

Rosanne Robertson Subterrane

Opening Reception: Thursday 7 October, 6 – 8pm
Exhibition Dates: 7 October – 21 December 2021

Maximillian William is proud to present *Subterrane* the West Cornwall based artist Rosanne Robertson's first solo presentation with the gallery. The exhibition brings together recent sculpture, performance, drawings and paintings which continue Robertson's exploration of the terrain of the Queer body in the landscape - inspired by the great energy, freedom and fluidity of the sea.

Recent gouache on paper and board works consist of two forms Robertson describes as 'islands' and 'stacks'. In the studio, Robertson works on large rolls of paper on the floor, starting with a loose arrangement of bodies, islands and stacks, more defined compositions emerge in a cyclical way. For this series, swaths of cyan and blue surround abstract forms which can be seen as standing figures or, in some instances, aerial views of bodily islands and formations surrounded by water at different stages of submersion. Intertwined forms, expanded figures and their appendages born of the body grow from shifting foundations and bleed into each other via watery channels that penetrate and surround the compositions- providing an alternative view into underground and unseen worlds- or a *Subterrane*.

Robertson employs Surrealist methods using techniques of automatism and improvisation to draw on experiences, dreams, feelings, physical sensations and memories of a place - how it felt to swim around a stack of rock, investigate the bottom of a pool or see a dramatic outcrop for the first time. This full-body experience of existing within the sea's constant reshaping of the landscape is reflected in their studio practice: the motion and rhythm of Robertson's gestures ebbs and flows as continuously as the tide changes. During this process, Robertson trusts in their deeper psyche which they describe as "less tainted by the hostile binary structures I have bent myself around".

Robertson began to work *en plein air* creating 'performance for camera' works and plaster casting directly in rock crevices across the Yorkshire moors while based in West Yorkshire. The process of working outdoors continued after they relocated to West Cornwall and whilst in residence at Porthmeor Studios, St Ives they created *Packing*, a durational work which depicts the artist's body flowing with the incoming tide in a dramatic crevice in the Devonian slate rocky seabed at Godrevy Point, St Ives Bay which becomes submerged at high tide. With this bodily intervention Robertson relates phantom spaces of the body - as an inner landscape - with the hidden spaces of the coastal landscape. "...gender fluidity is spiritual and plentiful and diverse and expanding with eternal potential. There are

parts of our bodies and genders that aren't visible, as if they were under water. There are spaces that can't be easily defined, that are forever shifting".

Clothing that Robertson wears during their performances such as white vests, shiny blue shorts and sports socks are incorporated into the new sculpture. These garments which Robertson describes as a 'base layer' reference gendered and Queer motifs and have a specific connection with masquerade laws that were imposed on trans, non-binary and Queer communities in both the US and UK prior to and throughout the period that sparked the Stonewall uprising and the gay liberation movement. Binary gender was enforced by law with anyone who stepped outside of gender norms criminalised. Robertson takes their so-called 'cross dressing' into the water, their body an inheritor of the violence imposed on their community, releasing the trauma into the sea which dissolves harmful categorisation. Robertson's ambiguous, anthropomorphic forms are as emotive as the sea and like the sea, resist all attempts of containment.

Notes to Editors

Rosanne Robertson's first public sculpture *Stone (Butch)* is currently installed in Bury Court, London as part of the 10th edition of Sculpture in the City. *Stone (Butch)* is part of a body of work exploring the terrain of the Queer body in the landscape and was created by plaster casting directly in crevices in natural rock formations at Godrevy Point, St Ives Bay. This 'sculptural void' makes physical a negative space created by the power of the sea. The sculpture will be on view until Spring 2022.

Rosanne Robertson (they/them) (b. Sunderland 1984) is a contemporary artist based in West Cornwall. They obtained their BA in Fine Art from the Manchester School of Art in 2010. In June 2021, Robertson unveiled their first public sculpture, commissioned for the 10th edition of Sculpture in the City and installed at London's iconic Gherkin skyscraper until Spring 2022. To coincide with this unveiling, Robertson performed *Stone (Butch): Undercurrents in Nocturnal Creatures*, a contemporary art festival programmed by the Whitechapel Gallery and Sculpture in the City. Their second public sculpture - commissioned by Sunderland Council as a legacy to the 700 women who worked in Sunderland's shipyards - will be unveiled later this year. Their work and writing are featured in *Breaking the Mould: Sculpture by Women Since 1945*, (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2020) which was published on the occasion of the eponymous Arts Council Collection exhibition.

While Associate Artist during the 2019 Yorkshire Sculpture International, Robertson presented a solo display, *Stone (Butch)*, at The Hepworth Wakefield, Wakefield, 2019 and exhibited in the group exhibition *Associated Matter* at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Yorkshire, 2019. Works by Robertson are held in the collection of The Hepworth Wakefield, Wakefield and were included in the institution's group exhibition *Vision & Reality: 100 Years of Contemporary Art in Wakefield*, 2020. In October 2021, their work will be on view both in this solo exhibition at Maximillian William, London and in the group exhibition *Seen* at the Newlyn Art Gallery & The Exchange, Cornwall. In June 2022, Robertson will take part in Yorkshire Sculpture Park's *Summer of Love*.

Maximillian William began with an itinerant model which allowed the gallery to gradually form a roster of contemporary artists. An impulse to expand alongside the advancing careers of these artists led to the establishment of a permanent gallery space in Fitzrovia in 2019. The gallery is artist-centric, collaborating closely with those it supports to build their platforms. On occasion, the gallery seeks to produce exhibitions that highlight those who have influenced its creative community, with the aim of presenting pivotal figures to a new generation. Alongside exhibition making, the gallery is committed to publishing, producing a range of publications from artist books to exhibition catalogues and monographs. The distribution of literature is key to the gallery's commitment to improving accessibility to contemporary art. Publications by the gallery are held in the archives of MoMA and Tate.

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