Zachari Logan

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NEW
ART
PROJECTS

Bathing Wildman
2020

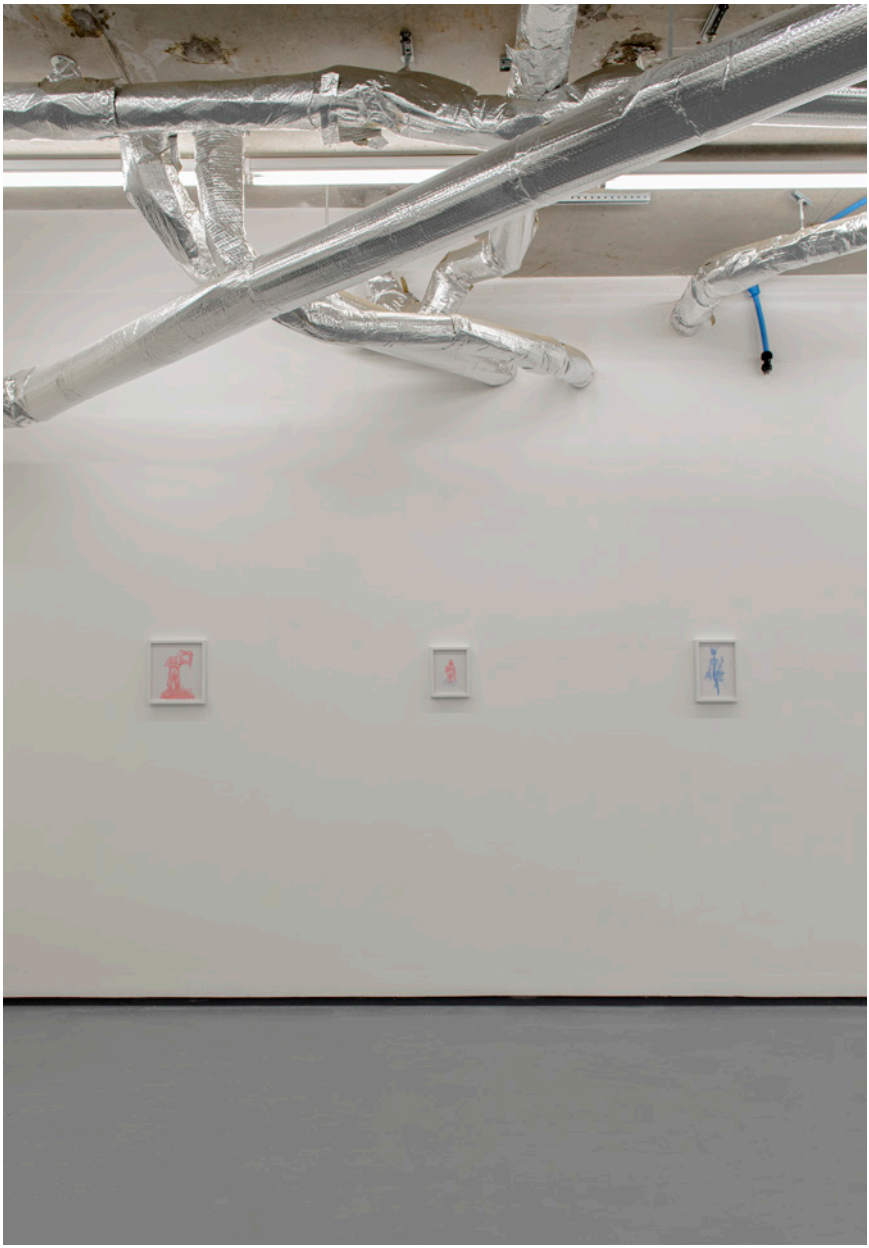
red and blue pencil on mylar
12.7 x 20.3 cms
5 x 8 inches

Wildman Picks Wildflowers
2020

red and blue pencil on mylar
25.4 x 17.8 cms
10 x 7 inches

Wildman Puts Wildflowers In His Hair
2020

red and blue pencil on mylar
22.8 x 27.9 cms
9 x 11 inches



Fred Mann

Foreword

For his third exhibition at New Art Projects, Canadian artist Zachari Logan pictures the character of the "Wildman". Among the 11 new drawings in this show, seven relate to this figure and his actions in a fictitious garden. Logan is concerned with the process of the re-wilding of the human form, mutating it into flora, fauna or fully transformed; as symbolic of a new magical state. He uses these transformations as a metaphor for queerness.

In a similar way to the characters of Ovid's Metamorphoses, where gods, consumed by their desire, transform their lovers into trees, or in the case of Io, a cow, Logan's transformations appear to occur as the a result of a strong personal desire for otherness. By grounding his practice in an ongoing dialogue exploring how men are portrayed both historically, and in a contemporary sense, Logan seeks to *"undercut notions of accepted images of maleness, of queering the canonical imagery that continues to inform so much of contemporary conceptions of gender as codified binaries."*

In this way Logan has created a language of portraiture that uses his own physical body as a catalyst, whether he directly appears in the works as a subject or not. He has created a space for the exploration of the male and queer body politic, by placing his figures in a symbolic landscape. For this new show, we encounter the "Wildman" posing, bathing, picking flowers and conjuring: Physical acts that suggest equanimity. These portraits are paired with a suite of drawings that feature wildflowers whispering words of warning among an intermingling of delicate skeletal forms and blooming flora.

In these new works it is the garden the “Wildman” inhabits that is changing and the flowers are transformed into skeletons at his touch. The “Wildman” has the power to effect his own transformations of the world he inhabits, without further changing himself. Once he has plucked the flowers in his garden they change into a symbolic message of impending death, which he then offers to the viewer. Conversely, when he weaves flowers into his own hair, they remain flowers. Here he inhabits his garden without separation, he becomes it.

In “Wildman conjures a black hole” we see the figure dip his foot in to the waters edge. In his right hand he holds a staff or a rod, reminiscent of a divining rod and he appears to have been depicted “dowsing”. This process, supposed to have originated in Germany in the 15th century, is a method of finding water or metals by using a Y or L shaped stick. While no scientific explanation for water divining or water witching exists, the phenomenon is said to be caused by the “ideomotor effect”, where a person unconsciously performs actions because of prior expectations, suggestions or preconceptions. It works much like an Ouija board, where it feels like the pointer is moving itself, but in reality, the person holding it is making small movements and pushing the pointer across the board.

Here the “Wildman” is using the divining rod to cast a spell that affects the surface of the water to make a black hole. He is the protagonist of magic and change, re-imagined as a fully formed shaman in his own right, Perhaps this black

hole is a space he is making to connect his world to ours, a bridge between where we are and where he exists.

In the final four works in this show, we are shown the messages the "Wildman" has created from the magma of a parallel, natural and magical world. In "Wildflowers from the *bone garden*" the arms and hands of a skeleton transform into bulbs while a plant flowers and blooms through the ribcage. In "Corona Flower" the head of a dandelion, echo's the virus itself, its head crowned by a half molecule – half dandelion "pappi", the soft seed culture that spreads on the air.

The center of a small, delicate wreath of flowers is blue, but as the tendrils spread they become red the further from the center they grow, a direct metaphor for the spread of the corona virus. The beauty of both the flowers and the drawing remains, but the red colour acts as a flag, a warning. A bunch of daisies appears innocent, but on closer inspection the flowers themselves are made up of a repeated sentence, "Go Back Inside", scrawled over and over again to show us that within the beauty of the parallel world we have been shown, there is a warning sent back to our world: Take the situation seriously, and take good care.

Wildman's Bouquet, From The Bone Garden
2020

red and blue pencil on mylar
30.5 x 43 cms
12 x 17 inches

Two Flowers from the Bone Garden
2020

red and blue pencil on mylar
15.2 x 25.4 cms
6 x 10 inches

Wildman Conjures A Black Hole
2020

red and blue pencil on mylar
8 x 8 inches
20.3 x 20.3 cms

Wildflowers Swirl To Make Black Hole
2020

red and blue pencil on mylar
15.2 x 20.3 cms
6 x 8 inches

Giovanni Aloi

Zachari Logan: Mythical Ecologies and Art

Natural Mythologies

Zachari Logan's work speaks volumes to me, not just as an art historian or as an art lover. First and foremost, it speaks to me about a kind of existentialist loneliness I know far too well. It brings me back to a wonderful childhood filled with the magic of a natural world invisible to scientific knowledge. But it also reminds me of the alienation I endured growing up among peers who couldn't understand me and could not see what I saw in nature.

Logan's work materializes a personal mythology akin to the kind that made my childhood truly special, and that continues to greatly enrich my life today. I grew up in a small apartment in Milan, the industrial and gray Northern Italian powerhouse. My parents emigrated from the south during the early 70s in search of work and better life prospects.

As working-class parents, they couldn't offer my brother and me much—their eyes were firmly planted on life's essentials. But my brother and I learned to make a little go a long way. We mostly entertained ourselves with invented games, one of which entailed flicking through the yellow pages. Sounds sad… and, in retrospect, it was.

My dad worked sixteen-hour shifts in the postal service. My mum contributed to the family income by sewing for friends and neighbors in a Milan that mostly despised southern immigrants and offered them next to no opportunities.

Maybe because of the austerity I grew up in or perhaps merely out of luck, I developed a sense of independence and self-sufficiency. As a child, I became aware of the value of time; that time was mine to waste or turn into a treasure trove of adventures, discovery, and excitement. My childhood knew no boredom as long as I could be around nature.

That wasn't often easy in a city like Milan. But we had a small balcony on which my mom grew some potted plants. Many came from the south – a little oasis packed with an oleander, some echeverias, snapdragons, and a jasmine. Reminders of her youth and the people she left behind. On summer days, these potted plants would become my private wilderness. So much lurked among them—a line of ants, a caterpillar, a tiny moth, aphids, the occasional bee, and on what would become an unforgettable day, the fleeting visit of a cabbage white. Just observing these creatures, their movements, their behaviors—discovering their worlds helped me discover mine. Nature brought magic to a concrete jungle. It absorbed my attention and made me see the beauty in the mundane, the small, the seemingly insignificant that is all around us.

Growing up, parents and friends started to call me "the naturalist." Then, one summer, my science teacher made us read Gerald Durrell's My Family and Other Animals as a holiday assignment. I was ten. The main character, Gerald, was around the same age. I recognized myself in him and found solace in the knowledge that I wasn't the only one who saw incredible beauty in nature.

I made that character mine and I began to play the part. By then, I had become obsessed with David Attenborough's wildlife documentaries. The patriarchal force of natural history was imparted upon me through multiple media channels.

I would keep locusts and snails in glass jars and build mini dioramas in shoe boxes. My parents bought me books on animals and nature since it was clear they made me very happy. Only retrospectively, I realized how the natural history path, the butterfly collecting, the jars, the cases, the organizing was what a set the only set of tools and behaviors I had at my disposal to make sense of my passion for the natural world in a way that could also be understood and accepted by others. At times a relative would cast me as "the strange kid" who preferred to rummage the grasses in the hope of finding a praying mantis instead of playing with his cousins. My mom would protect me.

Every year, we'd spend the summer in the south. The minimalism of little balcony in Milan could not compete with the bourgeoning natural world of the southern countryside. It was overwhelmingly rich, varied, surprising, and I had a seemingly inexhaustible urge to discover. But I soon realized that I could never become a good natural historian despite my passion and knowledge. I was interested in animal and plant behavior, but not at all in biology or chemistry. That's where the fun ended. I loved the animals and plants as characters of an enchanted world—in my mind, animals and plants were more than collectibles.

They were part of a personal mythology that defined me more than the natural history treatises I was reading during my teenage years. Chapter by chapter, the message became clearer—those treatises wanted me to give up the mysticism completely. My other passion, art, seemed to naturally have more room for the magical and began to tempt me more. I was faced with a choice and I was stuck down the middle when I realized that the world was just about to choose on my behalf.

By the age of fourteen, the humorous appreciation for my obsession for nature turned into discouragement. My parents never did. Despite their primary education and limited means, my happiness always came first. They saw nothing wrong with my love for plants and animals. If anything, their biggest concern was with my growing fearlessness. My mom was afraid I might get bitten by a poisonous snake, and my dad that I could fall down an abandoned well while scouring the countryside—a terrible news story that gripped the country ended in tragedy and haunted them for years.

But time had certainly made me more adventurous and daring. I had also discovered that some of the most incredible animal encounters happened in the hottest hours when reptiles soaked up the sun on the creek's rocky bed – by the age of fifteen, I had become pretty fond of snakes, lizards, and frogs. But the rest of the world started to tell me that I was getting too old to play the naturalist. The message was getting louder: nature is for kids, and I had to grow up. Swap the snakes for the motorbikes, and the frogs for girls.

I was made to feel wrong for not being interested in what everybody else seemed naturally attracted to. And little did I know that things were about to get even more complicated: I was more and more in love with butterflies.

My interest in butterflies, flowers, and plants was seen as feminine, and of course, that could only be meant in a pejorative sense. In life, it's sometimes hard to tell how much of yourself is defined by the things you love or by the pressure of those who hate what you love. Realizing I was gay further consolidated my love for the natural world, for I knew that there, the plants and the animals I always loved, didn't care.

Deep down, despite all the pressure and despise, I still believed that something was really wrong with them, not me. But of course, I was alone, always a minority. I knew nobody else like me. Then, more than now, we were raised to loath diversity. But I kept wondering why nobody seems interested in all the wonderful life forms around us. How could that be possible? Why should a car come before a snake or a football match take priority over a walk in the woods?

The Re-Enchantment of Art

In 1991, artist, author, and art critic Suzi Gablik's published a controversial book titled The Reenchantment of Art. Her main argument laid the foundations of many essential artistic/political concerns central to today's scene. It diagnosed the traits of a cultural crisis: a "disenchantment" caused by modernist philosophies — something that substantially impoverished artistic discourses and art making.[1] Postmodernism's fixation with Derridian adaptations of deconstruction "declared art's pointlessness openly, and baited us with its indifference".[2] As it turned out, this postmodern indifference, its cynicism, and often juvenile sarcasm, ultimately were all pretty faithful reflections of our end of millennium cultural milieu.

Drawing was utterly devalued, painting was declared dead, and realism had to be mistrusted – always. To this tired state of affairs, Gablik's counteroffer lay in "reconstructive postmodernism". A shift "from patriarchal thinking and the dominator model of culture toward an aesthetic of interconnectedness, social responsibility, and ecological attunement".[3] Gablik envisioned an art grounded in a sense of responsibility for cultural healing. Lamenting a peculiarly western loss of the "divine side of life, of the power of imagination, myth, dream, and vision," the author invoked the importance of a world-changing, magical sense of perception that art should foster.[4]

In this context, Logan's work is also important to me as an art historian because of its, as Gablik would have it, inherent reconstructivism. Its determination to recover and unashamedly and personally inhabit a magical world in which nature is everything and in which we are one with plants, animals, and environments.

At school, we study Darwin's theory of evolution. Most of us subscribe to the notion that we, too, are animals. But most don't grasp the deeper meaning of that implication. It is, therefore, no surprise that the planet is in the state it is. Not only it has been mismanaged by our politicians and institutions. The other side of the problem is with all of us and that vast majority who have never developed an intimate relationship with the natural world. What people call nature often is a towel on a sunny beach, or a lawn with a few scattered trees to use as goalposts. Their relationship with nature has been defined by capitalism—prepackaged to be safely consumed and filed under "recreation."
Our planet bursts with incredible life forms and unspeakable beauty, but we have talked ourselves out of appreciating them to the point that we cannot even see it anymore.
We have impoverished the natural world by telling ourselves that animals are dumb and plants passive. But there is nothing wrong with them.

Humanity is essentially an alienated species. We have all been miseducated to think of nature as a resource or a hobby. This is the greatest tragedy of humanity, the one no one seems to be able to fully acknowledge.

After all, we have understood our "being human" as a verticalizing process away from the ground, an elevation from the animal kingdom towards God's perfection. In our eyes, leaving nature behind is the essence of human virtue. But in truth, leaving nature behind is our most tremendous existentialist loss; one that defines every decision we take as individuals and communities.

Logan's ability to cast himself as a fantastical character, the Wildman, is in and of itself a daring move that signals the emergence of a new register of vulnerability in art and culture. The transformation into a mythical being constitutes the first step to relinquishing that "humanness" has separated us from nature. That has only allowed us to reconnect to it through the optic of science.

Over the past ten years, the importance of science has been seriously undermined. From those who think evolution is a conspiracy theory to those who still believe the earth is flat, science deniers are a thing, and the number seems to grow. But Gablik's argument and Logan's images should not be understood as anti-scientific. The key to our future on this planet rests on our ability to mediate both dimensions on the personal sphere so to retain a magical sense that can induce an intimate and emotional connection with the natural world.

The Enlightenment, with its desire to organize, theorize, dissect, stripped nature of all its mystique, it has stripped animals of their individuality, and has cast plants into resource. While this scientific body of knowledge has

proved of enormous importance to our understanding of the fragile ecosystems we share with non-human beings, it has presented us with a paradox: the more scientific knowledge we have accumulated, the least interested in nature humans have become.

As a true human-animal fantastical creature, Logan can gain access to a lost relationship with nature—a communion that bypasses the scientific order. This becomes visible when he deliberately merges human and vegetal forms, as visible in Wildman Puts Wildflowers In His Hair, suggesting a blurring of scientific categories, and unraveling his personal mythology. This demise of the conceptions of species and order allows an unprecedented bio-fluidity to unfold. To access this dimension, Logan deliberately returns to the pre-modern science times of the Renaissance times through the work of artists like Martin Schongauer and Giuseppe Arcimboldo. Their ability to devise alternative aesthetic languages and materialize original and fantastical iconographies, has clearly inspired Logan. It is through them that he has crafted his own visual language; one capable enticing the viewer through a sheer sense of beauty and sensuality. His love of nature is not merely intellectual, but it invokes a sense of wholesomeness that also invites a re-attunement of our senses so as to encounter the natural world afresh. In this sense, Bathing Wildman stands as a pseudo-pantheistic baptism which cleanses from the cultural structures that make us blind to nature and that immerses us in a primordial human-non-human sensual realm.

It is in this context that the body becomes part of an all-feeling, shared identity, and an all sensing network of connections that exceeds our scientific understanding of being in the world.

Through this proposal, Logan invites every one of us to discover, or rediscover, nature on our personal ground, for it is only when nature matters to us, on a personal level, that a different future for this planet might emerge. The news might continue to bombard us with apocalyptic images and scientists will share more and more alarming data. But will that bring more people to truly care for the environment? At this moment in time, when artists engaging with environmental concerns have also relied on images of doom and destruction to sensitize public opinion, Logan's body of work brings us to consider the problem from a very personal and much more profound perspective. It ultimately is our responsibility to bridge the distance between us and the natural world, for a better and sustainable future is not going to simply emerge from terror of an impending tragedy.

Notes

1. Gablik, S. (1991) *The Reenchantment of Art* (New York and London: Thames and Hudson)
2. Ibid, p.19
3. Ibid, p.22
4. Ibid, p.42

Heavy Crown (Corona Flower),
From The Bone Garden
2020

red, blue and turquoise pencil on mylar
22.8 x 27.9 cms
9 x 11 inches

Go Back Inside (Daisies),
From Advice Series
2020

blue pencil on mylar
25.4 x 20.3 cms
10 x 11 inches

Go Back Inside (Wildflowers),
From Advice Series
2020

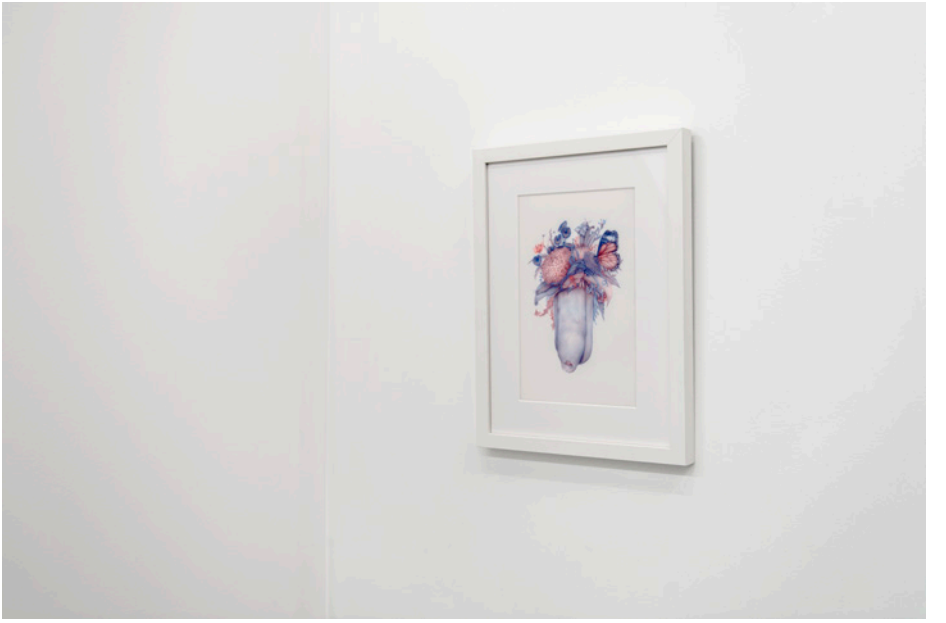
blue pencil on mylar
25.4 x 20.3 cms
10 x 8 inches

Wreath 3
(Levitation after Mary Delany)
2016

Pastel on black paper
59 x 61 inches
158 x 154.9 cms

Hive (iv), Wildman series
2020

Blue and red pencil
on mylar
11 x 7 inches
28 18 cms



Mark Pilkington

The Nearness of You: Love, Death and the Wildman

Whether he's a beast or man,
what drives him wandering across the land,
Is love for others of his clan
And loneliness he cannot stand.

Perhaps he dimly wonders why,
There is no other such as I.
To touch, to love, before I die,
To listen to my lonely cry.

— Lonely Cry. Chuck Bryant,
from *The Legend of Boggy Creek*, 1972.

While Zachari Logan grew up in Saskatchewan, Canada, home to perhaps the most famous wildman of them all, his work draws primarily upon European depictions of a figure that appears in tales and traditions from all over the world.

From Enkidu, the ancient Mesopotamian bull-man, to Pan and the satyrs of ancient Greece; from the jungles of Southeast Asia to the heights of the Austrian Tyrol, every human culture has its wildmen, and they fulfill strikingly similar roles wherever they are found.

The original wildmen, like the Greek satyrs or, arguably, the 15,000-year-old paleolithic "sorcerer" painted in the Cave of the Trois-Frères, were bestial fertility figures whose priapic encouragements could preserve the future of a community. But they were probably much more than that: "The Wild Man was the link to the unknown and

uncontrollable," writes Phyllis Siefker in *Santa Claus: Last of the Wild Men* (1997). "He was the vessel through which life flowed to the people and the land; he was the conduit of divine power, the god-humanity connection."

Embodiments of nature's bounty, and its fury, wildmen might be worshipped as demigods or feared as devils; they marked uncharted wilderness on early maps and helped to distinguish Us from Them, human from animal, settled from unsettled. They were a warning of what might happen if you didn't respect your community's ways, particularly concerning sexual behaviours, becoming bogeymen or lusty figures of fun during seasonal festivities; they were both feared and pitied as lost souls, and admired and desired like rock stars by those who felt different, or wanted to experience a life other than that prescribed by society.

Wildmen avoided human contact and sought out solitude, living quietly in the woods surrounded by animal companions; if disturbed they could fly into a terrible, dangerous rage. The Tyrolian wildman would sit shivering morosely in pleasant sunshine then leap into frenzied life during a storm, ripping up trees in his ecstasy. There's more than a hint of the unfettered potency of *eros* here, but also the constant threat of *thanatos*; that which creates life can just as easily take it, and this wildman would unthinkingly tear apart anyone who disturbed it.

As in Logan's drawing *Wildman Conjures a Black Hole,* some wildmen held formidable supernatural powers – they could make entire lakes or villages disappear, but would also dispense wisdom about nature's ways to those who knew how to ask – the healers, hunters, shamans and witches of their communities. It's probable that some wildmen became gods, and vice versa, and it's not difficult to see how these were twisted and transformed during the Church's early medieval power grab into the bestial Satan who, their accusers alleged, led the witches to their sabbats.

As religious and political tensions shifted across mediaeval Europe, so attitudes towards the wildman, and popular depictions of it, evolved. By the time of the Renaissance, when the Church's power went largely unquestioned and unthreatened, the wildman had become less of a threat and more of a figure of romance. We can see this in Martin Schongauer's heraldic images of wild men and women, cited as an inspiration by Logan, and in court painter Giuseppe Archimboldo's famous composite figures, to which Logan pays homage in his 'Natural Drag' Series. Where Schongauer depicts the wildman, or woodwose, as the familiar hairy, powerful – if now largely tame – manbeast, Archimboldo's playful, mannerist portraits suggest the wildman as Nature, in all its animal and vegetal forms.

Logan's own wildmen convey both personal and ecological allegories: "These elusive characters," he writes, "are historical constructs I find interesting, in part, because of their locality in the psyche. For me they are queerly

centered as outsiders… they personify landscape, and a philosophical meditation on ecology: land is body, there is no separation."

When European wildman traditions crossed the Atlantic in the seventeenth century, they entwined with those already living amongst the indigenous peoples of the Americas. As colonials encountered the resident spirits and deities of the Americas, aspects of their parallel wildman lores folded into one another, leading to scattered encounter reports by settlers, which multiplied alongside the twentieth century expansion of human industry and habitation into the wilderness. But folklore is not a one way system, its a continuum of influences, stories and beliefs that flows forwards and backwards in time and knows no boundaries: and now the syncretized offspring of the Americas have returned to haunt their European ancestors.
Logan's local wildman now has iconic status and, like its forebears, plays many roles: cultural, spiritual and economical. It's been known by many names – Sokqueatl, Dsonoqua, Bigfoot – but we'll stick with Sasquatch, the neonym coined in 1929 by JW Burns, a teacher on the British Columbia Chehalis Indian Reservation.

Yeti tales from Sir Edmund Hillary's 1953 Everest expedition inspired a surge of sasquatch news reports and led a British Columbian prospector, Albert Ostman, to remember his own wild encounter at Toba Inlet in from 1924. In 1957 he told *The Province* newspaper how, after being warned about them by a local Indian, he was abducted by a whole family of

Sasquatch and spent six days living among them: “They look like a family, old man, old lady and two young ones, a boy and a girl,” he said. "The boy and the girl seem to be scared of me. The old lady did not seem too pleased about what the old man dragged home. But the old man was waving his arms and telling them all what he had in mind.” And what they had in mind, Ostman grew to understand, was to mate him with the young female of the clan. Although he was well treated during his stay, Ostman didn’t want to join the family and made good his escape.

Ostman’s abduction experience, while alarming for him, remains a dream-come-true for many Sasquatch seekers who, if not quite wanting to tame the wild man, long to be accepted by it and allowed to observe it at close hand, as Jane Goodall famously did with her chimpanzee troops, bridging the gap – at least in the popular imagination – between ape and human.

Twentieth century wildmen continued to inspire awe, fear and pity. Charles Pierce’s hugely popular 1972 film *The Legend of Boggy Creek*, presented its creature as a fearsome-yet-lonely gentle giant, seeking out others of its kind. Its progressive, ecologically-orientated and compassionate approach to the wildman inspired new generations of hunters who would rather commune with a Sasquatch than mount it as a trophy. "The idea of searching, finding, watching and placing the biped under surveillance, blending into their natural environment is not a realistic opportunity at this time”, advises the North

America Bigfoot Search web site. Instead it refers to creating a gradual atmosphere of trust and acceptance, known as 'habituation'[i]: "Having a residence in the middle of a forest, making consistent offerings and having a stable environment without noise or visitors offers the best opportunity to develop a habituation situation."

There's undoubtedly something mystical in the contemporary quest for contact with Sasquatch, and like their European cousins, the wildmen of Indigenous lore bridged the material and immaterial worlds, a notion reflected in contemporary discussions of the creatures as paranormal, rather than biological entities. Today's Sasquatch seekers are the present-day equivalents of those shamans, witches and sorcerers who sought wisdom from medieval wildmen. The longing expressed by these new nature mystics for their elusive quarry can also nudge up against, and occasionally stray joyously into, the erotic domain once inhabited by fauns and satyrs, a dimension sensitively rendered in Logan's quiet works, like *Wildman Puts Wildflowers in His Hair* and *Wildman Picks Wildflowers,* and more crudely in Robert Crumb's 1970s drawings of the hairy, lusty wildwoman "Yetti".

The *ur-text* for those engaged in the Sasquatch habituation process is *The Creature: Personal Experiences With Bigfoot* by Jan Klement[ii], an 80-page book that sold only 100 copies on publication in 1976 but now holds legendary status within cryptozoological circles. Rippling with mystery and desire, *The Creature* describes Klement's increasingly intimate

encounters with a Sasquatch he names Kong, whose habitat overlapped with the author's cabin in remote Pennsylvania.

We could say that his account is an initiatory journey, his own transformation from man to wildman. *Eros* and taboo breaking form the basis of Klement's expulsion from civil society: he admits that "was not exactly living in the cabin by choice", having been asked to move there by his wife following an "indiscretion".

Klement's descriptions of Kong's physique and behaviour merge the scientific with the erotic, matter-of-fact observation with prurient fascination: "Kong had arrived at the cabin with this massive erection. Usually his penis hung limp and after a time it ceased to exist.... When the penis was limp it seemed to be about an inch in diameter and about six inches long. It looked very human with a red head that occasionally poked out from foreskin. His testicles were not overly large but they hung to about the same length as the penis."

Despite Klement's dispassionate attitude, it's hard not to sense the growing intensity of his encounters with Kong: "I was sitting on the porch when Kong returned to the cabin. He was visible in the light rays beaming from the cabin and I could see his penis dripping and for the first time I could detect his breathing. I started hollering at him and he looked bewildered. He held out his hand for apples.

I went into the cabin, got three and gave them to him and he promptly pushed these into his mouth."

While Kong allows Klement to touch him and feed him, their electric curiosity is never fully consummated, though things reach a climax of sorts with a powerful erotic display as the man-beast mounts a Holstein cow. But there's no happy ending to this fairy tale. Kong becomes ill and dies and, rather than expose him and their relationship to the world's media, Klement dismembers him and buries his remains in a secret location.

The Creature remains highly unusual, and effective, as a cryptozoological fantasy or mythic slash fiction, but it can also be read as an account of an attempted shamanic transformation: following the 'indiscretion' that sees him banished from the comforts of home and family, Klement retreats to the woods where he encounters the priapic, pan-erotic wildman, Kong. Klement considers shedding his past entirely, becoming a wildman and joining Kong, but ultimately rejects the notion, dismembering and burying Kong, erasing him from reality before returning to civilisation.

We can speculate forever about what was really going on out at the Klement cabin – was Kong really a manimal? Did man and manbeast actually consummate their affair? Did Klement kill Kong and then bury the evidence? Did any of it happen at all outside of the author's fevered imagination? We'll never know for sure, but there's a strange sobriety to the account

that makes it hard to dismiss, while its richly recursive echoes of both ancient and modern wildman lore make it equally hard to ignore. And some of those echoes can still be found in Siberia, on the other side of the Earth.

In his 2007 book *Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism, and Personhood Among the Siberian Yukaghirs*, Danish anthropologist Rane Willerslev details the hunting traditions and practices of a contemporary Siberian community, the Yukaghir, which involve complex, nuanced layers of biomimicry, animism and shamanism.

The hunters' beliefs about their prey (usually, though not exclusively, elk), and the techniques they use to overcome them, are explicitly thanato-erotic, expressed in terms of seduction rather than murder. "The hunter, writes Willerslev, "seeks to induce in the animal master spirits the illusion of lustful play. As a result, the spirits come to believe that what is going on was not a premeditated kill but a *love affair* with the hunter." (italics mine)

The Yukaghir hunter must play a crafty game, a magical balancing act, in which he uses objects, sounds and learned movements to adopt the prey animal's appearance and mannerisms: "To seduce an animal and its associated spiritual beings, the hunter must emphatically project himself into their agencies, even to the point where the boundaries between them are blurred and they become of the same kind."

A successful kill comes when the animal "throws itself at the hunter out of desire", rather than when the hunter overpowers and murders his prey. For the hunter, an ethical kill is one in which the animal gives itself up out of love for its executioner. When this happens, death and desire collapse into one another's arms in their eternal dance and the balance of souls is maintained. The hunter must then fully dismember his prey – as Klement did Kong – to prevent it from learning who killed it, and haunting (or hunting) his soul forever.

Yukaghir hunters go to great lengths to disguise themselves as their prey during a hunt. This has a practical function, allowing them to get close enough to their quarry to kill it, but also a spiritual one, preventing the animal's soul from recognising, and then tormenting, its killer. The hunter must also retain a psychic distance from his victim: should his biomimicry become too all-consuming, should he inhabit his role too well, he might forget who, and what, he is, and become *syugusuy suroma* – a wildman who has forgotten how to be human and can never find its way home to its people. Trapped between man and beast and recognised as neither, like the lonely Boggy Creek monster, these pitiful-yet-dangerous creatures roam the woods alone, with no recollection of their human past.

Merged with nature, these once-human wildmen have othered themselves entirely, abandoning their humanity to become a warning from the wilderness: contemporary, living incarnations of a tradition that is millennia old.

Human becomes animal, *eros* becomes *thanatos*, natural becomes unnatural and Other: these themes flow through the lore of the wildman, as they do so many mythic tales. They are here too in Zachari Logan's work: however, the looming threat is not only our own death, but that of the landscapes inhabited by the multitude of beings, human and animal, depicted so vibrantly within them.
"The ideologies that create ecological disaster are rendered into these landscapes," he writes of his drawings.
In *Wildman Poses As a Caryatid*, Logan's Wildman sits on the edge of a cliff. Although he isn't supporting any visible structure, his non-committal gesture suggests the figurative weight of the world, or a last glance over the edge of the abyss.

The image could hardly be more timely: at this time, America's West Coast is in flames. The habitats of Sasquatch and countless other species, humans among them, have been decimated by colossal fires erupting on an unprecedented scale. Whether physical creatures, spiritual beings or something wholly other and in-between, we can only hope that our twenty-first century wildmen can survive what has been wrought upon them. Erasing villages, draining lakes and destroying forests: we have become the wildmen that our ancestors warned us about.

Further Reading

Willerslev, Rane. 2007. *Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism, and Personhood Among the Siberian Yukaghirs.* University of California Press

Klement Jan. 1976. *The Creature: Personal Experiences With Bigfoot.* Allegheny Press Siefker, Phyillis. 1997. *Santa Claus: Last of the Wild Men.* McFarland.

[i]There are numerous guidebooks, blogs and podcasts on the subject of habituation. The title of this text, crackling as it is with romance, is taken from a podcast by Christopher Noel, author of *Electric Sasquatch* and *A Field Guide to Bigfoot Structures*, amongst others.

[ii]Klement is thought to be a pseudonym for either a chemistry professor, Dr Paul Johnson, or a geology professor, Dr Walter Skinner (*X Files* fans take note), both of Duquesne University, Pittsburgh.

Wildman Poses As A Caryatid
2020

pastel on blue paper
127 x 203.2 cms
50 x 80 inches

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