

what remains written in the sky?

Eva Sajovic

The exhibition, *Rise and Fall of a Temple*, and this accompanying publication, explores symbolic architecture to serve as a metaphor for ideology, with pillars and columns representing the foundational structures of Roman imperial power that continue to shape and uphold contemporary systems and societal ideologies.

Through display, a film and a series of participatory events, a dynamic framework for exchange developed. The temple became a stage for rethinking dominant narratives, welcoming audiences to participate in its (de)construction, to consider how the ruins of empire might be reimagined as tools for empathy, renewal, and collective dialogue.





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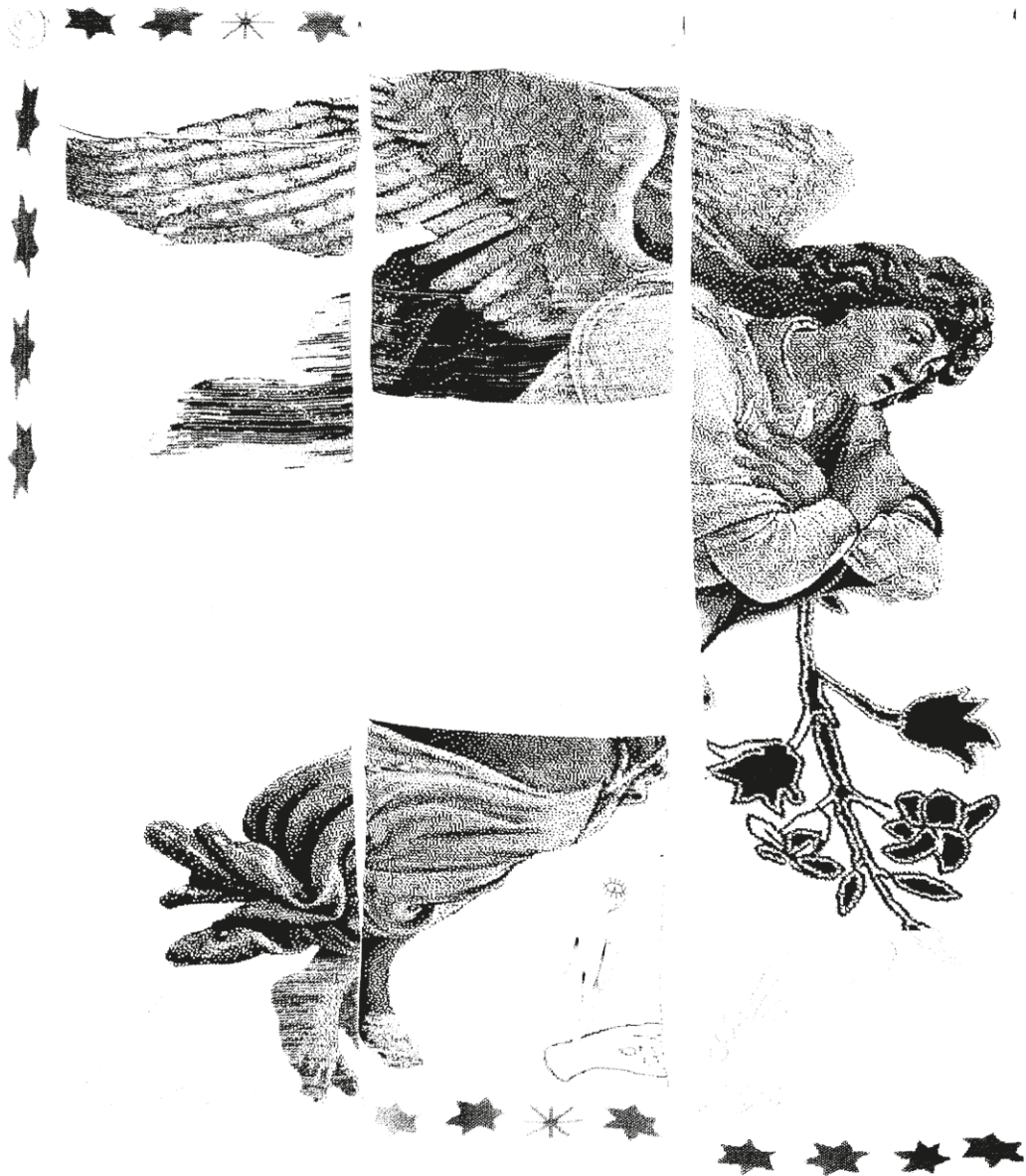
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(Film script)

Sarah Butler



THE GLORIOUS

CHARACTERS

THE PROFESSOR
THE MUSICIAN
THE CURATOR
THE ARTIST

SETTING

The Banqueting Hall at the Chelsea College of Arts, a large room with warm wooden walls and iron fireplaces that would not be allowed to be used now because of health and safety regulations. The carpeting is red and cream and sepia, with wiggly lines running longways.

TIME

Shortly after 2pm on 22 April 2026.

[Onscreen: Title Slide]

[THE PROFESSOR stands behind the UAL podium]

THE PROFESSOR

Good afternoon. My name is Erika Hughes and I am a Professor and the Associate Dean of Research for Chelsea, Camberwell, and Wimbledon Colleges of Arts here at UAL. It is an honour to welcome you to Chelsea today, to look toward what sort of future we can divine.

I think this symposium positions the act of divination as an act of agency - not just reading a future, or receiving it, but of *making* it happen.

In his book *Psychomagic*, the dramatist and psychoanalyst Alejandro Jodorowsky, who was also a great master of the Tarot of Marseille, notes that reading Tarot cards and conducting magic rituals works because 'Psychomagic proposes that we act, not just talk.' He locates the power of ritual in the transformation inherent to doing.

Similarly, the anthropologist Victor Turner notes that 'when a ritual does work, for whatever reason, the exchange... seems... to achieve genuinely cathartic effects, causing in some cases real transformations of character and of social relationships.'

Turner and Jodorowsky argue that actions can be transformative. This, I believe, is a hopeful, joyous way of viewing the world - and to hope and to laugh can be radical acts of subversion. The powerful and playful works in Eva's exhibition invite a similar intervention, channelling the spirits of the Roman empire and freeing them from their chipped terracotta prisons.

In the description of today's gathering, we are invited to, and I will quote here, 'collectively imagine more inclusive and resilient futures' as we seek to answer whether we can 'draw on lessons from fallen civilisations such as the Roman Empire to gain perspective on today's environmental, social, and political crises'. Just two weeks ago we heard threats to 'wipe out an entire civilisation,' and in some places they are more than just threats - they are genocide. The existential threat to civilisations from without and within is not only a theoretical question.

This stuff is real, and really absurd. Eva's work foregrounds the absurdity of power, literally spinning, rotating, and inverting her subjects. Her work reminds us of the power of inversion, of the revolutionary potential found in ludic interventions that laugh at this absurdity.

One of my favourite pieces in the exhibition is this guy.

[Onscreen: Exhibition photo]

To me he looks like he slipped on a banana peel and is caught in a perpetual state of falling, like the International Space Station. The ludic orbit-in-stasis silhouette of her Roman soldiers illustrates the absurd and temporal nature of power in a reality where each and every one of us will, eventually, die.

He is also something that I would love to buy and put in my small apartment in Tottenham. I know exactly where he would go - I've got this long hallway - anyway. The point here is that Eva makes work that I want to possess.

[Onscreen: Exhibition photo]

I feel the same way about her tapestries. I want to wrap that knitted sword around my neck, offering myself as a sacrifice to be decapitated by the mixed metaphor. Eva's work makes me confront my own impulses to buy, to take, to hoard.

This guy also reminds me of Pyrgopolynices, the eponymous protagonist of the play *Miles Glorious*,

or *The Braggart Soldier*, by the Roman playwright Titus Maccius Plautus. This play was written sometime before 184 BCE, and in the spirit of making a very small contribution to this beautiful day, I would like to share a bit of this play with you. But in the spirit of Jodorowsky and Turner, I would also like to invite you to participate in the ritual of performing together with me. Because in this play, the bad guy doesn't win. And in fact, Plautus's comedy offers us the opportunity to be a part of taking him down, and being radical agents of justice.

*[THE CURATOR enters, joins
THE PROFESSOR at the podium]*

The play begins with the director coming onto the stage, who tells the audience

THE CURATOR

'Now folks, if you'll be kind enough to hear me out, Then I'll be kind and tell you what our play's about. Whoever doesn't want to listen, let him beat it And give a seat to one of those in back who need it. I'll tell you why we've gathered in this festive spot, What comedy we will enact, its name and plot. This play is called the *Alazon* in Greek, A name translated 'braggart' in the tongue we speak. This town is Ephesus ...'

THE PROFESSOR

And I would like to add here that we are using a translation into English by Erich Segal,

[Onscreen: slide of Love Story book and film poster]

the author of both the novel *Love Story* and the screenplay for the movie - really - he was a trained classist and wrote *Love Story* as a sort of farewell letter to a former classmate who rejected him and married someone else. *And* he translated this play into English. True story!

THE CURATOR

Erika asked me to join this performance yesterday, and I only got the script today. I didn't actually say I would do this, but I gave a little thumbs up in response to her email so I think that is why I am here...

THE PROFESSOR

That is exactly why you are here! Now - what I want us to do very briefly is reenact just a bit of this play together. Not just Ruth and me, but all of you as well. But first, we need to set the stage.

[Onscreen: Rome 1, 2, 3]

THE PROFESSOR steps back from the podium and places a dropcloth near the front of the stage. She removes her jacket to reveal a tacky Roman-ish costume dress.

THE CURATOR

'The soldier you are about to meet is the braggart for which the play is named. He's a lecher and believes he's the gods' gift to women. His name is Pyrgopolynices.'

THE PROFESSOR

That's me!

I got the part because of my American accent.

THE CURATOR

It's true, that's why we asked her to do this.

THE PROFESSOR/PYRGOPOLYNICES

The stage directions say that Pyrgopolynices poses pompously, and declaims the following lines in heroic fashion:

'Look lively - shine a shimmer on that shield of mine Surpassing sunbeams - when there are no clouds, of course. Thus, when it's needed, with the battle joined, its gleam Shall strike opposing eyeballs in the bloodshed - bloodshot! Ah me, I must give comfort to this blade of mine Lest he lament and yield himself to dark despair. Too long ere now has he been sick of his vacation. Poor lad! He's dying to make mincemeat of the foe.'

THE CURATOR

The weapons trade must have been big business even then, in ancient Rome.

THE PROFESSOR/PYRGOPOLYNICES

Tell me - who was that chap I saved at Field-of-Roaches, Where the supreme commander was Crash-Bang-Razzle-Dazzle Son of Mighty-Mercenary-Messup, you know, Neptune's nephew?

THE CURATOR

Ah yes, the man with golden armour, I recall. You puffed away his legions with a single breath Like wind blows autumn leaves, or straw from thatch-roofed huts.

THE PROFESSOR/PYRGOPOLYNICES

No more of this. I don't know if I told you, but my grandmother was ... Venus.

THE CURATOR

Of course. Why bother to narrate Your many daring deeds to me - who knows them all.

[Aside, to the audience]

It's only for my stomach that I stomach him. While ears are suffering, at least my teeth are suppering. And so I yes and yes again to all his lies.

THE PROFESSOR

Pyrgopolynices has surrounded himself with yes men and lives in an echo chamber of exploits and successes he has made up, which is of course his great weakness. He is holding a young woman captive - this was way before #MeToo and grab them by the pussy. But his slave and a host of other people want to save her so they trick him, then ambush him:

THE CURATOR

Well, now he's trapped himself, caught in his own devices. The ambush is prepared: The old man's standing staunchly To attack this lecher who's so loud about his loveliness, Who thinks that every woman loves him at first sight, When really they detest him, men as well as women.

THE PROFESSOR

So what we're now going to do is stage the final moments of the play - but with fruit. Tomatoes. And bananas.

*[THE MUSICIAN begins playing tense music
on the ukulele.]*

[THE PROFESSOR/PYRGOPOLYNICES puts on helmet.]

Ok I am ready!

THE ARTIST

Bring 'im out! If he won't come, then pick him up
and throw him out! Make a little seat for him -
right in mid-air. Tear him apart!

*[THE CURATOR and others in the Public Programming
team throw tomatoes at THE PROFESSOR/PYRGOPOLYNICES.*

*They invite others to join in, throwing till
nearly all the tomatoes are gone. Make sure that
THE ARTIST retains one last tomato]*

THE PROFESSOR/PYRGOPOLYNICES

Stop - stop - stop - I'm pounded plenty.
Please, I beg -

THE CURATOR

Swear that you won't harm a single person for this
whole affair,
or
For the pounding you've received today - and will
receive - if we now let you go intact - sweet little
grandson of the goddess Venus.

THE PROFESSOR/PYRGOPOLYNICES

Yes! I swear by Jupiter and Mars, I'll never harm
a soul. And my beating up today - I grant it was
my just reward. As a favour, let me leave with
testimony to my manhood!

THE ARTIST

I suggest we wallop him a final time and let him go.

*[THE ARTIST smashes the final tomato
on PYRGOPOLYNICES's helmet.]*

THE PROFESSOR

Oh, pity me! And yet ... I find the verdict's just.

[Philosophically]

There would be less lechery if lechers were to learn
from this; Lots would be more leery and less
lustful.

Now - let's go on to the symposium, we have some
incredible speakers. But first, we must say the very
final line of the play, as Palatus made
Pyrgopolynices say to the audience

[To the audience]

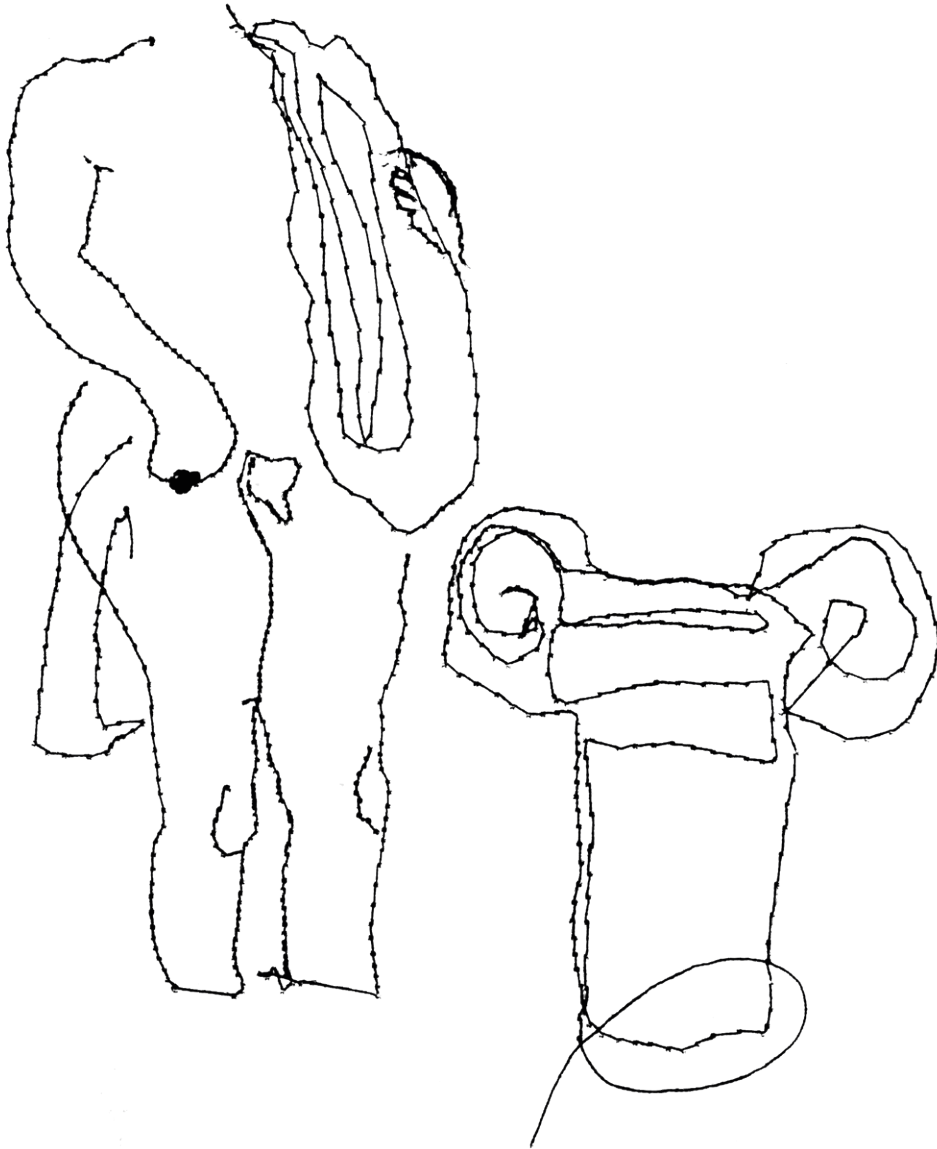
ALL

Applaud!

*[THE MUSICIAN plays something a bit more cheerful.
THE PROFESSOR, THE CURATOR, and THE ARTIST take
a bow. Onscreen: title slide]*

Erika Hughes
Professor of Performance & Society
and Associate Dean of Research for Camberwell,
Chelsea, and Wimbledon Colleges of Arts

ROMAN EMPIRE AND ROMAN IMPERIAL CRITIQUE



The work in Eva's exhibition evolved during her fellowship at the British School at Rome and it builds its aesthetic on the memory of earlier Roman and Italian ones, interrogating ideas of Empire and their cyclical nature. In this contribution, I will explore what makes Rome such a productive model for novel explorations of imperial themes. Beyond any other, Roman literature, as well as literature written by Greek-speaking citizens of Rome, presents us with the most complete narrative of empire. In it, we find the main tropes of conquest and colonisation. But at the same time, it provides the opposite: ideas essential for a critique of colonisation, and for despair at the idea of empire and its corrupting tendencies.

The ideas explored in *Rise and Fall of a Temple*, about empire's emotional impact and shifts in emotional register, about loss and mourning in empire, are already present in the way in which the Romans wrote about their own empire and about their own historical development.

Part of that development concerns the place of art and its relationship to the cycles of empire. If we look to Rome, the concept of art emerges in the Roman annexation of the highly developed Greek cities of Asia Minor, which had been flourishing centres of Greek culture for centuries, and where, in the period after Alexander the Great, new models for the imperial metropolis emerged: the most splendid was Pergamum. The historian Sallust describes a particular watershed that occurred in the context of Sulla's conquest in Asia Minor in the early 1st century BCE: the transportation of what had previously been sacred objects, including statues of the gods, back to Italy, where they entered the private collections of the élite. It would be an exaggeration to insist on this as the sole origin of the modern Western notion of Art, but the idea is useful. With the despoiling of Greek religious sites, repurposing things that had previously

had a religious function as decoration, and valuing them, thus dislocated, for their decorative and aesthetic qualities, a new relationship between aesthetics, religion, and ideology emerged. This is the moment when the idea of art, in the sense we still use, really began. But we can only understand it like that because the Romans complain about it. They are not celebrating it when they talk about it; rather, they are criticising it and using it as an indicator of their own moral decline.

Their moral anxieties centre on a despair at human greed. Statues are just one example of a whole range of things plundered on a massive scale: the things that made the Roman Empire look the way it came to look. Big bronze vessels, ceramic vessels, and even columns, to which Eva's film alludes, were taken away from the places where they had been made and used and brought to decorate luxury villas or new public buildings. Even at the start of this process, we find self-castigation centred around two things: fear of luxury, but also an acceptance that people want beautiful things and feel compelled to have them. In the background is a longstanding dialectic between Greek and Roman culture and the way in which these two superpowers work. One rises, then one falls, and the other rises. Greece goes down while Rome comes up.

But in that process, the two empires are not equivalent, since Rome is an illiterate society of what the Greeks would call barbarians. In Greece, which is an idea almost more than a place, we have Homer and tragedy, and a remarkable linguistic continuum that stretches from the Eastern to the Western edges of the Mediterranean Sea and beyond. Everyone, whether in Cadiz, Egypt, in Macedonia, or in Syria, is reading Homer. Of course, 'everyone' refers to a small élite, but it has a cultural effect, nonetheless. So a contrast emerges between illiterate barbarian Romans who come to control the world, and Greeks who have lost their political organisation. What Greeks end up doing is propping up Roman imperial discourse with their long tradition of talking about history and culture, and providing, in defeat, the cultural capital and the trappings of luxury that

demonstrate the new supremacy of Rome. It is interesting because what we find when we are looking for critique is that it is Roman authors who are doing it. They are the ones made anxious by empire. They are the ones who think that being an imperialist is a troubling and morally questionable project. If the Greeks protested, their words have barely survived.

Part of this is the presentation of the voices of resistance leaders, animated to hold up a mirror to the destructiveness of empire. When the historian Tacitus describes Roman expansion into Britain, we find the most concentrated critique of the imperial project. In the *Annals*, there is Queen Boudicca and then, in the *Agricola*, the military and tribal leader Calgacus. He is the first named Scot in history. In the entrance hall of the National Portrait Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh, the walls are decorated with Victorian representations of the genealogy of Scottish identity. The first figure in this parade is Calgacus, whom Tacitus brings into history, speaking on the eve of a final battle with the Romans.

Tacitus gives Calgacus the immortal phrase, 'where they make a desert, they call it peace', *ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant*. This is a maxim about the evils of imperialism that has rarely been equalled: here you are conquering, and your conquest leads you to wipe out existing culture and people, and then you declare that you have produced peace. It is not difficult to see parallels in our current global situation. Boudicca's speech in *the Annals* is similar. She presents a clearer articulation of sexual violence as a metaphor for empire. In all three works, the *Agricola*, the *Germania*, and the *Annals*, Tacitus explores the contrast between the cultured, advancing civilisation of empire and the simple, close-to-nature, unmaterialistic indigenous culture which it is encountering, and threatening to extinguish.

This continues in Cassius Dio, writing a history of Rome in Greek at the court of the emperor Hadrian. His Boudicca describes this contrast between being a Briton and being a Roman. She describes the Britons as 'living under another sky'. In these far-flung parts of the North, the whole environment is different.

The focus on the environment relates to the Roman critique of luxury. When the Romans arrived at the English Channel, they were baffled by the tides. What is this sea, this ocean, doing? It behaves in a way which we cannot get our heads around. But like tides, there are further exotic features that lure the Romans. Pliny the Elder tells us that the main reason Julius Caesar wanted to launch his invasion across the Channel was because he had heard that the pearls there were bigger than the pearls in the Mediterranean, and obviously bigger pearls are what motivated Julius Caesar.

How do we interact with this history, and what do we take from it? It is easy to say that the Romans gave us a model of empire. We know what it is: soldiers, slaughter, enslavement, endless expansion. But we are not involved in that process. Those imperial wars have been over for a long time. So we can decide which story we choose, and which emphasis we adopt. For me, at this point in time, it is the environmental impact of empire, the focus on the despoiling of nature in order to produce more riches for the Roman table, more trappings for the Roman villa; and, enabling that, the enslaved populations required to generate the network of world trade, which is what characterised the Roman Empire for the several centuries of its most stable period. We can be guided by the fact that the reason we are interested in these ideas, and the reason they feel so familiar, is because a lot of these historians, and many other texts exploring empire, perhaps especially Virgil and Ovid, were mainstays of European education systems for many centuries. Indeed, until the early twentieth century, they were the basis of everybody's education. So even though that dominance is no longer so current, the thought-world for thinking about empire is nevertheless produced by this material. The fundamental concepts which allow us to explore empire in more than a two-dimensional way are Roman ones, and it is impossible that we are no longer embroiled in them.

Matthew Fox

Roman Historian, Institute of Classical Studies





REFLECTIONS FROM AN ANCIENT ROMAN HISTORIAN

Soldiers, leaders, weapons, and armour: all are part of traditional narratives of ancient Rome. Through the eyes of ancient historiographers — and indeed modern historians of the ancient world — Rome's rise as an imperial power was born from conquest, conflict, and colonisation. This is reflected in the ruins of the ancient city. Triumphal arches commemorate victory in foreign wars; Trajan's column is a towering monument that celebrates the violent suppression of the Dacian people by the emperor Trajan.

These marble structures reinforce the harshness and oppression of empire in the ancient world in their materiality, construction, and the scenes they depict. Marble was a sign of wealth and a product of empire, and these imposing structures were built to last. But buildings — like empires themselves — inevitably collapse. As the camera pans down Trajan's column in 'the rise and fall of a temple' and, later, pans up a flourishing Oriental Plane tree, Sajovic imagines a world in which the collapse of empire is not only a possible development, but a positive one. One in which warfare is replaced by calm, in which nature can thrive again, in which patriarchal political structures may cease to exist.

Textiles, too, were part of the fabric of empire. Ship masts and sacks for grain were produced in large quantities and were practical supports for the expansion of Rome's empire. Murex-dyed togas and other exquisite fabrics were reminders of social stratification and aristocratic wealth. Women, both freeborn and enslaved, contributed to the creation of these objects, and have always played an important part in society and politics,

even if their contributions are frequently overshadowed, hidden, or silenced. But what if we start to reconstruct this narrative? Through a combination of knitting and tufting, and the integration of domestic objects in military portraits, Eva brings to the fore a softer version of the world.

The movable parts remove the sense of rigidity. Our gaze, and the narrative, is interrupted. A sword is transformed to a broom. A vacuum cleaner accompanies a medieval soldier. A cardboard temple is built and then collapses. The bold colours prompt thought about the presence of colour in the ancient Roman world.

Each colour had its own meaning: for instance, red was associated with power and war, while purple was a sign of aristocracy and political authority. We are also reminded of recent reconstructions of ancient marble figures in bright colour: what survives to us as white marble sculptures were once richly painted portraits of gods, philosophers, and emperors. But, again, these associations with power are challenged by the construction of Sajovic's figures, who wear recognisable military armour but appear genderless in their form. The materiality of the pieces, which are made primarily from end of production and reused wool, or recycled materials such as expired film and cardboard, add another layer to her work in which the hope for a better world is reflected in sustainable practice.

Sajovic challenges the traditional, patriarchal narratives of empire in her body of work. She imagines a world in which long-established political structures born from Roman imperialism that persist in contemporary capitalism could be dismantled and transformed. In her pieces, domestic collides with military and empire. The fragmented tapestries visually recall the physical structures of empire: the pillar-like pieces simultaneously evoke ancient columns while images of household objects are interspersed with weapons on the tapestries.

This disjuncture of symbols prompts the view to wonder if a world were possible in which conflict was less dominant. We still, in many ways, live in a world built on the marble pillars of the Roman empire. But what if we could disrupt patriarchal power dynamics? What if we could restore and regenerate rather than destroy? What if we could unravel ancient political structures and reweave a kinder, gentler world?

Kimberly Harris
Ancient Roman Historian

WHAT FUTURE CAN WE DIVINE? A COSMIC PERSPECTIVE

Humankind has long looked to the sky for signs and guidance: first through the cycle of day and night, and then through the changing seasons. These patterns became essential markers of time. People learned that there was a season for living and dying, for sowing and for harvesting. In time, they tracked not only the phases of the Moon but also the visible planets, such as Venus, which would appear as a morning star, vanish for about 40 days, and then return as an evening star. No less important were the two slow-moving planets, Jupiter and Saturn, whose conjunction every two decades seemed to coincide with a new business cycle.

People also watched the rising of certain stars, especially Sirius, the Dog Star. Located in the constellation Canis Major, Sirius is one of the brightest and most significant fixed stars, and, like many bright stars, it became the subject of mythology. Because of its brilliance, it came to symbolise success, ambition, and potential wealth. Its rising also signalled the season when the Nile was expected to flood. These celestial events helped shape human life by guiding farmers on when to plant and when to anticipate the migration of birds and other animals.

Ancient civilisations believed that these forces were governed by gods who dwelled in the heavens. Individuals who recognised these cycles and learned to forecast their rhythms were often revered. They gained elevated social status and, in some cases, became rulers. In these roles, they commissioned the construction of temples, obelisks, and pyramids in honour of these celestial gods.

The geometry and placement of these structures suggest that certain ancient peoples possessed sophisticated knowledge

that allowed them to align buildings with constellations, the Sun's apparent path across the sky, and the rising and setting of stars. Although these stars were believed to be fixed, they actually shift slowly over a cycle of around 26,000 years before repeating.

In many societies, certain individuals, now described as astrologers, were expected to watch the skies and warn leaders of unusual events. Eclipses, which occur in recurring patterns, were carefully observed. Knowing when they were likely to appear gave leaders a sense of authority and control.

The idea of cosmic gods to be honoured with temples and obelisks was not new. It spread from Mesopotamia through Babylon and Greece to Rome, where the number of such monuments increased. Temples were dedicated to Juno, Vesta, Mars, Venus, and many others.

Long before the founding of Rome, this area was considered important enough to warrant a temple to Saturn. Saturn, with an orbit of just under thirty years, was the outermost planet visible to the naked eye in the ancient world. Observers recorded the times when the Moon seemed to obscure it. Because Saturn was regarded as a force of order and control, its occultation by the Moon was seen as an unsettling sign. Since the temple of Saturn also functioned as a treasury, much like the central bank of its time, rulers were warned when crops might fail and expected wealth might not be realised.

It was natural for rulers, and later for the wider population, to watch the movements of the planets and to note comets seen around the time of a birth. Astrologers could often be found near the gates of these temples. There they drew charts not unlike those used today and made predictions about an individual's life.

We know, of course, the story of Julius Caesar and the warning that he should beware the Ides of March. The chart below consists of two circles. The inner circle shows the

positions of the planets at his birth, while the outer circle shows their positions on the Ides of March. Most notable are the two symbols that resemble headphones but are in fact the lunar nodes, marking the points where the Moon's path crosses the Sun's apparent path along the ecliptic. At that moment, they lay within a degree of one another. We all experience this cycle at intervals of roughly 18.6 years, and not all of us meet so dramatic an end. Yet such periods have long been understood as moments of destiny. It was presumably knowledge of this approaching alignment that led astrologers to warn Caesar to take care.

Records show that Caesar set off for the Senate after lunch, and from this we can estimate both the moment of his entry and that of his subsequent death. It is likely that Mars was on the far horizon at that moment.

The rules for interpreting planetary positions have changed over the centuries, but certain basic principles remain. Mars, for example, is still associated with action. Depending on the sign through which it is travelling, that action may be judged impulsive and careless, or measured and deliberate.

The astrologers of ancient Rome presumably studied the horoscopes of their potential leaders. In Julius Caesar, they would have seen the promise of greatness. They may well have recognised something similar in his successor, Augustus. In Augustus's chart, also shown below, those fated nodal points align with Saturn, the planet of responsibility and, in modern terms, something like a cosmic headmaster. Saturn is said to work best when placed in Capricorn. In Augustus's chart, however, it is in Scorpio, a sign often associated with financial acumen. Perhaps the astrologers of that time saw in him a leader who would preserve and protect their wealth. It is interesting to note that the coins of his reign bore the astrological symbol for Capricorn. This theme of personalising coinage — or bank cards — continues today.

In 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus proposed that the planets did not orbit Earth but that Earth was only one of several planets orbiting the Sun. Within two centuries, as the scientific revolution took hold, astrology fell out of favour. Interest in the subject never disappeared, however, and although it was no longer taught in universities, research continued and techniques developed.

The second half of the 20th century witnessed a surge of interest in astrology and the founding of various schools devoted to the subject. Interest was renewed, and many respected practitioners emerged. The perceived links between planetary cycles and social, economic, and political movements attracted attention from many in positions of authority.

It is known that Nancy Reagan, then First Lady of the United States, encouraged her husband, President Ronald Reagan, to consult Joan Quigley — one of the best-known astrologers of her time. She is said to have influenced the choice of both time and location for Reagan's meeting with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Reykjavik, Iceland, in October 1986.

The meeting was almost an unqualified success, as the leaders came close to reaching an unprecedented agreement to eliminate all nuclear weapons within ten years. There were, from an astrological perspective, many reasons for choosing that date. Yet with Venus, the planet associated with harmony, described as 'out of bounds' (that is, travelling beyond the Sun's declination), it may have been destined to become a 'so near, yet so far' moment. When Venus moved back within bounds, the deal collapsed.

It is not known which, if any, present-day world leaders make use of planetary cycles. We can be more certain, however, that few astrologers would choose these individuals solely on the basis of the positions of the planets at their birth.

President Trump was born at a lunar eclipse, with the Sun in Gemini and the Moon in Sagittarius. This combination is often seen in the charts of storytellers. Mars was near the horizon at his birth, and astrologers of old would have viewed this as indicative of someone who provoked conflict. In this reading, it is not the chart of a warrior but of someone who speaks of war.

The astrologers of ancient Rome might have seen in President Barack Obama the potential for a great orator, with Mercury (communication) opposite Jupiter (opinion). Together with a Sun in Leo, this configuration may have suggested a leading role as a lawyer or campaigner.

President Putin, like Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and David Cameron, was born with the Sun in Libra, a sign often associated with compromise and conciliation. Their political outlooks, however, were very different — something astrologers would explain by referring to the different positions of their Moons and other planets.

This information is presented as meaningful within astrological practice. Some researchers argue for correlations between planetary arrangements and human behaviour. Until early 2028, Neptune — a planet associated in astrology with seduction, illusion, magic, manipulation, and fraud — appears at the midpoint of Uranus (rebellion, deviation, breakthroughs, and political upheaval) and Pluto (power, rebirth, renewal, and reinvention). All three planets are, of course, in motion, but this formation, which took shape in August 2025, is expected to remain with us for several years.

Within that time frame, and once every month, the Moon opposes Neptune, turning an apparent small triangle of planets into a kite shape. According to astrological thinking, this affects us all. One might argue that, for a few hours each month, people become more open to ideas — some inspiring, highly creative, and constructive, while others may lead to confusion or impulsive behaviour, depending on the individual chart.

The fact that this kite formation disappears just as the number of sunspots diminishes suggests, in this interpretation, that the close of this decade will coincide with the emergence of new political and social structures. The astrologers of ancient Rome would not have monitored activity on the Sun, yet those who work in the field of planetary cycles today argue that there is a transferable energy between the planets and the Sun, and that the two are interdependent.

At present, we are moving through what is known as sunspot cycle 25. Most sunspot cycles last around 11.2 years, though this one may be shorter. During the earlier cycle 24, which concluded as Covid-19 took hold, it was thought that the present cycle would be relatively quiet, with few sunspots visible on any one day. In fact, it has proved to be anything but quiet: in August 2024, more than 380 sunspots were recorded in a single day.

We do not know the reason for this. We must, of course, remember that the entire solar system is moving through the galaxy, and it is possible that the Sun is being affected by forces outside our system.

Whatever the reason, the argument presented here is that we are moving into a new age. By monitoring both sunspot activity and planetary cycles, it may be possible to identify periods of potentially extraordinary creativity.

Christeen Skinner
Astrologer

7 PILLARS OF ROME

*Woe to that sacrificial priest,
First craftsman of the blacksmith's forge,
Who saw strange shapes within his fire,
And hammered out illgotten swords.*

Eugenius Vulgarius, transl. Helen Waddell
Mediæval Latin Lyrics, trans. and ed., Helen Waddell
(London, 1929), pp. 136–7

What of the supposedly eternal city would Eugenius recognize over a thousand years later? In response, one runs to structures, first physical, then — perhaps — more abstract. His lament remains, however, as tragically pertinent a condemnation of our own age as it was both of his own ninth century and of the 1920s of his translator. Eva Sajovic's work likewise invites us to question the relationship between temples and weapons, warriors, priests and craftsmen. Footage of the assembly (and collapse) of a cardboard temple on the steps of the British School, disarticulated tapestries of swords and renaissance leaders, and woollen figures who descend the studio's walls transform quarried stone and hammered iron into softer (less harsh, less durable) materials. In turn, they compel the viewer to become complicit collaborators, to reassemble the 'liberators of their (of our?) fatherland', though in the retelling their liberation comes not at the end of a sword. The tapestries of dissolved images accuse us, offering us their strange shapes to hammer out again.

But in their prognosis the corrupting climbing figures look not back to an age before Tubalcain but forwards to a time to come, when temple walls have collapsed and when warriors wear fuzzy wool and carry mops. How and what will they build? Building a new world out of the remains of the old was a challenge known to Eugenius and his contemporaries, whether they dwelt in houses erected in the ruins of Nerva's Forum or supported new churches with old columns. Yet in forging such a world, it is often easier to leave columns standing than to begin again; to borrow from the old, and in turn to be indebted to it. Inside the blocks of restacked marble, in temples which look like sepulchres, old spirits can hide.

James Drysdale Miller
Medieval Historian, Christ Church, Oxford University

THIS IS A STORY OF TWO TIMES: BEFORE AND AFTER

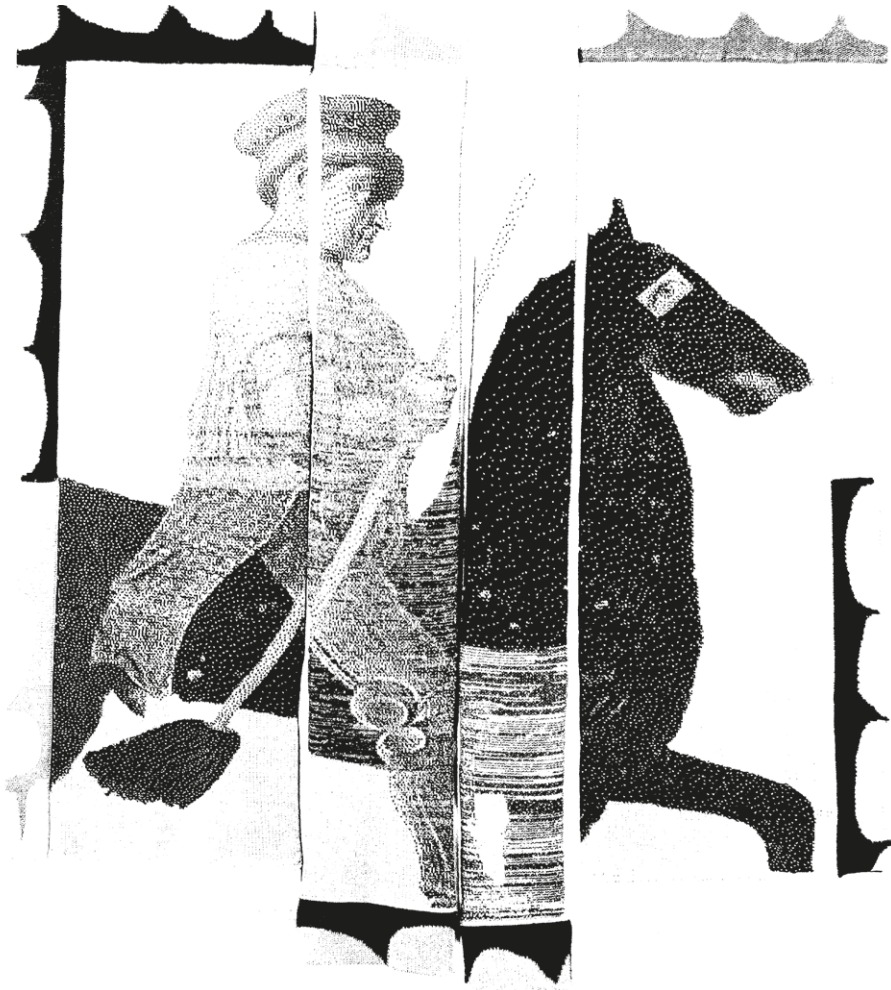
(Film script)

Before was a time of extraction and appropriation. A time when having meant being. It was a time of straight lines and big dicks. Of putting down in order to clamber up. Of slavery and exploitation. Winners and losers. Of gambling and gaming, risk-taking and blind belief. Ego reigned. Fear had a field day. Structures were built to keep everything, and everyone, in place.

When they came, they came from the earth: messy messengers with wide eyes and big hearts and mouths filled with questions. They pushed and pushed until the pillars started to fall. Oh, there was fighting, of course, no-one likes to give up what they know. No-one likes to lose. Money mattered, people insisted. Growth was the only way. There had always been people at the top and people at the bottom — it was just the way of things. These messengers were crazy, people said, they looked odd, they sounded weird, no-one was sure if they were male or female, young or old. The messengers just kept on pushing. Turned out pillars were already cracked, ready to fall. Turned out things were not the way everyone had been told they were — black and white, pink and blue.

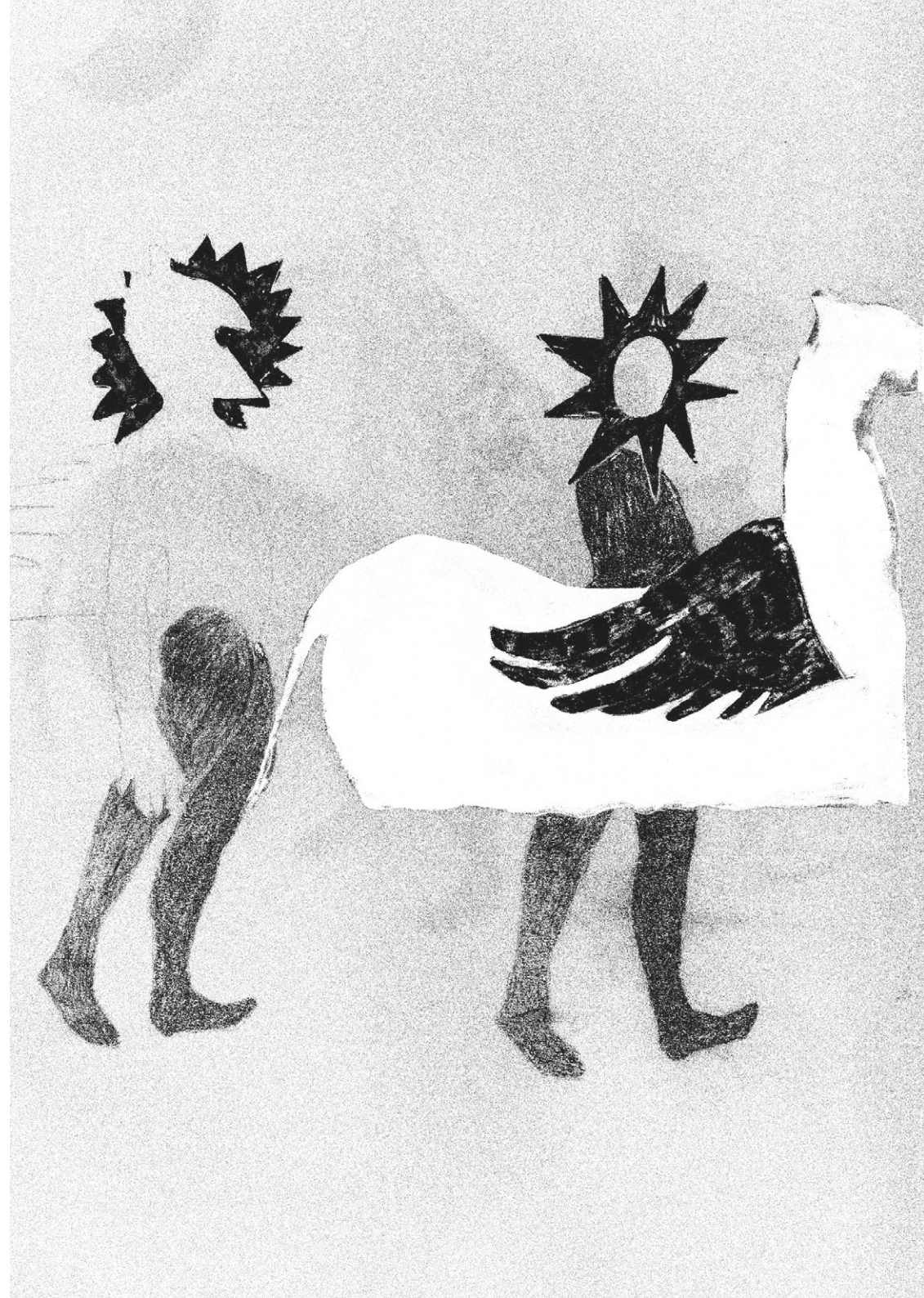
The messengers stayed a while to help with the fallout — offered bandages and words and other ways of seeing. They put out fires, stroked hair, kept on with their questions. The people — stunned, hurt, scared — started to listen.

After was a time of giving back; of return. A softer time. A time of wombs and vulvas. Of wandering and thought. Dissipation and dispersal. A time of bending with the wind.



Of worshipping buttercups and buzzards, dandelions and daisies. Hawthorn. Holly. Bramble. Bees. A time when the small mattered: a grain of sand, blade of grass, half-curved leaf, speck of pollen. Chaos. Cacophony. Contradiction. At some point, the messengers left. No one noticed at first, and then were surprised that they hadn't. Except by then, everyone had become a messier version of themselves, with wide eyes and big hearts and mouths filled with questions.

Sarah Butler
Writer





POSTSCRIPT

Rise and Fall of a Temple unfolded across three acts: the exhibition examined the structures we inherit; a symposium titled, *What Future Do We Divine?* invited collective speculation on the futures we might imagine; a performance, *What Temple Do We Want?* rehearsed forms of gathering and making together — and finally, this publication.

Collectively these acts question how systems of belief are built and maintained and what persists when they begin to unravel. This publication remains as a trace of those encounters, a space to reflect on what is retained and what continues. Rather than offering conclusions, the project leaves an open question: what kinds of structures, relationships, and rituals do we choose to build now, and where do we look for answers?

what remains written in the sky?

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what remains written in the sky?

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