

Spike Island

PRESS RELEASE

LUCY STEIN

WET ROOM

25 September 2021 to Sunday 16 January 2022

Preview: Friday 24 September, 6.30–8.30pm



Spike Island presents *Wet Room*, the first major solo exhibition in the UK by Cornwall-based artist Lucy Stein (b. 1979). Working primarily with painting and drawing, Stein's show is inspired by the fougou: narrow Neolithic underground passages unique to West Cornwall that lead to womb-like chambers and have become sacred sites of worship. Echoing the ritual rebirthing ceremonies that are believed to have taken place within these uterine caverns, the exhibition centres around an installation comprising a bathtub and sink with running taps, surrounded by tiled walls that have been hand-painted with scenes relating to the artist's study of western esoteric traditions.

Informed by Stein's long-standing research into the goddess culture that thrives in Land's End, this installation transports audiences to the mythical Celtic land of Lyonesse: the legendary sunken kingdom off the Cornish peninsula. The mermaids and water creatures painted onto the tiled walls represent the archetypes of the Anima – the driving forces of the human psyche traditionally associated with femininity, and described variously as irrational, emotional and nurturing. Characterised by a soft and alluring palette of red, pink and blue-green hues, the eerie, fairy tale-like qualities of these underwater scenes portray the psychological state of an overactive Anima.

Surrounding the central installation is a series of new paintings and drawings. Made during Stein's second pregnancy and throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, these new works reflect on a period of intensive



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domestic caregiving and anxiety. They combine Greek mythology, esoteric culture, and ecclesiastical and medieval imagery with vibrant tableaux that depict a wide range of western female archetypes. We see *Mary Magdalene* (2021) mournfully kissing the wounds of a dead Christ; an exuberant young woman with exaggerated breasts holding an ear of corn in *May Queen* (2020); and a tussling, half-naked old woman in *Hag Fight* (2020). Through these works Stein brings in the notion of the numinous – a religious or spiritual quality – in an attempt to describe the real, the symbolic and the imaginary.

In 2020, Stein began to study psychoanalysis, and many of the works in the exhibition reflect on psychoanalytical processes such as transference or projection – when someone redirects their feelings or desires towards one person to another. *Splitting and Projection* (2020) embodies and illustrates these processes: the artist applies wax to unpainted linen to resist the oil paint, building up a multiplicity of images that complicate the reading of the work. Here, a skeleton split in two is suspended against a vigorously painted red background and surrounded by ghostly traces of other figures and faint iconography.

Populated by romantic allusions and unexpected juxtapositions, the works in *Wet Room* share a raw quality, where quick, expressive brushstrokes and areas of intensive reworking reveal Stein's changing moods and compulsive approach to making. Loaded with wittiness and humour, they challenge the different clichés and stereotypes that have shaped the interpretations of esoteric culture and the female psyche for decades.

Lucy Stein: *Wet Room* is commissioned and produced by Spike Island, Bristol. The exhibition tours to De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, from 29 January to 2 May 2022. *Wet Room* is part of the West of England Visual Arts Alliance programme, supported by Arts Council England

– ENDS –

For further information and high-resolution images please contact Jane Faram, Communications Manager at Spike Island on jane.faram@spikeisland.org.uk or +44 (0)117 9292266.

Image: Lucy Stein, *Jung in PZ* (2020), Acrylic, oil, charcoal, Sennelier pastel and oil stick on canvas, 240 x 180cm. Courtesy the artist and Gregor Staiger, Zurich. Photograph by Steve Tanner

NOTES FOR EDITORS

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

- Lucy Stein (b. 1979) is based in St Just, Cornwall. She studied at The Glasgow School of Art, and later at De Ateliers, Amsterdam. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include *Thesmophoria* (including the performance lecture *Bride of Quiet*), Galerie Gregor Staiger, Milan (2020); *Digitalis Purpurea (a re-introspective)*, Conceptual Fine Arts, Milan (online) (2020); *£10.66*, Palette Terre, Paris (2018); *Crying the Neck*, NICC Brussels (with Nina Royle) (2017); *On Celticity* (organised with Paola Clerico), Rodeo Gallery, London (2016). Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Futura, Prague (2020); Bonington Gallery, Nottingham (2019); Tate St Ives (2018); TULCA festival, Galway; Newlyn Gallery, Penzance (all 2017); Le Bourgeoise, London (2016); UKS Oslo (2015). In 2017 she co-organised *Fuck you wheres my Sugar*, a two-day festival on themes of depression and hysteria at Cafe Oto in London with Mark



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Harwood. In 2016 she co-curated *NEO-PAGAN BITCH-WITCH!* at Evelyn Yard, London with France-Lise McGurn and in 2015 she organised the performance event *The Wise Wound* with Tate St Ives and Porthmeor Studios. Between November 2019 and May 2022, Stein and Sarah Hartnett are undertaking a pilgrimage along the Mary ley line, which runs from Carn Les Boel in Cornwall to Hopton in Norfolk.

LIMITED EDITION

- On the occasion of *Wet Room*, Stein has produced *Wise Children*, a limited edition of 16 hand-painted tiles featuring imagery related to the themes in the exhibition. Each of the editions is unique and available to purchase from the Spike Island shop from £120 each.

ABOUT SPIKE ISLAND

- Spike Island supports, produces and presents contemporary art and culture across an 80,000 square foot former industrial building in Bristol. Its diverse artistic programme includes free major exhibitions, events and engagement activities taking place on-site and online. Championing outstanding work by emerging and underrepresented local, national and international artists, the programme enhances access to contemporary art for audiences from all backgrounds.

Alongside its public offer, Spike Island directly supports artists through new commissions, over 70 subsidised studios, and sector-leading artist development opportunities that widen access to its programme and facilities. Its Exhibition Services business supports the bespoke production and installation of artists' film and video throughout the UK and internationally. Spike Island is home to a dynamic community of hundreds of artists and creative businesses, working in flexible, affordable workspaces, alongside UWE Bristol's Fine Art department, Spike Print Studio, and café bar Emmeline.



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