

ATHENA PAPADOPOULOS

Solo Presentation

H8 Focus Section / Frieze London 2018

At the centre of Athena Papadopoulos' presentation for Frieze, a group of beds made of wrought-iron curlicue sit facing each other, perched atop a selection of cocktail and medical trolleys. In this infirmary, viewers take sticky steps across a sickly green hospital floor to meet miniature single-beds offering up the enigmatic inner worlds of the girls who once occupied them. To peer into them is to encounter dreamscapes that feel at once cryptic and diaristically intimate: gauze and glues have been modelled into fleshy forms and saturated with the artist's usual repertoire of edible and cosmetic fluids. At the centre of the beds, mattresses give way to organ-shaped resin pools clogged with detritus and insects, collected trinkets, false eyelashes, discarded nut shells and love notes in drawn text. Like bird nests, these skeletal structures have been cluttered with the hoardings of an imagined occupant working through experiences of isolation, repression, nostalgia and longing.

The beds represent a confessional and performative space. As a site of vulnerability, angst and fantasy, the bed has been a platform across which discursive and political practices have been negotiated. In Papadopoulos' practice, furniture and domestic objects stand in for those who have come into contact with them. As avatars, these objects manifest the emotional and experiential complexity of internalised misogyny as much as individual self-realisation. Portraits in their own right, Papadopoulos' sick-beds for the love-sick operate at the outer limits of autobiography as they wrestle with the thrills and anxieties surrounding sexuality, adolescence and the unfixity of female subjectivity.

On the walls, sculptural paintings made of reconfigured second-hand bridal gowns flank the central installation. The assemblages swell into protruding wells within which polluted resin puddles entrap precious and toxic paraphernalia. Their titles - *Do Do Dodo Big Bird* (2018), *Burning Swallows a Well that Wallows* (2018), or *A Cuckoo Sidepain that gets Worse Knot Better* (2018) - are taken from a list of extinct exotic birds and fused with the cartoonish birds prevalent in mainstream entertainment. For the artist, the birds provide a vehicle for exploring the more intricate manifestations of societal gender conventions as they come to operate within language (the use of 'birds', 'chicks' and 'hens' as metonyms and terms of endearment for women; the frequent characterisation of Disney birds as cute but dim-witted, annoying or embroiled in evil intrigues).

Biography

Athena Papadopoulos was born in Toronto, CA in 1988 and lives and works in London. Following her BFA at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, CA), she completed her MFA at Goldsmiths (London, UK) in 2013. Recent exhibitions include *The Marvelous Cacophony*, curated by Gunnar B. and Danielle Kvaran, 57th October Salon (Belgrade, RS, 2018); *The Smurfette*, Emalin (London, UK, 2017); *Belladonna's Muse*, curated by Samuel Leuenberger, CURA Basement Roma (Rome, IT, 2017); *Wolf Whistles*, Shoot the Lobster NY (NYC, USA, 2016); *Streams of Warm Impermanence*, David Roberts Art Foundation (London, UK, 2016); *Wild Style*, Peres Projects (Berlin, DE, 2016); *Bloody Life*, Herald St., London, UK, 2016).