

ODYSSEY

Tessa Farmer | Patrick Haines | Damien Hirst | David Mach | Koji Shiraya

05 April – 06 May 2013

Bath Abbey and accompanying show at bo.lee gallery

Preview: Thursday 04 April, 6-8pm, Bath Abbey



David Mach
Jacob's Ladder



Damien Hirst, Saint Bartholomew, Exquisite Pain, 2006
Photography Courtesy of Sotheby's
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"A long journey in which many things happen"

A minute may rush past us and days blur into months, but our journey through life often feels as if it operates in varying temporalities. Time appears to speed up and slow down as the intensity of our experience fluctuates. Death is a spectre that waits patiently in the wings and its presence reminds us of the truly fleeting nature of our earth bound existence.

Odyssey brings together a collection of artworks which meditate upon the varied routes we may take in life but reminds us of the one common certainty. Housed within Bath Abbey and incorporating works from renowned and emerging artists the exhibition aims to prompt an altered means of reflection within this sacred space.

Engaging and interacting with the surroundings the works on show each examine a different pilgrimage. Damien Hirst's awe-inspiring 'Saint Bartholomew, Exquisite Pain' presents a subversive twist on the traditional representation of the martyr, and provokes questions about our attitude to the value of our own lives. Koji Shiraya examines the beginning and ending of life with his porcelain works 'After the dream' scattered throughout the Gethsemane Chapel. Patrick Haines's 'Perennial' represents the benefits of Christ's suffering using imagery borrowed from the natural world – a giant, multi-seeded plant growing up inside the Sanctuary. Tessa Farmer's 'Voyager', fills the exquisitely carved Birde Chantry. The dual perspective of her sculpture, a life-size swan populated by tiny insect-like figures, invites reflection on where our attention lies: on the grand scale of eternity, or on the minutiae of daily survival? Finally, David Mach's massive 'Jacob's Ladder', set within the South Transept, offers a startling and contemporary rendering of the Bible story famously also referenced on the West Front of the Abbey.

Bath Abbey

Bath Abbey provides not only a stunning backdrop, but also a potent context for the stunning works assembled by bo.lee projects Director, Jemma Hickman.

Alan Garrow, Vicar Theologian at Bath Abbey comments:

“Bath Abbey is an astonishing space, and one in which it has always been possible to explore the big issues: who we are, where we’ve come from and where we’re going. This exhibition, brilliantly brought together by bo.lee projects, adds an extra sharpness to that experience by provoking questions such as: ‘what am I giving my life for?’, ‘what good can come out of sacrifice?’, or ‘where do earth and heaven meet in my daily experience?’. It’s an amazing exhibition and one that promises to live long in the memory. We urge Bath locals to come and enjoy their Abbey, and to experience this landmark moment in the city’s engagement with contemporary art.”

bo.lee projects

bo.lee projects focuses on presenting curated projects through a series of innovative exhibitions, events and installations. Building on bo.lee gallery’s reputation for championing thought-provoking contemporary art which touches upon complex subject matters, the programme incorporates a variety of media including photography, painting and sculpture.

Curated by Director of bo.lee gallery Jemma Hickman, bo.lee projects acts a platform for exhibitions and off-site projects with international guest artists, institutions and independent art dealers as Hickman explains:

“As bo.lee gallery embarks on a new journey, we are honoured to be working with Bath Abbey as the venue to present the inaugural bo.lee projects venture Odyssey. Marking the beginning of our new journey Odyssey will examine art that serves as more than an aesthetic - art should challenge, question and create reflection and what better space to encourage such reflection than the awe-inspiring Bath Abbey.

Stepping out of the traditional white cube setting and into this sacred space provides the selected artworks with a back drop to exist, to question the journey that we are all taking, our faith, our beliefs and our sacrifices along the way.”

Odyssey artists

Tessa Farmer is known for her captivating miniscule sculptures crafted from desiccated insect remains, dried plant roots and other organic ephemera which transport the onlooker to an animalistic world of fairies captured at pivotal junctures of their interpreted existence. Collected by the Saatchi Gallery and the Ashmolean, Farmer exchanges Victorian romanticism for the darker pragmatism of science, evidencing her specimens as fearsome skeletal fiends of a microscopic apocalypse. Posed in dramatic battle formations, Farmer’s menagerie wages war against garden variety pests; each figure, painstakingly hand crafted and adorned with real insect wings, stands less than 1 cm tall and takes three hours to create.

The Voyager offers its audience a journey into an imagined reality that proposes an alternative plane of existence. She describes her work as a journey into *“imaginative possibilities that might otherwise linger unseen, just beneath the surface”*. The Voyager presents a dichotomy for the viewer, offering a life-size swan almost overrun by miniscule figures it challenges the traditional perspectives of life and invites the audience to reflect upon the parallels between the universal scales and intricacies of our continued existence.

Tessa Farmer, The Voyager is kindly sponsored by Bonhams Auction House in Bath

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Patrick Haines' work examines the relationship between man and nature, elevating it above a societal dictum, as nature breaks through disrupting the industrial and man-made, charting a journey from the outside in. The untamed natural world is brought into the human environment of the ordered domestic interior. The creatures of this world are given a higher consciousness by their unnatural surroundings and Haines' instinctive marriages of found and domestic objects. Striving for a natural balance in each work, the result is often a combination of equilibrium and poise; the smaller sculptures are calm and reflective whilst the larger works make more powerful statements.

A preoccupation with the mythology and symbolism of nature, in particular birds in a religious context frequently act as a touchstone for his work. Perennial offers an incarnation of the gold finch which in turn is seen as symbolic of Christ's suffering. A giant hogweed reaches to the heavens whilst a goldfinch in repose nestles in its exposed, earth-bound roots having pulled the thorns from Christ's crown (it is thought that the goldfinch's head was stained red by a drop of blood after pulling the thorns from the crown) - the odyssey from life to death bound in natural form.

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Since the late 1980's, **Damien Hirst** has used a varied practice of installation, sculpture, painting and drawing to explore the complex relationship between art, life and death "*Art's about life and it can't really be about anything else ... there isn't anything else*". His work investigates and challenges contemporary belief systems and dissects the tensions and uncertainties at the heart of human experience

The eight-foot tall 'Saint Bartholomew, Exquisite Pain' (2006) retains the appearance of a classical sculpture through the use of bronze but Hirst has reinterpreted traditional depictions of the Christian martyr. The flayed figure holds a scalpel, as according to tradition, but also a pair of scissors. Inspired by Tim Burton's film 'Edward Scissorhands' (1990), this addition implies that, "*his exposure and pain is seemingly self-inflicted. It's kind of beautiful yet tragic*".

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Leading contemporary artist and sculptor **David Mach** makes use of discarded objects combined in sculpture that explores the resonance of their industrial use. His monumental assemblages from such materials as vast stocks of magazines and directories that were turned into for example, life-size cars, tanks and submarines reflect aspects of an aggressive and consumer-driven culture. He aims to demythologise the practice of art and does not hesitate to incorporate mass-produced elements, ranging from children's' toys to kitsch accessories in often satirical constructions. He rejects the traditional function of sculpture as an avenue for the contemplation of abstract ideas, preferring in his temporal installations to make a point of contact with the urgent concerns of the modern world.

Jacob's Ladder presents spirituality exaggerated in a dream-like state; Mach's figures are not just sleeping, they are transported to an other-worldly state with a lack of grounding against the watery background. They are traversing a symbolic journey along fluid ladders that chart the elements of religion concerned with distance and the separation of man and God alluding to nature and the super-natural along the way.

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London-based **Koji Shiraya** won The Open West curators award with his serene porcelain installation 'After the Dream' in 2012. An expression of the harmony of nature's beauty and our use of it he likens these dented and misshapen porcelain spheres to the "*opening of a window to nature*".

These spheres are strewn about and appear to tumble from the space they occupy as a manifestation of the human mind which is distorted by its travels through memory and experience, yet still retains beauty and elegance. The installation represents both "*the beginning and the ending of life*" as each sphere charts its own path and the sum of parts plots a lifelong journey.

Notes to editors

The exhibition is supported by Minuteman Press, Jamie's Italian, Bonhams Auctioneers in Bath and the Abbey Hotel, Bath.

The Abbey Hotel, Bath is offering an exclusive discount for visitors to Odyssey:

£275 for a two night stay (Sunday – Thursday) including dinner on one night

£275 for a two night stay (Sunday – Thursday) including full English breakfast on both mornings

£350 for a two night stay (Friday – Saturday) including dinner on one night

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Please quote 'Odyssey' when making a booking.

www.abbeyhotelbath.co.uk