

135



beendet am  
25 November  
1922.  
aus miffillhoms  
das für v'erfaßt  
d' lebens baum.  
ein kreis auf es  
vollendet/ abo es is  
d' kreis auf im weltet ein  
fremde gott/ d' nicht z' benennen.  
da gott is einsem/ bebrütet es.  
neue leibes form/ für aus rau-  
afibe.

Carl Jung, page 135 (1922), from *The Red Book/Liber Novus* 1915–30, first published by W.W. Norton and Co. ©Foundation of the Works of C.G. Jung, Zürich.

# The Uses of Enchantment

*Jennifer Higgle tunes in to the cosmos.*

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I doubt that anyone would argue that the last couple of years have not been difficult. I certainly wouldn't. In late 2019, I stepped down from a job I had been doing for two decades—I was an editor at the London-based, international art magazine *Frieze*—and headed back to my family in Canberra. To celebrate, we went for a holiday by the sea and were caught up in the catastrophic bushfires that decimated an area larger than the Amazon rainforest.

We were in no real danger—the house we were staying in was next to the beach—but we lost electricity and were stranded for four days, as fires blocked out the roads. The sea was black with ash, the air thick with smoke, the sun a poisonous ball. Strange storms kept erupting; the extreme heat wreaked havoc with weather systems. As 2020 staggered in, we played Scrabble by candlelight, drank warm champagne, and ate sandwiches. My niece Alice read my tarot cards. Change, she told me, was afoot.

At dawn on the fifth day of being stranded, the roads briefly opened and we drove back to Canberra. The once-lush landscape recalled sepia photographs of the Western Front after World War I; ravaged moonscapes had replaced familiar forests. A few weeks later, I returned to London and repurposed my smoke mask for a new kind of wildfire—Covid-19.

Stuck at home, in my small flat in London, everything felt precarious—my career, the environment, the rapidly sickening state of the world—but the enforced solitude was a comfort. After working non-stop for years for a magazine that prided itself on agenda setting, I wanted to open myself up to new ways of understanding the world—a world in which the origins of so many catastrophes, from bushfires to pandemics, lay in our abuse of the environment we depend on. I began exploring the relationship between art, the spirit world, and nature, and soon realised I wasn't alone. In recent years, there's been a groundswell of interest in ways of living that, at best, honour the complexities of the past while accommodating the natural, even cosmic, rhythms of the present. It was apt that I was invited to pen an essay for the exhibition catalogue for *Hilma af Klint: The Secret Paintings*, devoted

to the mystic Swedish artist who died in 1944. (It opened at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and is currently on view at City Gallery Wellington.) In her journal of 1919, af Klint wrote: 'Where war has torn up plants and killed animals there are empty spaces which could be filled with new figures if there were sufficient faith in human imagination and the human capacity to develop higher forms.'

For a brief moment in 2021, galleries reopened and I went to see an exhibition I'm still thinking about, *The Botanical Mind: Art, Mysticism and the Cosmic Tree*—visionary work inspired by plants, spanning 500 years, at London's Camden Art Centre. When another lockdown slammed the doors shut, it went online, revealing a treasure trove of ancient and modern, Indigenous and Western artworks, texts, audio pieces, and videos that honour trees as magical objects, plants as metaphors for growth, and the wax and wane of the moon as cryptic code. The curators of the exhibition, Gina Buenfeld and Martin Clark, summed up a common feeling: 'During this period of enforced stillness, our behaviour might be seen to resonate with plants: like them we are now fixed in one place, subject to new rhythms of time, contemplation, personal growth and transformation.'

As I write this, the major touring exhibition *Supernatural America: The Paranormal in American Art* is about to open at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. I ordered the enormous catalogue and spent hours perusing its riches. In her introduction, Katie Luber, the Director of the museum, declares, 'Instead of treating spirit artists or mediums as specimens of outliers, weird or "making it up", *Supernatural America* takes their accounts seriously and asserts that what they sense is real.' This marks a radical shift: for most of the twentieth century, any discussion of the spirit world and its impact on modern art was considered beyond the pale. Of course, much scepticism swirls around this curiosity in other realms, but at its heart lies something serious and sincere: the desire to see the unknown as a signifier of possibility, not closure. I, for one, am digging in.