

Aline Mare: Poetry of the Tree of Life

By Betty Ann Brown, May 3, 2107

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*"Art is the tree of life."
—William Blake*

*"Oh, the tree of life is growing where the spirit never dies/And the bright light of salvations shines in dark and empty skies."
—Bob Dylan, "Death is Not the End"*

Aline Mare combines photography and painting in elegant portrayals of nature, isolating tiny fruits of the Tree of Life in inky haloes of chiaroscuro. Roots, flowers, seeds and stems are arrayed over darkly textured grounds, as if suspended in an eternal twilight. They emerge from dusky fields, capturing our attention like precious objects assembled in a curiosity cabinet.

Mare was born in Bronxville, New York, and educated at various New York-area schools. In the early 1980s, she became involved with the East Coast world of avant-garde film and video, teaming up with creatives like performance artist Vito Acconci, playwrights Richard Foreman and Robert Wilson, videographer Nam June Paik and sculptor Richard Serra. She also worked with the early feminist writer Starhawk.



Mare came to California in the late 1980s and received her MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1991. While in San Francisco, the artist renewed her friendship with experimental novelist Kathy Acker, who shared Mare's feminist politics. The artist began to focus on feminist issues such as women's right to choose, employing embryonic imagery in performances and related installations. Mare was criticized for her work regarding abortion. She turned away from this subject when she married her first husband and became pregnant with her son, Cyrus. That marriage didn't last; when her child was only a year old, she met painter Gary Brewer, to whom she is still married.

In 2006, Mare began collaborating with poet Olivia E. Sears. One of their pieces was entitled Saline's Solution, a term for late-term abortions. They also produced photo/synthesis, a book on cellular technology which Mare describes as "pseudo-scientific play." Photo/synthesis juxtaposes her exquisite portrayals of natural phenomena with Sears' poems in a powerful point-counterpoint of image and text.

In 2013, Mare and her family moved to Los Angeles, where she has continued her mixed media work, layering expressively painted surfaces with photographic passages. Her mixed-media compositions are dye-infused and printed on aluminum. Seedpods curl like mute apostrophes. A pale morning glory blossom shimmers against a bronze field. The crozier (or fiddlehead) of a fern emerges in a copper-colored curve from a dense, smoky ground. In her poem, How to Synthesize, Sears writes, "what's at work below/what bubbles up/black gold/blue-green algae/poetry of your data."

Mare's work is indeed poetic. She paints the poetry of the Tree of Life.