Yema

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
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Artist Statement

My work springs from my belief in a feminine creation myth. Both evolution and genesis are skewed in favor of masculinity. In my view, women are the source of life, and I strongly associate my art making with the female reproductive process. My subconscious mind dreams of my pregnant forehead, moldy placenta, and platters of fish. Each night, within this feminine landscape, my dreams also tell me—in great detail—what to do in my studio: “mix plaster with sawdust”, “braid cornhusk”, “work as if making a sandcastle”, “think in pale yellow”. Feminine origins are so central to my practice and my being, that I use a matronymic last name, De Maryela (from my mother’s first name).

This project began when received an Orthoceras Fossil in the mail. It was shipped to me accidentally. I wrote to the sender—an etsy shop—and they said that it was a mistake, but I could keep it. Orthocerae went extinct during the lower Triassic Period, approximately 200 million years ago. This animal-shell-fossil-object lived, died, and became stone about 194 million years before the earliest homosapiens existed, and it arrived at my doorstep by a neural glitch on the internet. I am fascinated by the existence of a time before history, before humans were alive to observe and tell stories about the world, and the way its vestiges filter into our lives—prehistory fuels our cars. I am also interested in a time after history, after our existence on this planet, and how human traces will filter into it. Beyond awe at a span of time beyond my comprehension, I was inspired by its yonic, tear-dropped form. I carved a blue base, which I lined with fur, and inlaid the fossil there.

This form led me to another, which I called “Vernal Pool”. It is a still pool, in a similar shape to the fossil, made from plaster, sawdust, and cornhusk. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art there are various Mayan clay figurines of deities born from corn, encased in a husk womb.
They are symbols of growth and regeneration. “Vernal Pool” contains these metaphors, but also appears polluted by its yellow color, crusting exterior, and the use of littered materials to create its landscape.

The work imagines a feminine origin myth within a speculative future. For much of history, women have been compared to nature– wild, unpredictable, and subject to male domination. My work seeks not to undo this comparison, but to engage it from an ecofeminist perspective, within an intuitive, experimental, and dream-guided studio practice. “Mother” earth is drying, but within this series, feminine and ancestral knowledge emerges from the cracks–dripping, draping, and laying eggs. Yema– Spanish for egg yolk– are forming, nourishing an embryonic age.
“Fossilization cast in fluorescent spotlight; bloodless menstruation; chain-link suspensions; animatronic dowsing rods; a stereoscopic Marian vision. This installation piece, in dreamlike pale yellow, slowly corrodes the barriers between sensuality and perversion, the sacred and profane, (wo)man and technology”, Stella Scanlon ‘24 concisely conveyed her impression of Yema.

The sculptures exhibited in Yema propose an alternate natural history from a chicana-futurist and ecofeminist perspective. Yema—egg yolk—the most delicious part of breakfast—is the nutrient-bearing portion of the egg. This non-human female source of nourishment is the anthropomorphic connective tissue of the works on display. At what moment does a woman become a bird, tree, puddle, insect, or cyborg? In Yema, materials such as shells, water, corn husk, cigarette butts, fossils, driftwood, bacteria, plastic, scientific apparatuses, and lace are used to express a feminine ecology. Sculptures levitate, drip, and glow, creating a dreamlike experience of a threatened world.
The exhibition takes the subjects of climate change, globalization, and contagion seriously, but also approaches the topics with warmth and absurd humor.

“Apparition”– a microscope turned sideways– literally subverts the scientific gaze. Looking through the microscope, the Virgen de Guadalupe is revealed. “Garden of Friendship” is an assemblage in which viewers are invited to examine shape-shifting samples of male DNA arranged on lace. In “Vernal Pool”, cigarette butts sprout as flowers, and yellow fluid is contained by a plastic bag— it is a fertile wetland in a world changed by global warming. It is both vagina and body.

Structured as a “Natural History Museum”, Yema leads us from prehistory to a distant speculative future, bookended by sculptural ‘artifacts’ (“Orthoceras Cloud” and “Liberty Leading the Nipple”). Carolyn Merchant wrote that “The ancient identity of nature as a nurturing mother links women’s history with the history of the environment and ecological change. The female earth was central to the organic cosmology that was undermined by the Scientific Revolution” (Merchant, The Death of Nature, xvi). The female earth (Pachamama) as an ancient idea at odds with the scientific revolution is central to this exhibition, in which the scientific method, divine feminine, and Latin-American folklore become integrated. Yema’s syncretism is at once sensual and clinical, clumsy and formal, sacred and deviant.
**Apparition, 2023**  
Microscope, lace

**Dowsing Rod, 2023**  
Wood, laboratory clamps, wax, resin

**Flood Flight, 2023**  
Wood, wax, resin, paint

**Garden of Friendship, 2023**  
Petri dishes, male DNA, lace
Loving an Egg at the End, 2023
Mixed media

Liberty Leading the Nipple, 2023
Mixed media

Orthoceras Cloud, 2023
Fossil, mixed media

Sana, Sana, 2023
Frog, resin
**Vernal Pool**, 2023
Corn husk, cigarette butts, plastic, mixed media

**Yema**, 2023
Mixed media

**Piazza Navona**, 2022
Water Color

**Piazza Navona**, 2022
Water Color
SAMANTHA DE MARYELA

YEMA: BARD SENIOR THESIS EXHIBITION
MAY 6-MAY 18, 2023

OPENING RECEPTION: SATURDAY, MAY 6, 3-6 PM

UBS

BARD EXHIBITION CENTER
45 O’CALLAGHAN LANE
RED HOOK, NY 12571

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