

## **Adam Stone** ***The Devil's Honey***

The word 'tragedy' is frequently overused in contemporary language to describe any event causing suffering or destruction. But in its earliest form, tragedy had a more complex and paradoxical meaning. Originating in ancient Greece, tragedy referred to a form of theatre portraying human suffering in order to invoke a catharsis in the audience. In this sense the word is closer in meaning to the German 'schadenfreude': the pleasure derived from the failures or humiliation of others. The tragic story was popularised by Shakespeare, who used the form to explore the human capacity for both good and evil. Shakespeare's tragedies are characterised by a hero whose fatal flaw, or weakness, ultimately leads to their downfall.

Perhaps the original tragic tale is Adam and Eve's 'fall from grace'. The story goes that Adam and Eve were seduced by the serpent (the devil), giving into temptation and eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, causing God to expel them from the Garden of Eden. Christian belief follows that this 'original sin' set all of humankind on an inescapable path of self-destruction.

Adam Stone examines historical and contemporary falls from grace as a means of exploring humankind's inherent drive for destruction. He has referenced religious stories and myths, such as Icarus who flew too close to the sun and fell to earth, and Adam and Eve's ejection from the Garden of Eden. These mythical tragedies are told as tales of warning and lessons in morality: remember your limitations; don't give in to temptation. In a more contemporary context, Stone is interested in the seduction and fetishisation of celebrity, and the worship and pursuit of unsustainable ideals. He has referenced, for example, the drug doping disgrace of hero sportsman Lance Armstrong, and the public breakdown of former pop princess Britney Spears (exemplified by her infamously shaven head), whose 2003 hit song *Toxic* ironically includes the lyrics: '*It's getting late / To give you up / I took a sip / From my devil's cup*'.

*The Devil's Honey* continues the body of work Stone has been exploring since *If You Ask Me Nicely, I'll Tell You Everything* (exhibited at Fort Delta in 2017), through the use of bronze-cast thorny rose branches and the brightly coloured gradients, reminiscent of the vintage Apple Computer logo. *The Devil's Honey* comprises seven sculptures displayed on plinths in the tradition of classical sculpture. Bronze-cast rose stems have been shaped and welded into poetic, visually pleasing sculptural forms. The works are arranged in the space to create a tranquil concrete and bronze forest. The exhibition title, *The Devil's Honey*, as well as being the name of a 1980s Italian erotic film, hints at the allure of evil, attracted by the illusion of sweetness or beauty.

The thorny rose stems symbolise the paradox of beauty and brutality co-existing. The delicate bronze thorns are beautiful and alluring yet razor sharp and capable of cutting skin. They are equally capable of both romance and violence, referencing the idiom 'no rose without a thorn' – every beautiful thing will have its contrary painful or unpleasant opposite. The image of thorns also suggests the woven crown of thorns that, according to biblical stories, Jesus was made to wear to his crucifixion, to both cause him pain and mock his claim to power. The continuous shapes employed by the artist reference the ouroboros (serpent eating its own tail) and infinity symbol: the cyclical nature of the universe, the suggestion of the eternal cycle of creation out of destruction and vice versa.

The image of an apple, a symbol Stone has previously referenced, is heavily loaded with mythical and superstitious meaning. The phrase 'forbidden fruit' originated in the Book of Genesis, to explain the fruit that God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat. Until a few centuries ago, the word 'apple' was used to describe all foreign fruit, and so the forbidden fruit became known as an apple, and the apple became a symbol for knowledge, temptation and the fall from grace. Apple, the tech company, can be regarded as a contemporary version of the forbidden fruit – tempting consumers with the promise of knowledge and beauty.

The inherent death drive has been a central pillar of Stone's work, which explores not only the individual but the hubris of humanity, which is leading to our downfall at an alarming rate. The sculptures in *The Devil's Honey* are aesthetically beautiful, formalists object in their own right, yet laden with the weight of historic and contemporary meaning. From afar they appear as pleasing, brightly coloured forms, but don't get too close, or you might get stung.