

Sound Plots: *Aporia (Notes to a Medium)*

Episode 2: Artist Talk with Jenine Marsh

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I've been interested in things like value and agency for awhile, I've been working with coins for about ten years, altering them and destroying them as this way of generating some sort of elicited form of agency, a sort of micro-agency by destroying coins. This made me think about wishing wells and fountains, which is what you see hear, these three, well, fountains or wishing wells, I guess. I started off by destroying coins way back ten years ago as a way of engaging this system of capitalism, of mobility, of colonialism, and destroying currency, it's a really direct act on real systems of capital, real material, ephemeral objects of capitalism, so it's very generative and powerful and considers what we can do as sculptors and as artists in the real world where we can feel political agency but also use our skills and our passion for sculpture in this activated social realm. These are three wishing wells or fountains, I worked with a professional scenic prop builder to build these. They are coated foam, they're really lightweight, and when I planned these, I wanted them to be human-scale rather than architectural-scale, sort of scaling down an epic urban civic fountain into something private-scale. They are meant to be as realistic as possible using the skills of a scenic prop builder who builds props for films and videos. He had his own way of defining realism and I had to negotiate with him how to make this realistic-looking thing and how to make something sculpture and not real. That was really generative in terms of thinking about what is real, what is symbolic, in this sort of navigation between the two that sculpture always has.

It also touches on this interest that I've been developing and deepening for a year or so about utopias. I've been thinking about how utopias are kind of out of style, to think utopically is kind of delusional and really optimistic and fantastical and fictional. Thomas More, the first person to write about utopia, he literally wrote the book *Utopia*, and utopia for him was basically a remodelling of his present-day England but on a man-made island made by slaves. This is what he thought utopia was, so it was really mirroring his own limitations of imagination – he wasn't able to step outside them – so utopia was already a huge failure, even the first one.

I'm thinking about capitalism, that famous Mark Fisher / Žižek quote, "It's easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism." It's like this phrase that gets knocked around and everyone quotes, but it's so incredible and it's so true. We're really stuck being anti-capitalists, but not communists, or not pro-something else. So I'm really interested in this failure of imagination and the failure of utopias. I like to think about micro-utopias and I like to think about wishing in terms of this powerful act, this micro-act, this very personal, small act of just throwing a coin into a wishing well or a fountain, this very embodied act of misusing capital, misusing the systems of value that we have.

Fountains were developed as a way of creating a city centre to start moving people into the city so that they didn't have to go trekking to get water, they could actually have the resource of water in the centre of the city. And they became sites of rallying, sites of just regular, labour – cleaning your fruit, gathering water, watering your animals – but also with this intense social aspect.

So there are three fountains or wishing wells and they have feet in the middle of them, sort of like an incomplete or broken statue as if maybe it's in progress, or it's in ruins. They're wrapped in plastic so that maybe they're new, they haven't been unwrapped yet, or they've been put out of service and put against the wall so they're done. I wanted them to have a sort of temporal uncertainty between past, present and future. You can see there are tiny bits of collage in them that I have selected language and phrases out of this incredible socialist newspaper called *The People's Voice* and it's been published for a hundred years in Canada, it's still a printed paper that you get delivered to your door, it's very old-school. I started getting a subscription about a year and a half ago, and I thought, I hope they have ideas in it about a future, about an anti-capitalist future, some plans! But of course, they didn't, we're still stuck in the present where we're criticizing capitalism but not building models. Even ridiculous models, ones that won't work, we're just not really doing it. So I started chopping up the language and finding moments of linguistic slippage between quoting capitalism and criticizing it, or sort of quoting a language of revolutionaries of the past, like failed revolutions, like this old language of comrades, solidarity, and brothers rising up, this very old school poetic language. And in between, there were some phrases and words that stood out to me. If you read them together, maybe it forms sort of a very loose open poem.

On the ceiling, it's called *Optimism*, and it's gels on the lights and there are also some pressed, dried flowers in there, it's sort of this nod to the space between delusion and reality, something beautiful and hopeful and something ugly, where the flowers are dead and they're stuck up there like dead bugs, but also this delusional sort of thing like shining the light of the flowers down on this space with a colour that's sort of rose-tinted glasses, this optimistic view, or perhaps like the sunset, or even if you go further, the sunset of pollution or of war where the sunsets are the best sunsets of all time – when we have the most garbage in the air, the most destruction on the planet. I like filling the space with this colour, rather than with objects so it becomes a sort of social, animated space.