

J/J HASTAIN

Identity Collages

I meet her in the candor of details: “tanged by melting tar”
from *Dream with Clam-Diggers* by Sylvia Plath

I have been pondering in more “artistic” ways lately. Perhaps it is because I am aging. Perhaps it is because, by way of many years as a practitioner of mystical work regarding gender and embodiment, I am feeling less dysphoria in my body. Perhaps it is because my relationship with sentences is now more open and pleasurable than ever before, and that puts me at a sense of ease: an ease which frees up space in me to engage other, enjoyable forms of work.

I have been collaborating with Sylvia Plath as an unseen but very extant being for many years now. These collaborations have been primarily alchemical, rooted in sharing emotional space with a poet and woman long dead. I love the glint in my friend’s eye, the colors of her skirts. This was a woman of needs, of feelings, of her own effort to make contact with a world ridden with exclusionary systems (eg: patriarchy) in which she was forced to nest in the somatic experience of her gains and her griefs (the coldest English winter in centuries (1962-63), her ill children, her having no money of her own, yet also her moods, her language, her short-term blisses).

Recently, I decided to collaborate with Plath by bringing her energy into my *Identity Collages* project. Identity Collages is an ongoing project in which I commune with various unseen entities (energies, directions, personages who have died, mythological figures) for formal communion based in forms *created* specifically to set us free, together.

In order to get into a psychic and physical space in which I could converge with a dead figure, I wrote fiercely, putting myself in a trance, intentionally channeling Plath as one would channel *effort to cooperate* when preparing the Ouija board. The sage smoke, burning for the sake of the ritual, abounds now. The lights are turning on and off as the wind whips through the ghost-froth lace curtain over my open window.

These particular collages involve color, sketch and image. I composed these as somatic stances from a trance state and in an effort at honoring Plath. I was trying to be a conduit between Sylvia Plath’s creative output and my own creative output, but in the *context of process*: in the place before or to the side of the *content of the output*. This is attention and attunement as I enter the *spinning into sense* of what looms on the loom of recombine images.

Note: each of these *Identity Collages* is named from a particular phrase in a Plath poem: the phrase that I was spinning until the form of the collage began to feel like it spilled open to me. ○

ABOUT THE ARTIST

J/J HASTAIN is the inventor of The Mystical Sentence Projects and is author of several cross-genre books including the trans-genre book *libertine monk* (Scrambler Press), *The Non-Novels* (forthcoming, Spuyten Duyvil) and *The Xyr Trilogy: a Metaphysical Romance of Experimental Realisms*. j/j’s writing has most recently appeared in *Caketrain*, *Trickhouse*, *The Collagist*, *Housefire*, *Bombay Gin*, *Aufgabe* and *Tarpaulin Sky*.



“to start the spirit out of the mud” (from *The Companionable Ills*)



“the magic sawdust writes: address unknown” (from *Denouement*)



“between this wish and that wish” (from *Burning the Letters*)