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# Some Mad, Mad Harmony

From Fukushima soil to the comfort of grass, Fawn Rogers situates the sustained violence against the environment and each other within the tragicomic cycles of desire and death.

COLTER RULAND, LE MILE MAGAZINE, 12 OCT 2023



I'm re-reading *Água Viva* early in the morning before starting my day speaking with artist Fawn Rogers. It's a slender book by Ukrainian born, Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, whose prose I turn to when I need help articulating the nonverbal realms of time, life, and creation. In the early pages, she writes: "Nature is enveloping: it entangles me entirely and is sexually alive, just that: alive. I too am ferociously alive — and I lick my snout like a tiger who has just devoured a deer."

As I drive across Los Angeles to Rogers's studio, inching through gasguzzling traffic and dodging the occasional roadkill within the immense concrete sprawl, I think about the forest she grew up in and the desert I come from. Nowadays it feels like one rarely encounters nature so alive.

While there are ecofeminist artists addressing the intersection of human rights and environmental issues, Rogers charges such explorations in a dynamic and broad practice comprising installation, painting, sculpture, neon, and video. Her work, often laced with sexuality and dark humor, is ferociously alive in its examination of power and how humanity extracts horrific concessions from the ecological world in order to satiate its own pleasure.

"I'm not interested in immortality," Rogers tells me. "I'm more affected by what it means if we destroy everything, and what it means now that we have effected change we can no longer reverse."

Rogers's work is remarkable for its ability to distill sometimes apocalyptic, sometimes common figures or well-researched information into images and objects that bristle with razor-like wit. Oysters that look like desecrated yet venerated pussies, car hoods taken from real auto accidents turned into gleaming slabs of meat on butcher hooks, pillars of resin that look like natural column formations and contain everything from contaminated soil to teeth whitener to sleeping pills, amongst a catalog of other surprising heirlooms.

"I wouldn't say I have more empathy for animals and the unbuilt world than I do humanity," says Rogers. "But I have found myself harboring aggression towards humanity's shenanigans and all the suffering we create for all other sentient beings, including ourselves."

Humanity's "shenanigans," and the cycles of creation and destruction in which such acts transpire, are perhaps no more visceral than in the artist's sculptures *Fukushima Soil*, *Meteorites*, & *The Lipstick*, an ongoing series of various objects encased together both within and onto resin columns formed from molds of lava.

When she first heard the news about the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, Rogers immediately speculated about what could follow, magnifying the scale of its consequences much like in her practice, often magnifying a portion of an object, the object itself, or the scale of her work. "What if we destroy most of our human species? The unbuilt world will go on and prevail and it too is violent," she says.

Images of all kinds of explosions came to mind: fiery volcanic explosions, atmosphere explosions of meteorites hitting the ground, the nuclear explosions we create, and the "little death" of an orgasmic explosion. "Together, the cosmic and intimate pit the politically significant against the ostensibly trivial," she says.

These sculptures are made in molds Rogers created from pieces of petrified lava and include the eponymous contaminated soil (collected by Rogers after she connected with someone in Japan via Craigslist willing to travel to the area) along with meteorites and an erotic dancer's tube of lipstick. Other works in the series

included patented Monsanto corn, lynx fur, panties, seed smuggle books, aerogel, coal, nails, construction fasteners, rose thorns, faux pearls, a titanium American Express black card, dead bees, and much more cataloged in her studio for future iterations. These columns and their objects can be set apart or gathered, toppled over or stacked as totems.

These sculptures are part of her series Project One and are as much enshrined as they are entombed for a future world in which they become evidence of existence and extinction. The volcano, the meteorite, the orgasm — the encasement of these forces is humorous, futile, and destructive.

“Together, the cosmic and intimate pit the politically significant against the ostensibly trivial”.

“The lush the jungle, the more violent it is,” says Fawn Rogers. While she speculates about civilization’s invasive behaviors and contributions towards our destruction, she also recognizes the potential for the natural world’s awe. Volcanoes become a kind of foil to Fukushima.

Despite the rending power of a volcano, lava can create new land mass, becoming a natural laboratory where a single seed in bird droppings can enrich the soil and jumpstart an entirely new ecosystem in as little as a couple hundred years.

The difference between these two kinds of disasters, as Rogers notes, is that humans have a choice to reason, to be rational, and possess free will. “But how do we use it? Do we use it?” she asks. “Every living thing wants to live just as much as we do. Like the insect running away from us as we crush it instead of putting it outside.” It is estimated that in only 100 years the world’s population will exceed 10 billion people, coinciding with dire predictions about deforestation, the amount of plastic surpassing aquatic life in the ocean, shortages of resources like water, food, and habitation, which lead to everything but harmony.

When people find out the soil in Rogers’s series is from Fukushima, she’s noticed they often recoil. “But do you think about the water the fish you just ate came from?” she asks. Rogers’s work is calculated to arouse sympathetic interest for the unbuilt world and that everything is connected.

“I want to cultivate more harmony, more and more empathy,” says Rogers. “My work is my way to try to find that within myself like when you throw a rock into a river and it ripples.”

This search for empathy often runs up against her frustrations with our lack of psychological evolution. “I’ve met very few mindful humans in my lifetime, including myself. I have a heavy internal conflict yet I still consume unnecessarily and create art about life that in the process simultaneously destroys life,” she says, as someone whose “hurricane of life experience” has seen her experience everything from homelessness to traveling over 70 countries.

For now, Rogers is momentarily shifting her focus from the tainted soil of Fukushima to the comfort of grass in a new series of paintings, video and sculpture that will debut in a solo exhibition, *Come Ruin or Rapture*, at Galerie Marguo in Paris. „I want to be like the grass. It’s both feminine and masculine. It’s magical as fuck,” she says with enthusiasm.

Its association with manicured suburban lawns (a source of unsustainable water consumption) as well as with grasslands which maintain everything from food resources to climate, lends grass a potent, complex symbolism in line with Rogers’s usual focus on the unbuilt world and the elements which we take for

granted. “Flying over the U.S., a lot of green is missing compared to years ago,” she says. “I remember some of my first sex in lush green grass and the romance of picnics and feelings of tranquility and timelessness in grass.”

With the current trajectory of the planet’s climate—this summer we’ve already seen record-breaking wildfires and seven states agree to cut water usage from the Colorado River in order to keep it from falling to critically low levels—Rogers’s work acts like a prescient last hurrah before the lights go out.

“It’s all a big thrill and sorrow,” she says. “So do we just enjoy it while we’re here?” This is not to say she is resigned, instead her work argues for an ecologically aware pleasure principle. Her work encourages us to be raucous but not careless, humored but not dismissive. Rogers ultimately wants more of what Lispector describes as: “Some mad, mad harmony.” Because it is maddening. It is messy and while that mess is sometimes grotesque it can also be beautiful.

“I’ve realized,” says Rogers, “for better or worse, we’re all the same. We’re all pleasure junkies. We mostly lack sustaining empathy and intimacy and that’s a big part of not psychologically evolving and not having harmony. It’s a horrible thing to know about yourself. There’s an enormous amount of responsibility you have to take in order to create the kind of harmony that propagates change.”

We are all culpable in that pursuit of pleasure. Our existence is inherently marred, perhaps even parasitic. And we have to live with that. The only solution, it seems, is to cultivate and exude as much empathy as we can possibly stomach, even if we devour the deer in the lushest of jungles, even if we have to wipe away all the blood.



Fawn Rogers, Fukushima Soil, Meteorites, The Lipstick 2016-Ongoing, ©Fawn Rogers. Courtesy of the artist.



Fawn Rogers, Thank you the Grass. 2023. oil on canvas. 76 x 102 cm. ©Fawn Rogers. Courtesy of the artist.