



Were You Here, Photographs 1984 Court Chrysanne Stathacos

In 1984 Stathacos went to Europe with a suitcase full of small votive sculptures carved in Africa, based on her Venus and Adonis torso drawings. These votives became her traveling companions to the ancient ruins of Delphi and were photographed on site over a two-week period exploring the ruins and caves.

Chrysanne Stathacos

DELPHI: THE WOMB OF THE EUROTIC WORLD

Chrysanne Stathacos

Eros shook my mind
like a mountain wind falling on oak trees...¹

In 1984, after a nervous breakdown at the infamous opening of the new Museum of Modern Art building, Anne de Cybelle found herself in crisis. The first exhibition revealed the vast underrepresentation of women artists at MoMA in a survey of new contemporary art. It was as if women artists and their work did not exist. Protests abounded, and the notorious Guerrilla Girls were formed. As for Anne, her reaction was deeply personal, a breakthrough as she looked into her antique gold mirror and did not know whom she saw. Maybe she did not exist anymore.

It was obvious that it was time to consult the oracle at Delphi, who would enlighten her and help her out of the shadows of her mind. Time to go where the wild Maenads danced in the mountains. Delphi was the home of the earth goddess Gaia, who is rumoured to still reside there in secret. The Greek word for Delphi, δελφύς, means womb, thus confirming this.

Within a month Anne left for Delphi with the votive sculptures that she had made in Africa from her drawings. The votives were carved out of wood, figures without heads, the body painted to evoke a face acting as offerings for deliverance. Ten-to-twelve inches high, these sculptures would be her companions, the vehicle



through which she could communicate to the Pythia oracle at the archaeological site.

whoever he is who opposite you
sits and listens close
to your sweet speaking¹

Having arrived on the mountain, Anne set one of her votives on an ancient rock of the temple ruins close to where the oracle pronounced her visions. Suddenly a voice whispered from the stones that the Pythia would confess all to her, a stranger. In a slow yet melodic tone Anne heard:

What he gave me tasted horrible; and whether because of its effect on me or because of my exhaustion after fasting, I felt ill, and reeled a little. The two priests of the oracle who were watching me the whole time helped me up onto the tripod, which was too high for me to mount unaided; then they set the dish of embers on a high stand, bringing it to a level with my head, and with every breath I had to inhale the drugging smoke. It was acrid and produced a peculiar giddiness. But it was the fumes rising from the cleft in the rock, which affected me most.²

SCAPEGOAT 9

As Anne listened, she almost fell into a trance herself, feeling waves of a damp wind as the voice continued.

One of the priests of the oracle leading forward from the obscurity, a he-goat with unusually large horns; it seemed to me that he poured water over its head. Then I knew no more. But all at once everything changed. I felt relief, release; a feeling not of death but of life, life—an indescribable feeling of delight, but so violent, so unprecedented... It was he! He! It was he who filled me, I felt it, I knew it! He was filling me, he was annihilating me and filling me utterly with himself, with his happiness, his joy, his rapture. Ah, it was wonderful to feel his spirit, his inspiration coming upon me be his, his alone, to be possessed by god.²

Anne feared she might have an orgasm on top of the ancient stones when she heard the moaning voice continue...

But the feeling mounted and mounted; it was still full of delight and icy but it was too violent, too overpowering, it broke all bounds—it broke, hurt me, it was immeasurable, demented.²

Quickly Anne took her votive and went back to the hotel for a nap. Her dreams continued but at least she was not in the public view. She realized that she wanted to know more, but needed to regroup her energy as she was very depleted. Also, she wondered what this story meant for women artists... the wild dancing Maenads were quiet now.

and lovely laughing—oh it
puts the heart in my chest on wings
for when I look at you, even a moment, no
speaking
is left in me¹

The next day she went to the top of the site. Looking down the mountain the voice returned.

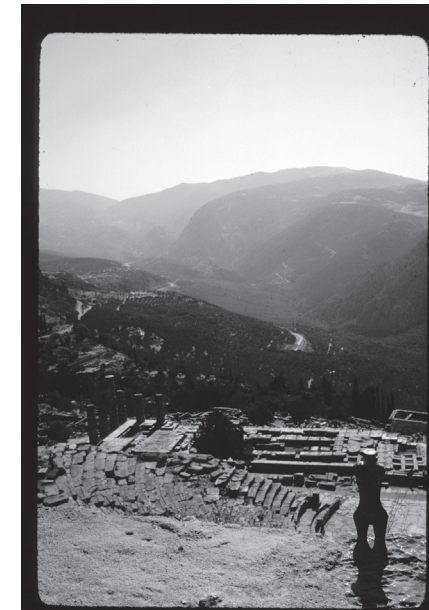
A joy and a happiness, which I had never

dreamed of. Which had been stolen from me—by whom? I was chosen by god; I was god's elect. But I was also chosen by the life of this earth, by ordinary human life, to live it. I was chosen by love, by a man who loved me, who wanted to possess me and whom I wanted to possess. I was his bride. God's bride—and his. Again; my body cried out for it and would never stifle its cry; my mouth longed to shout it out



across the mountains, over all mountains. What would come of it? I feared nothing. Love fears nothing. My only dread was that my beloved—that my beloved might...²

Memories of Anne's past lovers came back, but she wanted to give them away to the winds. Go away... The votive on the ledge started moving, falling. As Anne reached to pull it from the precipice she heard:



Did he know? Did he know that I was a Pythia, the priestess and bride of god?²

Confusion abounded. Anne thought: I am the one to ask the question, why is the Pythia asking me? Anne decided it was time to go to the local taverna, have her favourite Horatiki salad with Retsina to calm herself down. Perhaps the Dionysian Maenads would turn up with some answers.

no tongue breaks and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and drumming
fills ears¹

Back in her hotel, satiated with wine, Anne finally fell asleep. Suddenly visions filtered into her dreams as the night rains pounded on the windows... a whispering voice... the Pythia again...

The thunderstorm that drove me into the cave, the goats that were sent to take care of me, the scorching summer, charged with unparalleled heat, the birth in the goat cave while heaven

hurled its lightings at the earth, the queer behavior of the goats, their eager interest in the birth and the baby, the vile, repugnant, inhuman events in the goat cave—what lay hidden behind all that? Something divine? Something cruelly, savagely divine? Was there a mighty deity behind it?²

Anne realized that she must go to the cave that overlooked Delphi to get the answer to her question. At dawn she made her way up the mountain looking for the cave. Would the Maenads meet her there? Would her erotic experiences with the voice of the Pythia continue? She closed her eyes and decided on to follow a trail using her intuition. Her two votives, one male and one female, were in the large pockets of her black dress. Reaching the top of the mountain she saw a small hole. The opening called to her so she crawled into it.

and cold sweat holds me and shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead—or almost
I seem to me.¹



Once inside, she realized she was in a huge cave. She had crawled back into the womb. And she was not alone:

And I well know the stench of it—the sour goat-stench—who should know it better than I? It

was the first thing I recognized when I entered the cave. The cave in which perhaps I bore a son to a god, a son, no, no, What am I saying? I know. nothing, nothing at all about it... I don't know who is father to this child. I didn't know then, I don't know now. God's it cannot be, and it cannot be my beloveds; it hears no likeness to him nor to me—nor to anyone; he is like no human being, and still less like a god. But I shake my fist at him. He treated me so, who used me in this way, in his pit, his oracle pit—used me as his passive instrument—wed my body and soul, possessed me with his frightful spirit, his delirium, his so-called inspiration, with his hot breath, his alien fire, and my body with his lust.²

Anne had entered the Corycian cave, an ancient meeting place of the nymphs that Pausanias described in his travel writings. A circle of moist goat droppings lay on the ground. The ancient springs dripped water on them. Anne went deep into the cave. Was she going to the end of the world? Darkness enveloped her. She was knee-high in water as light poured in. She had come out the other end of the cave to the waves of the Mediterranean Sea and the sun.

But all is to be dared, because even a person of poverty...¹

Her question was left unanswered and she did not care. Anne de Cybelle dived into the ocean and swam away.

Όχι. No. She heard the nymphs sing.

1

Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York: Virago, 2003).

2

Par Lagerkvist, *The Sibyl*, trans. Naomi Walford (New York: Vintage, 1963 [1951]).