

RACHEL GOODYEAR: STIRRINGS

Dr. Catriona McAra

"Collecting stories is a constant palaeontologic endeavour.

The more story bones you have, the more likely you will
be able to find the whole story."

– Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992)¹

Rachel Goodyear (b.1978) is one of England's living masters of drawing, a draughtsperson of exquisite skill who combines spare, meticulous depiction with magical occurrence. Her chief subject matter is the human-animal psyche, our collective fears and desires. Contemporary feminine figures are haunted by marvellous filaments, ectoplasmic concoctions and uncanny sensations inherited from the gothic and macabre. Spirit creatures and witch familiars recur in both media, especially those more sinister or disquieting members of the animal kingdom that tend to prowl the margins: skunks, hyenas, and magpies. She describes her works on paper as "veils" while her animations can be approached as "moments locked in time, forever repeating."

"Drawing gives you this ability to push through walls...
...and into the paper."

– Rachel Goodyear (2021)²

Earlier in her career, Goodyear was drawn to the vulnerability and brilliance of Frida Kahlo and Louise Bourgeois, revelling in their feminist textures and their shrewd overturning of domesticity. More recently, Goodyear has followed a similar Ariadne thread through the feminist-surrealist visual narratives of Dorothea Tanning and Leonora Carrington, attachments which are amply evident throughout *Stirrings*.

"She sat on the edge of a deep crevice,
dangling her feet over the void...

Looking up, she saw it:

a piece of dream broken off the rock of herself."

– Dorothea Tanning (2004)³

Goodyear's latest animation, *Hole* (2022), offers an allegorical compilation of such art history through an epic narrative of descent. Here, recurrent motifs from her static drawings are brought to life on a series of rocky ledges. Bikini-clad figures torment circus bears with small fruits before transposing into floral bouquets. A crow pecks at a knotted scribble which will later tickle the belly of a playful dog. School girls levitate. Myth and legend are everywhere apparent – Medusa's hair is pulled by headless twins while the devil leapfrogs over a lame canine. Yogis contort while exhaling ghostly bubbles. A wolf howls out its soul while a seated figure coughs up a fluttering bird, evoking scenes from fairy tales. An oral dimension is often palpable, perhaps given our collective covering of mouths over so many months. Crystalline growths of stalactites on vertebrae in child's pose also hint at recent discomforts. Meanwhile, sonic interpretation by sound artist Matt Wand articulates the whole endeavour. These micro-episodes or vignettes are dislocated within the cavernous abyss of cinematic space, and the overall effect is that of a surrealist poem. We freefall or float in slow motion, "down the rabbit hole" as Goodyear and Wand invite us to play the curious protagonist in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Down, down, down through an aesthetics of shifting strata, through the unconscious layers of dream time. Between these precipices of narrative desire, strange somersaults of fur and skin, berries and beetles are to be found, heralded or underpinned by the experimental soundscape of roars and echoes.

"Once again we are in a knot of species
coshaping one another
in layers of reciprocating complexity
all the way down"
—Donna Haraway (2008)⁴

Tanning opens her novella *Chasm: A Weekend* (2004) with a chronology 'Destina Descending,' a family tree charting the descendants of a victim of the Salem witch trials from 1692 to 1965. Deep down in history. The present-day Destina has an imaginary friend, a lion displaced in the desert of the American West, who gifts her the eyeballs from his most recent prey. As with the two child-women in Tanning's doll-like painting, *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (1943), Goodyear's figures are blindfolded, their eyes frequently closed or obscured in three-quarter profile, suggesting the inward vision of nightmares and nocturnal activities. She has looked to Tanning in myriad ways, restirring the surrealist potion with twenty-first century meaning.

“women’s flagging vitality can be restored
by extensive ‘psychic-archaeological’ digs
into the ruins of the female underworld.”
— Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992)⁵

The primeval universality and diverse range of hermetic archaeologies found in Clarissa Pinkola Estés’s Jungian-feminist study, *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (1992), has also had significant impact on Goodyear’s imagination for this show. Estés encourages readers to get back to our roots and recodes the wolf as feminine to characterise a revisionary stance. The feral entity that dwells in her literary landscapes becomes the id, an inner force of unpredictability which rises to the convulsive, corporeal surface.

“...when I saw the hyena, something was set in motion.”

—Heidi Sopinka (2018)⁶

I recall last summer when the hyena crept back into Goodyear’s periphery with a monumental drawing of this scavenger on top of an antique desk. The artist reflects: “The hyena has not made an appearance in my works for many years though has always maintained a presence in my mind, and most often with a tentative homage to Leonora Carrington.”⁷ In Carrington’s universe, the she-hyena holds a privileged position, representing a subversive mode of femininity in her infamous short story, ‘The Debutante’ (1937), in which a hyena takes the place of the young woman at a coming out ball by chewing off the face of the maid to wear as a mask.⁸ Goodyear recycles such iconography and thus aligns herself with Carrington’s violent masquerade and refusal to conform to feminine expectations of what it means to be an artist.

“Do let's pretend that I'm a hungry hyena, and you're a bone!”

– Lewis Carroll (1869)

In summary, *Stirrings* encapsulates Goodyear’s practice of lots of little studies collaged into a coherent vision and feminist statement. *Hole* is arguably one of her most ambitious works to date and dislodges the anthropocentric into a more equitable series of interspecies relationships. Such concerns reverberate across her static drawings too. Her collected story bones form a highly personal mode of esoteric visual narration, yet the details are also generous and compelling, inviting us to reflect on our own trials, tribulations and malevolent thought forms.

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- ¹ Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman* (London: Random House, 1992), 17.
- ² Rachel Goodyear in conversation with Patricia Allmer (Leeds: Leeds Arts University, 2021).
- ³ Dorothea Tanning, *Chasm: A Weekend* (London: Virago, 2004), 156.
- ⁴ Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 42.
- ⁵ Estés, 3.
- ⁶ Heidi Sopinka, *The Dictionary of Animal Languages* (London: Scribe, 2018), 85.
- ⁷ Rachel Goodyear @rachel_goodyear (7 June 2021).
- ⁸ Natalya Lusty, *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 34.
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Dr. Catriona McAra: is a writer and research curator working internationally. Catriona is a specialist in modern and contemporary art history, and a leading authority on the work of Dorothea Tanning and Leonora Carrington, with particular interests in revisionary historiography and feminist-surrealist legacies in early twenty-first century art and literary practices. Amongst many others, Catriona is author of *A Surrealist Stratigraphy of Dorothea Tanning's Chasm* (Routledge, 2017), and co-editor with Jonathan P. Eburne of *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde* (Manchester University Press, 2017). She is currently finishing her second monograph, *The Medium of Leonora Carrington* (Manchester University Press, 2022).

Rachel Goodyear: (b. 1978, Lancashire, UK) lives and works in Manchester and Salford, exhibiting nationally and internationally with works held in a number of collections worldwide. Solo exhibitions include *Catching Sight*, The New Art Gallery Walsall ; *Restless Guests*, The Drawing Center, New York ; *Approaching the Surface*, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London; and *Modifications of the Host*, Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Recent major installations include 'Limina' commissioned by York Mediale and York Museums Trust. Group exhibitions include Tate Liverpool; Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester; Freud Museum, London; She is a featured artist in *Vitamin D3: Today's Best in Contemporary Drawing*, published by Phaidon 2021 and is represented by Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London.

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