

Voguing To Danzig

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Flora Yin-Wong, “Liturgy” (Primary Information)

Holy Palm, from Flora Yin-Wong, is an LP that resists centering. A hot spring of emptying sound-art sieves, Eastern instrumentation tangles, shamanic harmonics, and unexpected sample sources, this 2020 release dislocates and disorients; halfway or two-thirds through, one might be forgiven for forgetting what album is playing, or what preceded its arrival in the trance-like sonic present. This music reduces genres to powder, emitting an unfathomable, impenetrable force-field of mystery. Written while *Holy Palm* was taking shape, *Liturgy* approaches the uncertain and the unknowable from a different, more experiential angle, as this London-born multidisciplinary artist employs the Asian mysticism she grew up with as a bridge to considering and appreciating phenomena that exist just beyond the limits of (most) human perception.

“I was a little girl when I learned that I had a sort of second sight,” she writes. “My sister told me that she had also experienced paranormal phenomena since childhood. My mother, an absolute atheist, happened to take the matter of the spirits and omens as fact. I thought it ran in our blood. Or maybe it was just the women.” *Liturgy* proffers a wealth of introductions to precepts, rituals, omens, curses, superstitions, legends, fables, Buddhist apocrypha: kuji mantras, pyromancy, the primacy of the number eight and the unluckiness of the number four. The Shunya Mudra, we learn, may permit the hearing of “an unstuck, mystic sound that occurs spontaneously—not the result of physical things.” We are taught the difference between ikiryō (wandering from a living being, benevolent) and onryō (ghostly, vengeful) spirits, that “the element of yohaku represents a pause or blank space between words and implies a meaning,” that Gu poison is ghastly to produce, that chronophobia exists. Black, white, and gray images – some grainy or muddled, others sharp – accompany the text and deepen the unsettling sense that the reader has stumbled upon some meticulously-arranged tranche of half-remembered lore.

Yin-Wong herself becomes more prominent in the narrative as *Liturgy* proceeds. She relates the first time she, as a child, observed another’s possession: “Her five-year-old sister and I watched in horror as she was suddenly unable to breathe, her eyes wide in vivid terror, contorting violently with her every limb and screaming like murder.” A chapter dedicated to abandoned ghost cities and sites comes to life as she recalls a visit to Pyramiden, a former Soviet coal mining settlement: “An hour or so in, I realized the energy of the battery in my camera had quickly depleted due to the cold climate, and my body was responding the same way. Feeling indistinctly hazy, unnoticeably faint, a subtle change over time, I suddenly realized I was going to pass out. I thought I was dying, standing quite still, as cold delusion

had seeped in.” She ultimately confronts a particular landscape painting – a symbol, perhaps, of an alternate universe or universes, a representation of the oddness limning the waking world as we experience it – and is stunned by its duality.

“That cosmic vision, or rather the feeling that it cultivated, stayed in me, like a shadowy scent that wanders in and out of a room,” she remembers. “Attempting to exorcise my fear through analysis, I knew it had tapped into an intimate phobia of the lines between internal and external reality and non-reality merging.”