

Issue 15 – Anousha Payne

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

Anousha Payne is a sculptor and painter investigating the relationship between domestic objects and spaces in relation to the idea of animism – the attribution of a living soul to plants, inanimate objects and natural phenomena. In Payne's work, objects are imbued with a spiritual potential. She explores whether an object can impact the outcome of future events, like karma but with objects rather than actions. Her practice oscillates between intuitive making and painting and a more controlled and planned sculptural practice. She often works with ceramics and for her latest show at indigo+madder she has recently begun incorporating found materials into the pieces.

SOS: I'd like to begin as we often do by thinking about the lockdown and the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on artists. What has been your experience of this time? Have you found it has changed your practice or redirected your themes in anyway?

AP: The lockdown gave me the time I really needed to slow down – it was such a luxury to spend every day in the studio and spent so much time reading and writing in between. I think it's usually very difficult to commit so much time to research or reading as it's so hard to concentrate properly when your time is limited. This kind of slow, meandering thinking time proved to be more productive for me. It definitely changed my practice as I have never really written before, and felt quite suddenly compelled to write. I'd often write just brief paragraphs or short stories, but either way this definitely impacted my work as it gave it more of a direct

narrative – and oscillated between Tamil folkloric stories, personal fiction stories and memories, rather than a singular focus. During this time I also began focusing on more traditional Sri Lankan and Indian cooking, and my grandmothers Muruku (an Indian savoury snack) press ended up being the mould/press for ceramic hair of some of the characters. I think this playfulness and correlation between cultural identity, cooking & the work I was making wouldn't have occurred without the time that lockdown allowed.



Installation view of 'and her she dwells' at Indigo+Madder, 2020.

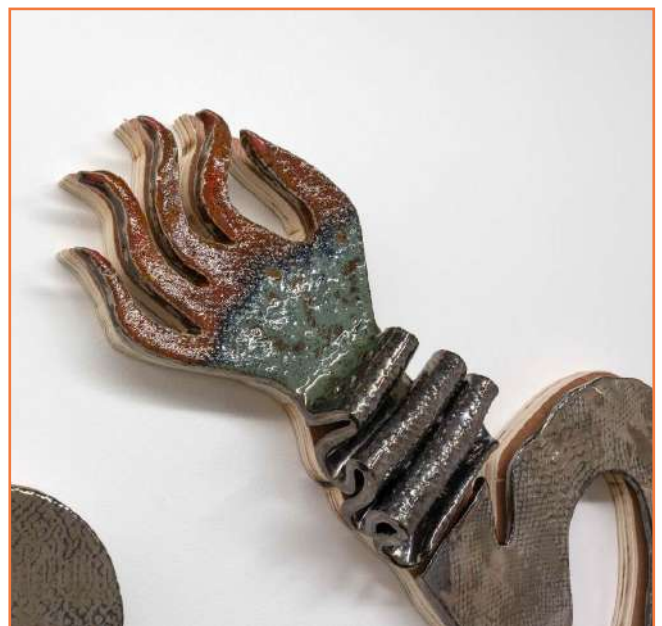


‘The snake maiden (stronger than a leaf)’ 2020,
Stoneware ceramic, plywood and metal. 170 X 109 X 7
cm

SOS: [Guest Question] You work a variety of media, but perhaps most notably ceramics. Thinking about form and figuration through clay made me think of the work of Rebecca Warren. This question comes from an interview with Warren and Tate St Ives Curator Laura Smith. Thinking about the very physical manipulation of clay in contrast to casting jesmonite or metalwork. “Do different materials change the way you work?”

AP: Different materials certainly change the way I work, but equally so can my mood and the feeling that I want to put into a certain work. With some clay works I’ll work fast,

allowing the folds and creases of the clay, the natural fall and weight of it to become part of the work, like a skin or hide. Other work is more concise and more planned; I’ll make a paper or card version and build it up one piece at a time. There’s also the physical constraint of scale when it comes to clay, so it needs to be broken into pieces or planned so it will fit in the kiln. When working with something like jesmonite I found I made the mistake of treating it like clay, when really it’s best as a casting material. I slowly built and layered the jesmonite up instead of doing a pour. In a way although this was more tedious (a lot more sanding was required) this was the way I thought best to create inconsistencies between each side of the body for ‘Your heart tastes like apples (the crocodiles wife)’. But generally with working with casting materials more planning is required so it’s a much less intuitive method. Sometimes I’ll plan these works in watercolour sketches, so that the initial shape is still based on intuitive drawing/mark making, though some of this is eliminated in the process of making. The glass that sits as the tabletop for ‘Your heart tastes like apples.’ was very precise to the millimetre as if not it wouldn’t have sat level..



‘The snake maiden (stronger than a leaf)’(detail), 2020. Stoneware ceramic, plywood and metal. 170 X 109 X 7 cm.

SOS: What drew you to first start working with clay?

AP: Funnily the first thing that drew me to clay is something I don't really do much of anymore, but I started with slip casting for my degree show. I wanted to make a hollow shell of some soft sculptures; an object that looked soft and sturdy but was instead thin, brittle and fragile. After this I started hand building; I found this process much more alluring as its so tactile and you manipulate the work as you go, the qualities of the material impact the output as much as your hands do.



'As she sheds her skin', 2020, Glazed Vulcan black stoneware. 32 x 30cm.

SOS: In your most recent work such as your exhibition 'and here she dwells' at Indigo+Madder you have delved into Tamil Folklore as a way of connecting with your own cultural identity. What brought about this exploration?

AP: Although my mother used to play us Hanuman tales on tape when we were younger, this particular focus on Tamil folklore began with my boyfriend buying me a book of Indian folkloric stories, and I focused specifically on Tamil stories as my family are Tamil. I have always been interested in storytelling, but usually focus on short stories and modern literature. In the past year or so I began to think about my cultural identity; questioning my relationship with my own heritage why I hadn't addressed it earlier, why I might have been uncomfortable with it. I began to connect more with mythology and folklore as there are often fictional magical creatures within mythology, and I'm interested in this combination of moral dilemmas and magic; spirituality and animism alongside characters with transformative qualities. A lot of these stories carry so much

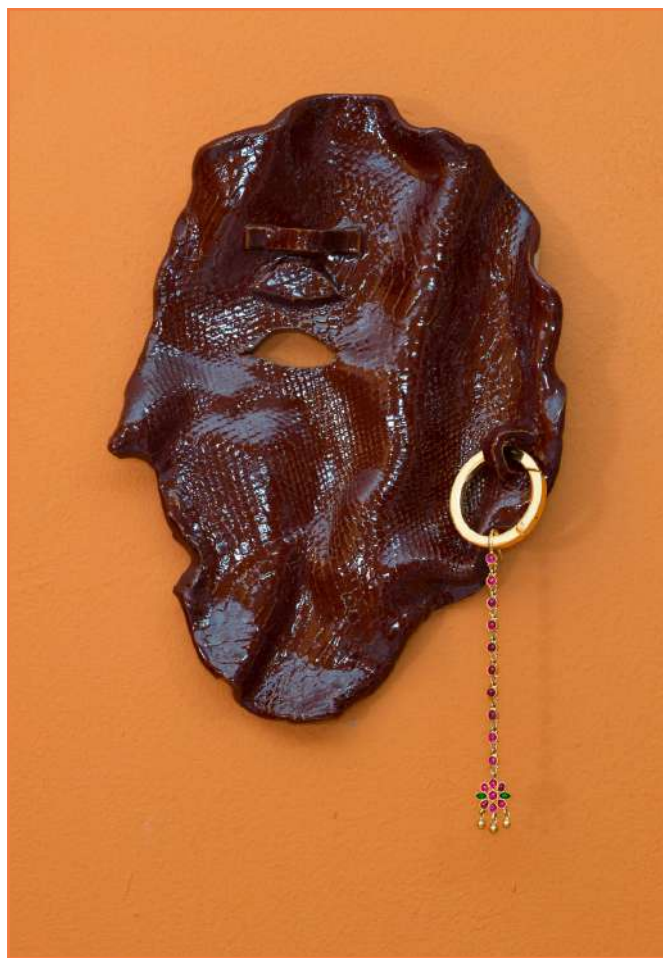


'As she thickens', 2020, Glazed stoneware ceramic. 36 X 27 X 4 cm.

history with them; they've been passed down from generation to generation, all word of mouth and personal adaptations and flourishes that change the stories over time. I think this tells you more about communities and particular groups within society, and about human communication and the importance of storytelling, about belief systems and caste systems and morality over time. All of these things are condensed into these short and often transporive stories, sometimes sad and often witty and comical. The stories are so visually driven too, so tangible but also quite dramatised.

SOS: Are there any artists practicing today who you feel you share particular affinity with?

AP: I love the work of Anthea Hamilton; the performative elements to her work, the set like presence of almost-functional objects. I also love the work of Camille Henrot, the show she had at Chisenhale years ago has really stayed with me. It felt like such a clear portrayal of what it means to be human.



'As she sheds her skin, she watches over us', 2020, Glazed stoneware ceramic and metal. 29 x 22cm.

SOS: Despite a global pandemic, it seems your practice has gone from strength to strength and you've exhibited work in some significant solo and group exhibitions. What's next for you?

AP: Next year I am doing some residencies (covid allowing) the first will be at Casa Balandra, which my friend set up this year. The residency is based in a village known for terracotta in Mallorca so hopefully I will be working with more clay there. The following will be in Brussels in the summer. In terms of shows there's a group show curated by Camilla Bliss at Platform Southwark and a two-person show with Anna Perach at Cooke Latham gallery.

Interviewer: Josh Wright



'As she grew', 2019, Jesmonite, pigment and resin. 110 x 80 x 60cm