

Ro Robertson TORSOS

Exhibition Dates: 3 September - 1 October 2022

Late Opening: Wednesday 14 September 2022

Maximillian William, London is pleased to present *Torsos*, the second solo show at the gallery from the Cornwall based artist Ro Robertson. The presentation brings together for the first time the *Torso* series of indoor sculptures and coincides with Robertson's presentation of their second outdoor sculpture *Drench* in Frieze Sculpture, Regent's Park, London (14 September - 13 November 2022). *Torso I* was first presented in *Subterrane* Robertson's first solo exhibition at Maximillian William, London in October 2021. *Torso II* was first presented in the group exhibition *Seen* at the Newlyn Art Gallery & the Exchange, Penzance in October 2021. The final sculpture in the trio will be presented for the first time in *Torsos*.

Ro Robertson's practice spans performances, drawings and sculptures through which they explore the terrain of the Queer body in the landscape. The trio of abstract Corten steel sculptures which make up *Torsos* present an expanded understanding of the figure via a body of bodies.

The sculptures are a departure from the torso and its associations with an idealised body relating to one of two genders. This collection of bodies is presented as an archipelago with the sculptures viewed 'in the round,' so one form is seen through the next and the shifts of the irregular shapes is experienced as a journey. These heavy steel sculptures are situated on or close to the ground rather than upheld on a plinth, weighted with stones weighing down sections of clothing and with pools of pigmented jesmonite on the floor.

The biomorphic forms welded by Robertson from water jet cut sheet Corten steel are painted in blues and paired with found objects which includes items of clothing from performance for camera works made over the last 3 years. The mulch filled sports socks are from *stonebodywater* made in the waterways of the calder valley, shiny blue 'manstore' shorts from their performance in a dramatic sea crevice *Packing* at Godrevy Point in St Ives Bay and more recently white boxer shorts from *birthbuildshift* made on a remote nudist beach near Lands End.

Socks, white vests and shorts or underwear are three items often reoccur in Robertson's performances and sculptures within which the role of underwear is reversed as it shifts from base layer to outer protective layer in full view. The soft white of the cotton vests provides a drastic contrast with the weathering steel and its hard associations.

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 Riots' and the gay liberation movement. The masquerade laws were also known as the three-article rule—or the three-piece law and meant that somebody assigned female at birth should wear 3 items of female clothing and vice versa. Binary gender was enforced by law with anyone who stepped outside of gender norms criminalised.

I use the white vest, white sports socks and items of underwear in my performance and sculptural works as a canvas which shows up the marks of the environment on the body. They are appendages of the Queer body which acts as a thin barrier between the body and external forces. I am interested in the bodies that have shared the spaces of these garments over the decades- how they have been flattened down or packed out to provide the spaces in our bodies we are comfortable with. These are intimate spaces and small interventions can make vast space within ourselves in order to feel at home."

- Ro Robertson

Notes to editor

Ro 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 September 2022, they will unveil a new outdoor sculpture *Drench* in Frieze Sculpture, Regent's Park, London. From June 2021 to April 2022, their first public sculpture *Stone (Butch)* was installed at London's iconic Gherkin skyscraper, commissioned for the 10th edition of Sculpture in the City. *Stone (Butch)* is now installed at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, where it is part of the permanent collection. Robertson presented *Subterrane* their first solo exhibition at Maximillian William, London in October 2021. While Associate Artist during the 2019 Yorkshire Sculpture International, Robertson presented a solo display, *Stone (Butch)*, at The Hepworth Wakefield. In February 2023, they will participate in the group exhibition *TRICKSTER FIGURES: sculpture and the body* curated by Jes Fernie at MK Gallery, Milton Keynes. Previous group exhibitions include *Into Abstraction* at the Hepworth Wakefield (2022), *On Queer Ground* at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park (2022), *Seen* at the Newlyn Art Gallery & The Exchange, Cornwall (2021) and *Vision & Reality: 100 Years of Contemporary Art in Wakefield* (2020). Works by Robertson are also held in the collection of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts and The Hepworth Wakefield. 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.

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.

For further press information please contact:

Chloe Austin, Exhibitions and Research Manager, chloe@maximillianwilliam.com

Maximillian William
47 Mortimer Street, London, W1W 8HJ, United Kingdom
www.maximillianwilliam.com
T: +44 (0)207 998 4054
@maximillian_william