

# Pagan Revival

15 February – 15 March 2025  
69 Reservoir Street, Sydney

The story goes that Demeter, the ancient Greek earth goddess, is bereft by the abduction of her daughter Persephone by Hades, king of the underworld. Demeter searches in vain and, being the harbinger of life and abundance, her increasing despondency turns the land barren and cold - a (winter) spell is cast by her mournful state. Taking refuge in the city of Eleusis, many try to cheer her up to no avail and the people are threatened with starvation. Enter Baubo, a minor yet critical character. Baubo is raucous, provocative and self-deprecating. She tells lewd jokes and flashes her genitals, evoking convulsive laughter from Demeter that lifts her depression, restores her will to continue her search and heralds spring. The myth continues but that's the last we hear of bawdy Baubo.

Cybele Cox has depicted Baubo often throughout her practice, and it is no coincidence that this seemingly peripheral personality offers a perfect entry point to her work. Baubo embodies female power and friendship. Her body is a site of creation and pleasure rather than shame or fear. She chooses ecstatic celebration and laughter in the face of difficulty and sadness. She makes fun to lift a burden.

The earliest Baubo figures date from the third century BCE and depict her head directly on top of her legs, with a face on her belly and the curve of her chin merging into her vulva. Cox deliberately increases her scale and occurrence in order to bestow her with the importance she deserves. Indeed, in *Pagan Revival*, this sacred fool takes pride of place as one of a triad of new columnal pieces: *Baubo Column*, *Cat Deity* and *Boob Capital with Red Shoes*. Each bears three faces - a number that provides structural integrity and is also associated with perfection or completion: mind/body/soul, birth/life/death, past/present/future.

The artist's inspiration and references are vast, encompassing everything from Greek classicism to (neo)paganism, radical feminism, utopian philosophy, fashion, architecture, and her dear cat Smokey. Aligned with much of the art she reveres, she employs anthropomorphism and zoomorphism to teach us how to see ourselves in the other, how to love and care for all living things. Her larger works have a similar scale to the human body, eliciting a visceral, relational and empathic response. They are

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devotional in the sense that they are hand built and painted by the artist over a long period of time. And they ooze in both form and affect.

The vertical sculptures stand as sentinels or temple guards for a space charged with sensuality, sexuality, seduction, love, devotion, and belly laughter. Creation myths and stories are literally built into the architecture. Other works in the exhibition include snakes, sphinxes, satyrs, Medusas, and naked body parts such as breasts and mooning bums. Cox's Sheila Altar contains a triumvirate of Sheila Na gigs, again foregrounding the sculptural lineage of depicting anasyrma, or self-exposure, connected to a pre-Christian appreciation for the feminine life force and its supernatural power. Cox's works are both comical and sincere, imbued with a joie de vivre and hope for what lies ahead. They call to us from a future civilisation with ancient roots, a pagan revival.

By Talia Linz