

PATHOS, HUBRIS & ZOË



ANDREA ZEMEL

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COVER: ARIADNE
Glazed ceramic and glass mosaic
18.5”h x 18.5”w x 2”d
Beehive Brain series, 2009

ANDREA ZEMEL

PATHOS, HUBRIS & ZOË

A Twenty Year Retrospective



NEW YORK

Zoë seeks sweetness and finds an intensification in it.

-Carl Kerényi

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ANDREA ZEMEL: PATHOS, HUBRIS & ZOË

A TWENTY YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

PATHOS, HUBRIS & ZOE

Pathos, Hubris, & Zoë examines the notion of civilization, discontent, and self-realization through both an analytic and poetic lens, drawing from a catalogue of narrative imagery spanning twenty years. Like the title of the show, the comprehensive body of work is presented as an inter-related whole, portions that configure to form a connective unity. As an allegory, the title is suggestive of nothing less than the soul's decent into the underworld followed by an ascent into the light.

Pathos, Hubris, & Zoë is presented within the framework and rubric of a Hellenistic world-view. Theirs' was a perspective in many ways much like our own. It acknowledged the preeminence of reason, and placed the patterns of everyday life squarely within a concrete world governed by cause, effect, and mortality. Likewise, theirs' was a world wholly circumscribed by a boundless, deathless realm; side by side, but forever in juxtaposition.

For Zemel, pathos and hubris pertain to life's drama as a repetition of history. Terms that come down to us through the Greek stage, they describe a reciprocal interaction between actor and audience. Pathos pertains to the spectacle of human suffering and its predictable response from the crowd. Hubris, like an overplayed hand, refers to an excess of pride or arrogance that invites retribution. Like two poles in a reflexive system of contraction and expansion, their interplay defines the fate of both the tragic hero and sacrificial victim in ancient drama.

Rising in contrast to fixed immutable law stands *zoë*, a subtle and ambiguous term denoting the unbounded, uncontainable, and overflowing nature of the life force. Here Zemel's work seeks harmonious balance by reaching for transcendent truths rooted deep within the frustration of the human condition. The capacity to overcome cyclic nature through metamorphosis is part of the Greek religious ideal encapsulated in *zoë*. As a formula it was integral to Greek thought from Dionysian cult, to Platonic notions of transmigration of the soul, to the Gnostic movements of the intertestamental period.

By encompassing every drama and individual history like an unbroken string of pearls, *zoë* stands in contrast to both to cyclic time, and to the twins, pathos and hubris. Each are joined, yet each are distinct in the Greek cosmos. One yet separate. In *zoë*, the idea of eternity comes closest to Buddhist ontology of mind.

In the iconography of the Bronze Age Mediterranean world, a symbol for *zoë* was the bee.

THE RETROSPECTIVE

Zemel's provocative narratives and flare for metaphor have always pushed at the boundary between contemporary and historical myth making. The vernacular of her early work of the mid-1990s is very much influenced by the language of psychoanalytic theory. This period reflects a fiercely introspective and politically incisive phase of the artist's career where her critique of contemporary society is equally a leveling invective directed towards the excesses of self. The urban landscape becomes at once her mirror and her prism, and modernity a façade behind which lurks a rigid social architecture of neo-tribalism fueled by the angst driven engine of unassimilated bodily impulses. Many of these early narratives employ a "Promethean dialectic", where the development and emergence of contemporary society is profoundly marked by a perpetual cycle of worthy attempts requited by unanticipated outcomes. Included in the exhibition are pieces from her irony-laden series of block prints entitled *Myth of Progress* which harp on the notion of American manifest destiny in an increasingly rapacious and disposable world. Also included from the same period is an installation of 20 hand colored etchings from her burlesque and expressionist *Ask Twenty Questions* folio.

The work of the late 1990's see a marked shift in tone and the transitional period is characterized by Zemel's concerted exposure to Buddhism, Jewish mysticism, and the Hermetic traditions of late antiquity - evoking yet another dimension to the character and style of the work. The language of Tantra and alchemy, being and emptiness, emanation and relativity, become a new grammar cohabiting side by side with the more familiar territory of depth psychology.

Started as a series of small hand colored etchings, the labors of Herculina carry Zemel's work through the millennia marking the shift from her life as artist and teacher in Philadelphia to the world of art and business in Manhattan. Integration, transformation, and re-invention mark the struggles of her heroine, just as grace, poise, and style will define Zemel's delicate balancing act between debutante and studio artist.

In 2005 she went on to collaborate with the Lower East Side Print Shop to produce Herculina as a series of large editioned color screen prints in the style of the comic book heroine, adding yet more chapters to the saga. With her last labor entitled Herculina Contemplates Growing Wings (p.xx), Zemel's world shifts again, this time towards the sublime.

BEEHIVE BRAIN

Beehive Brain began as an expression of the artist's infatuation with mosaic, revisiting the processes and materials of the collaborative work she did with the public art program she initiated at the University of Pennsylvania teaching there in the mid 1990's. Her welded steel and ceramic sculpture series of that same period entitled Cages had previously introduced mosaic elements into her repertoire, but it was not until her most recent body of work that we see the extent of her skill with the medium.

While reacquainting herself with epic poetry and the narratives of Greek theatre, Zemel encountered the early writings of philosopher Ken Wilber. Wilber put forward a theory for

the emergence of contemporary forms of society by envisioning its unfolding in a series of discrete yet permeable stages. Much as Melanie Klein had proposed a developmental theory of early childhood, Wilber took a developmental maturational approach to early forms of culture while speculating on the procession of early civilization from hunter-gatherer through city-state. Inspired by these homologous points of view, Zemel began to construct her own methodology in a new body of work, and sought in the arcane narratives of ancient mythology her own statement about the contemporary world. What emerged was a perspective consistent with psychoanalytic theory, which came to view social evolution as the interplay of group mind upon the nascent ego of the developing individual.

Zemel would discover that her new dialectic was similar to the structure of dialogue occurring between chorus and actor on the tragic stage. Like the classical playwrights of old, Zemel probed the remote origins of modern society through archaic motif in her conviction that society cannot progress without a simultaneous and critical re-evaluation of its own past. In time, a formulaic rhythm and pattern emerged. The design had a distinctive architecture and pantheon, and was populated by a cast of continually reappearing and interconnected characters along with their familiar stories and familiar circumstances. As such, Beehive Brain was born.

In this vein, elements of the Beehive Brain series are presented much in the style of an elegant algorithm or periodic table. Like a short hand or cipher, or a "music of the spheres", it portrays a schema both rigid and supple - as old as time, as fresh as the moment. Homunculus (p.xx), the first of the Beehive Brain images, is presented as seed or template. A beckoning mass of nerves and gray matter poised to receive, is yet without

context. Differentiation is a mere suggestion; potential no more than a mathematical possibility. Imperative is implied by a bee in the brain. Similarly, Hexad (p.xx) is a plexus of six typologies suspended in a sanguine and visceral crimson glass medium. The cast of characters that form the primordial grouping are drawn from myth and cult. The suggestion of selection and determinism is evoked by the structure of the hexagonal cell, the inference of blood as the connective medium of life defines lineage as both biological and cultural inheritance.

Conceived in parallel with Beehive Brain, Writing on the Wall looks to the tradition of oracular prophecy in the language of epic poem, blurring the boundary between sculpture, painting, and literature. Like the commemorative stele erected at ancient crossroads, their function is to remind, and their directive or cautionary tales were fashioned to inform or aid the wayward traveler. In the tradition of Illuminated manuscript, they are at once symbolic and decorative with great concern for craft as a vehicle for content. Richly textured and timeless in feel, the verses are rooted in the past but portend to the present or future. Using material and techniques evocative of the ancient world, the imagery remains profoundly relevant to our time.

FLAGS

FLAGS



FLAG; 1989
Monoprint etching
18.5"h x 24.25"w
1989

FLAGS



FLAG; 1991
Monoprint etching
18.5"h x 24.25"w
1991

MYTH OF PROGRESS

MYTH OF PROGRESS



BLIND LEADING
Linoleum blockprint
16"h x 26.5w
1994

MYTH OF PROGRESS



NE3W WORLD
Hand-colored photo emulsion print on mylar
20"h x 19.6"w
1999



BANANNA REPUBLIC
Photo emulsion print on mylar
12"h x 36"w
1994



MYTH OF PROGRESS



LONE RANGER
Photo emulsion print
on mylar
59"h x 34.5"w
1998

MYTH OF PROGRESS



GOOD YEAR
Hand-colored blockprint
17.7"h x 31.7w
1996

ASK TWENTY QUESTIONS



MONKEY MAN
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



TECHNOCRAT
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



VENUSAPHILE
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



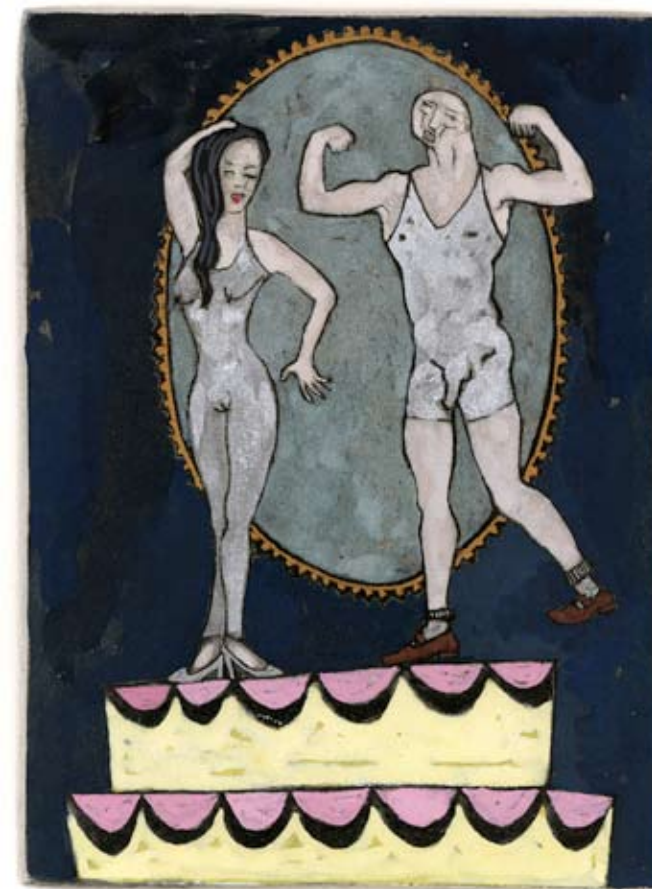
LONE RANGER
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



MONKEY MAN
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



ROCKABYE BABY
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



WEDDING STATE
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



VENUSAPHRIDGE
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



BOGIEMAN
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



ALADINN'S LAMP
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



FOX CHASE
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



HUMPTY DUMPTY
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



MISS MUFFET
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



OLD MACDONALD
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



FUCKUMAN
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



MORTAL COMBAT
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



LITTLE BO PEEP
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



MADONNA & CHILD
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



SISYPHUS
Hand-colored etching
10"h x 9"w
1995



EVE & ADAM
Hand-colored etching
9"h x 9"w
1995

SCULPTURAL MANUSCRIPTS

SCULPTURAL MANUSCRIPTS

SHRINE NO. 3
Welded steel, hand
painted etching and
block print on rice
paper with mixed
media, beeswax
27"h x 11"w x 11"d
1995



SCULPTURAL MANUSCRIPTS

SHRINE NO. 2
Welded steel, hand
painted etching and
block print on rice
paper with mixed
media, beeswax
25"h x 14"w x 11"d
1995



SCULPTURAL MANUSCRIPTS



TWO LEFT FEET
Hand painted etching on rice paper
15.5"h x 10"w
1995

SCULPTURAL MANUSCRIPTS



PROMETHEUS TRYPTICH
Welded steel, hand painted etching and
block print on rice paper, beeswax
15"h x 28"w
1995

HERCULINA



EASY AS PIE
Hand colored etching
12"h x 11"w
1996



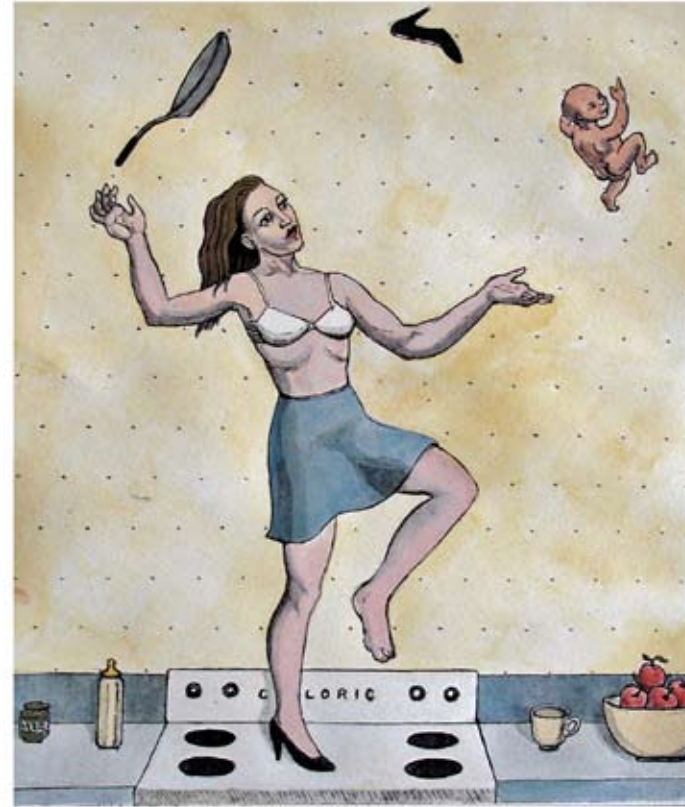
IN THE GAME
Hand-colored etching
12"h x 11"w
1996



IN THE OFFICE
Hand-colored etching
12"h x 11"w
1996



SECURITY MOM
Hand-colored etching
12"h x 11"w
1996



OUT OF THE FRYING PAN AND OUT OF THE FIRE
Hand-colored etching
12"h x 11"w
2006



RAISES CAIN
Hand-colored etching
12"h x 11"w
1996



HOUSE ON FIRE
Hand-colored etching
12"h x 11"w
1996

HERCULINA



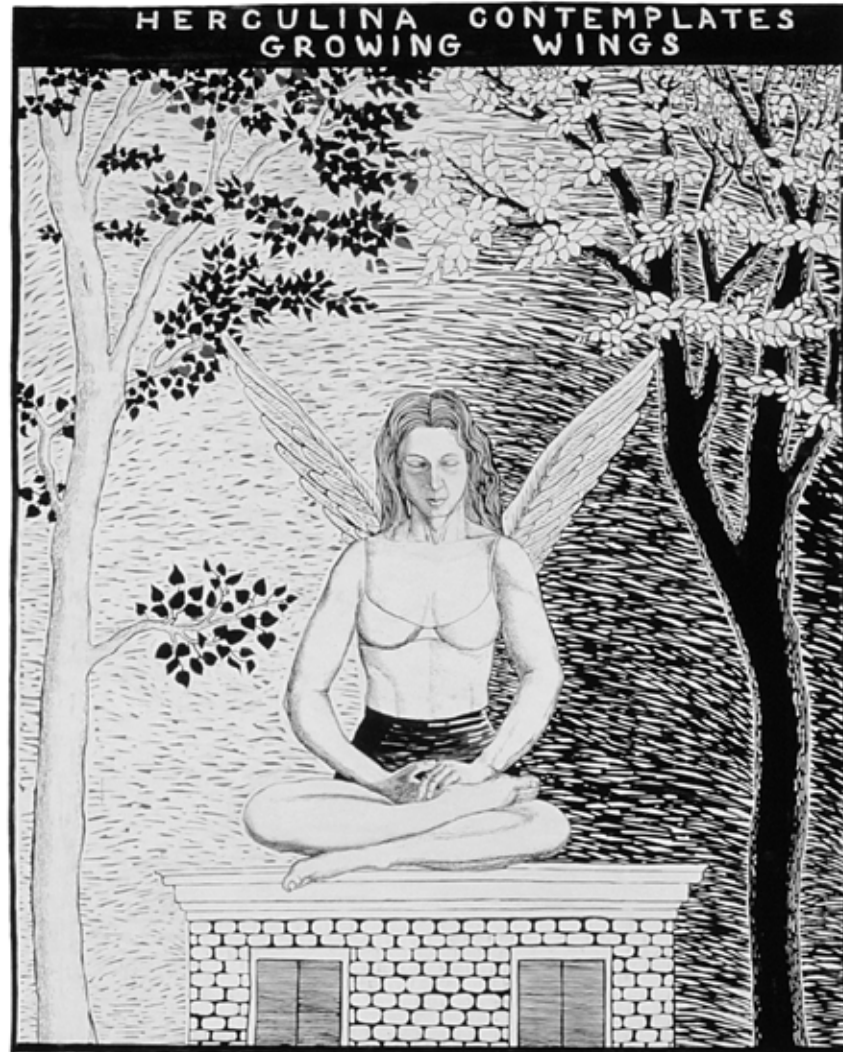
RISES TO THE OCCASION
9 color silkscreen
36.5"h x 29"w
2006

HERCULINA



WILD SIDE
7 color silkscreen
36.5"h x 29"w
2006

HERCULINA



CONTEMPLATES GROWING WINGS
Photo-emulsion print on mylar
36.5"h x 29"w
2001

INTERIM

INTERIM



PHANES
Oil on paper
(8%*)&^)&*^)*
2001

INTERIM



PHAETHON
Oil on paper
(*&(*&9870987
2001

BEEHIVE BRAIN

BEEHIVE BRAIN



CHRONOS
Glazed ceramic and glass mosaic
13.5"h x 13.5"w x 3.7"d
2005

BEEHIVE BRAIN



HONEY
Glazed ceramic and glass mosaic
15.5"h x 15.5"w x 2.5"d
2008

BEEHIVE BRAIN



ORACLE
Glazed ceramic and glass mosaic
18.5"h x 18.5"w x 2.5"d
2005

BEEHIVE BRAIN



HOMUNCULUS
Gouache on board, mixed media
19.25"h x 19"w
2005

BEEHIVE BRAIN



ORACLE - WRITING ON THE WALL
Glazed ceramic and glass mosaic
19"h x 18.5"w x 3"d
2005

BEEHIVE BRAIN



KALISHAKI
Glazed ceramic and glass mosaic
18.5"h x 18.5"w x 2.25"d
2005