



Stack (body set in motion)

Ro Robertson

On display

Title/Description: Stack (body set in motion)

Artist/Maker: Ro Robertson

Born: 2021

Object Type: Painting & Drawing

Materials: Charcoal, Gouache, Graphite, Paper, Sandstone

Measurements: h. 690 x w. 640 mm

Accession Number: 50857

Production Place: England

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Credit Line: Purchased with support from the Art Fund, 2022

Stack (Body set in Motion) originated via Ro Robertson's automatic drawing technique, in which the artist intuitively made marks on a large sheet of paper on the floor. When the composition emerged, they cut up the paper and worked further into the composition using a range of media including gouache, charcoal, graphite, and sandstone that was collected from the Cornish rocks.

The seascape in Cornwall was crucially inspirational on this body of work. When Robertson relocated there from Yorkshire in 2020, the sea became a prominent motif in their work. *Stack (Body set in Motion)* was the first in a series of 'Stack' works on paper. They reference 'the stacks and columns of granite, which appear like piles of boulders and anthropomorphic totems between Lamorna Cove and Lands End'. [1]

The present drawing represents a body of water dividing two rocky elements. Robertson is interested in this dialogue, as they describe, 'Stone is experienced as an unyielding material closely associated with the hardness of masculinity whereas water is seen as more yielding, and its softer fluidity associated more with femininity - the contradiction being that water shapes stone and the coastal landscape is in a constant state of flux with giant bodies of stone changing continuously over time due to the power of the sea'. [2]

Robertson associates this contradiction and fluidity in the landscape with gender expression: 'The materials of the rock and water we live on and within can teach us of the true power and freedom of flux and change and yet we choose to make very rigid and limiting binary structures in which to relate to our gender'. [3]

Robertson's practice is engaged with Queer histories. As they say of a body of work exhibited in an exhibition *Subterrane* at Maximillian William Gallery in 2021, 'A lot of our history as LGBTQI+ people has been underground; our spaces have been hidden and kept from view and there are big gaps in our histories due to homophobic and transphobic laws. The whole process of making this work is about bringing darker marginal spaces into the open and the light'. [4]

This particular drawing represents a torso form, with truncated legs, broad shoulders and a small head. It recalls a tradition of representing the body as landscape and the landscape as body that was

prevalent in Britain in the mid-twentieth century with artists such as Henry Moore and Ithell Colquhoun. Whilst Robertson does not directly reference their imagery, they do feel a closeness to Colquhoun in particular. They explained that since moving to Cornwall, 'I feel like I have been seeing her work and what she saw in the landscape - the colours and the seaweed'. [5] Robertson represents colours as vibrant as Colquhoun's in this drawing in its vivid blues and deep red.

Tania Moore, January 2023

[1] Ro Robertson, correspondence with the author 13 April 2022.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ro Robertson, 'Seven questions with Rosanne Robertson', by Tania Moore, ArtUK 9 November 2021 <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/seven-questions-with-rosanne-robertson>

[5] Ibid.
