

Camden Art Centre  
Arkwright Road  
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Phoebe Collings-James

*A Scratch! A Scratch!*

Gallery 2 exhibition

10 September – 23 December

Preview: Thursday 9 September

As the third recipient of the Freelands Lomax Ceramics Fellowship, Phoebe Collings-James (b. 1987, London, UK) has spent the last six months in the facilities at Camden Art Centre developing work for her upcoming exhibition in Gallery 2, opening this September.

Collings-James' practice encompasses sculpture, video, sound and performance and the new work created for this solo exhibition – her first in a UK institution – includes a new group of sculptures, held in a sensual environment combining bodies of water and an audio work composed and recorded by the artist with sounds of horns and the recital of texts, enveloping listeners in a moody atmosphere – lugubrious and elemental. The sculptures continue the artist's study of ceramic form through an engagement with tenderness, eroticism and the haptic qualities of clay, working with the malleability of the medium as it transforms, receives impressions, yields to wheel-thrown and hand-built techniques and layers of slips and oxides. The many vessels that appear speak to the artist's interest in the potential of these forms to relate to the body, as containers that hold precarious states of being. Collings-James is also developing her work in sgraffito on ceramic paintings, which are inscribed with images, words and phrases, many of them recurring motifs within her practice across ceramic works and works on paper, emerging from the artist's interest in non-linear storytelling and symbolic language and including imagery from mythological and religious traditions, such as the form of the spider which appears in Ashanti folktale as the trickster Anansi, the god of stories.

The title of the exhibition is borrowed from Act 3 Scene 1 of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in which Romeo's loyal friend Mercutio is slain with Tybalt's sword, and more specifically from Harold Perrinau's dexterous portrayal of Mercutio in Baz Lurhman's 1996 film adaptation of the play. Infused with the lust and machismo of friendship, the visceral phrasing in this scene is flooded with metaphor as Mercutio is caught in the crossfire of a conflict without resolution, alienation and the chaos of love. The abundant metaphors in *A Scratch! A Scratch!* move through both the tender and tenderising of the body, in poetry, language, and

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ceramic sculptures. The works explore an empowering relationship to the erotic, one that mines the inner resource of deep feeling as a fountain of meaning, knowledge and creative energy. Moving through sensual, emotional and psychic registers, the exhibition is a litany for the broken hearted, the bodies known, and slain, the pierced, the spared, the loved, the lovers and always, the fools.

Collings-James is a member of Black Obsidian Sound System (B.O.S.S) - established in the summer of 2018 with the intention of bringing together a community of queer, trans and non-binary black and people of colour involved in art, sound and radical activism. Following in the legacies of sound system culture they wanted to learn, build and sustain a resource for our collective struggles. The system, based in London, is available to use or rent by community groups and others with the purpose of amplifying and connecting them. B.O.S.S is included in the current Liverpool Biennial with a newly commissioned audio-visual installation at FACT that weaves together archival images and reflects the ways in which marginalised groups have developed methods of coming together against a background of repression and discrimination in the UK. B.O.S.S have also been shortlisted for the 2021 Turner Prize.

Collings-James has been developing two public programme events through her residency – the first, now published on our website, is a conversation on poetry and symbolism with artist, poet and dancer Serafine1369; poet, artist and tarot practitioner Daniella Valz Gen; and musician and artist Kelman Duran. Forthcoming is a discussion around studio pottery with ceramicist Grace McCarthy, looking at the specific legacy and labour history of studio potteries in Stoke-on-Trent.

The Freelands Lomax Ceramics Fellowship supports emerging artists working with clay. Between 2017-21, the Fellowship offers artists part-time six-month residencies at Camden Art Centre with an exhibition in the following year and also supports artists in spending a short period of her residency off-site, to develop aspects of her practices in a different context. In 2021 Camden Art Centre partnered with the Leach Pottery in St Ives, where Collings-James spent time working with ceramicists and gaining knowledge from the unique expertise offered at the historic home of Bernard Leach.

Supported by Freelands Foundation.

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## Notes to editors

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Phoebe Collings-James (b. 1987, London, UK) lives and works in London. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Amount of Love You Have to Give is More Than I Can Stand*, Ginerva Gambino, Cologne (2018), *Relative Strength*, Arcadia Missa, London (2018), *Expensive Shit*, 315 Gallery, New York (2017), *ATROPHILIA* (with Jesse Darling), Company, New York (2016) and *Triste Tropiques*, Liste, Basel (2016). Recent group exhibitions include *You Feel Me*, FACT Liverpool, Liverpool (2019), *In Whose Eyes*, Beaconsfield Gallery, London (2018), *After Cesaire /Modern Tropiques*, Platform Southwark, London (2018), *Okey Dokey*, Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf (2017) and *Bust Wide Open*, Harlem Postcards, Studio Museum Harlem (2017). She has had performances and screenings at the Getty Museum, LA (2019), *Sonic Acts*, Amsterdam (2019), *Café Oto*, London (2019) and *Palais de Tokyo*, Paris (2018). Collings-James recently launched *Mudbelly Teaches*, a free ceramics course for Black people in London, taught by Black ceramicists and artists.

## Camden Art Centre

Camden Art Centre in north London (Registered Charity Number 1065829) is a place for world-class contemporary art exhibitions and education. Founded by artists in 1965, it continues to be a space for the most vital and diverse mix of practices and ideas, with an international reputation for supporting artists at key points in their careers, championing excellence and fostering an open and inclusive environment of ambition, innovation and risk. Through a regular programme of exhibitions, artist residencies, off-site projects, performances, talks and educational projects, we ensure that Camden Art Centre remains one of the UK's most dynamic and respected spaces to see, make and talk about art and ideas.

Camden Art Centre has a long and proud history of nurturing talent, supporting a remarkable cohort of emerging artists in recent years from both the UK and the rest of the world, including Emma Hart, Christian Nyampeta, Ruth Ewan, Jennifer Tee and Haroon Mirza. Often providing

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their first institutional show in London, Camden Art Centre offers the necessary space, flexibility open-endedness and support for emerging artists to develop their practice; providing an environment in which risk-taking is encouraged within an ethos of learning and debate.