



## **DIRTY DIVINITY**

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To step into that Other Place—even for just a breath, a blink, a shiver. This is the wistful desire that incited the artwork in the exhibition titled *DIRTY DIVINITY*. This collection aims to grasp at ancient divinity with metaphorically bloodied fingers. It claims sacredness while confronting the connotations of what that actually means when no longer attached to religious practices—is it sacred if it is also unsettling? Perhaps that is what makes something feel sacred. This writing will explore and uncover this idea deeper.

With this work, I am considering what it means to build an internal mythos, or more aptly, an internal world. I have spent the past year evolving a collection of symbolic imagery that references folklore and religion, yet still stays rooted in my own lived experiences. This exhibition is meant to feel like remnants from the Other Place and to consider if that place is simply inside of us.

Much like the imagery within *DIRTY DIVINITY*, the theory behind the artwork is interwoven and self-referential. My aspiration is that through repetition, certain ideas will rise to the surface when considering the collection as a whole.



## SACREDNESS AS A WEAPON

*Hallowed out and hollowed ground,  
there comes a desire to strike out in that familiar way,  
the way which has been taught by  
subtle brutality, secret consistency, steady trickery.  
This is sacredness and this is a painful pecking  
by the beak of a sharpened blade I once trusted.*

Before understanding how sacredness can be wielded as a weapon, one must begin to grasp what it is, why we are drawn to it, and why it is useful. Personal private interpretation is often difficult to articulate verbally in a way that most others will agree upon. We all have our own lexicons of meaning we associate with symbols, therefore defining sacredness is much like explaining a dream; foggy and usually dissatisfying. Nonetheless, I will do my best to express my own thoughts on it.

A common association to that which is sacred is a connection to a higher power. God, gods, goddesses, spirits, etc. In my childhood, I certainly ascribed to this association with confidence. Presently, my understanding goes beyond the need to connect the divine to a deity. Rather, I understand that the root of it lies inside an individual being. For some time, I would find myself being drawn to mythology and ancient spiritual practices and the connecting symbols within different stories and lore. I was having a difficult time articulating why this seemed important to me

until I stumbled upon Carl Jung's theories surrounding myth and the collective mind. In a collection of works of Jung, Sonu Shamdasani writes,

Jung was studying the myth-making of the human mind, which led him to a new appreciation of the significance of myths and fairy tales. In Jung's view, at the deepest levels of subjectivity we come across what is quintessentially human and come to all mankind. A maiden in a fantasy explained to him that "the fairy tale is the great mother of the novel, and has even more universal validity than the most-avidly read novel of your time. And you know that what has been on everyone's lips for millennia, though repeated endlessly, still comes nearest to ultimate human truth." He had been conventionally seeking the "uncommon truths," and yet she explained to him that "Only what is human and what you call banal and hackneyed contain the wisdom you seek." Jung came to see the task of individuation as being one of coming to terms with the accumulated past of human inheritance, in other words, with the archetypes of the collective unconscious. (Jung ix)

According to Jung, the human mind has innate characteristics "imprinted" on it as a result of evolution. These universal predispositions stem from our ancestral past. It is in this imprinting of archetypes that exists a connection not only with everyone living but also everyone who once lived. Jung describes archetypes as, "essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its color from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear." (Jung 5)

The sanctification lies in that connectivity. The repetition of lived experiences cultivates a divine collective unconscious and if one desires to tap into it, there is a possibility for satisfaction and comfort to be found.

These differing understandings of sacredness—that which is rooted in a deity and that which is rooted in the Self—are both valuable to discerning meaning in the artwork in *DIRTY DIVINITY*. A reckoning with past understandings is just as relevant as an uncovering of a new interpretation.

The ways in which sacredness becomes a vehicle for violence are also the ways in which it can become a source of protection. The duality of brutality and sanctity situates itself within divinity;

they need each other desperately. By necessity, aggression needs reaction and so often that reaction is defensiveness. If I am attacked first, my instinct is to protect myself. If I attack first, I should be prepared for that act of defense. Sacredness can be visualized as a knife, its purpose is ceremonial in origin, but so very quickly it can be repurposed. It can be tarnished in a bout of anger, snatched from its pedestal of holiness, and plunged into whomsoever its wielder desires. Does this act mean the blade is no longer divine? I do not think so. With the blood of someone now dripping from its tip, I would dare say it has been consecrated further. I believe such a thing because I insist that sacredness is harsh, dangerous, and disturbed. If it is not, I could argue that sacredness does not exist at all. Every tool of sacredness, holiness, or divinity that has been offered as protection has also been wielded as a weapon.

I would like to use the sacred space I grew up in as an example of a divine weapon. It is a familiar one to me even still: the Church. A second home of sorts for most of my childhood and early teens. As the daughter of a pastor in the South, I spent many more days of the week than Sundays in church. Not only was it a familiar space, it was a comfortable and welcoming space. I recall sitting in the sanctuary of a church and knowing it was an honor to sit in such a holy space. A spirit-filled space. It fascinates me that a place I associated with such peace and comfort now only brings forth associations of trauma and devastation. It became a place I was no longer welcome in because suddenly, I no longer *belonged* there.

That familiar sacredness became a weapon used against me. And yet, it does not end there.

The weapon—the blade—can be taken. It can be stolen from the attacker and used against them in a twisted sort of gratifying way. This is how I have come to understand sacredness for myself. It is gruesome because we are gruesome. Every way that we are as living beings, sacredness

also is. It is ordinary, mundane, horrifying, and harmful. Divinity is not the unattainable, on the contrary, it is everything about existing and therefore it is *dirty*.



fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3

In a couple of illustrations taken from the book *The Last 29 Sentences*, (see fig. 1, fig. 2, and fig. 3), the Dweller is charged with the task of defeating a great beast. The sentence, ‘*Ragged with dissent, They adorn the metal like a second skin, “I do not want this beast to be slain!” They say as They press the knife into her gut.*’ accompanies fig. 1 in the book and is meant to subtly express this concept of sacredness as a weapon. The Dweller, while adorned with the appropriate attire to defeat a beautifully horrifying creature, wishes to do anything but such a thing. They not only battle a dragon, but they also battle with the need to fulfill what they set out to do and the desire to go against this need. They hold a regal sword, one that is infused with divinity, but must inevitably be

the cause of devastation and death. Much goes unspoken in this sentence, but it is clear to me that there is turmoil in the seeking out of the divine.



### **DIRTY NAILS & CHILDHOOD POWERS**

*Under that Dogwood branch, the veil is clear,*

*it wraps around whomsoever seeks it out*

*like the comforting embrace of sunlight.*

*I bite my nails and taste the Earth,*

*I feel the force of wonder pulsing through me*

*and know that even now it quickly fades.*

*Is this willingness going to leave me forever?*

*Is this divine ability to step into that Other Place*

*not meant to be sustained?*



*fig. 4*

In the back left corner of one of my childhood homes, there was a Dogwood tree. It was pressed far enough into the corner that if you stepped under a branch on either side, there was a small triangular space between the tree and the fence walls. This created an in-between place. I recall that stepping through this space and back out from left to right allowed a portal to open. You would not be returning to the rest of the backyard, but rather entering some other place.

While this specific ritual of movement stands out in my mind, I can remember versions of this existing at every house I lived in as a child. Sometimes it was jumping over a small creek, crawling through a tunnel of brambles, passing by a honeysuckle bush filled with honey bees, or crossing over a decaying wooden gate. The commonality being an act of passing through and as a result, entering somewhere else. In this somewhere else, *things* happened. It was so easy to begin to see peculiarities and simply know that it was because I was in the Other Place. This term, the Other



Place, is used in my practice to describe the space in which we allow ourselves to believe in mystical happenings. It is also another way of describing interior consciousness through the lens of an environment. These two meanings interact with one another, informing each other endlessly. In *Man and His Symbols*, Jung writes of childhood, “Because a child is..small and its conscious thoughts scarce and simple, we do not realize the far-reaching complications of the infantile mind that are based on its original identity with the prehistoric psyche.” (Jung 89)



*fig. 5*



*fig. 6*

I use gateways in my work often to reference the Other Place (see *fig. 4*). This use refers not only to the physical gateways I would create as a child but also the symbol of transformation. To pass through a gateway is to change oneself; to end a journey, to begin anew, to uncover, to rediscover,



etc. That is why I chose *Laurel Of Ó Maolalaidh (My Entryway)* (see *fig. 5*) as the first piece of artwork to be seen if the viewer begins at the wall label for the exhibition and moves to the right through the space. This piece includes three separate gateways; the one within the laurel tree depicted via the illustration, the black archway inside the composition, and the gateway made out of soldered metal that sits on top of the piece. The choice to include this visual symbol at the beginning of the exhibition is meant to place the viewer in the mindset that they are moving into a different space; the Other Place. The title is a play on my own name (Laura comes from Laurel) and my grandmother's maiden name (Mullaly comes from Ó Maolalaidh, which was the name of my Irish ancestors before Christianity overtook the island) as a way of placing myself in the work discreetly. By no coincidence at all, I found that the Ó Maolalaidh family crest contains within it a laurel branch.

In this piece, I consider whether I, myself, am the gateway into the work or maybe it is something else entirely undefinable. Either way, my hope is that this piece situates the viewer in the space in a similar way that the Dogwood branch situated me in an environment where mystical things occurred. And even though this open portal of sorts is present, there are moments of secrecy within the piece; the charms that insinuate further meaning, the flying mischief creature that is contemplating the entryway, and even the peculiar four-legged creature that becomes a laurel tree.

I also consider the three pieces under the title, *The Tripartition Of The Gathered Mind* (see *fig. 6*), to work as gateways. Rather than something one might step through, I see them as windows to *look* through. I envision them as a formation of imagery where the viewer can become aware of what stands out to them, what messages surface, and how they see themselves within the artwork. All the

while, there is little clear context provided, as to maintain secrecy alongside the intimacy of small detailed compositions.

There was a sense of privacy in the willingness to believe that felt intimate as a child. I had no desire to share my secrets with just anyone. It was mine and that was what made it special. Secrecy was unacceptable in my family. It meant a lack of control on the part of my father and that was simply not allowed. Secrecy meant deception and that meant I was sinful. Despite this knowledge, I kept my secrets. If I was the only one that knew about the mystical discoveries I had made, it kept them real. I did not have to rely on someone else to confirm them, my own belief was enough to keep me curious.

My stomach aches when I remember these moments in my childhood. It is an aching that I can only describe as a physical symptom of *deep longing*. I could not pinpoint when this ability to willingly believe in the mystical and otherworldly things vanished, but I imagine it was a slow process of fading. The size of the unknown grew smaller and with that so did the ability to make-believe. This awareness of the difference between my ability to believe in the mystical nature of things has played a large part in the way I approach art-making. Instead of feeling dutiful about the work I make, it has taken on a sense of indulgence. I find myself leaning into the intuitive attractions I feel toward certain imagery and symbology. I hold secrets close to my chest, knowing that if I divulged them, no one would understand completely. While the visuals of this work are complex and deeply meaningful, I am increasingly interested in outside reactions from those who have little context.

As I do my best to return to the mindset of a child regarding the mystical, I grapple with how this can replace the ways in which I once practiced Christianity. This sort of worldbuilding and uncovering of otherworldly meaning takes the place of a spiritual practice. It does so while leaving

behind all of the aspects of religion that I have been traumatized by. By design, building one's own world or mythology lends itself to a sense of freedom. There is irony in leaving behind one thing simply to recreate it anew, but this is just a part of the complexity of uncovering the Self. My work does not aim to be streamlined and clean-cut, it intends to be contradictory just as much as it is in harmony with itself; in this way, I reference what it is to be human and therefore what it is to be sacred.



### **THE UNCOVERING OF FEMININITY, MASCULINITY & THE SPACE IN-BETWEEN**

*Is it unfair of me, your only Daughter,*

*To want what he has?*

*To feel known for more than*

*Sweetness, Tenderness, Gentleness,*

*to be looked at and seen as more than*

*Lovely, Darling,*

*'Has anyone ever told you how beautiful you are?'*

*Can I be something other than Daughter—*

*if I must be her can I also be something else?*

*Can I be my brother, if just for a few moments,*

*so I can know what it is to be respected?*

*Can I be him so you'll see beyond*

*the things that have made me the bad Daughter?*

*And will I ever stop asking you questions as though*

*I need your validation?*

*My armor was molded in the furnace of your disapproval.*



*fig. 7 (front & back)*

Sharpness was a learned attribute for me. When it took root and began to fester under my skin at a young age, it was subtle and devious. The sharpness hid behind reactive emotions such as bitterness and frustration. It was fueled by unfair circumstances that abounded between my brothers and me. It took note of the way I felt hurt because I was treated differently. I was treated like a girl while my three brothers were treated like boys because that was obviously what we were, and this apparent observation of gender revealed unmovable barriers between us. Femininity was actually not sharp, not spiked or ridden with thorns, it was smooth like a baby. Yet, my voice would lash out like the knife I was forbidden from having because girls could not be trusted with such things.

This attribute could be accredited to my father and his own notoriously weaponized tongue. Yet I know the truth is that my own stinging words were a learned defense, a grasp at control where I

had never truly had any and his skill for sharpness came from the tower he built for himself, the one in which he sat and looked down upon me in disapproval. I have concluded that is partly why I am drawn to sharp objects. My first pocket knife was one of the first sacred objects I can recall carrying with me wherever I went. It was an indignant purchase, that pocket knife. One that I firmly considered unfair, unnecessary, and infuriating. My brothers had not needed to go out on their own and purchase their first pocket knife because it had been a right of passage at age twelve for each of them to receive one from our father. I sat by as my two older siblings received this gift, eagerly awaiting my turn. When my twelfth birthday arrived, I received no such gift. When I inquired about getting my own, I was met with disapproving responses and inquiries about what use I could possibly have for a knife. A knife became for me at that moment, a symbol of masculinity that was out of reach for me. So, years later when I had gotten my first job and made my own money, I picked out my first pocket knife.

I found it in an antique shop, the box it came in had been sitting on a cluttered shelf, waiting for my arrival. I remember playfully bartering with the shop owner over the price and we settled on an acceptable four dollars. As I left the store with the knife in hand, I knew it would go with me wherever I went. It took me years and many more knives before I accidentally cut myself with my own knife, which was a major concern when my family first learned that I carried one with me often. Defensively, I want to point out that I was hundreds of miles into the wilderness of the Appalachian mountains, slicing into a stick of summer sausage to eat for lunch when I cut myself. It was certainly an avoidable and foolish mistake, but I *had* just hiked eight miles and intended to go on to hike eight more that day with a roughly 30-pound pack on my back. I have perpetuated this desire to not only

seem tough by wielding a sense of sharpness but in fact, be tough as if my whole existence depended on it – in some circumstances it certainly does.

To this day when I use a knife, if a man is present they enjoy throwing out a joke about me cutting myself. It always reminds me of how my brother cut his lip on his own pocket knife a few weeks after receiving it because he attempted to open it with his mouth. Unlike my brothers or my father, my sharpness is a deep-rooted and cautious one; spiked like a serrated blade, best for cutting through hard exteriors.

This fierce connection to knives as sacred and charged objects has always felt to be very obviously connected to my internal identity and how in many ways I feel a need to emulate these sacred objects. It took quite some time for me to acknowledge that this is not always a positive notion. I spent my childhood cultivating anger into a weapon. While I was drawn to sharpness, I could not also hold space for softness lest I allow myself to show that weakness I so feared. Softness was femininity which was unavoidably weak. Claiming aggression and harshness in the way I did as I grew out of childhood and stumbled into my teenage years meant distancing myself even further from the truth of femininity and masculinity. It seems important for me to admit that my obsession with the sharp object is multifaceted and not completely positive. My spiked verbiage can often be a point of pride for me, yet it has put me in difficult situations on countless occasions since its emergence in my childhood. To relinquish the parts of something that have been the stronghold of one's identity for so long is like willingly having a finger cut off. There is no going back and it alters the way things are handled from that point on.

As I added the metal spikes to the frames of the pendants in my piece, *Ruminations on Femininity, Masculinity & the In-Between* (fig. 7), I considered their meaning and purpose. As I do

with any of the work I add the soldered spikes to. I reflect on their origins as sharp objects and that is how I began to recollect the beginnings of my own sharpness—the knife, the weapon, the defense. And that itself is always connected to my complicated understanding of sacredness.

Each of the twenty pendants that make up this piece is safely situated between two pieces of glass and soldered together, adorned with spikes that face outward, avoiding the person wearing the art object and warding off anyone who may come too close—although I have certainly still managed to cut myself on their sharpness. While the beginning of my understanding of masculinity was tied to this off-limits concept of sharpness, it drastically changed over time, and through my own experiences, I have come to see these protective spikes as utterly feminine in meaning and practice. This space where objects and symbols fluctuate between femininity and masculinity lures me in because of its inconsistency; it welcomes meanings that shift and it disregards rigidity.

Shedding the deep-rooted indoctrination from my childhood will most likely last my entire life, so I am not shocked that only in the past few years I have begun to relinquish my former mindset around femininity and masculinity regarding my own identity and the objects I surround myself with. The object can be a metaphor for something that holds within it memories, ideologies, emotions, and associations. In the case of this art object, I created a collection of photographic imagery sourced from old dictionaries to map out feminine and masculine associations. Once this was done, I adorned these images which are encased in protectively spiked frames to empower my sense of understanding in regard to myself.

Returning to the desire I had to always carry a pocket knife, I want to acknowledge the significance of an object kept on the body; the adorned object. When I consider ideas of letting go, I visualize myself removing something worn. With letting go of one thing comes a taking on of



something else. With this artwork, I wanted to focus on the act that comes after relinquishing a past self. There are aspects of this work that are certainly still entrenched in the past. The spiked frames express a need for control and protection, as I find this to be an aspect of who I am that is not easily removable. Whereas the imagery I used inside the pendants symbolizes something that has evolved; a perspective on my internal spectrum of gender. By interweaving these two, I feel like the piece resides in a more realistic space because relinquishing can occur simultaneously with reclamation.

Throughout the entirety of my artistic collection, I explore symbols of femininity, masculinity, and the in-between. Much like how I project my own meaning onto already well-used symbols in folklore and religious myth, I also partake in this when it comes to gender identity. Coming from an extremely binary upbringing meant for a long time that I did not know I could identify for myself what it meant to be feminine or masculine. That I could reclaim symbols in a new way. This practice has proven to not only be incredibly rewarding but freeing as well. I have realized just how much my perspective fluctuates and that this is not negative. My ideas around these things are fueled intuitively and that is how I ended up picking out the imagery for *Ruminations*. The front of the piece includes ten images that I associate with different aspects of my femininity and the back of the piece includes ten images that I associate with different aspects of my masculinity. The act of wearing this object suggests that this artwork can not only protect me, but it can energize me.

Making this piece felt like letting go of a specific kind of fear. One that was wrapped in the expectations of others. It seems there are countless barriers in the way of allowing the Self to exist freely. Barriers of expectations, past experiences, and the judgment of others to name a few. I have enjoyed, through the process of making *Ruminations*, the releasing of these barriers. Without concerning myself with the burden of explanation regarding intuitive decisions, I can look at this

piece retrospectively and revel in uncovering meaning. Much like other artworks I've made, there is something enticing about the things unsaid. Defining femininity and masculinity for myself is not something I wish to fully flesh out. The mysterious continues to draw us in, beckoning to us with promises of something wonderful. This piece works not only as a recollection of my past restrictive mindset around gender identity but as a reclamation of such things. This is why I decided that the piece needed to be worn by me when documenting. The closer I get to letting go of past attachments, the easier the choice is to let my artwork become worn.

Armor or chainmail came to mind often as I considered making *Ruminations* and their inherent attachments to masculinity certainly intrigued me. I am much more interested in the overlap and connections found between feminine and masculine attributes than the things that explicitly separate them. So often what we deem as feminine or masculine is based on language, especially in languages besides English, although it still occurs with English words. Since I had already been working with found dictionary images, it seemed fitting to source the imagery for this piece in a book focused on language. I gathered up twenty images and through intuitive gut feelings I separated them into two groups. I took note of certain overlaps and some images that seemed to be very related across the two groups. This overlap is where the in-between space exists for me. What a thrill, to allow myself to move through these spaces on a whim. To feel connected to the roughness of certain masculine energy while also relating to a deeply rooted strength I associate with femininity.

I consider this piece an evocative object, and so I have to imagine what the object evokes. Seeing it worn and experiencing it worn provided me with an elevated connection to the artwork itself. Not only was it made by me, but it was also made for me to wear as a subtle declaration; an

elusive rebellion against the perspective that was ingrained in me. No longer is femininity attached to submissiveness or passivity. No longer is masculinity out of my grasp, an opportunity for freedom and control that I had no way of accessing. The sturdiness of an unlit candle can symbolize masculine energy whereas the smooth-edged medieval helmet can symbolize feminine energy simply because I accept it to be so. Gender should not require explanation. Sharpness should not insinuate gender preference.

I can be cruel without claiming manhood. I can be tender without claiming womanhood. I can appear androgynous without claiming the in-between.

For some time it was difficult for me to release my attachments to womanhood. I was proud to be a woman and being anything else would diminish this pride. The myth of the Self is not meant to be fully defined or understood. In my creative process, the myth of the Self is elusive, hard to pin down and it is much more exciting to treat it this way. By sliding up and down the spectrum of feminine and masculine, my existence is full and well-rounded, like a juicy red apple; its taste is sweet and crunchy, perfectly satisfying.

While much of my work is infused with complexity and layered context, I often prefer art objects that leave space for projection. As I project my own private meaning onto the imagery I mine from the dictionaries, I hope the viewer does the same with context from their own lives. The way I see an elegant Siamese cat is most likely different than the way someone else might see her, as it goes with all of the images I use in *Ruminations*. This is how I maintain the magic of the work without illustrating the imagery myself. Through careful placement, I make sure evidence of intentionality exists in the art without giving context to the intentions.

This way of making has been an uphill battle for a few years. I often feel perfectly content to sit in my resentment. To ruminate on the past in a severely negative way. I can hold a grudge for a lifetime and I most likely always will, but it is an exhausting practice to let this mindset take over my artistic practice. Letting go is not something I willingly desire to do. Being wronged, being hurt and mistreated, are hard things to forgive. Yet I ponder over whether letting go means forgiving. I consider whether the rage that is tethered to my insides is such a bad thing if it fuels me to keep going. Maybe enlightenment does not equal complete neutrality. Or maybe it does and I am choosing to reshape it to make room for my issues. I know plenty of people that cling to their reactions to past trauma as if they are trophies that prove their resilience. I am this serrated blade of a person in spite of the way I was raised as a girl and I find immense satisfaction in the fact that I persisted. Letting go of such intricately woven religious mindsets is an ongoing practice and each of my works holds a piece of this practice inside of it.

*Ruminations on Femininity, Masculinity & the In-Between* is, at its core, a profession of something I have kept so close to my chest that I feared its reception by others, but is this facing of fear not the point of artmaking to some extent? To push your own private and unspoken boundaries, in hopes of discovering something fresh and intriguing? Perhaps yes, perhaps no. The answer is not the part I'm drawn to, but rather the question itself. I interpret this space as the one where the Self does not cower from internal fears or trepidation, but welcomes them in and then shifts the perspective.

The Object As A Reminder



*fig. 8*



*fig. 9*

In the exhibition, the piece titled *Your Presence Is A Reminder* (see *fig. 9*) sits next to *Ruminations* (see *fig. 8* for installation shot) on the wall. I chose to place it there because I felt that it was important to acknowledge the unresolved aspects of this work as a whole. No matter how deeply I persist with my exploration of meaning surrounding femininity and masculinity, there is always the presence of my past. This gauntlet acts as another charged object, but the context is potentially less freeing. It is a reminder of the armor forged as protection. While *Ruminations* resembles armor aesthetically, it also holds a fragility in its physicality. I created this print of a gauntlet because I want to be reminded of the way it once was. We hold on to parts of ourselves, even the parts we are not quite proud of—because they are still us. By placing these two pieces together, I hope to evoke a moment of contemplation of these two different ways of grappling with the past; one that charges forward into a new perspective and one that manages to remain planted in the past.



### WHERE THE RAGE LIVES

*Serrated edges, ornamentations of torture,  
jagged ruinous remnants.*

*Those defensive meanderings are  
misplaced in the absence of that former authority.*

*Instead, an internal seething persists  
in the very tips of my fingers and tongue,  
rushing to the forefront of my mind like  
a stampede of carnivorous beasts.*

*The rage mostly lives in my gut now,  
that land which is filled with hardy  
soil, unruly thorns, and empty caverns.*

When making work that refers to personal trauma, I wanted to make sure that it no longer sat at the forefront of the overarching theme in DIRTY DIVINITY. While familial and religious trauma was arguably the starting point of this entire collection, it has progressed from that place in many ways. I often describe the act of marinating in my feelings towards my past as ‘sitting in my resentment’ because it feels much like I am choosing to place myself in the most emotionally



charged part of my mind. I have a lot of unresolved anger towards my childhood that might not ever dissipate entirely.



*fig. 10*



*fig. 11*



*fig. 12*

The change that my artistic process has undergone in the past year has meant a rehoming of the anger and resentment that formally eclipsed the work. Rage now lives in the quiet moments; the sharp edges, the rather aggressively exaggerated flames, the watchful eyes detached from a body, drops of blood from an invisible wound (see *fig. 10*, *fig. 11* & *fig. 12* for examples). Rage is an emotion that capsizes all the others if you are not used to its presence. Contrarily, when you come to find familiarity in this burning sensation that situates itself in the body as well as the mind, you can learn to subdue it. I am interested in what happens when someone must persist through life with deep-rooted rage and not *react*. What happens when one must shrink their rage to fit inside the palm of their hand, so they can carry it with them always? It becomes a totem, a protective charm, one more we are confronted with the idea of an object as a reminder. This fiery indignation lives with you always, sustained by the very things that harmed you before it existed.

In Leonora Carrington's book, *Down Below*, Marina Warner writes of the artist, "Leonora had this in common with Ernst, that she had been brought up a Catholic and reveled in mischievous blasphemy..." (Carrington x) This book is an inscription of Carrington's time in a mental institute in the early 1940s. Carrington is quoted by Warner in the introduction, saying "...she would still remember how it felt: 'a burning inside, you know how when something really touches you, it feels like burning.'" (Carrington viii) This type of language—*mischievous blasphemy*, *a burning inside*—speaks of this charged emotion I refer to often that resides in the body, a desire for subtle rebellion, a mentioning of deep anguish and its need to be portrayed in the artwork. I not only connect with Carrington's desire to build a surreal world with her own lexicon of meaning, I feel linked to the very real and distraught emotion behind her work. It is macabre and unsettling, hard to understand at times.

I often consider femininity when I think of my own anger and bitterness and how it exists in this work. I think of other women artists with plenty of reason to be rageful and how so often, that emotion is interwoven so cleverly into their art. It is sorrowful and unending. This is where the rage lives; in the familiar comfort of subtlety.



### CREATURES OF SELF

*You carry inside of you everything,  
the meat of your living body aches—  
the bones suffocate, filled to the brim with matter,  
there is no room to spare.*

*The tunnels sending viscous liquid to and fro  
whisper desperate pleas for respite,  
there is a place inside the inside.*

*It is dark and wet and warm,  
you slip through the opening into the Other Place—  
the deeper vessel holds the trueness of everything  
a strange comfort, a lit candle unchanging, a bird,  
a creature covered in black liquid  
whispers its first words,  
'I am yours, do with me what you will'*



*fig. 13*



*fig. 14*

This body of work utilizes animals as symbols in every iteration of materiality. They persist whether via Gelli-plate print, handmade object, found imagery, or in book form. Their importance cannot be overstated as they are the vehicles in which I project meaning. There are some creatures whose meaning is solidified through increased repetition (the hound and the swan for example) and there are others whose meaning is more fluid, and harder to pin down (the alligator and the hare). As I build this lexicon of animals to hold purpose, I have found that this is where intuitive practice takes place most heavily. Carl Jung writes about the purpose of symbols in *Man and His Symbols*, "...we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot define or fully comprehend. This is one of the reasons why all religions employ symbolic language or image." (Jung 4)

I see significance in replacing meaning in the symbols I use. For example, the dragon. The spiked serpent that has persisted in storytelling for centuries is dripping with context. Like many of my recurring imagery, the dragon has been ascribed countless meanings by many groups of people. In some instances, it has been projected upon as a purveyor of sinful nature. Unlike the great beast in a heroic story to be overcome by the knight on horseback, the dragon was an emblem of demonic ideology and therefore, many stories of religious saints defeating the creature are recorded. The green dragon was considered to symbolize the unknown forest land, where wild boar and wolves roamed as true threats. The greenness of their skin, fur, or feathers indicated the greenness of what we fear, the looming threat of a mysterious natural world. Eventually, the symbol of the dragon shifted to indicate power and influence. The great beast was an emblem of wealth rather than one of cruelty. While I tend to prefer to understand the dragon in my work as an icon of the unknown, I find myself drawn to these shifting meanings in the recurring ideograms of humanity. I have no heedless assumptions that my projected meanings are original and have no interest in originality

either. My interest lies in what my preferred meanings say about myself and those who connect with them. Defining oneself through their interpretation of symbolic imagery can help us to divulge greater meaning if we so desire. If we do not, there is still space for simple contemplation and easy accessibility that demands no more than surface consideration and connection. The imagery I work with does not demand one over the other but holds space for both deep introspection and restful observation.

### **The Last 29 Sentences**

*(Words taken directly from the book)*

This splintering of the story takes place in the land of Self, an internal space where the collective archetypes perform their rituals of meaning. A shift occurs when the exterior mind collides with the interior in search of the Great Self, which leads to the parturition of the Dweller; the one who will dutifully—but not without anguish—traverse this inner landscape in search of answers and perhaps ultimately: contentment.

29 – change, growth, new beginnings, endings, conclusions, the number of bones in the head.



A signal of transfiguration, sent by blood, by claws, by hooves, by fire, by wood, by that which crawls upon my skin. The Proclamation is worn on the bodies of all those interior inhabitants; an announcement of change and the end of a story. When it is time, the expulsion of the dwellers does not occur without suffering, but it is known and necessary for the journey to begin. The dwellers

swarm like gnats, but they have teeth like childhood and there is a confusing obligation to let them bite. Suddenly, they are drawn to the flame of the candle like sinful creatures, sacred in their inclination for wicked rest.

*Sometimes I dream that I've sharpened my teeth and when I wake I am disappointed to find their edges have dulled.* Separated from the rest, beloved and chosen, They linger when the others disperse.

The place They sink into is full of dark liquid, warm like the womb, lit by a sharp candlelight that never goes out. The thorns are a reminder that They need no forgiveness, They need no saving, They need nothing from that accursed spirit that reaches for Them from the darkness.

*I protect the rage as if I would be nothing without it—it is rooted inside of me so wonderfully I could cry.* There is a sudden prickling of the skin, like a haunting of the desires of everyone who came before Them; it is gone as quickly as it arrived.

As if time were passing, They made their way through the forest and took the mist with Them, heavy footsteps, heavy breath, heavy aches, heavy eyes. Forsake the earth and be satisfied for only a moment, suspended by flight, ignorance, and hopefulness. Ragged with dissent, They adorn the metal like a second skin,

*"I do not want this beast to be slain!"* They say as They press the knife into her gut. The blood between Their nails is Their own. They could not move—They only imagined being left alone with Their thoughts forever and it horrified Them.

*God was the first demon I ever swallowed, they tasted like rotten fruit and I saved their seeds but refused to plant them.*



Barely beneath the surface, the submerged hound weeps because she did not want to fight the devil away any longer—oh to be eaten by the worms and caressed by the earth, but never to be known deeply.

*Buried dutifully, she has outgrown the grave you dug for her and I see this fearful creature—frightened and forced defender—as a beacon for all you wished to cast out. Sanctuary—that trickster, that scoundrel—it taunts Them with the promise of rest when there is none to be had in this Selfish land. That which inhabits the glow terrifies as much as it reveals.*

And so, into that familiar place They continue, a procession of desperation, an embodiment of a festering desire to continue to the very end. They realized the presence of another unexpectedly, and all at once, they followed covered in afterbirth and admiration—They wanted to disregard them, but they were born of this land too and more like Them than they ever could be. Through the valley of despair, the pair are confronted with that nasty emptiness and they know it will always remain. *Does the mist ever clear?* One asked and the Other worried about this as well, silently hoping it never would. Then there was a sudden vanishing all at once of unworldly desires and the absence left them shivering, unsettled, wondering what could possibly be next. “There it is, that cursed tragedy of Arrival, it confronts us with its unavoidability, its allurements, its devastation.”

*Am I meant to miss the Great Search when it brought so much pain?* They wondered, but it was far too late. On the outside now, it felt much like the moments before they were singularly begotten into the land of Self; quiet, endless, enduring.



*(End of book)*

I chose the format of a book so I could express this story in a more traditional and linear way. Where much of my work exists as part of a larger disjointed story, I wanted to see what changed in the work when I shifted the configuration. I reference the book as a symbol often, whether through the use of aged book pages to print on or by using the book itself as a found object, it holds power in my work. In my eyes, it is the ultimate emblem of storytelling, sharing knowledge, and connecting humans. There is an intimacy in reading a book—in touching it, collecting it, understanding it. As I am interested in what triggers reactions of tenderness in us, I often use the symbol of the book to reference this. With that said, I had yet to create my own book from imagery or written word. This is a large reason why I chose to create *The Last 29 Sentences*.

In this book, I lead the viewer through the Land of Self: a visual representation of the inner workings of the individual. By visualizing it as a land to traverse, there is an opportunity to approach the recurring symbols of the mind as actual imagery versus concepts that oftentimes slip through our fingers. The concreteness of a visual language offers something to hold on to, something to handle with care or violence, or indifference.

The inhabitants of the Land of Self exist as symbolic animals performing archetypal roles (see *fig. 13* & *fig. 14* for examples of animals in an environment). As the body and mind become aware of this land inside of them, it triggers a shift. The animals of Self feel this shift and begin to spread the message of change throughout the land. A black hound, which embodies the masculinity of womanhood breathes/births the Dwellers. The Dwellers—insertions into an unfamiliar land—are the mischiefs of Self, manifestations of internal introspection. I use the word mischief to describe these horned and winged figures because I see them as the unpredictable moment, the spice of uncertainty. The embodiment of those frazzling experiences that leave you blushing, running, laughing. They sit on your shoulder and climb in your ear. Easily swayed, erratic in their emotions and movements. We are them, most of the time. The interchanging of oneself as the mischief is significant in this story of 29 sentences. I am drawn to the ability to see myself in certain characters and this projection not always remaining consistent. There is fluidity in where I recognize myself in the work and where I am more conflicted. The inconsistency feels utterly real in this way.

Most of them, after being born, are chaotic in life and eventually find death in the flame of an alluring candle. All except for one, the chosen one to journey through the land of Self. All the while, they have dark thoughts and dismal musings that give a glimpse of the external world that coexists with the internal Self. These thoughts insinuate that perhaps there is more to this story that is out of reach for the viewer.

This land is often shifting and changing, as it does when the surviving Dweller finds themselves holding the candle that caused the death of their siblings. There are inklings of another dweller, but for the most part, the Dweller continues on their own. They battle a great dragon despite their innate desire not to. They gain acolytes along the way and lose them as well. It is apparent that this is their journey alone for now and that the things they must do to travel through the land of Self are not always what they *want* to do.

They arrive at a castle, guarded by a giant hound, much like the one who birthed them; this repetition is meant to feel surreal yet significant. The Dweller hopes to find rest in the castle but is not welcomed inside so they continue on. Rest will not come to them just yet. The Dweller enters a forest, being led by a recurring lantern. They find themselves in front of a giant gate where, to their surprise, is another Dweller. This gate is important, but it is not the Gateway they reach at the end of this journey. Once more, repetition conflicts with meaning. They continue in the land of Self together, journeying on top of the black hound through a valley. This addition of another mischief is meant to have multiple meanings; the introduction of a lover as an archetypical aspect of the story is meant to be referenced, but I am more interested in the possibility that this second character is simply another version of the first. As I consider ideas of the exterior and interior Self clashing with one another, it feels significant that the Dweller finds another as they near the end of this journey.

As they sense that they are getting to the end of the land of Self, they begin to doubt this inevitable completion. It slowly horrifies them that perhaps it was foolish to try to understand the land in its entirety instead of simply existing as part of the land. Nonetheless, they arrive at the end and are faced with the beginning. By this, they realize the cyclical nature of their own existence and that maybe this means there will be more to explore one day in a new land. Either way, they are comforted by the familiar existence they knew before entering Self.

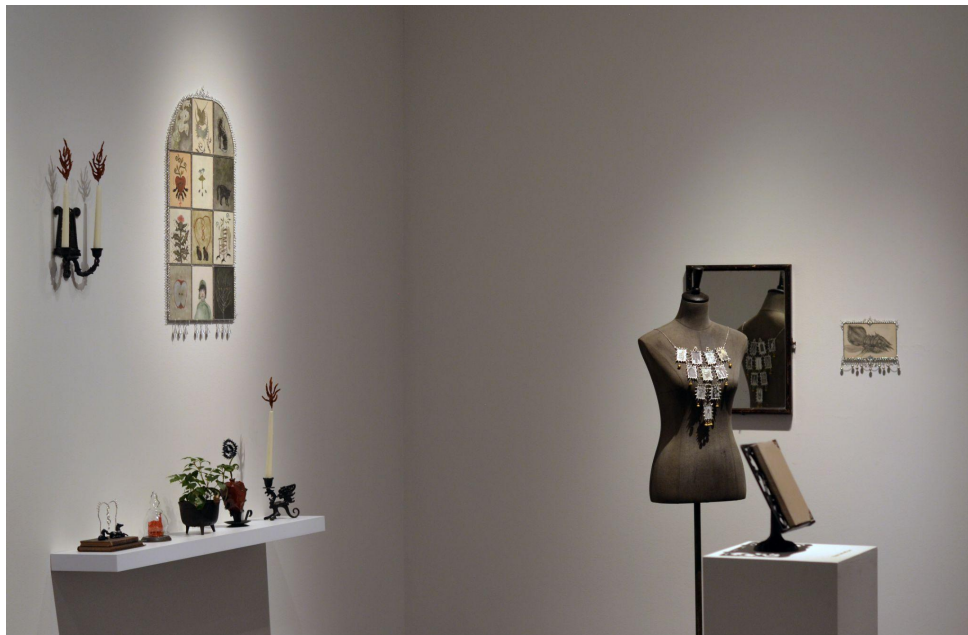
It was never my intention to express some deeply unique or profoundly original story through *The Last 29 Sentences*. On the contrary, I want to embrace a story that has been told many times before. To retell the adventure of self-discovery through the lens of a creature journeying across an internal space. I use the Jungian ideology of the Great Self as an environment to explore and one that has an ending point. The Dweller is inserted into the interior space as a result of convergence with the exterior mind. The conscious and subconscious intermingle and this story is what follows.

### **THE END & THE BEGINNING & WHATEVER ELSE THERE IS**

Through all of the moving parts of this exhibition, my intention is to portray a sense of connectedness. Beyond the details of personal meaning, there is a sensation of longing to feel larger than the individual that is pervasive throughout each piece. As I expressed earlier, originality is a lonesome endeavor. This collection of work has situated itself within a mindset that reaches out not only into the past but into the present as well. In those mere seconds of interaction an image, object, or word may have with a viewer, I wish I could be privy to those intimate reactions. Even that desire

of mine holds true to the contradictory nature of this exhibition. It's a relationship between what we desire and what we know we cannot have.

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