

Mythology in London, Etchings by Anna Alcock

Tokarska Gallery 15 March – 31 March 2012

Mythology is epic, as is this visual outpouring in print by Anna Alcock. The artistic method of telling is predominantly two-dimensional; etching on paper, some screen printing and linocut, moving to charcoal drawing, using fabric remnants, exquisite chine collé papers and collage. The work pushes boundaries into three dimensions.

Myths unfold chronologically and are an oral tradition of telling and retelling, over time. The works hang throughout the gallery space as single and conjoined episodes, loosely arranged by date, technique, medium or thematic.

Reading of the work is not prescribed by curation, allowing diverse interpretation of the complex whole. Each print is framed in cream wood of varying dimensions. The hang has undulating top and bottom lines creating a shifting horizon for the narrative to unfold.

Certain works offer entry points to reading *Mythology in London*. *Narcissus*, 1998, depicts a seated female nude gazing into the distance, observing, drawing. Sited within a room of windows, open doorways, stairs that lead elsewhere. Whether self-portrait, guide or protagonist, a characterization that embodies creative visioning as alternative to reality confined to a room.

The Flood shows children at bath time. It plays on words and acts as a humorous grounding in domestic reality. It is monochrome before colour is deployed to suggest a divide between lived and mythic reality. In *London Labyrinth* a Minotaur leads a female protagonist up and out of the cityscape, with colour as the transformative element.

Works in gallery II can be interpreted as early chapters to the later mythic series. *African Dance*, 2009, captures wild figurative energy in etching and dry point. *War Memorial*, 2010, is a direct etching study of architectural London. *Beastie Birds in London*, 2010, uses bold colour and linocut graphic mark making. A Hackney street scene that wrestles cultural references together. Insights into a range of printmaking skills, and collected imagery that later re-surface amalgamated.

Layering is central to process. The drawing or etching is dense in composition and mark making. The artist uses hand made papers, layers of pattern and colour under and within the narrative. *Victory*, 2012 is a circular etching with blood red paper under ink with scrapings through to release bursts of colour and pattern from a submerged paper or fragment. The process is change, the working and reworking of myth.

Within the etchings a mixing of mythical references takes place. Elements of contemporary life and London civilization are inserted. *Mount Olympus* looks down on a Stratford stadium, *Golden Fleece* incorporates Norman Foster's Gherkin in the trunk of an aged oak. Archetypal and contemporary references are juxtaposed and intermingled.

This interweaving of ancient and current, of the London cityscape and every day poses questions. It short-circuits the trajectory of time. It plays with the status of mythic and modern references with humour. *Elysian Fields* illustrates this process of inversion, depicting female worker figures in an underworld beneath a great industrial cog above ground. The logical narrative horizon is flipped, as is gender. Narrative 'truth' and subversion are all in play.

Density in terms of mark, texture, pattern plus narrative cohesion of archetypal and contemporary imagery demands skill and balance. The artist avoids asserting authorial grip and rigid fixing of fragments in a new order. Each piece has a fullness that is harmonized and controlled, without losing a sense of visionary freeness or flow in the compiling, the playing with and rearranging of myth.

Pandora's Box is an example of two-dimensional play entering three-dimensional space. The box is constructed from cut out prints. The layers burst forth from the single plane into the gallery space. The box from an adult perspective is reassuringly small, easily closed.

However, any sense of comfortable sitting listening to storytelling begins to shift in space and scale. The mood begins to change on passing into the interlinking corridor space. *The Kitty Cat Monster* and *When Dogs Fly*, 2010 are at face value charming illustrative prints for tales for children. However, like all the best children's tales they have a darker subtext for the reader. The animals leap and run as if they sense (as animals do), that something menacing lurks nearby.

Chair I and *Chair II* pre-date the myth series. With *She Wolf* they form a large-scale triptych, which surrounds the viewer in a three-sided space that must be navigated past a fantastical physical chair that is densely collaged, has a mask like face, has grown wings and seems to guard or menace the space.

This chair features two dimensionally in *Chair I* and *II* in threatening dialogue with a small child. We are transported back into a predominantly monochrome world of room, town and child. The wolf, worked in charcoal threatens or guards a collaged village of ecclesiastical buildings with snatches of writing or warnings. These mixed media pieces have a primitive potency that can be associated with the compulsion to make of Outsider artists like Henry Darger. There is menace and while they elude deciphering they affirm the artists license to author mythical creatures of the imagination and collapse the boundary between two-dimensional page and lived reality.

This *She Wolf* guards the portal between reality and creative visioning for the town, for her child. It is a portal that has monochrome on one side and transits through colour to the other. Who is the *She Wolf* defining how myth will unfold? Only Anna Alcock can shed light as the author and creator of her own dense and prolific myth making, unfolding in London.

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