

Joan Jonas: Good Night Good Morning

Select artwork transcripts

MoMA

Table of Contents

Joan Jonas reading David Antin's 1968 poem "a list of the delusions of the insane: what they are afraid of." 2018

***I Want to Live in the Country (and Other Romances).* 1976**

***Double Lunar Dogs.* 1984**

***Volcano Saga.* 1989**

***Lines in the Sand.* 2002**

***Double Lunar Rabbits.* 2010**

***Moving Off the Land II.* 2019**

***Reanimation.* 2010/2012/2013**

Joan Jonas reading David Antin's 1968 poem "a list of the delusions of the insane: what they are afraid of." 2018

**Audio recording, 2:44 min.
Courtesy of Joan Jonas**

In *Mirror Piece II* (1970) at the 14th Street Emanu El YMHA, the mirrors were employed for a wider variety of tasks, and combined with an audiotape of Jonas reading David Antin's "a list of the delusions of the insane: what they are afraid of."

First published in *Code of Flag Behavior* (1968), Antin's poem appropriated a list compiled by the Scottish psychiatrist Thomas Smith Clouston in his *Clinical Lectures on Mental Diseases* at the turn of the century, itemizing the hallucinations of over 100 women patients diagnosed with melancholia. The cumulative impact of these visions, which Antin adapted only slightly, is one of extreme psychic fragmentation:

... being poisoned
being killed
being alone
being attacked at night
being poor
being followed at night
being lost in a crowd
being dead
having no stomach
having no insides
having a bone in the throat

...
that their flesh is boiling
that their head will be cut off
that children are burning...

**From David Antin, "a list of the delusions of the insane:
what they are afraid of" (1968)**

I Want to Live in the Country (and Other Romances). **1976**

**Standard-definition video
(color, sound), 24:06 min.
The Museum of Modern Art,
New York. Purchase, 1992**

There is a room. A big room, with a steeply pitched roof, like an attic. It is blue. And in the book on the floor, she reads: "Doors and windows are cut out in the walls of the house. And because they are empty spaces, we are able to use them." The windows of the house are small, high, so that when you sit all you see is sky.

You see something in the distance and walk toward it. Then, when you get there, and look back, things seem so different from how you imagined them. Now I do not feel particularly attached to the house. The barn is vast and golden. The animals live there. The wind is blowing and the crows are gliding over the sea. And sitting in the barn, it is beginning to rain. All the trees on the road were cut, destroying our privacy. At the concert, the dancers swayed on their toes, and turned on their ankles. We found another white dog like the first. She had chased a sheep over a cliff. I became uneasy when he told me how much it would cost. Where should it go? I drew the hills again and again.

She decided to sell the farm. And that night, she dreamed of two huge black birds. One was killed by the other. She opened the book right to B for blackbird and it said, "you will be called upon to show a great deal of courage if you dream of blackbirds flying. If they alight, you will be fortunate. A dead blackbird is a sign of trouble."

It is very quiet. The sun is setting and there is something quietly crashing in the woods. Maybe it is an animal or the boy who was making a path to the flat rock. She calls his name and the noise stops immediately and does not resume.

The spaces I made were intellectual, historical, and stuffed with references carrying the past, stifling me in the hot blue cellar.

The air was totally still, with the smoke rising over the trees, the sun orange through the flames. Each dry pine burned like an inferno, throwing off an intense bright heat. Lucky there was no wind. A fire's speed is seldom seen in these parts.

It is possible to see what is happening, and yet not know what is falling.

And they taught her all that was known of shape-changing.

The red car goes by every morning now as I am washing or coming up from the field. Just someone who lives on the road. But they always wave and blow their horn.

The women were all watching until the end. Then suddenly we were all running around the charred trees, stamping on coals.

Last night, we turned on the TV for the first time in weeks. Poltergeists lifting and moving furniture. A child thrown against the wall. The smell of sulfur.

I went and there were a lot of people. I sat next to him. He was about to show some movies. And I decided to go and comb my hair, which took a long time because I couldn't get it looking right. Then we walked down the path and saw a faint grey figure in the mist. Someone stole my jewelry and I woke terrified. In San Francisco, in a high light room, with large clean windows, flooded with sun, on a ladder, in a precarious position, scared but alright. Outside the window way below were rocks and barnacles. Someone said, "look out!" I said, "it's okay." A man and woman came walking up the path. My friend said, "watch out, they may steal." I say, "oh no, they won't." I woke terrified. Swimming back with the boy, the sea rose and fell, in immense swells. It took all her strength to get back to the beach that hovered above and below. Later in the dream, she sat on the floor of the ocean at this point, while the waves crashed over her head.

Everyday with the dog she walked into the woods, with no path, and chartered another part in her memory, with broken twigs and stalks and stems. She remembered summers long ago when she spent days alone in the trees. She would not go with him but he would, and he was particularly good at finding lost objects. Now she knows it by heart. Build a house, I feel a reluctance to do so. I saw a red car by the house falling into the sea.

I am not here, I cannot see. There is no silence and they are blasting on the road in his quarry. After dinner I felt uneasy about coming back here. I locked the barn doors and undressed by candle.

He told her a story about the sea lions who pushed the box up and down the surface of the sea, whistling and calling to the wind, as you would to a dog, "come to this box." And their toy was a rainbow.

Time is more precious year by year. The air sharper, the sun warmer, and the trees more like friends, and my friends more precious like trees. The wind by the green house and the grey grass is gentle, turned by the hill. But here the wind is on the brink of violence. In the new house there are no memories.

The day was hot blue, and she was lying on the beach all alone. Except that the sound of a motor, like a mosquito, was getting gradually louder. And she had to put her bathing suit on and lie face down when the small boat rounded the point. It passed slowly with the man in a blue shirt standing at the rudder looking at the beach. He was just out of recognizable sight. Although he seemed to be the same one. She stared at him from under her arm. It seemed forever. His stance was that of the man at the quarry. Finally the boat went behind rocks and she turned on her back to feel the sun on her breasts. The sea as usual was immense. A man is walking down the road toward the house, which is part of the mystery on the hill. The wind comes up every night.

The house was a disaster. And the cat was killed last week by the dog. She reads, "They chased each other around for another whisper. They calculated things by the shape of clouds, by the length of shadows, by the flight of birds, by two flies on a flat rug, by throwing bones over the left shoulders, and by every kind of trick and game."

Last night I had a map dream in color of a detailed region above Egypt. Only it was all mixed up, and I was trying to say names like "Adada." I can walk it but I cannot draw it. Then when I came back, I found the wooden door chopped down and all the windows broken.

The vaguest it can grasp. It makes a solid object though. A gesture, a look. Still there is the wishing when I see the evening star. In what order did we meet? And when did I last see her? And where have I been since then?

It was hot again. I slept on the porch. Tonight I will sleep in the field as the barn is an oven. The crescent moon rose, and I watched the stars move across the sky. Too bad the land is so close. I am tired from the fire and the heat. I'm not afraid of night, finally.

As soon as I got upstairs, the wind overtook me, the wild trees blowing. And this morning they were still swaying. The house will be beautiful, and the idea of it takes over. As the summer ends, I learn more each day in the field.

I can hear the planes looking for the wreckage of the boy, who went down flying from Sydney. We are watching our woods. He said to listen for the west wind. At dawn I will walk down the road.

When I saw the man of the red car at the fire, the mystery escaped, but my obsession continues as before. It's the distant figure on the hill, the house in the future, and the man in the distance. But he thinks I should have a trailer and a gun. He shoots deer. He is a hunter. He drives out every morning and every evening to spot them. He observed me also, he said. "Restless, but not afraid," he thought. Strange the way we see one another in the distance. I ran over to the field and saw the red car out in the point. I ran in circles with the wind.

I am sitting upstairs where there is a lot of light. In high winds it is like a ship creaking, and I feel uneasy about the shingles. I took him home and went swimming in the harbor. A big black mass covered the sky from the North. The water was slate grey and absolutely cold, the sky dark with patches of grey light reflections of the sea. They came to visit and I was relieved. They stayed until dark. It is silent and ominous, like something had happened.

I am lying in the field trying to stay awake under the stars, watching the trees for smoke, listening for crackling, in case it happens again. Fire travels underground by the roots. You can't know where it will surface.

Someone said the youngest land is Iceland, and the oldest, Greenland. As she walked into the ocean, she told me that we were both on the edge, and that these are games of survival—time fillers—and the development is cyclic, circular, and that you always return to the beginning. I am an immigrant here, carrying in my heart a myth I support, from another place, where I do not wish to return from this new land I am occupying. And I fell in love the first morning.

From Joan Jonas: *Light Time Tales*, Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, 2014. Courtesy of Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan. Transcriptions by Robin Williams

Double Lunar Dogs. 1984

**Standard-definition video
(color, sound), 24 min.
The Museum of Modern Art,
New York. Purchase, 1992**

Imagine yourself on this spaceship that has been traveling for hundreds of years. You, the inhabitants, were born here and will die here. Everyone has forgotten where they came from and where they are going. But the ship, which nurtures you, hums on and on.

Where have you been?

What were you looking for?

What were you doing?

When I was young, I was followed by double lunar dogs for miles with them tagging at my heels. Is that clear? You should never go alone.

This is me. Who is she? I am here. Look at her. Who are you? Remember us? There's no past. The future's gone. Forget it.

You can't remember anything, can you? What do you remember? How far back? Or, how far forward? What is your earliest memory? Of the war?

Memory is stronger than time. To forget is happiness.

There's no mystery to be deciphered. It's a plain and simple existence living in the absolute. We are ever at one with existence alone. We move without coming to rest. We carry out endless actions. All retreats to a once that never was. For us, all is everything and yet nothing, so that you know now what it means to be caught in the absolute.

It is often quite easy to be mistaken. Our ancestors were romantics. Their truths handed down in allegorical language. Take their love of exaggeration. The tilting legs and buried cities and survivors wandering on an earth that ignores them—thus it seems. Earth's indifferent ways are like a haunting memory. A story of love.

I will read your past. Everyone forgets, outside the sun shines.

Green gardens of the ocean, great spirit of the sea
Green gardens of the ocean, great spirit of the sea
Your breath is fresh and pungent, your skin is dark and shimmering
On land they're telling stories that you would not believe
Yes they have told me stories that you would not believe
They told me that you're dying but I would not believe them

How can it be? Forget it. How can you long for a place shadowed by the glories of bygone days. You've mistaken allegorical language for everyday speech, and you want reports from outside. You hear of places where there are seasons. Winters with hurricanes raging across islands, springs with floodwaters pouring across the plains. You hear

of a rain that began one season and was still coming down when winter became spring, summer. Some said the end was near. Some, that it was already here. And others tell the story differently.

Man

You let go. It's mine. It's mine. Come here. It's mine. Let go, let go. Mine, mine, mine, mine, mine. Let go. Mine.

Woman

Let go of the rope. No it's mine. Take your hands off. It's mine! Give it to me! You're always taking everything. Give it to me! I want it. I want the rope. I want the rope. I want the rope. It's my rope.

M: Do you remember this?

W: No, I don't remember that.

M: Do you remember this?

W: No, I don't remember that either.

M: Do you remember this?

W: I've never seen anything like that before.

M: Do you remember this?

W: I don't remember that.

M: Do you remember this?

W: I really don't remember that.

M: Do you remember this?

W: No, I-I don't remember that.

M: Do you remember this?

W: No, no I don't remember that either.

M: Do you remember this?

W: I-I can't remember that either.

M: How much did it cost?

W: What kind of question is that?

M: What's inside of it?

W: I don't know. Let's find out.

Remember this from long ago? I can't recall what made me weep. The castle walls came tumbling down, and grass grew up between the tracks. The children play in plastic rooms with tanks and guns and dolls. "Hide below," the generals shout.

The dogs swim out to tell us more. Their hearts are made of flesh and blood. And stars move round to meet the moon. Hold on, hold on. But fall through space. There is no up. There is no down. And no more time to speculate.

They had a secret passion for armies. For what? Grey wolves?

I beg you not to interrupt.

M: I, who have enlarged the universe a hundred thousand times, have shrunk now into the size of my own body.

Why did you do it?

W: I don't know. I don't have any answers to your questions.

There are none.

M: What is the interpretation of the riddle?

You will not easily find another like me.

You should be let off, but on one condition. That you are not to inquire or speculate in this way anymore.

W: Now, we're going to show you the stars.

From Joan Jonas: *Light Time Tales*, Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, 2014. Courtesy of Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan. Transcription by Robin Williams

Volcano Saga. 1989

Video (color, sound), 28:30 min.
The Museum of Modern Art,
New York. Purchase, 1992

Woman: It was a beautiful, windy, sunny day. I drove out to the glacier. It started to rain, so I stopped for lunch in a big, pink restaurant and then I drove on. Just after I had reached the peninsula, the mountains and shallow ponds were on my right, and the sea was on my left. I lost control. The car went into a skid. For a moment, I didn't know when it would end. The car bounced a bit, went off the road, and turned over, leaving me hanging upside down. The wind was blowing like mad.

I pushed myself toward the top of the car and undid my seatbelt, just as a young, pale man appeared at the window and asked if I was all right. I was busy crawling around in the smashed roof of the car, looking for small things. The wind blew everything away. Then a rather large man appeared and offered to take me to the crossroads—to the restaurant there, to call the police. I trembled and leaned into the wind. I climbed into the back of his big, soft car and we crept down the road.

They told me I had been blown off the road by the wind. The radio said: "Woman blown off the road by the wind." We reached the crossroads and I got out. There was no restaurant. There was no crossroads. It was Iceland one thousand years ago.

Voiceover: A man called Gest lived in the West. He was a great chieftain and a very wise man, and he could see the future.

"Gest"

"Gudrun"

Every year he rode to the Althing. One year, after a day's ride, he arrived at the baths, where he rested. Gudrun, his young cousin who lived nearby, met him there, and they greeted each other affectionately. They fell into conversation, for both were intelligent and fluent talkers.

Gudrun: I have had many dreams this winter, and four of them in particular have disturbed me greatly. No one has understood them to my satisfaction. But I am not just asking for a pleasing interpretation.

Gest: Tell me your dreams. It may be that I can make something of them.

Gudrun: I dreamt I was standing outside, near a stream. I was wearing a headdress on my head, but I felt that it didn't become me, so I was anxious to change it. A lot of people warned me not to, but I paid no attention to them and tore the headdress off my head and threw it into the stream. And that was the end of that dream.

Gest: Tell me your second dream.

Gudrun: At the beginning of this dream, I was standing by a lake and it seemed to me that a silver ring appeared on my hand. I was sure that the

ring was mine. It seemed to become me extremely well, and I thought it was a wonderful treasure and was determined to keep it forever. But suddenly, when I least expected it, the ring slipped from my hand and fell into the lake and I never saw it again. I felt this loss much more keenly than I would have ever expected from losing a mere ring. With that, I woke up.

Gest: That was no less of a dream. And the third dream?

Gudrun: I dreamed I had a gold ring, and it seemed to me that the ring was mine and that it made up for the previous losses. I had the feeling that I would enjoy this ring for much longer than the other one, but it didn't seem to me to be that much better, even though gold is supposedly more precious than silver. Then I seemed to stumble, and in trying to steady myself, the gold ring struck a stone and broke into two. The two pieces seemed to bleed. What I felt now was more like grief than mere regret over a loss. Then it occurred to me that there may have been a flaw in the ring, and when I looked, I thought I could see many other flaws. I had the feeling that the ring could have stayed whole if I had looked after it better. And with that, the dream came to an end.

Gest: The dreams are drying up. And the fourth dream?

Gudrun: In my fourth dream, I dreamt that I was wearing on my head a helmet of gold set with many precious stones, and that this treasure was mine. The only fault I could find with it was that it seemed almost too heavy, and I could hardly cope with it and had to tilt my head under it. I didn't blame the helmet for that and had no intention of parting with it; but the helmet slipped off my head into the waters of the fjord, and after that I woke up. And now all the dreams are told.

[first interpretation]

Gest: I can see clearly what these dreams signify, but you will find it all rather monotonous, for I shall interpret these dreams much in the same way.

You will have four husbands, and I suspect that when you marry the first time, it will not be a love match for you. When you dreamt that you were wearing the headdress on your head and that it ill became you, this means that you will have little love for him. That you took it off and threw it away: this means you will leave him. That's why people say that something is thrown to the sea when a person discards something without getting anything in return.

Gudrun: Tell me a story.

Voiceover: One day, enjoying himself with some companions, he noticed a brightly decorated tent standing apart from the other booths. He came over and found Gilley, our owner, dressed in expensive clothing and wearing a Russian hat. "I am called Gilley the

Russian,” he said. “What are you looking for?” “I want to buy a slave girl, if you have one for sale.” Gilley invited him to have a look. There was a curtain dividing us. He lifted it and saw the twelve of us sitting in a row. He inspected each woman carefully. Sitting at the edge of the tent and shabbily dressed, I caught his eye. He later told me that he thought me beautiful. “How much does that woman cost?” he asked. “Three marks of silver.” “That’s a high price for a slave girl.” “You’re right. I value her more highly than the rest. But I have to tell you that she is a mute. I have tried every way to get her to speak, but to no avail. I am convinced she cannot speak.” The man said, “Well, anyway, we have a deal. Here’s the money. I’ll take her. I must say that you didn’t try to deceive me.” That night, we slept together. I was silent. The next day he opened a chest and took out some fine clothing that suited me perfectly. We set sail for Iceland and landed at the mouth of a big river. His wife asked who I was. “You’ll probably think me sarcastic, but I don’t know her name.” “Well, either the stories I’ve been hearing are untrue, or else you talked long enough to ask her name.” After that, he stayed with his wife. Later, I had a son. I was silent still. One fine day with the dawn sun shining, I sat talking with my son by the stream of an open field when I realized my owner was listening. “What is your name?” “I am Irish. I was captured and sold into slavery when I was fifteen.” My son became one of the most beloved of his children.

[second interpretation]

Gest: In your second dream you had a silver ring on your hand. This means a second husband who is an excellent man and whom you will love dearly, but only for a short time. I wouldn’t be surprised if you were to lose him in a drowning accident. This is all I shall make of this dream.

Voiceover: He took his golden night sword and set off with the farmhand. There was light snow on the ground. They came to the shed where the cattle lived. He went to the door and thrust the ghost with a spear. The ghost grabbed the socket of the spear with both hands and wrenched it so sharply that the shaft snapped. Then he tried to rush the ghost, but the ghost sank into the ground where he had been standing. And that was the end of their encounter. He was left with the shaft. The ghost had the spearhead. The next morning he had the body dug up and burned. The hauntings ceased.

[third interpretation]

Gest: In your third dream you had a gold ring on your arm. You dreamed that although this metal was more precious than silver, it did not seem much better. This means that you will have a third husband but he won’t outdo the second. You dreamed that the ring broke in two partly due to your own carelessness, and that you saw blood coming from both pieces. This means that your third husband will die. After his death, you will see the flaws in your marriage more clearly.

Gudrun: Don't remember.

Voiceover: He had many valuable beasts. He had a magnificent ox (bue) called Harry. Dapple grey and big, Harry had four horns. Two of them were well placed. The third stood straight up in the air, and the fourth grew up out of his forehead and curled down below his eyes. He used this horn for breaking ice. He scraped the snow with his hooves like a horse to get at the grass. During the winter, he found grazing for all the other cattle. When Harry was eighteen years old, his ice-breaker fell off. That same autumn, Olaf had him slaughtered. The next night Olaf dreamed that a woman came to him. She was big and angry looking. "Are you asleep?" "No, I am awake." "You are asleep, but that makes no difference. You have killed my son and returned him to me mutilated." Then she vanished. Later he told the dream to his friends, but no one could interpret it to his liking. He preferred to listen to those who said it had been a false dream.

[fourth interpretation]

Gest: In your fourth dream, you dreamed you were wearing on your head a helmet of gold set with precious stone, and you found it too heavy. This means you will have a fourth husband. He will be the greatest chieftain of them all and will completely dominate you. When the helmet fell into the fjord, this means, he will encounter the same fjord the last day of his life. I shall make no more of this dream.

Voiceover: A boat ran into difficulties in the fjord due to sudden appalling weather conditions. They eventually floundered on a submerged reef not far from land, but because conditions were so bad, they had to remain on board and hope that it could be refloated at high tide. Throughout the day, they saw an enormous seal swimming in the current. It circled the boat all day. It had huge flippers and everyone thought its eyes were those of a human. He told his men to harpoon the seal, but all their attempts failed. Eventually, the tide began to rise, but just as the boat was about to refloat, a violent gust of wind broke upon them and the boat keeled over. All but one of those on board were drowned.

Gudrun: You would have told me rosier prophesies, if I had given you the material for them. But thank you, anyway, for interpreting my dreams. It's a grave thought that all of this may come to pass.

I want to forget these puzzles.
I want to forget these puzzles.

Old woman: I bet it was a woman who invented the nets.

Old man: What makes you say that?

Old woman: Well, she was probably sitting home when the children were taking their nap and she started with a cord and she knotted it and knotted it and made a net. And then when her husband came

home he said, "That would be marvelous to catch fish in." I think that's probably what happened.

Old man: You know, I think you're probably right.

From Joan Jonas: *Light Time Tales*, Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, 2014. Courtesy of Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan. Transcription by Robin Williams. The script of *Volcano Saga* is an adaptation from the book *Laxdaela Saga*, translated by Magnus Magnusson (1969).

***Lines in the Sand.* 2002**

Multimedia installation with video documentation of Documenta 11 performance. installation (2002, edited 2005) (video [color, sound; 47:45 min., looped]); blackboard; wood structure; paint; *Pillow Talk*. 2002. Video (color, sound; 9:20 min., looped); monitor; performance video of Joan Jonas drawing on chalkboard, looped; wood platform; metal cone; green-painted wood couch; wood box with sand; rake; two chalk drawings on slate; two drawings on cardboard; two photographs; painting on canvas; and radio

***Lines in the Sand* (2002)**

There was something that was beating in my brain. I do not say my heart, my brain. I wanted it to be let out. I wanted to free myself of repetitive thoughts and experiences, my own and those of many of my contemporaries. I did not specifically realize just what it was I wanted, but I knew that I, like most of the people I knew, was drifting. We were drifting. Where? I did not know, but at least I accepted the fact that we were drifting. At least, I knew this: I would—before the current of inevitable events swept me right into the main stream and so on to the cataract—stand aside, if I could—if it were not already too late—and take stock of my possessions. You might say that I had—yes, I had something that I specifically owned. I owned myself. I did not really, of course. My friends, my family, and my circumstances owned me. But I had something. Say it was a narrow birch bark canoe. The great forest of the unknown—the supernormal, or supernatural, was all around us and about us. With the current gathering force, I could at least pull into the shallows before it was too late, take stock of my very modest possessions of mind and body and ask the old hermit who lived on the edge of this vast domain to talk to me, to tell me, if he would, how best to steer my course.

We all know the story of Helen of Troy, but few of us have followed her to Egypt. How did she get there? Stesichorus in his *Palinode* was the first to tell us. According to the *Palinode*, Helen was never in Troy. She had been transposed or translated into Egypt. Helen of Troy was a phantom, substituted for the real Helen. She is both phantom and reality. The Greeks and Trojans alike fought for an illusion.

In the night, everlasting, everlasting nothingness and lethargy of waiting. So they fought, forgetting women, hero to hero, sworn brother and lover, and cursing Helen through eternity.

How could I hide my eyes? How could I veil my face?

[onscreen text]

Helen in Egypt

Achilles remembers seeing her in Troy, but she was never there

from the battlefield outside the wall, but she was never there

they meet in Egypt

Helen, I have seen you upon the ramparts. No art is beneath your power. You stole the chosen, the flower of all time, of all history, my children, my allegiance. For you were the ships burnt. I prayed as he clutched my throat with his fingers' remorseless steel. Let me go out, let me forget, let me be lost. Does he dare remember the unreality of war in this enchanted place? His fortress and his tower and his throne were built for man alone. No echo or soft whisper in those walls,

no iridescent sheen, no iris flower, no sweep of strings, no answering laughter. The light grows dim. The riddle of the written stone suddenly weighs me down. Why do I doubt? Why wonder? Was war inevitable? Who won? Who lost? Must the battle be fought and fought?

Must we argue over again the reason that brought us here? Was the fall of Troy the reason? Can one weigh the thousand ships against one kiss in the night?

It was a trade war. They fought for an illusion. Most likely they were fighting for passage to the east—through the seaways to the Black Sea. We must blame someone. They were trading gold, silver, iron, cinnabar, ships' timber, linen, hemp, dried fish, oil, and Chinese jade. And so on. I mean, and on and on. I can see you, still a mist or a fountain of water in that desert. Why does she hold us here? The winters were ruthless and bleak. The summers burnt up the plain.

Length, breadth, thickness; the shape, the scent, the feel of things. The actuality of the present, its bearing on the past, their bearing on the future. Past, present, future: these three fourth-dimensional. The room has four sides. There are four seasons to a year. It is as simple and as inevitable in the building of time sequence as the fourth wall to a room.

I counted the fall of her feet from turret to turret. Will they count even yesterday's? Will there be five over? This was the game I played—a game of prophesy. When she turned, I stood indifferent to the rasp of metal, and her eyes met mine. You say I could not see her eyes across the field of battle, I could not see their light, shimmering as light on the changeable sea? All things would change, but never the glance she exchanged with me. I seem to know the whole, but as a story told long ago, forgotten and retold. I saw her scarf as the wind caught it one winter day. I saw her hand through the transparent folds, and her wrist and her throat. But that was long ago in the beginning, before I began to count and measure her footfall, from turret to turret. If I remember the veil I remember the power that swayed Achilles.

I will walk with measured step the length of the porch. I will turn and walk back. I will count the tread of my feet as a dancer counts, faster or slower, but never changing the beat, the rhythm. I will go from pillar to pillar, from stele to pillar, and round again to the river.

For myself, I consider this sort of dream, or projected picture, or vision, as a sort of halfway state between ordinary dream and the vision of those who, for lack of a more definite term, we must call psychics or clairvoyant. The dream? The veil? Obviously Helen has walked through time into another dimension.

A simple spiral shell may tell a tale more ancient than these mysteries.

These pictures are so clear. They are like transparencies set before candles in a dark room. I may or may not have mentioned these

incidents to the professor. But they were there. Upon the elaborate build-up of past memories, across the intricate network made by the hairlines that divided one irregular bit of the picture-puzzle from another, there fell inevitably a shadow, a writing on the wall, a curve like a reversed, unfinished S and a dot beneath it, a question mark, the shadow of a question—is this it? The question mark threatened the shadow, the apparently most satisfactory answers.

[onscreen text]

Egypt

Paris remembers seeing her in Troy but she was never there from inside the palace, but she was never there

Who will forget? Why did she limp and turn at the stair head and half turn back? Was it a broken sandal? Now it is dark. Can you see? Can you feel the woven veil by the portal that you clutched to break your fall?

Your hand was bone as you clenched your fist. The knuckles shone ivory. You were eaten away by fire. Nothing could help you.

I am the first in history to say she died, died, died, when the walls fell. What mystery is more subtle than this? What spell more potent? I saw the pomegranate blighted by winter. I saw the flowering pomegranate and the cleft of fruit on the summer branch. Who laid the snare? Was it love? Was it war?

Do I care? Do I love war? Take my hands in your hands. Teach me to remember. Teach me not to remember.

This series of foreshortened lines that make a ladder, or give the impression of a ladder: it is a ladder of light, but even now I may not take time, as I say, to draw breath. I may be breathing naturally, but I have the feeling of holding my breath under water. As if I were searching under water for some priceless treasure and, if I bobbed up to the surface, the clue to its whereabouts would be lost forever.

Was it a game played over and over, with numbers or counters? Who set the scene? Who lured the players from home or imprisoned them in the walls to inspire us with endless intricate questioning? Why did they fight at all? Was Helen daemon or goddess? How did they scale the walls? Was the iron horse an ancient symbol or a new battering ram? Was Helen another symbol: a star, a ship, or a temple? How will the story end?

Their texture is different. The effect they have on mind and body is different. They are healing. They are real. They are as real in their dimension of length, breadth, thickness, as any of the bronze or marble or pottery or clay objects. But we cannot prove they are real.

[onscreen text]

Past, present, future she was never there

There are priceless, broken fragments that are meaningless until we find the other broken bits to match them. I am happy to see the dawn, to remember the ladder and the broken slat or rung I forgot before.

Remembering desolation, I remember that other stretch of seaweed and the fire. I remember the hands that ringed my throat and no moment's doubt. This is love. This is death. This is my last lover.

The wheel is still. My mind goes on spinning the infinite thread. Surely, I crossed the threshold. I passed through the temple gate. I crossed a frontier and stepped on the gold burning sands of Egypt.

Then why do I lie here and wonder, and try to unravel the tangle that no man can ever unknot?

I see the pitiful heap of little things, the mountain of monstrous gear. Then both vanish. There is nothing, nothing at all.

I saw the world through my double lens. It seemed everything had broken but that.

Pillow Talk (2002)

Voiceover: The King and the Queen lay abed in their chamber at the fort. Feeling smug after his recent conjugal endeavors, the King said to the Queen:

King: "Is it true what they say, love? All is well for the wife of the wealthy man?"

Queen: "Might be right there, husband. But why is it you had that thought in your mind?"

King: "I was only just thinking how much better off you are now compared to before you wed me."

Queen: "Hold on, now, you. I was fine enough, and wealthy enough before I ever saw the face of you."

King: "I don't know about that. I never heard your wealth mentioned much before I chose to marry you. I mean, I know you had your woman's things, but all I ever heard of you is when your neighbors came raiding and stealing the things you lacked the power to hold and that's what you found attractive in me. Strength of me and my men to protect the things you had left."

Queen: "You conveniently choose to forget that the High King of Ireland was my father and I, the highest and haughtiest of six sisters—outdoing them in combat and battle. I had fifteen hundred men at arms in my court, all of them sons of exiles. And again, the same number of native free-born men. For every paid soldier, I had ten more men—and nine more for each of them—and eight more, and seven, and six, five,

four, three, two, and one. And I'll have you to remember that that was my ordinary household. My father gave me a whole province to rule, this one: Cruachan. Men from Leinster and Ulster came to woo me and take me back with them, but I refused, for I asked more of a husband than any other Irish woman before me asked: the absence of fear and jealousy and meanness. If I married a mean man, the union would be wrong, because I am so giving and full of grace. It's an insult for a wife to be more generous than her husband, but not if the two are equal in this aspect. And if I married a timid man, the union would be wrong also, for I thrive on all sorts of mischief. It is therefore an insult for a wife to be more spirited than her husband, but not if we two were equal in the same respect. And if I married a jealous man, the union would be wrong, for as you knew and still know, I never had one man without another waiting by the bed. And that is how I ended up with you, Ailill. You are not greedy, or jealous, or sluggish. Do you remember what I brought you when we were promised? Do you? Outfitting for a dozen men? A chariot with one and twenty bonds maids? The width of your face in red gold and the weight of your left arm in white gold? If anyone causes you shame or upset or trouble, the compensation will be mine to seek, for if anything, you are a kept man."

King: "I am by no means a kept man, Mebd. I have two brothers who are kings, Cairbre and Find, from Tara and Leinster. They rule because they are older and because I let them, not because they are better men. I'd never heard in all the places of Ireland where a woman ruled except for this one, and that's why I came to take the kingship here. It's accessioned to my mother, Madame Muirisc, Mága's daughter. I thought who better to be my queen than you, the daughter of the High King of Ireland."

Queen: "It still remains, oh husband of mine, that my fortune is greater than yours."

King: "And that—that most definitely is not true. Nobody has more property or precious things or jewels than I have."

Voiceover: And that, then, was the start of it. Their possessions were to be brought together in one place. And, on their two hills there rose two mountains: buckets, tubs and iron pots, jugs and wash pails, and vessels with handles; finger rings, bracelets, thumb rings, and other things of gold; cloth of purple, blue, black, green and yellow, plain grey and many colored, yellow-brown, checked and striped; herds of sheep were assembled, the rams also; all were found to be equal in number and size. The horses were taken together, and the pigs and the boars and the cattle: all these were matched and measured and noted and found to be identical. The King and Queen fumed across the tumult of beasts at each other. It was when the bulls were brought to the twin mounds that the scales tipped in the King's favor, for he had a bull, which had been a calf of one of the Queen's cows. White-horned, it was called. The beast refused to be led by a woman and had joined his herd. And the Queen had no equal to this bull, and her spirit fell, as if she hadn't a penny, as she realized that her husband had the better of her.

In desperation, she called for Mac Róich, her messenger, and she asked if, in his travels, he had ever seen a bull in Ireland the match for this bull. “I know where to find a bull the master of that one,” he exclaimed.

Queen: “You will get me that bull. Go to Dáire and ask him to lend me the beast for twelve months. After that I’ll give it back, along with fifty yearling heifers in payment for the loan. And tell him this: If he comes himself along with the bull, I’ll give him a portion of the plane of Aye equal to his lands, a chariot worth seven times three bonds maids, and my own friendly thighs on top of that.”

Voiceover: Mac Róich and nine others with him set out for the peninsula the following morning and soon arrived at the neighbor’s house, and all were made welcome. But the troop returned a few days later empty-handed. Mac Róich reports to the Queen on his arrival. She sat in her chair in her private quarters, silent for a while, and then she declared:

Queen: “There’s no need to polish the knots and knobs in this matter. Those idiots from Cooley should have been well aware that what will not be given up freely shall be taken by force, and that bull will be taken.”

Voiceover: The Donn, or the Brown Bull of Cooley.

Lines in the Sand (performed at the Kitchen, 2004)

Joan Jonas: There was something that was beating in my brain. I do not say my heart, my brain. I wanted it to be let out. I wanted to free myself of repetitive thoughts my own, and those of many of my contemporaries. I did not specifically realize just what it was I wanted, but at least I knew this: I knew that I, like most of the people I knew, was drifting. We were drifting. Where? I did not know, but at least I accepted the fact that we were drifting. I knew this: I would (before the current of inevitable events swept me right into the main stream and so on to the cataract) stand aside, if I could (if it were not already too late), and take stock of my possessions. You might say that I had—yes, I had something that I specifically owned. I owned myself. I did not really, of course. My friends, my family, and my circumstances owned me. But I had something. Say it was a narrow birch bark canoe. The great forest of the unknown, the supernormal or the supernatural, was all around and about us. With the current gathering force, I could at least pull in to the shallows before it was too late, take stock of my very modest possessions of mind and body, and ask the old Hermit who lived on the edge of this vast domain to talk to me, to tell me, if he would, how best to steer my course.

Henk: We all know the story of Helen of Troy, but few of us have followed her to Egypt. How did she get there? Stesichorus in his Palinode was the first to tell us. According to the Palinode, Helen was never in Troy. She had been transposed or translated into Egypt. Helen of Troy was a phantom; substituted for the real Helen. The Greeks and Trojans alike fought for an illusion. She is both phantom and reality.

Joan Jonas: We must blame someone. How could I hide my eyes?
How could I veil my face?

[pre-recorded video text]

Helen in Egypt

Achilles remembers seeing her in Troy but she was never there from the Battlefield outside the wall but she was never there they met in Egypt

Joan Jonas: Length, breadth, thickness, the shape, the scent, the feel of things. The actuality of the present, its bearing on the past, their bearing on the future. Past, present, future, these three- fourth-dimensional. The room has four sides. There are four seasons to a year. It is as simple and as inevitable in the building of time sequence as the fourth wall to a room.

Joan Jonas: Let me go out, let me forget, let me be lost. Does he remember the unreality of war in this enchanted place? The light grows dim. The riddle of the written stone suddenly weighs me down. Why do I doubt, why wonder? Was war inevitable? Who won? Who lost? Must the battle be fought and fought?

Henk: I saw her scarf as the wind caught it one winter day. I saw her hands through the transparent folds. I saw her wrist and her throat. But that was long ago.

Joan Jonas: Can one weigh a thousand ships against one kiss in the night?

It was a trade war. They wanted passage to the east through the Black Sea. They were trading gold, silver, cinnabar, ship's timber, linen, hemp, oil, and Chinese jade. And so on, and so on...

In the night: everlasting, everlasting nothingness and lethargy of waiting. So they fought, forgetting women, hero-to-hero, sworn brother and lover and cursing Helen through eternity.

These pictures are so clear. They are like transparencies set before candles in a dark room. I may or may not have mentioned these incidents to the professor. But they were there. Upon the elaborate build-up of past memories, across the intricate network made by the hairlines that divided one irregular bit of the picture-puzzle from another, there fell inevitably a shadow, a writing on the wall, a curve like a reversed, unfinished S and a dot beneath it, a question mark, the shadow of a question—is this it? The question mark threatens the shadow the apparently most satisfactory answer.

For myself, I consider this sort of dream, or projected picture, or vision as a sort of halfway state between ordinary dream and the vision of those who, for lack of a more definite term, we must call psychics or clairvoyants.

I will walk with measured steps the length of the porch. I will turn and walk back. I will count the tread of my feet as a dancer counts, faster or slower, but never changing the beat, the rhythm; I will go from pillar to pillar, from stele to pillar, and round again to the river.

[pre-recorded video text]

Egypt

Henk: The dream? The veil? Obviously Helen has walked through time into another dimension. A simple spiral shell may tell a tale more ancient than these mysteries.

[pre-recorded video text]

Egypt

Paris remembers seeing her in Troy but she was never there from inside the palace, but she was never there

Henk: Why did she limp and turn at the stair head and half turn back? Was it a broken sandal? Now it is dark, can you see, can you feel the woven veil by the portal that you clutched to break your fall? I am the first in history to say she died, died, died when the walls fell. What mystery is more subtle than this? What spell more potent? Who laid the snare? Was it love? Was it war?

Joan Jonas: Do I care? Do I love war? Is this Helen?

Take my hands in your hands. Teach me to remember. Teach me not to remember.

This series of foreshortened lines that make a ladder or give the impression of a ladder set up there on the wall above the wash stand. It is a ladder of light, but even now I may not take time, as I say, to draw breath. I may be breathing naturally, but I have the feeling of holding my breath under water. As if I were searching under water for some priceless treasure, and if I bobbed up to the surface the clue to its whereabouts would be lost forever.

Henk: Was it a game played over and over, with numbers or counters? Who set the scene? Who lured the players from home or imprisoned them in the walls to inspire us with endless, intricate questioning? Why did they fight at all? Was Helen daemon or goddess? How did they scale the walls? Was the iron horse an ancient symbol or a new battering ram? Was Helen another symbol, a star, a ship or a temple?

They are as real in their dimension of length, breadth, thickness, as any of the bronze or marble or pottery or clay objects that fill the cases around the walls, that are set in elegant precision in a wide arc on the professor's table in the other room. But we cannot prove that they are real.

[pre-recorded video text]

Past, present, future she was never there

Joan Jonas: I am happy to see the dawn to remember the ladder and the broken slat I forgot before. Remembering desolation, I remember that other stretch of seaweed and the fire. I remember the hands that ringed my throat and no moment's doubt, this is love, this is death, this is my last lover.

The wheel is still. My mind goes on spinning the infinite thread.
Surely, I crossed the threshold. I passed through the temple gate.
I crossed a frontier and stepped on the gold burning sands of Egypt.

Then why do I lie here and wonder, and try to unravel the tangle that no man can ever unknot?

I see the mountain of monstrous gear, the heap of little things.
Then suddenly all is vanished. There is nothing, nothing at all.
I saw the world through my double lens; it seemed everything had broken but that.

From Joan Jonas: *Light Time Tales*, Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, 2014. Courtesy of Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan. Transcription by Robin Williams. The script of the video is an adaptation from two sources: *Tribute to Freud* (1956) and *Helen in Egypt* (1961) by Hilda Doolittle. The script of *Pillow Talk* is an adaptation from *The Tain*, an ancient Irish epic.

Double Lunar Rabbits, 2010

Multimedia installation with two videos (color, sound; each 4 min.) and two wood-and-paper screens.

Performer: Ayano Momoda.

Producer: Akiko Miyake.

Courtesy the artist

One day the monkey, the fox, and the rabbit decided to practice charity, believing that acts of kindness would bring great rewards. After walking for a long time, Quetzalcoatl became hungry and tired. As there was no food or water to be seen, he thought he would die. Seeing an old man begging for food, the monkey gathered fruits and nuts, and the fox collected birds' eggs. Then, a rabbit grazing nearby offered himself as food to save Quetzalcoatl's life. However, the rabbit, who knew only how to gather grass, offered her own body, throwing herself into a fire the man had built. But the rabbit was not burned. Quetzalcoatl, moved by the rabbit's noble offer, elevated the rabbit to the moon. The old man, revealing himself to be a god, touched by the rabbit's extraordinary altruism, drew the likeness of the rabbit on the moon for all to see. Then he lowered him back to earth and told him: "You may be only a rabbit, but everyone will remember you. There is your image in light, for all to see at all times." It is said that the lunar image is still draped in the smoke that rose when the rabbit threw itself into the fire.

From Joan Jonas: *Light Time Tales*, Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, 2014. Courtesy of Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan. Transcription by Robin Williams

Moving Off the Land II, 2019

Multimedia installation with three videos in two wood theater structures (*Mermaid*. Video [color, sound; 11:27 min.]; *Mirror Pool*. Video [color, sound; 13:04 min.]; *Octopus*. Video [color, sound; 13:27 min.]); video sculpture with wood, trestles, and video (*Whale*. Video [color, sound; 7:09 min.]); video sculpture with wood, trestles, and video (*Jamaican Fisherman*. Video [color, sound; 4:06 min.]); 22 UV-pigmented inkjet-print reproductions of drawings from 2017–19; glass aquarium; cast glass; seven Murano glass mirrors; and sound installation, 9:08 min. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax

Mirror Pool

And so I knelt on the wet carpet of sea moss and looked back into the dark cavern that held the pool in a shallow basin. The floor of the cave was only a few inches below the roof, and a mirror had been created in which all that grew on the ceiling was reflected in the still water below. Under water that was clear as glass the pool was carpeted with green sponge. Gray patches of sea squirts glistened on the ceiling and colonies of soft coral were a pale apricot color.

In the moment when I looked into the cave a little starfish hung down, suspended by the merest thread, perhaps by only a single tube foot. It reached down to touch its own reflection, so perfectly delineated that there might have been not one starfish, but two.

The beauty of the reflected images and of the limpid pool itself was the poignant beauty of things that are ephemeral, existing only until the sea should return to fill the little cave.

Whales came on the land
They developed feet and they walked on the land
And then they went back to the sea

We all come from the sea, and we have memories of it
In our minds,
in our bodies

For all the fish in the sea
Cod, once so abundant you could almost walk across the ocean on
their backs.

Two marine biologists published a study of giant manta rays responding to their reflections in a large mirror installed in their aquarium in the Bahamas. The two captive rays circled in front of the mirror, blew bubbles and performed unusual body movements, as if checking their reflection. They made no obvious attempt to interact socially with their reflection, suggesting that they did not mistake what they saw as other rays.

Animals are always the observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance. They are the objects of our ever extending knowledge. What we know about them is an index of our power, and thus an index of what separates us from them. The more we know, the further away we are.

Tool use was once thought to be the sole province of humans. But the behavior has now been discovered in a wide range of animals, including fishes. The orange dotted tuskfish first uncovers a clam by blowing water on the sand, then carries the mollusk in its mouth to a nearby rock and smashes the clam on the rock with a series of deft head flicks. A grouper has been observed inviting a moray eel to join

in a foray, communicating by head-shaking gestures or a full body shimmy. The two fishes probably know each other. If a grouper chases a fish into a reef crevice, it uses its body to point to the hidden prey until the slender eel goes after it. If the hapless quarry escapes to open water, the grouper is waiting. Both partners dine more often by working together.

As a biologist who specializes in animal behavior and emotions, I've spent the past four years exploring the science on the inner lives of fish. What I've uncovered indicates that we grossly underestimate these fabulously diverse marine vertebrates. The accumulating evidence leads to an inescapable conclusion: fishes think and feel. At low tide, frillfins hide in rocky tide pools. If danger lurks—a hungry octopus, say—the gobi will jump to a neighboring tide pool with remarkable accuracy. How do they avoid ending up stranded on the rocks? A series of experiments during the 1940s found something remarkable: the gobi fish memorize the tide pool layout while swimming over it at high tide. They can do it in one try and remember it forty days later. So much for a fish's mythic three-second memory.

Lungfish
Shark
Paddlefish
Gray mullet
Hatchetfish
Moray eel
Catfish
Carp
Sunfish
Pufferfish
Triggerfish
Tuna
Spearfish
Swordfish
Herring
Trout
Dogfish
Goldfish
Flying fish
Butterfly fish
Mudskipper
Garden eel
Hake
Squid
Viperfish
Octopus
Frogfish
Scorpionfish
Dolphin
Skate
Sturgeon
Bass

Pollock
Sole
Angler
Sardine
Anchovy
Cod
Halibut
Lobster
Perch
Manta ray
Butterfish
Pilot fish
Jellyfish
Seahorse
Sting ray
Guppy
Salmon
Glass eel
Discus fish
Grouper
Albacore
Angelfish
Bream
Shad
Shrimp
Plaice
Turbot
Turtle
Coral
Flounder
Pike
Mackerel

Fish, amphibian, and reptile. Warm-blooded bird and mammal.
Each of us carries in our veins a salty stream in which the elements sodium, potassium, and calcium are combined in almost the same proportions as in sea water.

As the oceanographer Sylvia Earl, who, like me, no longer eats fish, says, "The ocean has given us so much for so long. It's time to return the favor."

Mermaid

How does myth arise?

We all come from the sea, and we have memories of it. In our minds, in our bodies.

On the Syrian coast, they told of their goddess plunging into the sea, because they saw a moon descend into the western waters.

It is curious how widely read is the belief in fish women. The prevalence of tales of mermaids among Celtic populations indicates these water

nymphs as having been originally deities of these peoples. I believe that the circular mirror they are usually holding is a referral to the moon disk.

The first known mermaid, worshipped by people living near the Mediterranean sea

Half-human

The great mother and fertility goddess of the earth and water

Her upper half, human, female. Her lower, a fishtail

Not far from her temple was a lake, filled with many varieties of fish—her sacred animal. They knew their names and would come when called, and would snuggle up to people to be petted.

The mind evolved in the sea

Water made it possible.

All early stages took place in water;

the origin of life,

the birth of animals,

the evolution of nervous systems,

the appearance of complex bodies

that made brains worth having.

But one day, this lady, as she was called, discovered her old cap in a corner. She took it up and looked at it, and then thought of her father the king and her mother the queen, and felt a longing to go back to them. She kissed the babies and then went down to the strand with full intention of returning after a brief visit to her home. However, no sooner was the cap on her head than all remembrance of her life on earth was forgotten, and she plunged into the sea, never to return.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves

Combing the white hair of the waves blown back

When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea

By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown

Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Octopus

I, like a river,

Have been turned aside by this harsh age. I am a substitute. My life has flowed

Into another channel

And I do not recognize my shores.

O, how many fine sights I have missed.

The giant Pacific octopus is one of the world's most efficient carnivores in converting food to body mass. Hatching from an egg the size of a grain of rice weighing three-tenths of a gram, a baby giant octopus doubles its weight every eighty days until it reaches about forty-four pounds, then doubles its weight every four months until maturity.

An octopus's muscles have both radial and longitudinal fibers, thereby resembling our tongues more than our biceps, but they're strong enough to turn their arms to rigid rods—or shorten them in length by fifty to seventy percent. An octopus's arm muscles, by one calculation, are capable of resisting a pull one hundred times the octopus's own weight.

The most dramatic similarity is the eyes. Our common ancestor may have had a pair of eyespots, but it did not have eyes like ours. Vertebrates and cephalopods separately evolved camera eyes, with a lens that focuses an image on a retina. There's a transparent cornea and the iris regulates the light to the retina.

The octopus lives outside the body/brain divide.

Fish are unaware they are in a tank. The octopus knows it is confined. They try to escape, and often do.

Fish have feelings. They sleep they dream.
How do we explain the unknown? With stories and myths

Whale

When Darwin thought about the eyes of mammals, he admitted that he broke out in a cold sweat. The complexity of the eye was hard to explain within the logic of his theory, for it implied the co-ordination of so many evolutionary "accidents." If the eye is to work at all, all the elements have to be there; tear glands, eyelid, cornea, pupil, retina, millions of light-sensitive rods and cones which transmit to the brain millions of electrical impulses per second.

The semicircular canals in our ears—in fish ears, the structure of semicircular canals are almost exactly the same. We come from the same source.

When animals crawled onto dry land, they took the sea with them.

The sperm whale, as with all other species of the Leviathan, but unlike most other fish, breeds indifferently at all seasons; after a gestation which may probably be set down at nine months, producing but one at a time; though in some few known instances giving birth to an Esau and Jacob—a contingency provided for in suckling by two teats, curiously situated, one on each side of the anus; but the breasts themselves extend upwards from that. When by chance these precious parts in a nursing whale are cut by the hunter's lance, the mother's pouring milk and blood rivally discolor the sea for rods. The milk is very sweet and rich; it has been tasted by man; it might do well with strawberries. When overflowing with mutual esteem, the whales salute more hominum.

And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternations and affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the center freely and

fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concernments; yes, serenely revelled in dalliance and delight. But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still forever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy.

The sea horse is completely encased in an armor composed of interlocking bony plates; these take the place of ordinary scales and seem to be a sort of evolutionary harking back to the time when fish depended on heavy armor to protect them from their enemies.

The brain is deeper than the sea
For hold them blue to blue
The one the other will absorb
As sponges, buckets do.

Transcription courtesy of Joan Jonas

Reanimation. 2010/2012/2013

Multimedia installation with four videos (color, sound and silent) projected on custom screens; prefabricated house structure; two benches made by Ed Gavagan; crystal sculpture; two wood video sculptures with video (color, sound and silent); 15 ink drawings on paper; three oil stick drawings on paper; and two china marker wall drawings. Soundtrack and voice: Joan Jonas. Sámi yoik singing: Ánde Somby. Piano and additional sound effects: Jason Moran. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired in part through The Modern Women's Fund, 2017

Under the Glacier (working title, 2010)

Take three mirrors. How the image fits the circle, and how it found its where in it. Shape shifting. Truth should be left alone. During the night the woman's huge corpse rose to its feet, stark naked, went to the pantry and fetched flower, and then went to the kitchen and begged for her pallbearers's bread in the Irish style, and gave them thick slices.

Landscape.

[onscreen text]

Melancholia

The undersigned has never before seen this mountain glacier, except from too far away, but was not about to become acquainted with it for a while. From here, the glacier looked somewhat coarse-grained, like a print that isn't good enough. The ice is rain-sullied in many places in the lower regions and has developed streaks like a smudged print. Some magnetism that I cannot yet explain draws one's eyes toward the summit. There is a hollow on the summit and two brilliantly white glacier crests rear upwards, bathed in an icy, mesmerizing light. Between these crests lies the crater, into which, on the advice of the alchemist, the party of three plunged, and these fellow found the center of the earth.

Re-animation.

Better to be silent. That is what the glacier does. That is what the lilies of the field do. Are you sure the flowers are silent, if a sensitive microphone were placed beside them? As a matter of fact, others are ready to help. There is, for instance, the weather, and there is the law of gravity, and last but not least, time. No one is a match for them.

We owned the glacier together, each from his own side. No one in these parts doubts that the glacier is the center of the universe. When I discovered that history is a fable, and a poor one at that, I started looking for a better fable and found theology. Often I think the almighty is like a snow bunting, abandoned in all weathers. Such a bird is about the weight of a postage stamp, yet he does not blow away when he stands in the open in a tempest. Have you ever seen the skull of a snow bunting? He wields this fragile head against the gale with his beak to the ground, wings folded close to his sides and his tail pointing upwards, and the wind can get no hold on him. Even in the fiercest squall, the bird does not budge. He is becalmed. Not a single feather stirs. It's a pity we don't whistle at one another like birds. Words are misleading.

I am always trying to forget words. That is why I contemplate the lilies of the field—but, in particular, the glacier. If one looks at the glacier long enough, words cease to have any meaning on this earth.

I once had a dog that was a stray for so long that he had forgotten his name. He didn't respond when I called him. When I barked, he came to me right enough, but he didn't know me. I am a little like that dog. There are special spots here where the all-thought is manifest in the elements themselves. Places where fire has become earth, earth become water, water become air, and air become spirit, and so on. I might just as well tell you the truth. There's a body in the casket. There you are: a body, a woman's body. One can be one's own ghost and roam about in various places. A ghost is always the result of botched work. A ghost means an unsuccessful resurrection, a shadow of an image that has perhaps once been alive—a kind of cut-out of the universe.

[onscreen text]

EARTH

WATER

AIR

FIRE

SPIRIT

We live in a world where daemons prevail. Murder weapons are what they live for. Murder is what they believe in, but they lie about everything else. And when I say the world is governed by nothing but daemons who will continue to be daemons until they have destroyed the world, I am not using profanities.

[onscreen text]

Too-Busy Bees

Dandelion and the Honey Bee.

If you are going to tell me the story of the Dandelion and the Honey Bee, I shall hit you. Lyrical poetry is the most disgusting drivel on earth, not excepting theology. I am going to bed. When a dandelion calls to a bee with its scent to give it honey, and the bee goes out for the pond from the flower and sows it somewhere far away: that I call a super communion. It would be remarkable if a more super communion could be established, even though intergalactic communication were put in order.

It is often said of people with second sight that their soul leaves the body. That doesn't happen to the glacier, but the next time one looks at it, the body has left the glacier. Nothing remains except the soul clad in air. Wasn't the fairy ram actually the glacier? A remarkable mountain. At night when the sun is off the mountains, the glacier becomes a tranquil silhouette that rested itself and breathes upon man and beast the word never, which perhaps means always. Come, waft of death.

Reanimation (2012)

Time is the one thing we can all agree to call supernatural. It is at least neither energy nor matter; not dimension, either, let alone function; and yet it is the beginning and end of the creation of the world.

A golden luster shone from him. Never in all my born days have I seen such a fleece on any living animal. I felt I was turning to stone. For a long time I couldn't tear my eyes from this beautiful animal. The Ram just stood there and gazed at me. In the end I had the sense to run out of sight.

A stone if you adore a stone; a tree trunk if you believe in a tree trunk; and so on;

I set down, then, that all history, including the history of the world, is a fable. Everything that is subject to the laws of fable is a fable.

From Joan Jonas: *Light Time Tales*, Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, 2014. Courtesy of Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan. Transcription by Robin Williams. The scripts of the videos are an adaptation from the book *Under the Glacier* (1968) by Hálldor Laxness.