

‘With grief as a partner’: meetings at the shrine in Delaine Le Bas’ *‘Tutis A Rinkeni Moola, Abri’*.

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*Shrine for Damian* 2017 - ongoing  
Mixed media, 241cm x 116cm x 95cm: photo Alexander Christie

What might it mean to live with ghosts? What might it mean to live with someone else's ghosts? To inhabit their memories? Walking into the current show at Yamamoto Keiko Rochaix one might well wonder, as the exhibition invites the viewer to wander into a haunting, mixed-media world peopled with figures and forms and memories. Delaine Le Bas' show weaves together the highly personal and the deeply political, traversing this (after)life in painstaking, sometimes painful increments, negotiating it through the display of (be)loved objects which merge past and present, self and subject. The works present a layered encounter with love, loss and memory, acting somewhere between narrator and memorial for the viewer. In seeing this show we are indeed haunted by the ghosts of other people, as well as by other people's ghosts – not least the specter of the artist's love, and the visual representation of her negotiation of trauma, and of grief. However, alongside this deeply personal exploration of change and shifting relationships, we are also given a glimpse of the haunted/

hounded spaces of her marginalized community, of political work left undone and yet impossibly continued, of things unsaid, and things that are said across the space/s of sudden crushing absence.

Le Bas' personal ghosts are here, but so too are the popular ghosts of psyche and mythos, which coexist with popular, pan-global kitsch. Medusa and Mickey inhabit this place, along with the embodied and portrayed forms of Saints, Virgins and goddesses; for the most part, deities of the dead preside here. Indeed, when looking at these works, for ghosts, we could perhaps read spirit. Spirits. Not haunted then, but certainly haunting – pieces, ideas and emotions commune and communicate through and across the form filled space of the gallery.

Fragments, figures, forms – all inhabit the space created by Le Bas in her current show *Tutis A Rinkeni Moola, Abri* (You're A Beautiful Ghost, And Free) – showing from the 11th January – 7th March, 2019. Yet this space, which performs as a shrine also acts as a crossing place, a meeting place. Here we witness, we commune. In looking at these works, we are also invited to listen to their stories, and hear what they have to tell us.

An artist who works across media, Le Bas has filled the gallery with forms and figures which inhabit the space, communicating in and around it, speaking across the white walled space which grounds their highly-coloured bodies, and frayed and fragmented forms. These figures, composed as they are of an amalgamation of mixed-media fragments and forms, have an ethereal quality – caught between substance and insubstantiality. Le Bas' figures, made of things, fabrics, collaged images, layered stiches, statues and writings, give the impression of being at once (re)imagined and remembered. Her work has been called 'magpie-like' and those acquisitive, collecting tendencies are all here, expressed in fabric, paint, text, and textile. The bodies she conjures from a series of things and forms and shapes are made up of pop-culture motifs, religious icons, mythical figures, patterned textiles which speak of powerful cultural intertexts and intersections; but also present her family, her community, her life. The show is, in so many ways, an intimate mediation on love and loss – and on the thin and fragile and frayed place she/we inhabit(s) in the world but it is also a space where loss is elided with love, and memory with moment. As the gallerist explains, "the exhibition ultimately touches on the universal themes of love and loss. Le Bas exposes all of the facets of the relationship

with her late husband using fragments from the diaries she has kept since his death along with older texts, incorporating elements that span their artistic careers and life together. It is indeed a deeply personal account, a record of her endeavour to interiorise and come to terms with the pain that comes with life and death, but importantly, it is also a promise, that something does endure beyond life”.

*Shrine for Damian*, 2017 – ongoing, could be said to be the focal point of the show. It is the culmination of a dialogue and an ongoing conversation, object as intercessor. Le Bas states “I have had a shrine with most of the objects that are on the photographic backdrop for some years, it is in my bedroom. Some of the statuettes myself and Damian collected while in Rajasthan others like the small St George Altar our dear friends Hamze and Vero brought for me when I visited Kosovo with them last Summer. There is also a Sara Kali statue which my mother brought back from Saint Maries De La Mer in the south of France many years back - in late May each year Gypsies and Roma travel from across Europe to celebrate Saint Sara who is carried into the water, after a procession through the town”.

Clearly, this is a lived with and loved set of objects, and as an installation, demonstrates a forceful emotional pull. The mixed textures of collaged photographs and architectural surround are viscerally presented against the white walls of the gallery, pulling the viewer toward and through the framed space of the shrine to the figures beyond the structuring, floral textile. Damian, in various images from across his life, is surrounded by religious figures, bright textiles and amulets, shrouding and enshrining him. Surrounded by votives, there are two altar-like surfaces fronting the shrine completing the installation. On these surfaces are a series of intriguing and beguiling objects and figures, many of which serve to intercede between the viewer and the shrine. These tables, serving as plinths for saints and symbols, are filled with small objects. These include flowers, his favorite scent, pocketful’s of shells the artists collected on walks and travels, and objects from Damian’s own collections, including a vase with Gypsy standing between two trees, a cowboy, a horse shoe – redisplayed here in front of his image, representing, perhaps, his handling and caretaking and arranging of these; not standing as static emblems of that past collection, but also performing as part of the ongoing collection and the shrine continues to evolve. In discussing the work Le Bas has

referred to her aim for an Etruscan influenced ‘neutral place for the dead’, and this installation is a curious mixture of the constructed neutral and the presentation of the hyper-personal. It is neutral, in that various figures from multiple religions come together harmoniously here on their patterned, embroidered hot pink ground, but the neutrality of spiritual and religious forms lead the viewer through the intensely personal narrative between Delaine and Damian, as they stand among gifts and objects the pair found and exchanged. As much of this show is about Le Bas renegotiating making and meaning, in the wake of tragedy it is interesting that this particular piece is both made and still in the moment of ongoing making: framing and performing both her memories and her ongoing renegotiation of self and subject, which is constructed around this evolution of their shared narrative.

The work, as a whole, speaks of relationships, of connections, of ties formed, severed and reformed – and ultimately of Le Bas’ (ongoing) relationship with her late husband – powerfully and materially presented in the space of the Gallery. It speaks of relationships, and moments, and monumental figures, but also fracture and fragment. Sometimes, as it speaks it screams. The figures she constructs and presents in the show often have mouths agape, downturned, stretched, opened. Many with scrawls or pools or patches of violent red immediately beneath their opened speechless mouths – most powerfully seen, perhaps, in the embroidered unfinished form of the Medusa-head, floating in an embroidery hoop on a white sea of fabric, with her embryonic, partially embroidered serpentine hair looped in frustrated, furious coils against their sketched and potential companions. This monster/mother/woman is just one of the silent, silenced female figures here, inhabiting the edges of the gallery, waiting to tell their stories. Placed, as they often are, in proximity to text and writing these figures are powerful. Their silence is deafening. Speech, and the control or erasure of voice are paramount here – as the artist says ‘[there is an] ongoing debate about what you can and cannot say and who also has the privilege to say what and where [...] as a “Gypsy” for most of my life I had been the elephant in the room and this was the same for many people depending on their situations, background, circumstances’.

The figures on the walls of the gallery are both articulate, and somehow disarticulated: consider, for example the form of *What We Don’t Know Won’t Hurt Us? (Self Portrait)* 2006 – 2018,

about which Le Bas has stated “I produced the embroidery in 2006 and at the time it related to the destruction of the environment and the lack of proper information from Governments concerning this and all the other information we are really denied access to. Last year when it was returned to me after being part of a touring exhibition it took on a whole different meaning when I looked at again with fresh eyes and after Damian’s death. I am wearing the embroidery as part of a Shamanic costume which includes the mask. As the title of my diaries and journals says: “*In The Forest Of Grief I Turned Into A Shrub Of Gold*”. The destruction of an environment – now, both domestic and global. The costume and mask of the figure take on an elongated, etiolated form; a rabbit headed, pink dressed form waiting to be embodied and empowered by its wearing. However, even in this latent, undressed form, hanging on the wall, the promise of the figure, and the narrative it quite literally holds in its body are present. The pastel pink abdomen is filled with embroidery, showing a dystopic landscape where Edenic flowers bleed into skulls and silhouetted forms of fleeing, fading fauna. The encircling, banner-like streamers that encircle this scene at once call attention to the message, but also look faintly sinister – strips torn from the chest; a type of opening of the chest-cavity; the open-heart excision of loss.

As demonstrated by these ecological pieces, her work encompasses both act and activism, and sometimes the act becomes active, activist. Paintings, drawings, texts, embroidery and other works with fabric along with an array of found-objects form a series of installations that converge into a large, integral whole spreading across the gallery. While each work can be considered individually, together they form a unit, companions who inhabit and witness and welcome us into the artist’s interior and emotional worlds. However, this welcome is double-edged and these pieces are raw. Raw edged, raw emotion all expressed in the material attention lavished on textures, edges and things seen throughout these pieces as they frame and (re)shape the space for the viewer of their material forms.

This show, scheduled before the loss of her husband, is very much a shared space. Delaine Le Bas is present here, her life is presented, but so too is Damian. Their relationship is (interwoven) in and through the fabrics and forms of the works and words, actively enshrined before the viewer/visitor. Of their relationship she says “Love is strange, you think you know what it is [...] when it is

snatched away from you forever. With grief as a partner a new relationship develops between you and the one that you love. Over the past year I have had to develop a new relationship with Damian [...] that transcends time and the boundaries of what common sense would describe as normality”.

So, then the current show, ‘*Tutis A Rinkeni Moola, Abri*’, is now the new normal - in part, an expression of the artist coming to terms with change and loss, but also (re)constructing her new relationships that collapse past and present, reimagining a new future; never desired but nonetheless desirable, as these longed for forms shift and ripple with meaning. The exhibition is a meeting place of forms and things and fragments. We hear her/their voices, we glimpse her/their work. We observe the/ir shrine and we witness this creative act of ongoing; the going on, of work, of love, of life – all of which endure here, in the form and figures which narrate and display their stories and their experiences across the gallery. In the words of the artist, ‘the work continues’.