

THE COLLAGES

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NINETEEN PLATES

E.

April–November 2023

All nineteen works were made between April and November 2023 in Photoshop, assembled by hand from fragments generated with Midjourney and DALL-E. The generator supplied the ore. The choosing, cutting and arranging are the artist's.

Plates are reproduced at full bleed from the artist's full-size masters at approximately 411 pixels per inch. Plate 3 is the one work in the series that is not square and is reproduced whole, within the trim, rather than cropped to fit.

The analytic text is the artist's own, written for this volume. The years in which the works were made are the subject of a separate memoir, *Sickness Medicine True Self*.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I started making collages in 2023, during the deepest part of the descent. I made nineteen major pieces over about eight months because words had completely failed me, and I needed to make something with my hands or I was going to lose my mind entirely.

I would prompt AI image generators—Midjourney, mostly, sometimes DALL-E—to create thousands of fragments. Faces, architecture, creatures, symbols, patterns. Then I'd pull these fragments into Photoshop and start chopping them all up, then arranging them. No sketches, no plan, no conscious intention beyond “make something that feels right.” It was more meditative activity while freaking out than making art. I'm a writer and a decent musician but I've never been a visual artist.

I didn't know I was descending to the Underworld—I just thought my life had turned into a torrent of other people's pain. I didn't know what the symbols meant: didn't know the *cauda pavonis*, didn't know the alchemical significance of nested triangles, didn't know that ravens in contained geometry are textbook psychopomp symbolism. I was working purely by feel, arranging fragments until something clicked into place that felt true in a way I couldn't articulate.

The AI was a *vas hermeticum*, a sealed vessel holding a condensed civilisational archive—every painting, symbol and visual trope I could reach by prompting. It generated raw materials. It didn't make the art. The alchemy lived in the choosing, the cutting and the arranging: in my hands, my psyche.

One fact the readings lean on, said once: I was born three months premature and spent my first three months in an incubator, not allowed to be touched. When the text speaks of a beginning inside machinery, or of the oldest wound, that is what it means.

What follows is my own reading of these pieces, written afterwards and set in the third person, as if somebody else were reading them back to me. I didn't know what I was making. Psyche knows the way.

—E.

THE VESSEL AND THE HAND

THE DESCENT

Every culture that has kept its stories long enough has told this one. Inanna goes down through the seven gates of the Great Below, and at each gate the keeper takes something she arrived wearing—her crown, her rod, her breastplate—until she stands in front of her sister with nothing on, and is killed, and hung on a hook. Orpheus goes down for Eurydice and comes back without her. Odysseus digs a trench at the edge of the world and fills it with blood so that the dead will speak to him. Dante is halfway through his life when he finds himself in a dark wood. Persephone eats six seeds.

The Greek word is *katabasis*: a going-down. Jung, who had read all of these closely, borrowed Homer's word *nekyia*—the rite that summons the dead—for the same movement inside a person: the descent into the unconscious that has to happen before anything can be integrated. He did not think of it as illness. James Hillman put it more sharply later: the underworld is not a metaphor for something else. It has its own logic, and the psyche goes there for its own reasons, and the reasons are not the ego's.

What matters here is one plain fact about the making. The nineteen works in this book were produced over about eight months, by someone who had never made visual art, while he was in one.

He was not illustrating a descent afterwards. He was inside one, without the vocabulary for it, and these are what came out of his hands while it was happening.

THE COLOURS

The alchemists were describing the same process in the language of metallurgy, and they gave its stages colours. The sequence in this book follows them closely enough that the names are worth having before the plates rather than after.

Nigredo, the blackening, is the first stage and the longest: putrefaction, dissolution, the breaking down of what exists so that something else can be made from it. Its colours are black and the deep sepia of decay, its bird is the raven, its mood is despair. It is not the pathology. It is the first operation. The four Shadowwork plates that open this book stand on black ground and carry death's-heads in their structure, and they were among the first works in the series.

Cauda pavonis, the peacock's tail, is the signal that the nigredo is ending: an iridescent flash of the whole spectrum appearing at once in the vessel, briefly, as evidence that the process is alive and moving. In this sequence it arrives in the coil of a wave.

Albedo, the whitening, is the washing that follows—not joy, but the capacity to see clearly what has been dissolved. Moonlight rather than sunlight. It is the stage at which a thing can be looked at instead of only undergone.

Citrinitas, the yellowing, is the one most often dropped from simplified accounts: the first solar gold after the lunar silver, a cautious dawn, the sun up but not yet clear of the horizon. It is easy to miss, because it is brief and because it looks like the *rubedo* starting early.

Rubedo, the reddening, is the completion of the work: not perfection but wholeness, which includes what was broken. Red runs through this entire series and changes function halfway along. In the early plates it is containment—a suture, a boundary, a line drawn to hold something shut. In the late ones it erupts.

The artist did not know any of these words when he made the work. He has said so plainly and there is no reason to doubt him. The interesting question was never whether he knew them. It is how the vocabulary arrived anyway.

THE VESSEL

It arrived through a machine.

The fragments in these collages were prompted out of image generators—Midjourney mostly, sometimes DALL-E—by the thousand: faces, architecture, creatures, patterns, symbols. They were then cut apart in Photoshop and arranged by hand.

The alchemists called their sealed container the *vas hermeticum*, and insisted the work could not proceed unless it stayed closed: nothing may escape during the transformation. The comparison is more literal than it sounds. An image generator is sealed in a precise technical sense. You cannot reach into it. You can put a phrase in one side and take a picture out of the other, and what happens in between is not available to you, including to the people who built it.

What is inside it is the reason the symbols arrive already loaded. A generator of this kind is a compression of an enormous visual archive—most of what has been painted, printed, photographed and posted, weighted by how often it recurs. Ask it for a goddess in an archway and you do not get one artist's goddess. You get something closer to the average of every goddess in every archway the archive holds. That is not a mystical claim; it is a description of the mechanism. It happens to be very close to what Jung meant by an archetype—not an inherited picture, but the shape that surfaces when enough of them are laid over one another.

So a man with no training in alchemical iconography could prompt for fragments, arrange them until they felt right, and produce a plate with a skull at the base of an axis and nested triangles running up from it. He was reproducing a structure he had never studied, because the archive held it and the archive was what he was drawing from. The vessel supplied the ore. It also supplied the grammar.

What it did not supply was a picture. What comes out of a generator is *prima materia* in the exact alchemical sense: raw, undifferentiated, inert until something acts on it. A thousand fragments are not a work. They are not even a beginning.

THE HAND

Collage has always been the technique for reaching what deliberate composition cannot. Hannah Höch cut apart the Weimar press. Max Ernst built *La Femme 100 Têtes* out of Victorian engravings. Joseph Cornell put objects in boxes until the boxes said something none of the objects had said alone. The Surrealists were explicit about the reason: the meaning is in the juxtaposition, and a juxtaposition can be arrived at by feel rather than by intention. You cut, you move things, and you know it is right before you know what it is.

That is the operation these nineteen works were made by. *Solve et coagula*—dissolve and recombine—is the alchemical formula for it, and it is also a fair technical description of what a collage-maker does all afternoon. Take the image out of its context. Put it beside something it has nothing to do with. Keep going until something clicks.

The choosing is the whole of the art. It is also the only part of the process that was not automated, which is to say it is the part where the psyche got a say.

THE ARTIFACTS

One more thing has to be said before the plates, because it is the first thing most viewers notice and the easiest to mistake for a flaw.

These pictures are full of machine artifacts. Faces merge into one another with no boundary between them. Hands have too many fingers, or joints that bend the wrong way, or a grip that does not close. Staircases arrive at ceilings. A torso runs into the wall behind it. A mouth dissolves into the background instead of ending. Generators of that period did this constantly, and an artist working commercially would have corrected every instance.

He kept them. That decision is what produced this book.

The case for keeping them is that they are not errors here—they are the vocabulary of dream, arrived at accidentally. Condensation, two people occupying a single face, is the dream-work's own mechanism, and it was named a century before anyone built a machine that does it involuntarily. A hand that reaches and cannot close is a more exact image of losing one's grip than any hand a person could draw on purpose. Architecture that is structurally impossible and emotionally coherent is not a description of a mistake. It is a description of a dream.

So the machine, asked for pictures, produced dream-logic; and the man arranging them, who was living in dream-logic at the time, recognised it and left it in.

That is the collaboration this book is a record of. A vessel holding a compressed civilisation, which cannot be reached into. A hand that cannot draw, choosing. And underneath both of them a descent that neither had planned.

HOW TO READ THESE PLATES

Every plate in this volume is laid out the same way, and the layout carries an argument.

On the left-hand page you will find four fields in a fixed order. *The image* describes what is visibly on the page: the things any two observers would agree are there. It is set in sans type. *Analytic response* is a reading of the work—what one viewer brings to it out of Jung, out of the alchemists, out of a long sitting with the whole series. It says *I*, because a reading is somebody's or it is nothing. It is set in serif, against a rule, the way a commentary is set beside a text. *Visual cues* tells you where to look and makes no claims about what you will find there. And a row of coloured marks at the foot of the page names which of nine recurring motifs are visible in the work, so that a plate can be read against the eighteen others rather than only on its own.

The division exists to hold apart two things that collapse into each other the moment nobody is watching.

Count the number of times writing about a picture uses the word *is*. The skull *is* the nigredo announced. The lemniscate *is* the codependent bond. The red creature and the golden goddess *are* the same thing. Every one of those may be true. Not one of them is visible. What is visible is a skull at the base of an axis, a red lemniscate threaded through a downward triangle, a gold figure in an archway, and a red organism behind a girl. The rest is brought to it.

That distinction has a name: the difference between the *image* and the *amplification*. The image is what any two observers would agree is on the page. The amplification is what a viewer brings. The amplification is not the lesser activity—it is most of what criticism does. But collapsed into the image it becomes a claim about the maker's intention, and this maker has said plainly that he had none. "I see a devouring mother here" turns into "he made a devouring mother," and the second sentence is one he can neither confirm nor refuse. That is the moment a reading stops being a reading and becomes an imposition.

This is not an argument for hedging. Hedged criticism is useless, and a reading that is wrong and committed is worth more than one that is right and evasive. It is an argument that for any sentence in this volume it should be possible to say which of the two halves it belongs to. The fields are those halves, kept apart on the page, so that a reader can take the first and argue with the second.

One thing the discipline exposes, which is worth stating before it is noticed. Certainty rises as the subject gets harder to look at: the most confident paragraphs attach themselves to the most disturbing plates, and that is a fact about the viewer rather than about the work. Two plates—4 and 10—carry a second look that contradicts the first, and a third, 13, sets aside what its title asks a viewer to see in order to say what the picture shows without it. Both moves are printed on the plate rather than made quietly, for the same reason the fields are kept apart.

THE NINE MOTIFS

What recurs, named only as far as the eye can confirm it.

■ SKULL	death's-heads and bone
■ EYE	a prominent eye, or faces that stare out of the picture
■ WATER	river, sea, wave, standing water
■ AXIS	a dominant vertical: spine, tower, staircase
■ FEMININE	feminine figures as principal elements
■ WINGS	wings, birds, flight and fall
■ ARCH	arches, portals, doorways, framed openings
■ MANDALA	circles, triangles and stars used as containing structure
■ GRID	checkerboard, labyrinth floor, pixel and isometric grid

These nine are named as far as the eye can confirm them and no further. *Feminine*, for instance, records that feminine figures are principal elements of a plate; it does not claim what they mean there. Whether a given figure is the anima, the devouring mother, or a woman the artist knew is an argument, and arguments belong in the second field. The Symbol Index at the back lists every plate on which each of the nine appears, alongside everything else in these pictures that recurs.

A NOTE ON SEQUENCE

The plates are numbered in reading order, not in the order they were made.

The eight Shadowwork and Dreamwork pieces came first, before any other collage in the series. The artist made them in alternation during the initial plunge—one Shadowwork, then a Dreamwork, back and forth, until all four of each were complete, and no other piece was begun until the set was finished. Seven of the eight are reproduced here; the fourth Dreamwork piece survives only as a low-resolution file and is not among the plates.

That alternation is not incidental. The Shadowwork pieces are the nigredo from within it: black grounds, rigid sacred geometry, skulls, serpents, the axis mundi as emergency scaffolding. They are made from inside the blackening, the container barely holding, the symmetry itself an act of self-preservation. The Dreamwork pieces are the nigredo from above it—or from a witnessing distance the Shadowwork pieces cannot reach. The grounds open into sky. Colour returns. Figures walk through archways rather than being contained by them. The same underworld, but now it can be seen as a landscape rather than only suffered as immersion.

That the two series were made simultaneously suggests the witness consciousness was present from the very beginning of the nigredo. Not as an achieved state, but as a structural feature of the psyche's response to crisis: the part that watched, even when it could not yet act.

Plates 18 and 19 also sit outside the sequence they are printed in. *Consciousness* was made early, close on the heels of the first eight. *Beginning and End* was never finished at all.

THE PLATES

Nineteen works, April–November 2023

I DEATH

The Shadowwork Series
PLATES 1-4

[Section introduction to come — 150–250 words, the artist’s own voice. See docs/phase_intro_outlines.md.]

Facing: Plate 1, detail of the two flanking figures



Shadowwork 1

The Alchemical Axis 2023

THE IMAGE

Black ground, near-perfect bilateral symmetry. A vertical spine runs from knotted serpents at the top edge through nested triangles and a mandala assembled out of eyes to a large skull set inside a six-pointed star. Two nude figures flank it.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

I read the skull at the base as the nigredo announced—death laid as cornerstone rather than ornament—and the spine above it as the axis mundi, descent and ascent on a single line. The flanking nudes repay a closer look than I first gave them. Both are the same classical body in the same posture, mirrored, down to the hip and the hand at the thigh; only the heads differ. A long-haired masked profile on the left, a spined and fanged muzzle over an opened ribcage on the right. Two heads, one body, drawn twice. That is the split that happens when one person is asked to carry another's projections: idealised on one side, monstrous on the other, and—because the composition insists on it—a single body underneath both. The symmetry itself I take as the immune system of the Self. When the psyche is in genuine crisis it manufactures sacred geometry, and the rigidity is proportional to the emergency. This piece is very rigid.

VISUAL CUES

Base: skull in a six-pointed star, ringed by bone-arms. Centre: mandala of eyes, small skull at its core. Flanks: mirrored nudes with differing heads; the left-hand mask part mechanical and part organic, its hand raised open at shoulder height, the right-hand figure's hand reaching to within a finger of the central mandala. Above the left mask: dense calligraphic patterning. Upper right: single red-rimmed eye set in a ring of gear teeth. Left edge: pale robed figure standing in a doorway. Lower corners: two reptiles, the right one wound through geometry around a second, smaller skull. Lower half: layered bone, eyes and geometric plates, bone reading as flat surface where the two meet; extra and merged limbs at the outer edge of both flanking figures.



Shadowwork 2

The Demiurge 2023

THE IMAGE

An enormous bald ancient face presides at the apex. Below it a red lemniscate threads a downward-pointing triangle between two helmeted mirror-figures. A masked woman sits inside a diamond mandala. Two crowned bird-dragons and two dragons hold the outer field.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

I read the face at the apex not as the benevolent Self watching the ego dissolve but as the Demiurge: the Gnostic false god, the authority that made the material world a prison. Against a beginning spent inside machinery rather than arms, it is the face of that machinery. Vast, impersonal, all-seeing, cold. The red lemniscate below is the coniunctio gone wrong: not the sacred marriage but the infinite loop of fused identity, two circles that share a crossing point and cannot exist apart. The mirrored figures beside it are one psyche split into two roles and then merged with what it split into. The four creatures sit near the corners but not on them—a fourfold sacred space a quarter turn out of true. And note the second mandala at the very bottom edge, the one the eye reaches last. The masked woman is the centre the composition points at. The ring of pale figures beneath her is the one it stands on.

VISUAL CUES

Apex: bald ancient face, appendages from the head. Upper middle: red lemniscate in a downward triangle, flanked by helmeted twins. Centre: masked woman in a diamond mandala. Upper left: gold bird-dragon on a textured branch, spiked crown, its eye mechanical; below it a skull whose teeth run continuously into the cheek of a human face. Upper right: its pink twin: two serpentine necks braided under one crowned head, one wing, claws on a ribbed branch; behind them a tower dissolving into the ground. Lower left: pale dragon with a canine snout; a blue horned figure holding a sphere, its fingers extra and elongated around it, looking up toward the masked woman. Lower right: dark scaled creature with a skeletal maw; a smooth column with a carved finial at the far edge. Bottom edge: a second mandala—a ring of pale figures over cloud, faces blurred or absent, horned heads in the corners. Across the field: red lines cutting through forms rather than framing them. Upper corners: a spire at either side against a starfield.



Shadowwork 3

The Descent Through the Feminine 2023

THE IMAGE

The only work in the series that is not square. A red-hooded face at the top and a pale jewelled face at the bottom bracket a descent through a fanged gold triangle, a magenta lattice, and a black sphere. Every face stares outward.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

The axis from the upper face to the lower one is the piece's whole argument, and I read it as a birth canal: passage through the feminine, arriving at the feminine, with the nested triangles as the funnel to be traversed. Against a birth that was never passed through—lifted out rather than delivered—the psyche appears to be completing symbolically what the body never finished. But what waits at the bottom is not an exit. It is another face, looking back. The descent through the mother arrives at the mother. The skull-headed winged figure down the left edge is the one making the descent, and he is the only head in this piece that is not a face. This is also the plate most saturated with the gaze—not the leer of the arcade, not the compassionate witness of the later work, but the raw stare of the unconscious meeting the ego directly. You cannot look at it without being looked back at.

VISUAL CUES

Top: face in a red hood, grey eyes. Beneath her mouth: small winged figure, arms flung wide. Descent: gold triangle with a fanged mandala-face, magenta lattice of triangles, black sphere on a white diamond, serpent crossing beneath. Flanking the triangle: two serpentine figures, one pale, one teal, each reaching toward the axis; both sets of hands distorted. Upper right: stepped ziggurat forms half-lost in mist; faint illegible text below them. Within the lattice: a small translucent figure, arms raised. Lower right: two seated figures, skin patterned like circuitry, rigid, staring; heavy fleshy tendrils sweeping across the corner. Bottom: pale jewelled face in an ochre crescent. Left edge: grey torso, skull for a head, one dark wing.



Shadowwork 4

The Bloody Buddha 2023

THE IMAGE

A teal-skinned crowned goddess with a lit portal set into her torso stands above a triangle holding a red eye. Below both, a stone ring contains an opened red-orange mass. An arm made of vertebrae reaches in from the right.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

I read the stone ring and its opened mass as the feminine rendered as gateway and wound at once, and the arm that touches it—an arm made of spine, entering from outside the composition—as the medical hand that saved and severed. That is my reading. None of it is in the bone. I want to correct something here rather than quietly. I first wrote that the weathered Buddha sits within the wound, because that is the sentence I wanted. It does not. It sits just outside the stone ring at the lower left, on the same axis the blood runs down: close enough to be splashed, separate enough not to be consumed. The image is stranger than my sentence and better than it. The indestructible core is neither protected by the wound nor destroyed by it. It is beside it, and it does not move.

VISUAL CUES

Top: crowned goddess, framed portal where the belly should be, ivory fan-ring behind her right side; her hands a tangle of merged fingers. Middle: triangle with a red eye at its centre. Core: stone ring, opened red mass, small pale figure within it. From the right: the spine-arm. Just outside the ring, lower left: seated grey Buddha. Upper left: skeletal figure with a hollowed face beside a floating teal eye. Upper right: skull inside a gold frame, a red crescent and dot at the forehead. Lower left: headless pale torso against a diamond holding a disembodied face. Lower right: dark serpentine creature with a wolf's head coiled near a winged skull; a horned, goat-headed figure, wings spread behind a triangle; a pale elongated arm reaching across; faint sigil-like script at the edge. Lower corners: two blue-grey animals, spotted and maned, facing each other. Background: architecture folding into itself.



II

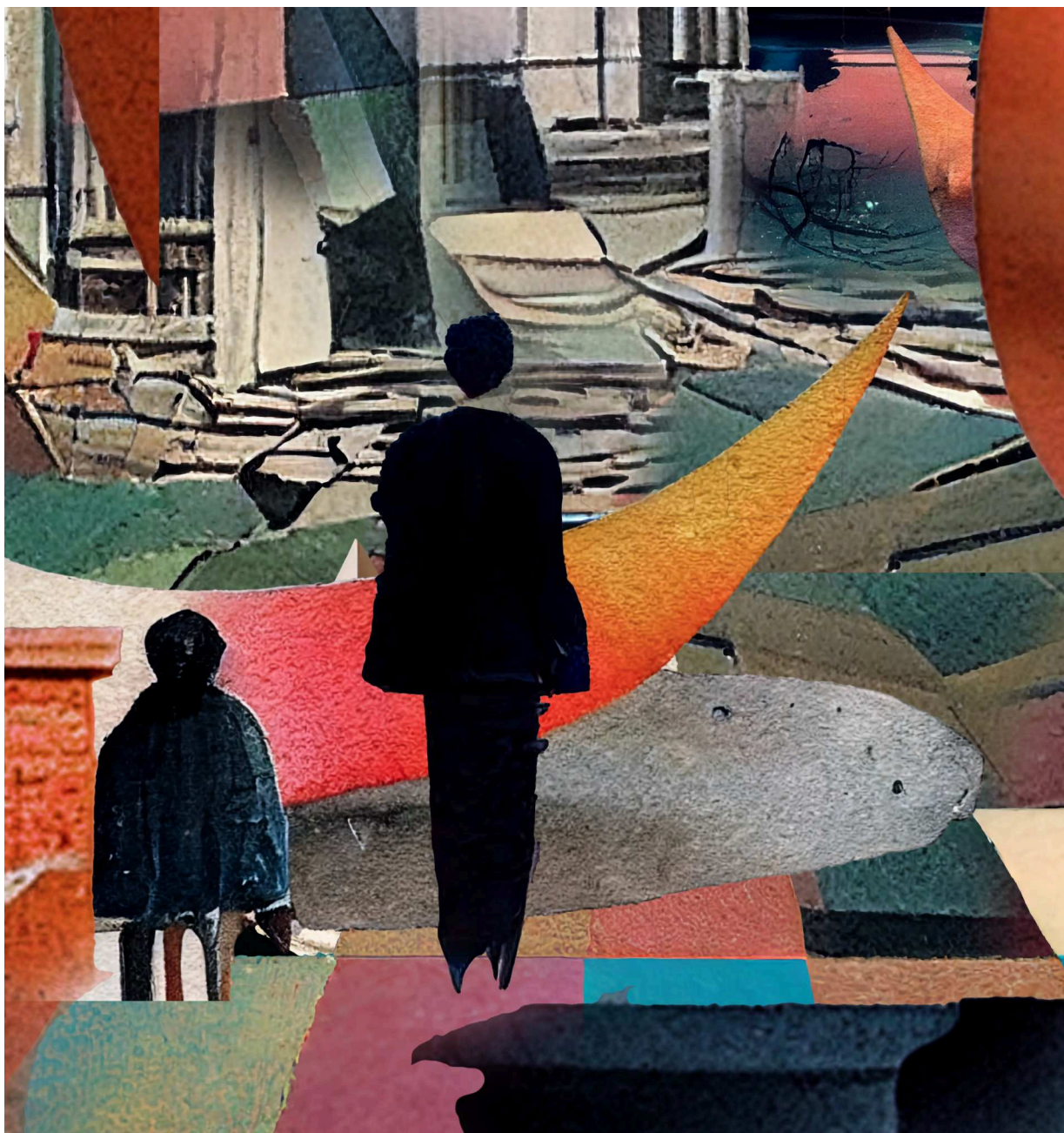
NAVIGATION

The Dreamwork Series

PLATES 5-7

[Section introduction to come — 150–250 words, the artist’s own voice. See docs/phase_intro_outlines.md.]

Facing: Plate 6, detail of the pair, lower left



Dreamwork 1

The Pilgrim at the Crossroads of Worlds 2023

THE IMAGE

Colour replaces the black ground: blues, teals, whites, vast billowing cloud banks used as architecture. Roads and corridors converge on a glowing circular portal. A grey-coated figure stands in the foreground, back turned, a staff in hand, a large ribbed apparatus at his head.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

This is the most complete image of the katabasis as navigable journey in the series—the same underworld as the Shadowwork plates, but now it can be seen rather than only endured. The witnessing instrument is the detail I keep returning to: what reads as an old camera, the collage-maker's own tool, set at the head of the figure at the threshold. There is a second, tiny figure at the far end of the portal, already walking toward the light, and the two of them make the same recursive structure the 8-Bit plates make—the self as both the one standing at the threshold and the one already inside. The witness and the witnessed are the same person at different depths of the journey. Every element here is in motion: cars on curving roads, a figure climbing the spiral staircase, the woman standing in still water. The descent is not static suffering. It is active pilgrimage.

VISUAL CUES

Foreground: grey-coated figure, back turned, a staff in hand; behind his head a large ribbed grey apparatus, possibly an old bellows camera. Centre: glowing portal under a rainbow arch, tiny figure walking at its far end. Left middle ground: woman standing in still water with her reflection. Right: grand staircase spiralling through arches, a man in a dark suit climbing it, a tiny figure at a gothic doorway far above. Upper left: floating architecture with striped onion-dome finials; a rounded vintage car on a curved road, its body distorted; a small blue butterfly near a dark archway. Upper right: sky hung with dark scalloped arches; a black-and-white geometric diamond floating in the mid-ground. Lower left: a man in red, a woman in blue and a disembodied head; a striped hot-air balloon; a carousel horse on a striped path. Lower right: a figure in a grey suit leaning forward, its head a blank oval; a coloured cube over a purple path; a figure in a wide-brimmed hat at the edge of a round platform. Throughout: checkerboard floors, vintage cars on roads that curve away.



Dreamwork 2

The Bubble World 2023

THE IMAGE

A ruined stone arcade opens onto night: a crescent moon over water, a band of orange light spiralling through stars. Clouds sit where a ceiling should be and again where a floor should be. A whole landscape hangs inside a floating sphere.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

Three things happen here that happen nowhere else in the series. The first is the sphere: a complete world with its own weather and a road running out of it, suspended and self-contained. The artist had no language for this when he made it. The felt sense of a world that expands and contracts—something he would later learn to navigate by, once words had failed him entirely—arrives here as a picture the better part of a year before it arrived as a name. The second is the pair. Every other walking figure in these nineteen plates walks alone; here two walk together, one of them small enough to be a child. In nineteen pieces this is the only place anyone goes on foot in company. The third is the ribbons. They cross the arches and the sky and the ground without regard for depth, which means they are not in the world of the picture. They are on it. Something is being drawn over the underworld from outside the underworld, and that is the first appearance of the hand doing the documenting.

VISUAL CUES

Centre: lit opening, crescent moon over water, spiral of orange light through stars. Across everything: coral and orange ribbons obeying none of the picture's perspective; at the upper right they close into a complete loop. Upper left: ribbon and starfield meeting in a shape that reads as a large eye; the archway stonework scaled like skin. Right half: landscape inside a floating sphere, road running out of it, a ladder descending from it to the checkerboard. Lower register: a tall figure and a small one at the left, both facing the central arch; a hooded figure at the water's edge; another crossing the checkerboard beneath the sphere; a fourth in profile by the ruined arch at the far right. Where floor meets water: the perspective does not resolve.



Dreamwork 3

The Castle Through the Arches 2023

THE IMAGE

Almost entirely architecture: arches inside arches, Moorish, Roman, Gothic, stained glass, ruined stone, cloud. At the centre, in cloud, a castle tower rises from a head in profile built out of buildings. A cream vintage roadster comes out of a coral tunnel.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

The castle is the detail that matters. It is visible, it is lit, it sits at the centre of the piece—and no road goes to it. Every road in this collage runs somewhere else: through the tunnel, out of the frame, down the colonnade, across the checkerboard. The one place the eye goes first is the one place nothing connects to. I do not read that as despair. I read it as orientation, which is the whole business of the Dreamwork register. These are not portraits; they are maps. The psyche is no longer dying, it is working out where things are, and one of the things it has worked out is that the destination it can see is not yet reachable. Colour comes back here before anything else does: the stained glass, the coral, the sudden blues after all that sepia and black. Not yet the peacock's tail—that arrives much later, in the coil of a wave—but the first evidence that the vessel is not only black. The colour has come back. The road has not.

VISUAL CUES

Centre: framed archway onto cloud; in it a head in profile assembled from buildings, a castle tower rising from the crown, a sphere where the eye would be. Below: coral-pink tunnel swallowing a road to a vanishing point; roadster coming toward the viewer. Right: colonnade receding to open country. Upper left: an ornate mechanical finial hanging in open sky; a small figure seated on a ledge above a stylised wave; a red box with a geometric pattern. Upper right: the stacked field resolving into fleshy, fish-like forms carrying human eyes, and a large human nose; a heavily pitted sphere above them; a small sepia figure standing on a dark triangular scrap. Lower left: small dark figure in a hat carrying something, crossing the checkerboard; a gold cube balanced on an arch; a patterned egg-like object on the floor. Lower right: woman in a white shift standing in shallow water, her archway shaped like a keyhole; a second red box holding a white circle; a wooden cross-form floating in the sky.



III

THE DIGITAL NIGREDO

The 8-Bit Pieces

PLATES 8-9

[Section introduction to come — 150–250 words, the artist’s own voice. See docs/phase_intro_outlines.md.]

Facing: Plate 8, detail of the question and the face at the vanishing point



8-Bit 1

The Arcade 2023

THE IMAGE

A pixelated arcade corridor seen from its entrance, cabinets ranked on both sides over a labyrinthine floor. The words WHO WATCHES OVER YOU? appear twice in the upper field. A river runs down the centre of the corridor.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

The piece is first-person: the viewer is placed at the mouth of the corridor, the cabinets lining up like a gauntlet, which makes you the child walking in. I read the doubled question as one that went unanswered the first time—asked, then asked again—and as simultaneously the wound and its answer. As the wound it names the absence: no one was watching, or the wrong people were, or the watching that occurred was not protective. As the answer it points at the witness consciousness threaded through both 8-Bit plates, the part that survived and observed and held continuity through the fragmentation. The face that might have answered dissolves at the vanishing point, fragmenting at the moment of approach, while the adult face on the right-hand screens laughs in a way that reads as leering rather than joyful. The question is asked by the arcade. The answer is the fact that someone is still there to hear it.

VISUAL CUES

Upper centre: WHO WATCHES OVER YOU?, in pixelated type, twice. Upper left: a stylised eye half-covered by neon geometry. Cabinets: marquees and side panels carrying distorted biological forms against the machines' straight edges. Right-hand screens: large adult male face, laughing; small pink squares floating around it. Vanishing point: pixelated female face dissolving before it can be reached, framed by shattered mosaic. Floor: labyrinth pattern, with intersections that do not meet and perspective that shifts without a break. Down the corridor: a river the length of the floor, catching the neon-pixel noise rather than water, carrying forms that come apart as they fall.



8-Bit 2

The Portal 2023

THE IMAGE

Inside a circular arch, at least three versions of one solitary figure stand at receding depths. The nearest wears a striped top and has a television screen where a face should be. A large eye rises from a field of stacked CRT televisions.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

I read the three figures as one person at three depths of psychic interiority—the self watching the self watching the self—rather than as three people. The television head is the self experienced not as a felt interior but as a broadcast: a signal being sent and received, the screen where a face should be showing the process of fragmentation itself. On the right, the watcher is made entirely of screens, an observer constructed out of the very medium of childhood memory. And in both 8-Bit plates the water persists. In every other respect these are worlds of pure construction—pixel, tile, circuit, code—and in both of them a river gets through. It cannot be gridded. It cannot be made isometric. It finds the lowest point and moves through every crack, which is what the unconscious does to any constructed system. The river is the proof that the nigredo cannot be fully digitised.

VISUAL CUES

Foreground: striped figure, television for a head. Midpoint and far end: two smaller versions of the same figure, the last at the threshold of an inner doorway. Right half: a single large eye emerging from stacked CRT televisions, ringed by pixel cloud; the screens around it carrying merged faces, static and geometric noise. Interior: waterfall descending through the arch, river valley opening below it. Lower left: a figure built from red, orange and yellow geometric shapes, walking or falling out of the frame, one arm disjointed, the hand missing. Upper right: a green scaled tail threading through the grid, emerging from or dissolving into pixel drift. Lower right: the grid breaking into stacked blocks and pathways that do not connect; a small figure in a red-and-white striped shirt at the bottom edge, facing a dense stand of trees.



IV

PORTRAITS

PLATES 10-12

[Section introduction to come — 150–250 words, the artist’s own voice. See docs/phase_intro_outlines.md.]

Facing: Plate 10, detail of the gold figure and the man crossing the floor



Lost Girl

The Puella Aeterna 2023

THE IMAGE

A doll-proportioned figure with enormous dark-circled eyes and grey wings stands before a massive red-coral organism spreading eyes and tentacles behind her. A gold seated nude occupies a red triangular arch at the upper right.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

The eternal girl, and the picture renders the pattern almost too literally: wings that are grey rather than white or black, the equipment for flight issued to a figure who stays on the ground. The red organism behind her I read as the mother complex the puella never separates from—the devouring mother that keeps the child a child—and she cannot be seen without it. They are fused. I want to correct a sentence. I first wrote that the small dark figure at the lower right was being drawn into the gold woman's body and engulfed. He is not. He is walking on a tiled floor, and her lap happens to lie at the end of his path. The image stops one step short of the sentence I wrote, and the step it stops short of is the step I supplied. What the composition does do is rhyme: the swallowing thing as beauty at the upper right, the swallowing thing as horror behind her. Devouring mother, twice. And the small walking man is the only figure in the whole piece who has chosen a direction.

VISUAL CUES

Centre: winged figure, grey wings, dark-circled eyes; her hair merging into the red mass behind her with no edge between them. Behind her: red-coral organism, eyes and tentacles spreading outward. Upper right: gold seated nude, cross-legged in a red triangular arch, coral fan opening where her lap would be, flanked by black-and-white barcode striping; a dark white-spotted butterfly to her left. Below: tiled floor running away from the viewer, small dark figure walking it, the tiling dissolving into cloud where it ends. Upper left: skeletons seated at a table of small red drops and chalices, one of them in a clerical hat; above them a fractured pink mandala overlaid with illegible script. Lower left: black heart with a too-wide grin; a man in a suit in profile; a gold-brown bird inside a small red triangle. Lower right: three figures in formal wear held mid-gesture; a skeletal hand reaching across pink. Scattered: two clocks, two black birds, a chopped mandala, a solitary man with his back turned.



Icarus

The Self-Portrait 2023

THE IMAGE

Upper left, a shirtless long-haired man with golden wings spread wide, airborne. Lower left, a grey classical figure with black wings, head bowed. Between them wings shatter in all directions. *elysium* in rave-flyer script across an orange sky.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

The two figures hold the whole arc at once: what he was and what he became. The golden wings were the illusion—beautiful, triumphant, unsustainable—and the black wings are what remains. Set this plate beside the one before it and the structure of the matched pair becomes visible: both portraits give their subject wings that do not work. Hers cannot lift her. His are what he has after the crash. One cannot take off and one is coming down, and the wings are the same wound expressed two ways. The white tower in the framed panel at the lower right I read as Tarot XVI—not background architecture but the Tower, the lightning-struck structure that figures leap from, the destruction of what was built on unstable foundations. Icarus is not only falling from the sun. He is leaping from the Tower, and the rave years were the Tower. ELYSIUM was not mythology. It was on the flyers, on the tickets, on the promise of transcendence through the beat. The sun burned him because he believed the flyer.

VISUAL CUES

Upper left: golden-winged man, airborne, alive; a yellow-eyed black bird spread behind his head. Lower left: grey stone figure, black wings, head bowed, its torso running into the background texture, its face unfinished; a small dark-winged cherub at the bottom edge. Upper right: *elysium* in rave-flyer script, the letters slightly warped; a white sun; a large dark bird whose beak carries jagged teeth. Centre: black silhouette facing away; wings shattering in every direction. Lower right, in a gold frame: white tower ringed by robed figures with arms raised, its base running into root-like forms; above it a red fleshy mass bleeding outward; a large blue eye framed in what reads as torn paper. Left edge: a pink open carriage on large spoked wheels, a small figure seated in it.

elysium



Circus

Masks All the Way Down 2023

THE IMAGE

Circus imagery packed edge to edge with no negative space: a pink-and-white big top, a white-faced clown in a top hat with arms spread, an enormous doll face across the lower centre, disembodied red lips, a screaming face at the lower right.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

The circus is the domain of the Trickster: the performer who wears masks, who can be anything to anyone, who delights in chaos and boundary-crossing. The clown is the Trickster's most unsettling form—a painted smile over an unknown emotion, laughter that could be joy or madness. Masks upon masks. Which face is real? The Trickster's answer is none of them and all of them. What does the real work here, though, is the claustrophobia. No negative space. No background. No way out. One is inside the circus and it goes on forever, which is what it is like to be in relationship with a trickster: no solid ground, no authentic self to meet, masks all the way down. The screaming face at the lower right is the only honest expression in the piece—marginalised, pushed to the edge, but present. Someone is screaming the truth in the middle of the circus and everyone else is too busy performing to hear. The horror is not what such a figure does to you. The horror is that there is no *them* there to begin with.

VISUAL CUES

Centre left: pink-and-white big top, black slashes across it, a crescent moon at its peak. Centre: white-faced clown, black top hat, polka-dot bow tie, arms spread. Right of centre: disembodied red lips; one heavily made-up eye; above them a large textured eye looking sideways, pupil wide; a poster figure suspended in a hoop. Lower centre: enormous doll face, red cheek circles. Lower left: a skull-like face surfacing out of the ground texture; a figure with a red bow tie and a painted or skeletal face; another in a bowler hat, face white. Lower right: face with the mouth open, screaming, the mouth running out into the background without an edge; a figure nearby with an eye set at the knee. Right edge: lion-maned figure in a white ruff.



V

THE TURN, AND INTEGRATION

PLATES 13–16

[Section introduction to come — 150–250 words, the artist's own voice. See docs/phase_intro_outlines.md.]

Facing: Plate 13, detail of the centre of the spiral



Hanuman's Wave

2023

THE IMAGE

Hokusai's Great Wave turned into an inward-turning spiral around a point of brilliant white-blue light. Rainbow colour flashes through the coil. City blocks fall into the rotation. A small figure rides a plank across the foam, one arm raised.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

A word about the title before I read the piece. The artist calls this one Hanuman's Wave. There is no Hanuman in it: no monkey, no mountain, no burning city of Lanka, nothing that would let a stranger arrive at that name from the image alone. The name is his association, carried to the picture rather than found in it. I keep it because it is what he calls the work and because his association is data—but it is his data, not the collage's, and the reader should be able to tell the two apart. With that said: this is the turning point, the shift from victim to participant, from being destroyed by chaos to riding it. The raised arm is a surfer's gesture, not terror. One cannot stop the wave. And the association earns its keep, because Hanuman is the devoted servant who leaps oceans and carries mountains—devotion to something larger than the self that permits survival of what should not be survivable. What the image brings on its own, without any help from the title, is the direction of the spiral. Hokusai's wave crashes down. This one turns inward, toward light.

VISUAL CUES

Whole field: the wave rendered as an inward spiral. Centre: point of white-blue light; through the coil, rainbow flashes and whole blocks of buildings pulled into the rotation, facades peeling away as they go. Upper left: the outer red arc composed of blocky segments rather than a curve. Upper right: a single tall slab of a building standing undistorted against the rotation. Lower left: small dark figure on a plank across the foam, one arm raised; behind him a red boat carrying three more, their forms run together. Lower right: the water striated like muscle fibre. Throughout the spiral: small points of light.



NOLA

2023

THE IMAGE

New Orleans in magenta, purple and gold, the entire surface fractured into glass-like facets. Two great brass horns cross the centre diagonally. Brass bands, second-line crowds, wrought-iron balconies, masks and feathered headdresses fill every register.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

The artist spent a month in New Orleans over Mardi Gras, in panic and terror, and the city held him—which is what New Orleans does. It is the American city that understands death: funerals and second lines, All Saints' Day kept in the cemeteries, joy and grief treated as partners rather than opposites. It does not try to fix people who are falling apart. It lets them be broken in a place that understands brokenness. The formal fact I would point at is the fracturing. Every surface in this piece is shattered into facets and the picture is nonetheless celebratory, which is a fair description of jazz—solve et coagula in sound, dissolve and recombine, take the pain and make it beautiful. The masks belong to the same logic. In New Orleans the mask lets you be who you actually are by pretending to be someone else, which is paradoxically more honest than the face. This is the underworld city, where the living and the dead dance together.

VISUAL CUES

Centre: two brass horns crossing the composition diagonally. Across the whole surface: faceted shards, magenta and gold. Upper left: blue rectangular goggles over the eyes of a large face; below, a woman in a blue bikini top. Upper right: a gold female figure, rigid and metallic; a man in a black-and-white striped shirt; a large glowing gold disc at the edge. Lower left: bar interior, bottles, a neon sign reading SOUL; a man in multi-lensed blue goggles; a pale figure in a suit beside a hollow-eyed mask. Middle: brass band, second-line crowd, French Quarter balconies and ironwork. Right and lower right: Mardi Gras masks, feathered headdresses, gold costume, a figure in a top hat; a woman in an architectural headdress; a face behind overlapping lenses. The instruments: tubes and bells merged into shapes that could not be played, fingers running into the brass.



Fool's Journey

2023

THE IMAGE

A rope-and-plank bridge arcs across pale water. A large figure in a wide-brimmed hat, carrying a leather satchel, walks it from the right. At the centre, an eye set inside a gold ring. Birds, a leaping black horse, a striped fish.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

The Fool is Tarot zero, the innocent who steps off the cliff without knowing what is below—naive because he does not know what is coming, wise because he trusts the journey. But this piece is doing something more specific than the standard archetype. The composition spirals, and it terminates in an eye. The Fool is not simply walking across a bridge; he is being drawn inward toward the witnessing centre, toward the part of the psyche that sees. And it is a water journey. The bridge is over water, the water is the unconscious, and the movement has the quality of a river—it carries the figure rather than the figure merely walking. Set the eye here against the eye in the arcade, where the same motif was a leer and an unanswered question. Here it is not surveillance. It is the Self, watching over the Fool as he crosses. The question from the arcade has an answer in this plate. He is being watched over. The Fool steps off the cliff. What is below is the water. What is below the water is the eye.

VISUAL CUES

Lower half: rope-and-plank bridge arcing over pale blue water. Right: large walking figure, wide-brimmed hat, leather satchel. Centre: eye inside a gold ring, beside a small building. Along the bridge: a procession of pointed forms. Upper left: a figure in a top hat on a unicycle tethered to a floating structure; a silhouette falling with arms spread. Upper right: a figure in a red hat juggling gold spheres; a spotted dog seated on a rock. Left: orange striped fish, its fins running into the water without an edge. Lower left: small silhouette inside a pale luminous circle; a doorway holding a single dark figure; a horse-drawn cart. Right panel: a jester in a belled cap, red and gold, in profile. Centre mountain: staircases that arrive nowhere.



The Magician

2023

THE IMAGE

A bearded man in a green hooded cloak stands at the centre with both hands open, a rooster perched on the one at the right. An enormous scaled serpent arcs around him, its ring open at the base. Windows and picture frames stack across the right side.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

The Magician is Tarot one, the one who has tools and knows how to use them. But the turn of the series is not the figure, it is the two hands, and they are doing the same thing. On the palm at the right a rooster stands: solar, masculine, herald of dawn, held rather than wielded. On the other, and far easier to miss, a small crowned girl kneels back on her heels, drawn in black and white against all this colour, her dress torn, dark streaks under the eye. She is weeping, and she is being held. Set her against Plate 10, where the eternal girl cannot be seen apart from the organism fused to her back. Here she is small, separate, and at rest on an open hand. That is the difference between a projection and a relationship, and the picture makes it with a gesture rather than an argument: nothing in either hand is gripped. This is not the masculine that dominated, nor the one that dissolved itself in service of an anima projection too large for any person to carry. It is a hand that can hold a wounded thing without becoming it. The serpent all but closes the composition into a circle with the whole vocabulary of the psyche inside, and the black bird, framed in a window, keeps watch from the far side of the glass.

VISUAL CUES

Centre: hooded figure, head down, both hands open and upturned. On the palm at right: a rooster standing, the hand tattooed with a sigil; behind it a black-and-white portrait of a woman, pale hair, dark lips. On the palm at left: a small girl in a spiked crown, kneeling back on her heels on a bed of black scribble, dress torn, dark streaks below the eye, in profile facing him. Around him: scaled serpent, head at upper centre, mouth open, the ring open at the base; scales part reptile and part pixel. Upper left: a vintage television, screen lit and empty; bioluminescent mushrooms growing from a machined base. Upper centre: black bird framed in a window; a large disembodied eye in a second, darker frame. Upper right: stained-glass figure seen from behind, her body breaking into mosaic tiles; a shadowed figure in a doorway behind her. Lower right: stylised face meeting the viewer, lips red, rainy street and tower beyond. Right of his head: a white-painted face, red-marked, in a collar. Left: a woman with a red flower in her hair; a rainbow arc behind the serpent's coil. Throughout: New Orleans balconies, stacked picture frames, a clock, a vintage car.



What He Is Holding

Plate 16, the two hands

At plate size she is about two centimetres tall, in black and white, low and to the left in a picture doing everything it can to pull the eye elsewhere. She is the first thing a reader loses.

Both hands are doing the same thing. They are open, upturned and level, and neither is closed on what it carries. On the right, a rooster stands on the palm; the hand is tattooed with a sigil. On the left, a girl in a spiked crown kneels back on her heels in a torn dress, drawn in ink against everything around her, with dark streaks below the eye. She is set on a bed of black scribble.

His head is down. He is not looking at the viewer, and he is not looking at the rooster.



VI
INTERLUDE
The Anima in Full
PLATE 17

[Section introduction to come — 150–250 words, the artist’s own voice. See docs/phase_intro_outlines.md.]

Facing: Plate 17, detail of the figure at the apex



Babalon

The Cosmic Anima 2023

THE IMAGE

Saturated teal, magenta, red and gold with no black ground. An androgynous figure painted half blue and half flesh stands at the apex of a star geometry. A pink-gold dragon coils the central axis. A skull sits at the base.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

This plate needs its own category because it does not sit inside the arc of descent and return. It is not the shadow feminine, not the devouring mother, not the Trickster's mask. It is the anima at full cosmic scale, and it shows more clearly than anything else here what was being projected onto the actual women in the artist's life. In the Western esoteric tradition Babalon is the Scarlet Woman: the goddess of absolute freedom and of the dissolution of the ego in the divine feminine. Not the mother. Not the lover. The force that unmakes the ego entirely and demands total surrender. In Jungian terms she is the anima at her fourth level—past the personal mother, past the beloved, past the spiritual guide, into Sophia. The central figure painted half blue and half flesh is the most explicit coniunctio in the series, and it is achieved inside a single body rather than between two people. The dozens of feminine figures around the axis are not chaos; they are a pantheon. The piece is saying that the feminine is not only the thing that hurt you—it is everything. And the skull at the base is not a contradiction, because Babalon is also the goddess of endings. This is not the descent. It is the reason for the descent. No mortal person can carry this projection, and a collapse is the arithmetic of asking one to. Babalon does not invite you into the underworld gently. She throws you in.

VISUAL CUES

Top: large blue-toned feminine face staring outward. Centre: androgynous figure, bare and tattooed, painted half blue and half flesh, at the apex of a triangle and star geometry. Around the axis: massive pink-gold dragon, its head skeletal, rearing at the right. Upper left: a large red rose; a masked figure with an open ribcage; a reptile head emerging from bone. Upper right: armoured figure with a blank glowing face; a lit eye inside a triangle. Lower right: a calavera with lit points down the spine; a woman seated in a pink flower, her hands running into her thighs. Surrounding: dozens of feminine figures—goddesses, dancers, warriors, mourners, mystics, mechanical women, burlesque performers. Base: a skull.



VII

THE GOAL, AND A CODA

PLATES 18-19

[Section introduction to come — 150–250 words, the artist’s own voice. See docs/phase_intro_outlines.md.]

Facing: Plate 18, detail of the closed eyes



Consciousness

2023

THE IMAGE

A crowned figure sits cross-legged in meditation, eyes closed, inside a circular frame, against a large pale profile. Below her an orange cat sits in a pale globe held by a wood-grained ring. A mandala of concentric faces sits above, between two weathered posts.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

The meditating figure is the Self in repose: consciousness that can sit still and simply be. After all the chaos and fragmentation and overwhelm, this figure is calm—not fighting, not fleeing, not performing. Her eyes are closed, and that is the whole argument. Set it against the Shadowwork faces that stare out of the picture, against the surveillance of the arcade, against the leer on the screens. The inward gaze is the destination of the entire katabasis. She sits inside a frame, a gateway, the one who holds the centre while worlds revolve around her. The animal is the detail that would be missed without knowing the earlier work. The artist had long taken a large cat as his own emblem, and in the one collage he made before this series, earlier the same year, he rendered himself as a tiger. Here the cat sits alone inside a globe held in a coiled ring, and a second one walks a pale path at the lower left. Not abandoned. Self-sufficient. And this was made early, close on the heels of the Shadowwork and Dreamwork set, which is to say the psyche made the destination before it had finished the journey.

VISUAL CUES

Centre: crowned figure, eyes closed, cross-legged inside a circular frame; a large pale profile behind her, a spiral at its temple; beside her a second seated figure in teal and green whose head is a wreath-like coil without features. Below: a pale globe in a coiled, wood-grained ring, a seated orange cat inside it; a red thread-like form and a blue ribbon within. Above: a mandala of concentric faces holding small meditating figures, serpents arcing over it, a classical building beyond. Upper left: a profile built out of leaves and organic matter, facing inward; below it an orange-and-teal checkerboard path running to a small figure at its edge. Upper right: a mechanical eye set into the architecture; beside it a second profile built out of buildings. Sides: two weathered posts forming a gateway, blossom trees. Lower left: a second cat, tiger-striped, walking away down a pale lit path. Bottom: water.



Beginning and End

2023

THE IMAGE

Unfinished. Competing centres that never resolve: a clockface or compass rose left of centre, a dark tower topped with an animal skull, a black void above centre, scattered timepieces, a gas-masked figure, a woman with tree-roots growing from her head.

ANALYTIC RESPONSE

This piece was never finished. The artist could never get it to cohere the way the others did, and the inability to finish it is the most accurate thing about it. The clocks are denser here than anywhere else in the series, and I do not read them as measuring time. I read them as the psyche attempting to impose temporal structure on an experience that was fundamentally pre-temporal. An infant in medical isolation does not experience time as narrative, as a sequence of events with a self moving through them. Time is pure duration, the endless present of containment and physical crisis. The clocks fail because what they are trying to organise predates the capacity for organisation. The black void above centre is not a portal. It is absence—a hole in the composition where a centre should be. It is the enclosure itself: the bounded space that sustains life and provides no warmth, no face, no voice, no touch. The void is held, but it is not loved. It is kept alive, but it is not met. The title is the diagnosis. Beginning is the wound that started everything; End is the katabasis that brought him all the way back to it. The piece sits outside the linear arc of the series because it is not part of the arc. It is the ground beneath the arc. And it could not be finished because the wound it was trying to image is the one that precedes finishing.

VISUAL CUES

Left of centre: clockface or compass rose, spokes radiating. Upper centre-right: dark tower topped with a large animal skull; an ornate sugar skull overlapping a second, realistic one; a ballerina suspended nearby; a clock with bent hands. Upper centre: black void. Upper left: a horned figure holding a flame; a baby in a gas mask; two mirrored figures in headdresses flanking a geometric core. Lower left: figure in a gas mask; a blue pregnant figure half covered by a clock face; a woman's profile inside a dark triangle, her hair becoming roots. Lower right: Day of the Dead skull; a face under a horned mechanical headdress; a man in a suit; a torso with voids through it; a flowering cluster beside a screaming face. Throughout: clocks and timepieces, more densely than in any other plate; merged limbs, mechanisms that do not connect, faces resolving into texture.



READING ACROSS THE PLATES

Three amplifications the plate pages cannot carry.

Everything in the preceding pages is anchored to a single work. Three things in this series only become visible when the plates are read in sequence, and all three belong to the second field rather than the first. They are amplification. I have kept them out of the plate pages because none of them is on any one page.

THE GAZE CHANGES TEMPERATURE

Eye is one of the most widely distributed motifs in the series, and what makes it worth tracing is not how often it appears but how it changes. In *Shadowwork 3* every face stares out of the picture and there is nothing to be done about it: the unconscious meeting the ego directly, unmediated, unrefusable. By *8-Bit 1* the gaze has become surveillance—a leering adult face on the screens, a question asked twice and never answered, and the one face that might have answered dissolving at the moment of approach. In *Fool's Journey* the same motif is a single eye set in a gold ring at the centre of the composition, and the Fool is walking toward it rather than away. In *The Magician* it is a bird framed in a window, keeping watch from the far side of the glass. And in *Consciousness* the eyes are closed.

That is an arc in five plates: scrutiny, surveillance, witness, company, interiority. The question the arcade asks in pixelated type is answered nowhere in the plate that asks it. It is answered by what happens to the eye across the eighteen others.

THE COLOUR CHANGES

The alchemists named the stages of the work by colour, and the series moves through something close to the traditional order. The *Shadowwork* plates are built on black grounds: the nigredo, the blackening. Red is in the field from the first plate—the rim of an eye, then the lemniscate and the lines that cut across it, the hood at the top of *Shadowwork 3*—but it becomes structural at *Shadowwork 4*, in the opened mass inside the stone ring, and it holds *Lost Girl* and *Circus*—the rubedo, the sacrificial colour. Gold and rainbow break through the coil of *Hanuman's Wave*, burn at the top of *Icarus*, and saturate *Babalon* entirely. None of these names was available to the artist at the time.

But I want to be careful, because a reader looking for a sequence will find one whether or not the maker put it there. The progression is not clean. Colour returns in the *Dreamwork* plates long before the wave. As *A Note on Sequence* records, the calmest plate in the volume was made early and the last one was never finished at all, and the numbering is a reading order rather than a chronology. Any progression traced through them is a progression through my arrangement as much as through his year, and the honest version of this observation is the smaller one: the black is at the beginning, the red is in the middle, and the gold, which glints from the first plate on, does not flood a picture until after the wave.

THE GIRL IS SET DOWN

The eternal girl appears twice in these nineteen plates, and the difference between the two appearances is the closest thing the sequence has to an ending.

In *Lost Girl* she is the whole picture: doll-proportioned, wings that are grey rather than white or black, and behind her a red organism spreading eyes and tentacles that she cannot be seen apart from. They share an edge. Her hair runs into it without a boundary—a machine artifact, and also an exact description of fusion.

In *The Magician*, six plates later, she is on somebody's open palm. Small, crowned, kneeling back on her heels, drawn in ink against all that colour, weeping. Nothing about her is better. The dress is still torn and the face is still wet.

What has changed is that there is a hand under her now, and it is not closed, and she is on it rather than behind anyone. I do not think the change is in her; both times she is what she is. The change is that in the first plate there is nobody to hold her and in the second there is—and that the man holding her is holding a rooster in the other hand, with exactly the same open gesture, which is to say he is not choosing between them.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The vocabulary the analysis uses. Where to find things is the Symbol Index's business, not this one's.

The alchemical stages and the working vocabulary of the vessel are defined where the book first needs them, in The Vessel and the Hand: katabasis and nekyia, nigredo, cauda pavonis, albedo, citrinitas and rubedo, prima materia, solve et coagula, vas hermeticum. Image and amplification are defined in How to Read These Plates.

Active Imagination

Jung's technique for working with the unconscious: evoking an image and then engaging it, rather than passively receiving it as one receives a dream. Conscious participation in the arrangement, with the unconscious allowed to guide the selection. The process these nineteen works were made by is active imagination carried out in a graphics program.

The Anima

The unconscious feminine element in a man's psyche: the inner image of woman that shapes how he perceives and relates to actual ones. Jung described four stages—Eve, the biological; Helen, the romantic; Mary, the devotional; Sophia, the transcendent. A man who has not differentiated his anima from the women in his life will project it, will experience a person as a goddess or a devouring mother, and will be devastated when the projection fails.

The Animus

The masculine principle as it operates inside the psyche. Not the enemy: it is the faculty of logos, discrimination and structure. Unconscious or inflated, it becomes the tyrant—the authority that mistakes itself for truth.

Coniunctio

The union of opposites that is the goal of the alchemical work. In its true form it is two things that remain two while touching—union without fusion. In its false form, the *coniunctio infernalis*, it is merger: two identities collapsed into one, the bond that cannot be separated into its parts.

The Demiurge

From Gnostic cosmology: the false creator, who made the material world as a prison and believed himself supreme while the true god remained beyond his reach. Psychologically, the experience of a universe that is vast, impersonal, all-seeing and cold. Authority without warmth. He is not the Self; he is the Self's dark mirror—the power that contains without holding.

The Fool

Tarot zero. The innocent who steps off the cliff without knowing what is below: naive because he does not know what is coming, wise because he trusts the going. He carries everything he needs in one small bag and is accompanied by an animal that may be warning him or may be urging him on.

The Great Mother

The archetypal mother in both aspects at once: the one who gives life and the one who takes it back, the womb and the tomb. Not a person but a psychic structure—the way the unconscious organises the experience of being held, fed and contained, and also of being smothered and swallowed. Where the mother complex is unresolved, intimacy risks becoming a repetition of it, and love becomes fusion.

Individuation

Jung's term for becoming who one actually is: not who the parents wanted, not who the culture demanded, not who the relationships required. Not self-improvement but integration—conscious and unconscious, light and shadow, brought into a whole larger than the ego. The descent is one of the mechanisms by which it happens, because it forces the encounter with everything the ego has refused.

The Magician

Tarot one. The one who has tools and knows how to use them; as above, so below. Unlike the Fool, he has already fallen and learned from it. He works consciously with forces that previously overwhelmed him, which is what makes him the image of what comes after a descent rather than during one.

The Psychopomp

The guide between worlds: the figure who leads the living into the country of the dead and sometimes back out. Hermes and Charon in Greek; in alchemical imagery, the raven and the crow, the black bird that turns up at the threshold between states. It does not rescue and it does not explain. It accompanies, and it knows the way.

The Puella Aeterna

The eternal girl. She lives in possibility rather than actuality, has difficulty landing in adult life, and has not separated from the mother complex. She has wings and cannot fly—equipped for transcendence, grounded by something unfinished. Not a diagnosis. A pattern that describes a particular relationship to potential and its frustration.

The Puer Aeternus

The eternal boy, and her masculine counterpart: the one who flies too high and will not land. Icarus is his myth. He is not merely immature; he is in love with the heights and with the possibility of escaping the weight of an embodied life. His fall is not a punishment. It is the descent that grounds him.

The Self

Capitalised, and not the ego. In Jung's usage the Self is the totality of the psyche, conscious and unconscious together, and the organising centre of it—larger than the "I" that thinks it is in charge, and older. It is what the mandala is a picture of. When the ego is in genuine crisis, the Self is what produces the containing forms that arrive unbidden and hold the situation together.

The Shadow

Everything the conscious personality refuses to acknowledge about itself. Not evil—rejected. It contains what a person finds shameful, and equally the unlived potential, the unacknowledged power and the disowned creativity. In a descent, the shadow is what can no longer be kept underground.

Temenos

The Greek word for a sacred bounded space: the precinct of a temple, the ritual circle, the container inside which a transformation can happen without flying apart. In analysis it is the frame—the relationship, the room, the hour. In these plates it is every mandala, arch, portal and geometric enclosure.

The Trickster

The archetype of chaos and boundary-crossing: the one who wears masks, changes shape, and lies and tells the truth in the same breath. Hermes, Loki, Coyote, Anansi. Not simply a villain—the Trickster breaks what needs breaking and shows the cracks in structures that were pretending to be solid. Also genuinely dangerous: the bridge that burns while someone is standing on it.

SYMBOL INDEX

What recurs, what it carries, and where to look. A coloured mark is one of the nine motifs tracked at the foot of every plate.

CREATURES

The Black Bird 10 · 11 · 16

The alchemists' raven, whose head—*caput corvi*—heralds the nigredo; the psychopomp, who guides between the worlds of the living and the dead and witnesses without intervening. Here the black birds cluster in the middle of the series: two in Plate 10, one spread behind the head of the man in Plate 11, and the last in Plate 16, framed in a window—seen from inside looking out, watched from shelter. Elsewhere birds shade into dragons, like the toothed, scaled flyer over Plate 11.

Bird into Dragon 2 · 11

Winged things caught halfway: bird bodies and claws under spiked crowns, braided serpentine necks, a toothed beak on a scaled flyer. Two of them perch at the top corners of Plate 2, mirrored, one gold and one pink; another crosses the sun in Plate 11. Neither the black bird nor the serpent, but something that has not decided which.

Cat 4 · 12 · 18

The solitary animal that carries its own fire and does not need a pack. A personal emblem—the artist had long used a large cat for himself, and the first collage he ever made rendered him as a tiger. By Plate 18 there are two of them, one at rest and one walking, and neither is accompanied.

Crocodile and Reptile 1 · 17

Chthonic, cold-blooded, older than consciousness. They anchor the base of a composition the way they anchor a riverbank: patient, still, and not to be turned one's back on.

Dragon 2 · 17

The serpent grown enormous. In alchemy the dragon guards the treasure and has to be confronted rather than killed. The pink-gold dragon coiling the axis of Plate 17 is not threatening the feminine around it; it is part of her.

Mechanical-Organic Hybrids 2 · 3 · 17 · 19

Figures part flesh and part machine: ribcages opened onto gears, skin patterned like circuitry, bodies fused with the architecture behind them. Partly what the generator does when asked for a body, partly the psyche's picture of a self kept alive by apparatus rather than held by warmth.

Tentacled Organism 10

All arms, all eyes, all reach—the thing that engulfs without chewing. In Plate 10 it is fused with the figure it stands behind: the two cannot be seen apart.

Rooster 16

Solar, masculine, the bird that cries at the boundary between night and day. In the Magician's hand it is held as a tool rather than wielded as a weapon, which is the entire distinction that plate is making.

Serpent and Ouroboros 1 · 3 · 4 · 16 · 18

Transformation by shedding: the creature that survives by leaving its own skin behind. Kundalini coiled at the base of the spine; the liberator or the tempter of Genesis, depending on who is telling it. What is worth following is the shape it takes. Knotted serpents open the series at the top edge of Plate 1, tangled and going nowhere. By Plate 16 one arcs around the whole central figure, mouth open, the ring left open beneath him; in Plate 18 one closes all the way round the mandala at the top. Neither is eating its tail, so neither is quite the alchemists' *ouroboros*, which feeds on itself and is therefore finished.

THE HUMAN FIGURE

The Small Solitary Figure 5 · 6 · 7 · 9 · 10 · 11 · 13 · 15

The ego in the underworld: tiny against vastness, but present and moving. Usually walking, usually at a threshold, almost always alone. It appears in eight of the nineteen, and its scale does not settle: dwarfed by the architecture in some, standing large in the foreground of others.

The Pair 6

In nineteen plates, figures walk together exactly once: a tall figure and a small one on the left of Plate 6. People share a frame elsewhere—a trio in evening dress, three carried in a boat—but nobody else goes anywhere on foot with anyone.

Mirrored Figures 1 · 2

The same body reflected across an axis, or drawn twice with different heads on identical limbs. Wherever it occurs the duplication is the subject: two readings of one person, held on a single frame that will not let either of them be put down.

Replaced and Missing Heads 2 · 3 · 4 · 5 · 9 · 17 · 18

A skull where a face should be, a television, a blank oval, a wreath. When the head is replaced the identity is the question—the self experienced as bone, as broadcast, as absence.

Erotic Figures 16 · 17 · 19

Sexuality as a transformative force rather than as desire. Burlesque performers stand beside goddesses in Plate 17 without any change of register, which is the argument that plate is making about the feminine.

The Androgyne 17

The *coincidentia oppositorum* in a single body. The central figure of Plate 17 is painted half blue and half flesh: not two people merging, one psyche holding both.

The Weeping Queen 16

She occurs once, on the Magician's open right palm, at the picture's left: crowned, in a torn dress, drawn in ink against all that colour, and weeping. Held rather than fixed, witnessed rather than quieted, and—the thing that matters, set beside Plate 10—separate.

The Screaming Figure 12 · 19

One face among dozens in genuine terror—mouth open, eyes wide. In Plate 12 it is marginal, pushed to the lower right, and it is the only unperformed expression in the picture.

The Falling Figure 11 · 15

The descent made kinetic: not standing in the underworld but going through it at speed. Arms spread, no ground yet visible.

The Meditating Figure 18

Consciousness at rest. Eyes closed, posture still. It occurs once, in Plate 18, after seventeen plates of faces that stare.

Clowns and Performers 12 · 15 · 16

A painted smile over an unknown emotion. Masks upon masks, and no answer to which face is the real one.

The Dancer 17 · 19

The body in performance: grace held up by effort that must not show. Suspended, mid-air, weightless by discipline.

The Infant 19

In Plate 19 a baby appears in a gas mask or a spacesuit, emerging from the chaos—an infant inside protective apparatus, in the one piece in the series that could not be finished.

The Gas Mask 19

The self that cannot breathe the ordinary air, with every exchange between inside and outside routed through equipment.

Roots for Hair 19

The freeze made visible: the nervous system gone underground, immobility as the surviving strategy. The body that became a tree in order to last.

ARCHITECTURE AND SPACE

■ Arch 1 · 4 · 5 · 6 · 7 · 8 · 9 · 10 · 16 · 18

The threshold held open—a structure that makes a passage by bearing weight. In the Dreamwork plates arches appear in every style at once, Moorish and Roman and Gothic, as though the underworld contained every threshold anyone has built. Where they are ruined, the ego's former structures are in dissolution: once functional, not yet rebuilt.

Doorways and Portals 1 · 5 · 9 · 15 · 16 · 18

Not a destination but the moment of decision. Pale robed figures stand in doorways at the margins of these compositions, neither in nor out.

Windows and Frames 7 · 11 · 16

Interiority made architectural: frames inside frames, and in Plate 16 a bird seen through one. The death-guide no longer surrounds the figure; it is watched from shelter.

Tunnels and Corridors 7 · 8 · 9

The space that narrows before it opens. Every tunnel in these plates runs to a vanishing point the viewer cannot see past.

Staircases 5 · 15

The *ascensus*—the upward movement present even inside the descent. The way up is visible in Plate 5 and occupied.

Whether it is reachable is a separate question, and Plate 15's staircases arrive nowhere.

The Castle 7

The destination that can be seen and not reached. It occurs once, lit, in a bank of cloud at the centre of Plate 7—a tower rising out of a head in profile that is itself built from buildings—while every road in that picture runs somewhere else.

The Tower 2 · 11 · 19

Tarot XVI. The sudden collapse of a structure built on unstable ground, with figures leaping from the height. Not punishment—liberation by destruction. The rave years and the promise printed on the flyers were the Tower.

The Circus Tent 12

Striped, garish, temporary. The space where the ordinary rules are suspended, nothing is what it seems, and the tent comes down again.

New Orleans Ironwork 14 · 16

Balconies, shutters, layers of history left visible in the walls. The architecture of the one American city that keeps its dead in the street with the living.

OBJECTS

■ Skull 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 17 · 19

Death as foundation rather than ornament—the alchemical *caput mortuum*, the dead head left after distillation. Structural every time it appears here: anchoring an axis, centring a mandala, sitting at the bottom with everything resting on it.

Animal skulls top the tower of Plate 19; a decorated *calavera* stands beside a realistic one in the same frame.

Clocks and Timepieces 10 · 16 · 19

Clocks measure narrative—events in sequence, a self moving through them. The earliest wounds are not stored that way. In Plate 19 the clocks are denser than anywhere else in the series and their hands are bent; they are not measuring, they are failing to organise.

Screens and Televisions 8 · 9 · 16

The self as broadcast: identity experienced as transmission rather than as a felt interior. Stacked CRTs form a single eye in Plate 9, a watcher built entirely out of the medium of childhood memory.

The Camera 5

The witnessing instrument, and the one tool in these pictures the maker also owned. It occurs once, if it occurs at all: a large ribbed apparatus at the head of the figure standing with his back to the viewer in Plate 5, reading as an old bellows camera. He holds a staff, not the camera. It does not intervene. It records.

Arcade Cabinets 8 · 9

When the psyche reached for the oldest wound it did not reach for skulls and serpents. It reached for cabinets, CRTs, pixel floors and neon—the exact sensory furniture of the decade the wound happened in.

Vintage Vehicles 5 · 7

Rounded cars and a cream roadster, always in motion, always on a road that curves away from the viewer.

Mushrooms 16

The fairy ring and the threshold. Bioluminescent, growing here out of a machined base: the organic erupting from the manufactured.

Roses and Flowers 17 · 19

The alchemical rose, the rubedo's flower, the secret kept at the centre. In Plate 19 a flowering cluster sits directly beside a screaming face.

The Sphere 3 · 6 · 7

A whole landscape suspended inside a floating globe. In Plate 6 a ladder descends from it to the checkerboard below, so the containment is not sealed.

The Boat 13

The container that allows a crossing without drowning. In Plate 13 a red boat carries three figures behind the one riding the plank: not everyone surfs, some are carried.

GEOMETRY AND PATTERN

■ Mandala 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5 · 10 · 17 · 18 · 19

The Self's immune response. A psyche in genuine crisis manufactures circular and containing form, and the rigidity is proportional to the emergency. The early mandalas here are hard and geometric; the late ones soften. That progression is the loosening of emergency containment into something that no longer has to hold so tightly.

■ Grid 5 · 6 · 7 · 8 · 9 · 11

The constructed floor: checkerboard, labyrinth, pixel and isometric tiling. The checkerboard is the Masonic threshold, light and dark held on one surface, and in these plates it turns up at every transition. The labyrinth of Plate 8 has no branches—one path, no way to get lost, no way to stop. And the grid cannot hold water: a river runs through the arcade floor regardless.

Nested Triangles 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5 · 10 · 17

Upward triangle interlocking with downward—fire with water, ascent with descent. Also the funnel: the passage to be traversed, the birth canal rendered as geometry.

The Six-Pointed Star 1

The union of opposites held in geometric tension. It contains the skull at the base of Plate 10's axis: death held inside the figure of wholeness.

The Diamond 2 · 3 · 4 · 5

The mandala turned on its axis—the same containment, but tensed, and pointed at both ends.

The Spiral 5 · 6 · 13 · 15 · 18

Recursive rather than linear: it does not branch and does not offer a choice, it simply turns and arrives. Hokusai's wave crashes down; the wave in Plate 13 turns inward, toward light.

The Lemniscate 2

Two circles sharing a crossing point, which is the shape of a bond that cannot be separated into its parts. Rendered in red and threaded through a downward triangle in Plate 2.

■ Axis 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5 · 11 · 17 · 18 · 19

The vertical connecting the worlds: the World Tree, the sacred mountain, the spinal column kundalini rises through. In the Shadowwork plates it is the dominant line of the composition, and it runs in both directions—the path down and the path back are the same line.

LIGHT AND COLOUR

Black Ground 1 · 2 · 3 · 4

The nigredo itself. Not background but condition: everything placed on it is placed on death.

Cloud as Architecture 5 · 6 · 7

Vapour used as masonry: banks of cloud carrying the weight that stone carries elsewhere in the same picture. The boundary between solid and vapour has gone, and the unconscious is the building material.

Rainbow and Iridescence 5 · 7 · 13 · 16 · 17

The *cauda pavonis*: the whole spectrum appearing at once in the vessel as the signal that the blackening is ending. Placed here without any knowledge of what it signalled.

Neon 8 · 9 · 14

Not the warm gold of the citrinitas and not the cool silver of the albedo, but the buzzing artificial light of the arcade and the screen—the nigredo refracted through a childhood palette.

Coral Ribbons 6

Coral bands laid across arches, sky and ground alike, in defiance of the perspective everything under them obeys. The one element in the series that is demonstrably on the picture rather than in it.

Gold and Warm Light 1 · 3 · 4 · 11 · 14 · 16 · 17 · 18

The citrinitas arriving: dawn after the long night. In the later plates gold is the colour of inhabited space and of tools held consciously.

■ Water 5 · 6 · 7 · 8 · 9 · 11 · 13 · 15 · 18

The unconscious itself, and the one element no grid can hold. Its state tracks the arc: standing and reflective in the Dreamwork plates, running through architecture built to exclude it in the 8-Bit ones, crashing in Plate 13, and finally still. The river crossing the arcade floor is the proof that the nigredo cannot be fully digitised.

■ Feminine Figures 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5 · 7 · 8 · 10 · 12 · 14 · 16 · 17 · 18 · 19

Recorded here only as far as the eye confirms it: feminine figures are principal elements of the plate. What any one of them is stays an argument, and arguments do not belong in an index.

■ Wings 2 · 3 · 10 · 11 · 15 · 16

The capacity for transcendence, and its failure. Wings here are never simply functional: grey and grounded on the figure who cannot take off, golden and shattering on the one already coming down. They are also the psychopomp's attribute—the dark flight between worlds.

■ Eye 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 7 · 8 · 9 · 10 · 12 · 14 · 15 · 16 · 17 · 18

A prominent eye, or faces that stare out of the picture. Its temperature changes across the series and the change is traced in *Reading Across the Plates*: the unmediated stare of the Shadowwork faces, the leer on the arcade screens, the single eye set in a gold ring at the centre of a composition, a bird keeping watch through glass, and finally eyes that are closed.

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*The person who made these collages is not the same person who emerged from making them.
That's the point.*