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**Yakira Ament | Song of the Snake**

**Curator: Yael Katz Ben Shalom**

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**I am a bird, I am a snake**

The image is summoned in a dream—a beginning embodying form and/or text, a magical means to establish contact with the beyond, sometimes conjured by language or ritual, used to divine, to reveal hidden verbal or visual knowledge of the future. A raw material that summons conscious, human, enigmatic resonance. The passiveness of the dreaming body giving way to a sustained rhythmic motion, accompanied by sound, submitting to the act of painting and sculpting in an ecstatic ritual of passion and emotion that calls forth the dance and leads the hands to the material—charcoal, chalk, stone, pigment, canvas, water, clay, fire, and bronze; light and shadow, liberated form of authenticity.

Divination is the operating principle hat attempts to predict the future by acting upon nature in keeping with a system of rules, like witchcraft. In Ament’s work, divination is an artistic practice, a journey to the abstract through concrete images connected by the action of the body. The objects writhe, as if charged with magical force and, in so doing, seek out the numinous, emerging from the female body towards their transformative potential, with the intention of realising a prediction.

The ritual involves the body, sound, and emotion, the knowledge and ecstasy of stimulation and seduction, the interaction between the body and material, concept and emotion, activity and passivity, the ephemeral and the eternal, and the force that confronts chaos and the psycho-cultural structure of ‘redemptive’ enlightenment. Thoughts of the source of Ament’s imagery turn to the image of the entwined snake as ‘a universal symbol of the answer to the question where do the principles of destruction, death, and pain come from?’, in the words of Aby Warburg. Writhing is the main artery, a concrete image that constructs the facts and reveals the existential feeling of heroic authenticity. The writhing of the snake that whispers its antiquity, chaos struggling against the divine ever since the creation myths of the Bible and the ancient Near East. A nocturnal snake that traces its primordial path in a long, writhing motion, overcoming the obstacle of vital organs, in an upward motion along a vertical rod. The dynamic force of the writhing never loses contact with the totemic axis, but links heaven and earth, evoking duality, the wild and the erotic alongside repression and concealment, turning everything on its head.

Three snakes coil around the legs of a standing woman, forming a mutant hybrid of her body and theirs. An armless woman trapped in a mythical, spiral net of thought, frozen in the chaotic world of symbols. A woman, with a ball-crown on her head, one leg bent and the other extended, as if covered in leaves, skins, and snakes, poised to dance ecstatically, to unite with nature; a woman who knows the Dionysian mystery, present in her enduring abandonment, in the liminal experience of female liberation. A bronze statue that is part octopus, connected to four muscles signifying the four cardinal directions, stands on the legs of birds of prey. A chicken- or bird-like torso, coils like the totem of a dragon opening a feminine mouth to fertility. The encounter between reality, imagination, and fantasy produces a manipulative performance, between up and down, Heaven and Hell. Emotion, spirit, and need are given expression in a hybrid of human anatomy and nature in an assertion of erotica and death anxiety.

These mythological creatures were born of the encounter between the rhythms of trance, techno, and rock and the world of martial arts—based on the movements of animals and birds. They are interwoven with the erotic forms of marine vegetation and creatures from a mysterious world, intertwined with motifs from the natural world and organic shapes of the genitals and face of an androgynous body. Twisted and terrifying eroticism, grotesque and lewd. Sexual and debased, physical and other. The fingerprints sunken in the bronze and patina in a range of blacks, browns, greens, and reds. A coarse and gnarled texture gives way to a smooth and delicate surface, mediaeval mystical motifs connect to art-nouveau-like gothic adornments, borrowed from nature, swallowed by and emerging from and into serrated and polished shapes. Maintaining constant unifying contact with what appears to detach.

The totality of Ament’s art ranges from the apocalyptic to a longing for the sublime. The idea of humanity and the self-perception that demands a new definition are placed at the centre of creation. The transition from charcoal and pigment or clay to bronze is the transition from the ephemeral to the eternal, from fragility and mutability to stability and solidity; from water to fire, from fleeting touch to connection, from intuition to feeling. A process that begins with the desire to dismantle the whole—the human condition as a product of complex relationships with nature and matter—continues with change that can be effected, and concludes with reshaping (of the human condition). Human-natureas a reference to trans-humanism and the aspiration to ‘technological singularity’—to convergence with human-machine.

A requiem of the human?

Lilies, the name of which evokes Adam’s first wife, Lilith, created from the earth—who is also a deadly demon—combine with eggs, wings, horns and trumpets, symbols that denote pride and strength, and the Satanic pentagram, to reveal the morbidness of the dark side, mystery, and the occult. Impulses, ideas, and symbolic forms receive magical, totemistic expression—representing chaos but also fertility and healing (as in the case of the biblical ‘serpent of brass’ [Num. 21]) and the inner form assumed in relation to the Jungian archetype of death and rebirth. painting on canvas with dry charcoal or red pigment and water. Manifestations of nature. Amorphous shapes painted as if they were close-ups of the sculptures, funnels and concentric ditches (Dante’s ‘evil ditches’, in which those guilty of fraud are punished), like a thick wood reminiscent of the circular motions in the illustrations of Gustave Doré or the suicides transformed into trees and devoured by harpies in the seventh circle of Hell). The seaweed and vegetation in ‘Red pulse’ are transformed by Ament through subtraction and erasure of the colour on the white canvas. Red chalk, infused with water, diluted, a dense cluster of oxygen-absorbing pixels that leave a faded red monochromatic space. Delicate painting on canvas with pigment derived from red stone mixed with water. The water floods the white canvas, in a motion that leads brush and sponge until contours appear. A river that no one has ever bathed in—like being in Limbo and experiencing the longing for Heaven without ever reaching it.

Yael Katz Ben Shalom, June 2023