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NEW YORK·LOS ANGELES

ANDREA HORNICK

NEW WORK 1435–1783

LINEAGES

TESSA PANETH-POLLAK

PORTRAITS OF WOMEN from the European canon become assisted readymades. Animals provide the assistance. But as readymades go, Hornick is more Guber than Duchamp: she painstakingly repaints works by the “Old Masters.” While they nod to avant-garde precedents, her animals are more than a mustache on the Mona Lisa. In the gap between woman and animal, the artist has undergone a journey. To find the animal for each sitter, Hornick draws from a syncretic toolbox of intuitive practices. Raised in Connecticut in early childhood, she was the only child of Jewish “hippie intellectuals.” Idealists committed to popular education, Mel and Joanne Hornick opened alternative schools where cultural figures shared their talents.

At nine, Hornick learned core-shamanic drum journeying from Michael Harner, an anthropologist credited as a key disseminator of New Age neo-shamanism.¹ Based on work with the Jivaro (Shuar) people of Ecuador, Harner posited that, whether by drugs or drums, societies have rituals for altering consciousness to connect with spirit helpers, including animals. He pushed the power of percussion to facilitate such experiences. Self-hypnosis and energy healing techniques gleaned from her father helped Hornick to cope with an adolescence plagued by loss—at thirteen, of her mother; at seventeen, her father. In the wake of their passing, she needed anchors. Further study with Indigenous and neo-shamanic teachers gave her grounding techniques, embodied knowledge that helped her learn how to “be in the world” as an orphaned young adult. She also sought out the land-based, embodied aspects of early Judaism, rituals missing from Reform synagogues of her childhood but now accessible thanks to Rabbis like Jill Hammer and Tirzah Firestone.²

Hornick starts with a painting to copy and equips herself with biographical information about its subject. She drums to connect with each sitter. After journeying, she jots notes that she works, over time, into narratives. Hortensia del Prado and Cecilia Gallerani become characters she sets out to meet up with. She remains awake. But description and interpretation intertwine, as in dreamwork. Sometimes, information comes packed in a pun, requiring wordplay to untangle. She sees del Prado caught in a lightning storm, her infant daughter held to her chest; she needs “lightning bugs” to lift her home. Journeying to meet Gallerani, she spies a harbor seal; it is her unborn child with the Duke, which will forever “seal” their fates.

To journey requires yielding. Hornick says images or information “arrive” to her. Indeed, her artistic project originated in the arrival of a box from her Jewish grandmother living in Alabama. Inside were stacks of National Geographics and catalogs of European portraiture. Faced with her MFA mid-program review, Hornick received the delivery as an answer. She began collaging animals into portraits.

The Professor “chewed me up.” When she had to represent her work to him, she tried a different tack. She delivered a slide lecture in the persona of a Vatican curator about the work of an unknown Renaissance artist who had apprenticed for all the great masters and survived the witch hunts in a convent. The slides presented the same collages, now with the framing authority of performance art.

The difference in reception intrigued Hornick. By nesting one form of discovery within another, more palatable and authoritative, she’d positioned herself not as the huntress of hidden animal spirits, but the curator uncovering obscured labor of women. She liked her audiences’ responses. Their puzzlement prompted surrender: Laughter. Yielding. Opening.

The paintings that engage her tend to be “the best portraits, technically.” She works to reconstitute them from the ground up, emulating even the old gesso formulas of rabbit skin glue, marble dust, and titanium powder. She labors on backgrounds, layering blues on blues, greens on reds, until they reach a near-black from which the figures emerge. Then, metabolization: she weaves animal and woman tighter by heightening underlying color correspondences in ways that further naturalize the pairing. Fluorescent violet Spider-Man agama lizard calls forth the undertones in

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Elizabeth van der Weyden's dress that her husband, Rogier, muted. Brown bat hanging from Ginevra de Benci's forelock camouflages itself against the iron oxides of her curls and within da Vinci's landscape (its gaping mouth releasing Munch's Scream, as Ginevra never could). Red fox tail provides a matching stole for Margarita Theresa's russet dress and red bows, accentuating her own lead-whitened skin.³

The animals are faces women could not show in their lifetimes, parts of self from which they were torn by biography, patriarchy. Has that lizard always perched on her arm? This is the point: It is not a retroactive addition, but a restoration. Flickering back in one's textbook to Goya's original, the Duchess of Alba does look rather unprotected—a lonely white column—without the Porcupine's Embrace to furnish her spiny overcoat. Once reunited, sometimes fully entangled, Hornick's women appear embrightened from within, even ecstatic. (Following page, right)

Hornick has mostly let the art historian persona go now, but her work continues to criss-cross the authority of different systems of "discovery." She works against the grain of three major religions: art history, patriarchy, and Judaism. Greater openness about her intuitive practices has brought greater integration. Compositions painted from Photoshop (versus handmade) collages are less riven by seams installing ironic distance between woman and animal, self and work. In newer works, pairs share a light source; animals cast shadows.

As Indigenous movements for cultural sovereignty grow, Hornick's sense of responsibility evolves. Her path was shaped by the counter-cultural spiritual seeking of many postwar American Jews in response to wounds of diaspora and genocide.⁴ It drove right into anthropology's colonial ghosts. She notes the contradictory package inherited from her grandmother: harmful levels of internalized oppression, delusions of assimilation into the Southern cult of lily-white womanhood. She is still unpacking that box.

The story of European portraiture parallels the history of individualism, documents generations of "white-body supremacy" accruing into culture.⁵ Some viewers might wonder: Why heal the spirits of Europe's long-dead ladies? For Hornick, their liberation is bound up with her—and our—own. Following Firestone, she sees the individual work of ancestral healing to bear directly on collective transformation of diasporic traumas. She invites the Medicis to release their bodies from Renaissance rationalism, the Habsburgs to detox from the hallucinatory project of their own bloodline. Hornick works toward a feminism that is "grounded," one that casts into histories in need of transformation. "Because that is where wisdom lies." Meanwhile, she takes time, layering blues into blacks, preparing the ground for new answers to arrive. •

¹ Robert J. Wallis,

Shamans/Neo-Shamans: Ecstasies, Alternative Archaeologies and Contemporary Pagans, 2003.

² Jill Hammer and Taya Shere, The Hebrew Priestess: ancient and new visions of women's spiritual leadership. Teaneck, NJ: Ben Yehuda Press, 2015. Tirzah Firestone, Wounds Into Wisdom: Healing Intergenerational Jewish Trauma. La Vergne: Monkfish Publishing, 2022.

³ For purposes of skin-lightening, Habsburg women nibbled on búcaro clay vessels from Mexico. Side effects included liver toxicity and hallucinations. Kelly Grovier, "Velázquez's Las Meninas: A detail that decodes a masterpiece," BBC Culture, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20201015-velazquez-las-meninas-adetail-that-decodes-a-masterpiece>.

Thanks to Carson Chan for this reference.

⁴ See Judith Linzer, Torah and Dharma: Jewish Seekers in Eastern Religions. Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1996.

⁵ Resmaa Menakem, My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies. Las Vegas, NV: Central