



Victoria Adam interviewed
by curator Paul Luckraft,
26 May 2016

Paul Luckraft: Can I start by
asking what the symbols of the
exhibition title represent?

Victoria Adam: They are
alchemical symbols for lunar
caustic, which is the old term
for silver nitrate, a substance
used to cauterise wounds. The
silver is a half-circle or moon,
because the symbol for gold
was a full circle or sun.

PL: Could you talk about the
main elements you're planning
for the show?

VA: A curtain form will hang
from the ceiling and obscure a
part of the space. The objects
I make are generally quite
small. They have this 'up-close'
intimate feel. In the show I have
a series of works that will sit
on the benches and ledges.
Hopefully the curtain will do
something to the way these
works are approached, and
will create some privacy in
viewing them.

PL: Is it a curtain designed for
one body?

VA: It's sort of a half curtain.
And there will some shapes that
hang from it. Behind the curtain
will be a small piece, and others
will hang on the walls. So the
curtain will be in some ways
obstructive and a foil to the
other pieces.

PL: Is the curtain a sculpture or
a staging device?

VA: A bit of both. I like the
idea that the biggest and most
spectacular piece can be the
most useless, or perhaps the
least important. It's made
from a particular material that
references shower curtains,
and hospital wards too.
Clean spaces. I was thinking
of modesty screens, and
gynaecological offices where
things are wrapped round the
body to give a fake sense of
privacy. The curtain I've made is
slightly see-through.

PL: Perhaps you can expand on
this notion of cleanliness you've
mentioned?

VA: It really comes out of an
interest in the intimacy of living

in a city. The things that are
touched the most. Or shared
the most with other people.
Tube hand-rails, bus seats, or
coins. This idea of cleanliness
is something that is both polite,
as in being able to tolerate
proximity, and also about hiding
disgust or contempt. Smell
is also a very important part
of living in a city. The smell
of someone you're up against
on the tube. It can be a very
intimate experience, and one
you can't get away from.

PL: Some objects in a city,
such as railings or benches,
might be caressed each day by
thousands of people?

VA: There is a nice sense of
ritual to that. Every day, this
is where all these hands fall.
There is an anxiety about dirt
and germs that is really pushed
in the selling to us of products
like hand gels. A promise of
neutralising things into a nice
pleasant living space for all. But
to return to sculptural ideas,
smooth or polished surfaces
are often the ones that are the
most handled and touched.

PL: So a pristine kind of
cleanliness can emerge for
repeated touching? Layers
are removed.

VA: Yes, through repeated
working, sanding and labour.
Like just on the edge of a
stone step where a beautiful
smoothed curve develops.
One of the pieces I've made
has these very smooth discs,
which are almost mirror-like.

PL: In your works do you set
up a tension between these
elegant smooth surfaces, and
things that could be perceived
as more abject?

VA: Definitely in working with
ceramics, which I'm doing quite
a bit at the moment, I've been
thinking about that. There's
so much haptic pleasure. It's
delicious to work with when
soft, and then there's the
glazing process that seals in
all that lumpy 'handledness'.

PL: And when you fire you are
out of control of the process
somewhat?

VA: Yes, well from my
amateurish appreciation of
the process there definitely
is a sense of not knowing
what is going to happen! I
guess I use the transformation
of liquid to solid quite a lot.
Turning something gooey into
something pristine. With a glaze
this finishes everything off with
a wet look. And it links to the
commercial glazes used for
bathroom basins, tiles or toilets.
The solidified wet-look, which I
think is interesting in relation to
cleanliness.

PL: You've used the motifs of
basins or trays in your work
quite a bit over recent years.
These seem to evoke domestic
shared space, but also individual
personal space within it.

VA: This first came from the
idea of one person being
able to see the sculpture at a
time. I used scale to create a
one-on-one experience, and
to draw people in very close.
In a formal sense, if you are
making something very small,
how do you get somebody's
attention? How can you make
something small have weight
and feel worth looking at. And
I was never sure if making
people have to come close to
look at something is generous,
or maybe more passive
aggressive?

PL: There is certainly control of
the viewer in a sense, making a
demand of them. That's maybe
not an aggressive demand, but
you are asserting something.
Your work can't be absorbed
through a cursory glance
around.

VA: To return to why I've used
the personal spaces of the
curtain, the bathroom set and
food tray, perhaps it's to do
with personal rituals. Where
eating or grooming are played
out in public, like when you
go to the hairdressers and
you are placed in the window.
I personally hate being on
display, but others may love
it. Or eating on planes when
you can't move your elbows
because of the people next
to you.

PL: Would you say your work
relates to the non-physical
personal space of online
presence? And if so, is that a
dialogue with it, or in opposition
to it?

VA: Maybe I use what I am
given, and what is fed to me. I
don't try to judge it too much,
but rather be more earnestly
receptive. For example if this
Google Ad is telling me I should
look at something then perhaps
I should look at it? But you're
right that the privacy of your
computer screen is not private
and the internet is so good at
picking up on anxieties. If I were
to search 'grey hair colouring'
then for the next six months
adverts for these products
would be all I'd see. So I feel
there's no escaping these
anxiety/desire cycles.

PL: The term 'cycles' is
interesting. You've used the
word 'lunar' in the titling of a
work in the show...

VA: I'm definitely interested
in the advertising premise of
creating a fear then selling a
desire. That kind of push and
pull. And the disgust/desire
interrelation. That loops back to
cleanliness as well. Hand gel or
perfume respond to an anxiety
that you are unclean.

PL: Perhaps the difference
today from advertising in
previous decades is that
it is now more precise and
individually tailored?

VA: It does feel more
inescapable. That it is always
encroaching into your individual
sphere.

PL: I'm interested in how you
use space. In your show at
Kingsgate you used the floor
a lot. For Invites you have a
hanging element. When you
install in a gallery are you
trying to create a metaphor of
domestic space?

VA: No, I'm not trying to create
a version of another space. But
I am using the familiarity of
things. The way I hang stuff in
a show always appeals to the
body. There will be something
at belly level, or something

that will stare back at eye
level. Or maybe something at
a mouth height. Maybe below
the curtain, viewer's legs can
be seen. It's perhaps to do with
an ergonomic sense that can be
felt in the space.

PL: What is the difference
between composing works in
the studio and then installing
them finally in the gallery?
Are decisions made at a late
stage or do you map things
out beforehand?

VA: Having all the works come
together in a show really does
become another piece in itself.
Often it's about sight lines,
bodily experience, tactile
appeal, and whether it can give
you a kind of gut hit.

PL: What is the smallest scale
you've made work at?

VA: Previously I've made these
wallet pieces that were really
smooth sanded plaster. Just
small enough to slide in your
pocket. And also tiny coin
pieces that were almost worn
away.

PL: That reminds me about the
works where you pushed coins
and bottle tops into materials in
these gestures of frozen time.
In some of your pieces items
seem very precisely placed, and
in others there is the feeling of
something more casual. That's
an illusion perhaps?

VA: It's so hard to get that
feeling of a louche gesture.
There is an appeal in that
feeling of spontaneity. Maybe
it goes back to advertising
again. The way the easy or
the casual is a promise very
carefully constructed. It turns
out to be an illusion.

Reverse:
*Detail of Luna (probiotic met
and met), 2016*

Artist's presentation

Thursday 14 July. A special event devised by Victoria Adam.
Please see website for further details.

Victoria Adam (b. 1983, Somerset) graduated from the Royal
Academy of Art in 2015 and previously attended the Slade.
Recent solo exhibitions include: *Leks* at Marian Cramer
Projects, Amsterdam, 2016, and *middens* at Kingsgate
Workshops, London, 2015. Group exhibitions include: *Either
Those Curtains* at FOLD, London, 2016, *Wronguns* with
AGENCY AGENCY, Brussels, 2016, and *Chalk Blush* at Kinman,
London, 2014.

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