

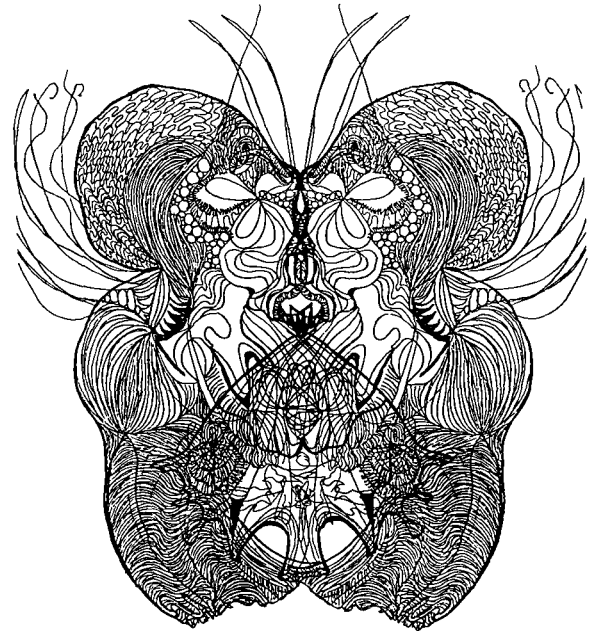
METAMORPHOSIS



Sarah Jackson and Xerography

Woman turns into a tree or a river. River or tree turns into a woman. The ancient myths of every culture speak of transformation. Psyche is a butterfly, is the soul, is a goddess/woman in love with Eros. The images are drawn from that collective substratum of the mind where myths generate, die, are re-generated. Energy is withdrawn from one form, reappears in another. Form not fixed becomes power. The cave paintings of primitive peoples show us the same thing: figures half-human, half-animal. A flickering reality sometimes called magic. Metamorphosis.

It is this borderline reality that Sarah Jackson captures in her xerographic art. The process itself is like a modern myth;

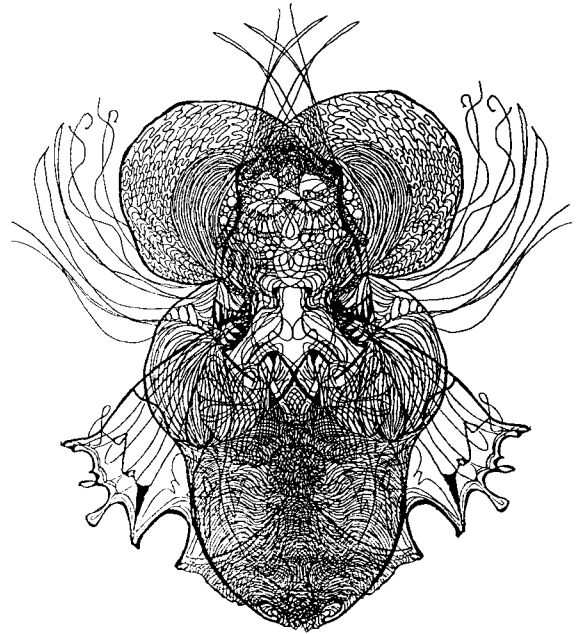


the woman creates the image, the machine completes it. The xerox copier, which most of us take for granted, becomes an externalized part of Jackson's creative process. We are reminded, as Robert Pirsig would say, that technology has a classical underlying form, not inimical to organic beings but an extension of them. The romantic schism between artist and machine is bridged with apparent simplicity. Yet, as they evolve, each sequence of prints becomes more complex, more demanding of attention. Jackson's personal vision and experience as an artist informs the technique and transcends it.

There are several levels of perception. Lines that Beardsley might have envied

combine with a sense of social satire which is sometimes amusing, often disturbing. The domineering mother's child is as fragile and vulnerable as a doll. Central figures pose triumphantly but always there is the small, dark reminder. In order to create the illusion of well-being, someone, something has had to be destroyed. Similarly, relationships between the sexes range from the affectionately familial to the savagely destructive. Each sex projects distortions upon the other, identities are lost in the mesh of social stereotyping. Adam and Eve are bemused as changing cultural perspectives influence projections and personal identity. Two of the wash prints are entitled *COURTLY LOVE* and *TWENTIETH CENTURY LOVE*. In the first,

the lady's head and shoulders predominate, she is demure and provocative while the man behind her looks both away from and to her. She is his Lady but it is his passion which makes her image. The second print shows the male figure in the foreground but he is like a merman, floating separately from the woman's figure in the background. The impetus is towards equilibrium but the evolution is difficult.

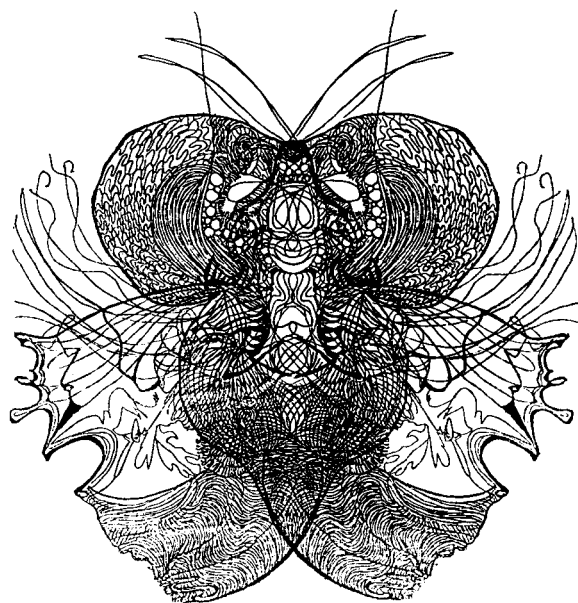
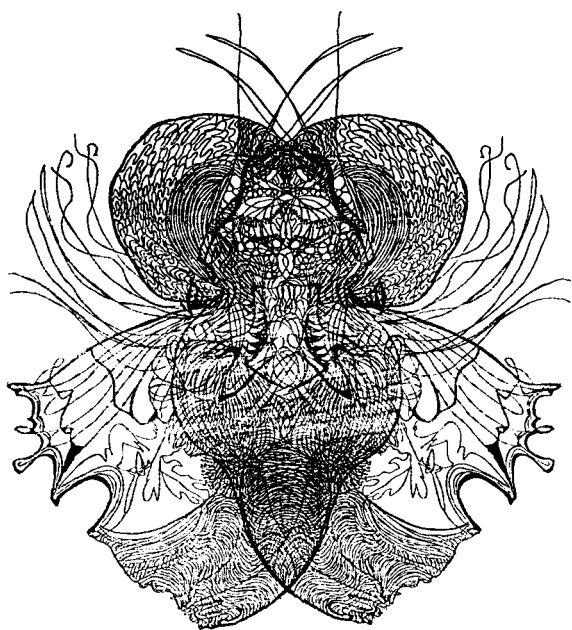


On another level, stereotypes are subsumed in mythic types. Reverberations from the psychic underground become stronger. Figures of goddesses appear. In the sequence, BECOMING, there is a mandalic mask-like face which, in the progression of the sequence, changes from the serene to the *disfigured tragic mode*. The impact of such sequences is not linear but simultaneous; the fundamental forms remain but the combination changes. The emphasis is on Becoming with the frozen visual image liberated through its relationship with the other prints of each set.

This relationship is not only technical but is essential to Jackson's vision. For example, in a sequence called SYMPHONY IN FOUR PARTS, the first and fourth parts are abstract organic forms from the ocean and beach. Abstract in the sense of not being separately identifiable but obviously associated with primal sexual energy and the impulse towards life on every level of being. Gradually the forms coalesce into magical shapes, human faces half-appear, bodies of fish, mermaid's

tails. These legendary beings flow into goddess shapes or perhaps they are stern queens from almost forgotten fairy tales. Human faces indicate potential form but human shapes do not appear. Creation returns upon itself, becomes again organic forms with all life contained within them. The mythic process speaks of eternal energy within a flux of forms, an elemental immortality where death is a necessary stage of life.

The SOCIAL BUTTERFLY sequence reproduced here employs the doubling motif so common in folklore and mythology. It can be viewed as a visual parable on narcissism or as a parable of the Self. To see oneself is to become self-aware but is also to set up a duality of consciousness: 1



am at once the perceiver and the perceived. In this sequence, the duality is resolved by a fusion of images or, rather, the images become one another. The ambiguity of the last double image is interesting: Inward contemplation becomes the extroverted gaze. Does the butterfly see nothing or all things? And is there a point where this duality is meaningless? Where, as the myths tell us, inner and outer reality are one.

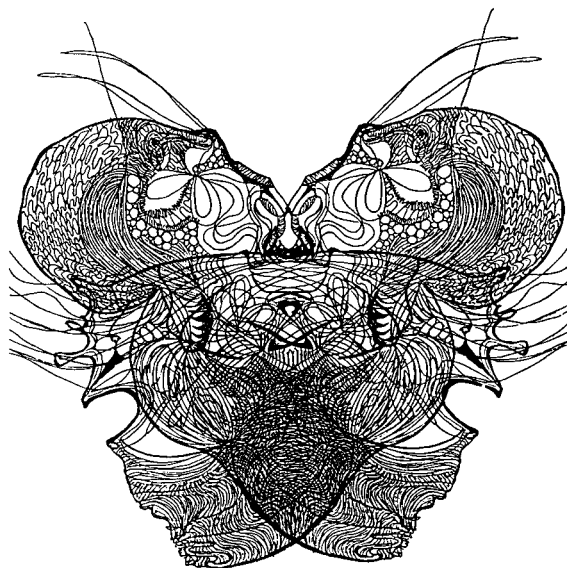
The artist's uncanny ability to project an inner landscape heightens our sense of a fluid reality. Individual images seem free-floating, as though matter has found a way to defy gravity. Jackson's previous work as a sculptor has evolved to

this two-dimensional plane highly suggestive of basic rhythms and relationships. At this stage of exploration, three-dimensional sculpture would impose its own space-time limitations. The mind is free and expresses its freedom through the spirit of play; that play being defined as a high seriousness which partakes of joy and sadness with equal passion. The microcosmic analogue is the interplay of molecules and atoms, substructures of form which combine to make life visible to the "ratio of our five senses". Disintegration of these forms is interpreted as death but may result in new combinations of life. As well as being the player, the artist becomes the medium expressing this play. In another sequence, CONSTELLATION HUMAN SAPIENS,

the first print is a stylized night sky, nebulous stars picking out the figure of the constellation; in the second print the figure is clearer, perhaps an ape, hero or human; in the third, the stars have receded and the figure is alone, looking up at the stars, thinking or dreaming, perhaps an ape, hero or human, must be the first two if it is to become human but is also descended from the stars. Again the perceptive levels are multiple: we are amused and touched by the figure who is a little absurd in her/his upwards and backwards glance to origins. The implications of the title invite the viewer to supply the future evolutionary stage. Will human sapiens, as opposed to homo sapiens, be the next leap into a new dimension of being?

Jackson's work provokes responses which draw the viewer into her sequences so that communication becomes a form of play which, in turn, is communication. Human sapiens may also be human ludens.

Co-existing with the psychic power evident in these prints and sequences is an astonishing emotional range. Wit and humour, joy in the sheer variety of beings and forms predominate but the dark vision is not refused. A caged owl becomes LE PETIT HIBOU, lyrically wise and sad. In more recent work, human figures caught in the tensions of war and the struggle to survive point to the beginning of new sequences.



In this sense, Jackson's prints are multi-dimensional. Hard-edged, washes, black and white and coloured, they explore a range of co-operative creativity between individual talent and technological potential. The limitations of the machine become part of the discipline of the artist. The capabilities of the machine mean that Jackson's prints are available to a wide audience at cheaper prices than other kinds of printing processes allow. It is one way to bring serious art out of the museums and into the homes of the people.

Here too, Jackson is a pioneer, as are most women artists of this century. Working out of a patriarchal tradition, many of them are struggling towards a new vision which requires new forms and techniques. It is exciting to see what kind of images they discover. The creative source may be fundamentally androgynous but centuries of patriarchal projections have lulled us to sleep. Gifted artists such as Sarah Jackson will help to transform us from somnambulists into living, vital beings. The myth-making process never stops. It simply assumes new shapes.

