An underlying threat of violence creates a tense and chilling atmosphere in Emma Woffenden’s *Elephant Revenge*. Inspired by shocking and disturbing stories that have resonated and remain within her memory, Woffenden embraces the contradiction of aggression and beauty, translating ‘terrible images into beautiful forms’.

Here Woffenden has moved away from using glass, the medium she is most well known for. Instead she has chosen to explore dark, unsettling narratives by experimenting with bronze, ceramic, and the fibreglass-like, industrial material jesmonite, whilst still citing her glass work in the forms used. With these various media, she creates ambiguous sculptures that suggest the human body, examining the psychology of violence, gender, death and fear of abjection that is infused into her work.

One inspiration behind ceramic piece *Shark Fin* is perhaps the most abject, physically appalling of the exhibition - it references the method of gathering meat for shark fin soup. The fins and tail are cut from the shark whilst it is still alive, and the dismembered creature is left to sink, unable to swim it struggles to death on the seabed. Severed limbs often recur in Woffenden’s artistic language, and her shark form is beautifully smooth, merging her feminine bell shape with a masculine branch form at the base. This, combined with *Shark Fin*’s soft pink, flesh-colour, offers a complete contrast to the traumatic brutality inflicted upon it, revealed in the notable absence of the ‘fins’ mentioned in it’s title.

Bronze figures *Elephant Revenge I* and *Elephant Revenge II* refer to a story of a mother elephant attacking a hunter after he had killed her son for his ivory. She goes into the hunter’s village at night, tracks him down and tramples him. That the animal adopted this seemingly human desire for revenge is both fascinating and horrifying, and Woffenden captures the apparently unrelenting resolve to reset the balance. In this pair the ‘male’ figure is the more vulnerable, dropped to his knees and holding arms up in surrender to the sinister, striding ‘female’, who appears to hold a club in her hand, subverting traditionally gendered expectations of behaviour. These dynamic figures threaten to explode with a barely restrained violence, carrying the tensions of raw and primal human emotion, anthropomorphised in Woffenden’s sculpture.

Questioning these socially accepted ideas of gender, Woffenden recognizes the duality and fluidity between the two ‘opposites’. This is explored in *Lunge*, a pair of jesmonite, feminine legs, topped with the phallic form that often appears in her blown glass work. The pose of this ‘double gendered’ piece is static and restrained, wrought with tightness and apprehension, with all the strain held in the curled, clenched feet of the piece. This contorted form has a forceful energy, lunging forward, about to stand upright. Polyester resin flows down from the top and pools underneath the knee, a simultaneous suggestion of visceral eroticism and religious performance.

This religious connotation is an important element of Woffenden’s *Elephant Revenge*, as it draws upon ideas of sacrifice and surrender, of power balance and fear. As she explains, ‘I wanted to feminise religion, and make things more feminine in the world in general. I thought this could make things less violent and destructive’. She recognizes however the irony of her threatening female figures, referring to Hindu goddess Kali, associated with empowerment, darkness and death.

Inciting ideas of the ‘destructive feminine’, a dark figure called *Transformer* is suspended high on the wall, looking down on the unsettling scenarios occurring beneath it, casting a fearsome, panoptic shadow. Not quite human, but not animal either, the arms of this almost cruciform jesmonite piece push back, as if it is about to release itself from its hold and cause a unknowable destruction. The legs are splayed in a powerfully suggestive manner, and this is the fearsome, threatening feminine, capable of an annihilation that just hasn’t happened yet.

In *Elephant Revenge* Woffenden confronts the terror of death, our ultimate subconscious fear, the inevitable end and ruination that we choose to, or even must, ignore. By exercising her own fears, she is ‘giving people their own little horrors.’ She comes close to transgressing the border into the unknown, capturing an uncertainty that she finds thrilling, and life affirming. Woffenden turns this dark horror into something awe inspiring, intriguing, and enigmatically beautiful.

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