

ALINE MARE

Requiem: Aching for Acker

inspired by Kathy Acker's last poem
from her last book: *Eurydice in the Underworld*
Arcadia Books, London, 1997

Essay by Shana Nys Dambrot

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the spirit of Kathy Acker,
renegade writer and iconoclast to the end....

Requiem: Aching for Acker is a body of work that is directly inspired by *Requiem*, the last piece of writing by counterculture writer Kathy Acker, a friend of mine – on and off – for decades. It was published as the final part of an opera, *Eurydice in the Underworld*, by Arcadia Books in London in 1997. A risk-taker and literary outlaw, Acker was a hybrid of punk, postmodernism, feminism, and critical theory in her public identity as well as in her literary works. She died of breast cancer on November 30, 1997 at the age of 53, after a double mastectomy and turning her back on Western medicine. I was deeply moved to be a close friend to her in her final days.

My series of photo-based multimedia works is an interpretation of the final poem in the opera, where Acker filters her cancer diagnosis through Greek mythology. Using a mix of alternative processes and technology, I weave nature-based iconography from other recent bodies of work: roots, seeds, fossils, and lichen, fused together with actual artifacts of Acker's. I use images of the body: with scars from survivors of breast cancer and ancient tombstones, whose age and weathered surfaces add pathos to the stone hands and wings of angels. The imagery is suspended in a dense atmosphere of chromatic gradients, in a space full of subjectivity, memory and pain – an emotion-filled realm of magic and myth.

In *Requiem: Aching for Acker*, I am looking for a vision to match the feelings: the loss and the power I felt reading Acker's *Eurydice in the Underworld*. Something that would remind the world of her power as a creative female force of nature – her self-mythologizing as a form of empowerment and vulnerability. To marry the past and the present in an evocative body of work that speaks to the universality of the path we must all take: the path to the underworld.

Aline Mare, 2018

Open up this Body

Past and present confront each other in a singular new series by mixed media artist Aline Mare. *Requiem: Aching for Acker* is raw, romantic, bloody, emotional, with the texture and depth of the ancient and careworn, and the luminosity and crispness of the absolutely modern. The suite of 12 works expresses a sort of animism in which the human heart and the stones of earth share equally in the pleasures and terrors of existence. Although the new series is dedicated to the life and death of her friend, the progressive writer Kathy Acker, in important ways both formally and materially, this work is also profoundly about Mare herself. And in its consideration of the flesh as the site of glorious blossoming and fearsome entropy such as mirrors the cycles of nature, it ultimately is about every one of us, and everything we love.

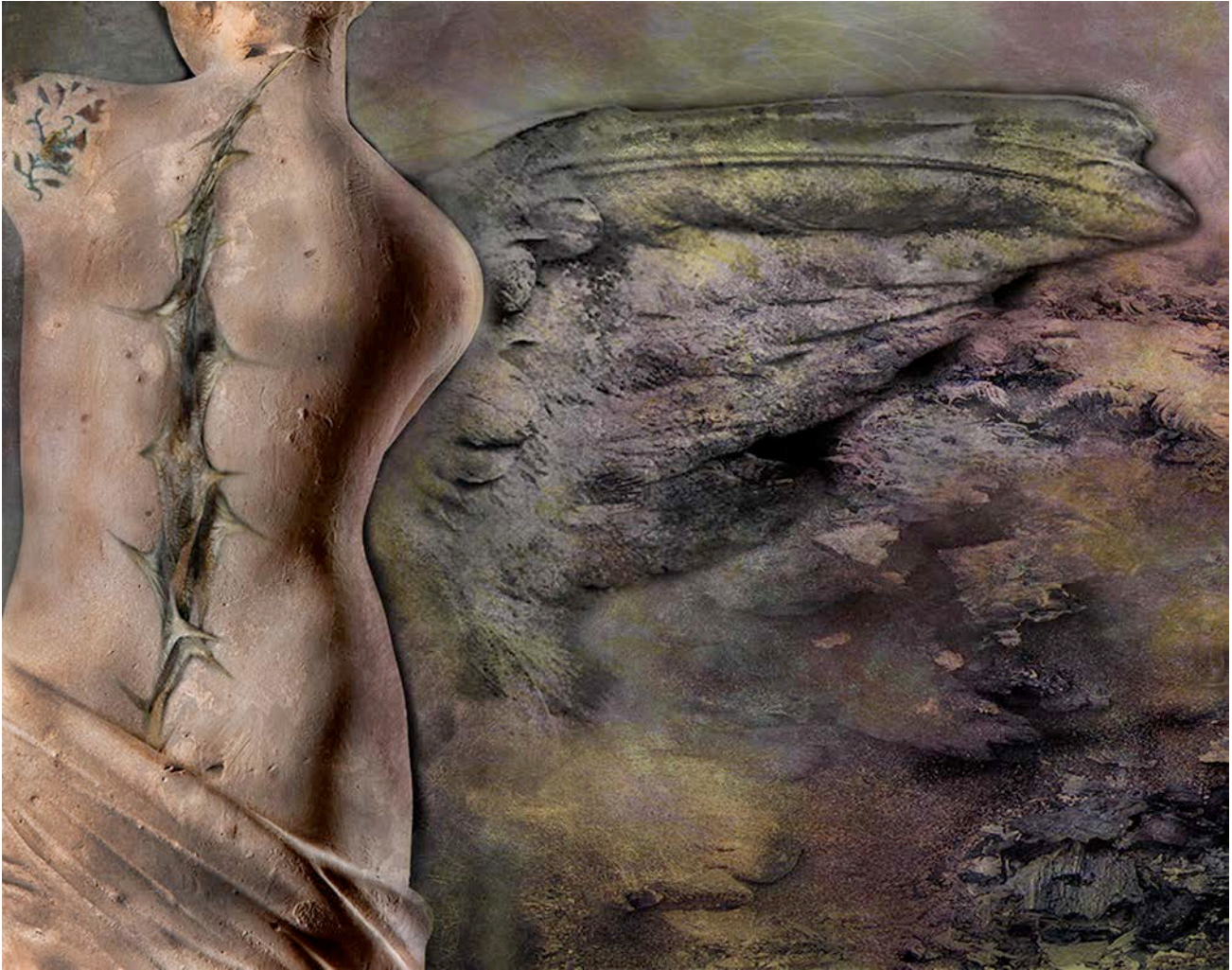
Acker died in 1997, but memories of their decades of contact and the rekindled closeness in the years before her death have re-emerged with the publication of Chris Kraus's biography of Acker in 2017, in which Mare figures. *Requiem: Aching for Acker* is a direct response to what was the final poem in Acker's last work of literature, the opera *Eurydice in the Underworld* (1997, Arcadia Press, London). The play ends as a particularly fraught passage, *Requiem*, is performed, infused with a painful awareness on the parts of both author and audience that this elegiac gesture was meant for Acker herself. "Take me in your arms, death," she wrote. "I'm so scared, do anything to me that will make me safe while I kick my heels and shout..." She knew she was dying; she was dead within months. It was cancer and it was awful.

With Acker's powerful and unnerving piece of literature as prompt and armature, with its author as both subject and contrarian muse, what we see in Mare's new work is in actuality the perfect synchronistic fusion of technique and narrative. Mare's photo-based, hand-finished, multimedia works combine alternative processes and digital technology, remixing nature-based imagery (roots, seeds, fossils, and lichen) in an array of studio processes to create surreal compositions that hover and radiate in the liminal place between creation and decay. A story of haunted flesh and restless souls with its own vein of poetics is, somehow, ideally suited to amplify the investigations of material and message that Mare has been pursuing for years, as Acker might describe it, "half in the realm of life, half in death."

But where previously Mare's metaphorical framework was the landscape, with the introduction of images of the body -- hearts, scars, tattoos, angel wings, and actual artifacts of Acker's like a single poignant, emblematic motorcycle glove. Mare works in a thematic vein that has little in common with the confessional, confrontational, sexed-up prose Acker produced. But in certain ways, the two women share a view of beauty and power that is more dark than light, more moon than sun, feminine and fecund and full of decay and contradictions. With Acker as an unlikely spirit guide, Mare achieves deepening this core message with a visceral impact tethered to experiences of human mortality. "For to breathe," wrote Acker, "is always to pray."

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Shana Nys Dambrot
Los Angeles, 2018

REQUIEM: Aching For Acker



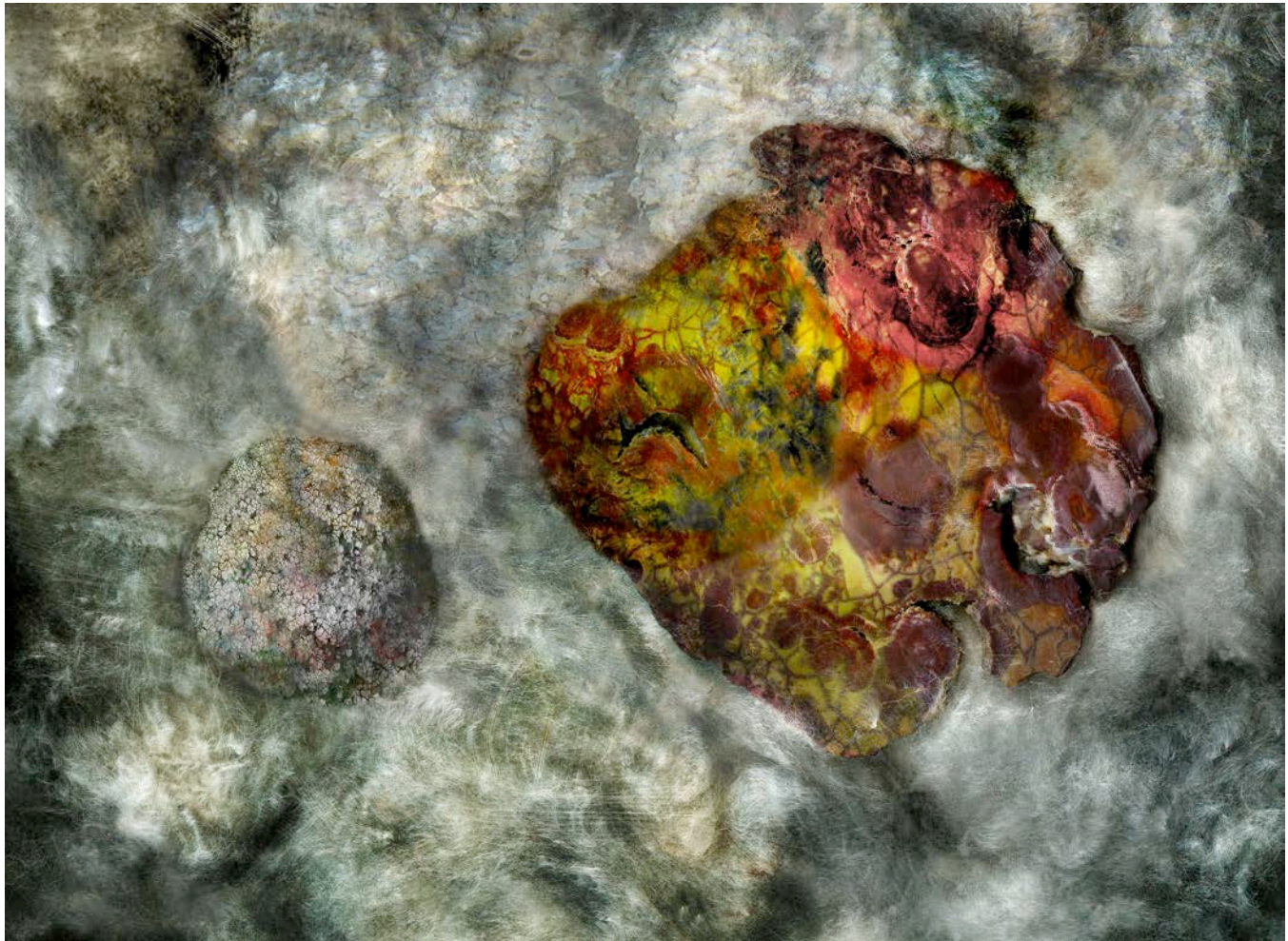
"Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels?"

I know the answer: no one.



Tell me: where does love come from?

An angel is sitting on my face. To whom can I run?



Take me in your arms, death, I'm so scared;
do anything to me that will make me safe



while I kick my heels and shout out in total fear,
while we hurtle through your crags to where it's blacker:

Orpheus' head eaten by rats,
what's left of the world scatters,
in the Lethe the poet's hairs, below where there's no ground,
down into your hole, because you want me to eat your sperm.



Death. I know.



“Every angel is terrifying.”

Because of this, because I have met death,

I must keep my death in me, gently,

and yet go on living



Because of this, because I have met my death,
I give myself birth.

Tell me: from where does love come from?



Remember that Persephone raped by Hades
then by him brought into the Kingdom of Death,
there gave birth to Dionysius.



Emerging at last from violent insight

"Sing out in jubilation and in praise" to the angels who terrified away the night.



Let not one string of my forever-child's heart and cunt fail to sing.



Open up this body,
half in the realm of life, half in death and give breath.

For to breathe is always to pray.



You were the terrorized child,
Mother, not me. Be no more.
Requiescat in pacem.

Requiem.
For it was you I loved.

Afterward

I first met Kathy Acker many years ago at the Kitchen in New York City, where she was doing a reading with Connie DeJong. We were both living downtown and running around in the same crowds. It was the beginning of a friendship that would last on and off for decades.

My creative life in New York's downtown world was rich—I was an image maker and performer who was an early member of the artist group Colab—participating in the infamous Times Square Show and working with many other artists living there at that time: Richard Foreman, Vito Acconci, Robert Frank, Meredith Monk, Richard Serra, among others.

At the same time I was creating experimental films that led to performance art and installation. In the late 1980's I met Bradley Eros, moved to Ludlow Street and together we formed *Erotic Psyche*, creating films and performances, showing in venues on the Lower Eastside including 8BC, ABC No-Rio, the Pyramid Club and touring Europe as well. The work was transgressive, using occult iconography, classic mythology, and raw explicit sexual imagery--freely blending silent film, Helen Cixous and George Bataille in a form of Dionysian maximalism. After *Erotic Psyche* split up I moved to San Francisco to get an MFA in New Genres and met up again with Kathy Acker, where she was teaching at the Art Institute.

In 1995, when I ran into her at a party in San Francisco, I could sense something was very wrong. Kathy told me that she was sick. It came out later she had stage 4 breast cancer. As Kathy was alienated from her family and had burned bridges with many friends, I became a close member of her support group for the final months of her life.

A year after Kathy died, I read her last published book, *Eurydice in the Underworld* and was blown away by its pure emotion and courageous confrontation with her own illness: particularly the play *Requiem* and the final poem in the book. It is atypical of Kathy's difficult writings—brutally direct and emotionally raw. Where much of her work used postmodern strategies to distance the reader creating labyrinthine structures to critique the idea of the novel in search of new approaches to writing, *Eurydice* was pure emotion, written in blood and fear, seeking strength and some form of redemption to her impending death.

Kathy Acker freely used passages from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* to find her voice in the chaos of terror. "Who if I cried out, would hear me among the angels?" This cry, this plea of Rilke's, is a universal cry of anguish and the desire to not be alone in our loneliest moments- while we face death. "An angel is sitting on my face. To whom can I run?" They both died at the same early age of 49. In Kathy's words, the iconoclast is still alive, facing death with equal parts of fear and wit, hoping that the heart and mind can put space between her and death, to add some time to her life.

When I got a yearlong residency at the Headlands Center for the Arts in the Bay Area twenty years ago, I dedicated the body of work to Acker and to this very same book: *Eurydice in the Underworld*. I worked with several multi media interpretations of the poem, including lugging her Harley Davidson up three flights of stairs to create a video installation and using the text as a mapping device. I was deeply moved by the intensity of this piece- it affected me deeply. Though the work was seen - I never felt it had the impact I had hoped for.

Being interviewed for the Chris Kraus' book *After Kathy Acker: A Literary Biography*, (Semiotext(e)/Active Agents, 2017) reminded me of my tangled history with Kathy and my relationship with this poem. It inspired me to do something more with this writing; to re-approach it using the skills and formal language that I have been creating for the last several years to explore the mythos of Kathy Acker's last words, words that link me back to my early work-- creating a golden thread to retrace my steps through the labyrinth of time, excavating my own personal history-- to wed the past and the present in a new body of work.

Aline Mare, 2018

REQUIEM

By Kathy Acker

"Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels?"
I know the answer: no one.
Tell me: from where does love come?
An angel is sitting on my face. To whom can I run?
Take me in your arms, death, I'm so scared;
do anything to me that will make me safe
while I kick my heels and shout out in total fear,
while we hurtle through your crags to where it's blacker:
Orpheus' head eaten by rats,
what's left of the world scatters,
in the Lethe the poet's hairs, below where there's no ground,
down into your hole, because you want me to eat your sperm.
Death. I know.
"Every angel is terrifying."
Because of this, because I have met death,
I must keep my death in me, gently, and yet go on living.
Because of this, because I have met my death, I give myself birth.
Remember that Persephone raped by Hades
then by him brought into the Kingdom of Death
there gave birth to Dionysius.
You were the terrorized child, Mother,
Now be no more. Requiat in pacem.
Tell me: from where does love come?
"Emerging at last from violent insight
Sing out in jubilation and in praise." to the angels who terrified away the night.
Let not one string of my forever-child's heart and cunt fail to sing.
Open up this body half in the realm of life, half in death and give breathe.
For to breathe is always to pray.
You language, where language goes away.
You were the terrorized child, Mother, Be no more.
Requiescat in pacem.
Requiem. For it was you I loved.

(Excerpted from the play "Requiem", Eurydice in the Underworld, Arcadia Books, London 1997)

THE FIRST ELEGY

by Rainer Maria Rilke

Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels' hierarchies?

and even if one of them pressed me suddenly against his heart:

I would be consumed in that overwhelming existence.

For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror, which we are still just able to endure,

and we are so awed because it serenely disdains to annihilate us.

Every angel is terrifying.

And so I hold myself back and swallow the call-note of my dark sobbing.

Ah, whom can we ever turn to in our need?

Not angels, not humans, and already the knowing animals are aware

that we are not really at home in our interpreted world.

Perhaps there remains for us some tree on a hillside, which every day we can take into our vision;

there remains for us yesterday's street and the loyalty of a habit so much at ease

when it stayed with us that it moved in and never left.

Oh and night: there is night, when a wind full of infinite space gnaws at our faces.

Whom would it not remain for--that longed-after, mildly disillusioning presence,

which the solitary heart so painfully meets.

Is it any less difficult for lovers?

But they keep on using each other to hide their own fate.

Don't you know yet?

Fling the emptiness out of your arms into the spaces we breathe;

perhaps the birds will feel the expanded air with more passionate flying.

From the *DUINO ELEGIES* (1875-1926), *Translated by Stephen Mitchell, 1992*



BIO

Aline Mare was born in in Bronxville New York into a family of movie and theatre professionals based in New York City. She was named after her Great Aunt: stage actress and Busby Berkeley film actress, Aline MacMahon; her paternal grandfather, Arthur Mayer, was a legendary East Coast motion-picture exhibitor, distributor and early lecturer on film history.

Her own career began in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the late seventies, where she worked with such luminaries as Meredith Monk (*Paris/Chakon*), Richard Foreman (*Pandering to the Masses, a Misrepresentation*), Robert Frank (*Keeping Busy*), and Vito Acconci (*The Red Tapes*). She also worked as a film editor with Richard Serra on *Railroad Turnbridge*, and Nancy Holt on the film version of *Sun Tunnels*.

She was an early member of Collaborative Projects, a collective formed in the late 70s and early 80s in downtown New York City where she participated in blockbuster exhibitions including the Times Square Show and the Real Estate Show and was an early performer and supporter of the non-profit cultural space ABC No Rio. After studying with eco-feminist writer and pagan, Starhawk, she performed in a multi-media partnership, *Erotic Psyche*; a film and music extravaganza exploring the body and the senses, which toured extensively in Manhattan, at venues such as Franklin Furnace, [The Kitchen](#), and the legendary Pyramid Club on the Lower East Side of NYC.

She was an undergraduate at Bard College and SUNY Buffalo's Center for Media Studies, where she studied with Nam June Paik, Hollis Frampton and the Vasulkas. In 1998 she moved to San Francisco to complete an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute where she produced the film *Saline's Solution*, a controversial experimental film about a late term abortion, which garnered support and awards internationally, exhibiting at the Cinematheque in SF, the Whitney Museum and MOMA in NYC.

In 2000 she received a year long Headlands Center for the Arts Residency, where she created a multi-media installation project examining the life of friend and writer Kathy Acker's courageous fight against the breast cancer that claimed her life in 1997. In 2004, Spider Woman Press published Mare's collaborative book with poet and translator Olivia Sears, entitled *self/cell*, which dealt with the horror and beauty of a biotech future; they performed visual readings of the book at Highways in LA and White Box in NYC and in 2012 they completed a collaboration entitled *Photo-synthesis*, which they presented in San Francisco and New York City. Recent grants and residencies include Ateliers Fourwinds, Surpass Sino-China, Starry Nights, and a Creative Capacity Grant.

Mare has continued her multi-media explorations with imagery, interfacing nature and the body, concentrating on altered photography, video, and installation. Her mixed media work dealing with transitional moments in the life of Jewish preadolescents: *Seeing the Light* (2009) and *Beautiful Boys* (2008), has been shown in major American cities in single channel video and photographic formats. New mixed media work has been shown at Noysky Projects, Millard Sheets, The Santa Monica Museum, as well as the Mike Kelley Gallery at Beyond Baroque, Sturt Haaga Gallery, Jill Joy Gallery and BLAM Gallery in Los Angeles and a recent solo show at MOAH Museum in Lancaster. Her work is held in private collections in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and Shanghai.

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