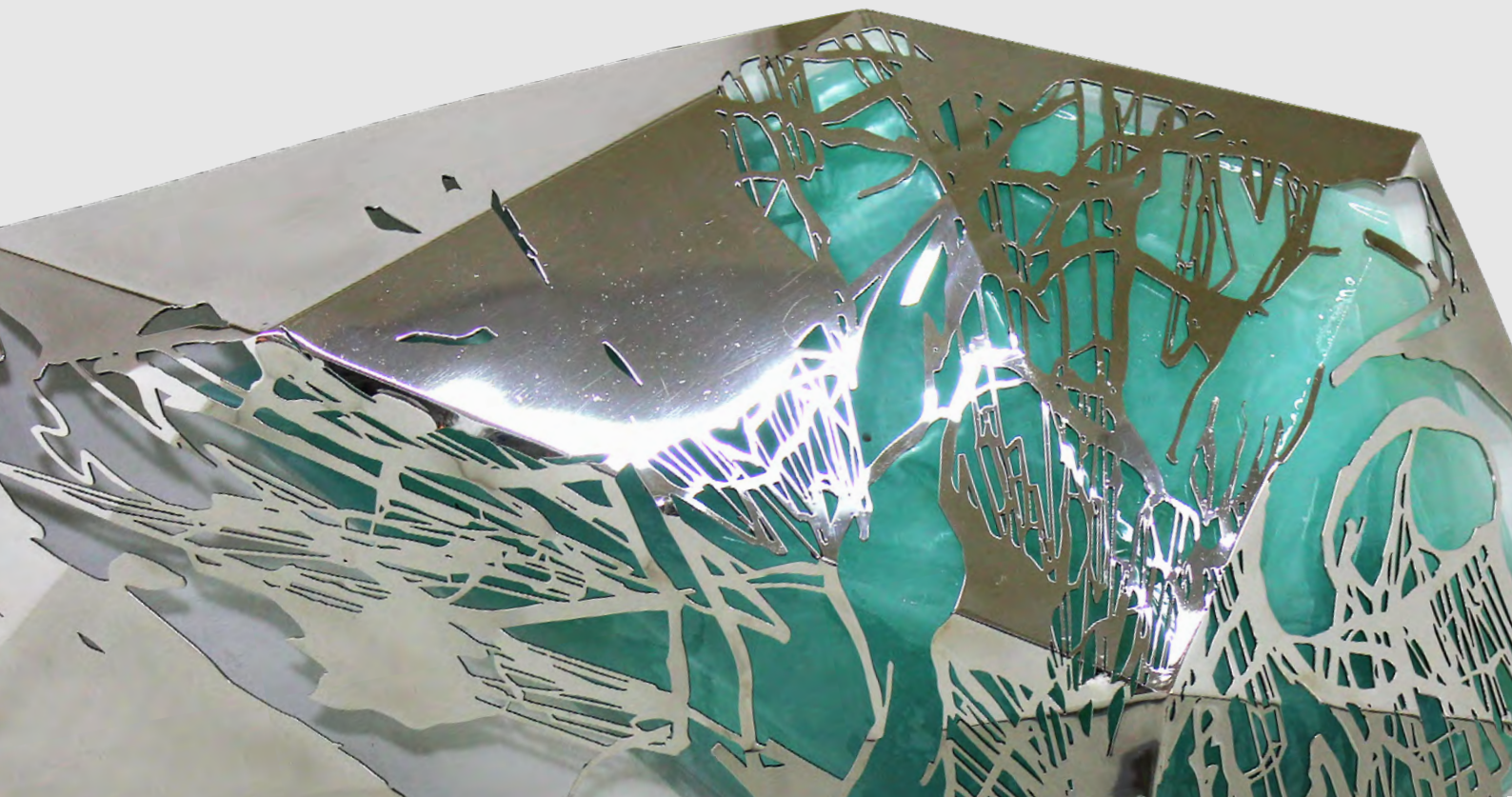




*Melissa Tan:  
False Doors,  
Glass Skies*





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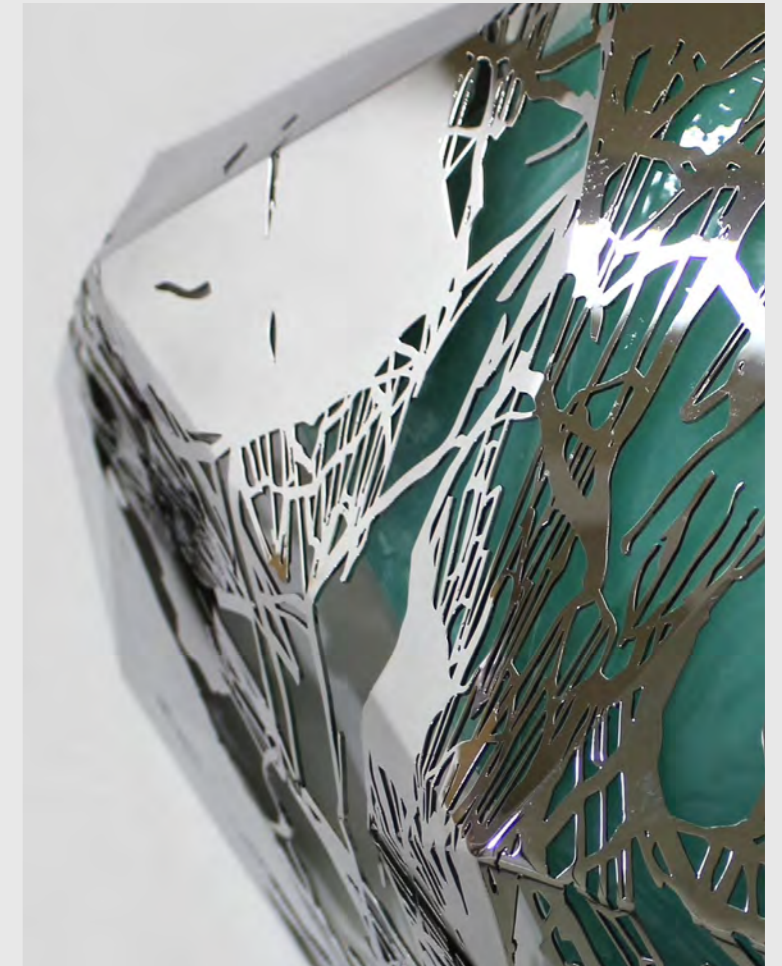
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Design by Aiden Taufiq

A digital catalogue for "False Doors, Glass Skies", a solo exhibition by Melissa Tan  
Richard Koh Fine Art, Blk 47 Malan Road, #01-26 Gillman Barracks, Singapore 109444

5 - 27 November 2021

Cover page: *Castalia* (detail), 2021



*Castalia* (detail), 2021





Cast of characters

*Amaterasu*

*Ino*

*Chang'e*

*Castalia*

*Alektø*

*Tisiphone*

*Daphne*

*Kallisto*

*Megaira*

*Lotis*

*Medusa*

*Arachne*

*Pandora*

*Sphinx*

*Nut*

*Charybdis*

*Lameia*

*Scylla*



Inventory

*Honzon*

*Safe*

*Cardea*

*Lotus*

*Bright*

*Celestial Door*

*Mirror*



◆ ◆

*How to be Both*  
Essay by Samantha Yap

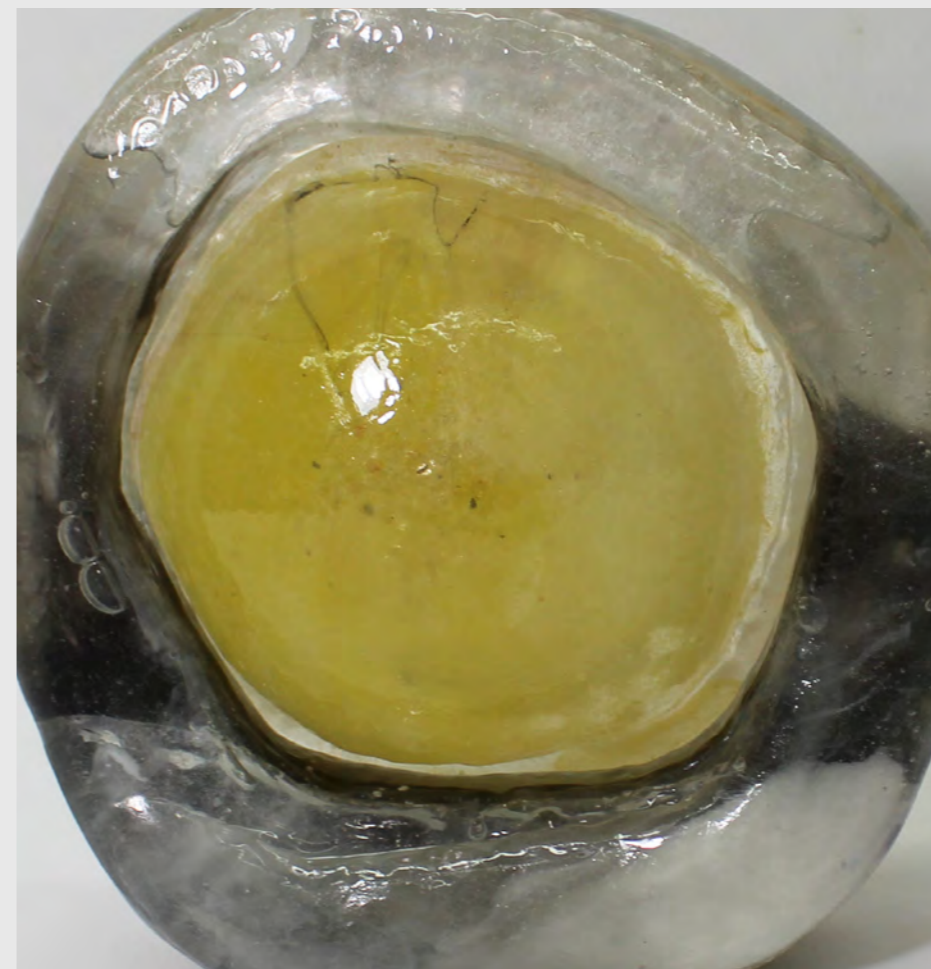
*"All we are is eyes looking for the unbroken or the edges where the broken bits might fit each other." - Ali Smith, How to be Both*

*False Doors, Glass Skies* takes on the question of survival as women in a world with dramatically higher stakes waged against powerful detractors determined to seize or subdue them. It pays attention to the intertwined destruction and self-preservation instincts at the heart of familiar myths and devotes a closer second look at the repertoire of diversions, actions, and rituals performed by different female characters in their varied attempts to assert and reclaim themselves from the people and circumstances who refuse them that right.

The exhibition features complementary sets of works — wall-bound metal works made from the trajectory maps of the asteroids named after various mythological women and an inventory of smaller resin sculptures that function as symbols of self-identification and protection, like amulets that these referenced figures may carry to gather strength, safety and live through their stories.

*You are journeying into a turbulent landscape, holding back eager pursuers,  
whatever path there is to take will be thorny and manifold, what do you hope to take with you?*

This essay is told through seven acts titled after seven symbols, each one corresponding to their namesake sculpture. Each segment is stylised as an act, referring to both parts of a dramatic performance and to carry out an action or thought.



*Bright (detail), 2021*

◆ ◆



### Act I. Horizon

*Start where everything above the surface of the earth appears to meet the surface of the earth. From afar, the sky and the earth seem to converge at the horizon. Above you, the same vast sky follows you in text and your waking life. Your feet are planted on the hard earth of the mountain. The sun follows your approach, bright and obvious until it crouches into disguise.*

Taking direct cues from the Egyptian hieroglyph Akhet which is expressed through the symbol of a sun rising over the mountain, *Horizon* also presents the resulting harmony of two parts coming together with a honey-coloured orb cradled by dark crags. Akhet is translated as “horizon” or the “place in the sky where the sun rises.”<sup>1</sup> As the furthest discernible point, the horizon is the perceived edge where two meet and the sky or the sun and the earth seemingly converge even as they remain separate. This coupling of the sky and the earth also recurs in common representations of the Egyptian goddess of the sky Nut whose feet and hands are often positioned firmly on the horizon and arched over the earth god Geb.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs* (Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1957), 489.





Detail of *The Greenfield Papyrus* showing Nut arched over the earth god Geb and supported by the god of atmosphere Shu. (Source: The British Museum)

The goddess Nut is also part of the cast of mythological women invoked in the exhibition and represented through one of the wall-bound metal pieces. The metal sculptures map out near and far coordinates that stretch across time and space. Their form takes after the namesake asteroid and its skyward trajectory and the body of the sculpture features certain items, poses or interactions that are closely associated with the mythological figure in visual art and stories.

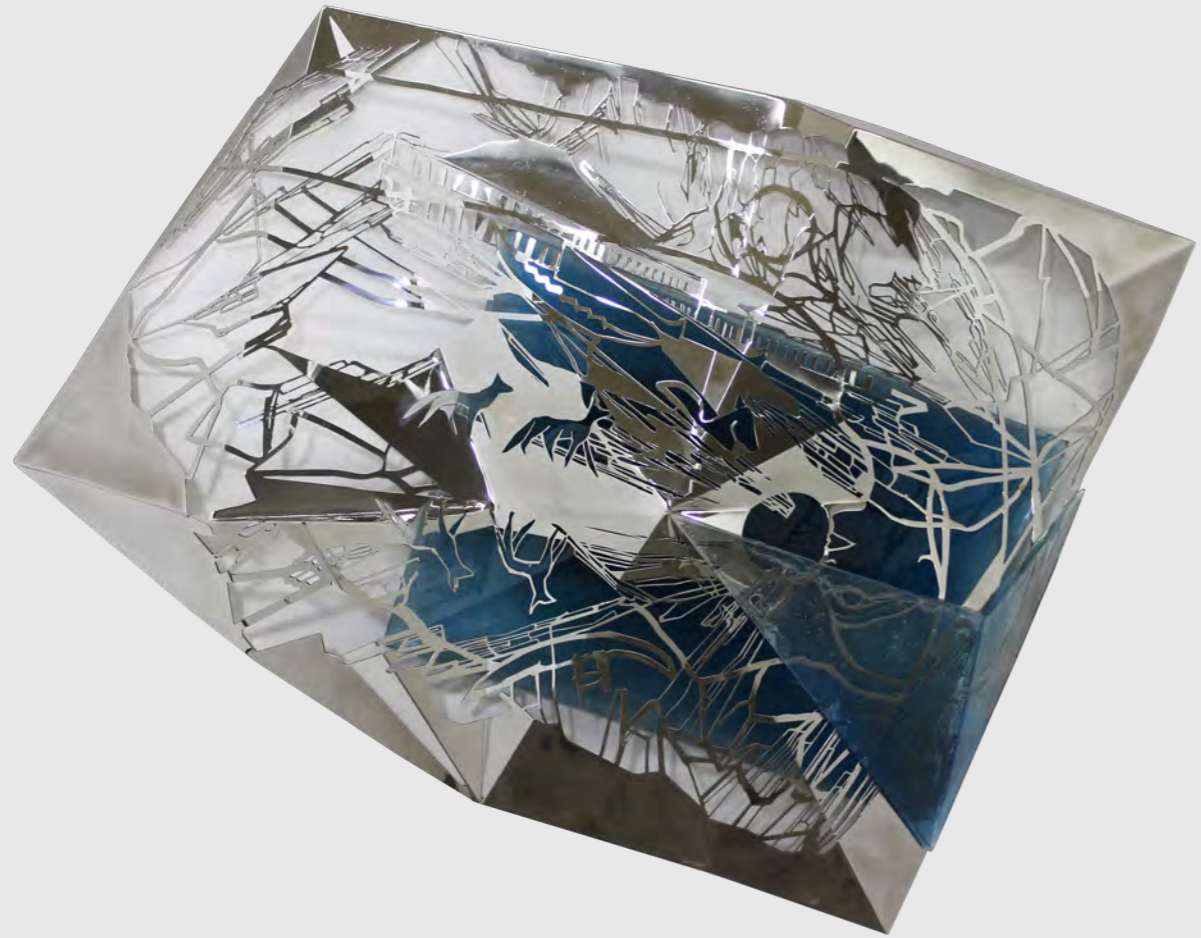
At first encounter, the sculpture *Nut* appears as thin ribbons of metal that crisscross and reveal areas intentionally hollowed out and illuminated by the coloured resin underneath. The subtle impression of Nut's face and her angled body is projected through the incisions and hollow parts of the metal. The incline of Nut's body seems to take on a rectangular form, stretching sinuously like the roof of a home that shelters and looks over its inhabitants.

This state of suspension with the goddess perched above like an arch recalls themes speculated in Melissa Tan's previous solo exhibition, *Under the Arched Sky*. In the exhibition essay, 'Suspensions', Euginia Tan highlights how in "all variants of suspension" that are at play in the artist's tedious exploration of her medium and subject matter, what is meted out are "reactions and plausibility."<sup>2</sup> In most mythological stories, these reactions are necessary responses in the face of vexed circumstances, because the "[t]he title of goddess wields a certain power and control, yet is fraught with knowing how to tolerate a miasma of pressure" and harks back to the narratives of power, escape, and survival that characterises most accounts of female mythological figures who are transformed into a monster or a lesser animate subject like a tree, both through their wills and against their wills.<sup>3</sup>

While these drastic measures, monstrous responses, and protective gestures are primarily deployed to avert crisis or death, they also uncover an enduring plausibility. As a sequel that develops ideas from her previous solo exhibition, *False Doors, Glass Skies* follows from the artist's reflection of various female mythological characters and the ways of living and being that are suggested through their stories. Like the titular motif of the false door hinting at the existence of another pathway beyond the obvious one, or the horizon that separates and connects both sky and sea or land, the exhibition hopes to offer ways of being both, of holding more than one possibility and reading of a story at a time.

<sup>2</sup> Euginia Tan and Melissa Tan, "Suspensions," in *Under the Arched Sky* (Kuala Lumpur: Richard Koh Fine Art Sdn. Bhd., 2019), pp. 4-13, 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



*Nut*  
2021  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
85 (L) x 67.5 (B) x 12.5 (D) cm



*Horizon*  
2021  
Found Object, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
13.5 (H) x 23 (L) x 17 (B) cm  
(Assembled Form)





## *Act II. Safe*

*To ensure that your data is properly saved, please input your name.*

*Would you like to overwrite the previously saved file?*



One way to write “safe” in Mandarin Chinese is 安 with the likeness of a roof sheltering a woman 女. In the exhibition, *Safe* also has two parts comprising a clasp-like base securing a dark green key that closely resembles a locking mechanism with its shackle snug firmly in the latches. The reference for the reed-shaped key draws on the linguistic self-representation of Queen Hatshepsut in the 18th Dynasty of Egypt.

As the rare queen in a lineage of kings, Hatshepsut struggled with issues of self-representation. The Egyptian written language commonly supplemented the first-person singular pronoun “I” with a pictorial classifier to specify the social status of the speaker but it was unable to account for the variation of a female King or Queen.

Bypassing the existing classifiers, where for instance, the symbol of a human female or an anthropomorphised male king helps to respectively specify the identity of the “I” as female or a divine figure, Hatshepsut offered her own classifier that had no affiliation to gender, divinity or social rank. Rather than employing a straightforward remedy and making a hybrid pictogram from the existing symbols for “female” and “king”, Hatshepsut chose to identify herself differently through a common plant form of the reed.<sup>4</sup>

The material adaptation of Hatshepsut’s reed classifier in *Safe* takes on the part of the shackle or key in the artist’s stylised representation of a lock. Identity or knowledge of oneself can be read here dually as a thing to protect and also something that similarly protects.

The stories of most of the mythological figures in the exhibition fall into the narrative formula of a “before” and “after”. Similarly pursued by the god Apollo, the river nymph Castalia was believed to have either shapeshifted into a spring or drowned herself in the spring to fend off the force of his amorous intent. Before, Lamia was the queen of Libya beloved by the powerful Greek god Zeus. After, she incurs the wrath of Zeus’ wife who metastasises Lamia’s beauty into a monstrosity. The “before” and “after” chronology echoes trauma narratives and their effects on the survivor, painfully cleaving a time of relative innocence before trauma and the changes endured after the traumatic event. In the face of these life-altering circumstances, to continue articulating an “I” is a recognition of the broken and unbroken parts of the self that continue.

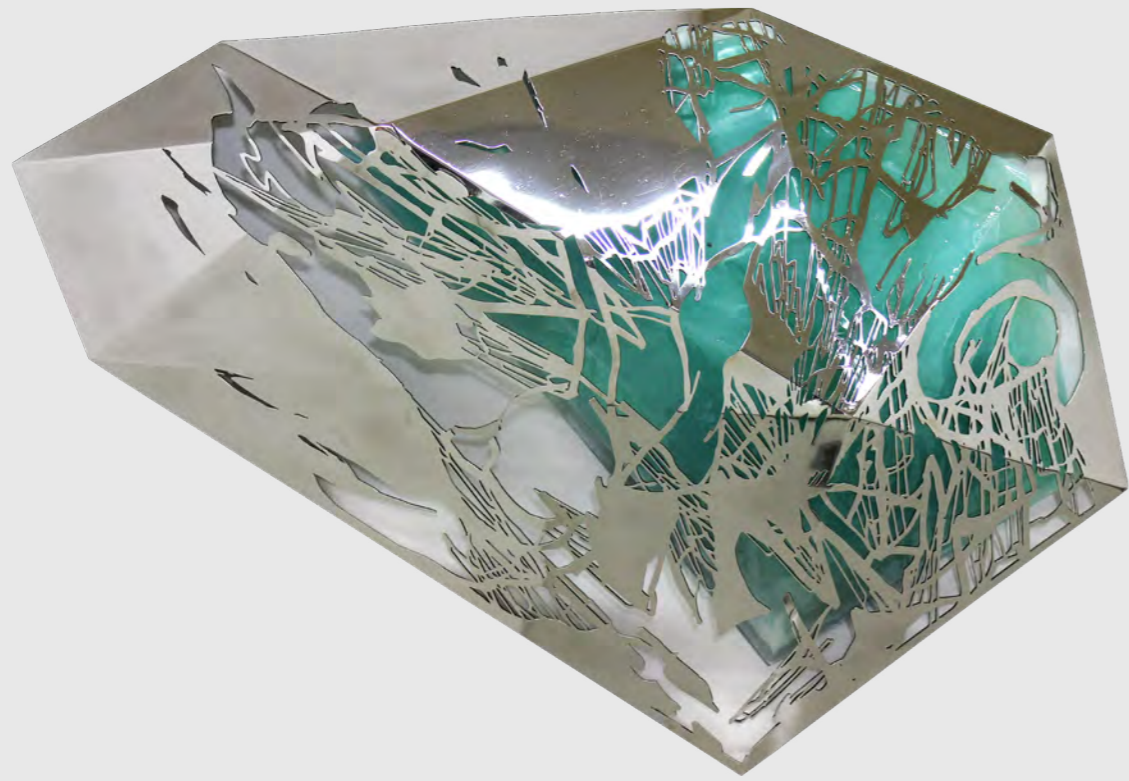
To identify as your own “I”, as Hatshepsut did with her mysterious reed classifier, is perhaps to devise ways to wrestle back control as the writer and protagonist in the story of our lives.

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<sup>4</sup> Orly Goldwasser, “The Dream of Haremhab” (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011), <https://youtu.be/0llv58zwGhU>.





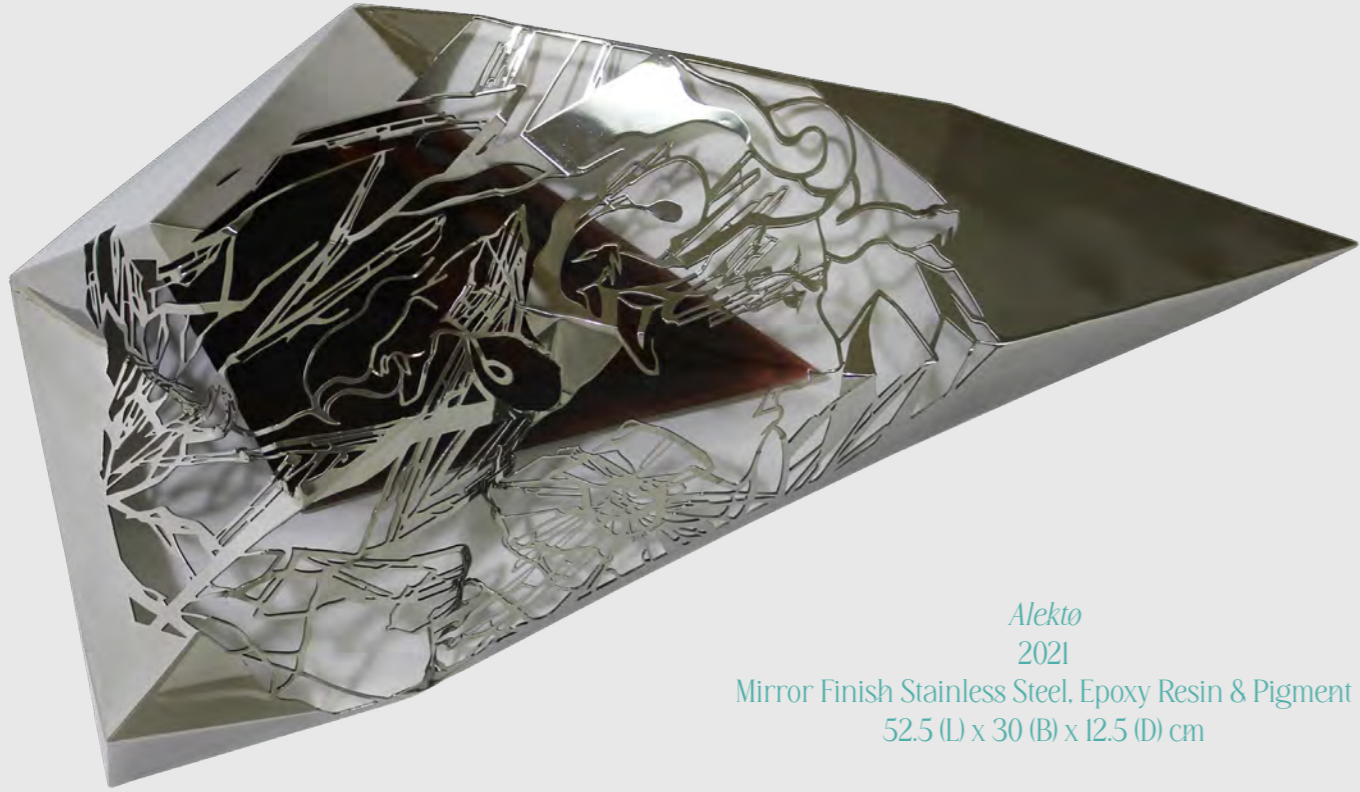


*Castalia*  
2020  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
51 (L) x 35 (B) x 7.5 (D) cm



*Safe*  
2021  
Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
10.8 (H) x 19.4 (L) x 6.2 (B) cm  
(Assembled Form)





*Aleko*  
2021  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
52.5 (L) x 30 (B) x 12.5 (D) cm



*Tisiphone*  
2020  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
50.5 (L) x 46 (B) x 9.5 (D) cm





### Act III. Cardea

*You are clever, well-loved, beautiful, and have much to lose. There is a lot more you can gain only if you are willing to forsake something valuable. Are you ready?*

*Cardea* is named after the Roman goddess of hinge who watches over doorways and thresholds. Like the other smaller sculptures, it consists of more than one part, taking the shape of a stylised hinge that supports an orbiting sphere in place. The orbiting sphere also presents a metaphorical reading of the earth as a hinge that consistently spins on its axis, facilitating the passage of days and time. In Ovid's *Fasti*, Cardea's central attribute is the hinge and she "opens what is closed, and closes what is open."<sup>5</sup>

Ovid tells the story of the nymph Crane (another alias of Cardea) whose irresistible charm made her the target of multiple suitors. To keep them at bay, Crane outsmarted her pursuers by beckoning them to lead them to a sequestered cave, allowing her to make her escape. When the Roman god of doorways Janus propositioned her, Crane relied on the same ruse but failed to deceive him. Like a bitter settlement, she is offered "control of hinges" as "the price of [her] lost maidenhood."<sup>6</sup> As part of their exchange, he also offers her a hawthorn, granting her the ability to repel any harm that enters through her doors.

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<sup>5</sup> James George Frazer, *Ovid's Fasti* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 325.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.



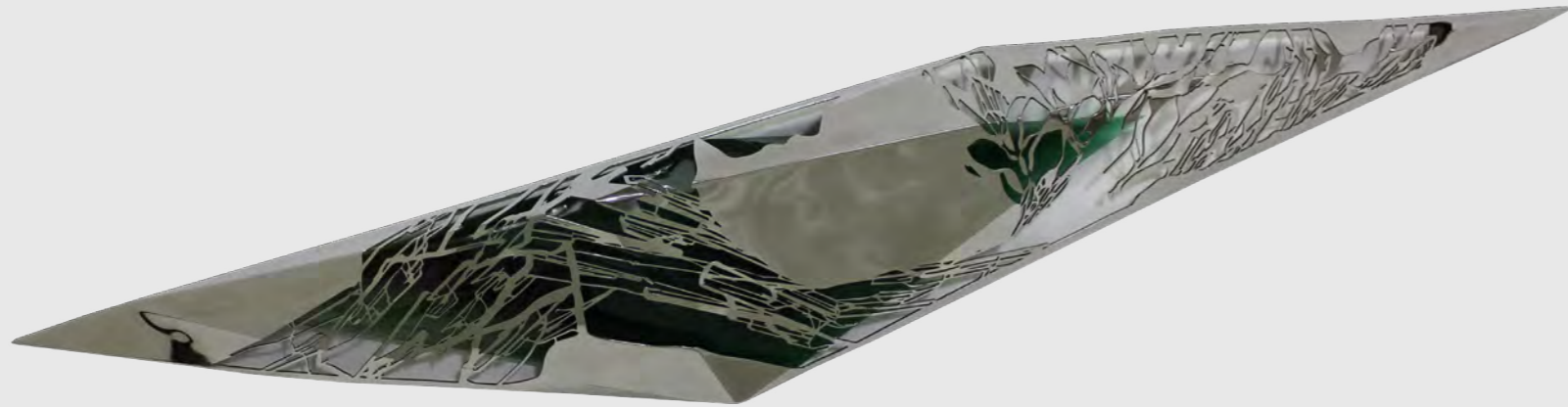


Detail of *Apollo and Daphne*, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1622–1625, Galleria Borghese, Rome. (Source: Wikimedia)

There is a terrible irony in Janus' decision to gift Cardea in sardonic kindness. What perhaps is the use of this power when it comes belatedly? If Cardea had the hawthorn during her encounter with Janus, would it have helped her keep him away from her domain and the threshold of her body? The hinges on a door allow for movement in two directions, it opens or closes, allows or denies, it is a temporary equipoise of power balancing and deciding between opposing forces and interests. Clever ruses were not enough before and more than a gift of power, what Cardea received was an uneasy compromise.

Cardea's story of being pursued by an eager hunter also recalls the nymph Daphne's experiences with Apollo documented in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Apollo stubbornly pursues her despite Daphne's unwillingness to reciprocate. She is aided in her escape by the gods who transform her into a laurel tree, completely rebuffing Apollo's amorous advances and his intention of conquering her. Daphne's representation in the exhibition is adapted from Gian Lorenzo Bernini's treatment in *Apollo and Daphne* that captures her hands amid transformation, retaining traces of their original form. The incisions on the metal sculpture *Daphne* form an outline of her hands in the crux of the bargain she makes with the gods. Hands capable of holding and releasing something, bringing something closer or blocking its approach becomes the starting point of Daphne's transformation.

A hinge is a turning point, like a forked road that invites the traveller to decide between two alternatives. On the one hand, it is trying to outsmart your pursuers. On the other hand, it is gaining something only through the loss of another. On the one hand, it is holding onto what you refuse to surrender. On the other hand, it is having to entreat a higher power who takes away your human body in exchange for a semblance of autonomy. In these stories, even as it is in reality, there is no gain without loss but the loss is always disproportionately borne by those in similar circumstances as Cardea and Daphne.

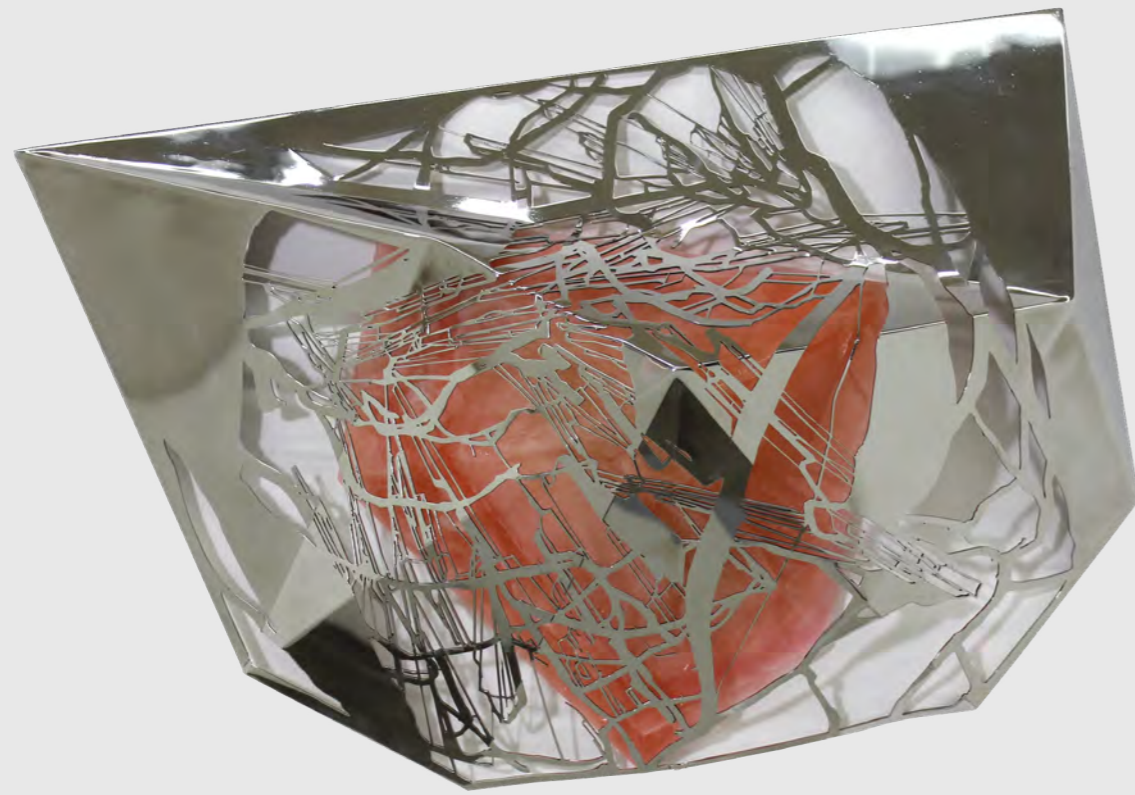


*Daphne*  
2021  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
82.3 (L) x 25.3 (B) x 11 (D) cm



*Cardea*  
2021  
Found Object, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
28 (H) x 25.5 (L) x 13.2 (B) cm  
(Assembled Form)





*Kallisto*  
2021  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
52.5 (L) x 37.5 (B) x 10 (D) cm



*Megaira*  
2021  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
52 (L) x 30 (B) x 11 (D) cm







#### Act IV. Lotus

*On your travels, you find a stinking jar that is rumoured to either restore your health or unleash more monsters to slay. You think, what if it is both and not either? The battles you have endured so far have taught you the mechanics of risk and reward. Let your curiosity decide.*

To assemble *Lotus*, the lotus-shaped body is balanced on a short stand and an orange lid is placed on the top to cover the remaining opening. Reminiscent of a *pithos* which is the Greek name for a large earthenware jar or storage container, *Lotus* also features a wide mouth and body tapering to a narrower base. Before popular culture propagated the idea of Pandora's box as a literal object or an allusion to being beset with troubles, it was originally a *pithos* that Pandora was unable to resist opening. The story typically assigns the first human woman Pandora both the responsibility of looking over the *pithos* and the subsequent blame of opening it, effectively freeing what was trapped inside.

"Pandora's box" is also used to describe a process or course of action that generates numerous troubles. For instance, the presence of lustful gods driven by desire opened a Pandora's box of difficulties for the nymphs. In Ovid's accounts, another beautiful nymph Lotis attracts the attention of a minor god Priapus and ends up sharing Daphne's fate by transforming into a lotus tree to escape capture. In the exhibition, *Lotis* references this turning point in her story through the bulbous forms of the Ziziphus lotus (the lotus tree common in Greek mythology) incised on the sculpture.





*Lotus*  
2021  
Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
20.5 (H) x 13.5 (L) x 14.5 (B) cm  
(Assembled Form)



*Lotis*  
2021  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
60.5 (L) x 37.7 (B) x 10.5 (D) cm





*Pandora*  
2021  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
94.3 (L) x 66.5 (B) x 14 (D) cm



While common understandings of the myth assume that Pandora lets loose all kinds of malevolent entities trapped in the *pithos*, other retellings believed that it was only virtuous things that were protected in the box. Unable to resist the temptation of curiosity, Pandora inadvertently releases these good things that leave the earth and humans, returning to the domain of the gods. What stayed behind was *elphis* or the spirit of hope in Greek mythology, commonly depicted as a youthful girl holding flowers or a cornucopia in her hands. The striking flower form of *Lotus* thus also recalls the reading of how *elphis* remains in Pandora's *pithos* after everything else has escaped. In the wall-bound sculpture *Pandora*, the outline of *elphis* also emerges from a round jar-like form, flanked by *Pandora* and her husband Epimetheus on the other side.

The Greek word *elphis* and its association with hope have also been more closely interpreted as a potential that sits between supposition and expectation.<sup>7</sup> Rather than a hope that good exists, it is a hope that refers to the expectation that something exists, similar to the thought experiment of Schrödinger's cat hovering between life and death. It is an expansive slippery kind of hope that is tied to good, evil, or any murky composite of both. Perhaps it is this same ambiguous *elphis* that Daphne and *Lotis* hold in their hearts when they beckon the gods to aid their escape. Both nymphs necessarily take on another path of being to avoid being captured. They morph and survive, leaving their pursuers wanting.

<sup>7</sup> Willem Jacob Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod: Works and Days*, Vv. 1-382 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 70.

◆

Act V. Bright

*You have been taking your rest at inns in small towns. The innkeeper across different locations always feels familiar and homely, like a gatekeeper protecting you from harm. They watch over you as you watch over the cat who has become your unexpected companion.*

◆

*Bright* can be conceived as an amulet that wards against danger through a concentration of light or brightness. The sculpture is made from the pairing of two organic circular forms, encompassing a silver halo that contains and gives prominence to a luminous inner sphere. The close-fitting grey ring acts as a protective circle that borders around the perceived source of personal and incandescent power, much like the wrapping of a macrame netting around a precious crystal pendant.

In a collectable card game, *Magic: the Gathering*, the Circle of Protection card serves as a protective enchantment that shields the player from specific forms of anticipated damage. The form of the circle also recalls the execution of an offensive attack, stun or buff spellcasting across video or mobile games. These Area of Effect (AOE) skills are capable of extending the range of the attack or spell across a particular domain, making it effective to heal yourself and any nearby allies or to rain a barrel of punches on a congregating group of enemies. In most of the animation for such abilities, the AOE is often demarcated by a luminous circle, visually communicating where the skill and its effects are contained and heavily concentrated. Likewise, in other spiritual work or spellcasting, circular forms and constructions have always been regarded as protective symbols that encompass the user in a circle of safety, putting them temporarily out of harm's way. A ring of salt was also believed to be an energetically guarded space capable of repelling evil spirits.

◆



*Medallion with Athena and Medusa, 200–150 B.C., The Archaeological Museum, Thessaloniki. (Source: National Gallery of Art)*

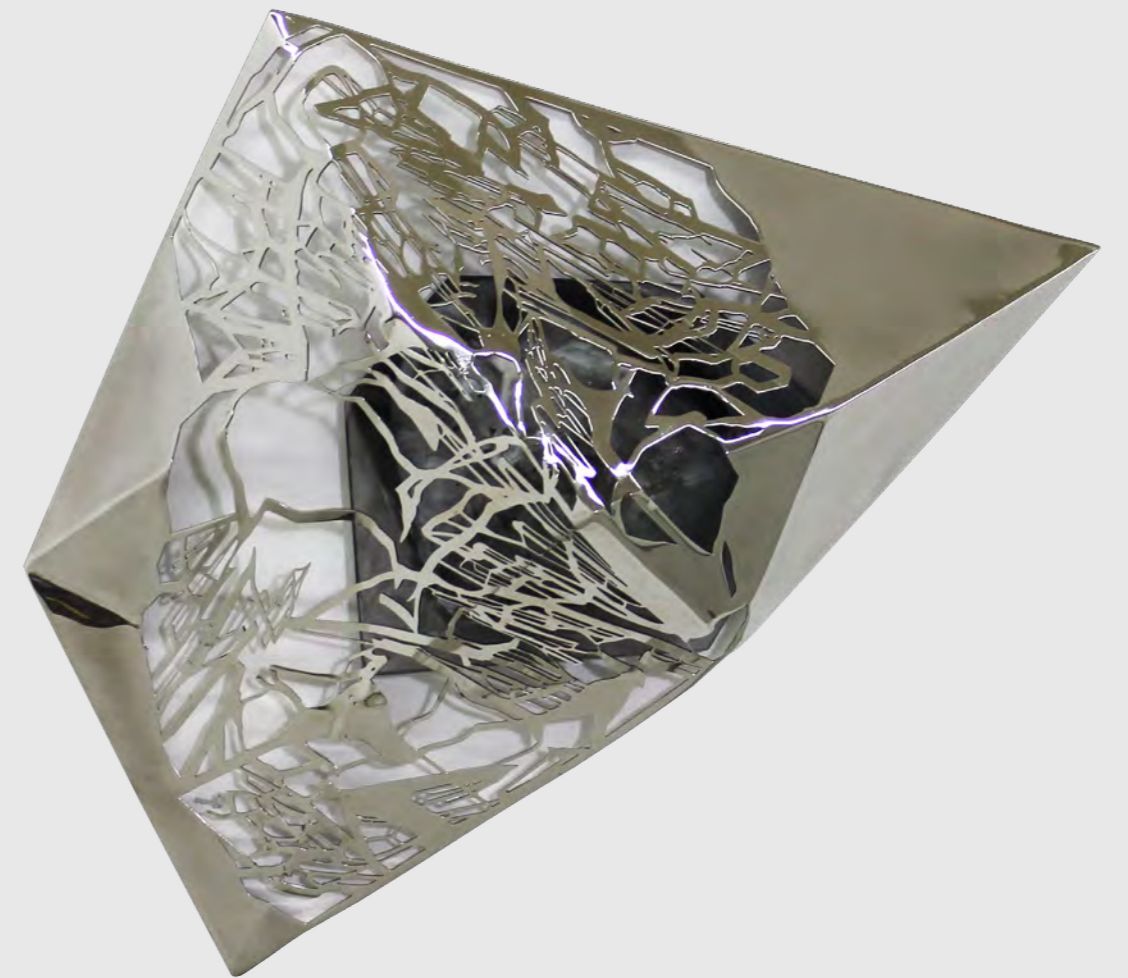
*Medusa* features a representation of the Greek gorgon Medusa in a protective role, channelled as an attribute taken on by the Greek goddess of wisdom and war Athena. Like her other counterparts Castalia, Daphne, and Lotis, Medusa's transformation into a monster with snakes for hair was the punishment of incurring Athena's wrath and her ill-omened affair with the Greek god of the sea Poseidon. As a monster, she was slain by Perseus who eventually gifted her head to Athena. The convex shape of the sculpture also bears similarity to a round shield that emphasises the protective role played by Medusa in this rendition of her story. The outline of a face with coiled hair on the sculpture is adapted from an existing representation of Athena and Medusa on a medallion, with the goddess wearing the snake hair of Medusa as an offensive and defensive garb to ward off enemies and endow herself with greater strength. Significantly, the word "ward" can mean two things, as both something to be taken care of like a child under the care of a guardian, and also something that takes care of another like a ward that dispels unwanted threats. To safeguard is an instinct.



*Medusa*  
2021  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
49.3 (L) x 51 (B) x 9.5 (D) cm



*Bright*  
2021  
Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
26 (H) x 24.5 (L) x 8.5 (B) cm  
(Assembled Form)



*Change*  
2021  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
40.5 (L) x 37 (B) x 8.5 (D) cm

◆

Act VI. Celestial Door

*You have gained allies along the way. It is both harder and easier to go on when you have people to take care of who in turn also take care of you.*

◆

During the exhibition preparation in late September, the artist experienced a nightmare where she found herself in a house with broken windows. In this house, she was busy preventing a pair of blackbirds from gaining entry but despite her efforts to mend the windows, they remained vulnerable to the birds' persistent attacks. Eventually, the crack lines on the glass window dissolved, leaving just the opening of a window without any glass threshold. Looking out, the birds were perched silently on a tree, waiting and watching with close anticipation as though stalking prey before attacking. Waking up from this ominous dream, the previous title of the work False Door was revised to *Celestial Door*.

Words are potent incantations. A false door may hold the promise of escape or safety, but in the same light of a promise, there is also the cast shadow of a possible impasse, a dead-end that closes in before the ending can be rewritten. The duality of a given situation does not confirm the possibility of an optimistic outcome, only the possibility that there is always more than one path that can be taken. The modular door structure in *Celestial Door* made of four blue parts can be put together to reinforce the entryway or taken apart and left empty.

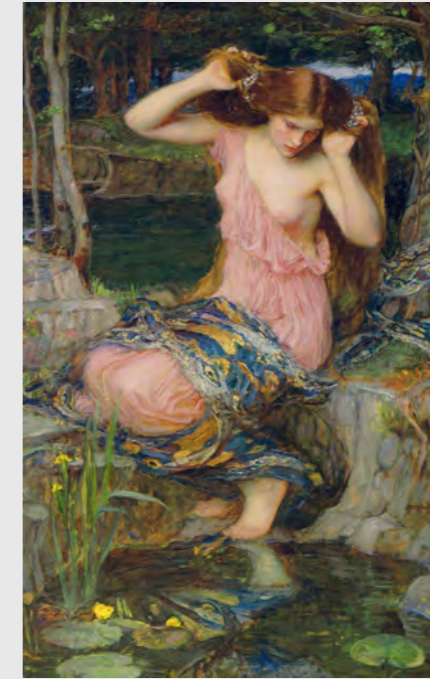
How do we travel the fine lines of a story and reach a different reading? In the act of renaming, the subject matter is reconstructed even with the same constituent elements.

◆



To dream of a flock of blackbirds foretells big life changes. To dream of a broken window suggests difficulty trusting people from a history of betrayal. Both these points may relate to Lamia, who was punished for being beloved by the influential Greek god Zeus. His wife Hera enacted her revenge by either killing Lamia's children or instigating Lamia to kill most of her children. Said to have been transformed by the anguish of her torment or by Hera's hands, Lamia's beauty moulted into monstrosity and took on the form of a serpent. As a type of bogeyman used to stir fear in children, she was said to prey exclusively on mothers and children. In one rendition of the myth, Hera had cursed Lamia with the inability to sleep and Zeus had granted Lamia a last kindness by gifting her with detachable eyes.

With *Lameia*, the projected form of a woman draws on John William Waterhouse's depiction with her face cast downwards, her gaze averted and her feet dangling by the edge of the water. Lamia's association with Keto, the Greek goddess of sea monsters and dangers in the sea, is also referenced through the inclusion of a shark's tail discernible in the curved form of her lower body.



*Lamia*, John William Waterhouse, 1909. (Source: Wikimedia)

In popular culture across anime or games, Lamia is portrayed as a chimaera of a woman and snake, equipped with a vicious serpent's tail. The contemporary adaptation of Lamia in *Raised by Wolves* is the chosen alias of the android Mother who is tasked with taking care of children in a new world. Reprogrammed from a ruthless weapon to a caregiving android, her chief struggle lies in the difficult overlapping of her abilities to protect her children and her innate capacity to destroy. As foretold in the myths, the key to her weaponisation lies in her eyes. Eventually, she chooses to keep her eyes aside so that she can continue taking care of her children without endangering them. Rather than seeing her origins as a curse, Mother perceives her powers as an untapped resource, a part of herself that she never knew existed. There are multiple dimensions to Mother/Lamia's character that springs forth from different readings of the mythical story.

In some tellings of the myths, Scylla is regarded as the grotesque offspring of Lamia who preys on unsuspecting seafarers. In the exhibition sculpture bearing her namesake, the human face of Scylla peeks out from the flurry of lethal limbs and tails, evoking the turning point of the myth where she was transformed through the jealousy and witchcraft of Circe as a result of catching the sea-god's attention. There is no clear designation of the enemy because survival compels drastic measures, just as Scylla invites sailors who sail too close to her rocks to meet their death, or another's jealousy besets her monstrous change. One looks at Scylla incised on the sculpture and sees the sharp point of the asteroid form behind her like a raised weapon coupled with the downward trajectory of Scylla's pose with her closed eyes and outstretched hands. She is charging forward and she is also striking a defensive pose, her hands raised before her in anticipation of what is to come. The ability to see both, to continue to see both, lies in the faith that a story can be read in multiple ways, that personal tragedy does not diminish our will to anticipate and continue and that a life can be lived in multiple ways.





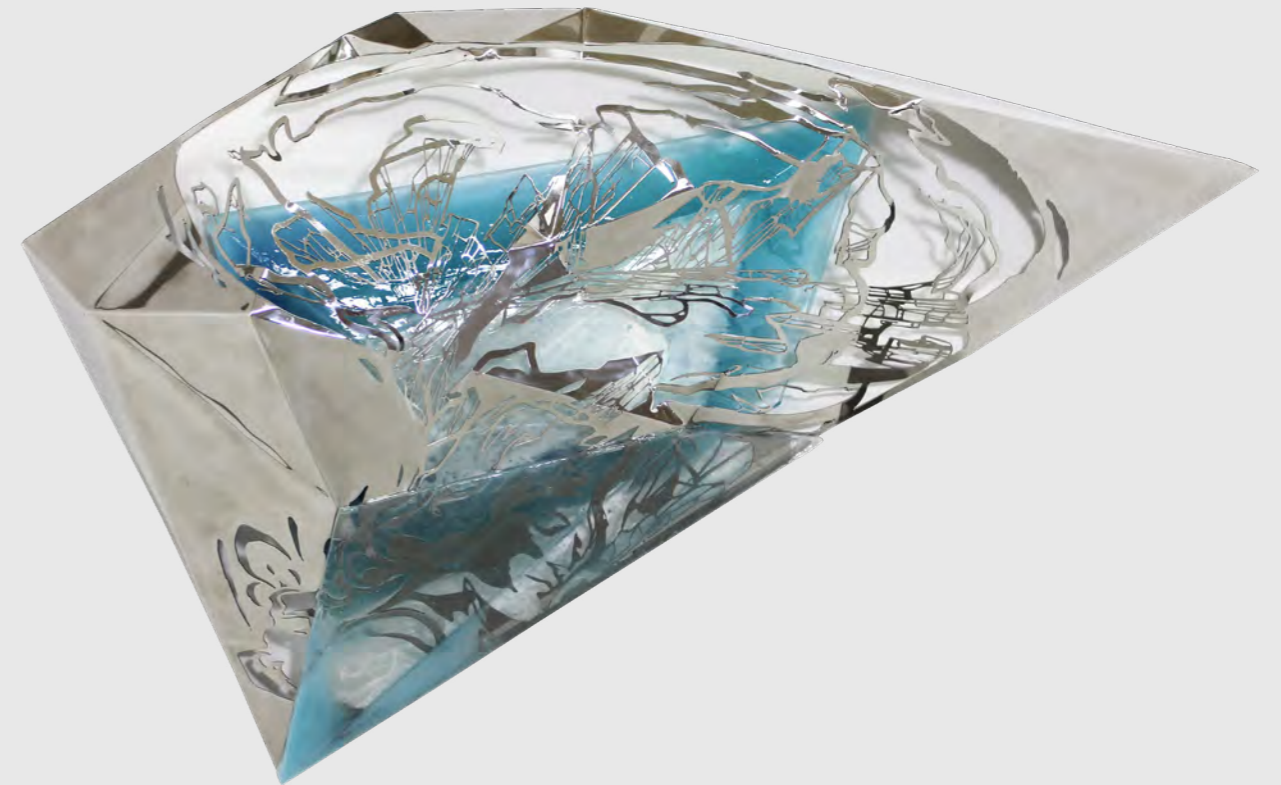
*Lameia*  
2021  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
138 (L) x 105 (B) x 15.5 (D) cm



*Celestial Door*  
2021  
Found Object, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
16.5 (H) x 21 (L) x 13.2 (B) cm  
(Assembled Form)



*Scylla*  
2021  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
101 (L) x 128.5 (B) x 18 (D) cm



*Charybdis*  
2021  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
88.7 (L) x 55 (B) x 12 (D) cm



◆ ◆

Act VII. Mirror

*Stage 7 cleared. New high score recorded. Continue?*

◆ ◆

In addition to the hidden circular plate that can be likened to a secretive mirror, *Mirror* also consists of eight other parts that are assembled over the mirror concealing its presence. These eight parts recall the Japanese sun goddess Amaterasu's *Yata no Kagami* (loosely translated as the eight-fold mirror). Following the chaotic outcome of her fight with her younger brother Susanoo who had challenged her right to rule, *Amaterasu* went into hiding out of remorse and the world plunged into darkness without her light. Eventually, she was lured out through the mirror and the curiosity of glimpsing her reflection. Her serene face, as it emerges from the cave bathed in light, is also reflected in *Amaterasu* which casts the close crop of her profile against an outburst of sharp lines like the sun's rays.

◆ ◆



In Ali Smith's *How to be Both*, an inventive novel that playfully weaves timelines and intertwines the stories of an expectation-defying 15th-century painter and 16-year old George, the question of duality follows even in the process of grieving over a loved one. Love and loss are lived dually. The teenager George forges a slow relationship with art and the process of close looking as she reminisces about their late mother.

"And which comes first...What we see or how we see?" George's mother asks them.<sup>8</sup>

The mirror does not stage an impersonal reflection, it dramatises the catalysing of sight into insight, metabolising what we see into an impression or a form of knowledge. What we see and how we see is closely tethered. Amaterasu looks at her own mirrored reflection and makes a brave reentry into the world. What does she see? A face looking back at her, the first she had seen since her self-imposed exile. How does she see it? Her face unchanged as though she had recently stepped into the cave? Maybe, in the quiet composure of the reflected image, Amaterasu witnesses the cloistered solitude of a face belonging to someone who still had much to do?



The premise of the exhibition also hinges on this revelatory play between sight and insight. The false door is a way of being misled, usually not out of choice but out of necessity, it is a kind of detour that navigates the trappings of one set path, like Daphne who chooses to transform into the laurel tree to fend off the unwanted advances of a god. The phrase "glass skies" revises the familiar metaphor of the glass ceiling that is commonly regarded as an invisible and inevitable barrier preventing members of marginalised groups from going further. The intentional revision of "ceiling" to "skies" also summons the artist's reference of asteroid forms in the wall-bound sculptures to depict the ongoing and persistent trajectory of the characters that these formations are named after. It offers a more hopeful adaptation that foregoes the limitation of this invisible ceiling for the vast expanse of the sky. Perhaps, to dream of a world where there would be no ceiling would be wishful thinking when privilege and power forge ladders to better circumstances but it does not discount the ongoing trials of those pushing back and against that ceiling to claim spaces for living and being. In art, we may imagine, rename, and reconstruct. The glass ceiling can be envisioned instead as a glass sky, not a threshold that limits our growth but the arched sky over our heads.

Reflecting on the colourful cast featured in the exhibition, I feel an enduring sense of sympathy towards these fictional characters who may not be real but are caught in difficult circumstances that sometimes mirror what is endured in reality. To imagine a kind of communion between myself and these mythological figures, similarly, as the artist caught in the exchanges between these figures, their stories and visual representations, reaches back across time and draws connections across disparate points. When we look closely, more than one reading avails itself to us. It is this persistent spawning of possibilities that remind us that pain is but one vital outcome out of all others that have yet to come to fruition.

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<sup>8</sup> Ali Smith, *How to be Both* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 258.





*Amaterasu*  
2021  
Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
51 (L) x 40.5 (B) x 9 (D) cm



*Mirror*  
2021  
Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
3.5 (H) x 23 (L) x 23 (B) cm  
(Assembled Form)



*Ino*  
2021

Mirror Finish Stainless Steel, Epoxy Resin & Pigment  
27 (L) x 40.5 (B) x 8.5 (D) cm

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Melissa Tan (b. 1989, Singapore) is a visual artist based in Singapore and received her BA (Fine Arts) from Lasalle College of the Arts in 2011. Her works are based on nature, themes of transience and beauty of the ephemeral. Her recent projects revolve around landscapes and the process of formation. Interested in geography and textures of rocks, she explores to translate the visual language through different mediums. Employing processes such as paper cutting, painting and silk-screen techniques, she is interested in materiality and how the medium supports the work. Though trained as a painter, she also works with video, sound and objects.

She was included in *The Singapore Show: Future Proof*, Singapore Art Museum at 8Q in 2012 and *An Atlas of Mirrors*, Singapore Biennale 2016, Singapore in 2016. She also participated in the National Art Council and Dena Foundation Artist Residency program (Paris, France) in 2013. Public collections include Singapore Art Museum (SAM), Marina Bay Sands (Singapore), Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GIC) New York, Facebook (Singapore), CapitaLand (Singapore). Solo exhibitions include *Under the Arched Sky* (2019) Richard Koh Fine Art, Singapore; *Back to where we've never been* (2018), Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur; *Arc of Uncertainties* (2016), Richard Koh Fine Art, Singapore; and *the Darkest Hour is Just Before Dawn* (2014), Richard Koh Fine Art, Singapore.



Samantha Yap (b. 1993, Singapore) shuffles between writing, curation, and project management. She is interested in forms of reciprocity such as the ethics of care, love, and vulnerability as well as the exploration of feminist perspectives across writing and visual culture. Her recent exhibitions include *Time Passes*, National Gallery Singapore, and *What is the current that presents a behaved waist*, Yeo Workshop. Her writing is featured in the poetry anthology *My Lot is a Sky* alongside other exhibition catalogues. She graduated with a BA (Hons) in English Literature and Art History from the Nanyang Technological University of Singapore.



RICHARD KOH  
FINE ART

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Founded in 2005, with spaces in Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Singapore, Richard Koh Fine Art is committed to the promotion of Southeast Asian contemporary art on regional and international platforms. Centred around a core belief in developing an artist's career, the gallery looks to identify understated, albeit promising practices, and providing it opportunities to flourish. Through its regular exhibition cycles, print & digital publications and cross-border gallery collaborations, Richard Koh Fine Art engages the art community with the aim of developing regional and intercultural dialogue.

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