



Stella Baraklianou 17/06/2021 - 04/07/2021

THE MAGICIAN

GLOAM

GLOAM Gallery: Craft is a word which crops up often in contemporary art discourse these days. Do you find it useful for thinking about production methods like print or textiles?

Stella Baraklianou: Craft is definitely a word that is resurfacing at the minute, in terms of its historical origins and relations to materials there's a long-standing tradition of how it goes back and translates to different mediums. Nowadays craft also tends to cross-over into areas of digital fabrication and production, and this is definitely something that my works address, as laser-cutting has been largely employed in the fabrication. I think for me personally it's about looking at this in a way, that doesn't have the historical background embedded.

My practice is aligned with photography, so for me thinking about craft is quite experimental. When I think about textiles or print surfaces this is an area that hasn't been explored that much in relation to photographic practice. Usually when we think about a photograph it is as a printed page in a newspaper or a magazine or on a gallery wall, for me these ideas about other areas coming into my photographic practice is what I was trying to create with these works.

GG: During the planning for this exhibition the importance of reflective surfaces such as the perspex and metallic ink came across strongly. You mentioned you were interested in mirrors (including mirrored shields, reflective pools etc.) in Western mythology. Can you say something about how this inspired your choice to laser cut the Magician into a modern material like Perspex?

SB: It all started a bit on the reverse: I started thinking about the colour black, the essence, the feel, the affect of the colour at some point over a year ago. I was really intrigued by black surfaces, textures and thoughts and how black is connected to melancholic or depressive states that I wanted to explore. In photography you get this sense you are inside a camera obscura and when you suddenly see light after being exposed to pitch black you start to discern figures and shapes. In mythology, darkness and reflection have a

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“The language of [Greenaway’s] films is so unique it’s hard to describe, they’re adaptations not just of films but also of characters like the figure of Prospero.”

very primordial connection to archaic mystical cults such as Orpheus and also as mentioned in Plato’s cave. I was drawn more and more into practices of occult and the relationship between magic and mirrors so obviously I came across the black scrying mirrors of John Dee and these practitioners who are thought of as clairvoyants. John Dee was an Elizabethan clairvoyant who would advise Queen Elizabeth on how to deal tactically with foreign armies from a perspective from planetary alignments.

Along with Edward Kelley he would perform these scrying methods involving black mirrors to speak with spirits. The essence of what I wanted to explore with the Perspex is how this reflective surface that is part of how we live now has taken us back to this marginal occult practice that represents a very spiritual way of looking into the past and the present.

GG: The blue cardinal’s hat is based on a costume from Peter Greenaway’s film Prospero’s Books, a film about Prospero as the archetypal magician. How do you feel about John Gielgud’s performance as Prospero?

SB: This was part of the research that related to the hat. This Tarot card belongs to the Marseilles deck which is one of the most famous decks alongside more well-known decks like the Rider-Waite.

In the Magician card from the Marseille deck the hat is portrayed as an infinity symbol which reminded me of these amazing films by Peter Greenaway and their exceptional costume making. The language of the films is so unique it’s hard to describe, they’re adaptations not just of films but also of characters like the figure of Prospero. It attracted me to the idea of creating something out of textiles and giving it a magical power.

Part of my research about the construction came from this film, the sense of the magician who crosses years and mediums from





the Elizabethan John Dee to Greenaway's Prospero, how that character translates into different eras. The infinity symbol appears in my hat which I've made for the show.

GG: Is there anything you can say about the origin of the arcana illustrations and how they inspired you to research this further?

SB: This figure specifically from the Marseilles deck I wanted to use by making the Magician less of an illustration and more a recognisable element that serves as what I call a shape-shifter. In the context of the exhibition I hope

the possible readings will seem quite open like how you can have multiple readings of the same set of tarot cards.

The magician for me represents the idea of the messenger, whether he's Hermes the Greek god or later Mercury. He acts as a gateway between gods, (the arcana) and humans in brief moments of clairvoyance, like when something clicks into place which is experienced as something magical such as a revelation or a spiritual awakening. I leave that open for each viewer as the role of the viewer is very central to my practice which is something I have expanded on some through these

“The magician for me represents the idea of the messenger...”

techniques. The viewer is central in activating the works depending on how he/she moves around the space and the different meanings and connections that occur to them.

GG: Did any of the female surrealists like Ithell Colquhoun and Leonora Carrington come up during your investigations and did their writings on clairvoyance and the occult influence your thinking?

SB: I came across Leonora Carrington's work when I read that a deck of her own major arcana had been discovered in curators Susan Aberth and Tere Arcq. Specifically the figure of Le Bateleur was interpreted by Carrington and given a black and

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white appearance with metallic pigment which is what led me round to this idea of using metallic surfaces. Not so much Colquhoun but another artist I found was Helen Chadwick who used the same figure of the Le Bateleur or Juggler in works I found whilst looking at her notebooks which are held at the Henry Moore Institute where I live in Leeds.

GG: What is it about the symbol of the Magician that makes it a pertinent symbol for your practice in the present moment?

SB: The Magician appeared during last year, a challenging year. What started as a reading, became a daily exercise with him as central figure. He was a close companion, in the form of the Tarot card, until he started taking up a life of his own, via my screen and the digital manipulations. Mercurial, like the planets in the night sky. Capricious, playful, volatile: was he leading me or was I leading him? Which way around? Obviously, I always preferred to see him upright. But there were days when it was impossible and I

had to accept that he would appear reversed, in a downward mood.

Glistening on my screen, I could manipulate him, until I realised he had taken over and wanted to exist on his own.

Manipulated and reversed, as on a screen encounter, the Magician is digitally transformed and laser-cut onto black, white, silver materials. He plays with ideas of perfection and the digital, alongside chance, mistakes, fate. He rests on the velvet photographic prints alongside the candle holder and magically lights up the flame.

The Tarot Magician appears and disappears, performs and recreates as he is also recreated





via the layers and combination of spray paint, photographic pixels and mix of materials.

Long before algorithms entered our daily lives, the idea of visualising or projecting the future was entwined with belief systems in magic as well as picture making. In Medieval and Renaissance Europe, everyday acts of magic were literally performed through oral story-telling and were evident in card games, like the Tarocchi card games, that have been the predecessors of Tarot cards.

Medieval mnemonic figures, like the Magician, often contained encrypted meaning and were arranged in a complex manner by combining objects, pictorial symbols and human as well as animal figures.

I wanted to use this figure from the Marseille deck as a recognisable element that serves like a shape-shifter. In the context of the exhibition, whilst there are direct links to Tarot and occult readings, The Magician represents the messenger, whether Hermes or Mercury, he is the gate way between Gods and Humans, or the spiritual and the carnal. In this way, I could utilise him as a figure that represents that brief moment of clairvoyance, when something clicks into place and magic can briefly occur, like a revelation, a spiritual awakening, whatever is important for each and every person.

The role of the viewer is central in my works, as he/she is the person who activates the works, depending on how they walk around the space, perceive things and make connections. I stage something, put things in place but then I want to leave connections and associations open for the viewer to interpret.

As I was planning the exhibition, Perspex screens and dividers were put up in shops and almost everywhere, in our daily encounters. I started to think of social distancing and our life been taken over by the screens and dividers, like an invisible obstruction.

The Magician courts with the invisible screens and Perspex dividers, he is a contemporary jester appearing and disappearing.

In the Marseilles version of the Tarot the card bears the name 'Le Bateleur', which can mean juggler, but also street performer. It suggests someone who might manipulate their audience into seeing things that are not there, with a sleight of hand. The Magician, Le Bateleur, thus makes a perfect figure for a world of digital image manipulation. The table before which they stand is covered in their tools some of which resemble those found in Photoshop, including the Magic Wand in their hand, as well as the various means of sharpening and dulling surfaces. Their hat contains, wittingly or not, the symbol for infinity, the lemniscate, which can also be seen to allude to the infinite combinations of elements made possible by digital image software.

Excerpt from *A Magician For Everyone*, by Charlie Gere, text written to accompany the exhibition

The Magician is a solo exhibition of the work of artist and researcher Stella Baraklianou. Baraklianou's practice takes up the idea of the reversible; the reversible encountered in nature, in energy distribution patterns, in magic and folklore, in clothing and garments, and in digital formats and algorithmic codes. Bringing together the material processes of craftwork, textiles, photography and digital fabrication, Baraklianou's exhibition focuses on the presence and absence of 'The Tarot Magician'.

PV: 4pm, Thu 17 June 2021

Open Sat-Sun 12pm-4pm
19th June until 4th July

160 Arundel Street
Sheffield
S14RE



GLOAM is a collectively-run exhibition and studio space located in Sheffield City Centre. It was originally set up by Mark Riddington on Mary Street in 2017. In 2020, GLOAM incorporated with a co-operative structure to include six additional co-directors (Stu Burke, Thomas Lee Griffiths, Sam Francis Read, Victoria Sharples & Rose Hedy Squires) and relocated for expansion to Arundel Street; the former location of the DIY music venue, The Lughole.

GLOAM would like to thank:

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Image credits: Magician (infinity), Magician I & II, velvet photographic prints, spray stencil, 2020-21

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