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Anousha Payne

A faint glow, a stone and a shark's tooth

May 4 – June 8, 2024

Opening May 3, 6–9 pm

'Grandmother'

I haven't seen my father in many years. Last year he sent me a fossilised baby shark tooth in the post. It came nestled in old newspapers and tied with a green organza ribbon, packed neatly inside a shoe box. The shoe box was an unreasonably large container in which to hold such an item.

A small hand-written note was also in the box; in his neatly looped script he informed me that this tooth belonged to my grandmother. By belonged to he meant it was once part of her mouth. I wasn't sure what to make of his claim. He had either lost his mind, or become deeply spiritual. I thought at first he was joking, but there was a sincerity to the tone in his letter that I couldn't shake.

That night I have a strange dream; I dream of a young woman. She's hunting for treasure in a dried out stream, alone in the midday desert sun. Her brown skin is turning a deep maroon in the blistering heat. She spots the fossilised tooth that my father gave me. As she reaches down towards the tooth to pick it up, an acid orange serpent slides out from under a rock. The snake slowly makes its way towards her, cautiously beginning to wind itself around her leg. It holds contact with her eyes; they have a mutual understanding. Her leg pulses as the snake winds its way tighter around her ankle. She isn't sure if the snake is her father or her grandmother, holding her tight. The snake squeezes tighter and tighter, before eventually dissipating, leaving behind nothing but a crackle of skin and a shocked mark on her leg.

When I wake I roll over and switch on my bedside lamp; next to the switch is the small newspaper parcel from my father. I open the parcel and take the fossilised tooth between my fingers, holding it up to the light so that an elongated shadow appears on my bedroom wall. Petrified by the power it holds over me, I take a glass of water from my bedside table and swallow the tooth in one gulp. Of course as it begins to slide down my throat it scratches uncomfortably. I catch my reflection in the mirror, and watch as the tooth carves a faint orange glowing pattern down my long neck. It will not be defeated (my grandmother's spirit lives on).

Anousha Payne b. 1991 in Southampton, lives and works in London. Working with sculpture and painting, her preferred materials are ceramics, textile, wood, rattan, metal and watercolour. Payne's work explores the human pursuit of spirituality in object form, as a mode of cultural expression that is distinct from religious symbolism. Her work processes the boundaries between personal experience, fiction and myth; exploring how information is both lost and gained through the transition from drawing and painting into three-dimensional works, notably ceramic sculpture. Often deploying reptile skin, her ceramics are intended as hybrid objects, a reminder of the fluidity and shared qualities between humans, animals, the natural world and inanimate objects. Ceramic sculptures are adorned with jewellery and textiles, acting as cultural signifiers whilst questioning material hierarchies and values.