



Ariel Parkinson

Politics & Theatre

House of Seiko

4850 Santa Monica Boulevard, Los Angeles



Ariel Parkinson (1926 -2017)

Politics & Theatre | September 18 - October 31, 2026

House of Seiko is pleased to present *Politics & Theatre*, the gallery's second exhibition exploring the life and work of Ariel Parkinson (1926–2017). Examining two interconnected forces that shaped her practice, her political engagement and her decades-long involvement in American theatre, the exhibition traces how these seemingly distinct worlds repeatedly converged in Parkinson's creative life.

From the late 1950s through the early 1980s, Parkinson lived and worked against a backdrop of profound political and social turbulence. Her engagement with politics existed alongside her work as a scenographer for theatrical productions across the country. Neither operated separately from her life as an artist. Instead, politics, theatre, and a rather private studio practice became overlapping platforms through which Parkinson confronted the events, anxieties, and contradictions of her time.

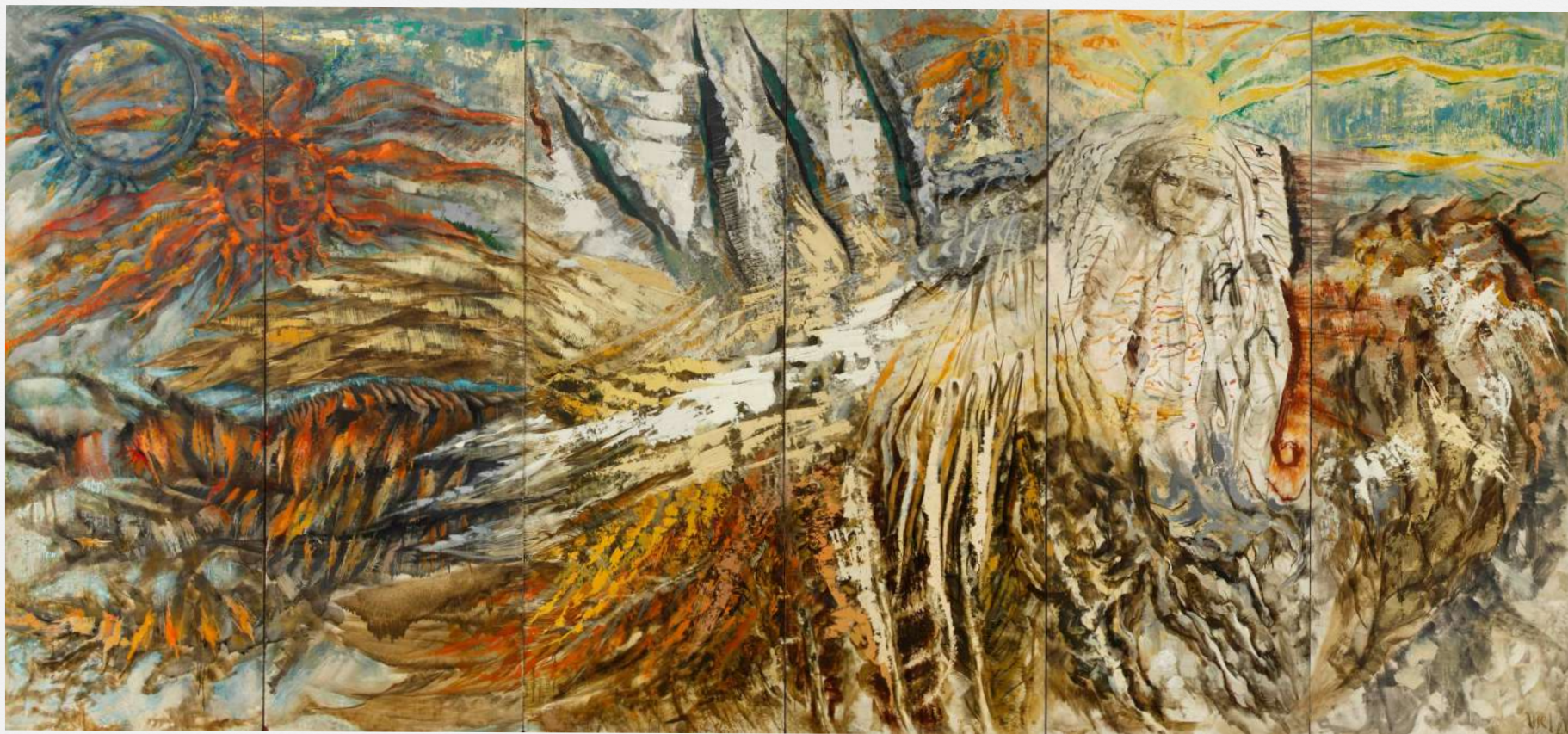
Theatre offered Parkinson a particularly fertile language for doing so. The heightened realities of the stage often seemed to mirror the political world unfolding beyond it. Likewise, the vicissitudes of contemporary life supplied their own cast of characters and dramatic structures. Fiction could emulate reality, while reality increasingly assumed the qualities of theatre. Within this exchange, Parkinson found a vocabulary capable of addressing subjects that occupied her throughout her life: war, environmental destruction, power, social conflict, spectacle, and the strange comedy of human behavior.

Parkinson's theatrical life was extensive. As a scenographer, she worked across productions ranging from *The Tempest*, *Ondine*, *Rilke's Elegies*, and *The Enchanted Castle* to *Madame Butterfly*, *Otello*, *Le Cid*, and *Carmina Burana*, drawing inspiration from each work's distinctive combination of music, drama, movement, and visual spectacle. Her engagement with experimental theatre also placed her within the extraordinary cultural environment developing around Berkeley during the 1960s, where poetry, performance, music, visual art, and political consciousness increasingly intersected. Recalling Daniel Moore's *Floating Lotus Magic Opera Company* and its outdoor performances in the Berkeley hills, Parkinson described a theatre in which the boundaries between performer and audience could effectively disappear. She carried this sense of theatre and its ability to transform quotidian existence through image, ritual, and spectacle into her own visual imagination.



At the same time, Parkinson was deeply engaged with the political and environmental movements developing around her in the Bay Area. She participated in Berkeley's emerging ecological consciousness through organizations and initiatives, including Ecology Action and the Ecology Center, alongside the region's early recycling movement and the broader campaign to protect San Francisco Bay. Her political consciousness also unfolded amid the anti-Vietnam War movement centered at UC Berkeley and later in environmental campaigns addressing automobile use, pollution, and California's Proposition 9 [1972]. For Parkinson, these movements reflected a broader concern with human consequences that entered her art both directly and allegorically.

Politics & Theatre focuses on the places where these boundaries become difficult to distinguish. Parkinson's theatrical designs reveal concerns that surface elsewhere in her paintings and drawings, while her political imagery frequently adopts the exaggeration, symbolism, staging, and narrative compression of theatre. Seen together, the works suggest an artist continually moving between private observation and public expression, translating the emotional impact of historical events through different creative forms.



Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

Rilke Angel, 1964

Oil on masonite, six panels

84 x 180 in

Rilke Angel is a sweeping, multi-panel vision created as a backdrop for a reading of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* at Daniel Moore's *Floating Lotus Magic Opera Company*, reflecting the artist's long-standing role as a sought-after scenographer throughout the San Francisco Renaissance. Across its atmospheric expanse, Parkinson's gestural marks—fiery, fluid, and almost calligraphic—conjure a landscape where celestial forces, earthly strata, and the faint apparition of an angelic figure surge together in mythic transformation.





Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

Pelléas and Mélisande, 1967

Ink and oil on board

31 1/8 x 24 3/8 in. (framed)

Created as a poster design for a production of Maurice Maeterlinck's Symbolist drama at The Berkeley Repertory Theatre, *Pelléas and Mélisande* gathers its figures into a dense, dreamlike entanglement of bodies, hair, costume, and ornamental line. Parkinson's delicate ink work and restrained passages of blue and violet translate the play's atmosphere of desire, jealousy, and fatalism into an image that reflects the experimental convergence of theatre, poetry, music, and visual art surrounding the company.







Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

Eleanor of Aquitaine, 1958

Ink on paper

28 3/4 x 17 1/4 in. (framed)

Parkinson presents *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, the formidable twelfth-century queen of both France and England, as a commanding theatrical presence, her crowned figure emerging from layered passages of black, ochre, and pale rose. Eleanor's story also offered Parkinson an aspirational historical mirror through which to consider her own position and that of other women navigating the period's social expectations. The elaborate costume and imposing silhouette transform political authority into spectacle, reflecting Parkinson's interest in how power is constructed, performed, and made visible.







Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

The Knight of the Burning Pestle, 1964

Ink and oil on board

17 7/8 x 24 3/8 in. (framed)

Taking its title from Francis Beaumont's early seventeenth-century comedy, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* reflects the play's irreverent structure, in which spectators interrupt a performance and insert their own hero into the action. Parkinson disperses brightly colored figures and fantastical forms across the page, translating its play-within-a-play into a scene of comic instability where theatrical convention gives way to spectacle and disorder.







Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

Titania's Throne (A Midsummer Night's Dream), 1974

Vintage chromogenic print

16 3/8 x 14 3/8 in. (framed)

Photographed on Chrysa, Ariel's youngest daughter, before being sent to the theatre, *Titania's Throne* documents one of the artist's completed costumes for a 1974 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Fashioned from silk, papier-mâché, and acrylic paint, its fantastical animal form transforms the domestic act of modeling into an intimate theatrical performance. With few of Parkinson's physical costumes known to survive, the photograph serves as both a staged image and a rare material record of her scenographic practice.





Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

Halloween Masks, 1975

Vintage chromogenic print

11 1/4 x 10 3/8 in. (framed)

Halloween Masks documents a group of animal masks Parkinson made for her children, nieces, and nephews from silk, papier-mâché, and acrylic paint. The masks grew from an informal tradition in which Parkinson created masks, puppets, and other sculptures for family and neighbors, extending theatrical invention into domestic and communal life; some of these objects can still be found in yards surrounding the family's Berkeley Hills home. Much of her work was made for her children, for whom art became a shared language of play, transformation, and imagination.





Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

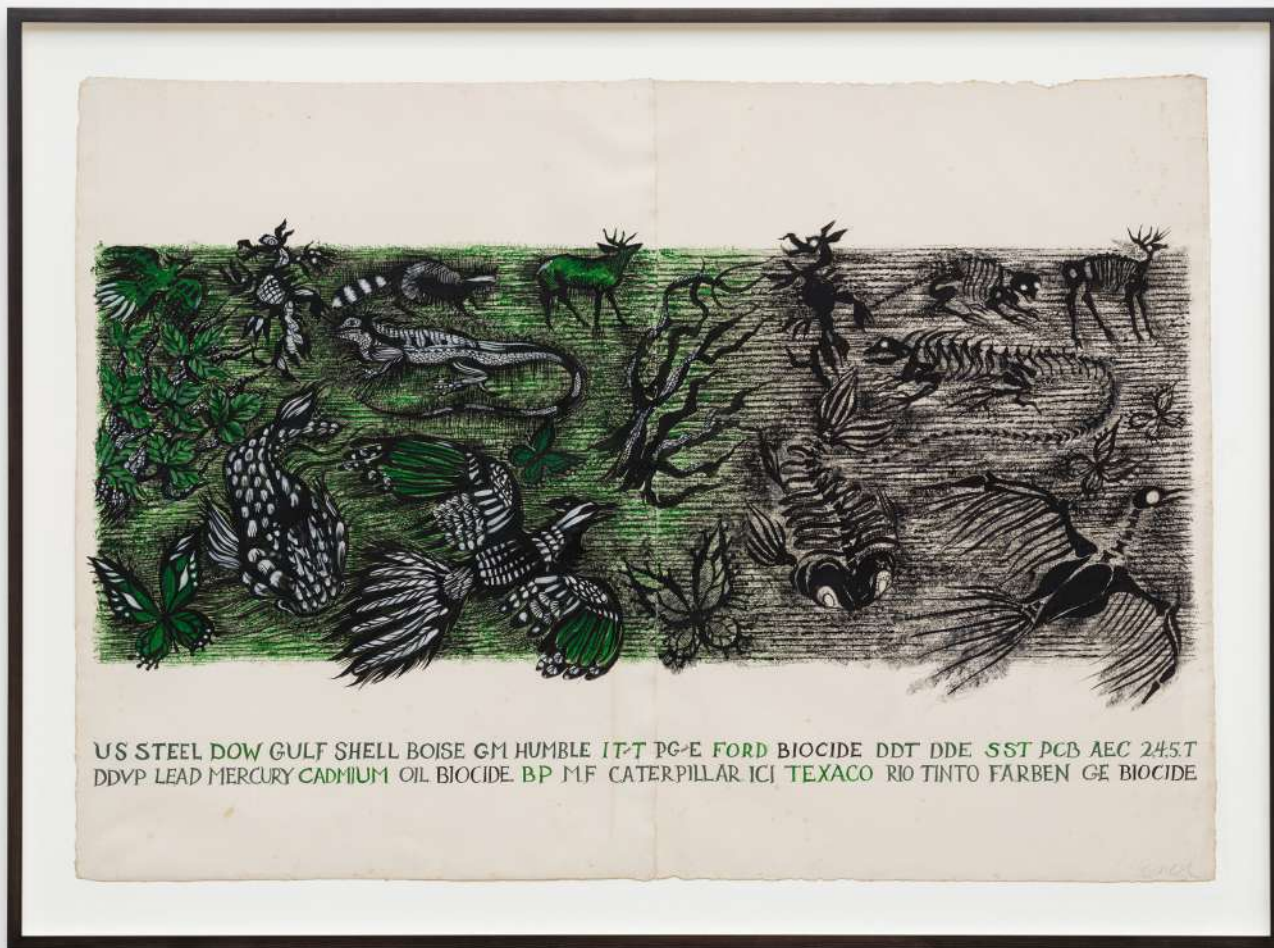
The Unicorn, The Gorgon, and The Manticore, 1973

Vintage chromogenic print

13 3/8 x 11 3/8 in. (framed)

The Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore documents Parkinson's completed costumes for a 1973 production of Gian Carlo Menotti's allegorical "madrival fable," modeled by members of her family before being sent to the theatre. Fashioned from silk, papier-mâché, and acrylic paint, the elaborate forms dissolve the bodies beneath them into a shadowy gathering of mythological creatures. With few of Parkinson's costumes surviving, the photograph preserves a rare record of both her scenographic imagination and the intimate family rituals that accompanied her professional practice.





Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

U.S. Steel (Poster for Ecology Center), 1971

Acrylic on paper

36 1/4 x 49 in. (framed)

Created for Berkeley's Ecology Center, which Parkinson helped establish, *U.S. Steel* reflects the artist's foundational commitment to environmental activism. Across the composition, a densely inhabited green ecosystem gives way to a barren field of animal skeletons, while a litany of corporations, industrial pollutants, and pesticides, including DDT, mercury, and lead, runs beneath the image. The poster transforms ecological destruction into a stark visual indictment, demonstrating how Parkinson placed her art directly in the service of collective political action.



US STEEL DOW GULF SHELL BOISE GM HUMBLE IT-T PG-E FORD BIOCIDE DDT DDE SST PCB AEC 245.T
DDVP LEAD MERCURY CADMIUM OIL BIOCIDE BP MF CATERPILLAR ICI TEXACO RIO TINTO FARBEN GE BIOCIDE



US STEEL DOW GULF SHELL BOISE GM HUMBLE IT-T PG-E FORD BIOCIDE DDT DDE SST PCB AEC 245T
DDVP LEAD MERCURY CADMIUM OIL BIOCIDE BP MF CATERPILLAR ICI TEXACO RIO TINTO FARBEN GE BIOCIDE



Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

Gas Mask General (for Freedom Press), 1971

Ink on paper

15 x 11 3/8 in. (framed)

Created for the Freedom Press, a leading voice of the Bay Area underground press, *Gas Mask General* was intended for circulation as anti-Vietnam War imagery. Parkinson's dense, agitated line transforms military authority into a grotesque composite of weapons, machinery, protective equipment, and fragmented bodies, collapsing soldier and arsenal into a single dehumanized figure. The handwritten instruction "Reduce 1/3" remains visible below the image, preserving the drawing's original function as material prepared for public reproduction.





Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

C.C. Rider (for Freedom Press), 1971

Ink on paper

15 1/4 x 12 3/8 in. (framed)

Created for the Freedom Press as anti-Vietnam War imagery, *C.C. Rider* depicts a skeletal motorcyclist surrounded by an American flag, rifle, missiles, medals, and other emblems of military power. Parkinson turns the heroic rider into an apparition of death, using grotesque satire to expose the violence concealed beneath patriotic spectacle. Like *Gas Mask General*, the visible instruction "Reduce 1/3" records the drawing's preparation for reproduction and circulation through the underground press.





Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

Juno's Sacred Chariot (Sketch for The Tempest), 1959

Oil on board

11 1/4 x 19 3/8 in. (framed)

Conceived as a scarf design for *The Tempest*, *Juno's Sacred Chariot* draws upon the goddess's appearance in the play's masque, where she arrives to bless the union of Ferdinand and Miranda. Parkinson compresses Juno's peacock-drawn chariot into a fluid, rust-colored emblem suited to repetition across silk. Such designs formed a recurring part of her illustrative practice and were often commissioned by theatrical institutions, most frequently the San Francisco Opera.



April 59



Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

Alonso & Claribel (costume sketch for The Tempest), 1969

Ink and watercolor on paper

11 1/4 x 23 3/8 in. (framed)

Created for a 1969 production of *The Tempest*, this working costume design presents Alonso, King of Naples, alongside his daughter Claribel, whose marriage precipitates the voyage at the center of the play. Parkinson differentiates the figures through contrasting fields of color: Claribel appears in a spare column of luminous orange, while Alonso is enveloped in dense layers of crimson, violet, and black that amplify his burdened authority. Smaller studies of crowns and alternate silhouettes supplied fabricators and seamstresses with practical details for translating Parkinson's designs from paper to the stage.





Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

Ariel (costume sketch for The Tempest), 1969

Ink and watercolor on paper

11 1/4 x 23 3/8 in. (framed)

For this 1969 production of *The Tempest*, Parkinson imagines Ariel, the mercurial spirit bound to Prospero's service, as an elongated, skeletal figure poised between embodiment and disappearance. A fully rendered costume is accompanied by studies of its mask-like face, exposed structure, and alternate views, providing fabricators with detailed guidance while preserving a sense of supernatural movement. The design translates Ariel's shifting, immaterial nature into a body that appears capable of transforming before the audience.





Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

Ferdinand, Prince of Naples
(costume sketch for *The Tempest*), 1969

Ink and watercolor on paper
11 1/4 x 23 3/8 in. (framed)

Parkinson's costume for Ferdinand, the shipwrecked Prince of Naples who falls in love with Miranda, emphasizes the character's youth and romantic idealism. Shown from both front and side, the design pairs a fitted blue-and-violet doublet with expansive pleated sleeves that would register the performer's movement across the stage. The two views balance theatrical expression with the practical information required for the costume's fabrication.





Ariel Parkinson (1926 - 2017)

The Brood (Mother Courage), 1983

Oil on canvas

60 7/8 x 60 7/8 in.

Taking its subtitle from Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Brood* transforms the play's wartime family into a compressed mass of interlocking bodies, straining limbs, and outstretched hands. Across the painting's large square field, ashen flesh and passages of black, bruised red, and ochre bind the figures together while suggesting both protection and collapse. Parkinson draws Brecht's account of a mother who survives war while losing her children into her own enduring concerns with motherhood, violence, and the impossible effort to shelter a family from history.





Installation Images





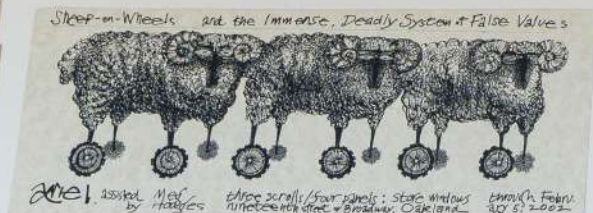
THE RICHMOND CONNECTION Page 10
Answering Questions About
Federalized Welfare Page 6

CO-OP ELECTION BATTLE Page 20

OIL COMPANIES IN CONTROL Page 16

freedom news

an alternative press



NEWSRACK COPY

freedom news

an alternative press

Volume V, Number 10 35¢ October, 1971

PRISONS AND THE TEST OF DEMOCRACY, Page 2

Box 1087, Richmond, CA 94801

freedom news

advocating peace and human dignity - in our time

Volume IV, Number 1 15¢ January, 1970

EARTH IS FINITE ~ GREED IS INFINITE

PROTECT THE EARTH

Box 1087, Richmond, California 94801

LIBERIAN NEWS, DECEMBER, 1970 3

IS THE UNITED STATES A PLANETARY DISEASE?

Imagine that we could compress the world's present population of over three billion persons into one team of 1,000 persons, in exactly the same proportions. In such a team of 1,000 persons there would be only 70 United States Americans.

These 70 Americans -- a mere 7% of the team's population -- would receive half of the team's income. This would be the direct result of their monopolizing over half of the world's available material resources. Correspondingly, the 70 Americans would have fifteen times as many possessions per person as the remainder of the team.

The 70 Americans would have an average life expectancy of 70 years. The other 930 would average less than 40 years. The lowest income group among the Americans, even though it included a few people who were hungry much of the time, would be better off by far than the average of the other teamers.

The 70 Americans and about 100 others representing Western Europe, and a few Japanese in South America, South Africa, Australia and Japan would be well off by comparison with the rest.

Could such a team, in which the 930 non-Americans were quite aware of both the fact and means of the Americans' advantages, survive? Could the 70 Americans continue to extract the majority of the new materials essential to their standard of living from the property of the other 930 teamers?

While doing so, could they convince the other 930 inhabitants to limit their population growth on the basis that resources are limited?

How many of the 70 Americans would have to become soldiers? How much of their material and human resources would have to be devoted to military efforts in order to keep the rest of the team at its present disadvantage?

Chances are the 70 Americans would have to organize into a military corps in order to maintain their material dominance of the remainder of the team. Chances are most of the Americans would be too insecure or guilty about their situation to enjoy their dominance.

Chances are this guilt and insecurity would lead some of the Americans to protest the situation and call for change. Chances are that the protesting Americans would find themselves subjected to variations of the same repressive forces being used to subdue the other 930 teamers. Chances are the military corps would also be a police corps.

The most regretful thing about the situation you have been asked to imagine is that it is not imaginary. For such is the present material relationship and incipient political relationship of the United States to the rest of the world.

The material relationship is very clear: the United States is systematically plundering the planet's physical resources.

And if the political conclusions drawn above are not yet so, they are rapidly becoming so. The logical complement of a nation of plunderers is a nation of police.

by Neil McKinnis, SpaceShip Earth Curriculum Project,
Center for Integrative Curriculum Design,
Kean College, Englewood, NJ 07624



the car is my tyrant, i can not breathe,
it makes me to drive on hot asphalt,
it leathens me past the full parking-lots,
it leathens my soul,
it leathens me in the ports of destruction for octane's sake,
yea, when i drive on the highway in the shadow of death
i will face much evil, my car is with me,
its coat and exhaust they madden me,
it prepaeneth monoxide before me in the presence of sepias bills,
it leathens my lungs with pollution, my eye sunneth over,
sunbly smog and congestion will follow me all the days of my life,
and i will dwell in the chase of cars for ever.



department of english and committee
for arts and lectures present

ROBERT CREELEY thursday • OCTOBER 18
william stafford thursday • NOVEMBER 8
BROTHER ANTONINUS thursday • DECEMBER 6

READING FROM THEIR POETRY
101 CALIFORNIA HALL AT 8.15 P.M.

the public is cordially invited

university of california • berkeley campus



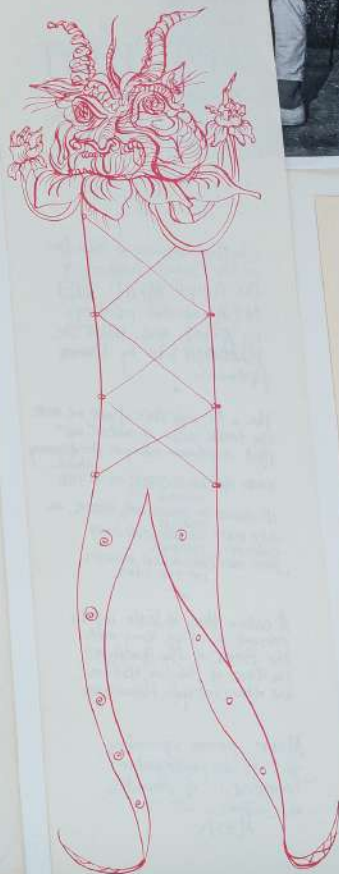
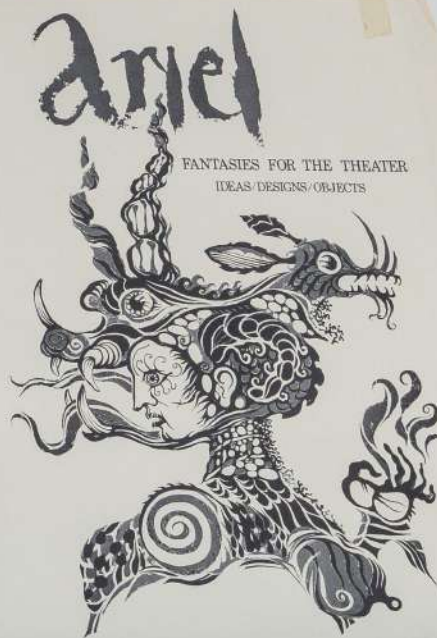
TRIAL and VERDICT
A Rump Parliament to
be convened Friday March
8, 1971 from Seven thirty
to Ten P.M. at the Berkeley
City Council Chambers,
Gracie Street at
Albion Way.

On the occasion of publication
in the Council Chambers of
the English MEAT, VIET
NAM and other paintings
by Ariel; and WHAT THE
BLINDMAN SAW by Thomas
Pentecost.

This is the only state of mine and more.
The terrible politics of constant war
Rink nightmare riding on the dreaming child...
come MARRIED AS JUDAS OK AS THE
ACCUSED.
AS JUDGE OR PROSECUTOR, ANNOA OR
ABUSED.
SAY WHAT THE LAW SHOULD SAY
CONSTRUCT, PRODUCE
YOUR OWN CONSIDERED VERSION
OF THE LAWS...

A certain Head of State will be
present in company with
the Beast of the Apocalypse,
the Chorus of Babylon, Adam,
and other Godspoke Personages.

Music, poems, speeches.
Your Active participation
requested - if possible,
in costume or in
Mask.



FANTASIES FOR THE THEATER
IDEAS/DESIGNS/OBJECTS

AMSTERDAM GALLERY: JULY 14 to OCT 11 LIBRARY & MUSEUM OF THE PERFORMING ARTS AT LINCOLN CENTER

Ariel SERIES, 1969-70
31/6 10/7
GAIL THOMPSON
Berkeley - California
CA STATE
UNIVERSITY

ONE WAY OR ANOTHER ALL THESE PAINTINGS HAVE TO DO
WITH THE WAR BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND VIET
NAM. THE THEME IS IN THE FOUNDING SET OF S-
QUATIONS: "THERE IS A SPECTRE HAUNTING AMERICA.
IT IS VIET NAM. THERE IS A SPECTRE HAUNTING
THE WORLD. IT IS AMERICA."

THE LARGE PAINTING, JOHNSON'S DREAMS ILLUSTRATES
THE SUMMARY MYTHIC TRIUMPH OF WAR IN ROBERT
DUNCAN'S MEMS - "LYNDON JOHNSON, DRAWING
FROM THE UNDERBOW OF AMERICA STREAMS OF DES-
TRUCTION AND DEATH."

THE BEARD IS AN IMAGE OF VIOLENCE DEVELOPED FUR-
THHER BY THE EXPERIENCE OF RICHARD KRUH'S "Ballet"
ON THE THEME OF ANOTHER CANCER AND HER UNLIVEN.

THE THREE SMALL PAINTINGS ARE DIRECT REMINDERS
OF VIOLENCE REFLECTED AS THE MIND THE GRIEF, THE
RESPONDING-BAITED OF A PEOPLE.

THE CAR IS MY EYE, I CAN NOT BREATHE.
 IT MADE ME TO DRIVE ON HOT ASPHALT,
 IT LEADETH ME DOWN THE FULL PARKING LOTS,
 IT SATIETH MY SOUL,
 IT LEADETH ME IN THE PATHS OF DESTRUCTION FOR DETROIT'S SAKE,
 VEC, WHEN I DRIVE ON THE HIGHWAY IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH,
 I WILL LEARN MUCH EVIL, MY CAR IS WITH ME,
 ITS COST AND EXHAUST THEY MADDEN ME,
 IT PREPARETH MONOXIDE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF REPAIR EDITS,
 IT FILTH MY THING WITH POLLUTION, MY EYE SHINETH OVER,
 SURELY SMOG AND CONGESTION WILL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE,
 AND I WILL DWELL IN THE CHAS OF CARS FOR EVER.



department of english and committee
 for arts and lectures present

ROBERT CREELEY thursday · OCTOBER 18
 WILLIAM STAFFORD thursday · NOVEMBER 8
 BROTHER ANTONINUS thursday · DECEMBER 6

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 101 CALIFORNIA HALL AT 8:15 P.M.

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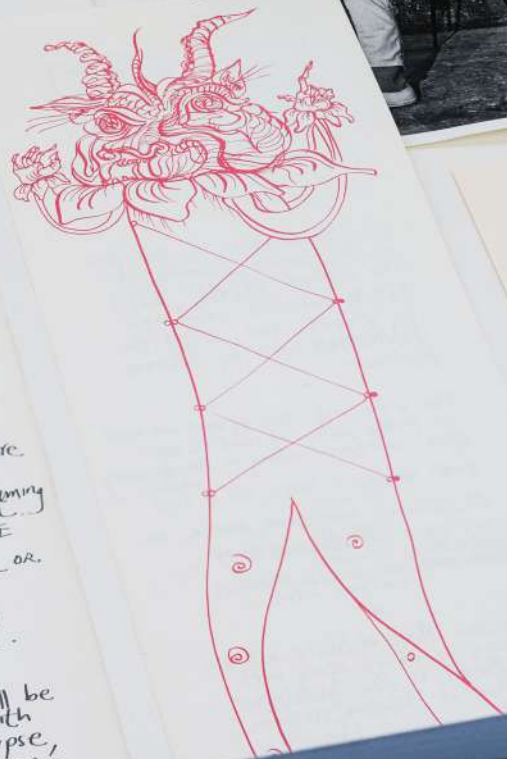


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 the terrible politics of constant war
 Rank nightmare riding on the dreaming
 child.
 COME MARKED AS JUDGE, OR AS THE
 ACCUSED, PROSECUTOR, ADVISOR OR
 AS JUDGE OR PROSECUTOR, ADVISOR OR
 SAY WHAT THE LAW SHOULD SAY
 CONSTRUCT, PROPOSE
 YOUR OWN, CONSIDERED VERSION
 OF THE LAWS

A certain Head of State will be
 present in effigy, along with
 the Beast of the Apocalypse,
 the Beast of Babylon, a Gorgon,
 - Personages



Ariel

FANTASIES FOR THE THEATER
 IDEAS/DESIGNS/OBJECTS



CA STATE
 UNIVERSITY

ONE WAY OR ANOTHER ALL THESE
 WITH THE WAR BETWEEN THE
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THE LARGEST PART
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 ON T













Upcoming exhibitions and fairs:

Ava McDonough
November 14 – December 19, 2026

NADA Miami
Ice Palace Film Studios
Miami, Florida
December 1 – 5, 2026

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