

V.O Curations

Josephine Baker

Clear out the wounds closest to the sun

9.09 - 07.10.2021

Press Release



Installation view, 'Clear out the wounds closest to the sun', 2021

V.O Curations is very pleased to present 'Clear out the wounds closest to the sun', a solo exhibition comprising new sculptural work and installation by recent artist-in-residence, Josephine Baker. Incorporating standardised industrial materials as well as natural elements such as Dover chalk, oak and pine, the show contemplates the fluid vernacular of London's organic and built landscapes, and in particular, the ecosystem of building sites and their various materialities.

Un train peut en cacher un autre, the French saying goes, one train may be hiding another. Once a practical warning, this rather ominous formula came to be appropriated, subverted and adapted to various contexts to express that there might be something more complex, more unpredictable than first meets the eye. That *one object may be hiding another* is a fair warning when encountering the work

of Josephine Baker, in which materials, meanings and references are as slippery as they appear concrete.

This is a show born of months of lockdown, during which the artist witnessed the relentless shapeshifting of London's landscape made even more apparent by the deserted streets, while nature felt like a distant dream. Every element here seems like it has mutated from a building site, the natural world or the artist's imagination into a constructed and fantasised landscape of sorts. At the core of this ecosystem is the desire to translate the fluid nature of language into sculpture – to turn poetry into materiality – and it does so by subverting the semiotic systems (linguistic and otherwise) by which we apprehend and understand the world. Baker mixes signifier and signified in tickling associations that have the effect of an agile metaphor: plywood hoarding is carved to delineate an alpine horizon line; its offcuts, turned into mountainous clouds (or are they nebulous mountains?), seem to shed small pieces of rubble collected in pockets below; the cement waves swirl and crash with barbed-wire splatter while steampunky hybrid creatures shaped into tools made out of rubber, carved wood and glass, roam loudly (can you hear the clinking and sawing sounds?); standing centre stage, the model-sized digger arm appears made out of chalk, one of the very materials it could be gathering and a most friable one at that. Titles citing a fictional construction site company, Mountain Security, meanwhile hint at the deliberate recuperation of nature's symbolism and semantic to camouflage an industry predicated on its exploitation.

How the elements interact within this particular ecosystem remains mysterious, but perhaps that's what we're here to figure out: to tune in to the invisible dynamics of this (and our) world; to become protagonists in this play ready to be set in motion. For even if it appears still, everything here suggests movement, from the extraction performed by the digger, halfway into crushing the earth, down to the invisible migration of materials that constitute these objects, made manifest in details like an FSC label left visible on the plywood boards (evoking a nebulous provenance from 'well-managed forests'), or the use of chalk collected by the artist from the cliffs of Dover. Dysfunctional and destructive movements then, not unlike the ones shaping our reality. There is a literal cutting edge to Baker's sculptures, too, which offsets their motion and points to another returning subject in the artist's work: frontiers, both physical and mental, natural and human-made. They are signified in the metonyms of barbed wire or the spiky fin-like shards of glass poking out of the digger's base, or more directly perhaps in the evocation of hoarding and mountains. Figuratively, it's the geopolitical frontier summoned by the Dover cliffs, as a point of transit or an impassable obstacle, or the socially constructed barrier that separates Baker from the male-dominated world of construction. By conjuring these frontiers, Baker's work reminds us – like the proverbial French phrase – of the inherent danger and promise that comes with their crossing.

Text by Louise Darblay

Josephine Baker (b. 1990, London, UK) completed her undergraduate studies at Central Saint Martins in London in 2012, and her postgraduate in 2017 at the Royal Academy Schools, London. Her recent solo presentations include: The Land Lies, ChertLüdde BUNGALOW (Berlin, 2020); Islands, Kupfer (London, 2019); Night Music, British School at Rome (2018). She has participated in group exhibitions at Nir Altman (Munich, 2021); Drawing Biennial, Drawing Room (London, 2021); Sundry (London, 2020); V.O.Curations (London, 2020); GAO gallery (London, 2019); Tintype (London, 2019); Love Unlimited (Glasgow, 2018); and Royal Academy of Arts (London, 2018). She was a 12-month resident award holder at the British School at Rome from 2017–18. Her forthcoming solo exhibition at Nir Altman (Munich) will open in January 2022.

Louise Darblay is a writer based in London and Managing Editor at ArtReview.

Exhibition: Clear out the wounds closest to the sun by Josephine Baker

Dates: 9 September - 7 October 2021

Location: V.O Curations, 56 Conduit Street, London W1S 2YZ

V.O Curations

Located in central London, V.O Curations is an arts organisation dedicated to supporting emerging and lesser represented artists, curators and researchers through an innovative and critically-engaged programme. Founded in 2018 by Zina Vieille and Nnamdi Obiekwe, V.O Curations believes that to curate is to approach all aspects of our programme - residencies, exhibitions, events, publications and studio spaces - with care. V.O Curations promotes diverse voices and narratives across all of our activities and projects. Our programme aims to facilitate artistic exchange, socially-focused discourse, knowledge production and experimentation. We are focused on cultivating a sense of community, promoting collaboration and encouraging active learning rather than passive viewing.

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