

RECENT WORK

BY CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

- 1. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF UNICA ZURN**
- 2. BANDS OF BLACKNESS**
- 3. BACON STUDIES (IV)**
- 4. ANOTHER LOOK AT ULLIKUMMI**

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF UNICA ZÜRN¹

The expanse against which I swarm is packed with bubbles, dead plant stems, milling like I mill, a baggy buoy bulging in and out, serpentine, intestinal compression. This will be my modus operandi: a nomadic map of sacred Zürn mirages, wells that turn into camels in heat.

A single face is working its way through, pronouncing its feline/human apparitions. On its forehead I place a rosette, dotted with coital traps. Face plowed and planted, composed of furrowed and stone-covered fields. Mouthless scape, eyes narrow with the non-expressed.

Some days I am bushy, plumed, orchestral, a patchwork creature in draft. An ocular vagina, vertical between hind legs. The living muff into which you've thrust your hands.

The slate sky hung with eye islands, jester bells, drifting chalk-white roots. Is forever coming undone? Every act tugs at greased strings, mind loops slipping mind mass. To populate one's options, to proliferate the fray...

¹ The German artist Unica Zürn (1916-1970) appears to have begun to draw after becoming the companion of Hans Bellmer (1902-1975) in Paris in 1953, undoubtedly stimulated by Bellmer's darkly erotic and meticulous art. While in Paris she had some contact with some of the Surrealists, like Breton and Matta, and is said to have been introduced to mescaline by Henri Michaux (who she referred to as "The Jasmine Man" in one of her several books). In *Sulfur* #29 (1991) Renée Riese Hubert edited a 40 page section of Zürn's texts and drawings. She committed suicide in 1970, via defenestration, from the couple's Paris apartment.

In the spring of 2004, I visited a show of some 70 of her drawings at the Ubu Gallery in NYC. Up to that point, I had a hazy image of her as a drawer, and mainly thought of her as Bellmer's disturbed companion. But this show revealed that her art belongs with the best that Surrealism has to offer. She is, in my opinion, the peer of Matta, Michaux, Ernst, Varo, Hoch, and Kahlo. I brought home a catalog from this show, *Unica Zürn / Bilder 1953-1970* (Verlag Brinkman und Bose / Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst / Berlin 1998), with reproductions of over 200 drawings. I wrote two pieces off these drawings. The first and the shorter of the two pieces, "Unica Zürn," is a lyrical attempt to register in several pages the impact of Zürn's work, based on images that she evoked in me. "The Autobiography of Unica Zürn," the second and longer piece, is an attempt to articulate many of the first 60 or so drawings in the catalog.

Martian, then, four-armed, with a girdle of red-nippled breasts, knock-kneed tumors,
wired to echo only what curls in the wombs of stars.

Projection of my refusal to project woman. That I am combines sensations from rootlets,
gourds, strangled peacocks, cut-open fruit. A pale lavender goiter, million-pored, at the
crown of which a legless grasshopper is embedded.

As if windshield spattered, a purple bat-insectile shroud. Out of the impact, to hold all
here, to replace the lie of Unica with hovering as the refraction of fear.

I have this fear of being a diaphanous lion clown, a complicated clawed bubble with pus
peaks, a jouncing lion, watery amber, dissolving as it jells, a folly, a fabulous split-level
joke, ha ROARED, HA snored...

Now that I'm asleep inside a cinder, white spider-thread buildings gleam. Orbs come
undone, skeins of fraying cocoons. A star, a minaret... Evocation of the street I've
dreamed, width-long, tao-deep, mazed with outer dark...

Near dawn, an upturned top hat out of which a tentacled pink fish form jumps. The party
ends as a star lowers on a spider thread and holds, as if regarding me, a fabulous machine
made up of dials, clocks, and accordion-like pleated planes.

All my ghouls, at this deathday party, hailing me as they dribble and melt. The Black Root That Walks. Gray Hannah With Expanding Glands. Bramble-Haired Eleanor. Hands, without musculature, pointy-fingered, glove-like gas...

I rub my knuckles against closed eyelids and the circus kicks in. Pepper-grinded bits of light, ladders, wheels. On a tight-rope, a goose-stepping doll. Under an opened umbrella, a tiny cage on one wheel. Structures so frail they blur, upon knuckle release, into a donut of light...

The eyes in the tits hanging from the underside of the tan hill...

Or the pink-lavender, undulating goddess, mouth clamped by a gray hand, whose four-fingered mons veneris has a vulva like a slit wrist...

Now I have two kissing heads, and a third of an amphibian whose leg turns into a serpent swallowing whole a ball of sprouting hair. This dissolving lavender, ivory body... These huge needle bones of a prehistoric hand, my looking-glass, my bloated waver...

A coiling, red, bird-headed serpent is all that is left from a fight between four red-eyed wounds... Lots of dots and crinkles, a roast-cold rash...

For you did I become a pink broth of writhing lime, gold and lavender eye-embedded snakes. With my iguana hands I dove, through your rainbow gale, to arrive knotted at the double helices of soul's deep.

For you did I throw this whole shadow depth into an astral mucus of salamanders
strolling on a liquid unlit moor of no Unica, no Hans, just our two hundred selves,
pustular in grievous adhesion.

Once I splinter, I recombine in apish, self-raping, sprig alerts. Funny? Try to draw your
state of mind as it sucks all potential into hamsters that fall like litanies of lead.

The sky-blue cosmic diver, white-beaded spine, seeking below, that's me, a fish in a
secobarbital haze. I've put on big eyes for this one, I've jettisoned all my flesh.

I am the spider they drugged and told: weave! As I ravel-flipped, I never ceased to spur
on what kicked into me. Drawings like somersaults knotted with flies.

A medieval armored head with wiry tufts... Why do my bottom sprouts flail about in
what has died?

Down a musical chart, a head with eyes and bulbous forehead plunges. Stasis. The
forebulb musical with held-back semen.

Over my headless, bristle-bladed, bi-abdomened body, a cute black toy. He looks out
from the *Norma* score, tapping what remains of my shoulders.

In anti-bloom, contracting through my central stalk. Black loops black, fanning out, legless. As based as a bowl.

I'm starting to get the gist of what I'm not. The thought that anything can occur is curbed by the abyss-leash directing transgression.

Two-headed snail pointing down. The main head a penis, loaded with feline smile. The other head beaks back into the shell body, where it is pinched by black tweezer-like feelers.

Still alive in the nursery of the children's hour: nourished by spectral rhymes, the tatters of comfy toys.

Come into this nest that's weaving itself, piercing its inhabitants with a shrubbery of eyes. Music leaking through the heartbeats of avian particles. A central fang-fenced mouth.

I am a proliferating hive of mauve breasts, a bubble lava sustained by the frailest of webs. An affectionate ram holds vigil over my churn. Paralyzed Ares stares out of my lower hatch.

You, coelacanth body, with your hundreds of colored dots, like pins in a map turning nebula. Stars and gas, with dorsal fin and vestigial lung. The near-amphibian Unica, really out there, with no way back.

Charred spatter gas. Clumps sprouting gray ferns. Sallow blood-colored smoke. All of it rushing out of the unseen as if the unseen were unity, and its progeny this pyrotechnical fade...

Meeting. Giving the devil head. Not swallowing, forcing the red semen back in and up those empty bone tunnels, into the deserted marrow palace, into his blackened hands.

Contact. Semen become red thread through me, entering me where once I sucked, bypassing the head I hold in my arms, exiting my fontanel. Behold my new background: a protozoa-grid of red nines.

Caught, through a shard-shaped peephole, lip to lip. We share a tongue in common that smiles as it reddens and blackens with coral snake bands.

Cartoon of the Beast and Whore of Babylon. He is three-legged, wearing lipstick, with a stethoscope attached to his anus. As for me, well, I am sort of there, forever, a head on a body of finger-nail-webbed wings.

Can a life be fully displayed in imaginative release? 1960. I gave off bodies, a creatrix issuing serpents who begged to return, bursting into black-striped baby magicians. I carried within me Hans, my Ethiopian homunculus. I farted pinions, blossoming plumage, out-raking quills

To be, in profile, gorgeous. To ride whatever Beast I choose. To be attended by a flying centipede whose breasts anoint my proffered hand.

On it goes, heads producing heads kissing heads turning away. Terror sweetens, prances about with little stag feet. By a tattooed Nausicaa-wave am I kissed!

To live in a parrot's puffed-up ass, a double-faced Madonna, breasts packed in, no feet, no arms, just rippling checkeredness, finned with scarves! This is paradise. To generate duplicity as a dyadic rainbow mass!

With Henri Michaux: cornucopias of nimble lace proliferating through asunder attraction. We met to palpitate the blind from which we were shooting. You can see our finger wraiths oinking and drooping. I in my aviatrix-brain-cap, with Cerberean Michaux guarding the entrance to the rat-tracked palimpsest of madness.

Fizzlings attempting to fire, scotched. Out of nowhere: red smut. Crushed butt ash as desperate semaphore. Who across the leonine vast will titillate my loneliness?

Black thorned bulbs, patches of them, under which, as if attempting to ignite, I scrawl in a vermilion trance. Hold what is left of me. Tie me to my flare!

Rash-prickled heartfire, blood rips tendriling. Like the burning bush, I fail at self-consumption.

Outfall, in self-recognition falling even further away—from what? Failure to scale the Eden wall. The horror of being cored.

On the nightside of the fallen tree, I am that tree, rampant. Inside the pencil foliage, a penile blow out.

You wonder why. I do too. As a tacky flapper, my belly pulsing with moronic lighthouse eyes, I twist about, doodle-transient.

Furl into self tighter. Compress to the first spindle, the Lady whose swerves led to the lathe.

In exchange for my face, the gods granted me horns, a hump-breasted back, a severed hand to hang from my navel. Then they inserted my sweet profile in my butt.

Let me kneel on my neck fingers to kiss your death ring with its stone of a petrified lotus. Accept the shrimp pressing through my side. Bury me with your doll.

Peaceful schematic kin. Butt to butt the alpha lopes, sharing omega space, anal ties.

To drain the dregs from the Homer bowl, to smell the blood in Tiresias's trench. To be so blocked no line connects, even the one you passed down to me, far below, in the angler mud.

Exploded maternal shrubbery still adrift in outer space...

Strong down draft. Out of foaming cinders a glove flaps toodle-oo.

Look, schools of leaves and fish are crossing the paper void... I have connected your eye phones to my breasts...

A vertical shark in a robe, ecstatically sniffing the fetid air. As if he were Rodin's Balzac. An excited grasshopper is about to bugger this make-believe.

Working the bellows of Bellmer's organ, I emerged, armored, a prehistoric sculpin, priceless, worthless.

A veiled viper in mourning over her venom loss. Her scribble sister draws near. Detonation. I always draw the afterclap.

The bouquet of sparking tinder I pulled out of your armpit. Now, as if on top of a tombstone, it has been tossed on me. Rest in havoc.

On a white, elephant-trunk-like thigh, at the top of a tight, white bandage, squeezes forth a bird's red eye.

The gold, goggle-eyed salamander whose limbs are fjords seen from a plane. The fat red and brown woolly worm with long crinkly hairs. The broken-backed mosquito, the pink dragonfly whose wings are now shredding plumes... They amble about on the thread lines of my mind, the opening act for "The Spider Queen's Lunch."

Out of Unica Zürn Hans Bellmer suffocation, to pull the anagrammatic, magical command: *Alchemize! Unsnarl! Burn!*

The anguish of being a head on a body of brown smoke. Of being squiggles, filler. Only a gaping, rueful mouth to organize pathos.

I laid a mass of eye eggs, bird parts and flounders. Out of this marsh, a bird with a twisted beak, in a metallic halter bra (with eyes for nipples) stares. Quagmire of the mind where the never seen gnaws on the seen too often.

To be dyadic, double to myself, a clown fish pressed to its clone, Unica against Zürn, attended by a winged jester worm, antennae-bound to our tail fins. Until we are rigorously one, a terrible wedding awaits us.

A hopeful spirit with eel ears, scaled body ending in a fin. Each figure represents the blank of my destiny, packed with ginger and dynamite. No description is true? Agitated sea urchin at 4 o'clock.

Limp-billed soul bird, all its energy discharging out the rear of its head (a feathery tumor), its back (a tubular wing-work), and the back of one leg (a monstrous spur).
Excremental wind. Crux of someone with only exit confronting entrance.

Proliferation of faces. Sylphs emerging from oak trunks, from one another, swerve, flash the back of their heads. Others to achieve eyes combine with spurs, berries, scaled blisters.

Onto what do their eyes fix, these heads like selfhoods emerging from a divine vacuity? They are the result of the disaster right behind my eyes, where a hierarchy-bereft totem loses its vertical head-to-head adherence.

You were two, Robert Schumann. Chain-mailed faces arrested your music. Beast arabesques entangled your struggle toward the ultimate altar. What did you find there? Chicken feet? Clara wearing a necklace of slugs?

My knitted kitten-masked hierophant, uncrowned. An egg-shaped human face blooms in your esophagus. Trolleys of black ball lightning race through your skull.

No goal, no afterbirth. Fleck-knotted flight as the only righteous stride. She with an Ice Age spring in her steps. He, mammoth-trunked, with muffler worm, linked to her plight.

Over the soul bird's crest, the Hitlerian moon doubled and held. In the pale salmon night, I was without refuge and so I invented: two-headed, ferned sea worms, pre-Permian conscience-free sprites.

Inky splotches of crinoline-nested air deliveries. Mine by the right of the black election!
Mine by the sign in the scarlet abyss! Only lines reveal!

Like clouds growling from their moldy undersides, the anti-forms arrive: the tyrannosaur-headed cobra, out of which an alarmed bear head pops. The cycloptic beaver curled up in its own life. I pluck at our partition, as if at some harp from Hell.

In the milk of dream, an undulating, noctilucous manta, gentle messenger from the ocean now reaching to my mouth.

In a mantle of leaping fish and twisting lips, I appear, part of God's annihilative profile, rich with macerated creatures, dinosaur-gradient with life's first eyes.

To draw the beginning of the visible, as absence curdles: bacterial apocalypse.

Poppy ghosts, in gust with rained-on blood-stained window drift...

Plesiosaur in free fall, through fathoms of shale, to alight here, decomposition's deity.

[May—June, 2005, Ypsilanti]

BANDS OF BLACKNESS²

“Black leads back to the foundation, to
the origin.”

--Henri Michaux

A sly filament of light sags, winks, ascends to rejoin the granite-like blackness that produced it.

The painter as a man-shaped shadow in common shadow clothes. He stands in front of a target of which only a smear of upper arc, a ruined halo, remains.

A bulb of light, pale apricot, hangs within blackness girdled by an apricot serpent, tail in mouth. Or is this a gonad in a solution of masculine self-enclosure?

I am thinking of blackness spun upon itself, black hives of black bees producing scarlet honey. Color as rapture. Blackness as an earlier rapture.

Within a black sphere, an anatomical purse rests, gleaming, an amputation, a potential. Is this the closed vulva of the black goddess which, when spread, reveals the aged face of blackness, the infant crone, black tongue balled in wizard lips?

I was black and blue for you, a confused mass turning toward the light. So I sang the blues, or tapped them out on my bones. I was a nigredo beginning to break up, blue glints, melancholy undermined. Blues are the transition from slavery to song in whose registers the “middle passage” repeats, blue sea, black hold.

² This piece appeared in Verse magazine, *Everwhat*, and with an engraving by the Japanese painter Matsutani as *Bands of Blackness* (coordinated by Kate Van Houten), 2002, in a signed and numbered boxed edition, including translations of the piece into Japanese by Eda Takaomi and into French by Jean-Jacques Viton. My piece was stimulated by pondering certain paintings of Matsutani dominated by the color black.

Am I free in this blackness to dissolve daytime generalities and to determine the particularities of the mauve zone? I have placed my genitals out in front of my thighs so as to press their tallow into dreams. Have arranged both arms under the side of my head, a Jolly Roger nest, good for all recumbents, alabaster queens as well as those still gazing at their grain.

What does a black circle mean? Flow with it, mind, draw out its orchids, especially the prostitute orchid whose curves, spots, and hairiness convince certain insects that it is a female viewed from behind. Draw out the drive-in diner trays of the dead heaped with hollow caviar, as well as the swatted flies that reincarnate as maggots in flux on garbage-filled black bags. The Milky Way? The “starry vast” as worm organic turf. Flow with it, mind, do not be stopped by the positive, the given. It is the negative that is to be struck here, the *bindu* which girders conception.

Conception a drop, a slow vertical ooze into the pit of many colors.

Splintering self-obliterating spheres. Hoops with charred Ojibway feathers. Spheres working against their own circumference: the artist’s daily return to his starting blocks. The blockage that startles, cold ignition to dig in, dent the matrix. The artist in cask to himself, staved about with the oily blood of Dionysus.

Again the subliminal uroboros looms, my blood circulation and yours, an ancient idea: Okeanos is the serpent girding the world as a solid belt. “If each event does not itself unfold its meaning then there is no meaning at all.”

O murdered circle! My larval ghost encoils, unable to get its end into its beginning...

No-gate where the two blind mammoths of generation meet, seem to kiss, fuse, push into the magnificent poverty of blackness, logic stripped of its mirrors. I face germination as the antennae-driven word, the word with its feelers probing its torn, denotational circumference. More light? No—more bands.

No. And in that word a masked dancer emerges—from eternity? No. From the riverbank where she was murdered? No is the gate of sagging breasts the pilgrim must part. With whose permission? Only thy own, O law unto thyself. Finger the hard nodule of a nipple on the wall in that cave where you see nothing. You will be breathed into manifestation by the blackness's plasma. The blackness is within you, and it is the blackness that molts.³

BACON STUDIES (IV)

“Bacon the Headhunter”⁴

Bacon’s portraits (heads) are made of semen, blood, and soot.

George Dyer’s head—hunted relentlessly in the 1960s—is composed of battered irregular bolts, chunks of semen-smearred rock, soot-packed sockets, the head as a sooty body sock of blood and sperm.

Faces in which a dog jerks against the leash while attempting to bound from its head kennel.

Heads lathered with white as if the brain were semen, as if the extension of the locus of life was the marrow in male bones.

George Dyer with no knowledge of who he is,
scored metal, punished ore,
asnore in shock, in muffled stress,
cold meat blue, an anal rose rolled nose,
no knowledge of who is,
poop dribble chin,
no who ledge, no is.

⁴ This piece was published in *Hunger* magazine and *Everwhat* (Zasterle Press, La Laguna—Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain, 2003). The imagery at the beginning of this piece draws upon Weston LaBarre’s *Muelos: A Stone Age Superstition about Sexuality* (Columbia University Press, 1984). According to LaBarre, participants in ancient as well as modern skull cults believed that the semen-like marrow in the bones was the source of semen, and that the skull, “as the bone enclosing the most plentiful *muelos*-marrow in the body (the brain) is therefore the major repository of the generative life-stuff or semen.” This superstition would appear to account for aspects of human behavior that would otherwise remain mysterious or misinterpreted. It not only, in part, explains cannibalism and head-hunting, but adolescent fellation, sodomy and superstitions concerning ejaculation and women.

Bacon’s heads often appear to be sites of violence, grotesque distortion, and psychological tumult, slashed and contoured with swirls of black, red, and especially white paint, evoking a fantasmagoric vision of the brain that is discussed by LaBarre in his book.

Isabel Rawsthorne's face, sibyl and alley cat.

Rawsthorne as a head hide or hair-hived head on a tiny hair body, flesh torqued as if by a rotary blade.

There is a police museum in Henrietta Moraes' gore-magenta-black hair wound about and twisted through her skull.

Well, is it cruel or not to see an "elephant man" in a beloved face? Or is it to accept the chance and fate that clambered aboard the sitter's fetal raft?

Does one dishonor sexuality by viewing the head as genital tripe? Is Bacon in effect sticking voodoo pins into his portraits? Is his swirling bravura designed to eliminate the pain from these trophy heads?

In thatches of blood, semen, and soot, being stands forth over the depth charge of absolute absence.

Ah, the seltzer of self, the carbonated, carboniferous antiquity of the ever-evaporating self!

ANOTHER LOOK AT ULLIKUMMI

Kumarbi the old god

would bring down Te_ub his successor

Te_ub = Storm-God

[probably still imbued with matriarchal force,
no connection between conception & fucking,
conception brought about by wind action, or rain,
by external forces... *la parole fecundate*]

Kumarbi is thus in this sense not an “old god” but *new stone man*,
the painted pebble carried out of the cave, the Neolithic pebble,
to be *planted* now in the earth, to grow itself with earth’s assistance

(Earth no longer cavern,
but a painted pebble,
portable, with the power to radiate,
have rays, spokes)

Thus to bring down conception as external force, Neolithic Kumarbi
brought his painted pebble “to a place where he met a huge rock,”
Güterbock writes, “Kumarbi has intercourse with this rock.
At this point the first column of the first tablet breaks off.”

Here we need Ogotemmêli’s “First Day” when Amma, his Kumarbi,
tries to have intercourse with the earth—she raises a termite hill to
ward him off—her massive clitoris, or her external force, equal to his,
he breaks off

and in Dogon lore a jackal, or carrion eater, is born.

Dogon Ogotemmêli’s tale is older than Neolithic,
for he preserves the ghost of Upper Paleolithic “reciprocity”

--by the time we meet Hittite Kumarbi

not only does the “tablet break off” but Earth’s resistance is broken:
into this “huge rock” his “manhood [*flowed*].

And five times he took her,
[*and again*] ten times he took her.”

Olson, in his rendering of “The Song of Ullikummi” is mesmerized by this repeated penetration, and cannot get beyond it, in his comments in “Causal Mythology” he curiously refers to Ullikummi, the offspring of Kumarbi and the (unnamed) “huge rock,” as “this aborted creature,” and claims Ullikummi “started growing from the bottom of the sea,” thus botching the heart of the action in the Hittite epic: “the rock bears a child to Kumarbi,” Güterbock writes, “divine midwives put the [stone] child [or lithopaedion] on Kumarbi’s knees,” still, thus, associating Ullikummi with lap, or womb, but here a new disjunction takes place: Kumarbi orders the child to be deposited *on the shoulders* of a god named Upelluri, “an Atlas-like giant who carries Heaven and Earth and...the sea. There Ullikummi grows, in the sea, with tremendous speed until he reaches the sky.”

The movement from *lap to shoulder*
is the movement from cavern to sky,
Ullikummi the first menhir?
“*an extension* of the earth’s fertility”

stone no longer possesses spirit, to be interiorly decorated, as in the caves,
but is an altar *to which a god is to be summoned*..

The war in the Hittite epic is between patriarchal seeding and matriarchal parthenogenesis, Te_{ub} can only stop Ullikummi’s “growth” with “the ancient tool with which Heaven and Earth had once been cut apart—with this tool Ea cuts Ullikummi off ‘under his feet;’ by separating him from the body of Upelluri on which he has grown,

he magically breaks his power.” “A fourth tablet,” Güterbock concludes, “follows with an elaborate account of the final battle... the victory of the Storm-God over the Stone.”

But it is a battle between gods,
and *the scythe* is “in”—the penis has become “plough, axe,
dagger & sword: semen the seed, rain, sun, snake & bird...”

The phallic stone child is severed, the earth is planted with—and
here I think the word Olson misused is true: the earth is planted
with his *aborted* force, studded with *his consternation*—
a chopped up & planted “prince” now meets the-mole-with-a-single-deadly-eye,
the earth is ALIVE with death, the “divine midwives” have fled into the stars
from where they will now “steal mens’ vital energy away in sexual dreams...

nixies, calling them to an erotic
but watery grave.”

[NOTE: This “hinge” piece was written on July 22, 1985, by the swimming pool at Hotel Cro-Magnon, in Les Eyzies, in the French Dordogne. It draws on Hans Gustav Güterbock’s “The Song of Ullikummi: Revised Text of the Hittite Version of a Hurrian Myth;” pp. 72-75 and 91-93 from Charles Olson’s *Muthologos*, Volume 1; and “The Second Day,” from *Conversations with Ogotemmêli* by Marcel Griaule.]