

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**PAULINA OLOWSKA: CERAMICS****18 SEPTEMBER 2014 – 9 OCTOBER 2014.****PRIVATE VIEW: WEDNESDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER 2014, 6–8PM**

Simon Lee Gallery Hong Kong is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition with leading Polish artist Paulina Olowaska. Olowaska's paintings, collages, and ceramics engage with traditional Polish crafts, feminism, the historical avant-garde whilst incorporating a modernist vocabulary. Questioning the distinctions between high and low art, *Ceramics* presents new works that are an appropriation and celebration of the cultural and historical vernacular traditions of her native Poland and a wider European context.

Olowaska's new series of ceramics extend and develop her exploration of female archetypes. Two of these sculptures are taken from standing polychrome wood sculptures of Saint Catherine and the Virgin with Child, housed in the Museum im. Wladyslawa Orkana in Rabka, the town south of Krakow in Poland where Olowaska has her home and studio. The authors and dates of creation of the original sculptures are unknown, but they stand within the tradition of Northern European wooden sculpture. While marble or bronze sculptures have held a more elevated place in art historical tradition, wooden sculptures, because of its poverty of materials, tend to be associated more with its devotional function and the communities it serves and from which it stems.

A third sculpture is an appropriation in ceramic of the celebrated late 15th Century Virgin Mary with Protective Mantle from the Church of Our Lady in Ravensburg. This iconographic trope, particularly common in plague years, shows the Virgin holding open her cloak to protect the supplicant community beneath it. Together with a head of a *Mater Dolorosa* these works propose a lexicon of female archetypes derived from the Catholic tradition: the Virgin with Child, the grieving mother, the holy protector and the martyr saint.

Olowaska completes the series with two sculptures from the secular tradition: a late 19th Century carving of a mermaid from the collection of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden and a remaking of Max Klinger's sculpture of Salome from 1887. These last two add to the group the archetypes of femme fatale or virgin whore. For the depiction of Salome, for example she chooses a version of the figure which is unusual in that it shows two heads – supposedly the death mask of Herod alongside the severed head of John the Baptist – which further complexifies the myth of the biblical figure so richly augmented by the romantic imagination.

These appropriations of historical works pay homage to the tradition of representation of the female figure, in a plethora of forms, both in a devotional context within the Catholic Church and as comforter, temptress or siren in a secular context. Alongside them Olowaska will show a series of collages and paintings which extend her themes of engaging with historical iconographies, referencing shifts in cultural perspective between East and West and the nostalgic re-staging of past aesthetics and ideologies.

Paulina Olowaska was born in 1976 in Gdansk, Poland and studied at the School of the Art institute of Chicago and the Academy of fine Arts, Gdansk. She has undertaken scholarships and residencies in The Hague, Lisbon, Japan, the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam and at CCA Wattis, San Francisco. Her work has been exhibited in biennials including Venice (2003), Moscow and Istanbul (both 2005) Berlin (2008) and the 56th Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (2013). Important Solo exhibitions include The National Gallery of Art, Warsaw (2014), The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and Kunsthalle Basel (2013), BOZAR Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (2011), CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2010), Camden Arts Centre, London (2009), and Saamlung Goetz, Munich (2007). She lives and works in Rabka, Poland.

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