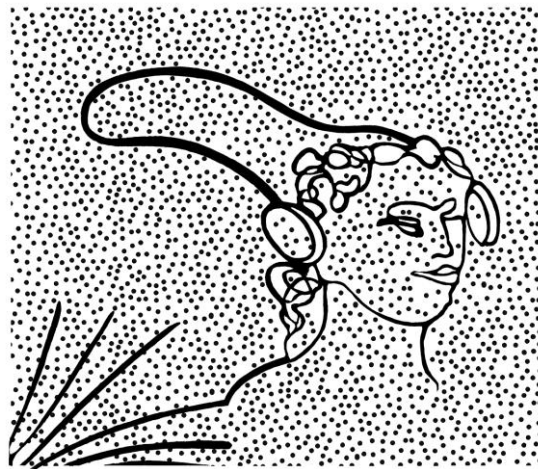


The Errant Muse

Charlotte Hodes & Deryn Rees-Jones
University of Liverpool, Victoria Gallery & Museum
16 November 2019 – 28 March 2020

<http://vgm.liverpool.ac.uk/exhibitions-and-events/special/theerrantmuse/>



In-breath

In-breath, engraving on glass, 22 x 22 x 0.6cm, Charlotte Hodes (image) Deryn Rees-Jones (text), 2019

An innovative exhibition bringing together, for the first time, new work by long-time collaborators artist Charlotte Hodes and poet Deryn Rees-Jones.

Showing across a set of interlinked spaces in the Victoria Gallery, *The Errant Muse* is the culmination of five years of ongoing collaboration between artist Charlotte Hodes and poet Deryn Rees-Jones. Historically the muse has been constructed as a female presence invoked and somehow subsumed to inspire male creative genius. The poet Robert Graves famously described this fantasy as 'the ancient power of fright and lust – the female spider or queen-bee whose embrace is death'. *The Errant Muse* ponders on ideas of inspiration and creative process, engaging with a lively array of alternative possibilities through poetry, papercut, ceramic and film.

Exploring the cumulative dialogue of Hodes and Rees-Jones' work as artist and poet, the show foregrounds their processes as female practitioners. Over years Hodes and Rees-Jones have shared thoughts and ideas and responded to one another's work, each becoming a holder or receptacle for what couldn't be contained or understood as they worked alone. This ongoing conversational process of re-encounter and redraft is echoed in the exhibition's intuitive arrangement, where meaning accrues as the visitor navigates between constellations of image, text and artefact.

The show opens with a new series of Hodes' signature, intricate papercuts created in conversation with Rees-Jones' poem *Perpetual Night*, the lines of which are delicately enshrined within the images. Loosely gesturing to Virginia Woolf's seminal text, *A Room of One's Own*, and the limitations on creative practice for women, the sequence shows a woman negotiating domestic furniture, finding a space for herself within it, sometimes escaping from it, and continuing from frame to frame across the scarlet gallery wall. Visitors can listen to *Perpetual Night* assembled in full, to transformative effect; held together by the poet's voice, the series of fragments, both text and image, comes to life.

Gallery One, 'The Orchard of Lost Things', engages with objects and manuscripts from the Victoria Gallery & Museum and the University of Liverpool's Special Collections and Archives. Developing an idea of errancy as both a medium of travel and of transgression, the show here adventures through historical periods and across artistic forms to create a fresh memoryscape for the imagination. A series of ornate display cases juxtapose Rees-Jones' haunting lyric poetry and Hodes' art works on paper, ceramic and glass with the intricacies found variously in tiny, exquisite etchings by William Blake (1757-1827); an early draft of Elizabeth Bishop's 'Questions of Travel' which, with its erasures and indecisions, shows a poem in slow, brilliant progress; and scrimshaw engravings carved by nineteenth-century sailors with needle and ink into the bones of slaughtered whales. By setting Hodes and Rees-Jones' own works in fresh alignment with the rich and strange treasures of the archives, *The Errant Muse* troubles conventional modes of collecting and ordering and invites its audience to create their own narratives and patterns of association.

Specially published to be read alongside the exhibition, Rees-Jones' lyric essay *Fires* (Shoestring Press, 2019) is a touchpoint throughout and acts as an anchor for the various works shown in Gallery Two. A meditation on the nature of poetry, *Fires* illuminates artworks by Hodes on both paper and wood and is the inspiration for a new animated film. In some sense the poem *Fires* is a reincarnation of the fantasy of the muse, and the animation embodies the show's ideal of inspiration in motion. The central process of ongoing encounter is echoed in the elusive dance of Hodes' female figure, whose refusal to be pinned down opens the possibility for shifting meanings and resonances over time.

CHARLOTTE HODES

Charlotte Hodes is an artist and Professor of Fine Art at London College of Fashion, UAL. Solo exhibitions include *After the Taking of Tea* (Ruthin Craft Centre, 2019), *Remember Me* (Wolverhampton Art Gallery, 2017, touring to National Centre for Art and Design, Sleaford in 2020) and *Fragmented Images* (The Wallace Collection, 2007). Hodes has participated in exhibitions at the Design Museum London, Jerwood Space Gallery, and the Venice Biennale. Her work is held in many public collections including the Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, British Council, New Hall Art Collection, University of Cambridge, and the V&A. In 2006, she won the Jerwood Drawing Prize. She is a selector for the 2019 ING Discerning Eye exhibition.

Hodes' work is about boundaries: the contours of the female nude, generic hierarchies between craft and art, the decorative and the fine arts, the domestic and professional, the body as a singular identity and the multiplicity of selves afforded by technological reproduction – **Hannah Westley, writer & researcher, American University of Paris**

DERYN REES-JONES

Deryn Rees-Jones is a poet, editor and literary critic. Her selected poems, *What It's Like to Be Alive*, was published in 2016 and was a PBS Special Commendation. Her monograph, on the intersection between image and narrative, *Paula Rego: The Art of Story*, is published by Thames & Hudson this autumn. ('compelling and an absolute tour de force' *The Artist*). She has received numerous awards for her poems, including shortlistings for the Forward and T S Eliot poetry prizes. She is the editor of the Pavilion Poetry list and Professor of Poetry at the University of Liverpool where she co-directs the University of Liverpool's Centre for New and International Writing. Many of the images and ideas in the exhibition are closely linked to her new collection of poems, addressed to the muse of love and lyric poetry, *Erato*, which was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation (June 2019).

Rees-Jones offers a new direction for British lyric ...one that's in dialogue with 20th century American poetry but not subject to it. Her work foregrounds investigation ... as a kind of social creativity, the lyric as a sonic means to plumb the faultline of a self formed through others. Lyric as a place where we find ourselves more truly, because more strange – **Los Angeles**

Review of Books

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