In the eye of the storm, look it in the eye


Each of us is born of a mother and then everything is up for grabs, gets complicated. After the violent exit-entrance, complexity of being-in-the-world is endlessly negotiated, or all a-tumble. Leaving her body to enter the world is a process of pain and hard work for one becoming two or more: all that pushing and being squeezed, the fire of air enters fluid-filled lungs, bright light hits black all pupil eyes, and sound is harsh without the mediation of fluid. Yet who remembers any of that, and how? Unsettled, unhomed, unheimlich: emotional labour is difficult work.

As a species humans tend toward survival and toward self destruction, endless wars under various guises, names, brands: energy wars, capital wars, and wars of The Book. Nuance: ‘suffering and difference make great art – not egalitarianism’ wrote Francis Bacon.[1] With seeing-sensing and memory, collective and personal, one works at working things out, translating with the estranging impossible necessity of numero-alphabetic language. Language makes and breaks community over and over again. What one sees, how one sees, is the work of research, of thinking, of finding out, of trusting feeling, of not knowing. How one sees is the work too of hearing, of listening with care, and of mishearing – getting it wrong and failing can make the best art work. It’s the work of being an endlessly flawed human amongst other endlessly flawed humans, the species of greatest force amongst other species. Love and care are necessary, difficult, and decisions of survival often cruel. ‘In order to try to feel the efficaciousness of those concepts, you have to accept a witch’s flight far from the ground of any secure good-willed opposition or settled habit. But then you may taste their power which may resemble that of a magic formula, as they empower becoming in a landscape of our impassable contradictions.’ [2]

I live in a place where a crow calls baaa baaa when I step outside into its world. Every morning last spring I went to crow territory paddock behind the house to tend two boundary-testing dorpers (sheep) named Jeffrey and Walid. They escaped four times, the fourth successfully. That nature is cruel I’ve learned here everyday as I take this house back from the wild – how far back, how far away, yet still retain the Noela Hjorth imbued magic? Noela, the artist who lovingly and ferociously tended the property – its buildings and trees and wild gardens – typifies the artist as worker, hyper-productive, driven by a commitment to the creative forces of life and death. Her work was/is iconoclastic, and didn’t fit the feminist zeitgeist of its time: too symbolist (woman as nature) with a sometimes questionable appropriation of other cultural mythologies – she sought to develop a personal feminine mythology and mystique, the animating principle of a generalised global woman spirit, and perhaps she was on to something, the way of vital life: ‘to fly without wings’.
From the hyper-productive value of ‘she worked so hard’ the making of work can also be productively slow, it can take a long time, happen over years, with a lot of being inside atmosphere, or soaking things up as a sponge. On such a path it’s not about the material of things, or the perfection of product. Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray called for a feminine divine, or at least noted the absence of a divine feminine in patriarchy: it was once a given — all life from the mother. Noela Hjorth had the ‘room of one’s own’ and the ‘$500 pounds a year’ Virginia Woolf prescribed as necessary for a woman to have a creative life. One of the greatest offshoots of Art at work as Capital and of Feminism, is the greater number of women from all classes (yes class exists) making art, who take art as a serious pursuit for meaningful life. (That women are comparatively highly under-represented in collections, critical reviews, solo exhibition statistics, grant successes, etcetera, is not the way I’m going to go here, not because it’s irrelevant or unimportant rather that’s not what I’m looking at.)

Women At Work is an enigmatic title, ambivalent yet somehow assured in the proclamation ‘Women’ — as if this’s something at least we can agree on: there are women, there are men, and I’m listening to Anhoni, previously Antony Hegarty of Antony and the Johnsons, a singer songwriter chanteuse whose voice-words tear me up from time to time. Marina Warner notes ‘a recent women’s questionnaire [she] was sent included 26 different genders with a blank box if none of the above applied’. And the necessary conditional here is that of course Women as Woman (holding up half the sky, wearing pussy hats for instance) continue to resist the inherent misogyny of the human world, it starts at birth — that violent entry, the malleable first years when the child grows at the behest of forces outside its control. Each of us carries the scars, some unhealed open wounds. It’s a wonder we (women, the array of possible betweens, men) are here at all.

Women AT work. What is an at, the function of at, its purpose: at isn’t an ‘it’, an ‘it’ or a ‘they’ is a pronoun, like a ‘he’ or a ‘she’ or a ‘she’ and a ‘he’: at is kind of verbie, it’s taking and making a position, it’s at it, positioning and indicating a place occupied in space, in time, on a scale, or in an order, for example at the middle–end–starting point, all at sea, assistance at hand. Curator, Linda M Walker writes, ‘The ‘Work’ in Women At Work is the-work of ‘artwork’; it is the ‘work’ that each artist does as-an-artist; ‘Work’ is what it is, in itself, informing, influencing, the artist’s work; it is the interest(s) an artist has in life, in time; it ‘causes’ work to appear/arise as artwork; the artist is who she is, At-Work in the world, and At-Work with work that is her own topic-of-interest.’ Linda Walker is an artist and writer who also works at examining the Riddoch Gallery archives of Iris Frame, another artist who was compelled by a solitary insistence on her own vision and path. Women At Work in general is representative of artists outside the networks made of elements including the institutional training of artists, grants, and career building events that are intimately connected to the discourses of Art as the brand of cultural capital, and also the work of artists whose practices resists the gallery system. Artists work at it necessarily. As with Iris Frame (painter) and Noela Hjorth (at her best as a printmaker), each of the artists in Women At
Work follows takes a path that rewards in ways other than cultural norms of accumulation of wealth, power, goods. Without art (as spirit of life-death force) the world would be bereft for humans are creative creatures, singularly and collectively, of a mind that is immeasurable. The one who makes, who works at what is not immediately useful, or who works deliberately at what is useless and transitional, strives to create that which is not yet in the world.

Kerrie Stratford finds doors she steps through and relays her visions in colour and pattern; Francesca da Rimini’s work is embedded in a social practice of resistance as she takes on personae to weave spells and incantations from and into actions, stories and performances from materials found and gifted; Mary Daily’s divine, often small, ceramic vessels beckon to be held, they are glazed with colour that sings, ‘it’s all about the glazing’, devising recipes for colour is ‘like cooking’; Diana Wiseman loves her medium, she controls directional drips with scrapes, drags, and scumbled colour, the effect is spatially aware, alluding to landscape or not, mark-making gestures make atmospheric fields that can convey the ominous feeling of after something or of premonition — ‘Along a River’ (2017) for instance, from the sky one looks down at a lone raven in flight at the frame edge left of river bend. Jo Fife has devised a novel technique that honours the traditions of women’s labor as lacemakers, with a disengaged feed-dog she draws with silk, cotton and rayon thread, stitching and twisting lines until space and matter touch and part; Jean McArthur, poet and writer, archives her life in words and in collaged images using pencils, crayons, watercolours and papers, until the image finds its resemblance in emotion; Yoko Kajio’s videos of water seek to express nature though technology, addressing the balance between the synthetic and the natural, the constantly moving and essential element that is the life/death heart of the stream of life.

And here they are, my monsters: the one who capsized his boat and swore me to secrecy. And the one whose glorious locks turn out to be a wig. I stare and stare for so long ‘but… but… can’t everyone see the edge?’ until the Emperor leaves in silence. And waiting for me in his nest behind the piano is my beautiful, beloved monster, the one that always loves me. HA! HA! And the Medusa laughs with him.

Notes
[5] ‘at’ is a preposition: 1. used to indicate a point or place occupied in space – to stand at the door; also used to indicate a location or position, as in time, on a scale, or in order – at the middle point; and used to indicate presence or location — at home, at sea, at hand. Bastardised from dictionary.com.
Naraat the Earthspeaker wants you to look into the Waters of Farseeing. A level 30 Stormwind City Quest. Rewards. Added in World of Warcraft: Cataclysm. Azeroth already stands in your debt, and yet again she is in need of her heroes. I am but a messenger. A powerful presence seeks audience with you. Peer into the Waters of Farseeing and behold the dilemma of our world. Completion. Now that your eyes have seen the truth, where will you choose to serve? Rewards. You will receive: 0. The "eye," or center, of a storm is surrounded by the strongest winds. The boss is furious about this blunderâ€”if you go into her office now, you'll be in the eye of the storm. I didn't realize that there were protests going on in my neighborhood today, so I was really in the eye of the storm when I left my house. See also: eye, of, storm. Farlex Dictionary of Idioms. In the Eye of the Storm is the first solo album by former Supertramp member Roger Hodgson. The album's first single was the four-minute edit of "Had a Dream (Sleeping with the Enemy)", which peaked at number 48 on the Billboard Hot 100. The follow-up single, a four-minute edit of "In Jeopardy", was a minor hit, peaking at number 30 on the Mainstream Rock Tracks chart but failing to crack the Billboard Hot 100. The album itself was only moderately successful, stalling at number 46 on the Billboard.