

Lost
Psyche

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POLIXENI PAPAPETROU

The Troubadour
150 x 100 cm
pigment ink print



The Storyteller
100 x 150 cm
pigment ink print



Bouquet by Brueghel the Elder

Unlikely bouquet, impossible bundle, chaotic pillar,

Millefleur

aged flowers and young flowers, appearing out of a night, like a vision ripped from a nightmare. Amidst heavy languid exhausted petals, unmistakable youth. Some of them alive in fate, the others in the illusion of life,

fantasy and nature forged, a fiction formed by the hand of man, then formed again, joy without concern, enchantment, a thrill for the retina,

your joy of a day,

like a dreamed garden, a fairy's mane, like the bush of the creator, a bucolic explosion, efflorescence of the ephemeral,

a silent cry of colour, like a Harlequin's costume,

a fire of flowers, a frenzied garden,

a dishevelled costume or an opulent garment, the velvet of a nymph, the promise of voluptuousness, a calm and sumptuous offering of mane and fleece, an affluent discourse, language freed.

Le Bouquet de Bruegel-le-Vieux

Bouquet improbable, impossible brassée, colonne désordonnée,

Millefleur

fleurs mûres et jeunes fleurs, apparaissent dans une nuit, une vision arrachée au cauchemar, entre lourds pétales, lassés, épuisés, transparente jeunesse, les unes dans le destin, les autres dans l'illusion de la vie,

fantaisie et fausse nature, fiction exercée par la main de l'homme, recrée, gaité sans souci, conjuration, magie pour la rétine,

bonheur du jour,

jardin rêvé, chevelure de fée, buisson du créateur,

explosion bucolique, efflorescence de l'éphémère,

cri silencieux de la couleur, costume d'Arlequin,

feu de fleurs, jardin échevelé,

costume dégrafé et riche habit, velours de nymphe,

promesse de la volupté, offrande calme et somptueuse, de la chevelure et de la toison, riche discours, parole libre.

The Merchant
100 x 150 cm
pigment ink print



The Antiquarian
150 x 100 cm
pigment ink print



The Immigrant
100 x 150 cm
pigment ink print



Water Boy

by Tony Birch

The boys were walking the dirt track heading to the water early in the morning. One boy was walking beside a bicycle, the other slung a fishing net over his shoulder. The bicycle was heavy and rusted and prehistoric, constructed from scrap metal. As the boys rounded a bend on the track they came across an old man curled into a ball, in the dirt. An overcoat covered his body. It was dusted in a fine layer of frost. He had been lying on the ground all night. The boy wheeling the bike let it drop to the ground. He ran to the man and tried shaking him awake.

‘Are you okay there?’ he asked.

The old man opened his eyes. He was too weak to talk. Together the boys sat him up and rested his body against the base of a tree. The boy spoke to him again but the old man did not answer him. He stared vacantly through the boys, into the distance. His eyes wept milk and blood ran from his cracked lips.

The boys collected the bike and fishing net and ran the last section of track, searching for the old men who gathered on the water together. The water was home to those who had none. The men had found sanctuary on the water for many years. The man on the track was one of their own, and once the boys had told the men who they had come across, they stumbled and climbed and rolled and found their way to their friend.

‘So that’s where he got to,’ one of the men said to the others. He then explained to the young boys, about the old man, ‘he didn’t show up last night and we was thinking he got himself into strife.’

One of the men leaned forward and shook the old man’s body, just as the boy had done.

‘Come on, fella. Time for breakfast.’

The old man collapsed onto his side, his eyes closed and his skin turned instantly grey. Each of the old men had seen more than enough death and knew straight up that their friend was dead. Neither of the boys knew the sight of a dead body and were not sure what they were looking at, although they were filled with a shaking fear.

The old man who had touched the body of his friend took a straw hat from his head and stood in silence. Another man, short and squat, standing behind him, stood on his tiptoes.

‘What’s up with him?’

‘He’s dead. Simple as that.’

Nobody spoke a word. The men, together, lowered their heads to the ground. The old man lying in the dirt, under the tree, in the morning light, looked no bigger than a young boy. He had chubby sausages for fingers and a fringe of hair disguising his face.

‘You boys best go,’ the old man with the straw hat ordered the boys. ‘You need to be leaving. We got work to do. And you’re too young to see what we have seen too much of.’

The boys could not make sense of what the old man was asking them to do. They wanted to know what would happen with the old man’s body. They did not want to leave and think of him lying alone, in the cold and dark for another night. They refused to leave, so the old man shrugged his shoulders, put his hat back on his head and told the boys they could please themselves. He then asked the other

men to join him in carrying the body of their dead friend to the water. When one of the boys asked the man where they would be taking the body he looked at him.

‘I told you to leave. You don’t want to leave, then you wait and watch and learn and understand this is life and death. Here.’

The other men seemed to know what to do. They each gathered an arm and leg of their friend and walked along the track behind the man with the straw hat. As they marched on the boys chased after the leading man, asking again where they were taking the body. The man again took the hat from his head and held it to his chest. He explained to the boys what it was he and his troupe of pallbearers were doing.

‘We are the men who belong with the water. Away from here we are nothing but worthless souls. If we have souls at all. After we die with have no family to speak for us. No one to pray over a grave for us. Worse than this sadness, there is no piece of ground we can afford to rest in. When men such as us lay down dead in the street, like this man, or when his heart stops in a hospital ward, or he’s beaten to death in the lockup, men like us with no money and no name once we’re gone, they put us in a hole in the ground, with other lost bodies, the dead babies, and the amputated arms and legs. We are the paupers of this world, and when we go, and if we go in that big hole in the ground, our bones fuse with the bones of others, and we are lost and found at the same time.’

The man mopped his brow, returned his hat to his head for the final time and looked down at the body being carried on the track.

‘The hole in the ground was never for him.’

At the water's edge the men joined together in prayer, followed by a song, the words of which were lost in the hard wind coming by. Under the instruction of their leader the four men walked into the water nursing the burden of their friend. The young boys watched, feeling that the dead man was about to die a second time. On the command of Amen the men released their friend. To the surprise of each of them he stayed a few moments longer, floating in the water, face up and smiling. His feet went first, followed by his legs and slim hips and chest, until only his face appeared above the water. He took one last look at the sky above and the world around him and said goodbye to this world.

The old men and the young boys watched as below the surface of the water, the body and soul of the dead man drifted from this world to the next.

The following summer the boys were on the water with their fishing net and bike. They were searching for fish but had found none. The boy with the bike noticed bubbles coming to the surface of the water. He called to the other boy to grab his net, dip it below the water and try catching the fish. The boy did as his friend asked and soon found that his net was heavy and full. Between them the struggling boys lifted the fishing net from the water and dropped it on the bank. They stood back, staring with wonder at their catch.

It was another boy. He was naked and slightly younger than both of them. He disentangled himself from the net and stood up. His long hair was a tangle of weeds, twigs and bird feathers, and his body was covered in fine bloody scratches and bruises. If he was in pain at all he did not show it. He looked at them with little interest before turning away and diving into the water, perfectly, without a sound or splash. He disappeared swifter than he had arrived and did not resurface.

The boys were sure they had imagined all they had seen. They packed their fishing net and collected the bicycle and were about to leave for home when there was a sound in the water behind them. The water boy walked from the water and stood in front of them. Although they were curious they could not bring themselves to speak to him. They would have preferred to turn and run away but could not move.

Eventually the boy with the fishing net released his stiffened tongue and opened his mouth and asked the water boy if he was dead. He did not answer. Both the boys wondered if he could speak at all. He was asked again if he was dead or alive. He responded by resting his head back, looking up at the sky and allowing tears of milk to run down his cheeks. As soon as they hit the ground the water boy disappeared from sight. And where the tears had fallen a pair of holes appeared in the dirt. They widened and deepened until they threatened to swallow the boys. They stood back and watched as the two holes became one and stopped growing. In the bottom of the hole lay many thousands of bones: the bones of lost boys and lonely men, and young girls and newborn babies. The boy with the fishing net was so frightened of what he was looking at he could think of nothing to do but throw his net into the water. As soon as he did the hole closed over and the bones were gone.

As the sun went down that night a group of old men stood and watched two young boys dragging a bike between them. The old men wished for nothing more than to hold back the world and wish they were young again. The two young boys had seen something of themselves, far off into the future, but coming for them just the same.

The Summer Clown
150 x 100 cm
pigment ink print



The Poet
100 x 150 cm
pigment ink print



The Angel of the Home

She appears like a moving target in the tall grasses along the shoulder. And just as rigid, in the summer landscape. But she's dressed like Max Ernst's Angel of Hearth and Home, flamboyant rags layered over the chest, hat on top, feet naked on the little stones that make up the asphalt.

The cab has put on its blinker and deviates slightly, out of caution.

"Stop!"

The driver stops the car, past the bend.

I trot up to the woman.

But a second woman has appeared. There's no saying where she came from; she wasn't here before. She's on foot too. But there's no other car standing by.

She doesn't recognize me.

Drivers slow down, drive at a crawl, and graze past us like you would to gawk at an accident.

"Hello, Ma'am," one woman says to the other.

Then grabs her elbow. Come along now.

"It's all right to take a stroll!"

"Well, no, it isn't. Not this far out. And why don't you have any shoes on!"

L'ange du foyer

Elle a surgi dans l'herbe haute du bas-côté comme une cible à pigeon-vole. Aussi raide dans la nature de l'été. Pourtant elle est vêtue comme l'Ange du foyer de Max Ernst, avec des oripeaux flamboyants et des superpositions sur le buste, et chapeau en haut, les pieds nus sur les petits cailloux qui font le lit de l'asphalte.

Le taxi a mis son clignotant et il fait une petite embardée prudente.

— « Arrêtez-vous ! »

Le chauffeur arrête la voiture après le virage.

Je trotte vers la femme.

Maintenant une deuxième femme est apparue. Je ne sais pas d'où elle vient, elle n'était pas là avant. Elle est à pied elle aussi. Pas d'autre voiture arrêtée. Elle ne me reconnaît pas.

Les automobilistes ralentissent, roulent au pas et nous longent, comme on regarde les accidents.

— Bonjour Madame, dit une femme à l'autre.

Elle lui prend le coude. Venez.

— Ah, mais on a bien le droit de se promener !

— Eh bien non, pas si loin. Et puis pourquoi vous n'avez pas de chaussures!

The Daydreamer
100 x 150 cm
pigment ink print



The Duchess
150 x 100 cm
pigment ink print



The Orientalist
100 x 150 cm
pigment ink print



Polixeni Papapetrou — The Lost Psyche Project



Polixeni Papapetrou
working with Olympia
on the set for *The Daydreamer*
Photo: Roy Chu

TONY BIRCH was born in Melbourne into a large family of Aboriginal, West Indian and Irish descent. As a young boy he attended his local Catholic primary school and was an altar boy. As an adolescent he was expelled from two high schools for fighting and found trouble with the police. His challenging and difficult upbringing was captured in his debut semi-autobiographical book, *Shadowboxing* (Scribe, 2006). He has also authored *Father's Day* (Hunter, 2009), *Blood* (UQP, 2011) which was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award and *The Promise* (UQP, 2014). In addition to being a regular guest at writers' festivals, Tony teaches in the School of Culture and Communications at the University of Melbourne. He has five children and lives in Melbourne.

EMMANUELLE GUATTARI, born in 1964, grew up at the nonstandard clinic of La Borde, (at Cour-Cheverny, in the Loir-et-Cher, France) renowned in the world of psychiatry. The clinic owed much to psychoanalyst and philosopher Félix Guattari who was co-director until 1992. Both her parents worked there for their entire lives. She has taught French and English in the United States and in France. Emmanuelle is the author of *La Petite Borde* (Mercure de France 2012, Folio Gallimard 2013, translated into English by E. C. Belli as *I, Little Asylum* (Semiotext(e) MIT Press 2014), *Ciels de Loire* (Mercure de France 2013) and her forthcoming book will be published in January 2015. She has three children and lives in Paris.

POLIXENI PAPAPETROU was born in Melbourne in the 1960s to Greek immigrants. Her childhood experience of feeling as an outsider in a then predominantly Anglo Saxon culture led her to question definitions of identity. Her sympathy for otherness remains a key element of her life and work. As a photomedia artist her images explore the relationship between history, contemporary culture and identity. Since 2002 she has photographed children dressing up, performing and wearing masks as a way of exploring the portrayal of childhood identity. Her work includes *Elvis Immortal* (1987-2002), *Curated Bodies* (1996), *Searching for Marilyn* (2002), *Phantomwise* (2002), *Dreamchild* (2003), *Wonderland* (2004), *Haunted Country* (2006), *Games of Consequence* (2008), *Between Worlds* (2009-2012), *The Dreamkeepers* (2012), *The Ghillies* (2013) and *Lost Psyche* (2014). She has two children and lives in Melbourne.

POLIXENI PAPAPETROU

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