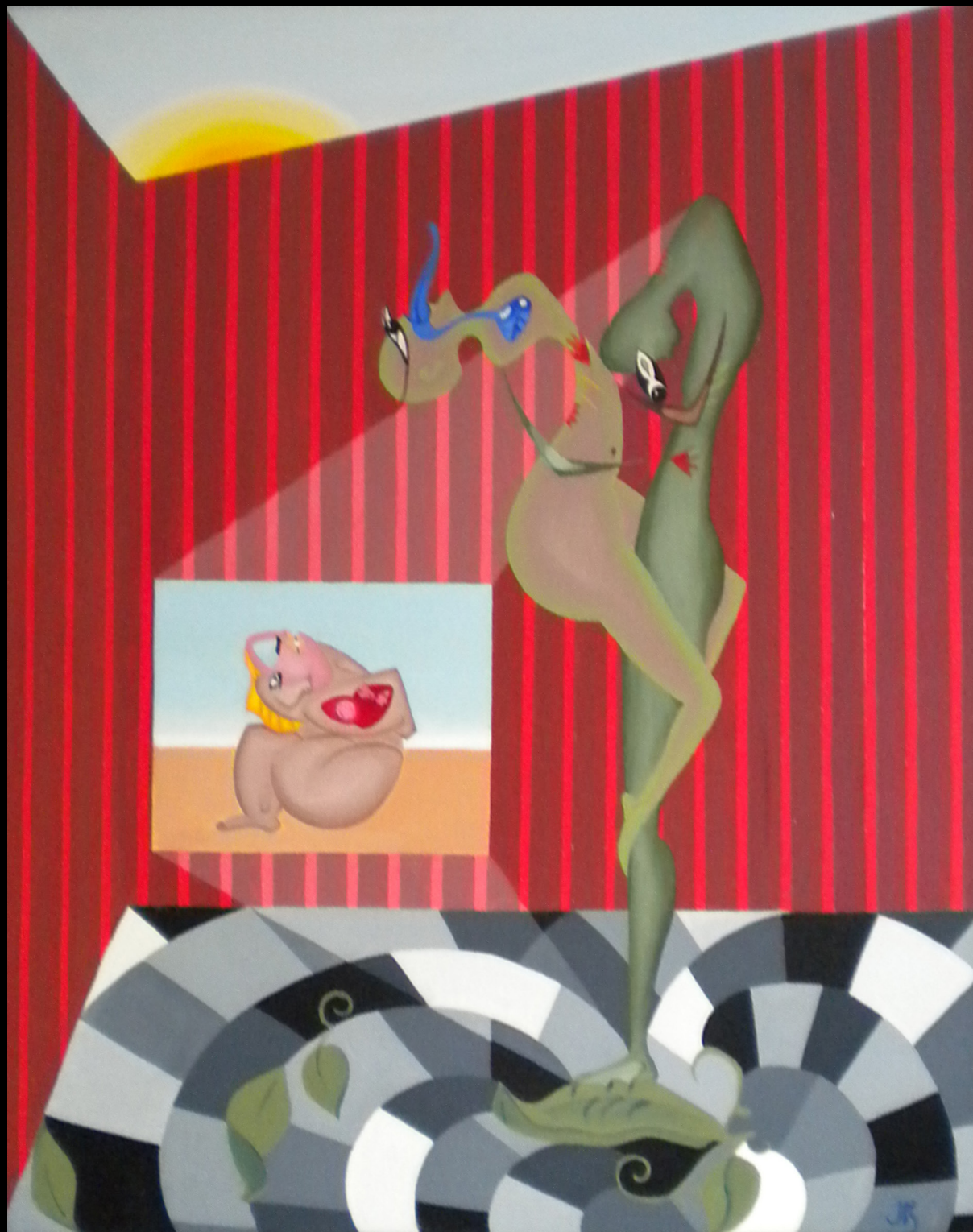


THE BIRTH CREATURES



SAMANTHA DUNCAN

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Samantha Duncan

Acknowledgements

A portion of this work previously appeared in the Fall 2015 issue of *Menacing Hedge*.

at thirty-seven weeks
I wake in the night

a cypress tree has appeared in the corner
roots bubbling under the wood
floor to the empty crib

you perch on its leafy flat-top head
the life inside me now separate
not new at all
scrubbing the walls of my

imaginings I look at myself
in pieces
whisked
into a faint copper-smelling air
and you a tank
sucking fat rolls on your arms
candied yams
for an early Thanksgiving

you hold your name
like a favorite toy
where was I
waking in the night
where was *I*

waking in the dirt
I'm an afterthought to be studied
my insides sighing
against the hunger for
more of me it you that

days after

absolved of my other
I drag my negotiated carriage
through the dewy yard
 in the house

I sense an accumulation

a rhinoceros sits upright
like a thick gray throne
in the kitchenette corner
where the bouncer was to go

bones of a small bird in the bathroom
smelling like a last meal
I put in the fridge

flooding noiseless pockets
 the ink of me at a slow crawl

I am all that is empty

we'll make room
says a non-compliant body
as for time
 we'll make compliant
 thieves of ourselves

at superhero status I walk through a wall
only my torso makes it through
a signal lantern highlighting dust
mixed with the blood trailing my cape

in this tired red sea
I'm asked for the first time
to swim to survive

in the yard
I poke a straw at the sun
for a jump start
but it's night
and the sun is actually
some other star

I've grabbed the attention
of the moon who sideways
glances come hithers
at me

I know I'm waxing
gibbous embarrassment
a thirst for answers

under cape of soil and blood
my muted function

the clots the clots
build or find
a new room in the house
for their conventions

 a black room
with a temporary expression
like I could wake one morning
to its disappearance

that lethal red

no the clots
are my dark cherry residents
 who dance dance
 displace
 in my carriage
driving down house value
one contraction at a time

while I am rhythm
sifted and tilled

the black clouds disappear
like puffs of cotton candy
this isn't punk rock anymore
you say this isn't

midnight boots punctuation jewelry
pizza philosophy fast life slow death

to which the moon
 rocks on my chest
 will attest

the rhino is a watcher
hungry-eyed fly-keeper

the eye-roller the judge when I
 readjust my shirt
over my body and instead

collect a slow discharge
of sap from the tree

roll it in your mouth
my sticky finger
large as your days-old eyes

you are
growing faster
 than my guilt

damp earth caulks thirsty cracks
along molding
in vents and doorways
 the entrance to our room
your concave loaf

when the mirrors catch you
they assess artificial growth,
 my chest tests
the weight of your disappeared neck

similarly the fridge talks
 important issues
illuminates my hunger
but never answers it

I cover my ears to the moon's ancient
calling it rotates toward the house, moving
 judgment closer

shoving my outer insides
under the crust I am cherry pie

the tides stretch our time

 you fed eight times today
you my lip of a thing

consequently the moon has moved
 a third of itself inside

pompous belly stretching into bookshelves
 middle finger to Proust
 and Dostoyevsky's bio

we bathe in incandescent charcoal dust
 your first playlist
I always know where I misstep

 while no one bothers telling us
 cleanliness is a never-thing

the rhino shifts in song aggravating
support beams and cutlery no longer in use

in another room

 I'm pulled to the ground

a peat bog
where the kitchen table was

a promise from the rhino
to paint an accent wall later

we're some version of happy
to let the tree frogs in
 [though some already
 started a poetry group
 in the upstairs bath]
and watch the floaters
in our eyes blink like timers
 alert alert
 feed again

I open my mouth to tell a story
and cement comes out
laying a path to the back door
with the broken lock
 in my midsection
a pulse a fire a non-hungry emptiness
 turning on itself

the moon is in
the kitchen is in my mouth
wanting under the gums
 until I quit myself

at night we shed
 the scraps left
from cutting ourselves
out of bark and clay

you remain so hungry

the tree is still wet
with sap I am
dry but more eager

quicker to breathe
the moss-cake
 filling the walls

only against
the grey womb
 of night
we are doing
we are real

dirt / gravity / settling

directions
I'm pulled
become rotations that
change with the days

the chimney grows
into the rhino's foot

I pick some grass
for the fireplace
baseboards breathe the sour
of newly fallen acorns

in the tree
you hug a low branch
munch on amber candy
as I push saliva
around in my mouth

revolution
is the gist of it

to be born

I'm pulled into the rhino
nestled in its crib of ribs
reminded of what I've missed

the deckled skin
 of home
welcome mat of prosaic warmth
in the discord of biology

a journey a century
transforms insides
into leftovers
the waste the time

the assimilation of you
 into me
me into sallow gray earth
where I am and I'll be
 of a different sort

now and then
I stand on the moon

less a pale stone
washed ashore

I open my mouth
of dust blood

pack in the dirt
climb my roots

wrap myself
in capes

of every night
of moss and ash

the doors the windows
 I leave open
to every new
color and air come out of me

we hold the moon
 as it moves us
through the foyer

I feel the sap in my hair on
 my skin
the chorus of the bog
 the rhino
 making lunch

the cypress branch
just under its flat top
where you sit
is thick as a thigh

you who have made me
a wisp of a thing
and a boar

I climb up
 where it holds us both

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