

**FOREVER
BECOMING:
CECILIA
BULLO'S
INVOCATION
OF ANCIENT
FEMINISM**

BY ERIN JOYCE



FOREVER BECOMING: CECILIA BULLO'S INVOCATION OF ANCIENT FEMINISM

In Cecilia Bullo's (Irish/Italian) recent exhibition at the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA), the artist explores materiality, the body, and the labor of creating. The show, *Being Haunted by the Breezes, Now How Will You Exist?*, which was on view from February 17th, 2023 – April 23, 2023 Bullo creates a pastiche of narratives, personal, historical, constructed, and mythological, based on kinship models and matrilineal power successions all as means to reconnect to agency, the earth, and eschew victimry imposed upon the femme and female body architected by patriarchal systems, imperialism, and colonialism.

The gallery itself felt like a stage set for story telling – playing with theatrical tropes of tenebristic lighting, creating vast pools of darkness and shining moments of light focused on the artist's sculptural works – its effect only amplifying the urgency of the works– by forcing the viewer's eye towards the objects themselves. A series of large ropes visually pull you into the space, leading to a massive sculptural representation of a rhizome, referencing that of an aloe vera plant. The work sores through the massive volume of the gallery, looming over the viewer in an all at once ominous and menacing stature that is paradoxically replete with warmth and protection. In numerous performances throughout the run of the show, Bullo activated the space with buckets of clay, dragging them through the gallery and adding to pre-added clay and jute fabric around the ropes, chains, and rhizome – often times aided in a community action with visitors to the museum.

Pushing further into the space the viewer encounters an imposing sculpture of a wild boar held up by spears, but instead of sharp points at the end, we see the artist has replaced them with casts of her fist. The work, which bares the same name as the exhibition, references the tale of Medusa and her gorgon identity – Bullo plays not only with this idea of elevating the gorgon (perhaps as a stand-in for ancient ideas of female-centered society found in pre-history Europe) but also this idea of expulsion. By placing the boar (which in this instance we will treat as synonymous with that of a pig - which in contemporary understandings is a stand-in for misogyny and police (police brutality)), the artist suggests a narrative of ransom – as though femme/female bodies have taken the form of the pig, scarified it, and placed its body on display upon an altar of liberation.

The large-scale sculptural installations are countered with intimately sized works, *un crapaud dans la gorge*, which features a huddled of jesmonite toads in a corner, a horse tail sourced from an abattoir, emerging from a gallery wall. The work, titled *Maiden, glossy mane. You have brought with you the standard, you have brought with you the quiver*, again references Medusa and the narrative of Pegasus who was borne from Medusa's neck when beheaded by Perseus, and the ghostly sound of the artist's voice chanting in ancient Sumerian, echoing through the space. Bullo collaborated with Trinity College professor, Martin Worthington, to research and activate the space through aural experiences of the ancient language. The works and the sonic installation, act as talismans – or as the artist stated, “evil averting amulets,” which the artist has created, pried up from the earth, and aimed sharply towards patriarchal culture and power structures.

CECILIA BULLO solo exhibition | *Being Haunted by the breezes, now how will you exist?*
curated by Patrick T Murphy | Gallagher Gallery | Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin,
IRL 16 February - 30 April 2023

Image

artist's name: Cecilia Bullo

title of work: *She grew the tree plant, she grew the plant, she grew the primeval mother: The plants of lamentation have sprouted.*

date: 2023

medium: 120 metres Manila rope, hardware, clay, water, mixed media, soil from Artemis' sanctuary in Kerkira (Greece)

dimensions: approx H 600 X L 1200 X 300 cm - installation dimension variable

photograph credits: [Ros Kavanagh] courtesy of the artist and [RHA Gallery]