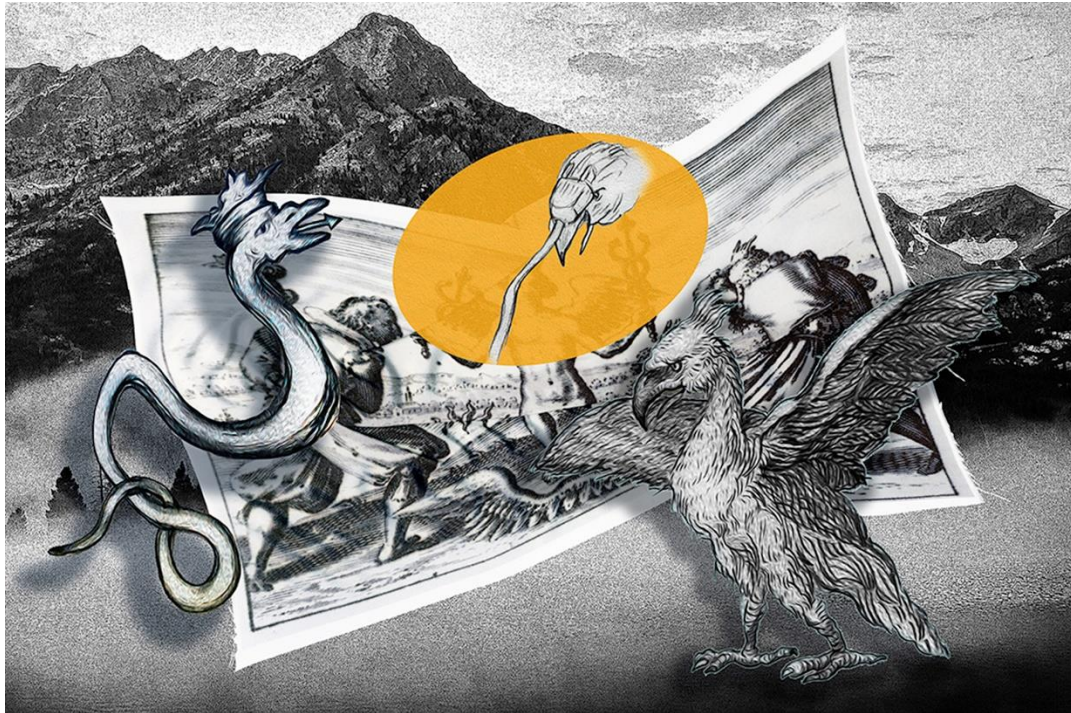


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Airy Triplicity, 2017. Digitized imagery on Plexiglas, 44 x 66 x 1.5 in.

JUDITH OSTROWITZ
PRIMA MATERIA

November 5 - December 18, 2021

Lola Shepard is pleased to announce **PRIMA MATERIA**, an online solo exhibition featuring paintings on canvas and digitized works on Plexiglas by **JUDITH OSTROWITZ**. The online exhibition will be viewable to the public on **Friday, November 5, 2021, at 11:00 AM** and highlighted on the website from **November 5 - December 18, 2021**.

The practice of Alchemy captured the imagination of its practitioners from late Antiquity through the 18th century and remains of interest today in the fields of psychology and spiritual practice. Integrating philosophical inquiry with experimental observation to decipher the natural world, Alchemy contributed to the science we now know as chemistry. Alchemists of yore were reluctant to divulge their secrets, so instead, they utilized coded language and obscure illustrations to convey meaning.

In **PRIMA MATERIA**, Judith Ostrowitz draws on Alchemical and related Qabalistic traditions as a springboard for her symbol-laden, visionary landscapes. Showcasing sixteen distinct compositions on canvas and Plexiglas, along with five studies, each work is a visual representation of some aspect of personal transformation and self-realization.

In creating the large-scale, collage-like panoramas, Ostrowitz merges traditional iconography derived from Alchemy, Qabalah, and Tarot with contemporary objects from everyday life. Manipulating imagery and media, the artwork is constructed from her own paintings, drawings, and photographs, combined with scanned fabrics, stones, and other materials. These combinations are then transformed in Photoshop and used as “cartoons” for her elaborate paintings or adhered to Plexiglas to create semi-transparent works.

Says Ostrowitz about her labor-intensive, image-making process: *“I start by drawing in pencil. I make detailed images that are relatively naturalistic, but quirky or other-worldly, and I combine or collage them. Often, I add my own photographs of scenes or objects, a few found images, and then I play with the whole thing for quite a while in Photoshop. Sometimes, I print parts of the image on fabric, twist it and shape it, and then photograph it again and re-insert it into the scene. The composite images are then transformed again because I paint over them.”*

Although many of Ostrowitz’s newest works are rendered on canvas, she has had a long history of working with Plexiglas. The Plexiglas pieces are mounted about one inch from the wall so that natural light can pass through, resulting in works that appear weightless, as if they are floating on air.

Ostrowitz’s fantastical landscapes often feature forest floors, canyons, or mountain ranges. In her most recent work, the cityscape environment has also gained prominence. She then populates the scenery with recurring motifs of animals, gemstones, and mythological creatures, deftly arranged on a flat picture plane. At first glance, the disparate images of both the strange and the familiar may seem incongruous, but on closer view, the significance of each combination is revealed.

For example, the translucent Plexiglas work entitled *Airy Triplicity* depicts a group of mythical beasts framing a fluttering piece of fabric. The animals embody the varying aspects and modalities of Alchemical Mercury, traditionally associated with the element of air. Ostrowitz states *“The serpent is the cool, moist Mercury; the Phoenix is its hot and dry aspect. Between them, the head of a bird is directly affected by the resulting energy or electricity that they generate. Its consciousness is literally “plugged in” to this Mercurial energy, the quick-moving subtlety of thought. Behind the yellow-orange ovoid, the mythological figure of Mercury can be faintly seen, holding the caduceus wand.”*

The study, *Form, Radiance, Song* relates to the alchemical idea of ‘the fixing of the volatile’. In other words, the elevation of matter. Hovering in mid-air, against the backdrop of Lower Manhattan, sits a large mountain and an amethyst stone. The two objects, the mountain and the crystal, have been made ‘volatile’, signifying a victory over the idea of limitation. Encircling the amethyst stone are three bird heads--two hens and one penguin. As they are flightless birds, perhaps they indicate the resilience and adaptability needed for this transcendent endeavor.

The panoramic painting on canvas called *Foremost of the Westerners* is constructed in reference to death and rebirth. The phrase ‘Foremost of the Westerners’ was an epithet used to refer to Osiris, the mythological Egyptian god of the underworld. The scene takes place in a canyon. On the far right of the picture plane, a phoenix is shown whole, and to its left are its dismembered parts. On the bottom left of the work, the artist inserts objects from contemporary life - a traffic light and a construction steam pipe, a symbol of Plutonic force, released from the depths of the earth. Here the artist emphasizes the notion that the ‘mythological’ can be viewed in everyday life.

In the context of art history, Ostrowitz’s idiosyncratic visual style blends Neo-Surrealism with Narrative art. She is a builder of worlds, skillfully juxtaposing two realities - the seen with the unseen. Moreover, the epic quality of her evocative, multi-layered dreamscapes serves as the “Prima Materia”, the First Matter, in Alchemy, signaling the exploration of the psyche.

Judith Ostrowitz lives and works in New York City. Ostrowitz holds a Ph.D. in Art History from Columbia University, a M.A. in Anthropology from the New School for Social Research, and a B.F.A. in Painting from Pratt Institute. She has exhibited her work at Denise Bibro Fine Art, Open Center Gallery, Porter Contemporary, Hudson Guild Gallery, the Sculpture Center, Kiana Malekzadeh Gallery, and others. This is Ostrowitz’s second solo exhibition with Lola Shepard.

As an art historian, Judith Ostrowitz has worked as an adjunct faculty at Columbia University, Barnard College, The City College of New York, New York University, and Yale University. She has developed curatorial projects for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Brooklyn Museum of Art, The Peabody Museum of Natural History in New Haven, The Newark Museum, and the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Ostrowitz is the author of *Interventions: Native American Art for Far-Flung Territories* (2009) and *Privileging the Past: Reconstructing History in Northwest Coast Art* (1999), as well as numerous articles about Native American art.

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