

“What would we be without the help of what does not exist? Not very much, and our very unoccupied minds would pine away if myths, fables, misunderstandings, abstractions, beliefs and monsters, hypotheses and the so-called problems of metaphysics did not people the darkness and the depths of our natures with abstract creations and images. Myths are the very soul of our actions and of our loves. We can act only in pursuit of a phantom. We can love only what we create.”

-Paul Valéry

Although we have clues to our past through the remnants of our ancestors, much of what we comprehend is fabricated from the collective unconscious within the deep currents of culture. An understanding of the present requires some knowledge of the past, but envisioning a future demands an ability to imagine parts of a forgotten past. The old forms never entirely perish; they only become transformed by each generation's imagination. It has become the artist's task to clarify and speak to the enigma of the forgotten.

When an artist seeks a form of expression there are many influences that rise up and make their presence known. A multiplicity of thoughts and images coalesce into visible form, and the direction of a body of work must submit itself to these undercurrents. Daniel Castro Gamelas gives us female embodiments that are the manual gestures of feminine attributes. Their form is the product of conjuring the matriarchal deities from a tenebrous ancestral recollection, but a muse can only communicate indirectly, through a medium, and the artist becomes the instrument of communication. Gamelas has submitted himself to the archetypes of Feminine mystery, and has been rewarded with and by the sculptural forms that have emanated from this acquiescence. His are deities of fertility, nurture, protection, earth, creativity, and compassion. In short, the Feminine is the mysterious source of life-giving energy, and for the artist she is the benefactress of form.

Gamelas has not chosen to depict arbitrary goddesses, but instead uses his native influences to create Iberian autochthons. The precise nature of these deities is not known, nor is their role in ancient Lusitanian mythology fully understood, but the clues can be found in their names. *Trebopala* is the altar of the home, the place where sacrifice is made to provide life and cultivation. *Trebaruna* is the protector of the home, providing strength and shelter for the fragility of life. What is clear is that these are goddesses of a lost matriarchy, and Gamelas has re-centered our attention on their importance.

Perhaps the female sculptural forms Gamelas has created are fetishes with the power to transform our perception of the Feminine role. The fetishistic power of these pieces may also be regarded as the Gamelas' Anima incarnate--the Feminine spirit imagined and concretized in the archetypes of female form. It is his individual unconscious seeking feminine symbols to reconcile and balance patriarchal dominance. Gamelas recognizes the need to voice unconscious feminine psychological qualities that every male possesses, creating a new conscious paradigm that includes intuitive practices, emotionality, creativity and imagination, and mystical sensitivity towards his self and others.

The Goddess, or eternal Feminine, is the universe, and the earth is her navel. The fecund mystery of creation is repeated through the female, not the male. Gamelas' sculpture is an omphalic meditation on the mystery of being, and a re-enactment of birth and the flames of human imagination. Though not the literal center of the figures, the conspicuous navels on his pieces represent an unmistakable psychic nodal point. Ideas such as this are most apparent with *Ceremonial Leader #1*, who fingers her navel, seemingly contemplating the omphalos of human existence, and pointing us toward our origins. This gesture echoes the posture of the *Venus Pudica*, but unlike the *Venus Pudica*, who seeks to modestly cover her vulva or breasts, the *Ceremonial Leader* unashamedly and straightforwardly displays her fullness and feminine attributes. With helmeted flaming hair, the *Ceremonial Leaders* are visionary seers of fertility, accompanied by their younger athletic apprentices, the custodians of creative energy.

These ceremonial figures are vessels, fragmented yet still containing the vitality of living receptacles. It is only because of their fragmentary nature that we can see inside, and their broken form is a metaphor for the lost cult of the Feminine, remnants standing guard

over the only whole figures in the ritual on display, *Fecundity* and *Goat Woman*--goddesses of the fertile nature cult, gesturing to the sky, planted on the earth; conduits for the reconciliation of man and nature.

Just as the inspiration of an artist must be autochthonous, his material choices must also arise in conjunction with the purposes and goals the work. Gamelas' choice of fired clay is wholly appropriate and consistent with the artistic and ritualistic intent of the forms he has created. Clay taken from the earth, the umbilicus of human existence, is returned to female form. Thus the life-giving female is formed out of the material of the life-giving earth. The Eternal Goddess returns as ceremonial vessels and maternal nature goddesses, who in turn act as the caretakers of the earth.

In this recurrence we see the central point of the Feminine in the cycle of life, and our respect for this nodal point and reverence for the maternal will restore to us a respect for the earth. From the earth we have our material being, and we must sacrifice to guard this altar. Herein is a fundamental role of the artist--to help us understand our primal beginnings, and care for what in us must eventually be passed on to succeeding generations. Gamelas has channeled this elemental feature of art-making and story-telling, and has revealed to us a path to the future.

-Brian Craig-Wankiiri