



KATY STUBBS

*Price Choppers*



## KATY STUBBS: PRICE CHOPPERS

In the run-up to her first solo exhibition *Katy Stubbs: Price Choppers* at ALMA ZEVI in Venice, the artist sat down to talk with Lara Johnson-Wheeler in December 2019 at her studio in Brixton, London.

**LARA JOHNSON-WHEELER:** *What have you most enjoyed working on for Price Choppers at ALMA ZEVI?*

**KATY STUBBS:** I really love the amphora piece, *You Are So Beautiful to Me*. I feel it's quite true to what I like about making things. I like the shape, I like the story and I like the posters with the rats and the street life. All the ceramics [in the show] tell one story and have images based on stuff I saw in Venice. I took note from Renaissance paintings like *Madonna and Child* by Cosimo Tura, *Cephalus and Procris* by Fabio Girardi and *Cain and Abel* by Andrea Schiavone. The whole exhibition is an amazing opportunity to tell one story through a number of vessels, plates and sculptures. I'm telling the age-old tale of a woman, unhappy with



*You Are So Beautiful To Me*, 2019

her life, who begins an affair with the man who works behind the fish counter at Price Choppers, a supermarket. Her husband finds out and, in a jealous rage, they both end up dead.

**LJW:** *You Are So Beautiful To Me* definitely shows different facets that indicate what your work is about. It's this clear juxtaposition between 'high' and 'low' culture. I am so interested in the tension that occurs in that piece - its form is that of a Greek Amphora, a delicate item with an elegant shape, but it depicts sex acts, dirty alleyways - the grit of life. Did your use of classical shapes originate from having studied Classics in school?

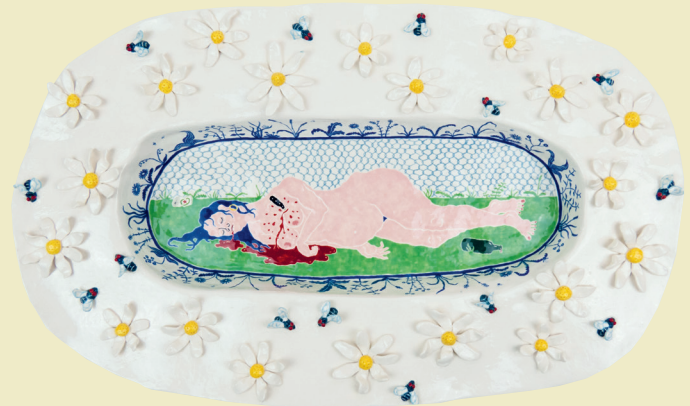


*Supermarket*, 2020

**KS:** Yeah, and also loving the stories, and loving the idea of people using them and the different ways in which they were used. It's a funny idea to me that people would go around talking about the heroes' stories - as if they would really be telling these tales on an amphora. Imagine, sitting round at a house party, "Oh yeah, did you hear about Hercules..."

**LJW:** *Are there certain myths or tales that inspired you?*

**KS:** I always think about Achilles and Penthesilea. He [Achilles] fell in love with her during the Trojan War; they're fighting each other and as he kills her, they fall in love. They realised that they loved each other while staring into each other's eyes. As she dies.



*Death Of A Nymph*, 2019

It's sweet and funny in a really dark way. One piece in the show, *Supermarket*, was inspired by that moment. The doomed look of love. I also like the stories of women turning into trees to avoid being raped and stuff.

**LJW:** *Yes, Ovid's The Metamorphoses was always my favourite. All the bestiality and great descriptions of human to animal to plant transformations.*

**KS:** The piece *Oh Shit! This Doesn't Look Too Good* is based on a painting of Cephalus and Procris, a story in *The Metamorphoses*! I also love that all the heroes are sort of horrible people. Deeply flawed personalities.

## I DEFINITELY DO FIND MYSELF GETTING QUITE ATTACHED TO THE CHARACTERS OF A PIECE

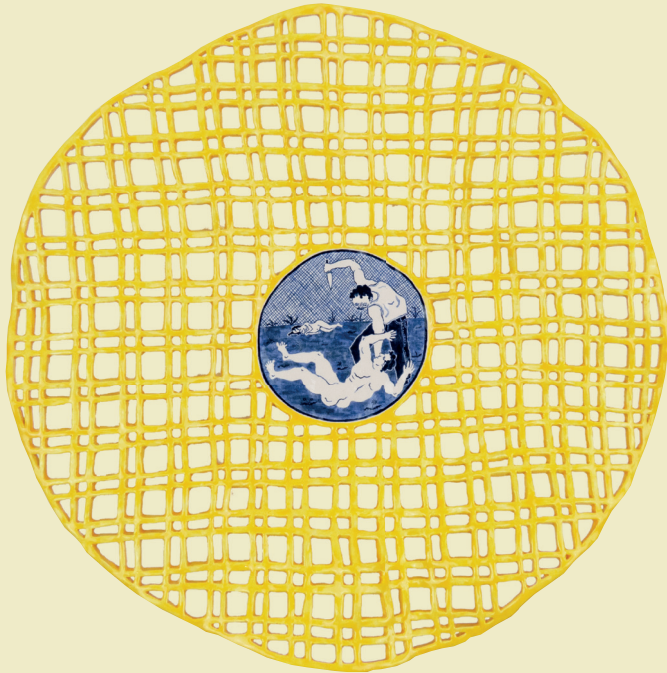
**LJW:** *What we would nowadays call 'problematic'...*

**KS:** Very problematic today! And yet, in some twisted way you're on their side and you're not on their side, you know.

**LJW:** *When you create your own characters in your pieces, how much of their stories do you imagine? Do you get attached to those characters?*

**KS:** I definitely do find myself getting quite attached to the characters of a piece, investing a lot of thought in their emotional lives. Still, it's in quite a cartoony way, a sort of on-the-surface way.





*It Definitely Wasn't Worth It, 2020*

**LJW:** *Take Rumours, the vase with people talking to one another, comic book style, until eventually a rumour gets back to the husband - how much of the narrative were you conscious of in the conception of that piece?*

**KS:** It's sort of about how we all talk about each other and no one really knows anything. It was based on seeing the Palazzo Ducale where some Doges are chatting to each other and they have these parchment comic book bubbles. And it's sort of a joke on the fact that, well, people are idiots.

**LJW:** *Is that the fundamental crux of your work?*

**KS:** Yes, I would say that is actually fully the crux of the work! We are all very stupid. And disgusting.

### AND IT'S SORT OF A JOKE ON THE FACT THAT, PEOPLE ARE IDIOTS

**LJW:** *Exactly what the ancients were telling us in their mythology. We've always been stupid and disgusting..*

**KS:** And we do terrible things.

**LJW:** *Speaking of terrible, disgusting things, cigarettes often appear in your work. I know you're not a smoker. What is it that draws you to cigarettes, what is it about that image?*

**KS:** It actually comes from my grandparents, who love smoking so much. At times I think it's like their



Price Choppers Fish, 2018  
 Call Me (The Receipt), 2019

whole life revolved around the cigarettes and smoking together. And I always thought that they - even though they're just two old people sitting watching TV - look so glamorous doing it. Even from a young age, the whole thing around it I just loved. At the same time it's disgusting but it's got this endless cool.

LJW: *A lot of your work also mocks the idea of what is 'cool'.*

KS: Yeah, exactly. It's a confusing one because humans themselves are so confused by it. It's a joke to smoke but at the same time you want to be cool...

LJW: *To me it comes across as inherently self-mocking, I suppose because there's obviously a mirrored joke in using an ashtray with a picture of a naked young boy smoking a cigarette on it. Or, more poignantly, not*



Price Choppers Discounts, 2019

*using it. And the food you create! You also seem to like working with meats and foods that, as a vegetarian, you don't normally eat.*

**KS:** Those kinds of moral practices you're talking about - you know, not smoking, not eating meat - are really important to me in reality, but in ceramics you can have freedom to do all the bad things I'm too shy to do or spend too long worrying about in real life. But it's also a fascination with things that are gross. I love that people create these things.

**LJW:** *You're fascinated by the disgusting things people create, and yet you're creating disgusting depictions yourself. Did you always want to make work that was funny?*

**KS:** No, that's the thing. When I started, I thought you had to make serious stuff. I thought it was really important to make serious work about being sad.

**LJW:** *But whilst your depictions are cartoon-like in their form, there is always a darker underside to*



City Life, 2019

*the things you're representing. Body shaming, tabloid gossip, celebrity status -*

**KS:** Violence.

**LJW:** *Yes, which can include violence towards women, bad health practices etc. One has to tread a fine line in the world that we live in today - staying 'woke', I suppose - in exploring these behaviours. Has your work developed in reaction to changing cultural practices and opinions?*

IN CERAMICS  
YOU CAN HAVE  
FREEDOM TO DO  
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SHY TO DO

**KS:** I've probably consciously gone away a bit from depicting certain things, but it's so difficult to define. I don't want to worry about it because I think you can get so trapped in thinking that everybody has to have experienced anything to show it. That's killing creativity. The idea that you have to live through everything that you ever want to



*Oh Shit! This Doesn't Look Good, 2019*

draw, or write, or say anything about is just madness. And to tell people off about it...

**LJW:** *Your depictions of female bodies have always interested me. It can be such a politicised field - you generally present these very pink, wobbly, shapely forms. And often, these bodies can be seen through the lens of tabloid culture. How do you respond to that now, creating art in this post #MeToo era? How much do you think about which parts of society you are reflecting in your work?*

**KS:** I definitely think a lot about it. Specifically, I think about how I'm basically always portraying white people in my work. I really can't decide if that's a bad thing. My characters are pink and flawed. Maybe I find



*The Verge, 2019*



that easier to portray than a wonderfully diverse and multicultural background of people. If I did, I think I might lose some of the humour. I do think about this in my work. Like, why I portray women as larger.

**LJW:** *So why do you portray women as generally bigger? Physically, you yourself are tiny. You're naturally a very thin person. I'm curious, is it a personal preference?*

**KS:** Honestly, I definitely prefer the aesthetic. In all the Renaissance paintings I like, the women are not skinny and I don't really want to draw skinny people. I don't think it looks nice. I don't think it has the same seductive feel to it. I don't know. I know this is a bit personal, but in my mind, when I have fantasies, I am never me, I'm never skinny.

**LJW:** *Do you think that when you're creating art you're drawing on that fantasy world?*

**KS:** I definitely think so. To me, sexiness is like that. It's that lady's bottom all red and soft looking. It's not some bony little tanned ass.

**LJW:** *That's so interesting to me as someone who does look more like that - actually that's a very similar red to my ass. It took a long time for me to find that sexy, or appealing. I wonder if it's just that, as women, we're conditioned to believe that whatever we have is not sexy enough.*

**KS:** I think that is completely it. Everybody always wants something different.



Blue Pot, 2019

## PRICE CHOPPERS

**LJW:** *But when you draw your men, they are not necessarily skinny, but they often appear diminutive in comparison to the women. Is that because - in this fantasy world - women are lush, wobbly, curvaceous and seductive, whilst men in popular culture are traditionally more physically dominant? So in your work, you're creating alternate gender roles through their depicted physicality?*

**KS:** I think so. Have you seen Robert Crumb's work? That's always a scene in my mind. These little men that just love to be crushed - I think that's fascinating. Men wanting to be sat on or stuff like that..

**LJW:** *But it's not that you're always evoking eroticism. The scenes in Price Choppers aren't necessarily sexy. In this exhibition, your pieces are about banality and domesticity.*

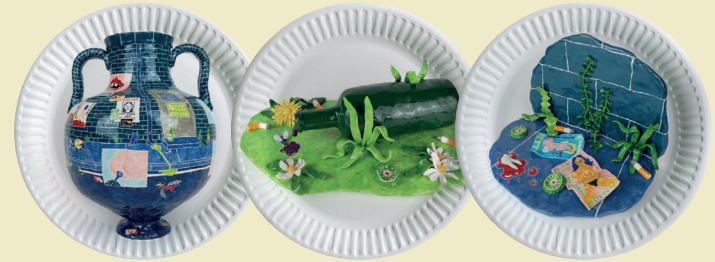
**KS:** That's exactly what it is. It's about this blandness of life; the guilt and shame and the fallibility of humans.

KATY STUBBS

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# Price Choppers

EDITION



### PRICE CHOPPERS EDITION

*A set of 3 glazed paper plates*

- 22.9 cm diameter
- Fully biodegradable
- Exclusive edition of 50 sets
- Printed with vegetable-based inks



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Contact [info@almazevi.com](mailto:info@almazevi.com) for further information

## LIST OF ARTWORKS



1



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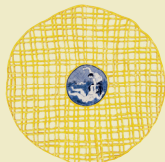
9



10



11



12

1) *Supermarket*  
Earthenware and glaze  
33 × 44 × 4 cm  
2020

2) *Price Choppers Discounts*  
Earthenware and glaze  
22.7 × 18 × 2 cm  
2020

3) *Price Choppers Fish*  
Earthenware and glaze  
28 × 32 × 4 cm  
2019

4) *You Are So Beautiful To Me*  
Earthenware and glaze  
22.5 × 21.5 × 29.3 cm  
2019

5) *Call Me (The Receipt)*  
Earthenware and glaze  
16.5 × 8.5 × 2 cm  
2019

6) *Blue Pot*  
Earthenware and glaze  
21.5 × 21.5 × 25.5 cm  
2019

7) *City Life*  
Earthenware and Glaze  
16.5 × 24.5 × 17 cm  
2020

8) *Rumours*  
Earthenware and glaze  
18 × 19 × 21.5 cm  
2020

9) *The Death Of A Nymph*  
Earthenware and glaze  
27.7 × 45.5 × 5.2 cm  
2020

10) *Oh Shit! This Doesn't Look Too Good*  
Earthenware and glaze  
16 × 18 × 29.5 cm  
2019

11) *The Verge*  
Earthenware and glaze  
19 × 30.5 × 10 cm  
2019

12) *It Definitely Wasn't Worth It*  
Earthenware and glaze  
39.5 × 38.9 × 5 cm  
2020

**KATY STUBBS** (b. 1992) was born in Hong Kong but grew up in London. She studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York. Katy predominantly works in ceramics, using these hand-made forms as a canvas for her interest in the tradition of storytelling. The socio-historical associations that this medium has, particularly in the Greek tradition, are a constant source of inspiration. Katy completed her residency at ALMA ZEVI Venice in March 2019.

**LARA JOHNSON-WHEELER** is a writer, editor and broadcaster, based in London. Specialising in arts and fashion criticism, Lara contributes to *Buffalo Zine*, *LOVE* and *Vogue*. Formerly Features Editor at *SHOWstudio*, she has roles as Features Editor at *Dapper Dan Magazine* and Contributing Editor at *Tatler*. She also has experience in luxury copywriting, consulting, and public speaking, regularly chairing panel discussions and debates.

**ALMA ZEVI** was founded in Venice in 2016. The gallery's mission is to provide a dynamic platform for both international emerging and established artists. The gallery is defined by both its artist-driven programme and its active engagement with the artistic community of Venice. It regularly hosts artist residencies where new bodies of work are produced in response to the city's unique cultural heritage. Central to the gallery's ethos is the project space for young artists founded in 2013 in the mountain village of Celerina, Switzerland. In January 2019, the gallery opened a private office and outpost of the gallery in Central London.

This publication was produced on the occasion of the exhibition *Katy Stubbs: Price Choppers* at ALMA ZEVI Venice (14 March – 25 April 2020).



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ALMA ZEVI