



Athena Papadopoulos interviewed by Paul Luckraft, 12 January 2015

exist on a mutually beneficial level – they need each other. I see the 3D works as having slithered out of the 2D, and vice-versa.

PL: What is the process of assembling the imagery? Does this always begin with key photographic sources?

AP: When I started out making this kind of work there was a cacophony of images. It quickly became clear that the most crucial images were those borrowed from people close to me. For instance, those taken by my father on his mobile phone – photos that come from these infamous parties he has hosted. Using them in my work opened a floodgate, and now he sends them to me via WhatsApp knowing they will likely pop up in one of my works. I think he takes a little bit of delight in volunteering them up, and in turn becoming the star.

PL: So he sends them to you knowing that they might be used? But he's not making those photos specifically for your work?

AP: No, but they do have a certain knowingness about them, which may make them seem staged. Though these images do have something extra to them... perhaps extra eccentric in the sense that my father is embodying a Dionysian figure.

PL: Does a viewer need to hook on to the autobiographical element of your work in order to engage in it fully?

AP: I think that for *me* it is important, in the sense that if I am to go to the lengths of producing this stuff it has to start from the point where I am doing something risky, exposing myself in some way that ordinarily one might not want to do, especially not in art because it's not really seen as cool. For the viewer, what makes the images function in a wider sense is that they are also archetypes; as well as being these really personal images they are also everybody's image to some extent. Returning to

your previous question about the development of the imagery – it's almost like word association. I expand the narrative of each photograph at a very fast pace. This is then edited down later. My works can seem as if they've been made in a really messy environment, but actually, since working in this way for the last two years or so, my methodology has become more organised, and involves creating categories for my images as a way of removing anxiety from the process.

PL: So you've created a system to log this imagery, allowing you to then combine them in different constellations?

AP: Yes, but also there is still a lot of freedom. The hand drawn elements start off on paper but they are then scanned, their scale is altered, colour changed or elements erased. They are made into image transfers that can be applied to any fabric or surface. There is something really exciting about knowing that the drawing will have a life beyond its original context. It can dance over here with another image when it might have started over there on its own.

PL: Are you adding and subtracting all the time towards a certain narrative or sensation?

AP: As much as the imagery feels like it can run very far, I do give myself limits. I've created my own set of rules as to what's permissible to use. For example, on the new works, one might ask "how does an image of a cookie fit into all of this?" It does so because the cookie would have a certain attitude, because that cookie will be partying among all these other images that will allow it to become totally ridiculous.

PL: The images are also partying in among and on top of these stained surfaces. Could you talk about the substances you use to create those stains?

AP: I am using imagery that is rather Bacchanalian but there is

also a very contemporary party-scene vibe there too. I want my images to relate to the substances that I paint onto the fabrics, like Pepto Bismol or iodine, and also for the fabrics to relate to the substances. I've used bed sheets and dinner napkins, pillowcases and clothing. Somewhere along the way I realised that instead of using paint it would be better to use things that people put into or onto the body such as red wine or medicine – stuff that stains your insides or outsides. Art is already about substitution, so why not substitute *back in* the things that could better help push certain innuendos. Pepto Bismol is a substance used to combat excessive indulgence, for nausea or indigestion. Also, some of the materials have much more of a relationship to the feminine, things such as self-tanners, Crazy Colour hair dyes. I use them to draw with or as spraying or smudging devices. I try to be militant about not allowing myself to use paint.

PL: So the candy pink colour on the new sculptures, what is that?

AP: It's hair dye mixed with henna. Both come in various artificial colours. It's so on trend to do bright hair colours now when at one time it was seen as totally punk. The same with tattoos, they have become so normal. For instance, today there could never be another writer like Kathy Aker. I love the way that she used collage and appropriation to create such affective work. But her work was a product of the socio-historical time. Whereas now, many of the traits that characterised her generation have been taken up in a very commercialised way – they are just different types of consumer goods and styles. This is not what my work is about, but it's certainly a point of interest.

PL: In depicting exaggerated female figures is your motivation to challenge clichés in some way, or do you try and avoid a fixed position?

AP: I would definitely say I'm depicting women in a very particular way. Sometimes they appear in different stages of drunkenness; they are certainly always a bit out of sorts. Maybe they are having too much fun or not enough? As I see it, being exposed, or exposing oneself, is actually not a terribly embarrassing thing. I like the idea of someone being sort of unapologetic about it. I suppose those are the kinds of women in my depictions. They are not meant to be totally satirical or damning depictions. I think there is a kind of sympathy and love for them, but at the same time the relationship is a complicated one because they clearly aren't heroic figures either.

PL: Is the notion of 'excess' important for the work?

AP: I think there is a sense of spontaneity and intensity embedded in my working process that I hope the viewer can see in the works, but at the same time there are decisions being made during the process to intentionally try to heighten that too. I don't want it to feel cooled-off and calculated. The works are not meant to be moving upwards towards a point of precision, they are of a world that is downward and sprawling...

PL: There seems a commitment to playing with formal possibilities of works or shows, rather than trying to fit the work into a set pattern?

AP: Absolutely! I think it is really important to try to stay excited by what one is doing. For me, the more one work starts looking too similar to the next I am not so sure about it. And that's what brought me to cutting things up and turning fabrics on to their backsides. I have tried to ape my own compositions and it never works!

PL: Some of your works are quite sparse. The focus seems much more on subtle textures, rather than an overload.

AP: I see some of the more minimal works existing as kind

of visual punctuation, where it's more about noticing the materials and three or four images in particular. I think these pieces are a necessary accompaniment to more visually intense ones. The more supersaturated ones are similar to the feeling of taking a relaxing afternoon lunch that stretches into a long night on the town, and probably rolls into the next morning...

PL: You use absurdity and humour, but do you sometimes feel the need to pull back on those things?

AP: Sometimes when I finish a work that is kind of crazy I'll show it to a friend and they'll say "Whoa! That's a lot!" Mostly I like that type of reaction, but sometimes I'll become slightly self-conscious, because it was made so unselfconsciously and made when I am by myself in the studio. But I won't let myself change, hide or bin the work. Instead it's: "I did that, and that has everything in it that my work's about." When I first started using images of my family I would worry about it being embarrassing or ethically bumpy. But you have to get over that. I think there are always going to be those moments of feeling sensitive toward the characters, because although they can be exaggerated they originate from real people. So there is this sense of empathy, but then there is a criticality there too. It's not celebratory but it's also not meant to be some kind of moralistic thing. It becomes very complicated when you start bringing in people you actually know, but I think for my work it is vital.

PL: Well, it binds you into that complexity. You can't just step outside it and judge.

AP: The artwork becomes a kind of surrogate of oneself. I have an affinity to works that contain in them all of those things that make life messy.



Paul Luckraft: Can I start by asking about the ideas behind the series of sculptural works you've made for Invites?

Athena Papadopoulos: I have been working on this kind of sculptural cushion-like form for a little while now. For me, they work well because of their direct relationship to the domestic, in the sense that the material form mirrors the domestic imagery I overlay the works with. The images I use can be quite crude at times, so the choice of the cushion form can help to soften a subject matter that is not so easily approachable. These particular sculptures resemble overfilled torsos, as if they've eaten way too much! They invite you to come closer and perhaps give them a little squeeze.

PL: These 'figures' are a group of bodies, and you see them as a gathering of some kind?

AP: Yes, they can be seen as congregating around each other but also around something else. They are facing the front of the room, looking at what might be the main event. The arrangement suggests that the 2D work has a sense of authority. But maybe it's being gawked at by the 3D works. Perhaps there is a bit of envy there too. Though I think they

Artist's presentation

Sunday 8 March, 3pm. Athena Papadopoulos in conversation with Leopold Thun and Jasmine Picot-Chapman.

Athena Papadopoulos (b.1988, Toronto, Canada) completed an MFA in Fine Art Practice at Goldsmiths, University of London in 2013, and a BFA in Contemporary Art Theory and Visual Art at the University of British Columbia in 2011.

Zabludowicz Collection Invites is dedicated to solo presentations by UK-based artists who do not currently have representation by a UK commercial gallery.

Reverse: *Death of Papadopoulos waaaayyyy after Death of Sardanapalus* (detail), 2015. Image transfers, Pepto Bismol, Milk of Magnesia, lipstick, hair dye, henna, red wine and Berocca on bed sheet over canvas, 170 x 200 cm

Upcoming Invites

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1 October–8 November
Milou van der Maaden
12 November–20 December

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