

Compulsive viewing

Carissa Farrell discovers that no aspect of the human condition escapes Vera Klute's focus as she marshalls her multi-disciplinary skills in preparation for her show at the Molesworth Gallery, Dublin in May

Across the disciplines of painting, animation and sculpture Vera Klute examines the impractical and occasionally embarrassing nature of human anatomy and behaviour while making fun of the foolish tendency of humans to anthropomorphise the world to their own image. It is a grand narrative that Klute cuts through incisively with inventive manipulation of primitive stop-action animation, illustration, drawing, kinetic sculpture, painting and video. Her eclectic use of motifs; body parts, organs, mechanical fittings, birds, insects and more, in peculiar couplings that hint at stylistic influences from early 20th-century science fiction, surrealism and Hieronymus Bosch. But she tones down their respective tendencies towards spectacle, fantasy and horror in favour of intimacy, melancholy and subtle humour. Klute takes good advantage of her exceptional technical range and sharp editorial instinct to make her work insightful, idiosyncratic and diverse.

Bodily matters considered too unpleasant for polite conversation are tackled head on with Klute's trademark deadpan objectivity. She makes no apology or fuss in illustrating noisy biological functions such as digestion or circulation in *Gurgles*, 2010, *Mind the Mucus*, 2006, *CPR*, 2011 and *Nutrition* 2007. With a distinctly un-Irish detachment she handles obsessive psychological thinking and behaviours in *Den letzten beissen die Hunde*, 2011, *Hair in my Soup*, 2008, and *Brains*, 2007. These deeply personal phenomena are made use of without a hint of confessional self absorption. They offer a candidness and universality that would strike a chord of identification with most viewers. Klute infuses enough humour and humility to pitch her eccentric critique of the human condition with sensitivity.

The awkward physicality of being runs through the most traditional aspect of Klute's practice. In 2014 she was commissioned to make a portrait of Sr Stanislaus Kennedy for the National Gallery of Ireland and in 2015 was announced Winner of the Hennessy Portrait Prize, also at the National Gallery. The portrait of Sr Stanislaus is unusually informal for such a grand commission. Sitting in an ordinary office chair holding a disposition that seems more tolerant than relaxed she appears to be fulfilling her duty to the etiquette of public life which is a necessary, rather than an enjoyable, experience. For the Hennessy Portrait Prize Klute painted a tightly focused image of Anne Ryder that roughly follows the selfie format. Ryder's face fills the image while her personality spills out through a mischievous taut smile and glinting eyes. Klute's skill in rendering these painted portraits is unquestionable but what is most impressive is her capacity to make the subject's intrinsic qualities the sensation, rather than her sublime painting ability.

In very much a coming of age process her forthcoming exhibition at the Molesworth Gallery continues to demonstrate her capacity to deliver potency without grandiosity in dealing with sensitive subjects. Three key sculptural works, *Flesh* &



WITH A FAMILIAR BUT STARTLING DIRECTNESS KLUTE POINTS TO THE IMMEDIATE PROXIMITY OF LIFE TO DEATH



Blood I – III are lumps of flesh rendered in glazed white porcelain (Fig 1). At first glance they are difficult to make sense of. Resembling specimens from a pathology lab, or hunks of meat on a butchers block, they are cut in cross-section like joints ready for roasting. The double entendre in the title, *Flesh and Blood* and the addition of tulips in one of them hints worryingly at a familial link and prompts a closer examination. Slowly it becomes apparent that hidden through the folds of flesh the near life-size form of an unborn baby is partially exposed. There is enough tension in the infant's limbs to suggest a life emerging but the association with butchery and pathology is unavoidably disturbing. With a familiar but startling directness Klute points to the immediate proximity of life to death. The association with childbirth is inevitable. These works are simultaneously beautiful, as both porcelain and the form of the infant's tiny body naturally are, but it is terribly frightening. Klute has delved deep and with great courage to produce such works and with aesthetic composure she challenges the viewer to unravel their own fears and confusions in looking at this work.

Klute's impulse to use whatever means necessary to execute an idea shows an unselfconscious compulsion to continue to make work. It distinguishes her practice from her peers whose tendency to excel within formal boundaries and disciplines allows for easier categorization and peer comparison. Her CV demonstrates a versatile and prolific output over a relatively short career for which she has been rewarded by many exhibitions and funding. In this forthcoming show Klute is revealing a new maturity that asks for the attention of an institution or museum. She has the skill, the guts and unlimited imaginative range that demands space for expansion. ■

Vera Klute 'Breeding Ground' Molesworth Gallery, Dublin, 12 May-10 June 2016
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1 VERA KLUTE
FLESH & BLOOD 2016
porcelain approx
25x15x10cm
each

2 SELF-
PORTRAIT (video
still) 2016 video
animation, 4 min
looped

3 SKELETON
2016 oil on
canvas
85x100cm

4 GNOME 2016
oil on canvas
65x95cm