

Cecilia Hillstrom Gallery:

Katja Larsson, Mythologies
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*The old god still remembered all his tricks,
and first became a lion with a mane,
then snake, then leopard, then a mighty boar,
then flowing water, then a leafy tree.*

- Homer, *The Odyssey*, Translated by Emily Wilson

In Homer's *Odyssey*, the ancient Gods are ever present tricksters, constantly meddling in human affairs. They shape-shift and insert themselves right into the arcs of our stories, and should we forget about their existence their revenge is swiftly felt.

A seafarer embarking upon a risky journey can only safely do so once Zeus' protection is ensured. When all measures have been taken to appease the gods, the adventurer can boldly set off headfirst into the unknown, knowing that his or her fate is in the hands of a greater entity.

But what about now? To whom do we pray? What do we worship, whose rules do we abide by to ensure that our travels take us safely to shore?

We no longer worship Athena, Hermes or Pegasus. We do however worship petrol. We are willing to drain the earth of its *Ichor* in order to run our machines, our winged horses, to hear their roaring engines, to feel their awesome power. We do not wish to worship gods, we want to be them. But maybe the ancient gods never went that far away. Perhaps there is a new strategy - to take the forms of the powerful things we surround ourselves by, our vehicles, our fuel?

In Homer's poem, Athena takes the shape of humans and animals alike to secure the outcomes of her own agendas. In our modern world, Athena is a tyre, an exhaust pipe, a Harley Davidson suspension kit. Hermes now roams the earth as the winged foot of Goodyear. Pegasus soars high in the sky as a red neon sign for Mobil Oil.

What does it mean when mythological symbols are appropriated in such a way? Is their meaning diluted? Or do the ancient gods in fact continue to live on as their names are invoked again and again? It has been argued that the closest a god will come to death is when their name stops being uttered. So maybe they are biding their time in our present-day as logotypes and manufactured goods? Is Athena-as-gasket, Zeus-as-brake caliper, here to protect us on our motorways, to keep us safe on our journeys much like in ancient times? Or have they simply settled for what's available for now, waiting for a renaissance?

Is it a coincidence that the vehicle and petrol industry seek this proximity to ancient Western deities? Strength, speed and divinity are obvious traits that anybody would aspire to (and they do, plenty of ancient gods advertise coffee, soap bars, gum etc) but there is something more sinister about an oil company taking Pegasus' image, a divine creature associated with peace and poetry.

When a switchboard gets branded Proteus, is the designer referencing the passage from the *Odyssey* where the old god tries to escape Menelaus' tight grip by switching from lion, to snake, to water, to tree? Or is Proteus inserting himself into our world of objects, where he best sees fit? The gods are not without a sense of humour.

In *Mythologies*, these contemporary forms of ancient deities as vehicle parts and logotypes are reimagined as classical artefacts.

A stack of Austone Athena tyres gets to form a classical column, where each tyre represents a stone section, arranged around a central pole just like the Doric columns of the Parthenon. On first glance these appear to be a stack of white tyres, but on closer inspection the tyres are seen to be made of natural stone. Athena reveals herself subtly but plainly to anyone looking close, in the cast logotype embossed onto the side of the tyre, placed flat on the top of the column, in lieu of a capital.

Hercules, in pale, weathered terracotta echoes the salvaged fragments of ancient ruins, the tyre tread worn and gradually faded.

Achilles is cracked right down the middle, resembling a section of a broken column seen amongst the ruins of The Acropolis.

Aeolus, the wind god, is calm and blue, the pattern of the tyre tread bearing the motion of a gentle wave. The Aeolus ADR35 is, of course, an all weather tyre.

Mythologies, a cast relief, echoes the composition of classical murals by Phidias and Donatello, and highlights the striking similarities between traditional religious symbolism and the imagery of contemporary branded logotypes.

The fragmented Pediments of The Acropolis are represented by Honda body parts cast in a white marble Jesmonite, presented on stainless steel poles like museological artefacts. Honda takes its winged logotype from Nike of Samothrace, the famous statue suggesting movement and speed precisely like the aerodynamism of a motorcycle counter steering through a curve. As in Roland Barthes description of the Citroen DS in his seminal text from which the exhibition lends its title, these fragments hold together *By Sole Virtue of Their Wondrous Shape*.

Mythologies echoes a museum of ancient history, a collection of modern day gods and heroes.