

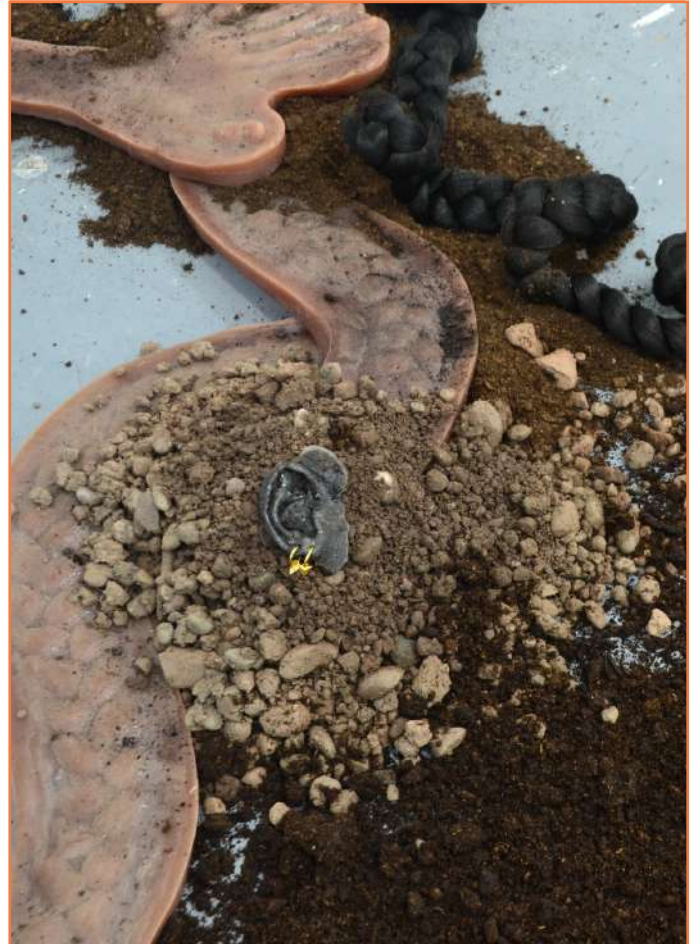
Issue 13 – Davinia-Ann Robinson

SOS / Sculptors on Sculpture is a series of weekly condensed interviews with early career contemporary sculptors.

Davinia-Ann art practice explores the politics of colonial emotions and how these are impressed onto Bodies of Colour who reside within colonial spaces. She is interested in the implications of these emotions and the sensations they create in-between the outer and inner layer of one's skin and the experiences of living within the societal peripheries that these emotions enable as they distort readings and connections to one's physical and metaphorical body, connections between individual bodies, and connections to one's environment.

SOS: This series of interviews came to fruition during from the Covid19 lockdown, fostered by a spirit of generosity and finding new ways of supporting each other. As we enter a second lockdown, how have you adapted to the lockdowns? Have you been able to make work in these periods?

DAR: During the first lockdown, for about three months, I did not make any physical work. Instead, I concentrated on trying to get through a very large reading list, which was forever growing! More importantly I just took time out to think and write, without putting pressure on myself to make. In July I got a studio for a few months because I was invited to make work for Bold Tendencies. Having that deadline was great, it forced me after months of not physically making to concentrate and work through all of the research I had accumulated over the first months of lockdown and create work. During this second lockdown, I have been very lucky, because Universities have remained open. I am currently in my final year on my MFA at Slade, so I have been able to access



'EARTH, BODY' (detail) 2020 ,Earth, Stones, Wax, Faux Hair, Gold Earrings and Fern.

my studio, see other artists making work and have some impromptu conversations about our work and life, which I find really helpful when working through my practice. I also turned a space in my flat into a mini studio (I put a desk in a room), I cannot really do any messy work there but it's a place where I can go and think and write.



SOS: With an increasing move towards digital platforms, I wanted to ask you about encountering your work. How important is it to you for your work to be visible and occupying physical space?

DAR: Digital platforms can be great, you can reach large audiences and viewers can potentially visit more art spaces and see more work than they could on foot. However there then begins questions of modes used to capture the work for digital encounters, and if these modes of capture then become part of the work, change the work or even become the work. Considering the cost of equipment used to capture the work and skills required to do so is also an interesting factor to digital platforms. The quality of modes of capturing works also influences how we approach work viewed online.

My work speaks of my embodied experiences of being a Body of Colour dwelling in colonial environments, the work is very tactile, and I want

'EARTH, BODY' (detail) 2020 ,Earth, Stones, Wax, Faux Hair, Gold Earrings and Fern.

people to encounter it with all of their senses, for instance the smell of the soil in my work *Bod(y)ies That Weather, Earth, Body. and Presence* or playing a soundscape really low from a speaker hidden in soil, so that the viewer has to crouch down really low next to the soil to hear, or varnish in *Plasticised Sensation* was used to invoke feelings of exhaustion and being overpowered. I am interested in the physical spaces which my work can occupy, gallery spaces, outdoor nature spaces where a viewer may just come across the work and outdoor nature spaces where the work can weather and become part of the environment. It's really important for my work to occupy physical spaces, and with this to consider how the viewer will encounter the work and in what context the work encounters the viewer.

SOS: [Guest Question] Your use of organic material and its relationship with the body reminded me of the work of Howardena Pindell whose “cut and sewn” paintings used hair and waste material to elude to what she describes as her embodied experience. This question comes from an interview between Pindell and Osei Bonsu for Frieze Magazine. “...you developed an interest in using everyday materials in a non-traditional way in your art. What [is] the impetus behind this?”

DAR: I do not think of the use of hair in my work as being a non-traditional material. I don't ever think of materials I use being traditional or non-traditional. I consider the narratives, histories and my personal connections to the materials I use instead. This is why I have used hair a lot in my work, but this is something that I am moving away from, or at least moving away from the type of hair previously used which was braiding hair extensions. It's a material which I grew up with, getting my hair braided every few months, and when I was younger it used to be a marker for my identity. At the time of creating the works which have this hair in them, I used it as a way of signifying myself in the work and as means of exploring colonial ideals of the palatable Black Female figure. My relationship with that particular hair has developed and I am not sure if I will come back to that particular material in future works.

SOS: In your work ‘Bod(y)ies That Weather’ you gather earth from spaces where in your own words you have ‘experienced colonial or socio-political violence,’ you then use this material to produce pigments and cast into body parts. Can you talk about your interest in using earth and its relationship for you with the body?

DAR: I have been thinking about the position of Blackness in line with the inception of the



‘PLASTICISED SENSATION’ 2019, Faux Hair, Elastic Band and Varnish.

Anthropocene and its beginnings in 1452 when the first slaves were put to work on plantations, humans first significant impact of the earth's ecosystems and questioning what the ecological understanding of The Atlantic Slave Trade is. Its ties to the declining health of natural environments and its thinking of human and nature as separate through Capitalism, industrial colonial farming practices, water contamination, mining practices for natural matter such as coal, silver, gold. As well as the displacement and unhumanising categorising of bodies of colour as matter and commodities of natural resources. My methods of research take the form of critical theory and tactile practice led understanding through my embodied experiences and with that this includes the environments where these experiences take place. This is why I am so

interested in using earth from locations where I have experienced socio-political violence or as I am starting to call it colonial emotions (I may stop calling it that). I am interested in blurring the connection between my body and soil and examining the colonial practices which have impressed onto both and ways of re-articulating both, but not through Whiteness. The practice of gathering the soil is also very important to me, it facilitates time for me to unpick my own lived experiences within local, national and global environments, facilitates a tactile understanding between the environment and my body and provides time for me to be present.



'PRESENCE' 2019, Wax, Soil and Faux Hair.

SOS: This summer your work was exhibited as part of Bold Tendencies in Peckham. Alongside your work 'Bod(y)ies That Weather' you produced a soundscape 'Damp Atmosphere.' The work is available to listen on your website, which I'd encourage everyone to do so. Can you talk about the origins of this work?

DAR: The soundscape work, Damp Atmosphere initially began as a poem which I wrote in September 2019. At that time, I had recorded it as a soundscape where I read the poem on repeat, later the work was further developed, and I created this new soundscape. The work explores local, national and global moments where I have experienced having my presence disabled. Revisiting these encounters in the work, I explore the language used to describe my body, the environments these encounters take place and the colonial emotions, which seep into and impress onto my body. I layered tracks of my voice reading the poem on repeat, with tracks concentrating on the repetition of singular descriptive words used to describe colonial emotions I had encountered, and tracks where I embodied emotions I felt because of the experiences, making freeform sounds with my voice.

SOS: And finally, what are you working on right now?

DAR: Currently I am exploring Black, Brown and Indigenous farming practices and methods of replenishing and understanding soil health as well as bio-diversity readings of specific locations as a fugitivity praxis. At the start of this month I began a collaborative participatory art project with Mimosa House, entitled Tactile Belonging. The project will run until February 2020. It surrounds my current art practice and research in Presencing and Black, Brown and Indigenous plant and soil conservation practices. The project invited People of Colour to take part in a collective art making and research project by examining the textural feel of soil, explore the Bio-diversity of 'nature' they inhabit while unpicking language used to describe 'nature' environments and their experiences. Whilst creating Tactile Belonging I am exploring ways of marking and tracing colonial emotions through my body and earth. I am in the process of creating new soundscape work too.

Interviewer: Josh Wright