

The Shamanic Journey of the Bee Priestess

IN THE WORK OF NANCY MACKO



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Stills from *Lore of the Bee Priestess*, 2004
Cat. no. 42

32 **N**ANCY MACKO'S video *Lore of the Bee Priestess* (2004) takes the viewer on a multidimensional journey in search of the lost knowledge of her transhistorical identity. Macko's quest resonates with pilgrimages made by women artists of the 1970s and 1980s in search of a Goddess heritage. Artists such as Ana Mendieta and Mary Beth Edelson are her precursors. These vision-quest journeys delineate a new archetype of female metaphysical travel, akin to time travel, in which the voyager explores the sacred sites of ancient civilizations and the body of the Earth Mother in order to unravel the mystery of her soul's extratemporal incarnations.

When Macko related to me some of the actual lore of the bees, understood as the epiphany of the Goddess in Minoan culture, she told me of a folk belief that seemed to unlock the implications of the tale narrated in the visionary world of her video. It is said that if someone has died one must tell the bees. If the beekeeper has died, it is of utmost importance to warn the bees; otherwise they will become confused and upset at not encountering her. You must *tell the bees*.

In this video we accompany the newly awakened Bee Priestess as she revisits the sites of her spiritual habitation across time and space only to find that the Goddess has died, the light of her civilization has gone out, the energy is gone. On a metaphorical level, one might say that we too, in our own time and space, have never been told that our Goddess/female creator has died (was extinguished and replaced by a patriarchal God) and that consequently we are living in a confused state akin to that of the bees. In the video the Bee Priestess performs rites to imprint upon herself the ancient energies of the Cretan Snake Goddess in order to revive her lost powers. Macko uses layered images, both visual and aural, in which voices and visions fuse their mark upon the spirit and body of the Bee Priestess novice. We hear the voices murmuring, "Wake up, sisters." Messages are being transmitted to her via



Therangels, 2002
Cat. no. 11

ancestral whispers: "Obligation to humanity," "Right action," "Leaps of Faith," "It's your power," "Freedom," "Faith." The words awaken her through their meaning as well as through their vibrations. They summon her to become conscious of her mission.

We view the Bee Priestess through the hexagonal aperture of the honeycomb. She runs through the ancient sacred sites of Delphi, Olympia, and Epidaurus, seeking the traces of her soul's transhistorical manifestations. But the culture of the Mothers is in ruins. She explores a cave, haunted by visions of ancient goddesses and their artifacts. She turns to nature, observing the waterfalls, placing rocks in the water as images of ancient artifacts glide by. She rushes to open the bee cages to wake up the bees. She seems to be reenacting an ancient ritual, but one that no longer functions in the absence of living Goddess energy. Frantically she wanders through the theater of Epidaurus, turning in circles, her arms uplifted like the Serpent Goddess, but without the serpent power. She spins, replicates herself, enters other dimensions, but to no avail. She reclaims her sexual energy through flamenco dancing, and we hear the pulse of the drum like the heartbeat of the planet. The whirring sounds of messages traveling through the wings of bees resuscitate more Goddess artifacts.

Juxtaposed to the flamenco-dancing feet are the bees doing their waggle dance. It is known that bees line up in relationship to where the sun is to tell one another, through the waggle dance, where the food is located. The bees communicate important information through their movements and their wing songs. The Priestess imprints the memory of these forms on her body with tattoos. We see her inscribing white, egglike dots on her skin. When the tattoo of the Goddess figurine has merged with her body, it lifts off her skin and becomes a part of nature (the water), turns gold, and is transformed into pure energy.

According to the lore of the bees, bees are souls of nymphs and messengers who fly to the heavens and become stars. In the film the bees are like nymph-souls who take the memory of matriarchal cultures to the sky, where they are transmuted into the stars of the Bee Goddess constellation. Hence it is not surprising that Macko's series *Feminist Utopias: New Constellations* introduces the first visions of archaic matristic star clusters as they begin to appear to us after light-years of time and space travel. Works from this series—including *Therangels*, *Beeroses*, *Queenangelbreast*,