



ANASTASIA BOOTH

Sepulchre

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Interview with Brooke Ferguson and Anastasia Booth

Can you tell me about the new work in *Sepulchre*, how did it come about?

The work in *Sepulchre* came from my research into female ritual practices and my fascination with specific mythological and historical narratives. In particular, the chronicles and rituals from the terrain around the Adriatic Sea, including Greece and Italy. While reading these texts, I kept returning to female characters, those whose representation was framed by aspects of their sexuality. When looking at these women together they seemed to sit within a greater narrative archetype, a communal dialogue of shared characteristics, repetitious narrative components and mutual landscapes. *Sepulchre* became my attempt to develop a conversation between these women by drawing from their commonality, and reimagining these collective elements into sculptural objects and moving images. The video explores an apotropaic gesture, a Baubo-style 'flashing'. A glass star chart rests on white cliffs, speaking to the narrative of Andromeda and her position as both a celestial and terrene landscape. Another object, a wall mounted copper light burst, pays homage to the framing device used by Gian Lorenzo Bernini in *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*.

You have mentioned the significance of your practice broadening or shifting away from a focus on contemporary fetish practice. Can you talk a bit more about why you consider this as important?

I consider this shift significant because it opens up the creative practice to a broader spectrum of cultural influences, visual languages and symbolic discourse. As you said, previously, the work sat within contemporary understandings of sexual fetishism, limited to subcultural practices including where they intersected with BDSM rituals. I was concerned with the lack of female agency within these scenarios, the pacification of the female subject and the repression of her desire. When I started to explore fetishism's earlier occult object-based etymology, I was drawn to historical and cultural narratives that appeared as a pre-cursor to these contemporary power-dynamics. Except, these dialogues depicted a subversive and authorial femininity, developed through connotations with mysticism, ritual practice and women's knowledge. It was the subversive potential of these earlier erotic codes that became important. Not only do they provide a rich visual platform to build upon but also operate as a site to critique and explore how we view contemporary female sexuality.

Andromeda, Baubo, and Anasyrma, an apotropaic gesture I hadn't heard of before came up when we began talking about the kind of research shaping the work in the show. The commonality of these references is that they relate to or are about women in astrology, mythology, etymology, and ritual. Why are you interested in these quite esoteric things?

I've always had a fascination with the arcane, it is strange that I'm only just starting to accentuate it within the work. My interest stems from the rich visual languages of these discourses; their ritualised objects, the enactment of characters, the costuming, wearable prosthesis and the landscapes. Once, they used to reflect an alternative and specialized type of knowledge, existing as the polemic to Christian belief and 'male centrality'. This position as an oppositional discourse allowed space for women to exist in

these dialogues in greater and more varied capacities. In that way I was attracted to the complexity of these characters; that they (ironically) reflected a real and more nuanced view of what women and their sexuality could be. Though in hindsight, I recognise that my attraction to contemporary fetishism was similarly linked to an allusion to these practices and characteristics.

How do you go about making your work, is there any particular process you follow?

There isn't a strict process that I follow but I frequently employ methods that are playful and intuitive. Part of this approach, involves appropriation and adoption, working with existing forms and reconstructing them or using them for their formal qualities. Because I draw material from bodily practices, the objects refer back to this performativity, appearing as wearable forms or prosthesis. At the same time, I continue to foster the relationship between text-based research and these material processes, drafting and mapping out core concerns before I start experimenting.

You facilitated a poetry event as part of your residency at Boxcopy, which preceded this exhibition, and you have facilitated similar poetry/spoken word events in the past. How do you consider the facilitations of these projects as part of your art practice more broadly?

The poetry events developed around my love of erotic literature and the intimacy of spoken word. Before I started to facilitate these performances, this interest had existed outside my practice, except for small hand written text sections that I never displayed. Curating these events became a means to draw these pieces into my exhibited practice and to generate an alternate platform through which to present them. They also function as a space where I can explore the potential of sound and performance. As a result, I negotiate these events as a test site for developing new works and future projects. With successive events, I have noticed that there are many practitioners who also have this side-material; small text pieces, sound bites and performances that wouldn't usually 'fit' within their broader practice. I hope for them that these poetry events can also act as a platform to flesh out these works.

Where to from here?

Back to writing and researching for the moment... and some new works still to be made.

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Image: Anastasia Booth *Sepulchre (detail)* 2015.

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