

Chipping Away at the Life of the Mind

BY JESSICA FIRGER

Jane McAdam Freud has never seen a shrink. But as an artist and the great-granddaughter of Sigmund Freud, she has plenty to say about theories of the unconscious that have shaped our understanding of the human condition for more than century.

Freudian theory has long been used as a tool to process modern art, but few artists have consciously created an oeuvre specifically about Sigmund Freud's work—certainly not an artist of the same bloodline. Ms. McAdam Freud's new collection, "Random Plus," explores theories of the unconscious, dream analysis, sexuality and repeated experiences using a vast collection of multimedia pieces fashioned from bronze, clay and copper. The works go on display Thursday in her first solo exhibit in New York, at the Sundaram Tagore Gallery in the Meatpacking District (a neighborhood moniker her great-grandfather would have had a field day with).

"I think it is really difficult for artists generally to feel free from the constraints of society with its morals and mores," said Ms. McAdam Freud, 52, who is also the daughter of British painter Lucian Freud. "In a way I think it is easier for me to say what I want to say with Sigmund as a precedent."

The London native has exhibited widely throughout the U.S., Europe and Asia, and her work has been acquired by the British Museum and the Berlin State Museum, among others. But it



Jane McAdam Freud with her 2010 sculpture 'Stone Speak.'

wasn't until the last five years that Ms. McAdam Freud became interested in addressing her family lineage as an artist—at least consciously.

Sigmund Freud was an avid art collector, favoring miniature antiquities of religious deities from Egypt, Greece and Rome. He often used these objects to articulate his theories, like Electra and Oedipus. His collection is now housed at the Freud Museum in London, where Ms. McAdam Freud did a 20-month artist residency in 2006. When she began, 25 years ago, as a student at the Royal College of Art in London, she mostly worked on small medallion-like pieces. At the Freud Museum in 2006, she was shocked to find that her work resembled her great grandfather's collection.

"I'd pair one of my objects with one of his and see that they had the same motif, the same scale, the same sort of intimacy," she recalled. "I recognized I was being driven by my legacy, almost by my genes."

Esther Dreifuss-Kattan, a Los Angeles-based psychoanalyst and art therapist who co-curated "Random Plus," met Ms. McAdam Freud while working on a chapter about Lucian Freud for her forthcoming book, and she views this moment as the artist's breakthrough. "By being at the museum, I think she learned she could rely more on her unconscious as an artist," she said.

Overall, Ms. McAdam Freud's work is, like her ancestor's theories, layered and complex—and often as provocative. In the clay

sculpture "1+1," a male nude is on his knees, leaning back in a yoga-like position and in an aroused state. His body is split into pieces like a puzzle. The sculpture is a display of autoeroticism, but for the artist it also embodies the process of psychoanalysis. "It was absolutely a metaphor for the therapeutic process—spilling your guts, getting everything off your chest that's quite dangerous to have and that's been repressed," she said.

In a gesture of laying even more metaphors upon meaning, she displayed a life-size version of the sculpture in front of Sigmund Freud's iconic couch for her six-week exhibit at the Freud Museum in 2005. It was moved upstairs after opening night.

There's no such repression in the Meatpacking District. "We are a gallery devoted to dialogue," said its owner, Sundaram Tagore, who exhibited Ms. McAdam Freud's work at his gallery in Beverly Hills four months ago. "And psychology has played a vital role in art."

"Random Plus" opens in tandem with the American Psychoanalytic Association's annual conference at the Waldorf Astoria. To mark the Association's centennial, it is holding a special symposium that puts Ms. McAdam Freud and her work on the proverbial couch. But the artist isn't daunted.

"I've found psychoanalysts to be very broad-minded, so I really don't mind being in a room with them," she said. "I think it must be quite refreshing to see sublimation at work."

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