

An Artist's Eye: Matthew Monahan

'I think her ears are there to be whispered into.'

In a new series, artists exhibiting at Frieze London selected works at Frieze Masters that spoke to them. Matthew Monahan - whose *Neptune (Rescue)* (2016) is in the Sculpture Park (S1), presented by Massimo De Carlo - chose a cult goddess (c.520 – 460 BC) at the stand of Kallos Gallery (B5).

The scale is what strikes you first of all - slightly less than life size. It's not monumental, it's not quite intimate. It's almost doll-like. Like a mannequin, the figure has holes in her ears for earrings, and holes across the breast that a dress could be hung from. It would have been painted on its "skin", like makeup. It could be played with.

It was a vehicle for worship, it houses a living presence. It's a living figure of a goddess of beauty. There's a suggestion that some of these holes by the ears were there so hot air could escape during the firing process. I disagree. I think they're there to be whispered into. So the owners could ask the goddess for things - probably, for more beauty.

There's a clarity in this work that is almost childlike - it's the clarity of the craftsman, being given an exercise. It's terracotta - which is insanely delicate. It's not "high status" material like bronze, or even marble. Look at the smile - there are a lot of questions in that smile. When I see it, I hear 'draw me a mouth', 'give me lips' - it's the product of an instruction. You can see the artisan modelling each of these fingers, adjusting their length. What interests me is that the whole development of the classical figure is just this kind of modelling process as well. With the Greek *kouroi*, there's this moment where the style of the sculpture goes from standing straight to standing with one foot forward. But for a while, the sculptors hadn't worked out contrapposto, so one leg was just lengthened. The arms here are displayed at right angles to the body, whereas there's documentation of them being presented one on top of the other (as if we're still figuring out how to use this goddess: the form of worship.)

The evolution of the figure - the evolution of personage itself, really - for me in this way emerges almost by accident from the development of style, or styles. We don't know who made this, but we can identify it as a product of a culture - that culture, that style is the author. So what does that bring us? Is this a woman? There is something in the elongation of these features that for a moment makes you think "alien". The alien body is a projection of a body formed by technology, by reason (big heavy brains, long fingers). I'm not, in



Head, shoulders and arms of a cult goddess or *Korē*, (c.520 – 460 BC) at the stand of Kallos Gallery at Frieze Masters 2016. Photo courtesy: © Kallos Gallery and Luke Andrew Walker Photography.



Matthew Monahan, *Neptune (Rescue)* (2016) installation view at Frieze Sculpture Park 2016. Photo courtesy: Frieze.

my work, looking at aliens (though I am a child of Mike Kelley). But I am looking at how exercises - in style, in form, in material, in their challenges - produces these bodies, these gods.