

In Practice: Phoebe Collings- James

Jun 27–Aug 12, 2024

SculptureCenter

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Phoebe Collings-James' works across media function as debris of knowledge, feeling, violence, language, and desire that result from living and surviving within hostile environments. At SculptureCenter, Collings-James exhibits *Infidels*, a new series of ceramic sculptures that explore relationships between heresy, faith, and orthodoxies of religion, state, and society. Intensely colored by iron-rich glazes, using various firing techniques, each of Collings-James' sculptures elaborates on the position of the heretic as a transmitter of incendiary speech, opposition from within, and ostracisation.

Here, Collings-James's work performs sound without sound, and voice without voice, transferring sensory experiences across media and giving material shape to resonance and speech. Collings-James refigures ideas of visibility, frequency, and attunement to "the tempo and tenor of blackness" (see Tina Campt, *A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See*) out of film and moving image into the physical world and the slower speeds of sculpture.

Each of Collings-James's ceramic sculptures comprises a bell- or vessel-like form with protruding parts that look like craning necks, mouths, or pipes growing from their heads. Some show stitches, sutures, or binding lines up their spines, and some appear to have sagged or twisted under their own weight during firing, setting their apertures at off angles. These moments of collapse result from firing at high temperatures, a production decision that retains the energy of an ecstatic outburst and release in each work, in parallel with the somatic experience of the infidel Collings-James explores across the series. Together these works appear cacophonous, as instruments playing themselves, heightened by the artist's inclusion of a brass tuba bell pocked with dents within their midst. At the same time, they are slightly anthropomorphic, to be read as figures singing or lamenting, and even zoomorphic, with swan-like necks tuning the viewer's speculation toward the half-trumpet, half-squawk of waterfowl calls. With these conflicting and simultaneous cues as to what a viewer might hear with their eyes, as it were, Collings-James establishes a "sonic bearing" (in the artist's words) of outsider speech: language or almost-language, noises that verge on words.

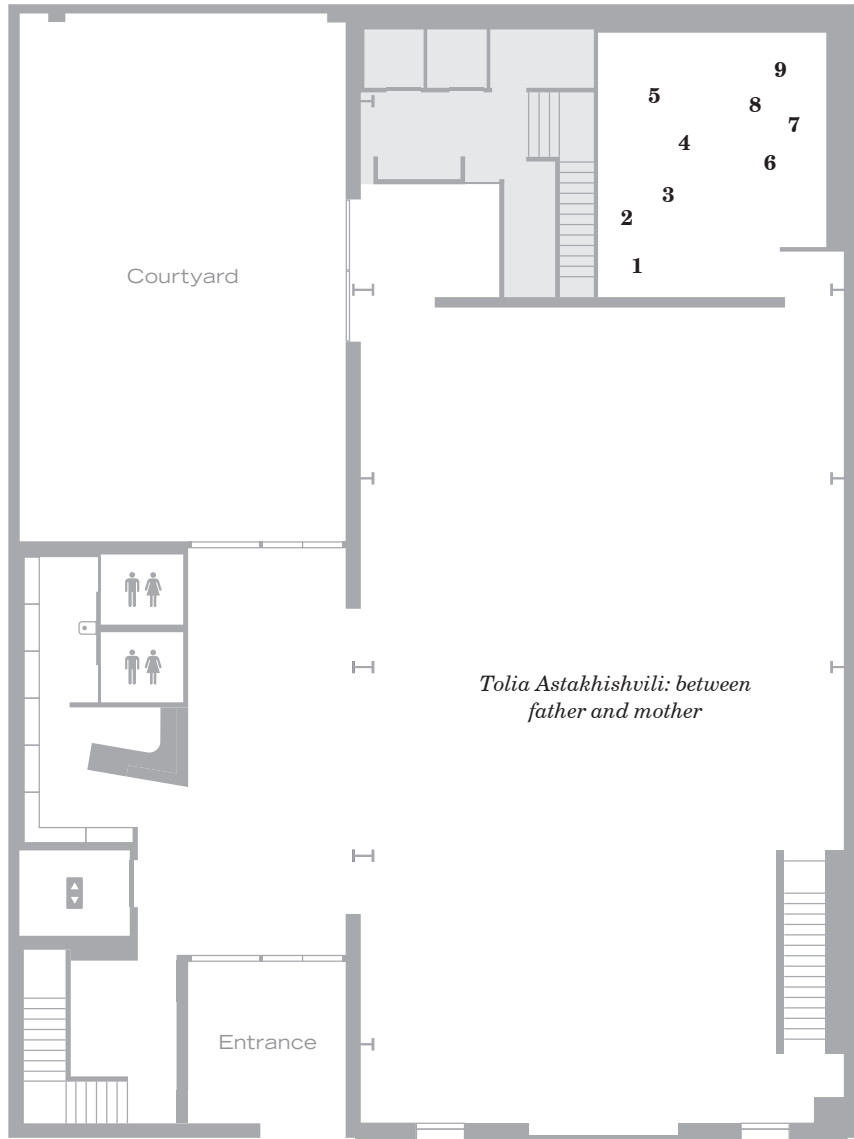
In contrast to such formal and sonic ambiguity, Collings-James' works are also imprinted with fragments of text, acting as rare bits of literal expression, suggestions, or language clues. These are sometimes hidden under layers of glaze and other times fully exposed: *belly/beast*, a kind of metaphysical yet fleshy geolocation; *Escuchad!*, invoking the survival and persistence through a bilingual tongue of New York City; and *Land Back*, an urgent refrain.

Embossing (as Collings-James does with bespoke roulettes), stamping, and inscription have long had important and varied functions in the history of craft, sometimes adding or removing layers of abstraction from utilitarian objects, and sometimes identifying

or misdirecting authorship. Considered within the *Infidels*' broader exploration of outsider-versus-insider status, and inflected by decolonial and queer political positions, these techniques continue a relationship to varied historical and contemporary African and African diasporic techniques for the surface decoration of coil-built vessels. In dialogue with recent iterations on these traditions, one inscription on Collings-James' work reads *Out of Anarchy*, a reference to the sculptor Donald Locke (1930–2010), who worked between Guyana, Britain, and the United States.

In subtle reference to Doyle Lane (1923–2002), an artist associated (in retrospect) with an underexplored sensibility for queer Black art in postwar Los Angeles, Collings-James' exhibition also includes a few ceramic beads that call to Lane's small-scale weed pots and his own beads, which occupied his production for much of the final years of his life. Collings-James' beads appear almost as hidden as a tongue, a shim, or a minor organ in just a few works—continuing an exploration of expression and its suppression that implicates many speakers in conversation through time.

Works in the Exhibition



Ground Floor Plan

Ground Floor

- 1 *Infidel [belly/beast]*, 2024
Glazed stoneware ceramic on a steel base
18 1/8 x 9 1/2 x 16 7/8 inches (46 x 24 x 43 cm)
- 2 *Infidel [eye]*, 2024
Glazed stoneware ceramic on a steel base
23 1/4 x 15 3/8 x 16 1/2 inches (59 x 39 x 42 cm)
- 3 *Infidel [escuchad!]*, 2024
Glazed stoneware ceramic
24 1/4 x 13 x 13 inches (54 x 33 x 33 cm)
- 4 *Infidel [strike]*, 2024
Glazed stoneware ceramic on a steel base
39 3/8 x 17 3/4 x 17 3/4 inches (100 x 45 x 45 cm)
- 5 *Infidel [out of anarchy]*, 2024
Glazed stoneware ceramic on a steel base
25 5/8 x 9 7/8 x 12 7/8 inches (59 x 39 x 42 cm)
- 6 *Infidel [split]*, 2024
Glazed stoneware ceramic
24 1/4 x 16 7/8 x 15 3/4 inches (59 x 43 x 40 cm)
- 7 *Infidel [KING]*, 2024
Brass, glazed ceramic
18 x 22 x 19 inches (46 x 56 x 48 cm)
- 8 *Infidel [dorsum]*, 2024
Glazed stoneware ceramic on a steel base
24 3/8 x 7 1/2 x 7 7/8 inches (62 x 19 x 20 cm)
- 9 *Infidel [blue]*, 2024
Glazed stoneware ceramic
31 7/8 x 11 x 10 1/4 inches (81 x 28 x 26 cm)

All works courtesy the artist and Arcadia Missa, London

On View Concurrently

Tolia Astakhishvili: between father and mother
May 9–Aug 12, 2024

In Practice 2024

Covey Gong
May 11–Jun 19, 2024

Phoebe Collings-James
Jun 27–Aug 12, 2024

Bastien Gachet
Sep 2024

Tony Chrenka
Oct 2024

Anita Esfandiari
Jan 2025

Zishi Han and Wei Yang
Mar 2025

About In Practice

In Practice 2024 marks the twenty-first anniversary of the program. Each exhibition is the artist's first solo exhibition in a New York City institution, and each artist will present new work commissioned by SculptureCenter.

SculptureCenter is a not-for-profit arts institution that takes the history and legacy of sculpture as a framework from which to consider the diverse activity taking place in the field of contemporary art. SculptureCenter's program encourages artists and audiences to explore the possibilities of sculpture and the multifarious ways in which sculpture is developing and connecting to other forms of expression, including installation, video, performance, architecture, and other media.

Since 2003, SculptureCenter's In Practice open call program has supported the production of new work by 250 artists.

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In Practice 2024 is organized by the SculptureCenter curatorial team.

In Practice: Phoebe Collings-James is curated by Kyle Dancewicz, Deputy Director, and Christopher Aque, Exhibition and Program Manager.

Sponsors

In Practice is made possible by the Elaine Graham Weitzen Commissioning Fund for Emerging Artists, which supports the production of new work by artists selected from SculptureCenter's annual open call. This landmark endowment established in 2024 reflects Elaine Graham Weitzen's (1920–2017) lifelong commitment to emerging artists and her exuberant support of new ideas in art. Weitzen served as a devoted Trustee of SculptureCenter from 1987 to 2017.

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