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EARTH/UNEARTH [on the Nature of G-d and Creation]

Macs Herdrich

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EARTH/UNEARTH

ON THE NATURE OF G-D AND CREATION

a n n o t a t e d e d i t i o n

M A C S H E R D R I C H

EARTH/UNEARTH

by

MACS HERDRICH

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A project submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for
the Bachelor of Arts degree in
Honors Liberal Arts
Seattle Pacific University
2024

ABSTRACT:

Inspired by creative and life-driven research, *EARTH/UNEARTH* explores the nature of the divine and the act of creation. This triptych of poetry features poems such as “EXPERIENCE OF A TREE (AND SKY)”, “RITUAL/SENSUAL”, and “THE THING THAT DOESN’T COME FROM THINKING” as meditations on the following questions: Is there a hierarchy that exists from G-d to dirt? How does inspiration flow through the hands to creation? And in the strain of creation, how do we care for our bodies? Each section concludes with an opportunity for visual meditation and reflection.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

For my faculty mentors Dr. Katie Kresser and Alison Stigora, without whose invaluable guidance, encouragement, and frequent conversation this project would be lifeless—many, many thanks. With immense appreciation to all those who laid eyes and ears on my work; to the faculty, staff, and students of SPU’s MFA in Creative Writing, who inspired me to put pen to paper. And for my mother: my perpetual sounding board, Hebrew dictionary, and extraordinary model of resilience and faith.

Presented at the SPU Honors Research Symposium
May 18th, 2024

TRUSTING WORDS TO MAKE UNDERSTANDING

using few words:

TRUSTING a talent of the triumphant *UNDERSTANDING*

using few words
a talent of the triumphant
to trust in understanding
and the benefit of their doubt

to trust in understanding
and the benefit of their doubt
beating a dead horse, displaying its corpse
is the method and medium

beating a dead horse, displaying its corpse:
is the method and the medium
left over for the meek
who write, and write, on something
that won't be understood

left over for the meek
who write, and write, on something that won't be understood

EARTHING ELOHIM

SHAMAR: TAKE CARE

UNEARTH ENFLESHED

EARTHING ELOHIM

•

“Supposing this world is a tree:
Are you leaves on its branches?
Or are you a bunch of birds
that settled on a dead old tree
from somewhere else?”

– Alan Watts

I.

EXPERIENCE OF A TREE (AND SKY)

EXPERIENCE OF A TREE (AND SKY)

Standing under that tree
and the dome of the sky
it was easy to remember
when this remember
it was God. his tree
back was God. his tree
The clouds danced their way
over head danced their way
a crook in the neck later
and the eye has passed, to
a mist above, gray and final, it
envelops like panic—
the fear of getting wet
and the tree—
that grand tree,
stood so tall and so close to the sky
like its branches could reach up
and swirl the clouds
and maybe hold back the rain
if only we pray hard enough
and maybe hold back the rain
if only we pray hard enough

II.

I HEARD DOGS HOWL

I HEARD DOGS HOWL AT
THE FULL MOON

I heard dogs howl at the full moon
from the retirement home on 3rd
and the modern house across
to be so far removed from instinct
yet carry prophesied bones
which cannot deny
but to cry at the moon
so deeply rooted
to commune with each other
and at once
in communion with their saints
in communion with their saints
THEN I HEARD DOGS BARK AT THE WANING GIBBOUS
THEN I HEARD DOGS BARK AT THE WANING GIBBOUS

III.

WE ARE ANIMALS WHEN WE ARE ALONE

WE ARE ANIMALS WHEN WE ARE ALONE

"Anxiety of having the care all to myself, I felt like the center of the universe... I was actually imitating the cave... contracting and expanding with its rhythm shimmering on its way back and forth. The atmosphere of the cave created a feeling of reverence and awe... for me it was a holy place." 1977 (from Mandelstam: Earth Body)

if claws and fur
might touch the face of God
more surely

WHEN I BECAME CONSCIOUS
(IS AWFUL)

than nails and straightened teeth,
then pray to the moon
for the transformation
to be upon us

of food
from pray to the moon
teeth,

• for the transformation
is upon us



IV.

SENSE

To Run is
connection with earth
and with ancestor—
to use the muscles born
to all animals henceforth
the toe downhill
and the toe up
as predator
or prey

V.

TO BE BOTH PREDATOR AND PREY

It is an agility

It is a tuning out
a tuning out
everything beyond
survival

survival

to eat,

to eat,
to not be eaten

to not be eaten
to place the feet

Place the feet
carefully

carefully
so as to have the privilege

so as to have the privilege
of continuing the placing
of continuing the placing

•

I STALKED A MAN LIKE HE WAS PREY
and **VI.** ^{omnivore} in the middle of the food chain
out once afraid of my prey seeing me
and **It is a nervous head twitching,**
a nervous head twitching
and I was torn in fear
fear of losing the catch
and being caged for my instinct

VII.

THE WORK OF NEW HAIRS

THE WORK OF NEW HAIRS

Finding one's way
 into a new ~~city~~ ^{city}
 in doing so
 discovering ~~the~~ ^{belly button lint}
 the idea of which
 had previously ~~not~~ ^{not}
 but now resonates
 like a ~~radio~~ ^{radio} ~~station~~ ^{station}
 frequency ~~from~~ ^{from}
 a city over, ~~or~~ ^{or}
 out of town
 a whole new ~~world~~ ^{world}
 to delight in
~~but~~ ^{but} miss the ~~same~~ ^{same} old songs
 while enjoying the ~~new~~ ^{new}
 which you
 and ~~but~~ ^{but} maybe
 an error ~~to~~ ^{to} delight in

To grow out of the earth
 and in doing so
 discover belly button lint—
 the idea of which
 had previously not made sense,
 the fuzz between the fingers
 a color of mixed up shirts
 and sweat—
 static
 now resonates
 like a car radio on a road trip
 that suddenly tunes in
 to classical music one moment
 and Y2K country the next

T H E
 E X T E R N A L
 W O R L D
 I S
 Y O U R
 O W N
 B O D Y
 E X T E N D E D

SHAMAR: TAKE CARE

•

“When I consider your heavens,
The work of your fingers,
The moon and the stars,
Which you have set in place.
What is humanity that you are mindful of it,
The children of mortals that you care for them?
**Yet you have made them little lower than the angels
And crowned them with glory and honor.”**

– Psalms 8:3-5

I.

RITUAL/SENSUAL

Finger touches lip, (religion, art, or sex?)
 touches paper,
 marks marks the place left off
 Return again with mouth
 in the quiet still—
 Strike to block the light
 burning, catching, then
 Light,
 beckons the soul back to the source
 hands to eyes, pray:
 you mystify me,
 you mystify me,
 you mystify me

•

II.

SPIRITUALITY AS ~~THE~~ SIXTH BORN

Divine is the sixth born sense
 around which the other five dote
 to be called out by name
 by their youngest:
 the testy infant
 who must never be left unattended,
 un- fed, clothed, or watered
 until it learns
 to brush its teeth
 and cook a hearty meal
 and outgrow its kin
 under frame of door
 and return again
 to stand at the changing table

III.

DOES THE DIVINE TAKE CARE?

Would G-d go home for lunch?
or forage in the break room
for an expired energy bar
and call it a day?
Could the Messiah
go without
brushing his teeth?
heal the sick while
avoiding the smell
of his own breath?—
Is your breath
worth the same
as theirs?
Would the stench
affect as many
or just messy little you?

AM I MY BODY?

IV.

Body as little brother—
would you deny your little brother
a good meal,
a full night's rest,
clean socks, a clean plate for dinner?

TIME TRAVELER : THE MIND

V.

"a man's mind can't stay in time the way his body does" (Steinbeck)

When I am here

when I am here
still, I am back there, where
the bridge spans the river
just barely

Cross back and be with—

hold the with hand under hand
and go forward
talking of things big and small
to understand
only now
the privilege it is
to share in time

•

VI.

Side effects of time travel may include
but are not limited to:

- increased heart rate
- quickened breathing
- headache
- impaired cognition
- diarrhea

For emergency side effect relief:

- observe the pattern of a quilt
or other nearby textile
- listen to the sound of birds
or neighbors from an open window
- taste an old forgotten snack
from the back of the pantry or
—alternatively (for added benefit)—
enjoy your favorite meal
- sniff a candle or the aforementioned meal;
inhale four counts, hold two, exhale six
- place hands or feet on the aforementioned textile;
wiggle

If relief does not follow, consult a licensed professional in your resident state (professionals may or may not accept medicare, medicaid, cash, concert tickets, guilt-trips, prolonged eye contact, blood, sweat, or tears to subsidize payment rendered for their services. This poem is not a medical professional and does not take responsibility for any injury or death that may occur.

•

VII. PSYCHE AS ~~THE~~ CARETAKER OF THE BODY

Psyche walks out
to her garden
to tend to her plot
and cherish the weeds
which grow from abundance
in belly
with great calm and care
she sprinkles her seeds,
and waits 'til they're ready,
for the wild juicy fruit of the spring
and imagined the abundance of spring

RELIQUARY
ELIQUAR
LIQUA
IQU
LIQUA
ELIQUAR
RELIQUARY

UNEARTH ENFLESHED

•

“The object isn’t to make art,
it’s to be in that wonderful state
which makes art inevitable.”

– Robert Henri

I.

(THE THING)
KNOWLEDGE
THE THING THAT DOESN'T
COME FROM THINKING

It sits in the stomach
with the butterflies and ulcers
waiting
until just the right moment
when the bubbles start forming, and
it ascends
up the esophagus,
out of the mouth,
where it hangs in the air
between bodies
and quietly it says
Naaseh v' nishma:

We will do, then we will understand
we will yield, then we will know
we will embrace unknowing, then acknowledge
the beauty in the embrace

"PEOPLE THINK THEY ANALYZE SITUATIONS WITH THEIR BRAINS,
THAT THEIR EMOTIONS ARE NOTHING BUT A RESULT OF
COGNITION, BUT THEY'RE WRONG, FOR INTELLIGENCE ISN'T
IN THE HEAD, IT'S IN THE BODY." - Christine Leunens, Caging Skies

PRIORITIZE
INSTINCT
OVER
CONTROL

ART IS EMBODIED
≡ SPIRITUALITY

II.

GOD IS ENTROPY, ENTROPY IS GOD

Where the mind and matter meet
there is the spirit
Entropy
the meddler, busy body,
beast slouching toward disorder

To ruin the vision of the mind,
shake the hand,
blur the eyes,
and wreck the best made plan
in favor of fate
and the Holy Object

A collaboration between ~~our~~ Body
and Entropy

III.

when sometimes I am visited
sometimes by the spirit
it bashes at my temples
and kisses them
passionately, oh
so sweetly
and in doing so
gives me the world
in small pecks

IV.

TO CREATE (TO LIFT THE HANDS)

FAITH IN THE ACT OF CREATION (AND LETTING GO)
To trust that everything needed
is contained within
by design or evolution
or neither or both,
is faith
is belief
in a continuous energy, an
everlasting output
to reach up and borrow from
if only one's hands are empty



Artist's Shit, Piero Manzoni

V.

THE THE OUTSIDE FINDS ITS WAY IN / N

Paraphrased title
(The creative act: The source of Creativity)

Stored within
 a cloud
 raging,
 blackening to the surface—
 grasped at once in a sublime
 moment sublime
 droplets fall from hand
 water stains
 from hand, and
 water stains the surface
 in a random,
 on purpose way
 old as ~~break~~ in its atoms
 new and at once
 old as its atoms

.

g â r a' (hebrew): to diminish, take from, clip

PERFECTIONISM (word idea)
 TO PULL PERFECTION
 DOWN TO FLESH
 INSPIRATION?

GÂRA'; PULL DOWN TO FLESH

To adopt from the heavens
 is to break
 and mar
 and steal the child from the source
 to dirty its face with caked muddy hands
 and set the still child on its course

.

VII.

THE MOURNING PROCESS
OF CREATION

THE MOURNING OF CREATION

→ The stillborn knows more flesh
than those never conceived—

Now wonder:
Is the cry in the night
worth more
than a moment of life?
Can bones which
never walked
be buried, and
return to earth
for a greater rebirth?

•

G O I N P E A C E

T Z I E T C H E M

L ' S H A L O M

A N G E L S

A N N O T A T I O N S

EARTHING ELOHIM

José González. "El Invento". *Local Valley*.

Sufjan Stevens. "All the Trees of the Field Will Clap Their Hands". *Seven Swans*.

Suzanne Vega. "Tom's Diner". *Tom's Diner*.

- [EE] Elohim (Hebrew): majesty (plural), the Hebrew creator god

- [EE III.] *WE ARE ANIMALS WHEN WE ARE ALONE* was partially inspired by the following performance and statement by Mary Beth Edelson.



(Mary Beth Edelson. *Grapceva Neolithic Cave Series: See for Yourself*, 1977. Documentation of a private ritual performance, Grapceva, Hvar Island, Former Yugoslavia.)

**"Aware of having the cave all to myself,
I felt like the center of the universe...
I was actually inhaling the cave...
contracting and expanding with its rhythms
shimmering on its way back and forth.
The atmosphere of the cave created a holy
feeling of reverence and awe...
for me it was a holy place."**

- Mary Beth Edelson, 1977

Quote encountered in: (Viso, Olga M., et al. *Ana Mendieta : Earth Body : Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985*. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, 2004.)

- [EE IV., V., VI.] *SENSE* and the following two poems (also see [STC V,VI]) can be contextualized by Robert Saplosky's lecture on the human body's modern overuse of its evolved stress response. (Saplosky, Robert. "Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers: Stress and Health." Fenton-Rhodes lecture on Proactive Wellness, 22 September 2016.)

SHAMAR: TAKE CARE

Mitski. "I Will". *Bury Me At Makeout Creek*.

Muna. "Kind of Girl". *Muna*.

Volcano Choir. "Still". *Unmap*.

- [STC] Shamar (Hebrew): to observe, to keep oneself, to take care

- [STC I.] *RITUAL/SENSUAL* borrows language from the following explanation of Shabbat ritual (Moss, Aron. “Why Do Women Wave Their Hands Over the Shabbat Candles?” Chabad.org. Accessed 26 February 2024.)

Its reading can be further enriched through more context from this source:

“True rest is the ingathering of our soul energy. After expending our powers outward, we draw our energy back inward. During the workweek we are pulled in all directions, and our frantic activities drain our soul. The creativity and inventiveness that lies within has been exhausted, and so we need to draw our energy back to its source to be replenished and renewed.”

- [STC V., VI.] were inspired by the following quote:
“Well, a man’s mind can’t stay in time the way his body does.”
(Steinbeck, John. *East of Eden*. Penguin Books, 2002.)

UNEARTH ENFLESHED

Henry Jamison. “Ether Garden”. *Gloria Duplex*.

Neutral Milk Hotel. “King of Carrot Flowers Pts. 2 & 3”.
In the Aeroplane Over the Sea.

The Beatles. “Fixing a Hole”. *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

- [UE] Many of the ideas in this section were influenced by the following quote from *Caging Skies*, a novel set in

1940s Vienna about a Hitler Youth boy who becomes caretaker for the Jewish girl hidden by his parents in their home:

“People think they analyze situations with their brains, that their emotions are nothing but a result of cognition, but they’re wrong, for intelligence isn’t in the head, it’s in the body.”

(Leunens, Christine. *Caging Skies*. The Overlook Press, 2020.)

- [UE V.] *THE OUTSIDE FINDS ITS WAY IN* was influenced by a chapter entitled “The Source of Creativity” in Rick Rubin’s *The Creative Act*. (Rubin, Rick. “The Source of Creativity”. *The Creative Act*. New York, Penguin Press, 2023, pp.13-17.)

- [UE VI.] Gâra’ (Hebrew): to diminish, take from, clip

- [UE VII.] *THE MOURNING OF CREATION* was inspired by an interview with singer-songwriter Andrew Hozier-Byrne, a.k.a. Hozier (“Hozier: ‘Unreal Unearth’, Spirituality & Songwriting | Apple Music.” *YouTube*, 28 Aug. 2023.) as well as the following quote from Rubin’s *The Creative Act*

“Turning something from an idea into a reality can make it seem smaller. It changes from unearthly to earthly.

**The imagination has no limits.
The physical world does.
The work exists in both.”**

APPENDIX A: LIST OF ARTWORKS WITH IMAGES AND PROCESS DESCRIPTIONS

Works by Macs Herdrich, displayed at Seattle Pacific University's senior studio art exhibition:
EARTHLY BODIES | April 15th-26th, 2024 | SPAC Gallery

Figure 1: SKIN

Figure 2: ANATOMY/AUTONOMY

Figure 3: The Potential of a Soiled White Light Eternal

Figure 4: If Moriah's Bridge Was Struck by a Flood, Our Hands Would Still Search for Scraps of Paper

Figure 5: If Jacob's Ladder Was Made of Glue, Our Feet Would Stick to the Rungs

Figure 6: RELIC/RELIQUARY

Figure 7: ORIGIN

Figure 1:



SKIN, nylons and sewing thread, 7x7', 2024

[*SKIN* was hand-sewn from cut up pairs of tights over the span of three months. Its shape was allowed to emerge through chance.]

Figure 2:



ANATOMY/AUTONOMY, video stills [chosen by the body], 5.5 x 0.5', 2024

[Each video still from *ANATOMY/AUTONOMY* corresponds to one timestamp from the featured log of data which was produced by the artist's body over the span of one week.]

Figure 3:



The Potential of a Soiled White Light Eternal, projection, video, 2023

Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/937550243?share=copy>

[In the studio, multiple image capturing devices were simultaneously utilized to project and film an infinity mirror effect onto the artist's body. Continuous takes, allowing for repetitive and free flowing movement, were then edited in reaction to Neutral Milk Hotel's "King of Carrot Flowers, Pt. 2 + 3". The resulting product is *The Potential of a Soiled White Light Eternal*. During exhibition, this piece was projected onto a found TV screen in front of an undersized chair, inviting viewers to consider the feeling of their body in space and time.]

Figure 4:



If Moriah's Bridge Was Struck by a Flood, Our Hands Would Still Search for Scraps of Paper, hot glue, paper, 6 x 2.5', 2022

[Hot glue was drawn on butcher paper and soaked in water in an attempt to isolate a glue version of the artist's motif *. This isolation was unsuccessful and, after meticulous peeling away of paper, the attempt was surrendered to the studio wall. What emerged is *If Moriah's Bridge Was Struck by a Flood, Our Hands Would Still Search for Scraps of Paper*.]

* also appears in *If Jacob's Ladder Was Made of Glue, Our Feet Would Stick to the Rungs*, *RELIC/RELIQUARY*, and *ORIGIN*)

Figure 5:



If Jacob's Ladder Was Made of Glue, Our Feet Would Stick to the Rungs, hot glue, transparency, 10' x 8.5", 2024

[Hot glue was drawn on transparent paper in the continuous and meditative lines of the artist's motif *.]

* also appears in *If Moriah's Bridge Was Struck by a Flood, Our Hands Would Still Search for Scraps of Paper*, *RELIC/RELIQUARY*, and *ORIGIN*)

Figure 6:



RELIC/RELIQUARY, impression, impression with ink, 22 x 30" ea.

[Hot glue was drawn on plexiglass in the continuous and meditative lines of the artist's motif *. This "glue plate" was then used to create prints on a printing press.]

* also appears in *If Moriah's Bridge Was Struck by a Flood, Our Hands Would Still Search for Scraps of Paper, If Jacob's Ladder Was Made of Glue, Our Feet Would Stick to the Rungs, and ORIGIN*).

Figure 7:



ORIGIN, intaglio print, 8 x 10", 2022

[The original version of the artist's motif *—etched into a copper plate, rubbed with ink, and printed. The motif allows for a decision-less and meditative process of creation as a partnership in creative responsibility between artist and material.]

* also appears in *If Moriah's Bridge Was Struck by a Flood, Our Hands Would Still Search for Scraps of Paper, If Jacob's Ladder Was Made of Glue, Our Feet Would Stick to the Rungs, and RELIC/RELIQUARY*).

APPENDIX B: EXHIBITION MATERIAL

Informational material as displayed in Macs Herdrich's senior exhibition *EARTHLY BODIES*.

"People think they analyze situations with their brains, that their emotions are nothing but a result of cognition, but they're wrong, for intelligence isn't in the head, it's in the body."

- Christine Leunens, *Caging Skies*

THE THING THAT DOESN'T COME FROM THINKING

It sits in the stomach
with the butterflies and ulcers
waiting
until just the right moment
when the bubbles start forming, and
it ascends
up the esophagus,
out of the mouth,
where it hangs in the air
between bodies
and quietly it says
Naaseh v' nishma:
we will do, then we will understand
we will yield, then we will know
we will embrace resistance, then acknowledge
the beauty in the embrace

My practice is process-oriented, exploring embodiment and ritual. I often combine found or common materials with meditative movement to tap into the subconscious knowledge of my non-binary and disabled body. I react rather than plan, and embrace imperfection, chance, and divine influence.

All of these practices came into play in the creation of the works displayed in *EARTHLY BODIES*, including my honors thesis: *EARTH/UNEARTH*. Through visual and written research, I explore the nature of what is divine. Where do our bodies—human and non-human, thinking and unthinking, earthly and unearthly—sever in two? And where do they commune as one?

APPENDIX C: HONORS RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM SPEECH

Panel Title: Creative Process & Processive Creativity
May 18th 2024, Seattle Pacific University

Shabbat shalom and thank you for being here. My name is Macs, I am a visual artist and a poet—and I *hate* to make plans. Had you asked me a few years ago whether I was a planner, I would have said 100%, in all aspects of life, I had to know the next step. But something changed when I began to apply myself to the practice of making art in earnest. I began to discover that creative work will not be controlled or predicted. It will not follow any guide. It will not stay on any trail; or heed a wagging finger or stand quietly in line...Long metaphor short—the creative process has its own mind. My research, both written and visual, explores this mind.

My honors thesis, *EARTH/UNEARTH*, is this hand-bound book of poetry—which was surprising to me, as I am primarily a visual artist. But this book chronicles my explorations into a new medium: the medium of poetry. The work printed here was only possible through the creative research I have done in the last four years of my *visual* artistic practice. Today I will walk you through my creative process using the three sections of my thesis as a guide. And I will invite you to join me in a few meditative exercises which I have found to be useful in my creative practice.

To begin, I'd like to read a poem from the final section of my thesis which describes the act of creation:

THE THING THAT DOESN'T COME FROM THINKING

It sits in the stomach
with the butterflies and ulcers
waiting
until just the right moment
when the bubbles start forming, and
it ascends
up the esophagus,
out of the mouth
where it hangs in the air
between bodies
and quietly it says
Naaseh v' nishma:
We will do, then we will understand
we will yield, then we will know
we will embrace unknowing, then acknowledge
the beauty in the embrace

EARTH/UNEARTH explores the nature of the divine and the act of creation. It was *itself* created using what I call “life-driven research”; meaning I focused attention only on sources that touched my life: sources that existed physically in our library, that were introduced to me by trusted peers and mentors, or that otherwise organically presented themselves. I used this method of research because it aligns with two lessons I have learned through my artistic practice.

The first is that creative limitations are essential—there are endless sources that touch on the divine and creation, so I limited the scope of my research to these life-driven sources.

And the second lesson is that physical interaction with materials, for me, must take precedence over the digital—any source that I couldn’t get physically, I printed out. It was important to me to hold my sources in my hands.

Using these methods, I researched other artists, looking at how they use their bodies to create art and how their work invites others to recontextualize their own bodies. I made a 6 by 6 foot map of these artists and had a pseudo altar to them taking up almost all the floor space in my apartment for a few weeks. From Ana Mendieta’s *Siluetas*, to Erwin Wurm’s *One Minute Sculptures*, I studied artists working with the human body in meaningful and new ways. But my research would not have been complete without hands-on creative exploration.

While writing these poems, I was at the same time creating the visual work which would be displayed in my senior exhibition. The two halves of my creative process—written and visual—began to merge with a single question in mind. I wanted to know what would happen if I got out of my head, and instead prioritized the subconscious knowledge of my body, as well as the superconscious knowledge of the Divine.

Now, let’s back up. You may be wondering: what do I mean when I say, “the Divine”?

Where is the line between mundane and Divine?
Is there a hierarchy that exists from G-d to dirt?
Or do we all stand equally upon the earth?

Section one. EARTHING ELOHIM, epigraph by Alan Watts:

**“Supposing this world is a tree:
Are you leaves on its branches?
Or are you a bunch of birds
that settled on a dead old tree
from somewhere else?”**

This first section, EARTHING ELOHIM, explores the divinity of nature and the human body. It begins with a tree...

EXPERIENCE OF A TREE (AND SKY)

**Standing under that tree
and the dome of the sky
it was easy to remember
when this
was God.
The clouds danced their way
over head
a crook in the neck later
and the eye has passed, to
a mist above, gray and final, it
envelops like panic—
the fear of getting wet
and the tree—
that grand tree,
stood so tall and so close to the sky
like its branches could reach up
and swirl the clouds
and maybe hold back the rain
if only we pray hard enough**

If nature is divine, then perhaps divinity can extend further, to animal instinct...

I HEARD DOGS HOWL AT THE FULL MOON

**I heard dogs howl at the full moon
from the retirement home on 3rd
and the modern house across
to be so far removed from instinct
yet carry prophesied bones
which cannot deny
a cry at the moon
so deeply rooted
to commune with each other
and at once
in communion with their saints**

Our bodies are animals. Our bodies are divine.

THE WORK OF NEW HAIRS

**To grow out of the earth
and in doing so
discover belly button lint—
the idea of which
had previously not made sense,
the fuzz between the fingers
a color of mixed up shirts
and sweat—
static
now resonates
like a car radio on a road trip
that suddenly tunes in
to classical music one moment
and Y2K country the next**

[Motif Process (meditation video): <https://vimeo.com/950867101?share=copy>]

I invite you to join me in a meditation, focusing on the breath. We will breathe in for three counts, and out for seven, repeating three cycles of breath.

Inhale [1...2...3],
Exhale [1...2...3...4...5...6...7]

Inhale [1...2...3],
Exhale [1...2...3...4...5...6...7]

Inhale [1...2...3],
Exhale [1...2...3...4...5...6...7]

In my practice, I try to move slowly, and be still. Not always successfully, but I try. I try to be open and to listen for inspiration. I don't want conscious control. When I try to plan out a piece from beginning to end, I become a perfectionist; which is a futile practice because perfection is a myth. So instead, whenever possible, I defer to Divine influence—both internal and external. I believe that there is something greater beyond my conscious mind to tap into, in the act of creation. My best work is done when things are left open to chance and the beautiful limitations of my body; when my materials aren't cooperating, or when the image in my head looks nothing like the end, I choose to embrace discovery; I choose to spend time and slow down, creating ritual within each work.

My most long-standing artistic ritual comes in the form of lines. For over two years now, I have drawn these same lines over and over. I have sketchbooks filled with this motif, and I have explored it through different mediums: from ink, to charcoal, to hot glue, to printmaking, and sculpture... I find myself getting lost in these lines. I become my body—not a fractured being of mind and flesh, but whole, and gloriously unconscious.

This collision of mind, body, and spirit, is the ultimate goal of my practice. In a culture which calls us to separate from our bodies for the sake of productivity, I cling to a creative practice which calls the connection to body, productive. In this practice, I pay attention to my body, and I listen to its unique knowledge.

My body is not the same as yours. I am trans and I have chronic pain, both of which I nurture with chemicals and with care. But we are *all* just hunter-gatherers living in a world which we

were not designed for—so suffice to say, whoever you are, it is important to pay attention to your body.

The body has veto power over anything you try to accomplish, so treat it well. Take care.

It is wise to treat the body well
given the soul that lives inside
where the light can hide

Section two. SHAMAR: TAKE CARE, epigraph by the Psalmist:

**“When I consider your heavens,
The work of your fingers,
The moon and the stars,
Which you have set in place.
What is humanity that you are mindful of it,
The children of mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them little lower than the angels
And crowned them with glory and honor.”**

This second section, SHAMAR: TAKE CARE, is named for a Hebrew commandment from the story of the Garden of Eden. Shamar means to keep, to observe, to take care.

RITUAL/SENSUAL

**Finger touches lip,
touches paper,
marks the place left off
Return again with mouth
in the quiet still—
Strike
burning, catching, then
Light
beckons the soul back to the source
hands to eyes, pray:
you mystify me,
you mystify me,
you mystify me**

The body is a wonderful and complicated thing. It takes time and attention to learn how to care for it. To learn to tune in, fully, to its beautiful senses.

**Divine is the sixth born sense
around which the other five dote
to be called out by name
by their youngest:
the testy infant
who must never be left unattended,
un- fed, clothed, or watered
until it learns
to brush its teeth
and cook a hearty meal
and outgrow its kin
under frame of door
and return again
to stand at the changing table**

When we tune in to our bodies, taking slowness and care, we create a hospitable place for creation to occur.

**Psyche walks out
to her garden
to tend to her plot
and cherish the weeds
which grow from abundance
in belly**

**with great calm and care
she sprinkles her seeds,
and waits 'til they're ready,
for the wild juicy fruit of the spring**

I invite you to join me in another meditation, this time to connect more deeply to the body.

Close your eyes if you feel comfortable
Feel the floor beneath your feet
And with your mind's eye,
Trace the curvature of your spine
from head down to tail,
Breathe in. Exhale.

[1...2...3...4...5...6...7]

[1...2...3...4...5...6...7]

[1...2...3...4...5...6...7]

Art helps us pay attention to our feelings. To the way our senses perceive the world, and the way we emotionally respond to this perception. Our noses perceive the smell of rain on asphalt, and we automatically relax in its beauty. Our hands feel the painful heat of the stove's burner, and our reflexes pull them away. The body reacts to sensations and feelings. The act of creation is one way of *physically* reacting to these sensations and feelings.

To create is to apply curiosity to pain.
To create is to listen to the internal and external Divine.
To create is to learn through the working of the hands.

Section three. UNEARTH ENFLESHED, epigraph by Robert Henri:

**“The object isn't to make art,
it's to be in that wonderful state
which makes art inevitable”**

Section three, UNEARTH ENFLESHED, explores inspiration and its translation through the working of the hands.

I work with my hands in a variety of mediums: sculpture, photography, video, printmaking, sewing, drawing, writing, performing, cooking, cleaning, showering— Anything can be done artfully. All that is required is attention: attention to line, or value, or shape, or color; attention to sound, to *feeling*. Art and life are not separate beings. They are partners.

For me, Art is a generous and spontaneous lover, which gives itself over in moments of joyous, and chaotic passion.

**it bashes at my temples
and kisses them
passionately, oh
so sweetly
and in doing so
gives me the world
in small pecks**

But every couple has their issues. Art and I struggle with trust issues. I find it hard to trust in something so spontaneous. It is in my nature to plan things out. But art will not allow me to plan. Instead, I have to trust.

**To trust that everything needed
is contained within
by design or evolution
or neither or both,
is faith
is belief
in a continuous energy, an
everlasting output
to reach up and borrow from
if only one's hands are empty**