

The background is an abstract painting with a textured, layered appearance. It features a mix of warm colors like ochre, sienna, and terracotta, along with cooler tones of blue and grey. The brushstrokes are visible and expressive, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall composition is non-representational, focusing on color and form.

MYTHOS

POEMS BY JEFFREY KATZ

PAINTINGS BY MARY KATZ

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METAMBESEN
ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON
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Mythos
is the sixty-first
in a series of texts and chapbooks
published by Metambesen.

The reader is free to download and print it
without charge or permission.

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Design by Mary Katz

Nine paintings were created in dialogue with nine prose poems
to reframe familiar stories. At times vivid or muted, allusive
or elusive, the images are intended not to illustrate but to
intervene in the texts—and the texts to ring through the images.
War & aftermath, longing, despair & defiance. Everyday stories.
Again & again.

With love for Emily who loves stories



Mythos 2017 Oil on linen 24 x 30 inches

MYTHOS

Start with one thing. Say, a gun is fired at a family picnic. Is anyone hurt? You traveled by train for two days to get there. Is anyone hurt? It may have been nothing.

You become inordinately interested in finding the place near the high school track where you kissed your wife for the first time. This becomes the only thing you want to know. You can remember every Number One hit that year. This is now part of the story.

She was my queen, you think to yourself. Although it sounds foolish & you would never say it aloud. Although this is what so many of those songs were saying. Stories are not always what you want them to be.

Every story asks: Is anyone hurt?

THE HORSES OF ACHILLES

The pair, a gift from Poseidon & passed from father to son, like a favorite shotgun. A cloudless sky. The air glittering with the floss of milkweed.

Kind Patroklos face down in the mud. What could they do? They lowered their heads. Their manes swept the ground. They wept. Deathless, they knew no end to grief.

Achilles became a wildfire among the dry wood of the Trojans. Whole towns were wiped out. The field strewn with fathers & sons, like potatoes, as far as the eye can see.

Where will it end?



Transit 2019 Oil on paper 14 x 11 inches



Reflection 2019 Oil on paper 12 x 16 inches

NARCISSUS INTERRUPTED

I am stretched out by the pond out back again. Propped up on my elbows, the way I did with my Batman coloring books. I am everyone's special boy. My hair is neat. I have a good appetite.

His bed is at the bottom of the pond. Dark & unmade. Everything I want. I know how this will end, but I don't care. Isn't that love, then? He laughs when I do. We finish each other's sentences.

Come out to me! Tell me the story of my life. Even the damage. Let's remember, like a couple of vaudevillians. Let's go over the finer points of the old act. Let's do the bit where we save each other's lives, then go home.

ANDROMACHE AFTER TROY

What do I look like to you with my lonely queen mouth? I am worlds away by now & out of my mind & invisible.

All afternoon my boy & I looked out from tents made with sheets & chairs for the dust clouds that mean armies on the move: of scorned brothers & bastard sons & grudge-bearing little shits from the neighborhood.

But I'm at digging my own grave, now. You'll see me spitting blood until they take me off covered in soot, remembering his sticky fingers in my palm.



Aftermath 2019 Oil on paper 16 x 12 inches

ARIADNE

They left me right out of high school. I'll admit I was wild. I wanted to write my own story. I would, they said, be introduced to the "real world," by which they meant this charmless circular ruin. The leftovers of the shit dinner had by the baby-boomers.

The dorm was nothing but long corridors. A door at every end opened up into another corridor. Etc. Etc.

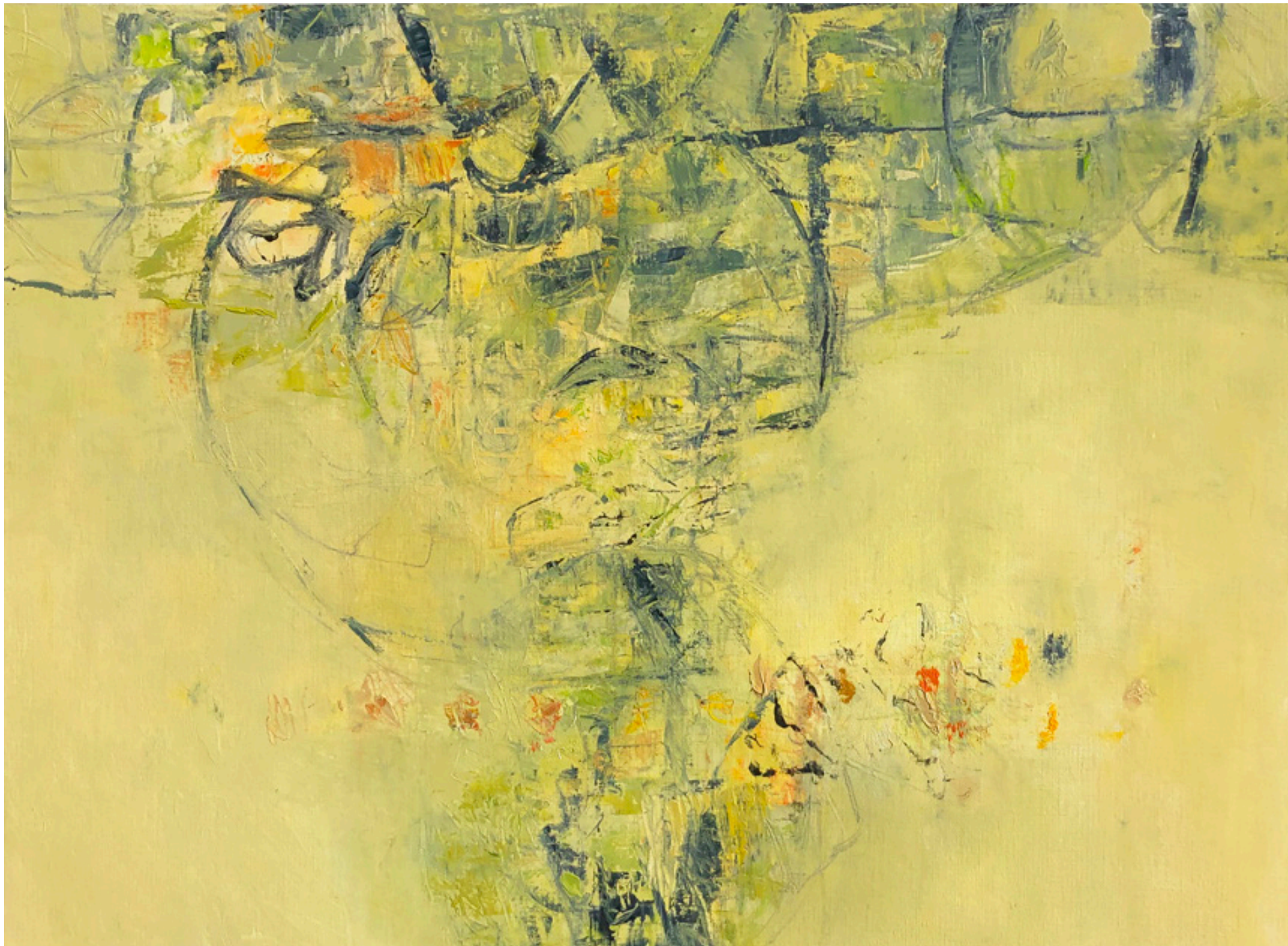
Nothing more than a holding tank. Why pretend? Why give it a name like Outward Bound? Don't forget that it's a system. It's made of men & their ideas. A tiny prison-town with a half-man, half-bull for a warden. A senseless twit scooting around in his underwear, waiting for lunch.

We need a hero, they all say. And you, pointing to me, can help. Here's a ball of twine. Make sure he's in & out quickly & the beast is dead.

But listen to this. I'm not on the staff. I'm the story. Put your ball of string in a museum. I'm going to burn the whole fucking thing down & walk out.



Lost Thread 2019 Oil on paper 11 x 14 inches



Icarus 2019 Oil on paper 24 x 18 inches

DAEDALUS TO ICARUS

Just the same I told you, my dear boy. Not too far.
Not too fast. The same way always with fathers & sons.
Not too far. We played catch in the yard. Lazily,
back & forth. Not too soon.

My new life without you is hell. I put away my tools.
Let the fire go out. I thought I could rebuild you out
of mud & sorrow. But who do I think I am?

You remade me. I only wanted to give something
back—the pint-sized bench & puffing bellows—
the magical intelligence of the family business.
To help you the only way I knew.

I take long walks by the lake, like some old fool.
I tell stories about how strong you were, how graceful,
about what a voice you had, to anyone who will listen.
They keep a chair for me at the shop. But I never
go in, now.



Apparition 2019 Oil on paper 18 x 24 inches

ORPHEUS ALONE

There are things we never forget. But now, I'm afraid of my own voice.
I loved even the way you held your hand up to shade your eyes. That was
nothing, but it was everything.

Like a system of winds around a moving center. Like a cyclone, a cyclone.
The way you sat cross-legged in a chair.

One thing & another. Your favorite chair is empty. You turned back.
I heard only the click of your tongue, explaining nothing. As if you'd
forgotten your keys.

CASSANDRA WITH AGAMEMNON

I am his fair share. His spoil. My new career at the main office in Mycenae. Apparently, we can tell ourselves anything. But do we have to? Do we, who come from privilege, properly understand a world in which it is better to die than to live? A world overwhelmed.

What did we think? That the world was a sugary roll? A meal that would last forever?

I can just make out the dogs cleaning their muzzles. Settling down. Satisfied. The sky is the color of nothing. The smoking roofs & vineyards. My mother, like a lost child, wanders the streets in a sheet.

Troy is a dirty joke. My aunts, my neighbors, my friends from school marched off to the Argive ships in a line. Don't say I didn't see this coming. Don't say this is the medication talking. I know where I'm headed.

Better to die in an ambush than live fetching coffee for the Atreides.



Prophecy 2019 Oil on paper 12 x 16 inches



Atlas 2019 Oil on paper 24 x 18 inches

NON PLUS ULTRA: THE PILLARS OF HERCULES

Not beyond here. The basement stair with linoleum
the color of dried blood. The flickering fluorescent light
above the workbench. The dirty handprints all over.
Our complete Magic Show of Death.

I start here again after every failure. On the pitching
deck of the top stair. My dark is out there. The huge
spider hauling her laundry sack of eggs. My mother
humming at the ironing board from beyond the grave.
Whose shoes are those? Whose mandolin is hanging
from this peg?

There is a spinning faster there, like a water spout.
Things change & change again. And slip away. And the
alert, lovely voices aimed like arrows. The pillars are
fixed to the end of the world. What if I've been wrong
all along? What if it's not a fence, but a terrace?