

Frogspawn



She had been like this for as long as she could remember - split between two bodies and two selves. One was a human girl, clean, fair and cold, the other a wild and nameless creature composed of many limbs, skins and species, with a home in water, earth and night. She had been found as a small child at the edge of the forest where the marshlands began and the villagers rarely went.

Nobody knew where she came from, but deep in her body, she understood there had been some great violence that had made and spliced her into separate pieces. To this violence her fate was bound forever, along with the endless longing to reunite with her other half; the monster dwelling in the vastness of the marsh, waiting.

Her handsome human form was despised and desired by many, and she gazed upon them with eyes full of spite. All she saw in their faces was her own loathed reflection; this hollow phantom-body forced upon her like a cage, dulling her senses and keeping her contained. She spent her days in constant yearning for the coming of night, when the songs of earth and water finally came flooding into her shifting cells, enveloping her slippery form in joyous renunciation and leading her back into the dark freedom of the marsh, until the first light of dawn.

One fateful night, she was possessed by a maddening desire. She wanted to call out to that ancient and absolute violence and become the instrument of its anger, so pure, that it could un-make the fracture it had once imposed upon her - even if once summoned, its terror would rip through the whole world and its imagination.

It was the night she finally showed herself to them.



They followed her into the darkness of the sleeping forest. Some carried torches, swords and pitchforks, the flames making the animalistic anger in their faces grow into the large shadows of the trees above.

Their shouts and curses filled the air: “Monster”. “Witch”. “Demon.”

“Frogspawn. “Devilwoman”. They wanted every piece of her gone from the world they knew, for she could take it all away from them.

- “There she is! Up ahead, at the edge of the marshes”, yelled one of their youngest.

And there she was, her giant frame towering over them against the cloudless night. Enormous petals in magnificent shades of black and ruby surrounded her many fierce faces, some animal, some plant and some still bearing traces of her former features and pairs of huge, glowing eyes. The lower half of her body extended long and thick into the ground, sprouting thorns and leaves covered in wet, amphibian skin that changed its pattern and colour as she twisted and turned. The men all fell silent, watching her as if hypnotised. When she spoke, her voice seemed to come from everywhere, at once human, critter and the marsh itself:

- Come closer. I love you. Let my warmth embrace you and hold you gently within. Let me turn you inside out and make you mine completely. Let your layers of skin, muscle, bone, your blood, hormones and bacteria all surrender to my desire, all that composes your beloved form dissolve willingly into me. Let your body become my body, and your name become my name. I love you. Come closer.

And so they did.



The forest fell into silence under the cloak of the trees. She now stood alone at the edge of the marsh - the very place she had been found many years ago. Around her on the soft moss, smoking torches and weapons rested like sleeping bodies on a thin blanket of crimson-red blood. What had been made by violence was finally undone by it - what had been split, found its wholesome form at last. Gazing up at the moon, her pupils dilated into infinite dark ponds that embraced the night sky. Her fluids - the sweat, saliva and slime - morphed into porous pollen particles that floated freely around her, humming along to her last breath before she finally became one with soil, beast, water and dream, to be born again.



Exhibition text by Sonja Teszler

Yulia Iosilzon

FROGSPAWN

PV: Thursday 9 June, 6 - 8pm
Exhibition dates: 10 June - 9 July 2022

Sapling is pleased to present *Frogspawn*, a solo exhibition of new paintings and ceramics by Yulia Iosilzon. Responding to an original short story by the curator Sonja Teszler, the artist combines inspiration from this fresh literary source with her distinctive visual vocabulary to open a portal onto a subversive fantasy world. Sapling is treating the exhibition space as a marshland, inviting the artist to populate the gallery with paintings and ceramics of her creatures emerging from the water.

Based in London, Iosilzon creates sites for escapism and introspection. Her instantly recognisable symbolic imagery finds roots in arts across time, from ancient mythology to contemporary cinema. In her paintings, the artist uses oil and silicone paints on stretched silk, expressing an abundant world where stories, symbols and characters subtly emerge, overlap, and interact. Rendered in the artist's signature calligraphic brushstrokes, monumental flowers, plants, snakes and mischievous human faces float and shimmer above the translucent surface. Iosilzon's ceramic practice includes standing sculptures and wall murals of distinct living organisms such as bees, mushrooms, and flowers.

Doubling as a curatorial text, Teszler's story is a speculative reinterpretation of the classic fairy tale "The Marsh King's Daughter" by Hans Christian Andersen.¹ He tells the story of Helga, a woman who lives in two states: a bewitchingly beautiful but cruel person by day, and a monstrous frog-like hybrid by night, albeit with a kind character. In Teszler's response, she learns to embrace her fluid, composite, non-categorical, and abject reality. The new story tracks Helga's progress from a "split" state towards synthesis and final acceptance of her hybrid existence.

Taking this as a framework for reconciling Western philosophy's tendency towards a dualistic worldview into a more holistic cosmology, the exhibition engages with the concept of the human and non-human evolving in contamination with one another.² The project embraces all aspects of life including abject elements that traditionally provoke fear. Informed by a feminist perspective, artist and writer propose that we celebrate what may appear monstrous as a state of vibrant entanglement.

¹ First published in 1858. The tale has a lasting cultural impact, including recent adaptation in the Shrek movies.

² "Most ecofeminists reject dichotomies and hierarchies as alien to the natural world – nature is interconnections."- Lisa Kemmerer, *Sister Species: Women, Animals and Social Justice*, 2011

Yulia Iosilzon (b. 1992) lives and works in London. She received an MA in Fine Art from the Royal College of Art in London, UK in 2019 and a BA in Fine Art from the Slade School of Fine Art in London, UK in 2017.

Solo exhibitions of Iosilzon's work have taken place at: Foundry in Seoul, South Korea (2022); Carvalho Park in New York City (2021 and 2019); De Brock Gallery in Antwerp, Belgium (2021); Huxley-Parlour in London, UK (2021); Berntson Bhattacharjee, in collaboration with Sotheby's Scandinavia, in Stockholm, Sweden (2021); Osnova in Moscow, Russia (2020); and Roman Road in London, UK (2020).

Group exhibitions that have shown Iosilzon's work have taken place at: Berntson Bhattacharjee Gallery in London, UK (2021); Roman Road in London, UK (2021); Space K in Seoul, South Korea (2020); Hannah Barry Gallery in London, UK (2020); Bloomberg New Contemporaries, South London Gallery in London, UK (2019); Bloomberg New Contemporaries, Leeds Art Gallery in Leeds, UK (2019); the Moscow Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow, Russia (2019); Hockney Gallery in London, UK (2018); and Kvadrat 16 Gallery in Copenhagen, Denmark (2018).

Sonja Teszler (b. 1997, Budapest) is a writer, curator, and musician. As a writer, she has published exhibition reviews and essays digitally and in print with Flash Art, Arts of the Working Class, Something Curated, Calvert Journal, thisistomorrow and Floor magazine among others, as well as contributed texts to various exhibitions in the UK and internationally in both creative fictional and more conventional formats. She has worked with non-profit organisations such as Migrate Art, Kunstraum London, and Drawing Room. She is focused on championing artists from the Central-Eastern European diaspora throughout her practice.

Sapling is a new gallery that celebrates nature through art. Founded by Charlotte Call in 2021, initially as a temporary space, it was established as a gallery in spring 2022. Sapling works on projects with early stage and established artists. Concept shows have explored the shift in humanity's perception of outer space by contrasting works by Albrecht Dürer with VR, while debut shows have springboarded careers of rising stars Orfeo Tagiuri, Eddie Ruscha, Jessie Stevenson, Angus McCrum, and Cecilia Granara. Sapling recently launched Sapling 'Studio' with an exclusive edition of wildflower seeds designed by Gilbert & George.

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Links

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Visit

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