

“Cosmos Cosmetics”

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Opening: 17 June, 6-8 PM

Press Release:

OUT OF ORDER

Amelia Groom

Anne Carson tells us that the word *Kosmos* – *κόσμος*— which she translates as ‘ornament’, “implies in Greek all kinds of ‘good order,’ from the arrangement of planets in the sky to the style with which an individual wears her hat.”

Our words *cosmos* and *cosmetics* stem from this same Greek root, *Kosmos*. Both words denote an ordering and re-ordering of the visible, the imposition of a certain relation between boundaries.

Cosmology is a cosmetic pursuit: the ordering of bodies and surfaces – celestial or otherwise – draped into coherent new arrangements, in keeping with the needs and beliefs of those who construct them.

“According to one ancient cosmology,” writes Carson, “*cosmos* was first assembled out of chaos, when Zeus threw a veil over the head of the goddess of the underworld, *Chthonie*, and married her.”

If we understand this myth, chaos is not dissolved or tamed away by order – it’s just ornamentally veiled. Order is a framing, a temporary cosmetic injunction which remains always provisional.

The veil is all surface; almost nothing but the presence of separation itself. Separation as the basis of ordering; the cosmic-cosmetic bestowal of a new prosthetic surface.

*κόσμος*: universe, arrangement, adornment, embellishment, world, make up, making up. “Nothing goes as deep as decoration,” writes Michel Serres, “ornamentation is as vast as the world.”

From the current order of appearances, new orders can be extracted. Any critique of present conditions demands a belief in this basic alchemical premise; the transmutability of the hitherto opaque – a re-draping of the veils.

“*Cosmos* and *cosmetics*, appearance and essence have the same origin,” Serres reminds us. “Adornment equals order, and embellishment is equivalent to law [...] Every veil is a magnificently historiated display.”

Anne Carson, *Dirt and Desire: The Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity*, in “Constructions of the Classical Body” ed. James I. Porter (University of Michigan Press, 1999) p 89

Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley

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