Before Easter After

Join Patti Smith and Lynn Goldsmith
on an artistic odyssey

I am the spring
The holy ground
The endless seed
Of mystery
The brazen image
The prince of peace
The ambassador
Of dreams
The thief of sleep
I am the sword
The wound
The stain
Scorned
Transfigured
Child of Cain
I rend I end
I return again
I am the salt
The bitter laugh
I am the gas
In a womb
Of light
I am the tears
The ball of sight
The evening star
Rising tonight

“We considered the symbolism of the colors in Christian art: blue for heavenly grace; red for the blood of the martyrs; white for holiness, purity, innocence, and virtue.”

LYNN GOLDSMITH
Introduction by Lynn Goldsmith

For me, photography is a means of writing with light; showing in order to tell. It’s a tool for awareness, though images will always deceive us because truth in its entirety cannot be condensed, summarized, encapsulated.

There are no hard and fast rules for what and how I shoot; only that I empathize with the subject in front of my camera. It was easy to do that with most artists. We all had some gene for anarchy; it’s alive in everyone born into the wrong class, the wrong color, the wrong sex. What I consider when putting myself in the shoes of others is whether I’m exploring or exploiting, documenting or manipulating, embracing or intruding. At my best I’m both watchman and spy. The watchman observes the outer while the spy investigates the meaning of the inner. I’d like to think that in portraiture the photographer can interpret the inner persona of the subject and that self-knowledge is acquired through the work of making those images.

When making images with Patti Smith, everything she did, she did as a poet. The photographs are evidence of that; how closely the sacred and the profane can interact, how one can combine a sense of absurdity with a sense of significance, how talent needs to form a trinity with effort and inspiration, the feeling of being mortal and immortal. She was a paragon of cool; always with a trace of philosophy in her sensuality. I wanted to identify with that as well as with the singularity of her face, the courage, the loneliness of it. I’d hoped to make images that possessed the enormous contradictions between ideals of strength and beauty and fragility of the human condition. She was the lyrical advocate of the flawed; a renegade enamored of tradition. It was easy to envision her storming the gates of Paradise.

My knowledge of anyone in front of the camera will always be fragmented, incomplete, but the mysteries of grace persist in all human beings. With Patti, I allowed for the serendipity of the process of making images; a trust in the hushed power of what has been left out. She would bring attitude and focus as well as clothing and props to shoots. It served to make the images into proof of her endearing, complex, and authentic self as well as of her formidable talents.
After a long convalescence in 1977, I rejoined my band, and we developed the songs that would form Easter. Whenever possible I spent time in Detroit with Fred. He noticed that I was a shallow breather, possibly due to the chronic bronchitis that I had marshalled since a child, and suggested I learn to play clarinet. He thought the challenge might deepen my breathing, thus enriching my voice. Fred had played the instrument in grade school before switching to soprano sax, then electric guitar. He taught me how to use a mouthpiece and prepare the reeds and gave me his boyhood clarinet.

I was never skilled in the mathematics of music, so I played by ear, in motel rooms, fields, tiled bathrooms, and tour busses. At home I played along to Ornette Coleman records and the Master Musicians of Joujouka. The clarinet demanded that I connect with diaphragm breathing and playing it became a part of my daily practice, ultimately pervading performance within songs like “Seven Ways of Going.”

When I left public life in the fall of 1979, I took my clarinet back to Detroit. In our new home Fred and I would often improvise together, on saxophone and clarinet, into the night. We would play until the wail and the whirl became as one. An ascending cacophony, as if the cries and chaos of the world, descending into softness, like a Jackson Pollock painting dissolving into desert.

Patti Smith
An intimate visual survey of the unparalleled Patti Smith by Lynn Goldsmith, whose lens has immortalized a golden era of rock’n’roll history. With hundreds of unseen photographs and exclusive texts by Smith, this signed edition documents a transformative moment in the artist’s career and celebrates two greats whose creative partnership continues to this day.

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LYNN GOLDSMITH

New York City, 2017
“Notes for Babel, Smith’s first major collection of poetry.”

OPPOSITE:
Patti Smith, photographed by Lynn Goldsmith.
NYC, 1975.

RIGHT:
New York City, 2017
“Notes for Babel, Smith’s first major collection of poetry.”

“Before Easter After.”
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