

Miriam Austin | There Are Traces of You Everywhere

Lupercalia. Ancient pre-Roman festival, averting evil spirits, purifying the city to make us healthy and fertile.

Miriam. She maps myths, tracing them through time's myriad moments. Mythographer. I saw her once as a pelican, or if not, a long-beaked creature whose apricot mouth consumed her head, stretched out beyond her body. She tells me strange tales; of a man who wants to marry his daughter, saved only by the magical bearskin that while walking down the aisle turns her into a wild creature, and off she runs out into the wilderness; stories of selkies, mythological creatures from Scottish, Scandinavian and Faroese folklore who live in the sea but can shed their skin to become human on land.

Performance. Opening night; cold and dark. Gallery goers gather around a shiny mound. Breath; rising and falling, filling hidden lungs beneath a wet chrysalis. Fish skin, sewn, silvery scales knitted together to cover flesh. Selkie waiting to be born; transition from sea onto land.

Jung. He inhabits her mind: his idea that specific folkloric narrative structures recurred in cultures through time, defining archetypal forms. He believed that these groups could never have encountered one another, therefore deducing that there was a significant link within our psyches, a commonality in our collective unconscious that meant these narrative structures and symbolic images held great significance.

Myth. Hers mostly describe women in the throws of late adolescence, escaping bad situations by inhabiting strange hybrid objects. Transformation. Animal-plant-human hybridity. Women who can inhabit alternate identities. By extension, might we today be able to reimagine our own constructed societal personas or identities? Women invented, man inverted.

Ritual. Spring. A series of stations are scattered through space. Zones. Shrines at which a sequence of actions take place. Organic matter merging land and sea, liquid and solid, drip all over me. Muscle shells discarded, piled high. Purple petals smothered as a milky shield, some still glistening. Who are you protecting? You are disgusting and beautiful simultaneously. Foxglove flowers draped from above or rounded as ouroboros O's – greedy serpent, eating your own tail. Purple to perfection, they hang as vestiges of spring preserved in prosthetics. They traverse the line between having healing properties and poisonous intent. Liquid drips; ceiling to floor, gathering in concave pools along the way. Salt crystals soak up blue dye; slowly dissolve into a sea of liquid indigo. Let me look into it: dark narcissus reflection. Rivulet sea run along the floor, stain the way for all to see.

Sea. There are traces of you everywhere. Shell into water into salt. Instability. Venus flower basket, made by molluscs, saturated with salt crystals. Fine white thread

woven like wizard's hair. A prison caging tiny crabs; hear it rattle as it shakes. Elsewhere, forms appear as strange alien sea creatures: bubbling seaweed with bulbous pods of pale purple, pink and green. Shrunken beneath shiny rubber residues, preserved with wax and resin. Fish skin, you fit me like a glove.

Vegetable. An aubergine object sits as a container for the body; top cut off, flesh scooped out to hold spit, skin, hair and blood. Fruit. A melon down below cries more tears of indigo, drip-drip-drip relentlessly.

Alphabet. Hanging on the wall as sharp, shiny shapes of aluminium and steel. Mysterious primitive tools trying to spell *something* out. They are layered to look like insects: legs, arms and wings, all cells and angles. Almond shape eyes, vulva ellipses, long-stemmed sickles to cut corn; how should we use you and what are you trying to say? The metal feels cold and hard against the mass of soft organic forms filling the space. Silver and shells; metal and milk; steel and salt.

Garments. Hanging. Everything comes together as one so that we can hold you or wear you or worship under you as a moving temple. Sheets of milky peach next to organza-like silk, offset against flashes of fluoro. Perhaps we can put you on and be transported to another time or place or consciousness; transform into wild creatures and run into the wilderness to find our bearskin sisters; slip back into the sea to swim amidst indigo waters that sting with salt and seep into our bodies, eventually dissolving us entirely.

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