





# REBECCA ACKROYD

# Period Drama

REBECCA ACKROYD'S first institutional solo exhibition in Germany, *Period Drama*, reveals dream-like landscapes somewhere between the corporeal and the ethereal, the tactile and the intangible. Rooted in both eerie fantasies and a sense of reality, Ackroyd's new works delve into nuanced examinations of human bodies, memory of the subconscious, and dimensions of sexuality in space. In her nuanced exploration of the feminine and spirituality, she intertwines elements of boldness with vulnerability and seduction with repulsion, piecing together an ongoing narrative that explores identity, mental symbols, and patterns. Ackroyd's practice synthesizes elements of abstraction and figuration into a coherent but enigmatic language, often materialized in complex installations and body-like sculptures made from unconventional materials like resin, wooden furniture and mechanical fragments, and plaster, as well as paintings and gouaches. Through a thematic spectrum that spans from the realistic to the surreal and from the corporeal to the ghostly, Ackroyd creates works that challenge foundational aspects of human experience—time, memory, femininity, and fertility—against the backdrop of spatial and architectural constructs. Her focus on psychoanalysis, spirituality, and the human mind manifests as a continual excavation of personal stories and collective memory of time, engaging with what has been repressed and questioning the veracity of lost memories. Reflecting on both individual and collective histories assembled in a fragmented yet spellbinding narrative, the artist presents a new, alluring yet uncanny installation in the domed and arched hall that is at once fragile, incomplete, and profoundly existent. Her works coalesce in it to form an environment suspended between surreal landscapes and visceral now, a threshold where the viewer is prompted to reconsider not only femininity and corporeality, but also the human consciousness itself.



REBECCA ACKROYD, *100mph*, 2020

## Period Drama

The exhibition title *Period Drama* is a complex cipher that offers multiple points of entry. Far from a simple reference to time, it evokes photographic lenses and the fleeting moments when light freezes reality. It is this precise moment—the genesis of an event—that Ackroyd captures, resisting the sentimental temptations of ruins or nostalgia as mere vestiges of the past. Instead, her work inhabits the instant, suffusing it with an intensity that resonates in memory. The phrase is rich in connotations, immediately calling to mind bygone eras, filled with their own unique set of customs, dramas, and tensions. It hints at the complex relationship between time periods and the recurring dramas or themes that persist across them—whether they be issues of feminine identity, social fractures, or broader existential questions related to human experience. The title serves as a compelling nexus, merging multiple layers: On one level, it evokes a well-defined genre in literature and film that portrays historical periods with painstaking accuracy—or at least, dramatic flourish. On another, it can be seen as a dichotomy, where “period” refers to a finite, well-defined epoch, while “drama” often signifies an unfolding, an evolution—essentially a work in progress. It is precisely in this interstice of fixedness and uncertainty that the potency of the title lies. *Period Drama* subtly invokes and suggests that every period, or chapter in time, comes with its own drama, be it social, personal, or caused by mechanical entities. The exhibition title subtly links the topic of fertility with cyclical life processes into broader narratives of female identity and experience. Through this multi-layered title, Ackroyd encapsulates the nuanced intersections of her work, prompting the viewer to consider the continual, cyclical unfolding of life's various dramas. The title implicates an inquiry that transcends time-specific aesthetics or mores; it probes into the often complex, occasionally tumultuous relationship between collective history and individual memory. What does it mean to fix a dramatic narrative within the confines of a period? And conversely, how does a period emerge from the dramas—both minute and grand—that animate it?

## Corridors of Mind

Exploring psychoanalysis and the hidden corridors of the mind, Ackroyd retrieves buried memories and recovers their fragmented nature. Her work is emblematic of fragmentation, whether in enlarged anatomical paintings or in epoxy casts as replicas of body parts. In her nuanced exploration of the human and spirituality, she intertwines elements of directness with vulnerability and seduction with repulsion, piecing together an ongoing narrative that addresses identity, subjectivity, and the temporal dimension. With her focus on the subconscious, Ackroyd excavates layers of memory and identity, as if each fragment—be it a painting of a turbine, a drawing of an eye, or a cast of a body part placed on a tree trunk—is a shard of a much larger, elusive narrative. In doing so, she disrupts conventional lines between past and present, facilitating encounters with the ubiquitous yet uncanny, like vestiges of a dream intruding on waking reality. By linking past and present, she stages encounters with the surreal, innocuous objects that are imbued with a sense of the unreal and experienced like relics or flashbacks. Her works invite us to experience the surreal as an archaeological site where the subconscious is unearthed layer by layer—whether in the fragments of drawings on paper of enlarged open and shut eyes or the mysterious epoxy resin casts of her own body.

## Fragility and Transience

Ackroyd's sculptures copy the outer human form like a second shell of the body and its coverings, but not as a static, impermeable volume. Instead, she treats the body as an “open and fragile architecture”, a translucent and yet fixed structure that invites penetrating gazes into its internal complexities. This approach aligns with the broader architectural themes, where the exhibition's translucent sculptures resemble fragile membranes, safeguarding a transient, perishable order. The red carpet seems to add a layer of urgency that feels like being in a private setting or at a red carpet event, or even like being in a bloodbath, running out of the veins of the body parts placed on the dissected white chaise longue in the space. In an intriguing move, the artist places translucent body parts at the center of the exhibition's scenography. Observed by hidden eyes—perhaps proxies for both the artist and the viewer—this structure appears as a sign for the fragility of both human anatomy and architecture, revealing their mutual dependency. This motif of fragility and transience is echoed in Ackroyd's drawings, especially her recent pastels, which explore the deterioration wrought by time and the exigencies of organic composition in an artificial environment.

## Life Cycles

In the first exhibition hall with the red carpeting, Ackroyd's black-and-white turbine paintings command full attention. These jet-like turbines, deliberately depicted at a standstill, evoke an intriguing tension between kinetic possibility and static actuality. Her paintings inhabit a monumental scale, framed by imposing arches that partly hide Ackroyd's eye drawings. The rotors, often integrated with spirals and text from contraceptive pill packages, remind us that time itself is a cyclical force. This thematic underpinning adds another narrative layer, rendering the turbines not just as machines but as images for cycles—of nature and blooming, of life, and of time itself. The painted spirals serve as visual analogues to the passage of time, coiling inward to represent not only the physical dynamics of turbines but also the cyclical nature of human evolution and experience. She thus creates an intriguing dialogue between the geometric and the chronological, asking viewers to consider how time imprints itself on both mechanical objects and human consciousness. Subverting expectations, the turbines are depicted not as symbols of relentless mechanical force, but as monumental figures caught in a moment of pause. Ackroyd draws an astute parallel between these mechanical structures and the fragmented human body, both laden with unfulfilled potential. By presenting the turbines in a moment of rest, Ackroyd invites us to reflect on unactualized energies and opportunities, both mechanical and human. She captures the intangible spirit of our age—an age characterized by rapid movement, acceleration, and instability.

Rebecca Ackroyd  
in conversation with Alexander Wilmschen, 2023

## PERIOD DRAMA

There's a duality in the meaning of the title: On the one hand, it refers to the specific genre of film that is particularly engineered towards a concept of female fantasy—the Mr. Darcy/ Bridget Jones effect. On the other hand, it has a literal reference to fertility. Both of these tie in to more broad ideas around time, nostalgia, theatre, set design and scene, memory and loss.

## FRAGMENTED REALITY

I've always thought about the fragmentation in relation to memory, in the non-chronological piecing together of personal history. Recently, though, I was thinking of the works more in relation to repeating something to the point of abstraction, like when you say a word over and over again until it becomes a sound and loses all meaning. I suppose it could relate, in a way, to my experience learning German: at what point does a foreign language switch from abstract sound making to a meaningful form of communication?



REBECCA ACKROYD, *Mum*, 2023

## IN THE EYE OF THE TURBINE

I remember once driving past a wind farm and discussing what would happen if you were strapped to one of the propeller blades. When I googled it, I found entire Reddit threads of people asking the same question, a collective speculation of what happens when we insert our bodies into machinery. The works in the show reflect a collision of content, of taking existing objects or materials and combining them with cast body parts to create layers of new meaning or confusion. There are a series of old clocks in the show that have been stripped out and emptied of their mechanisms—extracting the time from the object so it becomes an empty shell knocked back to its raw material form, combining the processes in the studio with manufacturing.

## VORTEX OF SUBCONSCIOUSNESS

I've been looking at a lot of spiritualist artists in recent years, who used drawing as a conduit to give form to a spiritual, unseen entity. The idea of trying to capture something visually that's almost indescribable is fascinating to me, and when making artworks. I'm always searching for that feeling of not quite knowing where a form or idea has come from. Whilst making the show I started to get tarot readings, and two of the drawings I'm showing were made directly after these sessions. There's an aspect in art making of giving form to the abstract ideas or feelings of the person making it and a risk in not always knowing or understanding where these come from. It's a push and pull of who is in control—the work or the maker.

Rebecca Ackroyd, born 1987 in Cheltenham, UK, lives and works between Berlin and London. She received her Post Graduate Diploma in Fine Art from the Royal Academy of Arts, London and her BA from Byam Shaw School of Art, London.

Recent exhibitions by Rebecca Ackroyd include *Shutter Speed*, Musée d'art contemporain, Lyon (2023–2024) and forthcoming *Phantom Sculpture*, at Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry (in 2024). Her recent solo exhibitions include *Fertile Ground*, Peres Projects, Seoul (2022); *100mph*, Peres Projects, Berlin (2021); *Tonguing the fence*, Lock Up International, London (2020); *Underfoot*, Fondazione Pomodoro, Milan (2019); *The Mulch*, Peres Projects, Berlin (2018); *The Root*, Zabłudowicz Collection, London (2017). Her work has been part of numerous group exhibitions including *Antéfutur*, musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux (2023); *Dark Light, Realism in the Age of Post Truth*, Aishti Foundation, Beirut (2022); *Masters and Servants*, Ygrec Gallery, Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Paris Cergy, Paris (2022); *SPRING*, Peres Project, Seoul (2022); *corpus murmur*, Peles Empire, Berlin (2022); *Act 1: Body en Thrall*, Rugby Art Gallery and Museum, UK (2022); and *Singed Lids*, for the 15th. Lyon Biennale organised by Palais de Tokyo (2019).

## Introspection

Continuing her exploration of fragmented bodily realities, Ackroyd presents a new series of eye drawings. Her eye gouaches are reminiscent of surreal body landscapes and explore the dichotomy between openness and closure, transparency and obscurity. With each rendition of open and closed eyes, the artist invites contemplation on the dualities of perception and introspection. Serving as windows to the soul in traditional symbolism, these eyes are far from straightforward windows; they are nuanced lenses clouded by the observer's own perceptions and biases. They encourage the audience to rethink not just the act of seeing but the very limitations of perception, elevating the gaze to an existential inquiry. Ackroyd's paintings—concentrating on isolated human parts like hair, arms, legs, eyes, and organs—transform anatomical detail into abstract narratives. Her gouaches of eyes draw artistic influence from the delicate portraiture of Italian painter Rosalba Carriera (1673–1757). They also echo the dynamic interplay of light and color that is a hallmark of the work of British painter William Turner (1775–1851). Ackroyd's paintings and drawings invite to reflect not just on physicality, but also on the emotional or cognitive dimensions these body parts might symbolize.



REBECCA ACKROYD, *Doctor (mum)*, 2023

## Dream Cabinet

Following the path of the eyes up to the upper domed hall, a new scene unfolds on a flower carpet, reminiscent of a familiar domestic yet unreal scene like out of a splatter movie set in a hotel or a private lounge. Here reside Ackroyd's resin sculptures and body casts, meticulously placed on wooden trunks and in antique cabinets. Suspended from the ceiling are large metal poles, on which resin and metal casts are stacked. Ackroyd's sculptures using casts of her own body, which she positions on wooden trunks and in old furniture, become objects like curiosities in a dream cabinet or props on a film set. This dialogue between the inanimate and the animate provokes a meditative introspection on what it means to be a sentient, vulnerable entity in an age that is increasingly mechanical and indifferent. Her assemblage of fragmented and stacked body parts encapsulates the recurring theme of potentiality, tying back to her recent works. The installation forms a like a camera snapshot, suggesting that even in our fragmented states there is a hidden unity—or perhaps a latent energy—waiting to be discovered. Ackroyd's dismembered body parts cast in resin and metal draw a parallel to the turbines in her paintings. The individual blades of the turbines, isolated yet integral to the whole, imply the fragmented body, presenting a study in parts that questions the singularity of whole entities—be they machines or humans.



REBECCA ACKROYD, *(Over)Thinker*, 2023

## Fragmented World

Ackroyd's works venture into the corporeal with a striking replica of reality, leveraging materials and forms that echo our physicality. Significantly, her choice of resin colors mimics the shades of bodily fluids, generating a visceral immediacy that stimulates both sensory experience and mental associations. Her works not only provoke fascination but also beckon us to consider deeper questions about bodily experience and vulnerability. *Period Drama* transcends mere visual spectacle; it is an inquiry into the mutable landscapes of our internal and external worlds. It summons a fragmented but deeply present reality, echoing the retinal afterimage that lingers when a transient flash illuminates the dark recesses of our perception. It challenges us to confront what is uncomfortable, uncertain, and unresolved, asking us to dwell in the interstitial spaces that define, yet also exceed, our understanding of a complex, multi-layered and bodily reality. In merging the artificial with the organic and the eternal with the ephemeral, Ackroyd offers us access to a continuum and timeless space where we are urged to reckon with the complexities of bodily existence in an increasingly fragmented world of disaster and reconfiguration reconstructed by our consciousness.

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In collaboration with Peres Projects.

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PERES PROJECTS  
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Front Cover  
Rebecca Ackroyd, *(Over)Thinker*, 2023, Resin and tree trunk, 102 × 85 × 65 cm, Courtesy the Artist, Peres Projects, Berlin, Photo: Peres Projects

Back Side  
Rebecca Ackroyd, *(Over)Thinker*, 2023, Wooden wardrobe, cast resin, wig, steel, 188 × 129 × 104 cm, Courtesy the Artist, Peres Projects, Berlin, Photo: Peres Projects

Rebecca Ackroyd, *Doctor (mum)*, 2023, Soft pastel on Somerset satin paper, 71 × 82 cm, Courtesy the Artist, Peres Projects, Berlin, Photo: Peres Projects

Rebecca Ackroyd, *100mph*, 2020, Pen and colored pencil on paper, 1 of 8, 30 × 42 cm, Courtesy the Artist, Peres Projects, Berlin, Photo: Peres Projects