

if not

winter

become  
a voice

every where  
glory

anxiety  
ground

if not  
winter

Colin Booth  
*if not winter*



## Colin Booth: *if not winter*

White on white, metal on stone, clang on the ear, lush on the eye, distant in memory, hard to touch

Like a Japanese haiku poem carved into marble, Colin Booth presents a body of work based on fragments of the lost poems of Sappho. Over 2500 years ago, on the island of Lesbos, so wide was her fame as a poet that perhaps only Homer, another mythic poet, was held in such esteem. It is said that all those seeking the height of culture made a pilgrimage to her, to hear her verses from her own voice, a voice now nearly lost, nearly silenced. Yet fragments remain, like *if not winter* or *everywhere glory*. They call to us across the ages, if not winter, then what, and what kind of glory can be found everywhere?

These fragments are like teasers, that tear at our imagination, what came before, what came next, what followed *anxiety ground*? For anxiety is deep within this and every translation. What was the original, how much has it changed from the base? It is hard enough for translation to be done in modern languages, where there is a real possibility to talk to others who speak that language as natives. What do they think of the new words, the new idea of the original? So what then can we say of a translation of a long dead version of the Greek language? It is not only that the words are different, the time is different, and we can never know what those words might have meant for those who heard them afresh. Our ears are stuffed with the cloth of time, we cannot know the context of them and so we hope, we are anxious, to know, anxious to believe that what we do know of her voice, is her voice or something like it.

She was a woman who loved women, she gave her island a name for such love for the rest of time, for Lesbos and lesbians. Booth is neither a lesbian, nor a same sex lover, and some might ask if he is appropriating her voice, but this is to misunderstand the universality of poetry. It can speak to us all, we all can be the vessel of its voice. If the translation is even barely good enough, that voice will sing, and it is the music of her poetry that Booth connects with.



Carving words into marble might seem to fix what is fluid, yet, in doing so, he not only reinvigorates the past he honours it. Like in classical times, only the best epitaphs and words are carved in stone for future readers.

Booth also presents two floor based black marble fragments: *who is gone* and *surely a sign*. The dark marble is in stark contrast to the white, it has a sheen, a mirror quality, that allows the carved words to float up into our mind, more so than by just reading them. The words carved into the black marble are more visual than the white ones, which are ghostly, are almost a mere momentary memory, a fleeting glance to the past. The black pieces seem to have the weight of history.

Booth also presents a work designed directly for the MOCA library. *Go, litel bok, go* comprises 75 books carved from cedar wood. They sit directly under the shelves that are full of words, yet they are forever silent. The paper (made from wood) printed with millions of words about art, about poetry, about history, can be opened. MOCA's books can speak, by handling them with care, they call out to their quieted cousins. What is the title of each imaginary volume, what words are inside those closed books? In fact, each book is a physical replica of one of Booth's own books in his library, and the work's title comes from Chaucer's *Troilus and Creseyde*. This work comes full circle with Sappho in its mystery and in the last marble inscribed text presented by Booth: *become a voice*.

What better call to art.

Michael Petry, 2016



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*if not winter*

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