



Museum of Classical Archaeology

Press Release

Topos Embodied **An exhibition of female-led, interdisciplinary art** 25 July – 15 September 2023

Installation: Monday 24 July

Website: <https://www.classics.cam.ac.uk/museum/exhibitions/exhibitions/topos-embodied>

Private view: Monday 24 July, 6-7.30pm

Tickets: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/private-view-topos-embodied-tickets-668213102377?aff=oddtcreator>

This summer, the Museum of Classical Archaeology is hosting an exciting new exhibition of female-led, interdisciplinary art: *Topos Embodied*, by mixed-media artist Justyna Borucka and sculptor Cat Vitebsky.

Join us on a journey through a postpartum landscape, one which explores a very personal experience of maternity and motherhood via the materiality of the classical past. Borucka and Vitebsky respond to MOCA's cast collection via a return to the original marble quarry on Paros, the source of the marble from which so many ancient Greek masterpieces were

sculpted. In doing so, they explore what it is to be a mother and to occupy a body which has given birth and nurtured children, in unexpected ways.

Unexpected, in part, because they use the materiality of sculpture – down to the molecular level – to open up questions around how we define huge and culturally significant concepts like *beauty* and *femininity*. They are especially interested in how those definitions relate to the bodies beautiful of antique sculpture, the types of heroic nudes and naked Aphrodites on display in our Cast Gallery. In making space for the maternal body, in other words, they are diverting our focus to what types of bodies and what types of beauty are left out or remain unseen when we look only for washboard stomachs and perfect pectorals. The result is a celebration and an expansion of our very idea of the beautiful.

Their work, then, is rooted in their own bodies, in the changed perspective which their personal experiences of motherhood have wrought upon their outlook as women and as artists. But it is also grounded in the landscape of Paros today, a *topos* (in Greek, τόπος), where the past is intimately connected to the present and where memory is married to meaning through relationships built upon and framed by the land itself. Or to put it another way, the rugged island landscape of Paros (which Borucka today calls home) is the *topos* – the space and the place – for the personal and collective experiences which have shaped their show.

And in this way, this exhibition is not just an abstract or free-floating meditation on airy ideals: Paros is embedded in the creativity, practice and thinking of both artists. From Vitebsky's plaster casts of her own pregnant and postpartum body, made from plaster mixed with Cycladic marble dust, to her sculptures weaving the natural flora of the island into new visions of physical beauty, to Borucka's *Atomic Series*, which mobilises the molecular make-up of MOCA's plaster casts and the marble of the absent originals to mediate their relationship between the two, the *topos* of Paros is also quite literally embedded in their work.

And that *topos* or landscape of Paros is, for Borucka and Vitebsky, a living and breathing one, one which is inhabited and meaningful in the present as much as the past – and in this way, this is an exhibition which has been shaped by a collective of women during its development. There are the women of Paros, those who have lived and settled on the island, are an integral part of this project, their personal histories giving tell to the island as a lived-in landscape, participating in body-mapping workshops, and literally embodied in Vitebsky's work, *In Her Hands*.

In addition, the generosity and expertise of the members of Paros Creatives, a unique and interdisciplinary collective of women from a broad range of fields founded by Borucka and Vitebsky, is just beneath the surface of the show – a multi-hued vein of female solidarity and friendship, adding colour and strength to the substrate of the artists' partnership.



Images:

1. Cat Vitebsky's studio, featuring one of three triptychs entitled *Beauty Transformed* (2023), cast made from plaster and Cycladic marble dust
2. Justyna Borucka, *Oxygen* from the *Atomic Series* (2023), marble dust and yarn on raw linen, on display on Paros
3. View of the quarry at Marathi on Paros, photograph by Vassia Katsirea

Private View

Join us for the opening night of *Topos Embodied*, an exhibition by artists Justyna Borucka and Cat Vitebsky at the Museum of Classical Archaeology. Grab a glass of wine and be one of the first to view this show of new works, inspired by the intersections between the landscape of a Greek island and the postpartum body.

Monday 24 July 2023, 6-7.30pm

£££: free.

Booking: essential.

More information and how to book: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/private-view-topos-embodied-tickets-668213102377?aff=oddtcreator>

About Paros Creatives

Paros Creatives are a female-led interdisciplinary art project working across and between both Greece and the UK. The founding members, mixed-media artist Justyna Borucka and sculptor Cat Vitebsky, met as students at the University of the Arts (London) in 2006, where together they questioned the rejection of humanism and beauty in modernist and postmodernist artistic practices.

In 2019 they created the collective Paros Creatives, which has since expanded into an exciting collaborative interdisciplinary project exploring the famed Parian marble quarry and its surrounding landscapes through the lens of beauty, womanhood and motherhood, merging art and science. Together with the artists, the members of the collective include: geologist Maria Birmbili, sociologist Moshoula Capous-Desyllas, philologist Anastasia Kanli, videographer Vassia Katsirea, and ecologist Elena Symeonidou.

<https://paroscreatives.com/>

About the artists

Justyna Borucka

Born in Warsaw, Poland, Borucka spent her early years in Milan, Italy. From 2001 to 2010 she lived and worked in London, UK where in 2009 she graduated with a BA (Hons) from University of the Arts, London. During this time her focus was on an experimental approach to painting infused by her interest in land art, material manipulation and object making. She later moved her studio to the Greek islands (Skyros, Andros, Mykonos) and has resided permanently in Paros since 2018. Her new forthcoming solo exhibition, curated by Giuliano Serafini, will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the beginning of archaeological excavations at the ancient site of Delos, Cyclades.

<https://justynaborucka.com/>

Cat Vitebsky

Born in the UK, Vitebsky travelled from a young age on family ethnographic field trips to Northeastern Siberia, living with migrating reindeer herders. In the early 2000's she studied

as apprentice to a renowned bronze caster in the UK and spent several years mastering the craft. She graduated in 2009 BA (Hons) from the University of the Arts, London where her main focus was around post-holocaust memorialisation, acts of remembering, intergenerational mourning and the counter-memorial or anti-monument movement. Part of this research investigated the widespread rejection of figurative representation in postwar Europe. Since this she has been working in Cambridge (UK) as a freelance sculptor and workshop facilitator.

<https://www.catvitebsky.co.uk/>

Visiting Museum of Classical Archaeology

The Museum is open to the public Tuesday-Friday 10am-5pm. There is no need to book, but more information on our continued Covid-secure measures can be found on our website.

<http://www.classics.cam.ac.uk/museum/visit-us>

About the Museum of Classical Archaeology

The Museum of Classical Archaeology is home to one of the finest surviving collections of plaster casts of Greek and Roman sculpture in the world, housed in its atmospheric Cast Gallery. Exhibitions are displayed amongst the casts, creating new dialogues between ancient and modern, antiquity and its reception. MoCA is one of eight museums and collections which work together as the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) and received funding from Arts Council England as a National Portfolio Organisation.

For further information and images, please contact the Curator, Dr Susanne Turner
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www.classics.cam.ac.uk/museum



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