

# Unnamed Saints

**Artist:** Lara Smithson  
**Preview:** Friday May 5<sup>th</sup> 6-9pm  
**Exhibition:** Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> May – 4<sup>th</sup> June  
**Times:** Friday Saturday Sunday 12 - 6pm

*"The first relic sent was the collarbone which contains the arteries which carry a thought which is in the heart so that the tongue might burst forth into voice; the second was the arm, through which work is perceived; third, a long bone which seems to be from the tibia or femur...Fourth and finally, the head came, as if so that he might speak, since thinking and speaking and acting are communicated through the collarbone and the arm"*

*'Canonicus Lingonensis' in Riant, Exuviae Sacrae Constantinopolitanae 1:33-34d.*

Coleman Projects is pleased to present Unnamed Saints, **Lara Smithson's** first solo exhibition in London. It marks the culmination of work and research begun during her time as Bridget Riley Fellow at the British School Rome (2021/22) and coincides with her residency at St John's College Oxford.

Smithson's focus is on the contradictions that link health, ritual, theology, divine and political power; how these have and continue to shape the human condition. The exhibition is comprised of two parts, a central film work anchored by a reworking of her installation 'Detritus', originally formulated in Rome, along with prints and drawings that also feature in the film.

Anatomical votives and relics have long been imagined as able to transfer illness or sin between human and divine objects or remains, especially in times of plague and pandemic. Symbolic limbs and organs created during Etruscan and Roman periods might be thought of as an early reference to the idea of cloning body parts, Smithson suggests. Her representation of the fragmented body also refers to how minds and bodies are divided by the specialisations of medicine; the human treated as parts rather than a whole.

Entering the gallery, the installation of drawings appears to spill out of the walls and grow in fragments across the ground. They offer a petri-dish view of "unswept floors" and what might have littered them over time. Shaped like animal skins, they bear evidence of all manner of historically loaded and scattered remnants: relics, gilded bones, walnuts, bodily traces. Ribbons appear to wrap themselves around bones like the banderoles found in Medieval and Renaissance paintings used to communicate silent speech or prayer.

The film imagines a dead saint's return to Earth to find her body "scattered, torn apart, spread so thin, untraceable". She lists all the ways it has been erased - endlessly replicated, worshipped and desecrated - her voice travelling through different periods and locations in Italy's history. Reliquaries, often bodily remains enshrined in precious metals, are also perceived as having the power of speech. Here, Smithson's fictional channelling of their "voices", echoing down the line of time, reminds us of the deep historical roots of the saints' magnetic hold on humanity.

Lara Smithson (BA Fine Art, Slade School of Art, 2015) lives and works in London. Her many Awards and scholarships include residencies at St Johns College, Oxford University, 2023; British School of Rome, 2021/22. Solo exhibitions include: Unnamed Saint, Una Vetrina, Rome, Italy, 2022; She Spoke Rain, The Why Not Gallery, Tbilisi Georgia, 2018. Group exhibitions include: Brewers Towner International, Eastbourne, October 2022; Red in Tooth and Claw, curated by Francesca Dobbe.

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