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Experimental Archaeology: Goddess Worship

Experimental Archaeology (2006-ongoing) is a re-enactment project in which I explore the possibility of continuity with prehistoric communication systems and if we can understand the situation in which they were produced. For the project, I reconstructed archaeological artefacts, taken from examples found in Marija Gimbutas' book *The Language of the Goddess, Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization* (1989). In order to increase the authentic "aura" of these rebuilt objects today and to emulate these original objects, the ceramic reconstructions were wood-fired with archaic methods in a ritualistic context. My video *Experimental Archaeology: Moon Rituals* shows fragments from two of these full moon sanctification rituals, to which I invited two contemporary Goddess worship priestesses, from different contexts, to compose and lead the rituals.

In her book, Marija Gimbutas writes, 'archaeological materials are not mute. The amazing repetition of symbolic associations through time and in all of Europe on pottery, figurines, and other cult objects can be convincingly compared so that it seems that they are more than "geometric motifs"; they must belong to an alphabet of the metaphysical.' Her thesis is that folk tribes living in Eastern Europe between 6500 and 3500 B.C. shared a view of the world and comparable religious ideas. She argues these traditions were 'passed on by the grandmothers and mothers of the European family, the ancient beliefs survived the superimposition of the Indo-European and finally the Christian myths. The Goddess-centered religion existed for a very long time, much longer than the Indo-European and the Christian, leaving an indelible imprint on the Western psyche.'

Their survival in handicrafts, magic, the cult of witchcraft, story-telling, traditional customs and rites have often been understood as an "off-space" for women, providing them with an opportunity to express their thoughts and also pass on traditional knowledge and their own history. Not only do I try with my re-enactment to come closer to the Neolithic artefact producers who lived in a very different social, political and economic system, I also try to create a followup to feminist art made in the 1970s especially to those artists who were questioning the relation between the problematic legacy of monotheist religion, the female body and politics within contemporary art.

Self sacrifice arising from social, political and religious motivations and (undermining) power relations within society have been the focus of all my art projects. I want to learn from

those moments in cultural history where patriarchal structures were implemented or enforced. I try to think of strategies in my artwork which can form playful counterparts to these histories of repression. Inspired by the life of the French philosopher Simone Weil, I often try to put myself – for instance through re-enactment works – into situations similar to those I come across in my research and hope then to create alternatives to seemingly hopeless situations, or to enact an experience in myself that could create a different opinion and approach to reality.

p.39 *Female with Phallus Head Starcevo* (Endröd- Szujóskereszt, Körös Valley, SE Hungary; c. 5600- 5300 B.C.) Fusion of Goddess power (buttocks, v-shaped incisions) and cosmic pillar (phallus form). Reconstruction of the original, wood fired ceramic, 18.5 x 13 x 8 cm. The v-shaped structures on this figurine's buttocks resemble the form of the female uterus. The testicles-shaped form of the woman body enhances the life force enshrined in the female body, whereas the phallus is understood as a cosmic pillar.

p.40 *Bear-Shaped Vase Early Cycladic* (Chalandriani, Island of Syros; mid-3rd mill. B.C.) Cult vase associated with motherhood, healing (Bear) and aqua-cosmology (net design). Reconstruction of original, wood fired ceramic 16 x 10 x 13 cm. The holiness of the bear, an animal of great strength and majesty, the glory of the forest, was universal in the northern hemisphere. As a vegetation spirit, the male bear was sacrificed once a year to secure the renewal of life in the spring. In folk memories the bear is seen as ancestress...

p.40 *Mask of a Sow Vinta* (Leskavica near Stip, Macedonia; c. 4500-4000 B.C.) Used in ritual dances, symbol of seed and field fertility (pig). Reconstruction of original, wood fired ceramic, 20.5 x 8 x 20.5 cm. The fast-growing, rounded body of the sow was probably allegorical of seed and field fertility, and its condition must have been regarded as magically influencing the crops. The association of the sow with the Goddess can be observed in figurines of the Pregnant Goddess marked with lozenges and wearing pig masks. Individual sow masks were probably used for ritual dances in worship of the Goddess.

p.40 *Female Torso Starèvo* (Starèvo near Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 5800-5500 B.C.) Figurine linked with nourishing power (breasts), aqua-cosmology, water of life (net design). Reconstruction of the original, wood fired ceramic, 9 x 7 x 6 cm.

p.41 *Spiral on Cult Vase Linear Pottery* (Brno, Moldavia; ca. 5000 B.C.) Symbolic abstraction of snake (spiral), linked to nourishing power (breasts). Reconstruction of original, wood fired ceramic, 18 x 16 cm. The spiral as a design on pottery emerges in the second half of the 7th millennium B.C. in south-eastern Old Europe (At Achilleion II, Thessaly, dated to ca. 6300 B.C.). It spread to the Danube basin and eastern Balkans between 6000 and 5500 B.C. and became very common during 5500 and 3500 B.C...

(All text fragments above are from: Marija Gimbutas *The Language of the Goddess* (New York, 1989) p. 146

All photos, pp. 39-43: Kai Dieterich. All objects were consecrated and burned in a full moon ritual on the night of 7 Nov. 2006

pp. 42-43 *Experimental Archaeology: Moon Rituals* HD, single screen video (2007) Production shots, November 2006









