

**ELPIDA HADZI-VASILEVA**

*Making Beauty*

Highly porous polymer microparticle made using a thermally induced phase separation process, 200 microns in diameter, 2015. Courtesy, Dr Richard Day, University College London

## **Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva** *Making Beauty*

The R&D phase (funded by Wellcome Trust) of *Making Beauty* is coming to a conclusion. Curators are invited to consider joining Elpida, to contribute to the development of production and final exhibiting of the project.

Making Beauty is a collaboration between artist Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva, scientist Dr Richard Day and clinician Professor Alastair Forbes, with their associates at University College London (UCL), the University of East Anglia (UEA) and others. The project aims to expose highly regarded medical research activity to larger public awareness – considering nutrition, healthy diet, our gut and how highly specialised, invisible to the eye, manufactured parts can fix problems. The works will balance the fragility of our bodies, and reflect on the delicate nature of these medical components.

Exploring current research into regenerative medicine and bowel function, Hadzi-Vasileva is developing new works which use biomedical materials which are still being developed. These include biological and synthetic degradable glass scaffolds, which replace tissue removed for clinical purposes. This develops and extends Hadzi-Vasileva's established approach of using caul fat and other animal organs in her art work to considering particular human body parts we sometimes would rather forget. By working closely with medical researchers, observing and discussing the impact of the research on patients and students, Elpida is using innovative therapeutic devices such as microscopic sphere-based scaffold and drug encapsulation/delivery technology to inform the new work. These prototype spheres are intended to improve healing while the prototype scaffolds are used to restore continence to the sphincter muscle.

Concurrently Elpida has been shadowing Gastroenterology clinical staff in wards and out-patient clinics at Norwich Medical School at University of East Anglia to understand the critical impact of nutrition on patients, the difference between healthy and unhealthy guts, the role of bacteria, those with various bowel disease and intestine failure, either as an illness or self-inflicted. In addition Professor Forbes has introduced a further partnership through Professor Robin Spiller at The University of Nottingham and his colleagues at Nottingham University Hospital where Elpida has been observing research into Inflammatory Bowel Disease using novel magnetic resonance image techniques and interviewing patients to understand their history of symptoms, medical history and the impact and effect of long term living and control of severe IBS. This also includes access to Motilent Ltd and their innovative use of MRI images to develop improved motility analysis.

The new work brings cutting edge medical research into new devices together with personal, individual experiences of bowel failure and dysfunction.

Elpida is proposing a series of new works (including drawings, sculptures and/or sound), which can be considered as individual artworks, and/or brought together as installation – subject to curatorial dialogues.

Works currently in development include:

- Work developed from biological glass scaffold production – taking the fibres, which are virtually invisible, using the spinning manufacturing process to make forms to be manipulated into sculptures. In medical use the fibres are tested with current and light, so these sculptures can in turn act as screens or digital devices which can be enhanced with images Elpida sources from the gastroenterology department.

- Work developed from biological glass scaffold production – taking the discarded products of the manufacturing process – in effect drips and stalagmites of the biological glass, as source materials for a small sculpture.

- Spherical works taking the forms of the biological micro-spheres; using 3-D printing to create spheres (up to 19cm in diameter) in plastic (in the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL); use pigs and cow stomach to create 20 – 25cm spheres.

- Larger scale physical works to be made in discussion with Bartlett School using advanced 3-D architectural printing processes, to create an internal skin for the gallery space. The ambition for this process includes creating a one-off large scale work using the sphere's struts.

- It is intended that some of the works will be entered individually, perhaps 'helmet' or 'umbrella' shapes, with projections on the internal surface, encouraging a personal experience – looking 'internally', reflecting the intimate experience of bowel disease.

Partners and collaborators include:

**Dr Richard Day**, Applied Biomedical Engineering Group at University College London; **Panagiotis Sofokleous**, Biomedical Engineer at University College London; **Jaspal Puri**, PhD thesis in the Division of Medicine at University College London; **Prof Ian Zachary**, Professor of Vascular Cell Biology at University College London; **Dr Caroline Pellet-Many**, Post-doctoral Research Associate at UCL; **Dr Vedanta Mehte**, Research Associate, University College London; **Prof Jonathan Knowles**, Professor of Biomaterials Science, Biomaterials & Tissue Engineering, Eastman Dental Institute; **Richard Beckett** – Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London & Syn.De.Bio (network for innovative fabrication techniques); **Prof. Alastair Forbes**, Professor of Medicine (Gastroenterology & Nutrition) & Director of Postgraduate Research, Norwich Medical School; **Dr Cinzia Papadia**, MD, FRCP, Gastroenterology & General Medicine, Clinical Nutrition and Intestinal Failure at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital; **Mr Shaikh Irshad**, MS, MD, FRCS (General Surgery), EBSQ (coloproctology), Consultant General and Laparoscopic Colorectal Surgeon, at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital; **Dr Giles Major**, Clinical Research Fellow, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences, Digestive Disease Centre, Nottingham University; **Dr Caroline Hoad**, Senior Research Fellow, Faculty of Science; **Sir Peter Mansfield** Magnetic Resonance Centre, Nottingham University; **Andrew Wrapp**, Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement Facilitator, Biomedical Research Unit, Nottingham University Hospital; **Alex Menys**, Imaging Analysis for Gastrointestinal Tract, Motilent Ltd; **Gill Hedley**, curator; **Mark Segal**, The Artists Agency

### **About Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva**

Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva is a site-specific installation artist working across the varied media of sculpture, installation, video and sound, photography and architectural interventions. Her materials range from the unusual to the ordinary and the ephemeral to the precious; they include organic materials, foodstuffs and precious metals. Central to her practice is a response to the particularities of place; its history, locale, environment and communities.

Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva is currently exhibiting *Haruspex* commissioned by the Vatican, as part of the Pavilion of the Holy See, at the 56th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia.

Elpida is also developing a new commission for Nymans Garden and House. Her commission for artSOUTH, *Resuscitare* has an extended presentation at Mottisfont Abbey near Romsey, Hampshire. Both properties are run by the National Trust. Her recent commission *Fragility* for Fabrica Gallery appropriated the length, breadth and height of the church exploring near death experience. She represented Macedonia at the 55th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia in 2013. *Silentio Pathologia* was commissioned by the National Gallery of Macedonia.

Elpida has exhibited extensively and realised numerous commissions nationally and internationally, in gallery spaces, museums and within the public realm. Past sites and commissions include Pied à Terre London, Gloucester Cathedral Gloucester, Towner Gallery Eastbourne, Southgate Bath, L'H du Siège France, Kilmainham Gaol Museum Ireland, 51st, 55th and 56th Venice Biennales and Public Room Skopje. She has work in public collections internationally including The Vatican, Office of Public Works, Ireland, and New Hall Art Collection, Cambridge as well as private collections around the world.

Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva  
*Haruspex*  
Pavilion of the Holy See

"In *Haruspex*, Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva has worked with some very raw material indeed: the caul fat of the pig creates the canopy and walls of her 'tent of meeting'. Once a membrane for the pig's gut, it is now the membrane of a sanctuary-like space which may repel or may protectively envelop. This is then criss-crossed by ropes woven from the intestines of sheep, and these seem to bind in two possible ways: by connecting and supporting (as the ligaments of this space), or by constraining and entrapping (as a net or mesh). Finally, supported by these ropes, or caught in them, is the suspended heart of the piece, which is literally made of stomach: the fascinatingly-layered 'omasum' (or third stomach, out of four) of the cow....

It would be artistic laziness to let mere choice of material do all the semiotic work of a piece. *Haruspex* is, by contrast, highly-wrought, hand-crafted with a great investment of labour and time, and fashioned into a whole which is both aesthetically arresting and charged with possible meanings.....

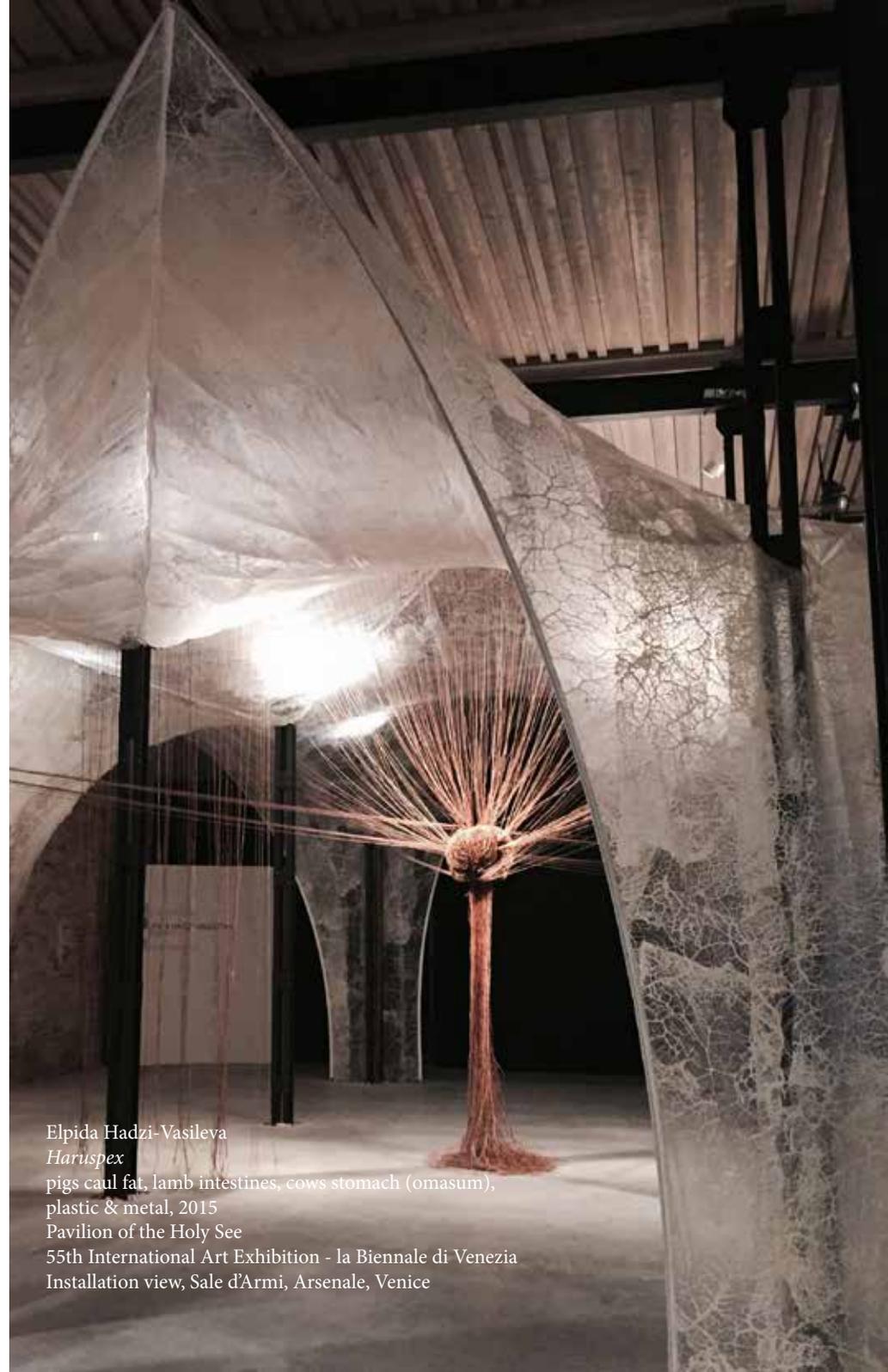
But Hadzi-Vasileva does not simply draw us into a deeper relationship with fleshiness in this work (the fleshiness, or corporeality, which the Word of God assumed in the incarnation). She makes flesh eloquent. In this respect, flesh becomes 'word' in her artistic practice.....

The goat sacrificed yearly by the Jews on the Day of Atonement (as well as the other goat sent out of the city to carry their sins away with it - the scapegoat (Leviticus 16)) were conduits for sin to be expelled from the social body. Analogously, the Gadarene swine in Luke 8 were used by Jesus as a sort of conduit for unclean spirits to be expelled from the suffering body of a possessed man. There are analogies between them. In different ways, these animals are like the 'gut' itself - a necessary conduit to make the body clean. Jesus's own sacrifice makes him like these animals - a means whereby the 'Body' of the Church is made whole and well.....

Hadzi-Vasileva discovered that the 'omasum' with which she had become fascinated, and which she had decided to bring from out of its darkness into the light, is called in the English vernacular the 'Bible' (sometimes the 'Psalterium'), on account of its dense, page-like folds of skin. As flesh it has already been

imagined by butchers and slaughtermen (perhaps for centuries) as 'word'. She therefore presents it to us to read, a 'thickness' anchored in a finely-sculpted and luminous 'thin' space, in which we may be drawn upwards or downwards by ropes of desire."

Selected text by Ben Quash from  
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Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva  
*Haruspex*  
pigs caul fat, lamb intestines, cows stomach (omasum),  
plastic & metal, 2015  
Pavilion of the Holy See  
55th International Art Exhibition - la Biennale di Venezia  
Installation view, Sale d'Armi, Arsenale, Venice

Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva  
*Fragility*

Taking over the length, breadth and height of the church the installation, *Fragility*, utilises Hadzi-Vasileva's appropriation of unusual materials, in this case pigs caul fat. Exploring the experience of death or near death experience, Elpida has focused upon the light seen and discussed by those effected, employing the architecture of Fabrica to route light through animal membrane - juxtaposing experience and materiality.

*Fragility*, like much of Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva's work over the past decade, re-appropriates animal viscera. In this instance she uses pigs caul fat, a membrane that holds the vital organs together, transforming it from a perishable waste product of the meat industry into a sublimely beautiful material via a chemical process akin to embalming.

*Fragility* considers our attitudes to beauty and decay, our perceptions of finitude and the role that the body and bodily material play in Christianity and Christian art. Located in a church re purposed as an art gallery, this signature work exemplifies Hadzi-Vasileva's commitment to place and context.

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Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva  
*Fragility*  
pigs caul fat, plastic & metal, 2015  
installation view, Fabrica, Brighton