

# Tablets in Tension:

## A Spatial Approach to Orphic Eschatology

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This essay is presented in tandem with *The Orphic Experience; a Creative Katabasis* (Figure 1); an exhibition of artworks by the author exploring the mysticism and physicality of the chthonic landscape as presented by the controversial and contradictory ‘Orphic’ Gold Tablets or *Lamellae Aureae*. At its center stands the figure of Orpheus himself; the chthonic *flâneur* through which this landscape is encountered and maps itself out. I will explore how this fragmentary Orphic topography and identity align with various other ancient mappings of the Underworld, ranging from the seventh century BCE to the sixth century CE; investigating the stabilities of where they overlap, the discontinuities where their paths diverge and the all-important gaps that are left between. I intend to demonstrate through both spatial and linguistic means that approaches to the elusive nature of Orphic topography and identity can be deeply aided by spatial, phenomenological, and artistic praxis. Mysticism is an area of study deeply steeped in the importance of naive experience, for that reason I consider it vital that this essay be taken as additive to the exhibition rather than examined as a separate entity from it.

## **An Encounter with the Orphic; a Roadmap in Three Segments**

### **Segment One: Theory**

Though this project is concerned with the Orphic eschatology more generally, due to the variety of topics across Orphic texts and the crushing absence of the lost or perhaps even nonexistent *Orphic Katabasis* (Edmonds, 2015, p.216) the focus will primarily be on the the so called Orphic Gold Tablets’; a collection of gold leaf artifacts, with inscribed text written in Hexameter verse that were discovered in gravesites across the Mediterranean (Bowden, 2010, p.149). They contain various allusions to mysticism and

Orphic/Bacchic eschatology and are assumed by some scholars to be paraphrased from (a) longer Orphic ritual text(s) (Burkert, 1974, p. 327, Betz, 2001, p. 104, Edmonds, 2004, p.102 - 4 and Johnston, 2007, p.104). This collection of *Lamellae Aureae* have been labeled as Orphic since the discovery of the first one in Petelia at the start of the nineteenth century CE (Graf, 2007, p.6), yet as they do not mention Orpheus by name, there is a large amount of debate amongst scholars of Orphica as to whether they ought to still be included in the corpus. Throughout this project I will be taking the stance that these Tablets and other works like them (various fragments, commentaries and texts as compiled by Kern (1922) and Bernabé (2004 - 7)) can be considered Orphica and described as Orphic; as defined as texts relating either to the figure of Orpheus himself through reference or pseudo-authorship, and/or to the series of themes, rites and tropes (such as katabasis, Dionysus and Persephonean linkage, ritual initiation, Bacchic centrality, alternate Theology and esoteric relationships to an internal concept of ‘truth’) commonly associated with a so-called Orphic belief system.

However, like the branching paths in Plato’s conception of the Underworld (*Phaedo*, 108.a and *Gorgias*, 524a) perspectives on the nature of what can be considered Orphic are often fractionate. Traditionally they are divided into two opposing categories, usually summed up as Maximalist and Minimalist (Toujussen, 2005, p. 293). In the Maximalist camp are gathered influential twentieth century scholars such as Vittorio Macchioro and W.K.C. Guthrie, who take the the figure of Orpheus as a quasi-historical figure (Guthrie, 1952, p.9) and the movement associated with him as its own doctrinal religion standing independent from, or even opposed to, the ‘mainstream’ Olympian Greek religion (Macchioro, 1930, p. 122 and Guthrie, 1952, p.6). Orphism, in its Maximalist capacity, can be understood as a mystical yet doctrinal religion with a series of codified beliefs and practices based upon the writings (attributed to) Orpheus. It is easy to understand this characterisation through a Christian lens, where Orpheus stands as a Jesus-like figure and the emergence of Christianity is framed as Orphism’s spiritual climax (Macchioro, 1930, p.130).

A less extreme and overtly Christianizing version of this perspective is presented by Alberto Bernabé, who often get lumped in with the Maximalists for his emphasis on Orphism as a nucleus of doctrine (Bernabé, 2004, p. 205). Bernabé, however, deliberately distances his understanding of Orphism from Macchioro's by framing it as a distinctly un-organised religion, characterised far more by its diversity than by its unity (Bernabé, 2002, p. 216). As a compiler of Orphic fragments, second only to Kern (1922), his eclectic approach to the subject becomes apparent, and his decision to include and discuss the Gold Tablets as distinctly Orphic cannot be understated in its importance to this project's definition of the term.

Yet, remarkably, eclecticism does not always make a Maximalist, Ivan Linfoth (1941) takes a somewhat similar kleptomaniac approach to gathering Orphic evidence, yet he concludes only in exacerbated Minimalism. After reviewing almost three-hundred pages of "miscellaneous and disparate" sources vaguely grouped together under the Orphic umbrella he declared the term '*Orphic*' as devoid of all meaning (1941, p. 291 - 2). In Linfoth view, rather than adding meaning, applying such an adjective to a text actively siphons meaning away; leaving the question of whether to consider the Tablets as part of the Orphic corpus nothing short of a semantic mistake.

Included in the Minimalist camps are also scholars such as Radcliffe Edmonds who take a pragmatic view of the term '*Orphic*' as a label applied to any text with the name Orpheus later attributed to it, rather than as an descriptor referring to any specific spiritual, textual or religious movement (Edmonds, 2013, p.71). This approach narrows down Orphic texts to only those works penned under his name, works like the *Lithica*, *Argonautica* and twenty-one other titles listed under the name Orpheus in the *Lexicon Suda*, but perhaps not the Gold Tablets (though the possibility of Pseudo-Orpic authorship for these will be discussed below).

The authorship of these pragmatically Orphic texts is something that has been contested since the mid fourth century BCE, when Androtion (a pupil of Isocrates) made the argument that a authorial Orpheus

was inherently flawed as the people of Thrace (Orpheus' supposed homeland) were too barbaric and ignorant of writing to have produced such a literary figure (Detienne, 1989, p.132). Though the emphasis on Thracian barbarism has waned in importance to modern writers, almost all scholars agree that the body of work attributed to Orpheus is pseudepigraphic. Just as the *Batrachomyomachia* and *Homeric Hymns* were attributed to Homer despite their diverse geographic and temporal origins, the wide variety of works attributed to Orpheus were written by many Pseudo-Orpheus's associated with a later literary tradition attached to his name. Not even Macchiore attempts to contest this.

What is contested, however, is whether anything outside of the Pseudo-Orpheus authored canon can still be described as Orphic. To Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, another heavy-lifter on the Minimalist side, the Tablets on which much of my exhibition is based are certainly not Orphic, nor even Greek, but instead draw from Egyptian chthonic traditions (1931, p.200). This position is closely seconded by Zuntz, although instead of connecting them to Egyptian customs, he connects them to Pythagorean funerary rites (1971, p.383 - 5). From the hyper-Minimalist perspective constructing an Orphic topography of the Underworld is a task doomed from the start, as without the Gold Tablets, the chthonic musings of Plato or comedic wandering of Aristophanes' stage (all distinctly non-Orphic according to Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 1931, p.191 - 202) there is little on which to base spatial speculations.

One method of discussing the Golden Tablets in a compendium of Orphic texts is to cleverly label them as simultaneously both Orphic and Bacchic in nature, thus appeasing both camps and creating an image of the Gold Tablets that avoids exciting Minimalist/ Maximalist dichotomies. This is precisely the tactic Graf and Johnston employed in their 2007 publication *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets*; the source of the translations used in the titles and descriptions of each artwork included in *The Orphic Experience; a Creative Katabasis* and throughout this essay.

The general landscape of Orphism's academic reception in the last century is varied and vast and may better be summed up as a spectrum of competing and complementary ideas than as the simple bi-fold path of *Gorgias* 524a. In relation to this varied landscape of ideas my own conception of the Orphic stands a little Maximalist of center, however attempts to avoid some of dogmatizing Christianising and fetishising attitudes associated with old-school Maximalists such as Guthrie and Macchiato.

Having briefly sketched out the theoretical roadmap and this project's place within it, I now move on to address the far more elaborately rendered topography of the (pseudo?) Orphic Underworld.

### **The Significance of Spatiality**

The Gold Tablets may not be universally accepted as part of the Orphic cannon nor necessarily be based upon a canonized Orphic account of Underworld topography (such as the *Orphic Katabasis*), yet they are representative of a sixth to fourth century BCE tendency towards a traversable chthonic landscape at least partially associated with mysticism. Almost all documented mystery cults active in this period include some reference to a journey to the Underworld, a *katabasis*; from the abduction of Persephone central to the Eleusinian Mysteries (Cosmopoulos, 2015, p.8 - 10 and *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*), to the doctrine of rebirth at the heart of Pythagoreanism (Horky, 2013, p.14). The prevalence of this trope of death as traversable geography is a deeply spatial concept and requires a spatial reading in order to be fully understood. Following in the tradition of Lefebvre (1974) and the general spatial turn in the Humanities that is his legacy I intend to investigate the Orphic/Baccic Underworld through a hodological lens, engaging with the constructed environment of the exhibition not just as a cartographical diagram (as depicted in Figure 2) but also as an itinerary of artistic phenomenological experience, constructing space through the movement of human action (Fitzgerald and Spentzou, 2018, p.2 - 3). This blended approach to space stands in direct opposition to the concept of the artist as a pseudo-intellectual category and of art as entirely disconnected from academics. In bringing the two together I am attempting to engage in an

exercise of interdisciplinary hybridism that could be termed *technesophy* (from the Greek *techne* meaning craft, art or the act of making more broadly and *sophia* meaning knowledge in the abstract sense, as in *philosophy*).

While the essay section also represents a form of *katabasis* (entering a fathomless pit of fragments and esoterica to later emerge into the light of knowledge), the praxis portion of the project allows my investigation to take on an immersive three-dimensionality that is hard to convey by words on a page yet utterly central to my thesis. As Synesius (*Dio*, 7.10) put it, while likely commenting on Aristotle's lost work *On Philosophy*, those "being initiated [into a mystery cult] have not a lesson to learn, but an experience to undergo". Though this was not written until the late fourth century CE it reflects a phenomenological importance to mysticism that can be felt from the *Derveni Papyrus* (Fr.3, 7.1) to the letters of Plato (*Epistula* 7, 341e). It is not apparent whether Synesius and Plato are referring to mysteries associated with Orpheus, Bacchus or otherwise but like the *Derveni Papyrus*, they frame mysticism in a qualitative light; not something to be explained in text but a phenomenological experience to be undertaken by the initiate.

### **Segment Two: Space**

Despite their somewhat controversial status the Gold Tablets, provide a useful jumping off point for creating a spatial chthonic topography. Like the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, the Tablets found at Calabria, Petilia, Lucania and Entella (Graf and Johnson, 2007, no.1, 2, 3 and 8 respectively or a significant proportion of Zuntz's group B, 1971, p.355 - 385) lay out directions that the deceased must follow as they move through the Underworld. These Tablets function as mnemonic devices, a crib-sheet of concise notes on where to go and what to say when the deceased soul reaches the great beyond and finds themselves wandering an unfamiliar geography (Johnston, 2007, p.94). Forgetting appears to be a major concern

upon entering the realm of the dead (Betz, 2011, p.104) and this anxiety is hinted at both by the Tablets placement alongside the deceased as memory aids and by their own description of Hades as “murky” (1 and 8). Though they do not always agree upon precise details (for example in no. 1 the spring that the deceased must not approach is on the right, whereas in no. 2 it is on the left), across the current collection of Tablets a general landscape emerges. It is far from a continuous narrative (such as that presented in *The Odyssey* Book 11, for example) and as mnemonic texts, providing such a narrative was likely not their primary goal. Instead the *Lamellae Aureae* provide brief glimpses through time, creating what is now a deeply fragmentary escatological system, but what once may have been a katabatic narrative laid out in (a) longer now lost text(s) (perhaps *The Orphic Katabasis* or other text(s) attributed to Orpheus). Burkert (1974, p. 327), Betz (2001, p. 104) and Johnston (2007, p.104) all suspects the Tablets may be paraphrasing from such poem(s) to remind the initiated of their most significant elements, those deemed important enough to be inscribed on a material as costly as gold. Geographical elements feature prominently in this prioritisation and appear in thirteen of the twenty mnemonic Tablets, and it is from these thirteen that much of my exhibition draws its inspiration. In attempting to recreate the space hinted at by the Tablets through a combination of carefully arranged drawn, painted, sculpted and filmed compositions, I inevitably found myself filling gaps and bridging lacunae left in a highly fragmented tradition. The initial conception of this layout as designed for the Emily Wilding Davison Building Exhibition Space can be seen in Figure 2, however due to Undergraduate booking constraints (one of the most significant limitation in the construction of this project), the final exhibition was presented in a separate venue at in the International Building, Room 148.

As a soul enters the gates at the house of Hades, or the threshold of the exhibition, they are greeted by two bodies of water, represented in sculpture by two wire-mesh and watery figures (Figures 3 and 4), entangled with the various scraps of shades who have passed through them and gazing at the visitor with blue-tinged vacancy (a full reception piece on these sculptures is available in the Appendix below Figure 4). The orientation of these water bodies, and therefore the recommended path for the deceased souls, is



not unanimous, but all but two (2 and 18) position them to the right, leaving with this instruction the tacit implication that there is a certain group of souls, distinct from the initiated in-group, who instead travel to the left. This is in keeping with a general prioritizing of the right-side over the left in ancient mentalities and implies a subtle morality to the souls' directionality (Jiménez San Cristobal, 2001, p.41 - 2). The first of these water bodies, despite being surrounded by the souls of the dead refreshing themselves (1, 4 and 8, 6), the initiate is warned never to approach (1.5, 2.3, 8.7 and 25.3), further differentiating them from the less fortunate souls crowded around its banks. The name of this spring is never explicitly mentioned in any of the *Lamellae* but Johnson (2007, p. 116) identifies it as the River Lethe; a staple of the chthonic landscape from Simonides, (fr. 67) and Seneca (*Hercules Furens*, 679) to Lucian (*On Funerals*, 5), it is a physical manifestation of the oblivion facing the uninitiated shade. It is (almost) always accompanied by bright cypress trees (1.3, 2.2, 8.5, 10.2, 11.2, 13.2, 14.2, 16.2, 18.2, 25.2 and 29.2), represented in Figures 5 and 6 as pure light steaming upwards through dendrite silhouettes into thick fog; creating a brooding and disorientating atmosphere to the halls of murky Hades. Mimicking the inconsistency in the Tablets as to which water source lies on which side, and the apparent inability of the uninitiated to properly discriminate between the two, both sculptures are almost identical in their construction, with only the features of the face and gesture differentiating them from one another.

Across from the spring is the Lake of Memory (Mnemosyne), a body of water that is explicitly named by multiple Tablets and that the initiate is invited to approach (1.6, 2.4, 8.8, 25.4). Yet before they may drink its waters they must confront the Guards, who may ask the soul directly (as in 10.3, 11.3, 12.3, 13.3, 14.3, 16.3, 18.3, and 29.3) "Who [they are]?" and "Where [they are] from?" or more generally what they are "seeking in the darkness of murky Hades" (as in 1.9, 8.11) or even for "what necessity [they] have come" (25.6). Like the wording of these questions, the answer with which the initiate must respond also varies, but almost always begins with the phrase: "I am a child of Earth and starry Sky" (as in 1.10, 2.6, 8.12, 10.3, 11.3, 12.3, 13.3, 14.3, 16.3, 18.3, 25.8 and 29.3). Appearing verbatim twelve times across the *Lamellae Aureae*, this is easily the most repeated clause in the collection. It is rendered in the exhibition

as the first of the large oil pastel drawings (Figure 8) and looms over the visitor as they approach the Lake of Memory, inviting them to engage directly with the symbolon to Orphic eschatological acceptance.

Given the line's prevalence, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is disagreement amongst scholars as to its meaning. Some interpret it as referring to the Hesiodic tradition of Gaia coupling with Ouranos at the beginning of the universe (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 126) and others to the less well known Orphic tradition of the human body as constructed from the soot of the incinerated Titans (representing Earth, as the Titans are earth-born creatures) and the cannibalized flesh of Dionysus (representing Sky/Heaven for his transcended divinity) (primarily told in Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Plato's Phaedo*, 1.3, but similar human creation stories appear in *The Orphic Argonautica*, 17 - 20; Dio Chrysostom, *Orations*, 30.10 and Damascius, *Commentary on Plato's Phaedo*, 1.8 ). The first of these approaches may seem more straightforward and in less need of shakey explanation, yet it is the second that is more widely attested; especially according to Maximalist schools of thought. Guthrie (1952, p.173 - 4) and Zuntz (1971, p.366) both accept this line as referencing the Titanic cannibalization sequence, and Betz (2011, p.106) describes the Earth/Sky-Titanic/Dionyesian paradigm as a soul in tension; both a mortal and a divine being. The representation on this line in Figure 8 has been left intentionally vague, that the viewer may take their own interpretation; imagining the contorted bodies as either erotic representations of Gaia and Ouranos or as symbolic portrayals of the biform soul.

The Maximalist reading of this line is also backed up by the following line on Tablets 2.7 and 8.15; "but my race is heavenly" (Figure 9 in the exhibition) a line suggestive not of distant Hesiodic ancestry but of something divine about the human race itself. If, as Olympiodorus suggests (*Commentary on Plato's Phaedo*, 1.3), the human race is composed of Titan and Dionysiac matter and, as Guthrie suggest, the initiate has 'lived Orphically' (1952, p.174), overcoming their Titanic aspect and embracing the Dionysian, then they may claim to be of heavenly race. Like epigrams, these lines represent a form of funerary self-identification (Betz, 2011, p.105) that allow the deceased to memorialise their positive

attributes (heavenly/Dionysiac) while carefully overlooking their negative features (earthly/Titanic). Even if the soul had not ‘lived Orphically’, in a funerary context, their heavenly aspect may be celebrated as representative of the deceased virtue (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1995, p.117 - 8).

Having answered the Guards’ questions in accordance to the Tablets’ instruction, identifying them as in-group to a form of chthonic mysticism (Orphic or otherwise), the initiate will then be allowed to drink from the sacred waters of the Lake of Memory (1.14, 2.10 and 8.17) represented in Figure 10, and avoid forgetting their past life and, therefore being doomed to repeat it. Following this, according to 8.16 they may even be announced to the “Chthonic Queen”; likely Persephone.

Tablet 8 acts as a crucial link between Zuntz’s group B: those tablets previously discussed relating to the Lake of Memory and Guard’s questioning, and group A: relating to the released soul communing with the “Queen of the Chthonic Ones” (5.1, 6.1, and 9.1). In this group the “child of Earth and starry Sky” refrain is replaced with the image of a kid (or sometimes ram/ bull) falling into milk, a phrase which is repeated eight times within this group (3.4, 5.10, 26 a & b.3, 4 and 5) and appears to represent the *jouissance* of the released soul, having “flown out of the heavy, difficult circle” (5.5) and entering a new phase of ecstatic existence. This represents the emotional climax of the soul's journey, the teleological endpoint for which the Tablets have prepared; it is displayed in the exhibition in directly figurative terms (Figure 11 and 12). For these lucky souls their experience of the Underworld is far from the loathsome place bemoaned in Homer (*Odyssey*, 11.490), or the sunless vault of gloomy Tartarus (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 740) but instead, it is a “holy meadow” (3.6 and 27.4), and “seat of the pure” (6.7, 7.7) where the blessed ones (initiates) shall receive prizes (26 a & b, 7).

### **Segment Three: Convergence**

These glorious initiates (1.16), rejoicing as they traverse the “right-hand road” (3.5) towards a positive construction of the Underworld, are strongly reminiscent of the “happy band of initiates” presented in Aristophanes, *Frogs* (319). Like the initiates of *Lamellae* 3 and 27 they are enroute to a meadow (*Frogs*, 326, 341, 372 and 448) and delight in the worship of Iacchus/Bacchus. The Underworld Aristophanes constructs is, of course, necessarily tangible as a physical space on stage before an audience at the Lenaea (Barrett and Dutta, 2004, p.127) and although the topography he creates for his characters to traverse, is not identical to that sketched out by the Tablets (it includes several features such as a field of serpentine monsters (143 - 4) and monumental sewer (145 - 6) that do not find a parallel in the Tablets), it is in some ways remarkably similar to the *Lamellae Aureae*, as though in dialogue with Orphic/Bacchic escatological texts. Ritual and mysticism emerge as themes in several of Aristophanes comedies (Bowie, 1993, p. 112 - 24) and although Orphism does not stand out as a focus above the mysteries at Eleusis or those associated with Pythagorus, Orphic ritual was clearly something the comic playwright was aware of. Orpheus himself is even mentioned as a teacher of mystic rites (*Frogs*, 1032) making the play perhaps more Orphic (in the Edmonds sense) than the Gold Tablets themselves.

Plato too appears to share in this tradition, with various references to the Underworld suggestive of in/out-group constructions and spatial divergence. In *Phaedo* the Road to Hades is described as branching (108.a), with the souls of those who have lived without virtue “wallowing in mud and manure” (69e8). In *Gorgias* (524a) this concept is expanded by labeling the two paths as leading either to Tartarus or the Isle of the Blessed. Then in *The Republic* (614c), as we will see below, this is taken further still to include geographical elements any scholar of the Gold Tablets would find familiar. These various similarities led Guthrie (1952, p.176) to suggest that Plato and the *Lamellae Aureae* were drawing on the same source, perhaps the lost *Orphic Katabasis*, when imagining the Underworld. Although Orpheus was clearly a popular figure among later Neoplatonist writers (notably Olympiodorus, Proclus and Damascius) projecting this same interest backwards onto Plato himself may be anachronistic. The similarities between texts (especially when taken in contrast with Homer and Hesiod) are perhaps symptomatic of a general

shift in eschatological beliefs from the seventh to fourth centuries BCE, from a vague below-place to the traversable chthonic landscape of Aristophanes, Plato and many of the contemporary Tablets.

Though it is not impossible that Orphism was behind this shift in the zeitgeist, if it were, it seems it was not lasting enough to mark a continuous tradition up until the works of the later Neoplatonists: by the first/ second century CE Orphic references became notably absent from discussions of the Underworld. As Edmonds (2015, p.261 - 3) points out, the various places one might expect to find Orphic references in this period, such as Plutarch (*How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, 17.b7 - c9) and Pausanias' (*Description of Greece*, 10. 28. 7) discussions of the Underworld, nothing of the kind is presentenced. Instead, both reference Book 11 of the *Odyssey* (which appears to have reclaimed its place as the dominant authority on chthonic geography) alongside a lost play by Sophocles (Plutarch), and two lost epics the *Minyad* and the *Nostoi* (Pausanias). The conspicuous Orphic absence, leads Edmonds to the conclusion that whatever Orphic texts existed in this period could not have been canonized in the manner of the epics mentioned, nor could a singular katabatic text have served as an authority on which others could draw (2015, p. 276 - 7).

However even within seemingly canonised works such as Homer's epics, there are internal inconsistencies as to the nature of Underworld geography. In *The Iliad* (as in Hesiod's *Theogony*, 720) the Underworld is orientated along a vertical axis, precisely as "far beneath the earth, as the earth is below the heavens" (8.16). Whereas in *The Odyssey*, Book 11 this axis is turned on its side and the Underworld is presented horizontally as a far off place somewhere at the end of the world. Odysseus must traverse sideways through space across "the deep-flowing River of Ocean" (11.24) to reach the "wild coast and Persephone's grove" (10. 510); symbolically crossing over water from the realm of the Living to the realm of the Dead; this is perhaps one of the most common of Greek chthonic tropes, and also appears in both Hittite and Egyptian escatological texts (Watkins, 1995, p. 277 - 91). Yet once Odysseus has crossed this river spatial qualities seem less important; the chthonic terrain is not particularly mapped out, and

has a space-less, intangible, quality to it. There are no distinct areas or landmarks associated with the blessed, the cursed or even unburied; instead members of all classes of the dead come floating through the chthonic mists with little indication of spatial separation (mighty Agamemnon; 11. 385, cursed Tantalus and Sisyphus; 11.582 and 11.594, and unburied Elpenor; 10.5). Apart from a couple of notable exceptions (such as Menelaus and Achilles (*The Odyssey*, 4. 561 - 9 and 11. 576 - 600 respectively) who seem to occupy a blessed Underworld similar to what we will soon examine in Pindar's *Olympian Ode 2* (Bowden, 2010, p. 150)) the Homeric dead all occupy one languid chthonic space, free from either reward or punishment (Johnston, 1999, p.11 - 14).

This heterogeneous conception of the souls' dwelling place stands in direct contrast to the tripartite system of souls presented by Pindar, Plato and seemingly implied by the *Lamellae Aureae*. In his second *Olympian Ode* Pindar sketches out a chthonic landscape which divides its souls into three distinct categories; those who have lives unjustly and must pay a penalty in a punitive section of the Underworld (2.56 - 60), those who have lived justly and may enjoy a positive afterlife experience in the rewarding section (61 - 7), and finally those who have lived justly three times and are directed to "travel the road of Zeus" towards the "Island of the Blessed [where] golden flowers bloom" (68 - 80); a route which Bowden (2010, p.150) equates directly with the "Sacred Way" of Tablet 1.15. In a fragment of a lost dirge (Fr. 129 in Plutarch, *A Letter of Condolence to Apollonius*, 35.120c), Pindar even implies that these three places are to be reached by three roads, suggesting hodological movement through space akin to that of the Golden Tablets. These categories are implied to be both ethically and geographically separate, thus creating a chthonic map with clear moral-spatial divides. Due to the widespread influence of Christianity, the link that Pindar is drawing between anthropology (what we do in life) and eschatology (what we do in death) may seem banal and uncontroversial, yet in the context of the fifth century BCE Mediterranean, it is a radical move. Though it is consistent with wider trends in the Archaic period towards individual responsibility, the importance of this shift in escatological perspective cannot be overstated (Johnston, 2007, p. 92 and p. 106). The "purity" of the initiates souls is mentioned several

times through the Tablets (5.1, 6.1, 7.1, 9.1 and 31.3) and in examining this from a modern perspective, wrapped in Christian concepts of divine judgement, heaven and sin, it is easy to interpret this as referring to the initiates virtuous behaviour, as laid out by Pindar. However, moral virtue does not appear to be of particular concern to the Tablets and it is likely, according to the later criticisms of initiatory cults, such as those levied by Plutarch (*How the Young Man Should Study Poetry*, 4.21) and Diogenes Laertius (*Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 6.39) that the purity the Golden Tablets are referring to is contingent on initiation and procurement of gnostic knowledge rather than adherence to a code of ethical behaviour (Bowden, 2010, p. 151).

Yet Pindar is far from alone in this tripartite system, Plato's conception of the Underworld (*The Republic*, *The Myth of Er*, 10. 614 - 21, likely drawing on contemporary 'Orphic' sources (Lee, 1955, p. 385)) where the dead are yet again grouped into initial categories of the Good/ Just and the Bad/Unjust. The Just are then steered towards the right-hand route and the Unjust towards the left (10.614c - d); as in *Olympian Odes* 2 and the majority of the Gold Tablets. From here the Just are again subdivided to create the second and third categories as presented by Pindar and implied by the *Lamellae Aureae*. Typically of Plato and his philosophical tradition, Pindar's system of thrice-blessed reincarnation is replaced by measures of the soul's virtue (specifically *sōphrosynē*) and knowledge of philosophy; these become the determining factor behind the quality of life the Just souls will be reincarnated into. Interestingly the method Plato employs to make this distinction bears striking similarity to the chthonic landscape of the Gold Tablets; the Just souls must make their way across the stifling heat of the Plain of Oblivion before arriving at the banks of the River Lethe (10. 621a). This topography is not only concordant with the thirst emphasised across many of the *Lamellae Aureae* (1.11, 2.8, 8.13, 10.1, 11.1, 12.1, 13.1, 14.1, 16.1, 18.1, 25.9 and 29.1) but may also be the the same "painful thing" alluded to in 3.3. Once at the River Lethe's banks (unlike in the Tablets), all the Just souls drink from its water. Their division lies not in whether they drink but in the quantity of water they consume: the knowledgeable souls in possession of *sōphrosynē* drink in moderation, and therefore carrying some wisdom into their next life, whereas the un-knowledgeable

souls drink deeply and bring no previous learning though their process of metempsychosis (10. 621a - b). The reincarnation inherent to Plato's eschatology is inherently at odds with the chthonic beliefs of Homer, and may even come into conflict with the *Lamellae Aureae* which only hint at reincarnation themes (5.5), which are seemingly reserved only for the uninitiated. Yet the traversable nature of the Underworld as constructed by Pindar and Plato is crucial to examining the trains of thought that separate *The Odyssey*, Book 11 from Orphic eschatology.

Yet even within the confines of *The Odyssey* itself, a shift can be felt in the way the author is conceptualising of the hereafter. Death in Book 11 is presented as something reaching up to greet Odysseus, however by Book 24, the Underworld suddenly begins to take on a far more hodological quality. The Suitors' path to Hades after their slaughter by the returned Odysseus, is marked out with a series of landmarks, beginning, as in Book 11, with the crossing of "Ocean's Stream" (24. 11) but then diverging from Odysseus' path as the Suitors' shades pass "the White Rock [...], the Gates of the Sun and the regions of dreams" before finally reaching "the meadows of asphodel" (24.11 - 15). The specifics of this itinerary (except perhaps the eventual end point in a meadow) differ significantly from the eschatological terrain that is explored by the Golden Tablets, however both accounts frame the underworld in spatial terms as a journey one might take on foot.

The simple explanation for such inconsistencies within the same epic is the difference in who it is accessing the Underworld in Books 11 and 24. Odysseus is a living man, simply visiting the realm of the Dead to gather information; thus making his journey there somewhere between necromantic, katabatic, perhaps even a little phantasmatic (Burgess, 2016, p. 16), he is guided by a divine force (the words of Circe, and personified North Wind, 10.506) but not by a designated psychopomp such as Hermes (24. 1). There is a sense that Odysseus is an intruder, gaining access through back channels and infiltrating a realm where he does not belong; he is a tangible being in an intangible sphere and therefore the spatiality of that sphere becomes fluid. The souls of the Suitors, however, as intangible deathly beings themselves



are natural inhabitants of Hades, they conform with the natural cosmic order as implied by a locative theory of religion that dominated the Mediterranean throughout this period (Smith, 1978, p. 132).

Therefore, much like the initiated souls of the *Lamellae Aureae*, the spatiality of the Underworld that they encounter feels more concrete and cosmologically ordered.

Despite their internal inconsistencies, complete texts such as Homer's epics and even Plato's dialogues present largely continuous accounts of the Underworld that cannot find parallel in Orphic eschatology. The Orphic tradition is instead fragmentary, and although the Gold Tablets when taken together can sketch a skeletal landscape, their sporadic nature also draws attention to what is missing. There are many pieces that cannot be found scattered across space and time, dangling from branches or incarnadining streams, much like the figure of Orpheus himself, they present a katabatic narrative that has been ripped apart by the bloodied hands of time (Eratosthenes, *Katasterismoi*, 24; *Lyre*).

### **Orpheus of All Things**

Throughout this essay I have referred to the Orphic and Orpheus as though he were a tangible figure; a Maximalist approach with doctrines and texts (such as the Gold Tablets) that can be grouped together under one label. However the more I have researched Orpheus the more I have discovered that this is not the case. Any attempt to grasp the nature of the great poet is like an attempt to grasp a Homeric ghost, the seemingly tangible figure "vanishes like smoke" (*The Iliad*, 23.100), "like a shadow or a dream [he] slips through [our] hands" (*The Odyssey*, 11.208). Anything that is tangible is crumbled into a thousand tiny fragments that will not converge and, like Agave, we are left piecing together scraps (lacuna at Euripides, *The Bacchae*, 1300 or potential parallel in Seneca, *Phaedra*, 1254). It is fitting that Orpheus' life (if he ever lived) ended in *sparagmos* (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 10.1 - 66) as it provides a helpful metaphor for understanding his legacy and connection to the Underworld and *Lamellae Aureae*. Like his physical body,

the corpus of Orphic texts have been widely scattered through both time and space; the Gold Tablets alone (a seeming homogenous and often even identical group) were discovered in locations as distant as Crete, Macedonia and just outside Rome (Figure 13) and date from times periods as diverse as the fifth century BCE to the second or third century CE. Even the seventy-eight hymns under Orpheus' name, all stemming from a single town in Western Asia Minor (Graf, 2007, p.155) have dates that oscillate from the first century BCE to the fifth century CE (Malamis, 2024, p.196 and Morand, 2001, p.301). Johnston (2007, p.73 - 90) characterises the author behind the Orphic texts as a *bricoleur*; taking pieces of various existing mythic traditions and combining them to create new hybrid meaning. In reflection of this, my sculpture of Orpheus is itself a bricolage. The eyes that view the Orphic Underworld and mouths that map it out, are not presented as belonging to one continuous gestalt, but as several discordant and competing faces each representing an interpretation placed on Orpheus throughout time and culture (Figure 14). As the central katabatic figure, the archetypical chthonic *flâneur*; it is through his gaze that the Underworld is constructed, yet standing in its center Orpheus' form is just as fragmentary and self-contradictory as the landscape that surrounds him.

The first of these faces reflects Orpheus as a historical Prophet, a flesh and blood priest of Dionysus (Guthrie, 1952 p. 9 and p.41), who acts as "the Great Initiator" to his many mysteries (Graf, 2011, p.53). These are perhaps neatly wrapped up as a 'sect' of Dionysian religion (Macchiore, 1930, p.137 - 8), orienting his face outwards towards a larger religious landscape. This is the face of the tutor, renowned for teaching Bacchic Mysteries in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (1032 - 3) and Apollonius' *Argonautica* (1. 910 - 22), he is a prophet who walks among men spreading the worship of his god, not unlike the feigned identity of the Stranger (Bacchus himself in disguise) at the outset of Euripedes' *Bacchae*.

The second face is that of an Author; the prolific writer behind the "hubbub of books" mentioned by Plato (*The Republic*, 364a). He has written at least twenty-three titles, if the *Lexicon Suda* is to be believed on topics as vast as the birth of the gods (*The Theogony*), to the magical properties of stones (*The Lithica*).

This Orpheus is a poet of the oldest order, writing alongside contemporaries such as “Musaeus, Hesiod and Homer” (Kern, 1922, VS 86 B6 =T). He is perhaps even a generation above Homer, teaching the blind bard his art (Diodorus of Sicily, *The Histories*, I, 96). This is a face of wisdom and learning unraveling secret truths of the universe to those lucky enough to hear them.

Opposite to this, in stark defiance, sits the face of Orpheus the Thracian. A wild and wandering figure amongst ‘savage’ Thracians (Horace, *The Art of Poetry: To the Pisos*, 407) untouched by the constraints of ‘civilised’ Greek (Attic) society. He moves through the forest with an unconstrained motion, more ancient than order or syntax. This Orpheus is *threx* as an untamed Roman race horse, or wild gladiator (Suetonius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars: Caligula*, 54.1) and represents, to Androton at least (Detienne, 1989, p.132), the total inverse of the literate authorial figure of the previous face.

Next to this, in uneasy unison, is the face of Orpheus the Musician; the famous lyre player and singer, his head thrown back in song and hands busied with sonorous strings, he is the paradigm of Orphic iconography (Figure 15). This is the face whose voice “charms the rocks of mountains and changes river’s courses” (Apollonius, *The Argonautica*, 1. 30 - 33), who’s melody is a progenitor of syntax; music that acts as forerunner to the formation of language (Detienne, 1989 p.131 - 2). He is the “father of song” (Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, 4.176) and child of Music (Kalliope) (*Orphic Hymns*, 24.12, and Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 1.3.2); a rustic figure surrounded by the wilds of Thrace and immersed in ancient song. This aspect is not only represented in the exhibition through sculpture but also through performance. As is fitting for such an emblem of musicianship, alongside the visual artworks the exhibition featured a musical performance of several of the *Orphic Hymns* by Holly Workman, accompanying herself on the lyre and reanimating this central aspect of Orphic legacy.

The fourth face, staring boldly out at the viewer is that of Orpheus the Hero. This Orpheus is as mythic as he is mystic; he is the first to be listed in the catalogue of heroic names joining Jason on his quest for the

golden fleece (Appolonius, *The Argonautica*, 1.25 - 40) and takes up his place in grand heroic tales alongside figures like Herakles and Peleus. This is the Orpheus who bravely defeats the Sirens (Appolonius, *The Argonautica*, 4.900 and (pseudo-)Orpheus, *The Argonautica*, 1264 ) and guides the Argo safely on its journey ( (pseudo-)Orpheus, *The Argonautica*, 70). This Orpheus is not just the writer of great poetry but, it's starring character and champion.

Next comes the face of Orpheus the Lover, perhaps the most recognisable feature among modern audiences, this is the face of a man who undertook a katabasis to retrieve his lost bride, Euridice. Though this tale did not rise to prominence until the Hellenistic era (Bremmer, 2017, p.296) references to it first appears in Euripidean choruses of the mid fifth century BCE (Euripedes, *Alcestis*, 357 - 362). It is this romantic tale of Orpheus and Euridice that has since outpaced all other Orphic stories, creating the best known archetype of the poet in love and remaining popular throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance (Edmonds III, 2015, p.275). The face of Orpheus the Lover is still wildly popular today, finding itself strewn across modern stage and screen through popular adaptations such as Anaïs Mitchell's *Hadestown* (2016) and Netflix's *KAOS* (2024).

From here the sources to Orpheus' faces only continue to creep forward through history, as we are confronted by Orpheus' sixth face; the Christian Allegory. Macchioro (1930, p.130) perhaps most famously presented Christianity as Orphism's inevitable climax but the link goes back to fifth century CE Alexandria and the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus, where Orphic Dionysus is presented as an almost Jesus-esque figure. This Christian interest in Orpheus stretches forward through the works of famous theologians such as Thomas Aquinas (*Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, 11. 468) and into modern texts such as Cantalupo's series of poems regarding Orpheus (1985-8) for the *Journal of Christianity and Literature* which present him as a deeply Christian (perhaps even saintly) figure.

Yet standing across from these faces of monotheistic religion lies the face of Orpheus the Egyptian. A face attested by several ancient authors, this is an Orpheus who borrows his themes of reincarnation from the land of the Nile (Herodotus, *Histories*, 2.123), along with his prohibition on internment with woolen wrappings (2. 81). This face teaches the rites of Osiris who comes to represent a second Dionysus (Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, 1.96), also giving souls cold water like the Guards at the House of Hades (Guthrie, 1952, p.177 referencing *Egyptian Book of the Dead*). He is the face of Orpheus favoured by Minimalists such as Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1931-2 II, p. 200) when they describe texts as belonging far more to Egyptian than Orphic traditions. Even Maximalists must recognise this face in the hodological similarities presented across *The Book of the Dead* and the Gold Tablets.

The final face on this sculpture, represents Orpheus as a Pythagorean figure, representative of a more well-attested mystery cult in sixth to fourth century BCE Southern Italy. This face of Orpheus might have been an outgrowth of pre-existing Pythagorean communities active in Sicily, Italy's toe and heel, only rising to prominence after the death of Pythagoras around 495 BCE (Bremmer, 2017, p.296). This face of Orpheus may even have led a hybrid community of worshippers containing groups of both Orphic/Bacchic and Pythagorean initiates (Dieterich, 1913, p84 - 108). Writers as far back as Clement of Alexandria (*The Stromata or Miscellanies*, 5.8 discussing Epigenes' lost text *Poetry of Orpheus*) have pointed out similarities between Orphic and Pythagorean ideas and this convergence of the two mysticisms continues into the works of modern scholars such as Zuntz (1971, p.383 - 85) who sees the Gold Tablets as belonging to a distinctly Pythagorean tradition.

### Conclusion

Like the initiated souls descending through Hades with the Gold Tablets to guide them, Orpheus is also a composite hybrid being, an embodiment of the dynamic tension central to the Orphic conception of the soul (Betz, 2011, p. 106). None of these faces represent him entirely yet they come together to create a

patchwork body, ever-staring out at the viewer and pointing, beckoning them to create their own conception of the Orphic and implicating them in the hodge-podge of competing legacies that make up his body. His fragmentation invites us to fill in gaps left in the corpus, to build bridges across the cracked and crumbling landscape in search of a unified whole that can only be constructed through creative intervention.

As with the statue of Orpheus, the exhibition and its sources are filled with lacunae and self contradiction. Between each artwork and its audience is a generative space, a conspicuous absence pregnant with the possibility to create meaning, reminiscent of the many spaces that make up the gaps in Orphic escatological tradition. Texts such as the Golden Tablets can provide useful glimpses that make up a fragmentary landscape, one perhaps augmented by complimentary accounts in Plato, Pindar Aristophanes and the Neoplatonists, yet it is not continuous. This is a project built around a poem lost to time, an orphic katabasis without the *Orphic Katabasis*, and thus the space between is just as important as the space filled. As the visitor to the exhibition moves through the space, embarking on a hodological itinerary from landmark to landmark, artwork to artwork, they are asked to pay close attention to the gaps in between the pieces. An art exhibition is not often an environment that surrounds completely, and mine is far from an all-encompassing virtual-reality or total immersive experience offered by projects such as *Frameless* (Ilie, 2022). Instead it offers fragments of artistic expression, peering between the conspicuous lacunae of plain white walls; easy to ignore when moving non-linearly between points of visual interest. This same instinct applies when moving between fragmentary Orphic text and traditions that can only offer brief glances at the past and may not even agree between themselves. We can try to piece continuous topography or identity from such fragments but the gaps will always remain. Orpheus' voice seem to mock across the eons, an ever-present reminder of lost katabatic text and unremembered experience:

“I have told you all I saw and learned

when at Taenarum I walked the dark road of Hades”

((pseudo-)Orpheus, *The Argonautica*, 41 - 42).

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## **Visual Media**

*Frameless*. (2022) founded by Ciprian D. Ilie <https://frameless.com/>

*Hadestown*. (2016) Dir. Rachel Chavkin and Wri. Anaïs Mitchell, National Theatre Production.

*KAOS*. (2024), Dir. Georgi Banks-Davies and Runyararo Mapfumo, Netflix.

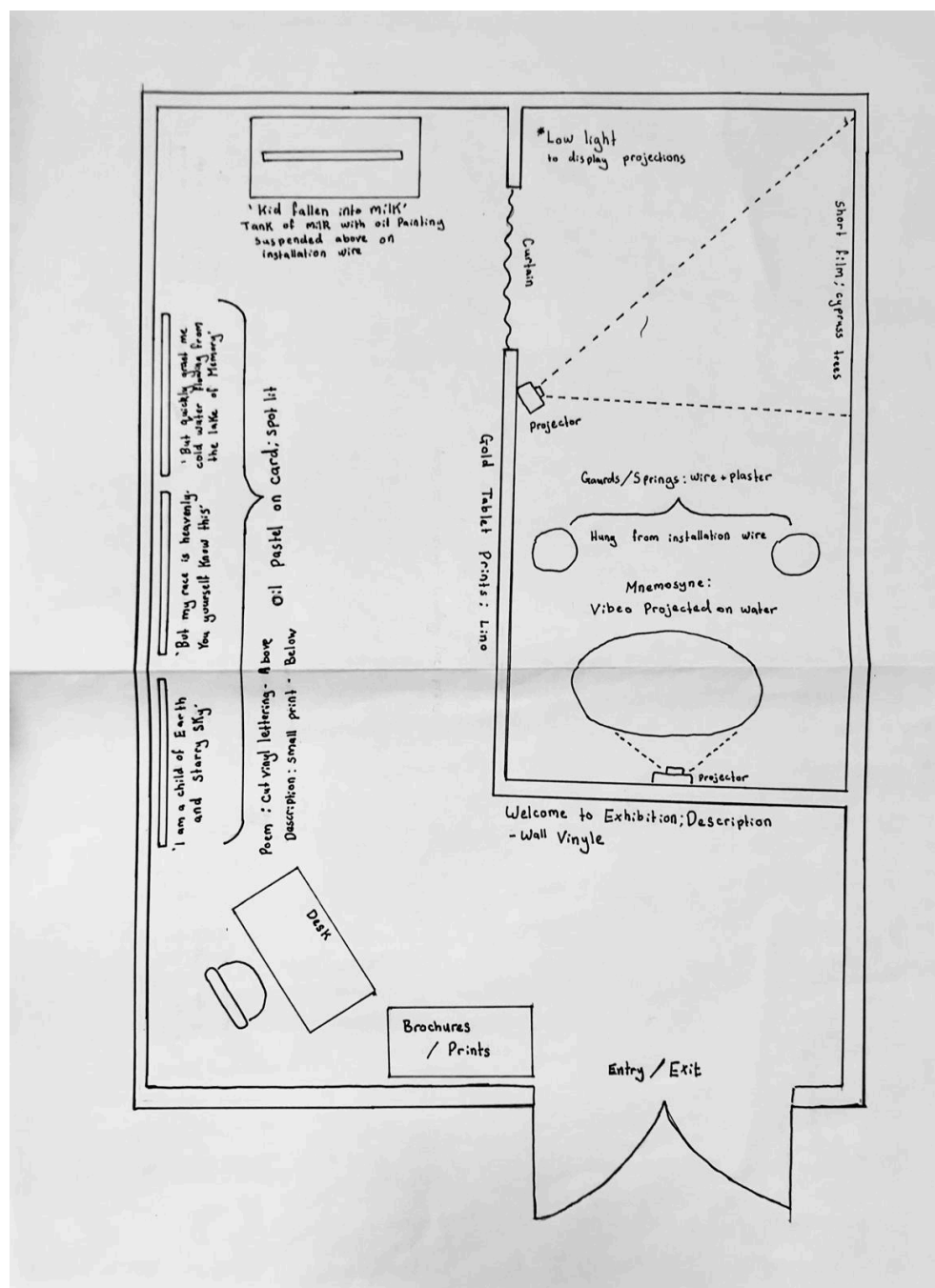
## Appendix



**Figure 1.**

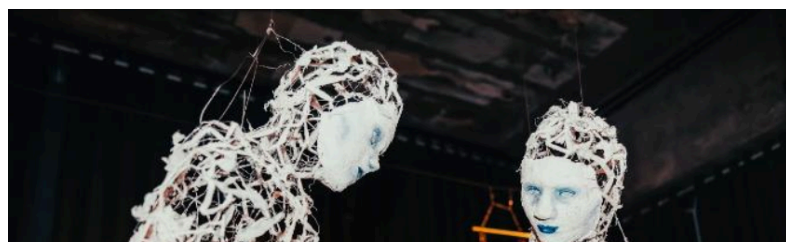
Promotional poster for *The Orphic Experience; a Creative Katabasis* (2025), featuring a photograph of the *River/Guard* sculpture as presented in an earlier exhibition at *Riposte; Icon Duos* on the 14th March 2025.





**Figure 2.**

Initial floor plan for the exhibition based on the dimensions of the Emily Wilding Davison Building Exhibition Space, as presented to the head of the Cultural Services team on the 6th November 2024.





**Figures 3 and 4.**

*The Guards/ River Lethe and Lake Mnemosyne*, (2025), wire, plaster of Paris, modroc, fabric and acrylic paint, 2 x 3 m.

These mixed media sculptures are representational both figuratively as guards of Hades, to which approaching souls must answer to in accordance with the Gold Tablets' guidance and metaphorically as the River Lethe and Lake Mnemosyne, their wireframes tangled with the many souls who have tried to path though their waters..

### **A Reception Study**

Prior to the main Orphic exhibition I took two of my sculptures to an all night gallery in the Docklands. Throughout the night I watched as guests interacted with the solum wire forms; some dancing with them, holding their hand, placing small votives to their outstretched palms, breathing smoke-soaked souls into their hollow bodies, taking photos, reaching upwards to kiss painted plaster lips or simply observing, the gaze as interaction enough. Though there were brochures and an artist statement elucidating on the nature of these sculptures, their place amongst my other artworks and their symbolic status as manifestations of the river Lethe and lake Mnemosyne, few had read these. Instead the night brought a wave of new eyes, unaware they were mingling with the waters of the Underworld.

*As the night went on they drifted between Bacchic estasis and artistic indulgence,*

*The presence of the joyous twice-born god heavy in the air,*

*His spirit enthused in the sweat of writhing bodies,*

*Thumping of feet in rolling rhyme.*

*Ehoi! Ehoi!*

*Wild Maenads and Satyrs on Brutalist Parnassus.*

I asked those convening with the Guards at Hades gates for their thoughts, how the sculptures made them feel or who they thought they were. Some saw them as lovers, another as twins and a third as strangers passing in the night, cruising perhaps. One saw them as opposites, the next as two of the same. Some said they felt afraid of being crushed under an imposing floating authority; no pupils in their eyes, they were not seen, only gazed at. Another said the sculptures made them feel comforted as they held a soft plaster hand and swayed softly as though holding someone dear.

Several people picked up on themes of miscommunication. The sculptures hung facing each other, with their eyes not quite meeting (a mistake on my part as I fumbled with hanging wires atop a weak-kneed

ladder, a tool much sought after by desperate artists as the sun began to set). Within this miscommunicative interpretation, people again imagined them as stilted lovers unable to understand one another or, friends with different communication styles. One person tried to nudge them within one another's reach so that they might embrace and their blue-grey lips meet if only for a moment. The Guards only swung blankly back to their usual impassive distance.

Perhaps due to their construction from chicken wire and old clothes or due to their patience expression or perhaps they'd read my artist statement on the significance of the river Lethe, one person told me it reminded them of rebirth, the process of becoming anew. Multiple people stood with me on the themes of Abjection, something I had not published anywhere but was core to my thought process as I constructed their crumbling epidermal layer and uncanny liminal expressions. People just seemed to notice the sculptures were somehow in between, alive and moving yet cold dead things; like Kristeva's cadaver. Hands passed in and out of wire frames slowly dismantling the clinged to boundary of Self and Other, highlighting its awful irregularity.

Many asked questions ranging from if the sculptures were 'real' or 3D printed, how they were hanging or why I cared what they thought about the sculptures at all. Not all were particularly interested in giving their opinion, but most were.

Some saw them through a Biblical lens as angels; an interpretation spurred on by my own presentation as a hundred eyed seriph. One person even wrote a poem entitled Two Angels:

*Two angels drift down from the ceiling,  
Their eyes meet—does it hold a meaning?  
Hands entwined, as if to share a secret,  
Yet we forbid it,*

*And so, they remain silent.*

I spoke to one Classicist and we had a long conversation on conceptions of the Underworld from the miserable place bemoaned by Achilles in the Odyssey 11 to the black and white office blocks of Netflix's Kaos. She also felt the sculptures remind her of Arcane.

One conversation really hit upon the nature of this plurality of interpretations. After answering my question on their interpretation of the sculptures (:humanity/vulnerability), they asked if I was the artist (a fact I tried not to reveal too quickly) and what my intention was in making these sculptures. I answered that:

‘On the most figurative level they are the Guards to the house of Hades from the Petilia tablet.’

‘So they are a function?’

‘Perhaps. They are mentioned only in passing.’

‘That is why they are so empty, they have no soul, no character. They are only a flat role within a system.’

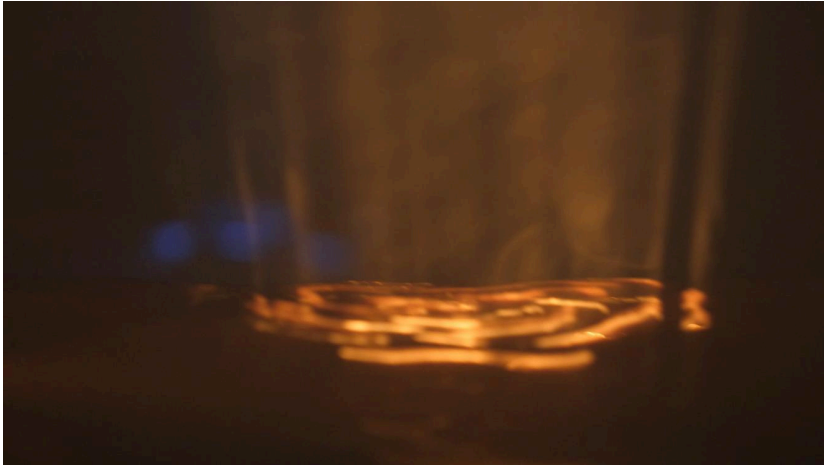
‘I think their soul is what people see in them.’

‘They are projections. Can I breathe a soul into them?’

‘Go ahead.’

The soul smelt like cherries and coiled through the wire mesh in tiny ringlets bathed in pink light.

As art objects the Guards soul is all projection, they are not alive themselves but reflect the observers own vitality back at them. Like with the figure of Orpheus or the Orphic tradition more widely, each person who comes into contact with them takes what they need transforming them into something new. They are reborn with every passing glance.

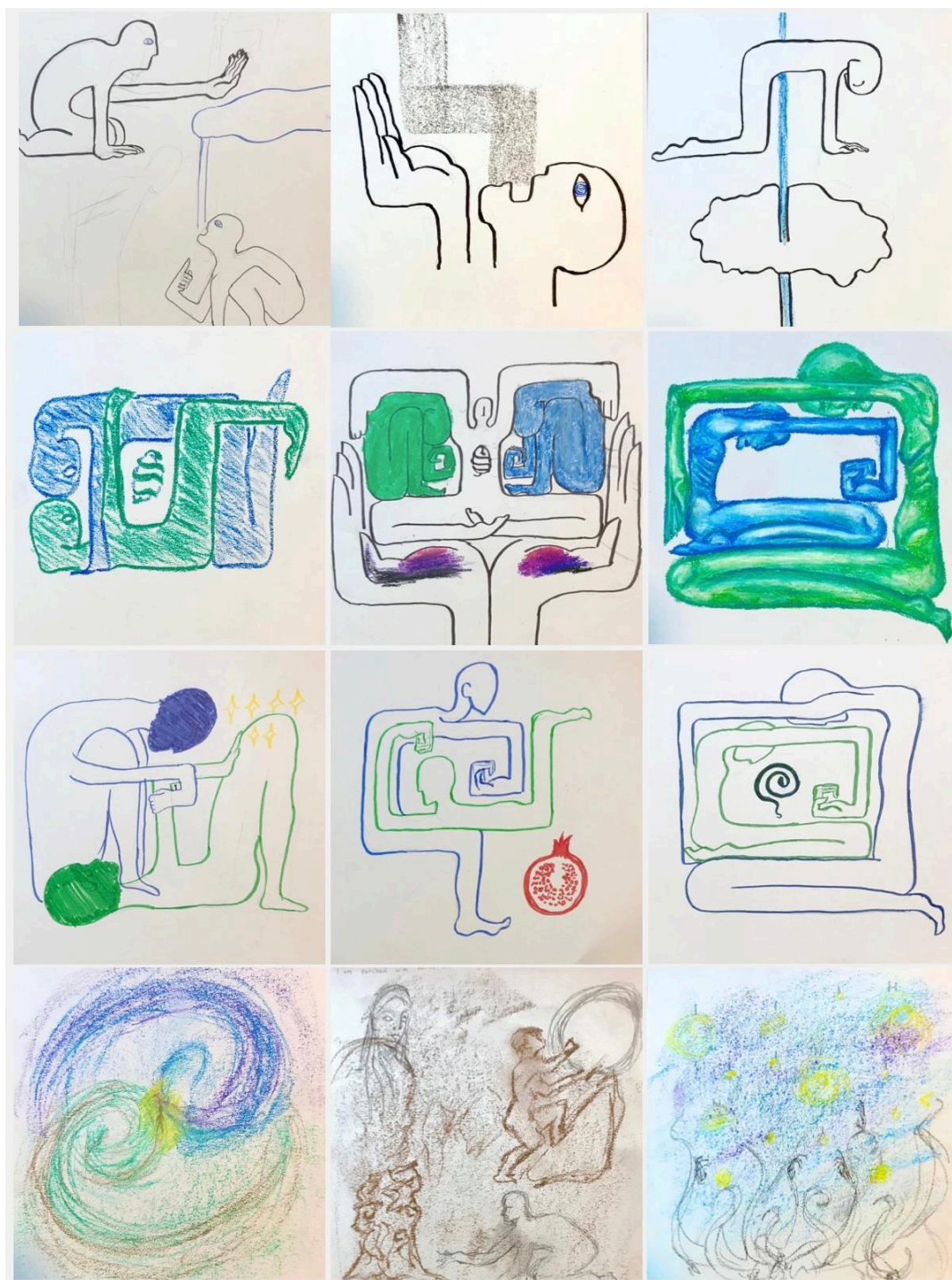


**Figures 5 and 6.**

Screenshots from *Cypress*, (2024), short film.

This short film directed by Sohana Collins with lighting design and editing by Megan Griffin, represents the bright cypress trees that grow near the River Lethe in the depths of the underworld. Their trunks are made from pure light streaming through dendrite silhouettes into dense fog; creating a brooding and disorientating atmosphere to the halls of murky Hades.





**Figure 7.**

*A selection of sketches developing compositions for the pastel drawings, (2024), markers, chalk and oil pastel, each 21 x 29.7 cm.*



**Figure 8.**

*I am a child of Earth and starry Sky*, (2024), oil pastel on card, 59.4 x 84.1 cm.

This is the first of three drawings inspired by the sacred phrase which a soul must tell the Guards to the house of Hades according to several of the Gold Tablets. Both the artwork and the line it references can be interpreted in Hesiodic terms; as representing Gaia and Ouranos, locked in a reproductive embrace at the start of the universe, or in Orphic terms; as presenting the biform soul part heavenly/ Dionesian and part earthly/ Titanic.





**Figure 9.**

*But my race is heavenly*, (2024), oil pastel on card, 59.4 x 84.1 cm.

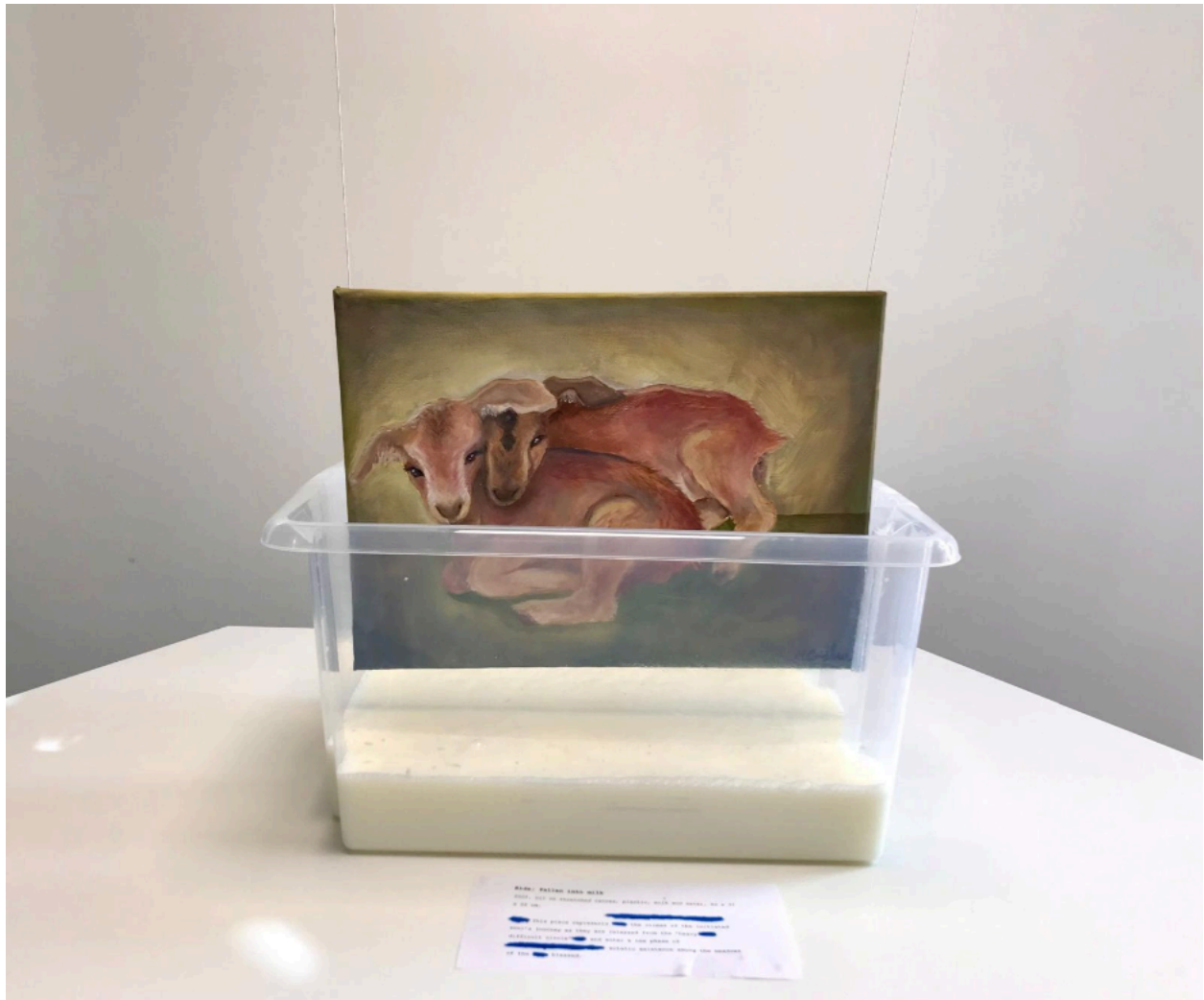
The second in the series, this drawing represents the start of the creation myth as presented by the *Orphic Theogony*. This differs significantly from the Hesiodic creation alluded to above; Gaia and Ouranos are still present but they are decentralised and instead held in the double embrace of both Phranes and Nyx.



**Figure 10.**

*But grant me cold water flowing from the Lake of Memory*, (2024), oil pastel on card, 59.4 x 84.1 cm.

As the final piece in the pastel series, this drawing represents the initiated soul fulfilling the path laid out for them in the Gold Tablets and gaining access to the Lake of Memory, an achievement that will free them from the cycle of reincarnation and perhaps even grant them communion with the Chthonic Queen (Persephone).

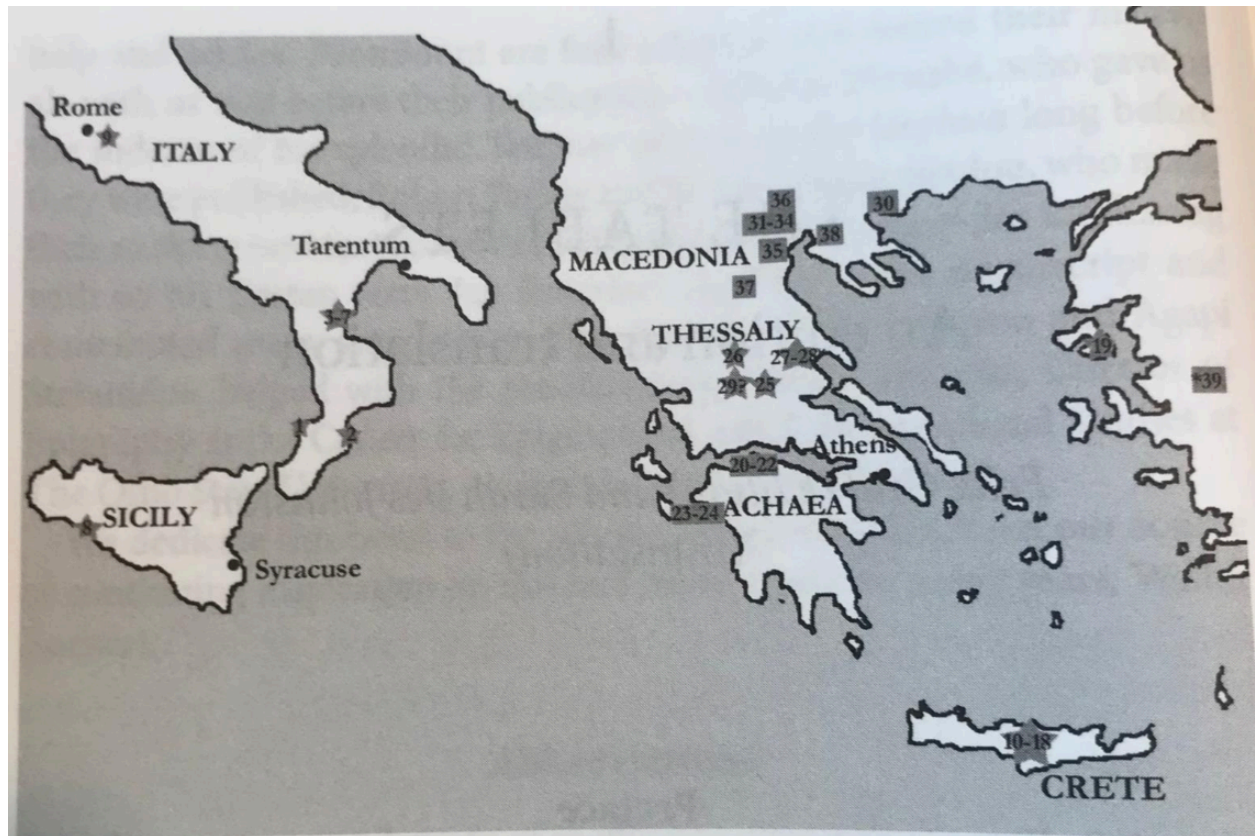


**Figures 11 and 12.**

*Kids, fallen into milk*, (2025), oil on stretched canvas, plastic, milk and water, 50 x 31 x 25 cm.

This piece represents the climax of the initiated soul's journey as they are released from the "heavy difficult circle" and enter a new phase of ecstatic existence among the meadows of the blessed.





**Figure 13.** Map 1 in Graf and Johnston (2007, p.3) illustrates the find spots of the Gold Tablets.



**Figure 14.**

*Orpheus of All Things*, (2025), card, clay, plaster of Paris and acrylic, 50 x 35 x 40 cm.

This sculpture represents the multiplicity of Orpheus and the many legacies and traditions that have claimed him. Each face represents a different aspect; encompassing Orpheus the Prophet, the Author, the Musician, the Hero, the Lover, the Christian Allegory, the Jewish Teacher, the Egyptian and the Pythagorean, while the fingers point outwards at the viewer inviting them to create their own conception of Orpheus.



**Figure 15.**

Red Figure Attic pelike, depicting Orpheus among the Thracian, strumming his lyre and singing, c. 430

BCE, currently housed at the British Museum, AN: 1846,0925.10.