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## **Objects in mirror are closer than they appear**

Jill Smith

Exhibition essay by Angel Callander

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Recurring dreams of a childhood home and its various schemas. Both architectural and emotional—sometimes empty, sometimes filled with people throughout a lifetime; at once comforting and haunted.

To *be* is, at many turns, involuntary and absurd. With fantasies of ever being made whole, we are in essence the accumulations of chance encounters and experiences. Following Simone de Beauvoir in her writing on what it means historically to become a woman in *The Second Sex*, the body is a situation rather than a thing, encompassing our perceptions of the world around us and shifting throughout our endless processes of individuation.<sup>1</sup>

I might imagine myself as the earth: ancient and resolute. Geological layers of self, stratified and faulted, and irrefutably weathered.

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<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), p. 46.

Covered over by the dirt, feeling deceived by the assurances of personhood, my embodiment is a record of one-in-a-million prospects. Mediation of the divine accelerates the process of becoming, a long purgatory within the dialectic of “being” and “nothingness.” There must always be an internalized force in order to determine where one truly belongs.

What and where is home, again?

In Jill Smith’s work, the absurdism of forming an identity with the objects we keep is complemented by an understanding of the inherent need to do so. The spaces we create for ourselves are museums of curiosity, sentimentality, and memory. They contain not just physical objects, but also entire histories, with spectres of who and where they—and we—came from.

I could not say it better than Dorothee Sölle: “Things themselves have a song and a language, pointing beyond themselves and praising God in hidden, divine names.”<sup>2</sup>

*Objects in mirror are closer than they appear* is a study in domesticity, memorialization, grief, entropy, fallacy, and yearning to become. In a site-responsive installation, a series of works in ceramics and handmade paper are adorned with found jewellery, collected flowers and greenery, chains, and pearls. Ultimately an exploration of materials in flux, Smith uses the physical and emotional properties of each individual piece to create what feels like a home. By turning familiar objects into approximate entities in and of themselves, their hybridity between thing and body ushers in a means of identifying with them on more than one level.

A large, floor-bound vessel is filled with water; five cups hang from the rim by lengths of chain. Made to be reminiscent of the 5 of Cups card—a card about loss, defeat, and

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<sup>2</sup> Dorothee Sölle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Fortress Press, 2001), p. 423

sorrow—the overflow of water presents a dual perception challenge: the prospect of abundance, or the burden of excess. Playing with unions of function and non-function, a crossbreed of goblet and hourglass sits in its own leaked sand, an emblem of time as it both accumulates and slips away. Ceramic candle holders and picture frames are abstracted to new forms of their assumed purpose; a frame contains gifted dried flowers in resin, a portrait of a person’s objects rather than the person themselves.

“YOU REALIZE THAT YOU’RE ALWAYS  
SHEDDING PARTS OF THE BODY  
AND LEAVING MEMENTOS EVERYWHERE.”<sup>3</sup>

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Tarot references call upon explorations into the relationship between symbolism, divination, and combinations of archetypes to produce various ideas about the universal search for affinity. Jung believed in archetypes as parts of the collective unconscious that emerge, unspoken, as organizing principles for human societies. The persona, the shadow, and the anima, and the self are the results of embodied experiences and shared memories, which persist in social contexts and forms of art.

As Jung said, we have “always felt the need of finding an access through the unconscious to the meaning of an actual condition.”<sup>4</sup> Our need to discover what lies beneath the surface is both mystical and primordial. The inextricable link between suffering and desire, as a conduit for identification, expresses itself heavily in the dreamworld through vignettes of who we believe ourselves to be and to have been. Perhaps they are aspirational, too.

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<sup>3</sup> Jenny Holzer, from the *Living* series, 1980-82.

<sup>4</sup> *Visions: Notes of the Seminar given in 1930-1934 by C. G. Jung*, Vol. 2, ed. Claire Douglas (Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 923.

“In a dream you saw a way to survive and you were full of joy.”<sup>5</sup>

In a dream it is your mother’s hand reaching for you.

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My skin is thin but my blood is hot, burning occasionally like various small fires. At times I feel as though I am filled with viscous molten rock.

Infinitely performing various ceremonies of self-assurance, awareness, fulfillment, or determination—extrapolated out to achieve a breadth of knowledge about others. Those geological layers of self, connecting generations.

My cup runneth over with what Hélène Cixous referred to as the combined accidents of history.<sup>6</sup>

Being at home in one’s own body is a feat of purpose. It is a lifelong reckoning with the weight of becoming, constantly encountering the most intimate strangers: mother, monster, time, and God.

In what way do I resemble my creator, when I am so intertwined with my own tragedy and farce?

In a dream there were no clouds overhead.

In a dream, I met the angel of my retribution and awoke with tears on my face.

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<sup>5</sup> Jenny Holzer, from the *Survival* series, 1983-85.

<sup>6</sup> Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 70.

- Angel Callander