

*Afterlife*, An Interview with Anjali Rathod by Jordan/Martin Hell



Indigo+Madder

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*My life comes & goes / My life comes & goes / Short flight, free rows / I lie down & doze / . . .  
But the sky, over the ocean / & the ocean, skirting the city / & the city, bright as a garden / When  
the garden woke to meet me / From that height was a honeycomb / Made of light from those  
funny homes, intersected / Each enclosed, anelectric & alone / In our lives is a common sense /  
That relies on the common fence / That divides, & attends / But provides scant defense / From the  
great light that shine through a pin-hole / When the pin-light calls itself selfhood / & the selfhood  
inverts on a mirror / In an amora obscura / But it's mine / Or, at least, it's lent / & my life, until  
the time is spent / Is a pin-light, bent . . .*

— *A Pin-Light Bent*, Joanna Newsom

Psyche is the Greek goddess of the soul (or *anima*, in Latin), often depicted as a mega hot crazy sexy anime lady with über cool butterfly wings, even hotter than Aphrodite which is irrefutably a boon & a flex. Butterflies are said to be spirits of the dead, sort of reincarnated. Shimmers of half-lights erupt from their wings in cartoons, it's all to signify transformation. Inside chrysalises they turn from glorified slugs into molten vomit & thus inherit beauty (distilling chlorophyll into several tricks of the eye which garner their fabulous colors, though the browns & yellows are just plain melanin— a strategic tan). In life, they exist to pollinate but mostly piss raindrops on your face whenever they land on you, supposedly that's good luck. Being that they've already died a few times before they get to be baddies, they have the ditzzy humility of a slightly high Buddha; fluttering about from moment to moment, never in a straight line but always uncannily on course. I know because I'm constantly running away from them because I find them just as creepy as moths, I can sense the death of them; see their scrawny bodies, fuzzy bespeckled bug eyes, & coiled wiry maws behind their Volto masks. Their prettiness perfumes their ugliness.

In Anjali Rathod's paintings inspired by the connection between death & water there's an attention to the sultry ethereal magic of half-light; skies shimmer, sparkles glimmer, people-shapes spiral weightless as angels into translucent powdery abstracts, immaterialities of sense-magic, everything is fluid & mutable like pisces— a blushing brush with bedrest, a meandering intestinal Spiral Jetty, roses, wombs, ripples, shadows, vapor, shine, blues, purples, & swirl. There's a vestigial kinship to emotion that's about the soft, the unnamable, a depression of pillows buoyed upon rivers of grief; highways & interstates of outer space as much as they are capillaries of earth's natural aqueducts.

*Shapes* become human & so stretch themselves; vectors where ghosts dissolve themselves, shadow boxers leaving soluble bas-relief, a solution of selfhood more than self itself primed & poofed onto canvas like fluffy blush shake dusted onto a plush cheek for lush effect as smooth & stricken yet meek as shhhh-ing. Rathod's works hold the subtle ever-morphing that proves saturation is akin to depth, that one can see the bottom from the surface if one endeavors to *look* & that underneath death & water & light there is mirror; a Narcissus in everyone that's drawn to images, that that's what *looking* is, equal parts pleasure & grief. There is an endless process of

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perceiving, discerning infinite dualities between fluidities; is it a bowel? Is that spit? Is the blood blue or red or purple? What about bile, the fated humors; again colors read like tea leaves, bodies, general structures with sense & pain stirring & floating all around inside— constellation yet non-meridial, scattered or ambient— *journeying* even. Lavender parabolas, parabolic positions crossed & bent signs curving their sexes as seen through a pinhole, their guts as through a probe— *suggestions, feelings, gestures, (e)motions* buttered faintly into the real as the *pretty*. Because prettiness matters most, especially in loss, in grief, in decay even, & death. The pretty ghosts are a populace architected by fate.

**J/MH: What are your thoughts in relation to your work in the show at Indigo+Madder, *Afterlife*?**

**AR:** I made all new work for this show continuing with themes I've been exploring for the last few years; thinking about death, afterlife, grieving, etc. The main themes have surrounded the connection between death & water, particularly the spiral shape as a visual & somatic metaphor for a 'river of death' across various social, cultural, & physical forms— i.e smoke, rituals, the bowels/intestines, mythology, philosophy, as a form of embodied death or grief study. Specifically I've been moving further into thoughts related to my last solo show, thinking about the form of the chrysalis & the Greek mysticisms which relate butterflies to 'spirits of the dead.' It's this place where a lot of transformation takes place but it's also really disgusting & the process itself is akin to digestion which is like this gross but vital internal process. Thinking of bodily processes in relation to the intestines as a sort of river of death inside of the body & the decaying nature of life within that in relation to grief, as a place for more material grief.

In relation to water I'm always thinking of Gaston Bachelard's *Water & Dreams* & the concept of water as an imaginative space, merging that with death as a space that's mostly imagined since we don't really know what happens. It feels like the most universal things there is which gives it this gossipy mythos that breaks down into these colloquialisms where everyone's like, "It changes you forever..." or you might have dreams about people who have passed & is that like 'a presence'— there's so much wishful thinking involved in imagining spirits or aspects of the afterlife & there's so much commonality in that between people & across cultures. Painting works really well, too, inside of this imaginary watery death space as a place of internal processing of life, daily life as well as intellectual life.

**J/MH: Does it feel like it edges into the somatic & the psychological, maybe the way people *feel* about death? More so than specific mythologies or theological relationships? Like, for example, "*Jesus rose from the dead . . .*" ?**

**AR:** Right. Hmm, I think it's like Western history of painting is like . . . *Jesus*. There's that heavy Christian influence but I didn't grow up with that. I did grow up with rituals around death but I

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think these paintings are really about me creating my own relationships & interpretations, mythologies, etc. around death related to my experiences with it & with the world— more in an auto fictional or speculative sense. I think it's also the Greek mythological thing of Psyche & butterflies being representative of spirits of the dead.

**J/MH: There's an ambientness or a powdery, fluid nature to the works that feels spectral, or like it could lend itself to the embodiment of those concepts. How do your ideas about death translate on the canvas in relation to material realities of painting?**

**AR:** Well, I'm using water-based paint & working with washes of color, light layers that build up to the watery, indecisive, speculative space where paint is mixing on canvas in ways that surface themselves as I go in a more expressive sense, more so than than having a really hardcore plan beforehand. I do have drawings that I work from but there's a lot of room for ideas to slip together & become each other. I like that murky luminescence where it becomes mostly about process, allowing things to be unclear until they are clear, as in responding to ideas around death which require that process to reveal what's underneath.

**J/MH: There's also a matte-ness, too, that isn't necessarily fixed, like make up-y.**

**AR:** Yeah, they're matte. But the layers aren't thick so it kind of sinks into the canvas— where the mixing is happening internally & decisions can happen overtime, through different washes of ambiguous color.

**J/MH: & how do you think about your figures? There's something about the human figures that reminds me of sandstone & many times they converge upon each other or overlap in some way, like a blendable materiality where everything is intersected upon itself— like in water where everything blurs into everything. Is that fair to say?**

**AR:** I think it's been a process orienting myself to how to present the figures in a way where they don't become characters & can sort of exist in their ambient or ambiguous forms, *suggesting* things like care or engaging with grief in relation to experiences I've had or that I'm exploring around death but not necessarily being representational so that they have more space to express the untethered multiplicity of death's imaginary.

**J/MH: It feels like a death poetics, like a visually fluid linguistic.**

**AR:** Yeah, I keep coming back to this poem by Alice Oswald, *Severed Head Floating Downriver*:

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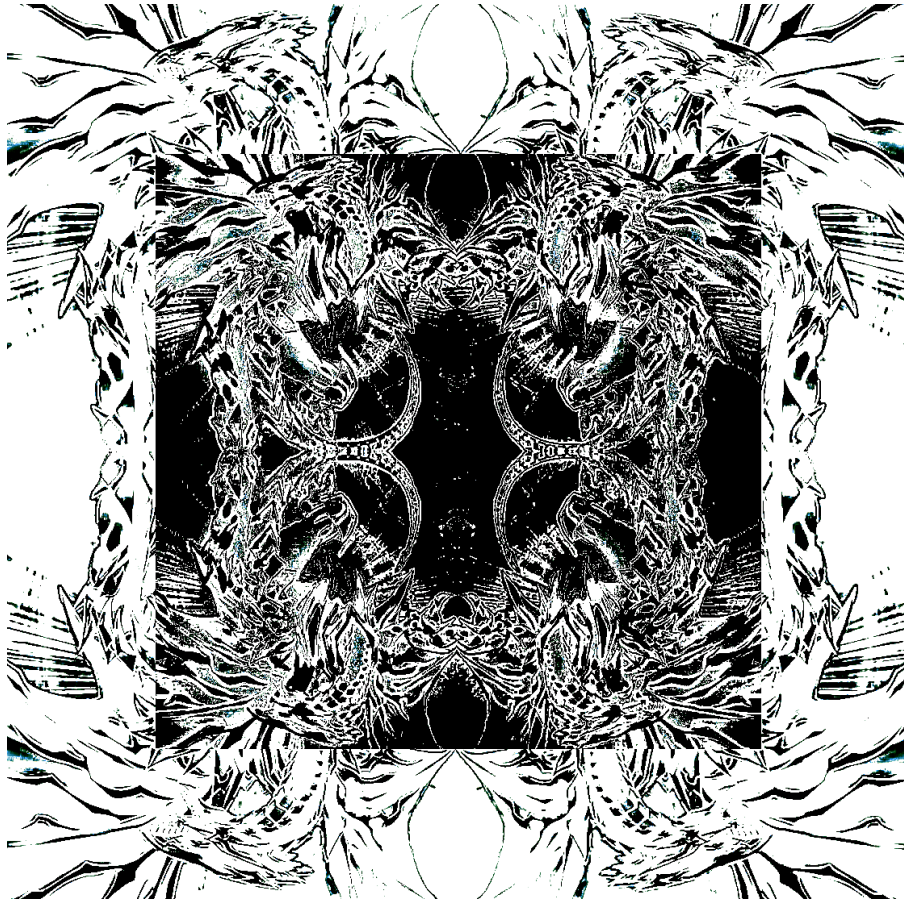
*It is said that after losing his wife, Orpheus was torn to / pieces by Maenads, who threw his head  
into the River / Hebron. The head went on singing and forgetting, / filling up with water and  
floating way. / Eurydice / already forgetting who she is / with her shoes missing / and the grass  
coming up through her feet / searching the earth / for the bracelet of tiny weave on her charcoal  
wrist / the name of a fly or flower / already forgetting who they are / they grow they grow / till  
their bodies break their necks / down there in the stone world / where the grey spirits of stones he  
around uncertain of their limits / matter is eating my mind / I am in a river / I in my fox-cap /  
floating between the speechless reeds / I always wake like this being watched / already forgetting  
who I am / the water wears my mask / I call I call / lying under its lashes like a glance / if only a  
child on a bridge would hoik me out / there comes a tremor and there comes a pause / down  
there in the underworld / where the tired stones have fallen / and the sand in a trance lifts a little  
/ it is always midnight in those pools / iron insects engraved in sleep / I always wake like this  
being watched / I always speak to myself / no more myself but a colander / draining the sound  
from this never-to-be mentioned wound / can you hear it / you with your long shadows and your  
short shadows / can you hear the severed head of Orpheus / no I feel nothing from the neck  
down / already forgetting who I am / the crime goes on without volition singing in its bone / not I  
not I / the water drinks my mind / as if in a black suit / as if bent to my books / only my face exists  
sliding over a waterfall / and there where the ferns hang over the dark / and the midges move  
between mirrors / some woman has left her shoes / two crumpled mouths / which my voice  
searches in and out / my voice being water / which holds me together and also carries me away /  
until the facts forget themselves gradually like a contrail / and all this week / a lime-green hght  
troubles the riverbed / as if the mud was haunted by the wood / this is how the wind works hard  
at thinking / this is what speaks when no one speaks*



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*“...I’ve been in your cage 400 days / So why would I listen when you say / Worry, worry, baby / Low, low-low-low, low / Low, low-low-low, low / I taught you to dance 400 ways / So why would I listen when you say / Worry, worry, baby...”*

*—Your Dystopic Creation Doesn’t Fear You, Deerhoof*

The floor of the gallery is lava, so we have to scale the ceiling. Another option is to roller skate around backwards on molten pigeon wings, but that’s intermediate level viewership. I’m inclined to cruise on latex pads made of upcycled fossilized eyelash containers but I don’t have enough yet. I’ll have to find or somehow collect more halfway when I jump through the rat’s cage techno-apparatus that’s essentially the last world. The final boss is a message that I have to decode from red blips on an LED screen. I don’t have enough clout with the bats & spirals that surround the area in infinite vectors— a detached grip that depresses in & lalts around the white cube, a dizzy hazard, a skyscape gridlock— to coax them into telling me anything new or giving me any more tokens so I can guess again. So, instead I try like a hundred times to make the jump on my own until I’m sick to my stomach from making my brain do somersaults through all the obstacles. This time when I land on my butt in the lava though I don’t disintegrate & respawn.

In fact, I toggle, delay, pivot, reorient. I find myself looking at the wings up close & realize they’re gangrenous like internal organs, machinations of decayed flesh— they lift & pucker like lungs yet are bruised & smooth, shiny & pustulous like science experiments. *What does this mean?!!!* If I survive this round I get a thousand bonus lives, more time to play. I search the steel bars for an answer but they’re busy drawing blown out pictures of my next emotional state, a kind of glitchy header deadline. I can’t let it render or I’ll repeat the sequence all over again & I may not remember myself the same way in the future. So it has to be *NOW!* The eyes wink back in agreement, they get a million views a day so it’s cool when they notice me at all, much less endeavor to console. They’ve seen *literally everything* so it’s totally an honor that they’re rooting for me, the non playable character, to finally get it. On all the forums everybody always says that the game really does *want* you to win & I figure it must. How could it not? What else does it have to do, you’re in *its* screen after all, not the other way around...., “Stop daydreaming, kid, & Jump! *NOW!*”

The whole game is screaming like an audience at the Colosseum. I scroll up, up, *UP!* & the eyes *do* have it, the key to unlock boundless existence! *Everyone* was right! I grab my cursor & click, *hard!* Sautering joins all my wounds together into a diamond shape, my new body soars through the air & the air is filled with rainbows made of wire & happy constellational oscillations which read like the poems from positive fortune cookies. I’m a makeshift rocketship, jetting away from Earth, blue fire unfurls behind me as the cardinal sign blinks *coming soon, the sequel*— a crimson riddle translated from a concussed cache of nocturnes & nodes & when the dream’s all over I sleep like a baby... ☆

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**J/MH:** What are your thoughts in relation to your large scale mixed media sculptural installation work, *Destroy this card*, in the show at Indigo+Madder, *Afterlife*?

**EBF:** *Destroy this card* is quite a big & intricate work in many ways, but like a lot of my work it's made up of so many parts that it can break up the space in interesting ways without really necessarily being massive in itself. It's been installed for this show specifically so in this iteration of the work some pieces within the work have been moved around the space & linger in the gallery while others are positioned in the entrance lobby. I'm an architect, studied architecture, & there's a very organized structure to that sort of drafting, production, & creation. So I used to work in a more rigidly planned way but now my process has changed, I'm engaged more in fluidity & tend to break that tendency to over define. There are pieces on wheels that didn't start out as fragments of the larger structure, they were actually wings— or sort of wing-like constructions but they also look like lungs but they have these blends of color that place them somewhere in-between as far as 'what they are,' in a sense. But giving them these wheels added this ability to allow them to move differently about the space even if they were still, they suggest movement & those kinds of subtly amended suggestions have been interesting— especially when working with sculptural materials like & resin & tech that tends to involve less room for spontaneity than certain forms of painting say. It becomes spontaneous & flexible both in installation or in a kind of tinkering as well as curationally because the work can exist in various iterations, across various articulations of the breadth of its form & what that includes. Even the various pieces within the piece resist a kind of categorization which I'm really interested in the utility of.

**J/MH:** *That makes sense, there's something really painterly about these objects & their transience, their fluidity. I could see how that kind of approach would bring a kind of poetics or visual dialectic in a way to the work, like the piece itself constructs its own language for itself in each exhibition/iteration. But then you have parts that have led screens with messages on them which feel like they extend those associations in a way... What's your relationship to language & technology?*

**EBF:** Many of my works, *Destroy this card* as well, tend to relate to video games & the aesthetics of contemporary entertainment mixed with what I encounter in daily life, what filters through me through algorithms, signs, the various technologies we interact with & encounter everyday— my internal processing of that & articulating it into a landscape or a scene, for example. So there are elements that I take from anime or manga or gamer culture, things I read, things I see, & then recontextualize into these sort of mixed fabrications. When I use the LED screens I use them in many ways & I mimic or sometimes quote texts from elements of these inspirations, whether it's the technology that I'm working with or the encounter with whichever aspect of contemporary entertainment, technological, or gamer culture. Stripped from their previous contexts & placed inside of the sculptural spaces of the works, these fragments of



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language take on multiple meanings, often times they inherit this sincerity & depth from like more embodied language that changes their meaning significantly & facilitates this element of translation

**J/MH:** *Like kind of the way Chat GPT & AI tech now can be used to write a love letter, for example. It's almost like you're sitting outside of or inside of the spontaneous connection that happens in relation, like for instance when I was a kid & used to watch Grey's Anatomy & whatever the characters said it would feel like it immediately related to my life lol.*

**EBF:** Yes, it's exactly this kind of misnomer that sort of architects alternate meaning that's more about what we internally process than it is about what might necessarily be happening in front of us at any given time, like it's more about what we *need* from something when we're searching for its meaning than it is about what it actually is or means as the thing itself.

**J/MH:** *In that way it almost feels like you're almost charting a kind of psychological or speculative impulse— in yourself but one that's inherent to language & aesthetics in general, like about your/our/the body's ingestion of these aesthetic realities & how they transform inside us to make meaning? Does it feel embodied for you, what's the relationship between technology & the structure of the self?*

**EBF:** I feel like it's about externalizing that process into the body & the fun that happens with that. You take some language from a game or even a visual element & place it in real life in a gallery, say, & suddenly it starts to *feel* life changing or have this reverence or sincerity that it didn't have when there was that mediation of the screen where you're more *empathizing* with characters or aesthetics you already know to be fictional. But the fun part is really interesting to me because I like to have fun with those connections & see what's possible through playing with them & the play that they involve, especially because I'm using & taking inspiration from contemporary entertainment as it exists both today & recent antiquity (as things become obsolete) so these elements are already invested in play & are *for* play so I like exploring how they make us play & experimenting with sculpturally how that play can change or be externalized into the real world.

**J/MH:** *That feels like it goes into your interests in materials & the sort of presumed antiquity or emotionality or somatics of those materials, how you shift that. What motivates your choices in that— especially in relation to architecture? Is there a logic to the experimentation happening (a sort of message within the messaging) or is it more open ended? Do you feel like you're creating or edging into a worlding or world-making space?*

**EBF:** Yes, I am but to be fair with you I'm very invested in experimentation. I'm someone who's constantly looking for material for that all the time. For example I take like a thousand photos a

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day & then I start *working them out*; playing with their meanings & positioning them— curating them in a sense. So coming from that & architecture which is much more rigid in terms of planning, I think I lean more on the side of experimentation & allowing things to happen which allows a viewer to sort of interpret a world rather than it being built out strictly for their passive consumption, a lot of that extra work happens in the gallery, in a person looking & finding space for themselves to play inside the experimentation, too. It's coming from an investigation of materials, for instance. I am an architect so I have deep investments in materials— I'm invested in what they do, how they look, how they work, what they are. But I diverge from architecture in the sculptural non-determinacy of the outcome. The world builds itself in that way & we sort of collaborate on the meaning therein.

In terms of materials, I work a lot with steel & there are these sort of impressions people get from steel that it's cold or unyielding in a way & I try to test that & reinvent it's materiality in that way. Latex too is all about inviting you to touch but I sort of played with it in *Destroy this card* making molds of eyelash packaging & seeing how much the aesthetic changes just in a kind of repetition with different materiality. Things can become very weird & unrecognizable that are actually commonplace, there's this painterly element that becomes involved almost by accident as the material is being processed & depending on what materials are chosen to fabricate whatever element of aesthetics I'm playing with.

**J/MH:** *Yeah, repetition seems to yield a lot when you're working across materialities.*

**EBF:** When you reproduce something that's handmade you tend to want to make the same thing over & over but it never appears as the same, it's almost impossible to have that perfect reproduction. I'm kind of in love with what something looks like from this alternate perspective. When I lived in Japan I lived & I worked at an architectural firm that also really was invested in sort of enhancing or magnifying that divergence from perfection, on an even larger scale. But I think it's really interesting how even really simple changes, or changes that seem simple if exaggerated or recontextualized can really change the space in which something is considered.

**J/MH:** *So in terms of the 'Afterlife' show it feels like your process of working, the way you're coming to these sculptural objects & engaging with the world is all about engaging the lives that sit underneath life, how aesthetic repetition creates afterlives for objects, spaces for change & interpretation of meaning. Or maybe it also relates to obsolescence & antiquity in your work & how subjective that is— or how much of the technology we discard for 'the new' can be repurposed or reappropriated. Second generational technologies, or slightly older technologies that have yet to become sort of extremely old pull at both the future & the past in a way & those networks don't necessarily end just because we stop playing with them.*

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**EBF:** In this case I think I really was thinking about depression & simulated emotions in video games & various technologies, simulated grief v.s. ‘real’ grief or sadness. The original body of work that *Destroy this card* comes from was from this exhibition of mine called *My depression is cured for at least the next few minutes* which had to do with this period of intense depression that I went through & a lot of the sort of small things that would essentially ‘cure’ my depression for a few seconds until I stopped looking at it & then I would reset back to sadness. It reminded me of the way emotions are experienced in video games & how a character has this moment of engagement that involves a certain emotion which basically immediately disappears when its task is changed or when it is idle. There’s something there that feels present in a lot of technological ephemera too like Yugio-Oh cards for example which is where *Destroy this card* comes from. Those games, technologies or objects of contemporary entertainment have these fleeting joy based relationships with the public that consumes them but those relationships happen in instances & then perhaps they repeat through time when there’s a resurgence of use in the thing. It’s interesting how those relationships fold into the body & how it now governs or is mirrored in the way we experience our own emotions sort of in between the time in which we’re experiencing something else so there’s this glitching that happens between the self at play & the self elsewhere...



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