

REBECCA

ACKROYD



REBECCA ACKROYD in conversation with LUCY PRICE
in Charlotte Knowles & Chopova Lowena
Photographs JULIA MONSELL & JAMES BROOKS
Artworks courtesy of Peres Projects, Berlin
Artwork Photography Matthias Kolb
Location Rebecca's studio, South London

REBECCA Do you want a glass of water?

LUCY Yes, please.

Rebecca, the sculptor and visual artist, turns a squeaky tap in the corner of her studio and fills a jug with water, placing it and two glasses in front of Lucy



LUCY So, we met here a handful of years ago. I remember writing to you to see if you needed any assistance since you'd just graduated from the Royal Academy. I can visualise your high-rise plaster-limbed installation from your degree show, it's stuck with me ever since. Whether in a gallery setting or your studio, even in an image, whenever I come across your work, I feel very sucked in. There is this sense of mystery and sometimes a dream-like displacement. Would you say this is a subconscious existence that is naturally organic within the work?

REBECCA I think in terms of the dream-like sense you mention, it is a combination really. I want certain works to feel like they are grounded in reality and others to feel completely abstract and psychological. There are two spaces - lived

and imagined experiences. I'm planning a drawing show at Peres Projects, Berlin, at the moment. My drawings have always been my private space, but now they have shifted into the public space, which is why for a long time I found showing them incredibly uncomfortable. During lockdown, I was keeping a dream journal, loads of people were having these intense and vivid dreams, but throughout my life I've always had insane dreams. My mum told me that as soon as I could talk, all I spoke about were my dreams.

LUCY Wow.

REBECCA Yeah, from about the age of two. I can still remember dreams that I had as a child that have become pivotal signifiers of change in my life, a subconscious narrative, or something like that. I was reading some quotes by Louise Bourgeois and Kai Althoff recently, both of which stated that their work comes from a place in their childhood, that they are still living out those early ideas in their work. I had never really thought about that, but it resonated with me. When I'm in the studio making work, it almost comes from somewhere so far in me that



I can't really talk about it in some ways. Almost as if I'm not in control of it. I haven't really thought about dreams actually being an important part of the work, though, but they probably are!

LUCY Especially the drawings - the smaller works on paper - the materials you are working with sometimes make me think that there is a voyeuristic element. Would you say it is a subconscious reference point?

REBECCA The whole act of making art feels voyeuristic. There is often an element of looking in - just thinking about the figures with windows in them - there is the invitation to look at how this body/sculpture is made. Like looking at an architectural model, you can take the whole thing in at once; a giant's perspective. It's an intimate experience, and essentially the encounter with a work is one-on-one, it's a moment that excites me. I'm gradually coming to terms with the feeling of not having to justify or to find reasoning or relevance to the works and allow myself to be naturally intrigued in other ways, but that's the driving force.

LUCY I think a lot of people



make work that way and they try to bring this formality towards it like «reference XYZ» etc.

REBECCA It is easier if you use someone else's work as reasoning, it's safe. I feel like making art feels quite stupid a lot of the time, but it's obviously not. In some ways, you need that bit of stupidity to let go.

LUCY A sense of freedom.

REBECCA Well... yes, when I'm making my work and completely absorbed in it, it does feel like freedom.

LUCY Would you say there is an awkwardness within some of the pieces?

REBECCA Which works do you mean?

LUCY Those in your studio - the epoxy casts. Previously you have said that the intention is for the sculptures to have conversations with one another...

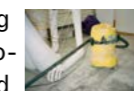
REBECCA I want those casts to be open and not bound by so many references that you need a sheet of paper to get something from them. With sculpture, I find it much easier to be direct in what I want, as you're dealing with



something that is in the room, especially with the casts and the way I make them. For example, the chaise longue sculpture is a deliberate reference to psychotherapy and this idea of internal space, personal history, individual sense of experience and memory. Maybe that is why the work can have a feeling of displacement, as I think about all these different elements at the same time.

LUCY In a way it is autobiographical. You reflect on memories, childhood and use personal moments too... you're even wearing your mum's old boots in some of the casts of yourself. Do you only use casts of yourself, or do you include family and friends as well?

REBECCA For the works I made for the Lyon Biennale last year, I used my two assistants, Jess and Aidan, they are in a lot of those casts. But also I use my nephew and nieces, and in more recent works I've used various other members of my family. I like having different generational bodies present at the same time. When making casts of people, what I find interesting is how it freezes a moment in time, like a photograph, because as bodies



grow and get older, it makes the works one-offs. They're transitional moments too, the materials I use can become fragile, fragmented, glass-like.

LUCY Jewels.

REBECCA Or boiled sweets - sucked and corroded. It all feeds into the aspect of memory, loss or history and time. It's why I have figures holding a computer/mobile phone or hands that are writing or flicking through the paper. Being rooted in the present, but reflecting back on memories past.

LUCY Going back to the use of the body as a cocoon, a home, what about architectural spaces? Everyday objects that are overlooked or overturned and the impact of bodies in these spaces as an aspect of shelter.

Shifting conversation, Lucy gestures to a sculpture resembling an oven and set of shutters

REBECCA I started making the shutters by accident almost. It was for a commission, and they developed from there. I wanted to make them in graphite to feel heavy and dense, to be more



grounded amongst the other works that feel more dream-like. The title of the works, *Carriers*, refers to the idea of a loaded, heavy, burdened objects. They carry baggage in the sense of ideas or thoughts, somewhere to place content. The top of them has imagery from my phone which I photocopied, pasted on and rubbed onto the surface. The date and location on them creates a chronology of the work. I see them as anchors within my work, however, they are continuously developing. For my next show, they will all be white - bleached and washed out.

LUCY There is tartan on this too?

REBECCA It's my family tartan - my mum is Scottish. At my first presentation at Peres Projects, I showed a metal shutter that had my mother's maiden name, Ironside, emblazoned at the top. I was playing with the idea that a name can be no longer part of a family - the ending of names.

LUCY From the reference to tartan and also wigs, sunglasses, motorcycle helmets or just clothing in general, would you say fashion and the playfulness of clothes inform the outcomes or developments

of the sculptures?

REBECCA In the sculptures, it is important. The first figure I made had a very short wig in reference to Lynda Benglis in... I can't remember now...

LUCY ...The *Artforum* Ad?

REBECCA Yeah, where she's holding the massive dildo and wearing the sunglasses. The piece was called *Gloria*, an homage to Lynda. The wigs and glasses are important to my work in the sense of identity or the attitude that the works inhabit. The glasses and helmets are a sense of protection and concealment, fishnets because they add a layer of lizard-like scales to the flesh but also carry undertones of corny sexual prowess, which I quite like.

Rebecca laughs to herself

LUCY Going back to that image of wigs and sunglasses, I think about Elisabeth Frink too.

REBECCA Oh yes, and Nancy Grossman - she is also someone whose work I look at. The figures I make are grotesque and clunky, but at the same time some of them are sexual, or maybe less sexual and more powerful.







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LUCY So they are binaries: soft/hard... masculine/feminine. The materials you use reflect that, there'll be plaster and chicken wire or wax with epoxy. They have a fragility to them but are also weighty. I recently finished a book called *Notes to Self* by Emilie Pine, which comprises a series of essays exploring the psychological elements of femininity and feminism. An honest rendition of lived experiences and trauma. Would you say you look towards trauma as expression?

REBECCA I probably do, there's always an element of destruction in the work, an anger that comes out perhaps. The process of putting on a show is sometimes traumatic too, which is probably where the trauma is! Coming face-to-face with what you have made and thinking, «This is it, and this is what I do». Whenever I do a show, there is always a sense of dissatisfaction and slight disappointment. I hope I feel like that forever, as it creates the momentum to keep searching for something. Saying that, I never want to find it.

LUCY Do you want some more water?

***Lucy pours two glasses of water, the jug glugs**

and a droplet flicks from the spout, it lands on her phone*

REBECCA I never really think about trauma and the part it plays in my work as a present idea. I suppose a lot of these things we are talking about are trauma to an extent, and it is difficult when it is societal trauma rather than personal trauma.

LUCY Would you say that you directly reference political current affairs?

REBECCA I sometimes do, but it won't often be a direct political statement. There might be moments in which I am very direct, but if I try to make work that is too literal, it doesn't work anymore, it becomes less open and in some ways less political. However, in my *Outpost* exhibition in 2016 - post Trump and the EU referendum in the UK - I made two works which were in direct response to it all. One being a blown-up image of me nude, grabbing my crotch with massive hairy monster hands, and the other, a pub carpet that was in reference to a very specific national identity. The sudden feeling of being trapped in a way I hadn't experienced before.

LUCY A Wetherspoons carpet!

REBECCA The thinking was around a masculine space, a setting for all the other works to exist within. The carpet was like the inescapable national identity, and the works became implements for me to think about where I was in this current moment - maybe that's another trauma. Sudden, uncontrollable changes on a global scale. In those moments, I don't want all the works to reference one political signifier, I like them being interruptions. I think the shutter series is an exploration of this content. I often think about Philip Guston's Nixon drawings as a prime example of making extremely political work that is still generous.

LUCY By having your own hand within it, being present?

REBECCA Yes, being immersed in the work. The artists I'm drawn to are people where you feel their work flows through them, it's honest and true, it's timeless - not of a time.

LUCY We should call time on this. Shall we end the interview here?

Rebecca's forthcoming solo exhibition 100mph will be shown at Peres Projects, Berlin in 2021

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