

Lauren Clay's Architectures of the Psyche

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Lauren Clay's bulbous sculptures look like intricate and almost intestinal portals and mazes that summon the sense of being suspended in an ever-moving infinity.



Exhibition view: Lauren Clay, *Persephone*, Bosse & Baum, London (18 February–26 March 2022). Courtesy the artist and Bosse & Baum, London. Photo: Rob Harris.

These wall-based sculptures are constructed from a mixture of paper pulp and plaster and finished with gradating shades of oil paint that create a graphic luminosity.

For *Persephone*, Clay's latest installation at Bosse & Baum in [London](#) (18 February–26 March 2022) and the artist's first solo show in the United Kingdom, these sculptures intersect with a digitally printed vinyl wall installation to explore the architectures of the subconscious.



Left to right: Lauren Clay, *The Eleven* (2022). Oil, epoxy clay, on panel. 74 x 102 x 8 cm; *Persephone* (2022). Oil, paper pulp, plaster, on panel. 122 x 102 x 10 cm. Exhibition view: *Persephone*, Bosse & Baum, London (18 February–26 March 2022). Courtesy the artist and Bosse & Baum, London. Photo: Rob Harris.

To create these hypnotic wallpapers, Clay folds paper laden with wet paint to create a Rorschach print. Once dry, the paper is used to create small collages, which are then scanned and enlarged to the size of the wall.

These prints help extend Clay's engagement with a network of connected symbols and archetypes that invoke surreal dreamworlds in her sculptures. The wall-based sculpture *Persephone*(2022), for instance, evokes the mythological figure of Persephone, both goddess of Spring and the queen of the underworld.



Lauren Clay, *Persephone* (2022). Oil, paper pulp, plaster, on panel. 122 x 102 x 10 cm. Exhibition view: *Persephone*, Bosse & Baum, London (18 February–26 March 2022). Courtesy the artist and Bosse & Baum, London. Photo: Rob Harris.

Warm orange and cold blue hues alternate on the whirling, curved bends of the sculpture, with the same colours repeated on the wallpaper, creating the sense that the forms materialise from the background. These juxtaposing hues equally allude to the duality that *Persephone* occupies in the psyche, as a traveller between parallel domains—this world and the afterlife.

In this blend of oil, modelling paste, paper pulp, plaster, and clay, sculpted marbled windows grant entry to a knotted labyrinth...

For Clay, who is interested in Jungian psychology, Persephone's figure embodies the slippages between the conscious and subconscious, just as she travels with ease between life and death.



Lauren Clay, *Little Descender* (2022). Plaster, acrylic. 23 x 25 x 3 cm. Edition of 10. Exhibition view: *Persephone*, Bosse & Baum, London (18 February–26 March 2022). Courtesy the artist and Bosse & Baum, London. Photo: Rob Harris.

Refusing unity, the sequences of interconnected marmoreal geometric forms in *Hundred Year Hall* (2022) recall Jung's understanding of the psyche as made of separate but interacting systems. The fragmented architectural structure defies spatial roles without agreeing to any anachronistic definition, as with the dream-like universe Clay creates.

In this nonlinear cosmos, where signs are free-floating but in continual conversation, modernist ideas are disrupted by witty contemporary pop-cultural references.



Lauren Clay, *Hundred Year Hall* (2022). Oil, modelling paste, epoxy clay, on panel. 99 x 99 x 10 cm. Exhibition view: *Persephone*, Bosse & Baum, London (18 February–26 March 2022). Courtesy the artist and Bosse & Baum, London. Photo: Rob Harris.

For one, Clay's references to the descent into the underworld parallels the thinking of modernists such as T.S. Eliot and Thomas Mann, for whom the motif symbolised a transgression into the spiritual realm. In this universe, the artist becomes the hermetic, magical thinker that acts as a mediator between spirit and sense.



Lauren Clay, *Abyss Gazer* (2022). Oil, modelling paste, paper pulp, plaster, epoxy clay, on panel. 122 x 102 x 10 cm. Exhibition view: Persephone, Bosse & Baum, London (18 February–26 March 2022). Courtesy the artist and Bosse & Baum, London. Photo: Rob Harris.

Delving into inauspicious discussions of psyche and the mythological realm of the underworld, as experienced by Clay in a recent dream, *Abyss Gazer* (2022) recalls the continental philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's quote: 'And when you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.'

In this blend of oil, modelling paste, paper pulp, plaster, and clay, sculpted marbled windows grant entry to a knotted labyrinth, while loops emerge from the hypnotic vibrations of the printed wallpaper mimicking a descent into the unconscious.



Lauren Clay, *Captain Trips* (2022). Oil, epoxy clay, paper pulp, plaster. 79 x 50 x 18 cm. Exhibition view: Persephone, Bosse & Baum, London (18 February–26 March 2022). Courtesy the artist and Bosse & Baum, London. Photo: Rob Harris.

While these semi-abstracted works allow for open associations, Clay gently guides viewers to consider far-ranging influences beyond form through her titles. Referencing both the psychedelic rock band the Grateful Dead and Persephone's journey are *The Eleven* (2022)—a string of neon green, yellow, and blue architectural fragments on panel, built from oil and clay—and *Captain Trips* (2022), a free-standing plaster sculpture with white coiling tubes embedded with pale blue marbled doors.

Amid these material and metaphorical entanglements, independent systems interweave non-linear ideologies, ideas, and symbols to open up a multitude of symbolic planes. —[O]