.



I was also thinking about that cliché of kids sharing a bedroom and putting a line of tape down the middle, so I made this raised ridge that bisects the show, it is like a newly laid grave and the newsprint that covers the floor is a reproduction of scans of book pages. These pages are all over the floor. There are also lots details and metaphor around the show that is for the lyrical pleasure of the viewer to feast on. There are nests made of wigs and in the black paintings there are empty nests and ripped off bird wings and on the white paintings, home-made wing-less birds sit atop and their eyes have been stolen from the cut-up plush toys which are consumed by the paintings innards. It boggles my own brains in terms of how it is so rich with references and complexity that I do not even know is there or inside of me - it just comes out. I try not to be prescriptive of meaning, I don't know what it all means in fact and I try to figure things out about myself through looking at my own work - things that are not even clear to me but

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Ahead of the imminent release of our new publication *Invites Vol.2*, marking 50 *Invites* exhibitions since the series began in 2012, we're delighted to share some exclusive material from our archives and from the artists.

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manifest themselves by way of my hands and body movements - clues that emerge out of the pores of my being as to what I am going through at the time of their creation - or even unacknowledged unprocessed trauma.



LN: You seem to use sound now to draw people in, and one of the reasons we decided to make these little videos of the singing sculptures from your show at Liebaert Projects last year was because that is the sense it is hard to evoke without being in the space. In both these shows you are adding sound to already maximal works. This could seem to be over-doing it.

But I can imagine that perhaps it makes it easier to access the story. Like an audio guide for the show is more accessible than reading the captions, because it allows you to look and receive the narrative simultaneously.

AP: I wanted to make the sculptures sing, they are bodies, they talk. I never shut up - so nor should they. They sing and lament about their fears and tell their stories through song and rhyme. Usually their stories are laden with darkness and violence of the spirit and body. My works hide so much detail - because that is what I am like.



LN: There is sound in the gallery and it mainly comes from the central book on the lectern. How was the book made? Was it written in eyeliner like your first book: *A Tittle-Tattle-Tell-A-Tale Heart*?

AP: The paper of the book-sculpture is made of the pulp scrubbed off from the image transfers that present themselves within the paintings. I have always wanted to use the image transfer paper-waste somehow because there is so much of it and so much physical labour goes into its removal that it saddens me to throw it away. So finally it came to me that if I were to mix glue and blood and soil (a reference to the Cain and Abel story) with other detritus I could hand make the pages. The text is written in pen this time but the pages are heavily varnished and really dense.

LN: What about the process of writing, was it written all in one go?

AP: I wrote it over time, phrases would pop into my head, from conversations or arguments that I have had, and I would write it down. Some are also movie quotes, *Casino* (1995) is one of my favourite movies and in it Robert De Niro says to Sharon Stone "You are looking at me a certain way I want you out of here." I really loved that line and wanted it. So I take things from reality and as well as literature. I studied Shakespearean literature for years and that tone comes off sometimes. That theatrical atmosphere is certainly there as well. And in terms of the process of writing. The pressure was on and it was time for the text to come, and I wrote it out longhand, the typed it up, then edited and then transcribed it onto the book. Before I was an artist my main thing was literature. I keep a diary, I write every day in the morning, and I must have over 1000 pages of handwritten diary entries. Text is a really big part of my work and plays such a role in the titles of the works and their development. If you think of Louise Bourgeois, her continual practice of writing was always there. For me writing is what gives the power and the content to the work. I really want to give it that extra layer of complexity with text. I find it beautiful to have abstract and formally incredible art works but the artists I love have a strong narrative pull that draws me into their work.

LN: Obviously the MOSTYN show was closed just as it opened, what else has happened and how are you coping with the "lockdown"?



AP: Hopefully the show might still be up so you can see it! It has been extended but it depends on when and how things start again. But I also was supposed to have a solo show at



comes out as anger. I wish I could feel sadness more, but sadness depresses me, anger stops me in my tracks but also sends a surge of hot energy through my body which then gets me to create.

I left London one year ago so I could be in solitude because I felt overwhelmed with trying to please others. I thought if I isolate myself with my work and put everything into that, and have my own home where I could make it my world - then I would feel safe. I couldn't hurt anyone and nobody could hurt me. It is a stupid thing to have done, to run away like that. Though my work has skyrocketed in it's richness I have nowhere to put my love and care so I put it in my work. I suppose I see so many people doing it all, having children, a husband, friends who they go out with (used to at least) and I wonder how I would manage to have all that and do the work I am doing and also not push people away because I feel they are distracting me from my work. I think the worst thing in the world is loss. Maybe that is why artists feel the need to embed experience into works. They will outlive all of us.

Emalin open last week. This year, like the last two have been for me, was going to be so busy. So in fact I hope to be able to get organised and work on my archive. I always write and draw so I can work for nothing any time, I can pick up on elements of the work and keep it going. Sometimes I get hopeless feeling but that only usually lasts for about 10-30 mins and then I try to stop pitying myself and get up and try to make something better whether it is fluffing a pillow, making a bagel or calling my grandma, since I am a terrible child who was always bad at calling her family as I get lost in my work and own romantic dramas often.

I suppose I think about loneliness, I don't know if I feel lonely - I think I surround myself with so much material that I feel overwhelmed with things that I could engage with to enrich my mental and spiritual life. But I also have this unfortunate tendency to run away from emotional attachments and I think that is why it consumes my work so much. This theme of relationships between people; I am quite fearful of people hurting me so I try to speak through my work because I am too afraid to say how I truly feel and sometimes I really do not know how I feel. I struggle to identify my emotions, it often



Installation Views, Athena Papadopoulos, *Cain and Abel Can't and Able*, MOSTYN, Wales, UK, 14 March – 05 July 2020
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