

whitney mc veigh

Much like a music producer might use samples to weave his own narrative from filaments carefully unpicked from the tapestry of history, Whitney McVeigh is an artist whose work depends on the nuances and stories told by fragments of the past salvaged from the shores of oblivion and recontextualized according to her own criteria. Assemblages, installations, rooms full of mysterious books and arcane objects, films and monotypes create "archives of nameless memories", or arcs that sail towards safety carrying specimens of histories at risk of being forgotten in a deluge of other histories. Re-establishing the universality of psychological and physical elements that define us as human beings, McVeigh's environments and imagery confront us with strange encounters that speak of uncannily familiar feelings. Sozita Goudouna interviewed Whitney McVeigh exclusively for Nakedbutsafe, just when the artist was appointed Creative Fellow at the London College of Fashion, beginning this October.

Glass Stress 2013





top: scarifier, 2013

What artists did you grow up around? When did you first start to think about art in a professional manner? What were the first things that got your attention?

WMV: I first started thinking about becoming an artist when I was interviewing painters for the Nat West prize in London when I was 19. I was working for a gallery and archiving material for them. I had long conversations with artists about their process and I started to see a way of moving forward with my own work. I was writing then and later the work evolved into a visual language. I grew up surrounded by art. My mother was an artist and our house was full of paintings and sculptures made by my grandmother. I remember a family-visit to a cathedral when I was ten years old and understanding it as both religious and work made by human hands.

You have collaborated with eminent artists, curators and gallerists. Do you consider anyone as your "mentor"?

WMV: In many ways James Putnam has been a mentor. He understands my work and thought processes. We've worked on four projects over the last year together. And Gus Casely-Hayford who has supported and encouraged through challenging times.

How did you decide to visit Louise Bourgeois, in what ways does her practice connect with your work? How did you experience your encounter with Bourgeois?

WMV: I was called up by a friend in New York who said I should come over and attend Louise Bourgeois' salon with him. He'd already given my name and I was on a plane a few days later with one of my paintings. Her home was a real home and I felt there was genuine intent and support in opening a dialogue with other artists. There were twelve of us there, including a curator from the Pompidou Centre. We sat in a room full of her books/papers and took it in turn to present work to her. I wouldn't say my practice is connected to hers but her writing and interviews have made me see things differently. I first discovered Louise Bourgeois when given her book *Destruction of the Father, Reconstruction of the Father* (1998), a collection of her writings and interviews in the late nineties. I didn't know her work well and I later went with a writer, who I was collaborating with at the time, to the archive library of the Tate where we listened to several recordings of her in interview. I saw an artist's transformative qualities, fearless in her work and who reflected all aspects of herself in what she did.

Whilst a student, you ran a funk, reggae and rare groove night club named 'Chocolate City' (after the Parliament classic) in Edinburgh with your then boyfriend Jamie Byng, do you miss this period? What was it like running a club?

WMV: Jamie and I ran the club for four years doing everything ourselves. I deejayed downstairs and he upstairs. We had 500 people regularly coming to listen to funk, jazz, reggae and blues on a Thursday night. There's something very enlightening about playing music and being in the moment. We had a core of regulars and we both loved it. We were passionate about collecting and sharing music and we'd carry four boxes of vinyl up six flights of stairs at 3am each week! It was a great time but all of that energy goes into my work now.

WMV: Last year your work was shown at the parallel programme of the Venice Biennale, both at a group show and at a solo show entitled "Hunting Song," can you tell us more about these projects?

WMV: 'Solitude a breath away' is a line from a poem I wrote several years ago and the title of the work I made for Glass Stress. It's a sculpture that addresses all aspects of carrying, including the carrying of the mother and relates back to when my son was in hospital during the first year of his life. Assembling it and making it was challenging as it is an autobiographical work. This and *Hunting Song* are probably two of the most significant pieces I've made relating to my past and to broader themes around individual and cultural identity. *Hunting Song* (titled from sheet music) was a fictional curiosity shop made with objects collected over twenty years and integrated with the foundation's objects. The work explores both personal history and collective memory and alludes to the layering of time and how the histories of found objects can transfer something to the person encountering them.

Are there new ideas or projects which are currently particularly of interest to you?

WMV: I'm collaborating with curator Eiko Honda on a short film about Birth. The project asks women at the end of their life to talk about their experiences and memories in front of a video camera. I'll also be participating in the Folkestone Fringe this year which opens in August.

Can you expand on the notion of the Human Fabric and your collaboration with the London College of Fashion?

WMV: Human Fabric is a research project I'm setting up in connection with the work I'll do at LCF. From October I will be a part time creative fellow with London College of Fashion. I met Frances Corner at a dinner following the opening of Glass Stress at the Wallace Collection and we shared similar ideas on the subjects of women. I will be working on two projects with them initially.

<http://whitneymcveigh.com>



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