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ALICE MOREY

SHAPES OF PERMANENCE

By Louisa Elderton

Milk. Alice Morey sent me this word in a poem over email, milk flowing through wires in search of a digital cloud in which to settle. I drank it up as I read. White pixels making my eyes wet. Later, we sat together in the park and I let the water out while an ice cream melted onto my hands. Vanilla dripped, over and over, making my skin sticky. Somehow it conjures her paintings. You've probably already noticed the milky vanilla veil that hangs over (and over) her pigments, a liquescent layer through which you can't quite see, but you know something's there, seeking sanctuary, *behind a screen.*

Over the years I've seen her do different things to her paintings. She buried one alive. Dug a huge hole in the sodden mud and let the body of the canvas settle into the earth. Or maybe the mud was frozen solid – after all, she lives in Berlin. Crystals of soily ice kissing colours that continue to shine though condemned to the underworld. Another time she swam into the middle of a lake, hanging onto a painting that trailed behind. She took slow strokes as the piece undulated in still waters. Baptise cloth to make it pure; pour yourself over it, skin against skin. This matter matters: legs kicking from side to side, water bubbling and alive, *soaking up the surface.* Sometimes she burns things too, mainly sticks from the forest. Can you see a story building? Mud, water, wood. You'll know her charcoal because you can see it in front of you, making lines. They sway, curve and arch. Look.

Mud sticks and algae ages. *Breathe.* She wills *the surface to grow on its own.* So it does. Let your eyes linger; let the shapes materialise. Sweep the veil aside or dive beyond the shallows. I see water in everything, here. 'The Power of Blue' (2017) sets a horizon between two blues that seem to ripple and flow with different waves; 'Borderline' (2017) inverts a luminescent sunset that glows above the reeds; 'Trunk' (2017) sees swollen bark floating in a turquoise pool tinged with tones of coral. Maybe your mind, like mine, drifts into Monet's 'Water Lilies', sometimes so abstract as to morph into daubs of lemon yellow and flutterings of pink amid swathes of deep green and blue. Or there's Dürer, the dandelions and plantain of his 'Great Piece of Turf' (1503) seemingly re-emerging in Morey's 'Threshold' (2017), though blurred with the

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brush of time's inevitable passing. Like them, her works come from nature, but are concerned with the purity of colour; of light bouncing off matter to highlight hue, texture and consistency; of bacteria that might multiply if left to their own devices.

Yoghurt cultivates and moves with life. *Sour sometimes*. She dips her giant brush into tubs of it, smoothes *with automatic hand* the thick whiteness over the powdery pigments that she's already laid down, sprinkled from stained fingertips. *It brings us proteins and binds our bodies together with first life*, she says. In her images, everything is alive: an amorphous shape searches for its own form in 'C'est la Vie'(2017), a mass that will surely expand to consume the stark florescence just above. A white apparition lifts its head above water in 'Ghost' (2017), searching for *its own memory* in the dark. These are *patterns of loneliness* reaching out to find anything that might feel familiar. *Breathe*.

She calls them 'Shapes of Permanence', but how can we be so sure? Life continues to move all around, changing us. Sometimes she takes clay and moulds it into tiny organic forms; crumbly earth that has been pressed, coiled and rolled, placed delicately on the ground as she tempts you to tread a path through the gallery. It crunches underfoot, pounded into a powdery carpet of dust. *Action*. The wind will pick it up and move it to another place, perhaps back to the land from where it came. *There must be more than this*. Yet still she says it is permanent. Here, some of her sculptures are stacked around us: pastel tones of orange, green, blue and pink hiding other elements that have been dipped and set. Little piles of nature made lovelier, but ready to be broken. *Sky turns grey with you again*. Hers is a threshold; whether you boldly break through or gently peek into the curved, clear windows among some of these hazy surfaces, well, that's up to you.