



EXPLORING IMAGINATION  
IN DARK TIMES

Eight Painted Masks  
inspired by Shakespeare's  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream*



# SUMMER SOLSTICE

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I feel growing excitement as summer solstice - June 21 - approaches and my mind turns to nature and fantasy, and especially a play written by William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The play, which premiered on January 1, 1605, is set in midsummer in Athens.

Shakespeare lived all his life in the shadow of the bubonic plague, writing prolifically during outbreaks and quarantine lockdowns in London and Stratford-on-Avon.





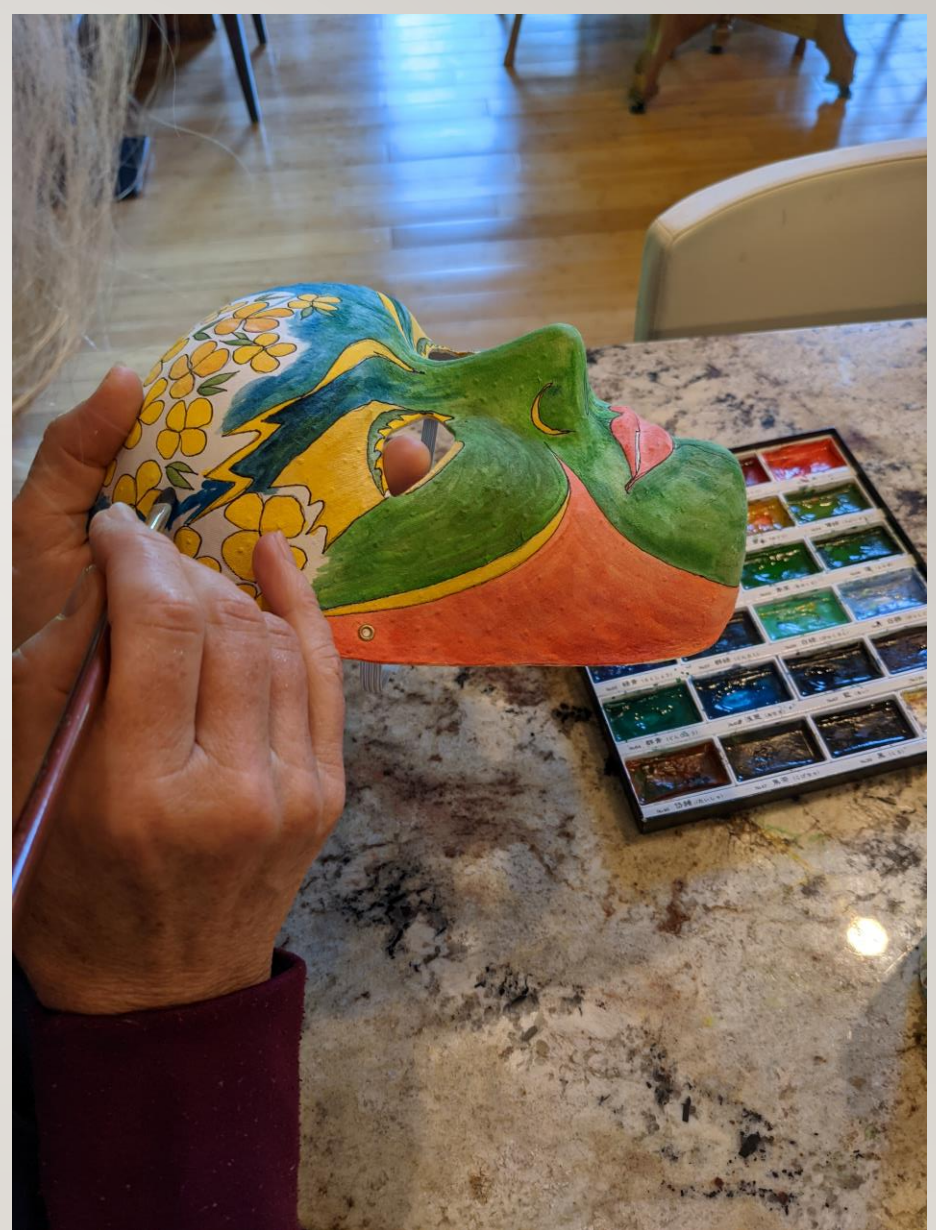
# MAKING MASKS OF IMAGINARY FAIRIES

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My project – painting odd alien paper masks - explores my need for vicarious pleasure in imagination.

I am making masks of imaginary fairies from Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. These are freakish but cathartic.

I begin with Titania's fairy assistants, Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mustardseed, and Moth, flowers and creatures from the garden or field, tiny and magical in imagination; in reality, complex, interconnected and amazing.





# COMPLETING EIGHT FAIRIES

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After the four fairies are complete, I am still thinking about the fairy characters. First, I make Fairy.

Then I make contrasting King Oberon and Queen Titania to express their fraught relationship and the extreme dichotomies of jealous rage and peaceful gratitude.

I complete the set with Puck, who enlivens the plot with his maddening pranks.

The Stratford Festival's 2021 "pandemic" version of the play uses 8 actors to perform all the many human and fairy characters.







## PEASEBLOSSOM

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My imagination identifies with these fantastical creatures – my name Oonagh is that of an Irish fairy goddess and it is fun to imagine what a fairy's life might be as compared to my life as a lawyer.

I love the idea of tiny creatures living in flowers and sleeping on mossy banks of streams and frolicking in the moonlight, but I do not *believe* in them.

The project is about separating imagination and fantasy from reality and fact, which sometimes becomes complicated when we live online and may be susceptible to believing fake news on real subjects like the pandemic and vaccine safety and efficacy.



## MUSTARDSEED

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The fairy world of Shakespeare's play presents an excellent metaphor for the chaotic injured planet we experience.

Shakespeare's poetry is full of natural allusions and names of flowers and plants. A whole garden in Stratford, Ontario, celebrates the flowers he writes about.

Shakespeare's England was long before the Anthropocene. It was dealing with bubonic plague and natural disasters of flood, drought and pestilence. In his time there was no false sense of human mastery of the environment.





## COBWEB

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In the play, conflict between the fairy king Oberon and his queen Titania, is creating havoc for humans - floods, torrential rains, crop failures.

In our day, Anthropogenic climate change, loss and damage to habitat and biodiversity give rise to the COVID-19 pandemic, caterpillar infestations, unpredictable severe weather, floods and forest fires, etc.



## MOTH

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The fairies are not just sweet and benevolent, they can be malevolent and mischievous.

The actual living creatures are magnificent, awe-inspiring, from a scientific point of view, capable of harming or helping us.

Imagined as fairies, they provide stories to help us reconcile with the chaos of life – serendipity, coincidence and misfortune.





## FIRST FAIRY – FLOWER POWER

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FAIRY (whom I have named Flower Power)

*Over hill, over dale,  
Thorough bush, thorough brier,  
Over park, over pale,  
Thorough flood, thorough fire,  
I do wander everywhere,  
Swifter than the moon's sphere;  
And I serve the fairy queen,  
To dew her orbs upon the green.*

William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*  
1605.





# PUCK

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Robin Goodfellow (Puck), servant to King Oberon is the jester, mocker, mercurial and willful, doing his master's bidding but always adding a twist of mischief just for the fun of it.

FAIRY:

*Either I mistake your shape and making quite,  
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite  
Call'd Robin Goodfellow: are not you he  
That frights the maidens of the villagery; ...*

W. Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream 1605.





# FAIRY AND PUCK

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Fairy and Puck meet at dusk in the woodland and discuss the conflict of their King and Queen that is roiling the countryside.

**PUCK:**

*The king doth keep his revels here to-night:  
Take heed the queen come not within his sight;  
For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,  
Because that she as her attendant hath  
A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king;  
She never had so sweet a changeling;  
And jealous Oberon would have the child  
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild;  
But she perforce withholds the loved boy,  
Crowns him with flowers and makes him all her joy:  
And now they never meet in grove or green,  
By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen,  
But, they do square, that all their elves for fear  
Creep into acorn-cups and hide them there.*





## “JEALOUS OBERON”

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Oberon, King of the Fairies is filled with jealous rage. Queen Titania has adopted a little changeling boy as a promise to her dear friend dying in childbirth and refuses to give the child to Oberon. Their bitter conflict has stirred up environmental chaos.

Spurned and angry, Oberon conspires with Puck to humiliate Titania. With a magic potion applied to the eyelids of sleeping Titania, Oberon causes her to fall madly in love with the first creature she sees upon awakening.

Through fairy magic Puck transforms the head of amateur actor Bottom who is dozing between scene rehearsals, into that of a donkey or Ass (ripe with double entendre jokes in olde English).

W. Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream 1605.





## “ILL MET BY MOONLIGHT”

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TITANIA:

*... The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts  
Far in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,  
And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown  
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds  
Is, as in mockery, set: the spring, the summer,  
The chiding autumn, angry winter, change  
Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world,  
By their increase, now knows not which is which:  
And this same progeny of evils comes  
From our debate, from our dissension;  
We are their parents and original.*

OBERON

*Do you amend it then; it lies in you:  
Why should Titania cross her Oberon?  
I do but beg a little changeling boy,  
To be my henchman.*

W. Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream 1605.





## “PROUD TITANIA”

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### TITANIA

*What, jealous Oberon! Fairies, skip hence:  
I have forsworn his bed and company.*

Queen Titania has come to the woodland near Athens to contribute to the nuptial celebrations of the noble Athenians. Her fairies prepare a bower for her to spend the night.

As she sleeps Oberon anoints her eyes with a magic potion. When she awakens, she falls madly in love with the transformed Bottom. (Or is she just pretending to torment her husband?)

W. Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1605.





## CALLING THE FAIRIES

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Titania speaks to her new love, Bottom, and calls her fairies to attend to him:

TITANIA

*Out of this wood do not desire to go.  
Thou shalt remain here whether thou wilt or no.  
I am a spirit of no common rate.  
The summer still doth tend upon my state,  
And I do love thee. Therefore go with me.  
I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee,  
And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep  
And sing while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep.  
And I will purge thy mortal grossness so  
That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.—  
Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed!*

W. Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream 1605.





# HAPPY MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAMING!

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After Oberon and Puck reverse the magic and Titania awakens from the strange 'dream' of falling in love with an Ass, she reconciles with Oberon and shares the darling child. The world is at peace.

## OBERON

*Now, until the break of day,  
Through this house each fairy stray.  
To the best bride-bed will we,  
Which by us shall blessed be; ...*

## PUCK

*If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended,  
That you have but slumber'd here  
While these visions did appear.  
And this weak and idle theme,  
No more yielding but a dream, ...*





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Where does your  
imagination take  
you?

Free your  
imagination but be  
grounded in reality!