

Lucy Stein: Wet Room

Extended Captions

Large Print

Persephone holding a pomegranate seed, 2021
Hand-painted ceramic tiles Stein has responded to the modernist history and coastal setting of the De La Warr Pavilion to evoke the genius loci or spirit of its meeting point between land and water. A new tile work made especially for this iteration of the exhibition depicts the Greek goddess Persephone, queen of the underworld and goddess of springtime. Her presence alludes to the original design of the Pavilion, which included a 26ft high sculpture of Persephone by artist Frank Dobson that was intended to stand in front of the building, a fold of cloth in hand as if preparing to enter the sea. Incomplete and lost at the outbreak of WWII, Stein conjures and reconstructs the memory of Dobson's sculpture in the present.

Wet Room, 2021

Hand-painted ceramic tiles, bath, sink, shower head, black acrylic mirror, water

Informed by Stein's long-standing research into the goddess culture that thrives at Land's End, this installation takes us to the mythical Celtic land of Lyonesse: the legendary sunken kingdom off the Cornish peninsula. The mermaids and water

creatures painted onto the tiled walls represent the archetypes of the Anima, a term coined by Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875–1961) to define the driving forces of the human psyche traditionally associated with the female gender, and described variously as irrational, emotional and nurturing. ‘There’s a feminist sense of what has been suppressed and subdued throughout cultural history’, Stein explains, ‘and all the things that go with that, like intuition, empathy, care.’

Stein has been working with ceramic tiles for the past decade. ‘My work’, she explains, ‘is always a workout in one way or another – even the drawings. I always press very hard, and I use a lot of oil stick and charcoal. It can be quite aggressive, quite physical. And this new way of working – it’s still physical, but it’s more like swimming than punching.’

This installation, like the many painted figures surrounding it within the gallery, are positioned facing out to the sea, catching upon their surfaces the subtle shifts in light and shadow as the sun moves across the horizon, eclipsed by the monumental form of Beachy Head in the distance.

Baubo, 2021

Crysta Soap Base, Port Navis Oyster shell (crushed), Princes gay dahlia petals, Autumn Equinox, Oakmoss, Clary Sage, Geranium Egypt ointments

This soap sculpture represents Baubo, the old woman who performed an obscene spectacle that made the ancient Greek goddess Demeter laugh. This marked the end of her long period of mourning, following the loss of her daughter Persephone (Kore), who she had, until then, been dolefully wandering in search of.

Some earthenware figurines found in the temple of Demeter and Kore in the ancient Greek city of Priene at the beginning of the twentieth century, have been identified with Baubo. These 'Baubos of Priene' merge the head, the belly, and the female sexual organ, with the genitals immediately below the mouth.

Blobber, 2021

Crysta Soap Base, Port Navis Oyster shell (crushed), Princes gay dahlia petals, Autumn Equinox, Oakmoss, Clary Sage, Geranium Egypt ointments

Hag Fight, 2020
Oil on canvas

Mermaids are rich metaphors in Stein's work. 'Mermaids', the artist has observed, 'still have enormous power... I think for women the siren is still a very strong image to connect with.'

Mermaids first appeared in Assyria (present-day Syria and northern Iraq), in the myth of the fertility goddess Atargatis, who became a mermaid after casting herself into a lake. Later, Greek mythology greatly expanded on the concept of mermaids, including the Nereids, the Tritons, the Sirens and Thessalonike.

For Stein, the mermaid is more than a subject – in her nature, she mirrors the artist's own creative battle 'between the lyrical and the sweet, between the saccharine and the very rough, raw, angsty and ugly. Mermaids are always connected with thoughts of death, and the sea as a frightening place... of the unconscious rolling up from the depths.' Typically portrayed as young women, here Stein depicts an ageing mermaid in the turmoil of a violent fight.

Sylv's first bath, 2021
Oil on canvas

Woman under the sea, 2021

Wax resist, acrylic, poster paint, oil and Sennelier pastel on linen

Precognition, 2021

Oil on canvas

May Queen, 2021

Oil, wax resist, charcoal and Sennelier pastel on linen

Thesmophoria, 2019

Oil, spray paint, oil stick and charcoal on gessoed panel

This work takes its title from an ancient Greek religious festival held in honour of the goddess Demeter (the Greek life-giving goddess of agriculture, grain and harvest), and her daughter Persephone. Restricted to adult women, the festival celebrated human and agricultural fertility and culminated with the sacrifice of pigs, whose remains were put into pits called *megaras*. Later, the rotten remains of these sacrifices were retrieved from the pits and placed on altars to Demeter and Persephone, along with cakes baked in the shape of snakes and phalluses. Stein often references mythology in her works, explaining that 'when my work is at its best...it uses signifiers but puts some sort of lived experience into them, so

they feel like they're from now and from mythology'.

Wandering star, 2019

Oil, spray paint, oil stick and charcoal on gessoed panel

Splitting and projection, 2021

Wax resist, poster paint and oil on linen

Matrilineal: Ghosts of the future past, 2021

Oil and Sennelier pastel on linen

This painting is based on John William Waterhouse's (1849-1917) haunting portrayal of Cleopatra from 1888, an image of intense power defined by its protagonist's piercing stare and stoic posture. In Waterhouse's painting, we see Cleopatra seated with her hand placed on top of a lion head statue. In her contemporary rendition, Stein includes the outlined forms of two female bodies next to Cleopatra, their heads either partially or fully omitted from the canvas. As the title of the work suggests, Stein conjures the energy of a feminine kinship across time, while questioning the representation of women within acts of image making that seek to define them.

Erotic encounters South West, 2020
Acrylic, oil and charcoal on canvas

Stein has often acknowledged the influence of modernist British women painters in her work. One such figure is the artist Eileen Agar (1899–1991). ‘One thing that Agar taught me’, she has observed, ‘is that your progression through subject matter and motifs isn’t linear – they come back.’ In this painting, recurring motifs from Agar’s work, such as the crescent moon and the owl, are depicted in a nocturnal scene surrounding the figure of a reclined woman.

The corn goddess goes back on Instagram, 2021
Oil on linen

Her Beneficence, 2020
Acrylic, oil and charcoal on canvas

In this work, Stein was inspired by the bust of Nefertiti in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin and subsequent interpretations by artists Marlene Dumas and Isa Genzken. Through an extended period of research at The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle, Cornwall in 2016, Stein traced a lineage between the traditional so-called cunning folk of South West England and ancient Egypt: ‘it was during my research that I read a lot around these connections, and how many of the

traditional poppets, as well as cursing and banishment rituals and techniques, are thought to have descended from ancient Egypt. Her eyes quite successfully follow you around the room!

Drawing occupies a central place in Stein's practice. 'Drawing is the backbone of my work... and I suppose there's something automatic about it, so a lot of the time it tells me what I need to be making work about, and how I need to be making it. I tend to get these bursts or gushes of inspiration.' In this selection of drawings, Stein depicts a wide range of female characters, from goddesses to mermaids. 'I've always painted women, and to some extent female beauty. Like a lot of female painters, I've tried to suggest a "female gaze", often by giving agency to the muse. My figures tend to be imagined characters from the Western canon, perhaps stand-ins for myself, acting out psychological vignettes. I've tried to suggest the ambivalence, fear and shame that comes with embodying the body/mind dualism.'

1. Cosmos = Bitch (3), 2021
Ink on paper
2. Cosmos = Bitch (4), 2021
Ink on paper
3. Her Benevolence, 2019
Ink and Sennelier pastel on paper

4. Cosmos = Bitch (2), 2021
Ink on paper
5. El Sol, 2021
Underglaze paint, acrylic, pencil, ink, Sennelier pastel on watercolour paper
6. Samhain, 2021
Ink and acrylic on paper
7. Drawing down the moon in Penwith, 2020
Underglaze paint, acrylic, pencil, ink, Sennelier pastel on watercolour paper
8. Agriculture = patriarchy, 2019
Spray paint, oil stick, ink, pencil on watercolour paper
9. Isis, 2020
Ink, oil stick, spray paint, charcoal, Sennelier pastel on paper
10. Cosmos = Bitch (5), 2021
Ink on paper
11. Marija Gimbutas disturbs a pagan at Boscednan on the blood moon, 2019
Ink and acrylic on paper
12. Priest's Cove, 2020
Underglaze paint, acrylic, pencil, ink, Sennelier pastel on watercolour paper
13. Cosmos = Bitch (1), 2021
Ink on paper
14. Mermaid of Zennor, 2020
Ink and pencil on Indian paper
15. Grail (what women want) 2021
Ink on paper

16. Neolithic Feminism, 2021

Underglaze paint, ink, Sennelier pastel on
handmade Indian paper