

Lauren Clay



Persephone

BOSSE
& BAUM

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Greetings, Thy Who Wander,

At last you have come, digging your way through the endless folds of your consciousness. Skillfully squeezing your spiritual body in between things and storylines. You look surprised. You would have expected to see gates here, massive like Rodin's Gates of Hell or vicious like any other hell-mouth (cf. *the Hours of Catherine of Cleves*). But the thing is, there are none. The seemingly obvious subterranean location of the place you have been searching for is misleading. The Underworld is, in fact, scattered everywhere. It dwells below and above, within and without - especially in the given circumstances. The Underworld is what underlies and underlines, highlighting things by their shadows. It is a threshold, a pedestal (should we say a throne?), but you already know that, don't you? Just like you know that each act, each thing, each event could function as a portal to it. However, there is a paradox: if everything is a portal, then nothing is, although the opposite statement is equally true. This ambivalence begs the very question: "where lies the border between the world-world and the underworld".

Why are you here? You've received an invitation, signed by the queen. "Persephone", you read silently, wondering whether it shouldn't have been 'Her High-ness'? It still feels extraordinary how a simple girl - a goddess, sure, but it wasn't *that rare* to be a goddess then (some even heard 'phony' in 'Persephone' (- no, they didn't!)) - could be reborn as a figure of power. Embracing darkness and distilling herself from the mass of 'many' to become 'one of a kind'. Before going from a natural condition of a goddess-like entity to the supernatural status of the queen, she undertook a difficult journey. Or rather, a journey happened to her, pulling her deep underground by invisible tentacles stretching out from an invisible world. Stolen, then locked up and deprived of everything that was dear, cherished and familiar, she was confined within a bubble of suffering. She did escape later, thanks to a 'deus ex machina' intervention: it was Hermes, the god of a thousand wiles and ways, that brought her the word of freedom on the wings of his shoes. It couldn't have been anyone else, really: there are but few who can cross back and forth through the world's most mysterious threshold.

Lauren's artworks navigate universal themes to illuminate the depths of the Ego through its darkest Shadow, and bring some wholeness into today's fragmented, complicated and partially broken world.

With Persephone's reemergence, however, a question arose: could one come back from the Underworld *for good*? Wouldn't she or he be destined to go there *from time to time*?

The Underworld, they say, is a tricky place and doesn't let one leave that easily. It plants in the soul's soil a desire, if not a compulsion to keep returning into the dark of its womb. Following the logic of cyclical movement, one is destined to be pulled there over and over again. Going in circles – drawing an ouroboros with one's feet.

The official statement claimed that Persephone would return to the Underworld for three to six months each year, because her treacherous husband of Hades fed her a fruit. No, it wasn't an apple (wouldn't it be boring, if it was?). His choice was a bit more sophisticated: pomegranate seeds. They were red like blood drops and orange like splashes of fire (cf. *Persephone* (2022)). Despite this fancy reason for Persephone's fate, such an explanation appears too easy. **When one gazes into the abyss, the abyss stares right back - as if it was a mirror.** Might it be that Persephone *chose* to re-descend into the Underworld, because she discovered some darkness within herself?

Imagine it was so, imagine it was her, who made this choice. This would turn everything on its head, letting Persephone emerge as a creature of an interstice, of an 'in-betweenness'. She would be a messenger then, a liant, a trader. In other words - and speaking *archetypically* - a trickster. Spirits of mischief, of crossroads, of various thresholds (wouldn't it explain why there are so many doors and windows here?) tricksters are eager to run in circles in the maze of existence. Masters of their destiny, they float along with the waves of its cyclical currents. According to official propaganda (*oh, not again!*) tricksters are mostly male: Hermes in Greece, Thoth in Egypt, Mercury in Rome, the list goes on. Funny thing, those who've returned from the Underworld are mostly male too: Odysseus, Orpheus, Dante... What are the odds?? However, if Persephone is indeed a trickster, this would change everything and shake the world's patriarchal foundation to its very core.

Persephone has a magnificent kingdom. A misty realm, filled with darkness, but also with knowledge, veils, and secrets. The dead are discrete: they don't speak unless they are called upon (which they are - don't you see a hint of pentagram underneath the elementary structure of the *Abyss Gazer* (2022)?) - one should only listen. In the past, the kingdom was inhabited by the wandering shadows of souls. In our contemporary and much more abstract reality, it's colonised by archetypes - these do not murmur like shadows would, but rather point to the hiding place of psychic depths with symbols and signs. With metaphysical fingers too.

But tssss... do not panic.
You will manage.

You have an example - and footprints to follow.

Be careful, though.

And also, remember: the queen was here first.

Acts of transformation and trespassing are key to the artist's work. Similar to alchemical explorations, Lauren's experiments with matter function like portals towards the spiritual and seek to translate the physical into psychic terms, encouraging introspective wanderings. Hence the recurring motif of architectural 'openings' in her artistic vocabulary: windows, doorways and arches multiply, leading the gaze towards the invisible. In Jungian tradition, psychological structures manifest themselves in dreams through architectural ensembles, so when one dreams of a house, the latter represents the psyche of the dreamer. Lauren's inclusion of architectural fragments in otherwise abstract environments echoes this vision. Her wallpaper transforms the gallery into a material incarnation of one's psyche: a theatre inhabited by archetypes. Including a trance-like state, the curiously psychodelic effect of the marbleized surfaces blurs the viewer's vision of reality, pulling him/her deep into the dreamlike world of wavering colours and patterns. The snaking tentacles of her sculptures interlace, hugging each other very tightly, and pass through architectural elements, as if wishing to reach out. One may see them as sublimated monsters of the unconscious as they twist through the doorway of rationality: Chthonic cthulhu-like octopuses that turn into marshmallows once they crawl from the darkness into the Olympian light.

Lauren Clay is an American artist whose practice is situated at the crossroads of sculpture and print-making. The two mediums interlace and intertwine, bearing secret dimensions and mysterious gateways in between their folds. Print-making is closely connected with painting and the art of marbleization, but also with the digital realm; after the small pieces of paper are marbleized, Lauren digitally manipulates them in order to create all-enveloping architectural environments. Similarly, her process of creating her sculptures conceals various slippages and shifts between media: a traditional or digital drawing is turned into a sculpture, which is then painted and sometimes marbleized. The very foundation of Lauren Clay's material practice is based on transitions and liminality, metamorphosing flatness into three-dimensionality and the physical into virtual, while blurring the borders in between.

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about movement, about the endless internal search and psychic explorations. They also have a critical dimension, raising important questions around power and femininity. Lauren's artworks navigate universal themes to illuminate the depths of the Ego through its darkest Shadow, and bring some wholesomeness into today's fragmented, complicated and partially broken world.

Lauren Clay's archetypical sculptures dive deep into the ocean of the collective psyche and combine mythological themes with art historical references. In her work, modernist inspirations neighbor flashbacks from Renaissance or Baroque art and architecture, which in turn, border medieval and Celtic themes. Her works are puzzling and labyrinthine, in the proper sense of the world, finding the intersection between the rational and the irrational. They are

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