

Myths

Lauren Fournier

myth, i: the artist's body presses up against the material (matter, mater, earth)

myth, ii: the material (matter, mater, earth) presses back against the artist

myth, iii: the light strikes the soft shell, only to be absorbed by it

myth, iv: the sensation of light, earth, water as they move against the body

myth, v: the vibrational pulse of light and sound as they move through the material

myth, vi: the language describing those who press themselves up against the material

Myths brings together work by five artists who, through sculpture, video, performance, and photo-based work, reflect on questions related to medium and myth. Working materially and conceptually, the artists are absorbed in questions of history, material, touch, contact, and the body, creating new materialist feminist folklore. Through light, matter, and tactility, these artists stir a return to aesthetics in its etymological sense of the sensorial—the feeling—in contrast to the more distanced mythologies that drive art and its histories.

*The front of our chest and the space between our shoulder blades: these are the most receptive, the most vulnerable places—the places that face out to the world, that receive love and that receive hurt.*ⁱ

Amy Brener works with urethane resin, silicone, pigment, and found objects and materials to cast semi-translucent shields and architectural structures like altars and dressing screens that exist somewhere between “the goddess” and “the cyborg” of feminist history. In her *Flexi-Shield* series, Brener creates large, hanging sculptures that resemble female forms, embedding materials like razor blades, dried flowers and plants, symbols like peace signs, and small toys in the pigmented polyurethane. What results are armour-like, feminized figures that are pellucid and pliant. *Flexi Shield Expecta* is a see-through, suspended, bubblegum-pink bodice, amazon-sized at 76 inches long. It holds various materials in a single body, the dried red flowers and the charged symbol of red maple leaves power-clash with its bright pink skin. The artist embeds objects in the material and presses objects into the resin to create imprints: here, there is the cast of her father's face in the area near the pelvis, with the outline of a computer keyboard below, alongside other textures and patterns, like waffling. Uncannily heroic, the bendable breastplate stands as a testament to the soft strength of contemporary feminist life, while ambient light moves through the silicone, illuminating the body and the various things that constitute its form. *Flexi Shield Expecta* reveals the self as a composition of many materials, both “natural” and “man-made.”

The gallery light moves through Brener's pink resin and toward a suspended, double-sided screen, on which **Elise Rasmussen's** video *Fragments of an Imagined Place* is projected. Robert Smithson's proposal *Island of Broken Glass (Atlantis)* from 1969-1971 is one of many myth-making moments in the art history of Vancouver. The American artist Smithson's interest in working on Canadian land, and the sensational nature of his proposal, established his place as a legendary figure on the west coast. Smithson's proposal: to make an intervention on an area of land in the unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples, on a small island near Nanaimo. “The work, should it move forward, will create a visual spectacle for people to bask in—look at all of that light, reflecting on all of that glass!” (Do not think about context, do not think about the Indigenous peoples or the animals or others who make a home here. Is this formalism?)

The luminescence of lightⁱⁱ as it hits glass and reflects back to the human eye, the animal eye, all of the many eyes that see light—consider this in contrast to the bioluminescence of marine bodies, deep in the dark of the ocean, the multitude of organisms who live in the water, generating light through their physical constitutions and metabolic processes. A bioluminescent body might come in contact with the island, suction onto it, crawl up to it, slide up over it, ooze with it. They feel their way up to it, slithering along, sucking against it, and then feel something sharp, blinding—the cuts of one thousand shards of glass. This is the glass that reflects light for eyes in a way that some would describe as beautiful, others violent, and others still as both.

Elise Rasmussen's *Fragments of an Imagined Place* reflects on the myth of Atlantis by performing a feminist response to Smithson's proposal, one that is resolutely embodied and collective. With an attuned focus on materials and their vibratory possibilities, Rasmussen's work engages sound, sculpture, movement, and group performance to engender space for aesthetic (and literal) reflection. Shards of cut plexi reflecting rainbow light stand in as a mimetic gesture to the mythological shards of glass, with the female and queer performers holding the objects close to their bodies.

In their respective works, Elise Rasmussen and **Evann Siebens** think through two figures from the 1960s-1970s art world who, through their lives and their work, have taken on mythical status in Vancouver. For Rasmussen, this is Smithson; for Siebens, it is Canadian choreographer and dance artist Helen Goodwin. Both working from studio practices that are heavily research-based, Rasmussen and Siebens work with their media to re-imagine the dominant mythologies of these figures. While Goodwin contributed a great deal to Vancouver's art scene, the temporal nature of her work—live happenings, rarely documented—results in a gap in this history. The Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery has acknowledged this absence, commissioning Siebens to create a body of work that commemorates Goodwin and her contributions to Vancouver art and the increasingly interdisciplinary practices of the 1970s. In *Plus TheCo, Minus Helen Goodwin*, Siebens projects a video work that she made on Hornby Island onto a glistening, geodesic dome; featuring choreographed group performance on the shores of Jericho Beach, the video honours Goodwin's movement-based practice while placing her in the canon of Vancouver's contemporary art history—one that, with other recent exhibitions like *Radial Change* (2018), is beginning to better understand the politics of its aesthetics.

*The most interesting of this work — past, present, or future — is or will be that which dismantles, boycotts, ignores, destroys, takes liberties with, or at least pokes fun at the avant garde's long commitment to the idea that the shocks produced by cruelty and violence — be it in art or in political action — might deliver us, through some never-proven miracle, to a more sensitive, perceptive, insightful, enlivened, collaborative, and just way of inhabiting the earth, and of relating to our fellow human beings.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Suicide heightens the artist's mythic hold: Goodwin (like Ophelia, Virginia Woolf, and other women before her, both fictional and real) died by self-imposed drowning, in the waters off of Jericho Beach. Her pockets were filled with stones. Female suicide is particularly ripe for romantic, morbid imaginings. In **Maegan Hill-Carroll's** recent

works *Suicide Striptease Diaphanous Hold* and *Lucretia Standing on Stones Golden Ratio Toes*, the artist re-investigates mythical figures from art history: here, it is the much longer history of European art that she is concerned with, specifically the figure of Lucretia as compulsively represented by male artists over centuries. Lucretia metonymically embodies the violences of patriarchal myth-making: she was raped, and then she killed herself, so the story goes. But despite this horror, the images that remain of her are sex-doll-like renderings, psychosexual fetish-works with diaphanous fabrics that idealize Lucretia as a feminine idol: Hill-Carroll turns to Lucretia's “golden ratio toes” as a case in point.

She and her creation here present themselves to one another with equally expansive welcome.^{iv}

Working with foam, ceramics, and participatory performance, Zoe Kreye creates a body of work plump with communal feminist possibility. Invoking the Swedish artist-mystic Hilma af Klint and her otherworldly use of colour, form, and shape, Kreye's sculptures tap into the potent energies of feminist aesthetic prophecy. Titled *De Fem*, after Klint's symbolic metaphysical paintings, Kreye's work references a longer history of avant-garde feminist practices that, historically, have been overshadowed by a male-minded canon; to be sure, the work of Klint and her female contemporaries anticipates by a number of decades the twentieth century movements like Surrealism and automatic writing that male artists would later become known for. The material imprinting seen on the pastel skin of Brener's *Flexi Shield Expecta* is echoed here, with Kreye using her body as the mould to make new work: the ceramic vessels, which are meant to hold—wine, food and other sustenance—are formed by the artist pressing the clay against her body and holding it there to form. Kreye's work gestures to utopic feminist space of collective gathering, where Dionysian revelry meets the heady dialectics of lightness and weight. The ceramic vessels or tools sit on the foam plinths when they are not in use, evoking lush tension between brittleness and bounce. Pleasurably pressing up against the limits of “the artist's body” and “the work,” Kreye's *De Fem* makes use of sculptural materials to both symbolically and literally extend the body beyond “the self” and toward others as part of a speculative feminist practice of new materialisms.

black wings of eggs, symmetry that sways, women in seance, seance says . . . we are given more than an impression/these are the paintings for the temple that she saw^v

Though such interventions are playful and textural, there are also more somber resonances with earlier feminist body art and sculptural practices of the 1960s. Such similarities are most recognizable in Rasmussen's *Finding Ana*, a series of photographs that provide documentation of Ana Mendieta's “lost works” in Jaruco Park, Cuba—works which, the story goes,^{vi} were destroyed but were, in fact, “weathered but not dismantled.” Mendieta, perhaps now best known for her death (an assumed murder by then-partner Carl Andre, who was charged but later acquitted, an event that has sparked ongoing protests by feminist artists and activists), is also canonized in contemporary art and feminist art history for her “private sculptural performances”^{vii}; ephemeral works in which her body, pressing into the earth, leaves indented traces on the land.

From Brener's new materialist feminist armour and Hill-Carroll's reflective, defamiliarized renderings of Lucretia, to Rasmussen and Siebens's embodied re-engaging of mythical art world figures and Kreye's supple staging of Dionysian rituals, *Myths* brings together contemporary feminist practices that feel their way through issues related to mythology and myth-making. In place of the distancing, even violent, myths of philosophy and art history, we find a close engagement with materials, contemplative reflection, collective performance, and ebbing, vibratory touch. Holding tension between softness and strength, these works evidence subtle intimacies between the artists and their mediums through practices that, across media, resonate sculpturally against site, time, the political, and the aesthetic.

The place where the body pressed, the place where the light hits: this is where the truth is.

Lauren Fournier is a curator, writer, and video artist from Treaty 4/Regina, Saskatchewan who is currently based in Toronto. Her current research is focused on the histories and practice of “autotheory” as a post-1960s feminist mode across media. Her writing has been published in a number of peer-reviewed journals and contemporary art publications, including *Canadian Art*, *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies*, *Comparative Media Arts Journal*, *Magenta*, *Kapsula*, *CSPA Quarterly (Center for Sustainable Practices in the Arts)*, *Canadian Journal of Woman Studies*, *Contemporary Women's Writing*, *Desire Change: Contemporary Feminist Art in Canada*, and *West Coast Line*. She has authored catalogue essays and experimental art writing for various artist-run centres, commercial galleries, and public galleries and museums, including Dazibao (Montréal), Untitled Art Society (Calgary), Susan Hobbs (Toronto), Zalucky Contemporary (Toronto), and the Organization of Saskatchewan Arts Councils. Recent curatorial projects include *Autotheory* (Vtape), *The Sustenance Rite* (Blackwood Gallery), and *Fermenting Feminism* (Medical Museion, Front/Space, Büro BDP). Her first novel *Feminist Father Worship*, which comprises an expanded text and a multi-channel video installation, is forthcoming 2020. www.laurenfournier.net

Amy Brener was born in Victoria, BC, but lives and works in New York. She was included in Greater New York 2015 at MoMA PS1. Her work has exhibited internationally at institutions and galleries such as Galerie Pact in Paris, Wentrup Gallery in Berlin, Derek Eller Gallery and the Katonah Museum of Art in New York, Julius Caesar in Chicago, Susan Hobbs Gallery in Toronto and the MacLaren Art Centre in Barrie, Ontario. Brener received the NYFA Fellowship for Crafts/Sculpture in 2015, attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2011, and graduated with an MFA in Sculpture from Hunter College in 2010. Her work has been featured in a wide variety of publications including CURA, The New York Times, Hyperallergic, V Magazine, The Brooklyn Rail, artnet News, Time Out New York and Artsy.

Zoe Kreye creates interdisciplinary art projects that explore transformation, embodiment and collective experience. Recent projects include *Make Our Own Air* (commissioned by SPACE, London), *Our Missing Body* (Hochparterre Berlin, Western Front, Kamloops Art Gallery), *FutureLoss* (grunt gallery), *Unlearning Practices* (Unit Pitt, Goethe Satellite, <rotor> Graz). Working in the realms of sculpture, dance/movement, drawing, somatics and bodywork her projects take shape as installations, workshops, rituals and journeys. Materially she works close to the body using clay, cloth, foam and gestural lines. She create artworks through transcendent experiences, then invite publics and performers into the installations to embody, disrupt and explore the transformative capacity of sensation, narrative and ritual. She holds an MFA in Public Art and Social Practice from the Bauhaus University Weimar, BFA in Sculpture from Concordia University Montreal. She co-founded and continues to work with the Berlin artist collective Process Institute. She is currently based in Vancouver and teaches Social Practice at Emily Carr University.

ⁱ The writer's psychotherapist, who comes from Croatia and is based in Toronto/Toronto.

ⁱⁱ The light: a vibratory material that strikes up against another vibratory material, glass, only to ricochet back to our vibrating bodies, standing there to behold the spectacle: American cowboy art of the colonial persuasion.

ⁱⁱⁱ Maggie Nelson in *The Art of Cruelty* (2015).

^{iv} Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick on textile artist Judith Scott in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2012).

^v This was the narrative as described by the Guggenheim Museum and the Ludwig Foundation (<http://www.eliserasmussen.com/findingana/>).

^{vi} From a poem entitled *De Fem (performative art writing exercise #2)* that Fournier wrote in response to Hilma af Klint's “Painting the Unseen” at the Serpentine Gallery, London UK, 8 May 2016.

^{vii} “The photographs of Ana Mendieta document private sculptural performances enacted in the landscape to invoke and represent the spirit of renewal inspired by nature and the power of the feminine” (<https://www.guggenheim.org/arts-curriculum/topic/ana-mendieta>).

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Maegan Hill-Carroll is an artist and writer living and working in Vancouver, Canada. She holds an MFA from the University of California Los Angeles and a BFA from the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, where she grew up building houses. She was the 2010 Barbara Spohr Memorial Award winner. Her work has been exhibited in Los Angeles and across Canada. Hill-Carroll has been published in *Fillip*, *Capricious* and the *Chapess*. Recent solo exhibitions include *Muniment Monument* at Wil Aballe Art Projects and *Green Puce* at the Platform Centre for Digital and Photographic Art. Last summer she attended Chris Kraus's Summer Institute writing residency at the Plug In ICA in Winnipeg. In November her second solo exhibition *Lucretia's Toe* will be mounted at Wil Aballe Art Projects.

Elise Rasmussen is a research-based artist working in photography, video and performance. She assumes the role of artist as investigator to uncover lesser-known histories in an attempt to challenge the hegemonic record from a feminist perspective. Elise has exhibited, performed and screened her work internationally, including the Brooklyn Museum (NY), Night Gallery (Los Angeles), Pioneer Works (NY), CCS Bard Hessel Museum (Annandale-on-Hudson), Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin), Standpoint Gallery (London), Dazibao (Montreal), TRUCK (Calgary) and ESP | Erin Stump Projects (Toronto). Elise received her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2007 and has been an artist in residence at a number of institutions, most notably the Irish Museum of Modern Art (Dublin), the Nirox Foundation (South Africa), LMCC (NY), Shandaken Projects (Storm King), SOMA (Mexico City), and the Banff Centre (Alberta). Elise has been written about in publications such as *Art in America*, *BOMB Magazine*, *Hyperallergic*, *Canadian Art* and the *New Inquiry*, and has received grants from the Jerome Foundation, the Canada Council for the Arts and the American Austrian Foundation. She was recently awarded the 2018 NYSCA/NYFA Interdisciplinary Artist Fellowship and the Gattuso Prize from the Contact Photography Festival. Born in Edmonton, Canada, Elise lives in Brooklyn, NY.

Evann Siebens makes media with movement. She has exhibited her projects at galleries such as Eyebeam and Centre Pompidou, while her documentaries have been screened at MOMA and on PBS. A former dancer with the National Ballet of Canada and Bonn Ballet, Evann graduated from New York University. Now based in Vancouver, she has participated in residencies at the Banff Centre, UNIT/PITT and ACME with Keith Doyle. Evann recently won the ID/Identities Istanbul Best Video Prize, and performed at Western Front, as well as New Media Gallery, Vancouver. Recent exhibitions include *MediaArtLab/Urban Screen*, Russia, Lincoln Centre Film Society, New York, and screening a commissioned work during *FacadeFest* on the exterior of the Vancouver Art Gallery. She is represented by Wil Aballe Art Projects in Vancouver.



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Myths

AMY BRENER
MAEGAN HILL-CARROLL
ZOE KREYE
ELISE RASMUSSEN
EVANN SIEBENS

Opening: Thurs, Sept 13th, 6 p.m.
Exhibition: Sept 14 – Oct 13, 2018

at the gallery's new location

WAAP
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Wil Aballe Art Projects
Vancouver

Image: EVANN SIEBENS, *Plus TheCo.*
Minus Helen Goodwin (still), 2018, video.
Pictured: Anne Ngan.

