

The annexe

Paloma Proudfoot

The Voice of the Play

23 February – 30 March 2024

Preview: Thursday 22 February, 6-9pm

The Approach is pleased to present *The Voice of the Play*, a debut presentation of work by Paloma Proudfoot in The Annexe.

With a background in textiles, Proudfoot's artistic process mirrors flat pattern-cutting, initially working with paper templates before realising the work in a three-dimensional format. Throughout her practice, she has been led by an enduring interest in how corporeality is both registered and articulated.

The Voice of the Play began with research into the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris during the 19th century, which, led by neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, redefined the treatment and understanding of 'hysteria'. Proudfoot's work looks at how the patients of Salpêtrière became seen as mannequin-like, ventriloquised bodies malleable to the doctors' whims; imagining through her works what their stories might have been had they been allowed to speak themselves. Drawing together this historical research with contemporary references and personal experience, Proudfoot explores the voice as a mechanism of agency more broadly, understanding it in physical as well as metaphorical terms, asking the question *who gets to speak?*

The exhibition takes its title from the narrator-esque character named *The Voice of the Play* in Hélène Cixous' play *Portrait of Dora*. In this work, Cixous reimagines an account written by Freud (who was Charcot's student) of one of his hysteria patients, the eponymous Dora. Cixous' uses *The Voice of the Play* as a method to acknowledge her new account of Dora is precisely a *version*, one of a number of possible readings. Across the works in the exhibition Proudfoot also seeks to make space for a multiplicity of interpretations.

In *Everybody has their own view*, Proudfoot draws on documentation of patients with 'Dermographia' at Salpêtrière, who had such skin sensitivity that if lightly traced upon their skin would react in angry red welts. Often signing their own name, the doctor demonstrated an obvious sense of ownership and dominance over their vulnerable patient. In Proudfoot's work, a disembodied hand is still in the process of writing across the figure's back, as if in the moments before the chosen message is finalised and the photo is taken, the viewer is invited to imagine what might be written on the skin. The title is a translation of the Birgit Jürgenssen artwork *Jeder hat seine eigene Ansicht* from 1975, where, in uncanny parallel to the documentation of Dermographia patients at Salpêtrière, the artist has these words written across her own back in lipstick. Like Jurgenssen's message, the viewer is reminded that while they are seeing one version, it is not a definitive representation. Written in lipstick, the smears of this stereotypically feminine object, is used to deny categorisation.

Disembodied hands reappear across the exhibition, like the just-seen hands of a puppeteer; the viewer is made aware of how the figures are being manipulated for their viewing. In *Unfinished Painting*, a hand holding a medical instrument to the face of the figure demonstrates the hypnotic spell she is under. The open weave of the shirt is suggestive of the chalked in lines of a painting before the exact contour of the body is decided and colour

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applied. A ghostly presence yet to take shape and her writing stalled by a bleeding pen, the body and its portrayal shown as a work in progress.

In *Threaded*, the exterior of the body is peeled back, demonstrating the depths to which a narrative might be imprinted on the female body. We see unzipped clothing revealing a spinal cord protruding from the back and a hand threading through the vein network, like an anatomical model maker paused at work. In *Emotional Anatomy (I)* and *Needle (I and II)* the spinal and rib like forms take on different textures, vine-like or with scaled protrusions, hybridising the visual language of anatomical models with a more metaphorical and emotional vernacular, *spine crawling* made manifest.

In *Plume Proudfoot* draws on stories of Charcot's 'Tuesday Lectures', specifically the demonstrations in which feathers would be attached to patients to amplify the movement of their trembling and show the apparent neutralising effects of hypnosis. The women of Salpêtrière treated like mannequins, to which various accoutrements could be attached, are here and across the exhibition, reimagined with the agency to shape and model the representation of their own bodies. Transposed and stilled in clay, but fragmented and articulated as if only in momentary stasis, the works maintain a sense of flux and change.

Paloma Proudfoot (b. 1992, London, UK) lives and works in London.

Recent solo exhibitions include: The Lowry, Salford, UK (2024, forthcoming); Soy Capitán, Berlin, DE (2023, 2021 and 2019); Bosse and Baum Gallery, London, UK (2022); Hannah Barry Gallery, London, UK (2022 and 2018); Editorial Projects, Vilnius, LT; The Box at Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London, UK (2020); Sans Titre, Paris, FR (2019); Ballon Rouge Collective, Brussels, BE (2019).

Recent group exhibitions include: *The Infinite Woman*, Fondation Carmignac, FR (forthcoming); *Present Tense*, Hauser & Wirth, Somerset, UK; *Unruly Bodies*, Goldsmiths CCA, London, UK; *Contested Bodies*, Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery, Leeds, UK; *In Watte und Nadeln*, Galerie im Koernerpark, Berlin; *off the beaten rack*, Kunst im Tunnel, Dusseldorf, DE; Sculpture commission for Love, Bold Tendencies, London, UK; *The Land of Cockaigne*, Quench Gallery, Margate, UK; *In Flux*, National Geological History Museum, Meteora, EL; *Art by Post*, Southbank Centre, London, UK.

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