

HUMBER STREET GALLERY

EXHIBITION GUIDE
GALLERY 1 & 2

A TITTLE-TATTLE TELL-A-TALE HEART

ATHENA PAPADOPOULOS
12 APRIL – 30 JUNE 2019

For the artist's first major gallery exhibition in the UK, Athena Papadopoulou presents a newly commissioned body of work that includes sculpture, sound installation, costume and performance.

Based on her first novel, Papadopoulou has designated a series of zones within the gallery that mimic the book's chapters. This narrative draws on ideas from Film Noir and follows the journey of Papadopoulou's protagonist, Bunny, to uncover what may have led to her downfall.

The artist continues to make use of materials such as cosmetics, medicinal substances and edible ingredients, but this exhibition also constitutes a new exploration of immersive installation. Incorporating memory and myth from the artists' own life as well as research into the locality of Hull, a complex web of clues and references are transformed using Papadopoulou's expansive artistic language.

The exhibition begins with a series of enclosed spaces that reimagine remembered places from the artist's childhood as well as alluding to sites of suspended disbelief, such as theatres and haunted houses. These act as sets and backdrops for a series of new free-standing sculptures alongside ephemera from the artist's studio and new sound works created in collaboration with HP Parmley.

In the Body of Growing Lover

ESSAY BY LARA KONRAD

Girl, you are born and so you will learn to live.

In her first institutional exhibition in the U.K., Athena Papadopoulos visually and sonically transforms the intimate textual journey of her fragmented semi-autobiographical novel, "A Tittle-Tattle Tell-A-Tale Heart" (Cura Books, 2018), which conveys the constructed path of a woman's silent becoming.

What happens after she has grown backwards from woman into human, where she is no longer oblivious to her downfall instead seeing it as an opportunity to be born all over again. Because, although she has fallen, a woman never stops, she is fluid, changing, semi-permeable, and she will (re)claim life as affectionately as she can. For if they did teach her, it was without choice they taught as the extent of her becoming.

The involuntary kindness that rests right here within, girl, when there is nothing to decide.

Continuously referring to autobiographical fragments of the novel's protagonist Bunny, we start in a corridor representing a funeral parlour where we encounter three gossiping characters, acting as doorways swallowing us back into a hallucinatory past — a leisurely-forming (un)reality in which a biological future cannot help but already embrace a cultural past.

Papadopoulos' makes us immediately aware of the enclosed, quarantined reality we are about to witness (the threat of black spots ((dis)ease) threatening to spread. Inside Papadopoulos' white, free-standing garden fence we are presented with a cosmos of newly commissioned works that take on qualities from a selection of chapters from her novel.

How the physical separation between the external and internal also confirms the great dangers within human's grand ideal for safety. In all of them, these illusions of freedom. The dichotomy of both desiring and being disgusted— two truths existing simultaneously.

Because, girl — meanwhile you have been kept safest, you too remained changeless on your way to female exhaustion. And nothing feels quite as much like home than the false spectacle of forever, even if at the tender mercy of human oblivion.

Segments of girlhood (because the word 'woman' still causes our tongue to harden with antilove whenever we try to embrace her future as something larger and therefore disconcerting), emerge in front of us; step by step, teaching us gently the lethargic drifting that is her ever-disappearing singularity. The further we are granted access into manifestations of Bunny's previously lived pasts, personal memory becomes the object of any.

While not everyone here might have existed inside the body of a growing girl, we all have lived her with the same kind of inevitability. Patiently, we watch how she grows into her one true destiny — desiring otherness that always is, with no sign of return. Desire never lasts, unless it is futureless.

As she declares her inherent dependency on a world that shall never be a world of her own, she finds promise in her vow of wanting— like Belle of Beauty and the Beast 'for so much more'. For as long as desire voices itself everywhere, her waiting will have carried purpose. And what could be braver than the search for meaning, when this very duty is also her sincerest death.

Yes, a high price must be paid as human satisfaction becomes the process of your own becoming and undoing. But, girl, you would have learned to live this brutal glory, as the glory of being alive and fertile within your newest truth.

Over time, (the protagonist of Papadopoulos' novel) 'Bunny' proceeds with gravitas, as beautiful things and beautiful people are promised to her. Soon she cannot help but love them with the same inexhaustible outcome, for the fear of being unloved will always be greater than her search for freedom. Everything must be left behind in its entirety, when the outside world proves to her its' uncompromising individuality and therefore resistance. She succumbs. She surrenders.

Her world has once again ended because, girl, whenever the Other decides to live another type of mortality: of these fragments of amorous fatality, it is just you girl, trying to find your way 'back home.'

As we ascend the back stairwell to the second floor through 'Club on Club Row'— a yellow lit grungy room punctuated by floating enlarged toe-tag like vinyl banners. These new drawings take from missing women posters and are then rubbed out using nail varnish remover and are weaved together with girly, make-up stained ribbon.

It is here, on the second floor where we enter a heavenly space, the final outcome of Bunny's becoming.

This moment of truth is her now-total annihilation of the self. Our subjugated bodies enter through the backstage and emerge walking out on to the catwalk/the plank. We find ourselves in a mythical fashion show in all its unreal, whimsical magic — a physical place where the human body is given utmost authority, simultaneously stripping all its already-disintegrated individuality from it. Reincarnated figures (referencing Papadopoulos' past bodies of work and absorbing/becoming sick with elements of the lower ground floor works) this second body of work flaunts an excessive existence, their 'skin' thickly inscribed with societal measures of desire. We are here, because we must love their physical perfections yet, is it not them that seek our faces in order to discover their meaning?

How beautiful it looks, your doomed female body.

Papadopoulos' second floor exhibition is again a visual and sonic transformation of one of her Chapters or as she calls them 'Tatahs'. Here we are in "Go Ahead Take It— Chapter 30. (Tatah 30) of her synonymously titled "A Tittle Tattle...".

Here in the last act, the final chapter, we retrogress into children both stunted by and in awe of these authoritarian devouring mothers. The culturally-emancipated villains Queen of Hearts, Ursula and Cruella de Vil are the last allusion to Bunny's 'self-destination.' Now the body is tired and worn and has no choice but to welcome its irreversible disengagement with outside desire. It is exactly here, where female's gradual awakening must search elsewhere for meaning. Papadopoulos's conscientious choice of using these iconic and manic obsessive female representations— ultimately alluding to a critical misidentification with the all-consuming demands of mass-culture — reaching not just the point of impartial resistance to female's globalised destiny, but fully embracing the anti-heroine inside herself.

A road to hell, paved with good intentions, this hybrid woman still carries the effects of her colonised history, but is no longer bound to foreign infatuation.

At long last, girlhood is left behind, and she now lives for the sake of revenge. Teaching us, the new youth... all that was once was taught to her, as if it meant everything and nothing.

Lara Konrad is a writer currently based in Mexico City. She recently published her first book of prose, "Mother, We All Have Been Lonely and Lovely Places," with Gato Negro Ediciones.

RELATED EVENTS

PERFORMANCE EVENING WITH HP PARMLEY (AGES 11+)

Thu 30 May

6–8pm

Free, booking required

NATIONAL WRITING DAY:

NEEDHAM PRIZE WITH CRITICAL FISH – WORKSHOPS

Wed 12 & 19 June

6–8pm

Free, booking required

ABOUT US

Humber Street Gallery is an Absolutely Cultured project, bringing a vibrant, high-quality contemporary art space to Hull. The gallery's free programme of exhibitions is supported by a series of talks, performances, screenings and workshops.

Absolutely Cultured puts culture at the heart of Hull's ambition and aspirations, commissioning and producing a programme of events and projects which are ambitious, surprising and imaginative. In addition to the gallery and our broader cultural events, we continue to develop our world-class volunteer programme, to deliver initiatives to support the cultural sector and to offer access to creative learning opportunities.

OPENING TIMES

GALLERY & CAFÉ

Mon: Closed

Tue – Sun: 10:00 – 18:00

First Thu of the Month: Until 20:00

(During Exhibitions)

Official Funding Partners



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