

# *Crossings*

## - Rebecca Lewin, 2021

Depending on how one encounters Marie's new body of work, the presence of myth-making as a human ritual and as an ongoing obsession within her practice may not be immediately apparent. But its constituent parts – the labyrinth, the apparition, the proclamation, and the figure of the goddess-messenger – are so many breadcrumbs. In previous work, Marie has referred to gods, goddesses and hybrid bodies, replicated parts of herself and scrutinised the beautiful flaws of others, built forms that breathe and surfaces that sweat, often turning flat images into tantalisingly haptic sculptures and installations.

In *Styx*, she has returned to classical mythology again, and offers a first interpretative foothold in the title of the work. Inspired by the forced experience of making work remotely, removed from this space by ocean and land, restricted by the global pandemic (about which we will no doubt tell each other stories for years to come), *Styx* meditates on the contrast between the enforced rest of the imprisoned and of the dead, and enforced movement. The historic experiences of human bodies traversing water – as punishment, in chattels, to trade/as trade – these crossings, both literally and metaphorically, represent a morphing from one known state (nation/mode of being) into another.

Like humans, myths travel, from mouth to ear, following people from place to place, proving the existence of the path behind, anchoring the now in the everafter, reassuring in their predictions, unpredictable in their mutability. Their movements cannot be controlled, but they are sometimes caught: they land on parchment and paper, are carved into and out of stone, and since the development of computers, flit through copper and lithium and silicon. They are woven into tapestries and painted onto surfaces; they are projected onto stretched cloth. Their capture is of paramount importance in human culture: as the philosopher Édouard Glissant (1) remarked, the loss of memory, language and storytelling had profound implications for the enslaved. For him, transatlantic crossings created 'a reverse image of all that had been left behind, not to be regained for generations except – more and more threadbare – in the blue savannas of memory or imagination.'<sup>1</sup>

(1) Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, translated. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press,

The metamorphosis of the story, its mutations and variants (to use terminology that has become sickeningly familiar in the last two years) is reflected in the images we make to understand it. Human forms appear throughout ancient mythologies, but they are rarely fully recognisable. In the Classical Greek sources to which Marie so often refers, hair becomes snakes, feet flip into tails, arms outstretched flap, feathered. Marie has brought together a curious mixture of technologies to create these images – the cyanotype, the x-ray, and the hologram – but the history of each invention is one that has expanded or undermined the sovereignty of the human body in a way that echoes ancient myths. The cyanotype, arguably the earliest form of photography, led to the mechanical fixing of human likenesses onto a surface for longer than the lifespan of an individual (was Medusa the first photographer?); the x-ray dissolved the obscuring protection of skin, allowing us to see through it ; and the hologram has replicated the living and revived the dead, apparently in three dimensions.

The story offered by the voice of the narrator that accompanies the hologram describes many deaths, processes of transformation, and travel. As it does, the female form takes on the mantle in front of her. Is she the corpse mentioned by the voice, accepting her fate? Or are her golden wings a clue to her identity – Iris, the messenger of the gods, who travelled between the earth and heavens on rainbows, who could put liars to sleep with water from the River Styx, or grant passage to death? The text, written by Marie's collaborator Nina Boukhrief, is a prayer, or an invocation. Perhaps more than a specific deity, it seems to be liquid itself that is speaking to us, accompanied by the sounds of waves and chimes, while it states: "I am water."

From the movement of a story and its telling through time and space, and the implied movements of bodies through and across waters, the visitor's own movements through this installation implicates and enfolds them in a parallel experience. They may choose to follow the source of the voice to the hologram, or to look for the centre of the labyrinth, behind curves of blue fabric. These will no doubt move and ripple as they pass, covered with light and shadows cast by abstract shapes that occasionally resolve themselves into the bulge of an intestine, or the crack of a joint. By moving into this tinted space, they are responding to the invocation: "I flow and the passage is inescapable. Fear me not, there is no use, as you are on time."

Rebecca Lewin is Curator of Exhibitions and Design at the Serpentine Galleries.

# About the artist

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Alix Marie (b.1989, Paris) works across the mediums of photography, sculpture and installation. She graduated from Central Saint Martins College, London, in 2011 with a first class honours degree in fine art and later completed an MA in photography at the Royal College of Art, London. In 2017 she won the Portfolio Review Award, was selected for the 11th edition of Foam Talent Call, and her first artist book *Bleu* was published by Morel Books. Marie was recently nominated for the EMOP Arendt Award 2019 and also received the Royal Photographic Society's Vic Odden Award in 2019. Her recent group shows include: *RAW*, Rembrandt House Museum, Amsterdam (2022), *Nude*, Fotografiska New-York, USA (2022). Her solo exhibitions include: *Styx* - co-commissioned by Photoworks UK & Ballarat International Foto Biennale-, National Centre For Photography, Ballarat, Australia (2021); *Sucer La Nuit*, MBAL, Switzerland (2019-2020); *Shredded*, Roman Road, London (2019); and *ADYTA*, Ratinger Tor, Düsseldorf (2018), as part of Duesseldorf Photo Weekend 2018.

# About Roman Road

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Roman Road is a contemporary art gallery based in London and founded by Marisa Bellani. The gallery has recently redefined itself with a more fluid and ethical approach, becoming a platform for collaborative exhibitions in 2019. Since 2020, Marisa has organised art residencies in London as part of the gallery activities. Roman Road exists since 2013, following and fostering notable projects and dealing with artists all over the world. Since completing a full renovation in 2015, Roman Road has established a qualitative programme and has seen its represented artists become internationally recognised by institutions and collectors. Roman Road has established a qualitative and thematic programme and realised the creation of a research cell and Roman Road Journal in 2018, an online platform dedicated to publishing articles and exploring topics on art, science, technology, anthropology and literature.