

Sonia Payes LUMINOUS INTERLUDE REVIEW by ASHLEY CRAWFORD

In Sonia Payes' world reality shifts in spectral incarnations that simultaneously act as harsh journalistic recordings of ectoplasmic phenomena and a startling vision of the world around us.

There is something strange and otherworldly here, both in her subject and in the way it is executed. Sans Photoshop ("not a touch of it," she says.) truly extraordinary colors emerge. Affected by the light (the colors seem to shift and vibrate into entirely new hues depending on whether the light is natural or artificial) extreme reds, greens and silvers emerge and then recede, as though the very paper on which they lie were pulsating and evolving. They act more as paintings than photographs, a rare and unlikely achievement - the literal sources - the landscapes of Papua New Guinea or New Zealand morphing into the mythical and other-wordly.

In one such image the literal landscape of an island is inverted to a degree that it drips from the wall, a cascading undulation of odd colors dripping with mercury that recalls electrified and irradiated Asiatic water colors. Elsewhere Payes invites us into a shadowy, misty grotto, clearly a pathway to the beyond. Roots dangle from an obscured earthy ceiling and one is tempted to meet Charon, the ferryman who is believed to have transported the souls of the newly dead across the river Styx or,

depending on the source of mythology, Acheron, into the underworld. The mist in this image is cloying, choking the lungs with moisture, yet it invites us to move into its shadowy depths and perhaps to meet with Acheron.

The technical bravado at play here is nothing short of breath-taking. Eschewing the norm, Payes works off the natural landscape. And yet the result is anything but natural or literal. It is haunting, surreal, mysterious and disturbing, revealing the world in a new, unreal and unruly light. There is an element of montage at play here; it takes time to realise that there is the hint of the female form shimmering amidst these works, a play of brazen sensuality that tantalises before the viewer can even image why.

In her most previous body of work she captured islands floating in darkened seas like blobs of mercury. These monochrome works suggested an other-world in a state of flux. With the newest works that world is still a miasmatic, crepuscular zone that hovers uncomfortably between reality and the surreal. They are beautiful but troubling, solid yet unreal, based in the here and now but transfigured by Payes' strange eye.

Photography, so usually locked down by either reality or technical trickery, is here transformed. Almost despite her medium, Payes has

dismembered notions of tangibility; she has done the opposite of what photography is supposed to do, she has crept over to the somnambulistic side of reality and returned with a record of what lies on the other side; a world of bizarre and beautiful colors, a world where the living enter with trepidation and awe and wonder.