



Persephone/Persephone A Mythic Journey Through Greek Mythology

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Imagine having the opportunity to enter a time machine and be transported back in history to the time of the Eleusinian Mysteries and the origins of spoken and pictorial Greek Mythology. The opportunity has arrived in Harrisburg as Susquehanna Art Museum is hosting an incredible multi-panel exhibition of collaborative paintings by Joanne Landis and Elody Gyekis titled *Persephone/Persephone*, inspired by the narrative arc of the Greek mythological story. The exhibit opened in early April with the official catered opening set for the May 21 3rd in the Burg. The show will run through mid-August.

The idea for this show began to emerge after Landis' and Gyekis' first yearlong collaboration for the exhibit "Call and Response," a six-painting collaboration with additional works by each artist held in 2018 at the Factory

Works Gallery of the Pajama Factory in Williamsport, PA. Each of the six in the collaboration was a painting begun by one of the artists, then traded halfway through to the other artist to be finished. After this experience, both knew they wanted to take this collaborative process to another level.

In *Persephone/Persephone*, Landis and Gyekis again collaborate on each of 12 paintings to explore the themes of mothers and daughters, birth and death, love and renewal, and separation and reuniting. Their work celebrates the power of women while

exploring the diverse feminine in mythologies and archetypes.

The story is told in three stages within the 12 paintings: Persephone's happy childhood with her goddess mother, Demeter; their separation when Persephone is taken into the underworld by Hades to become a chthonic goddess; and Demeter's pain, which causes the earth to freeze rendering it fruitless since Demeter is the goddess of earth and fecundity. The painting narratives end with their joyous reunion and the return of spring to the land. When Persephone must return to Hades for six months out of each year, the earth returns to its barren state — symbolic of the power that shoots forth, but then withdraws into the earth.

The paintings are supported in free-standing frames that surround the viewer in a large semicircle. Each frame, made from local white pine and maple, was designed and built by woodworker Gary Gyekis. The works were created on three large rolls of canvas, which were traded back and forth between Landis in Pennsylvania and Gyekis in New York.

The process took over a full year to create and began with a series of thumbnail sketches laying out the progression of the story. Each piece was created through a belief in the creative process of each other and regard for the intuitive process, which each of them brought to the work. Their strokes of paint surround and overlap each other creating an alchemical magic born of canvas, oil paint, and love of feminine archetypes.

Landis and Gyekis's independent works are aesthetically quite different from each other, but they do explore similar ideas in their personal oeuvres. Both celebrate the power of women in their many roles in everyday life and create these roles by using a variety of visual symbols and mythological nuances. A synergy occurs in the paintings by the combination of the two different yet equally powerful female voices: Landis working in a bold

intuitive spontaneity, and Gyekis creating through thoughtfulness, realism, and mindful execution.

Landis describes herself as a "storyteller — a narrative painter. My work develops much like dreams, altering and growing in response to my evolving emotions and visions. I build an environment inhabited by beings who have all the means to be human, alive, and still in a dream."

Meanwhile, Gyekis says her work "is fueled by collaboration, driven towards beauty and preoccupied with the feminine experience. It explores the internal battles faced by women as we confront society's prefabricated narratives and realize our unique identities."

Landis, a New York City native, has seen her career evolve from poet to fashion illustrator to fine arts. She has taught illustration and design at the Fashion Institute of Technology in NYC and illustration for designers at Drexel University in Philadelphia. In addition, she has received artist residencies and fellowships in the United States, Germany, and Ireland. She has taught fashion design workshops at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, PA, and other design workshops in New Jersey and New York. Her painting workshops take place mostly at Pajama Factory in Williamsport, where she has a studio.

Landis' work was mostly small pieces using subdued colors because of her small New York apartment studio. But her move to a beautiful

9-acre plot on a winding road in Troxelville, PA, along with a barn that has become an at-home working studio opened her up to the large, vibrant colorful celebrations that define her work today.

Gyekis earned her BFA in Painting and Ceramics from Penn State and her MFA in Painting at the New York Academy of Art. Her paintings have been exhibited in solo and group shows in this country and Central America and Europe. Gyekis' work is in private collections in Germany, England, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Brazil, China, and Canada. She has done artist residencies in Romania and France and has taught painting workshops in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Honduras, and Costa Rica.

Gyekis also is a muralist for nine murals in State College, Harrisburg, Williamsport, Huntingdon, and Millheim. She has worked on various other community art projects in other locations, such as Toms River (NJ) and the Dominican Republic. She was the artistic director of the "Book Benches of Centre County" public art project in 2014 - 2016.

Landis can be contacted through Facebook as *Joanne Landis Artist*. Gyekis can be contacted through Facebook as *Elody Gyekis Artist* and her webpage elodyg.com.



PHOTOS SUBMITTED
Stages of work



Elody Gyekis in her studio



Joanne Landis at work on a panel



PHOTO BY CHRISTINA HEINTZELMAN
Elody Gyekis (left)
and Joanne Landis