



an experimental opera

# ONCE SHE DRIES



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an experimental opera and multimedia installation  
about coral reefs and climate change

March 3 - April 2, 2023

Presented in partnership with SMUSH Gallery





created by

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## Science, Myth, Life, and Love

The tiny polyps that make up the living structure of a coral reef may only live a few years, but the colony they create can continue to grow and reproduce for thousands of years. The resultant reefs that are created from the various structures of coral form an ecosystem that supports nearly 25% of the world's ocean life. Reef colonies are vital communities of biodiversity. The rocky growths surround islands and coastlines to form barriers that calm ocean violence and protect beaches against erosion.

Unfortunately, these coral reefs are also fragile and under threat from pollution, ocean warming, ocean acidification, overfishing, recreational boating, and the very tourists who want to enjoy them. Nearly a billion people worldwide depend on coral reefs for their livelihoods. Yet it is expected that 90% of all existing reefs could die by 2050. This worldwide disaster would negatively impact everyone on the planet.

*"The cosmos swirls in a coral reef and we will be judged on how we proceed."*

The immensity and urgency of this challenge is the inspiration for *Once She Dries*. The collective of artists involved in the production are sounding an alarm. To do so, they've harnessed the value and function of science — and of myth. They've seduced us with song, enveloped us in undulating waves, and affirmed our sense of mystery and awe as we confront and engage with our planet through their multidisciplinary installation. They've teased out a tale that recognizes love as its ideal while embracing science as a divine entity. The cosmos swirls in a coral reef and we will be judged on how we proceed.

The gods managed chaos. They might have been as fickle as we mere mortals, but at least we could better understand the vagaries of fate, the cost of vanity, of love, courage, and jealousy through them. The mysteries of the universe were better navigated with the instructive benefit of their mythology. But science decided there was another path to understanding ourselves and the world around us. Science claimed reliability and accuracy. The ways of nature and society could be observed, measured, and understood with systematic study and experimentation. Science was less likely to be corrupted by passion. The gods and goddesses are a passionate lot. Yet, science knows of no absolute truth. Every scientific theory has a provisional dimension. Perhaps that's the trade off — the passionate vs. the provisional.

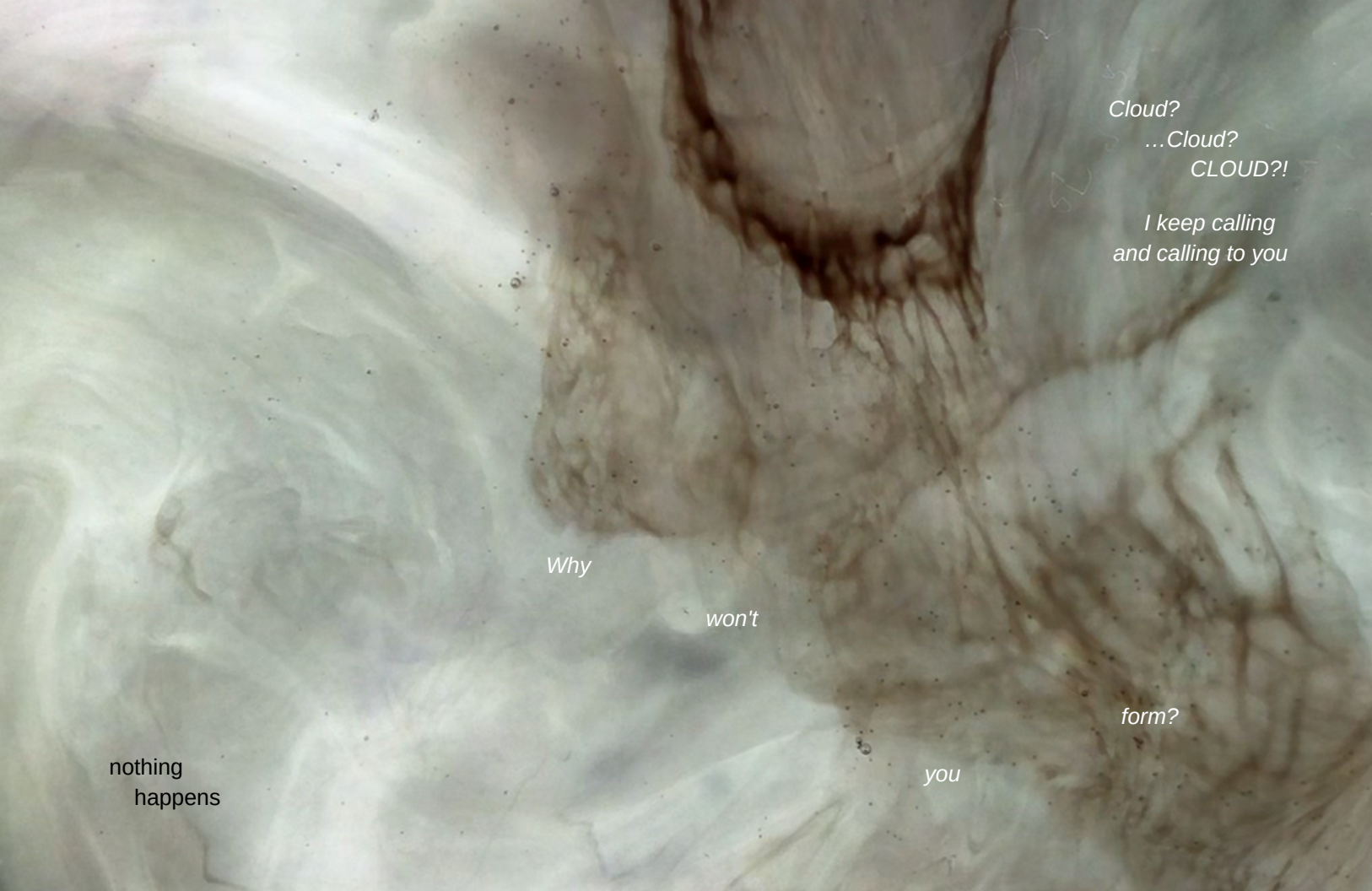
The libretto of *Once She Dries* tells the story of a coral reef in peril, in desperate need of shade and cooling. The reef's plaintive cry ascends from the ocean floor and releases a cloud-producing vapor. The cloud is charged with finding the nourishment the reef requires. Their bond — the coral, the cloud — and their commitment to each other will bring healing. It is an expression of love. But the way forward isn't without treachery. All the gods have been eavesdropping. The largest cast concrete dome, home to all the gods — the Pantheon — has become the keeper of the reef. (Coral was once mined for lime to give cement its solidity.) Coral has been trapped under the dome, like Danaë shut up in her bronze chamber, or Eurydice consigned to Hades. What heroic intervention will free Coral?

*"Once She Dries is a cris de coeur, a new mythology of science that makes palpable a crisis of global proportion."*

*Once She Dries* offers a cautionary flood of hope. Science has rightly put us on high alert. We are stewards of the planet. Charged with its care, we've failed time and again. We've turned a blind eye to poisonous activities. If we implement regulations here, transgressions over there can be ignored, it's a convenient self-delusion. Our rivers are the birthplaces of civilizations and our oceans and seas feed and regulate every aspect of our wellbeing. *Once She Dries* is a *cris de coeur*, a new mythology of science that makes palpable a crisis of global proportion. Data is a cold tool, stark in its utility. The gods of myth with their wayward passions have a keen function too. The artists of *Once She Dries* suggest the union of the two may prove the way towards our salvation.

**Raymond E. Mingst | Arthur Bruso**





Cloud?  
...Cloud?  
CLOUD?!

I keep calling  
and calling to you

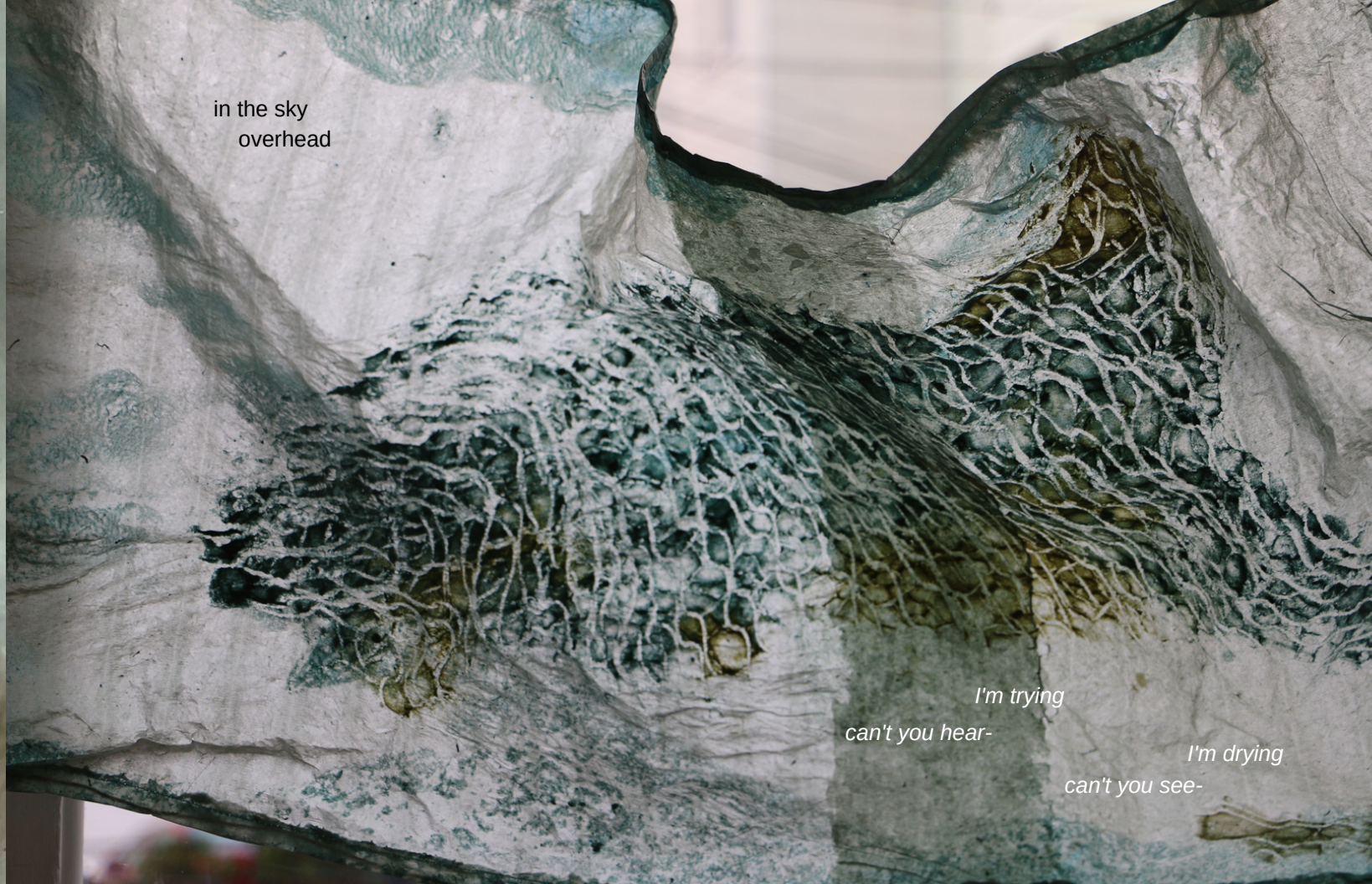
Why

won't

you

form?

nothing  
happens



in the sky  
overhead

I'm trying  
can't you hear-

I'm drying  
can't you see-

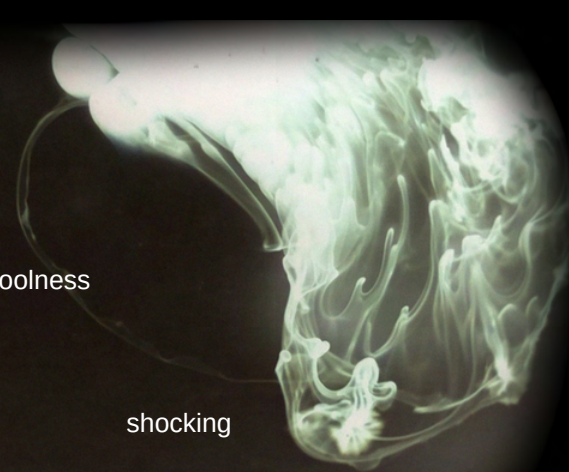


Finally

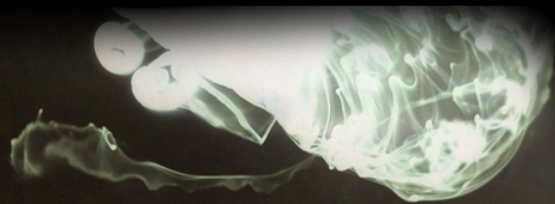


as waters relinquish  
their warmth  
that first rush of coolness  
is always

shocking



shadows begin to form  
coloring her ashy surface a deep gray  
  
sending shivers through each crevice



then tastes like evenings  
and youth









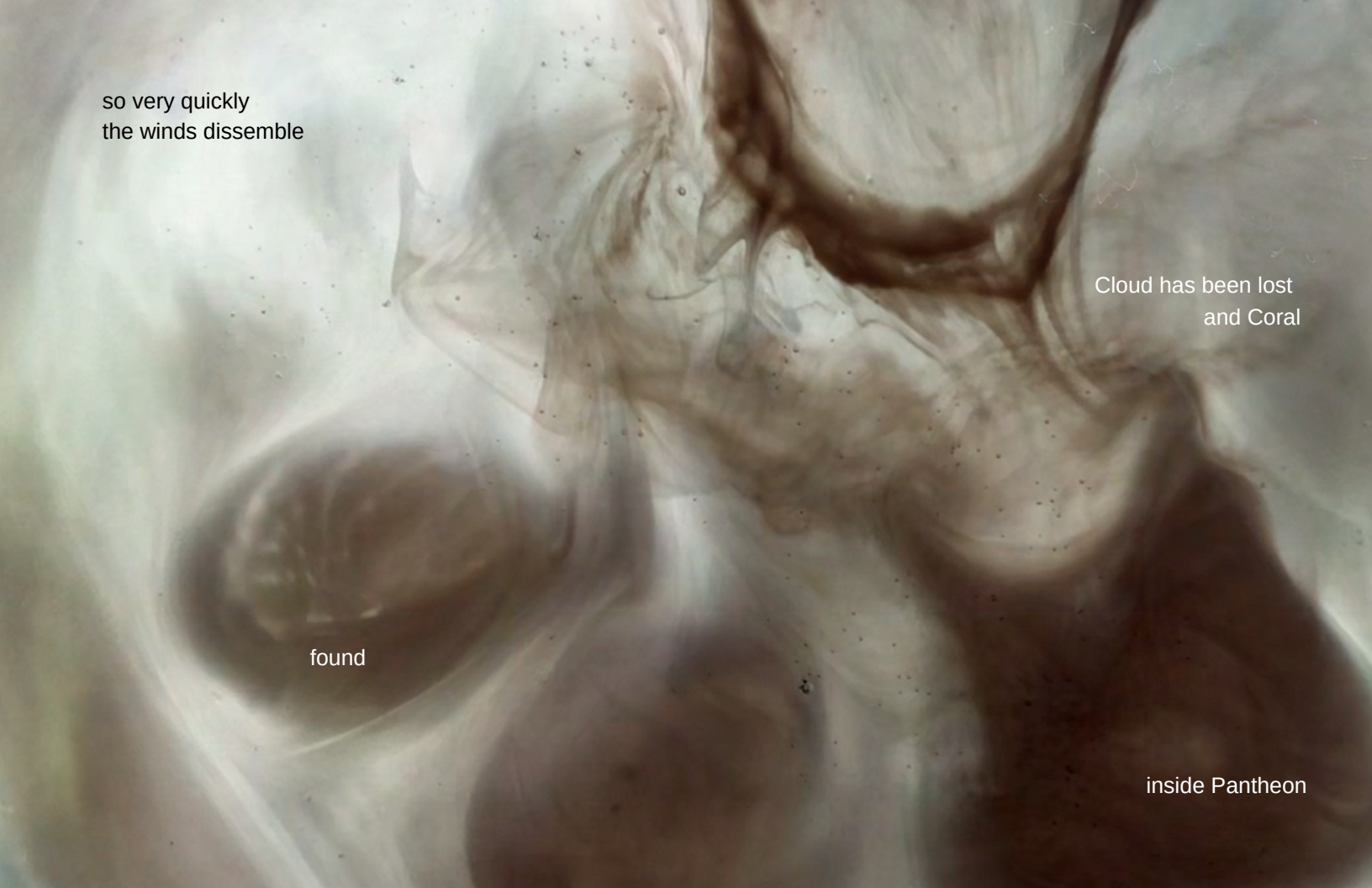


a  
storm  
overpowers  
Coral's  
grip  
she  
is  
violently

ripped

from her seafloor

and dropped on land  
in a dank, cavernous  
place



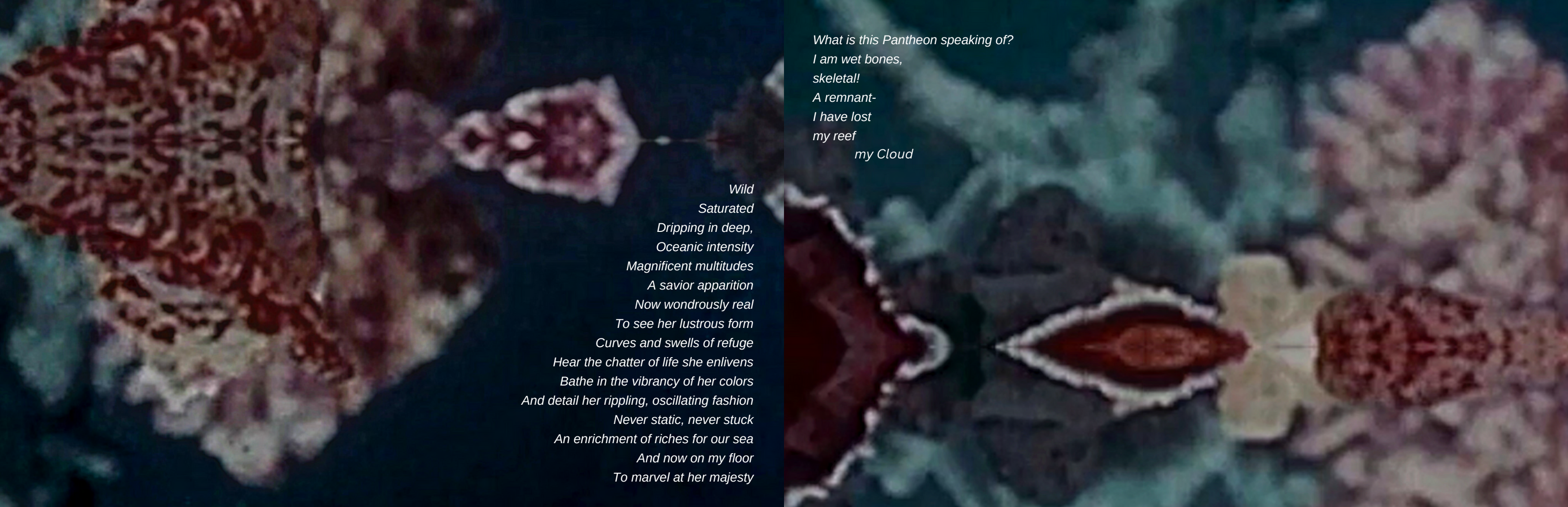
so very quickly  
the winds dissemble

Cloud has been lost  
and Coral

found

inside Pantheon





*What is this Pantheon speaking of?*

*I am wet bones,  
skeletal!*

*A remnant-  
I have lost  
my reef*

*my Cloud*

*Wild*

*Saturated*

*Dripping in deep,*

*Oceanic intensity*

*Magnificent multitudes*

*A savior apparition*

*Now wondrously real*

*To see her lustrous form*

*Curves and swells of refuge*

*Hear the chatter of life she enlivens*

*Bathe in the vibrancy of her colors*

*And detail her rippling, oscillating fashion*

*Never static, never stuck*

*An enrichment of riches for our sea*

*And now on my floor*

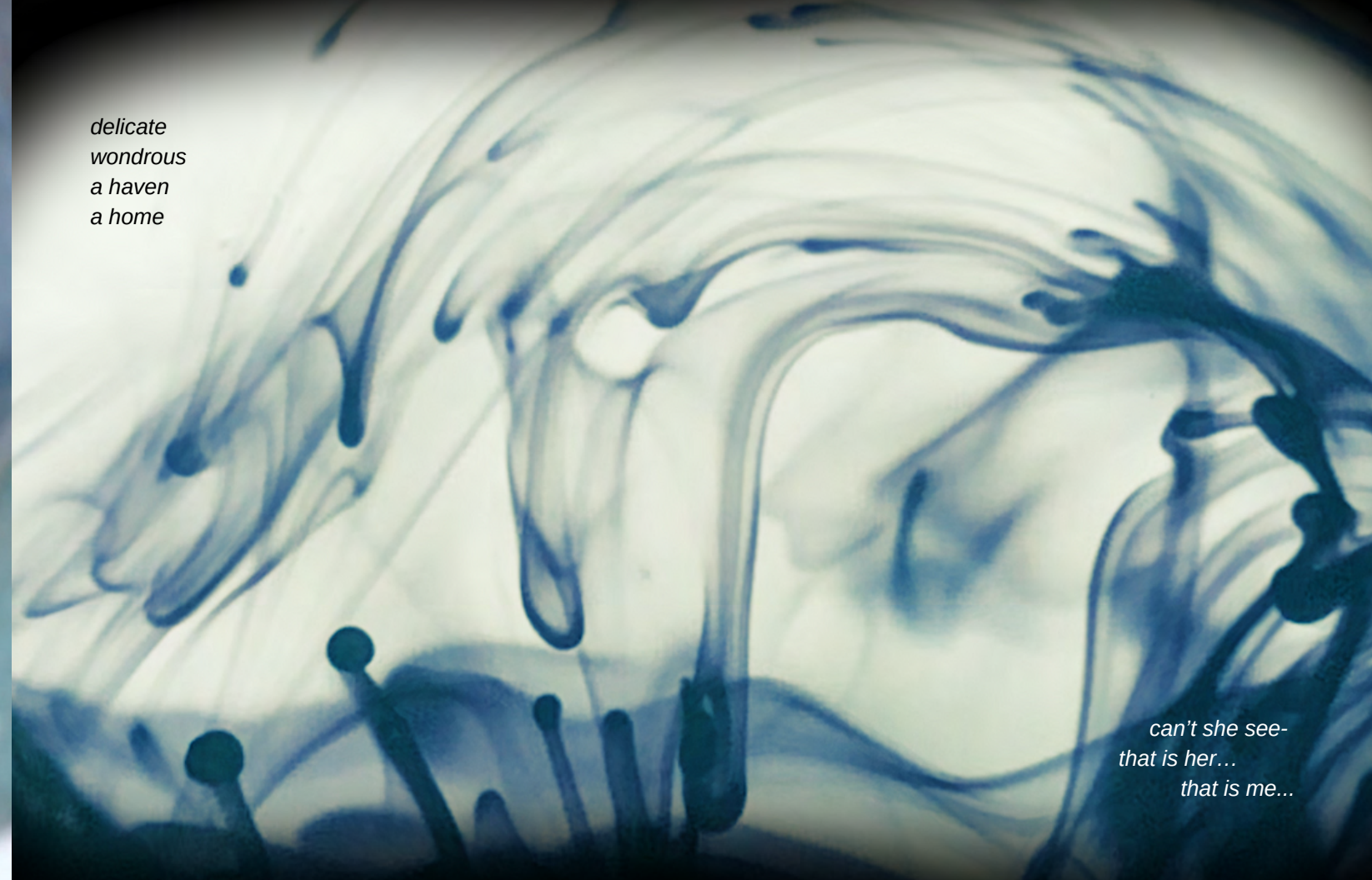
*To marvel at her majesty*





*Rough  
Hard  
Porous  
Strong*

*Can't she see-  
That is her  
That is me*



*delicate  
wondrous  
a haven  
a home*

*can't she see-  
that is her...  
that is me...*



# Coral and Concrete

Each is made of calcium carbonate

Each can be rough, hard, porous, strong

One is a massive carbon sequester, the other a massive carbon foot-printer

Coral and concrete express a fascinating array of similarities, distinctions, and symbiotic potential.



While the concrete sector has been one of the largest contributors of industrial pollution, methods of using recycled and bio-safe concrete may reimagine this substance as it becomes a site of rehabilitation for its textural look alike, coral.

Scientists are using marine-safe concrete to create sculptural, artificial reefs that corals and sea life might repopulate, grow, and thrive upon. Cement glue, concrete pellets and plaques, and even entire underwater sculpture gardens are proving the collaborative potency between concrete structures and reef resiliency.

**Global Coralition** is a non-profit organization harnessing the power of art along with cutting-edge scientific techniques in a holistic approach to reef revitalization. They launch each project with a large-scale sculpture, inspired and co-created with the local community, that is deployed into the sea to become a reef and site for education, ecotourism, and restoration.

Global Coralition co-founder Angeline Chen shares: "art invites people into the climate space and makes it inclusive, inspiring and participatory."

There are incredible, available solutions in science, including the ability to grow coral up to 50x faster on land, rapid recovery rates of fish populations through marine protection, and the restoration of mangroves that filter and cool water while sequestering 4-10x more carbon than our rainforests.


Engaging people to adopt and fund the science on the ground requires awareness, connection, and motivation to support the cause.



***"It's not too late to turn the tides. It will take a unified, cross disciplinary, collaborative and creative effort."***

**Angeline Chen**  
artist, diver and co-founder  
Global Coralition



**GlobalCoralition.org**  
 **GlobalCoralition**

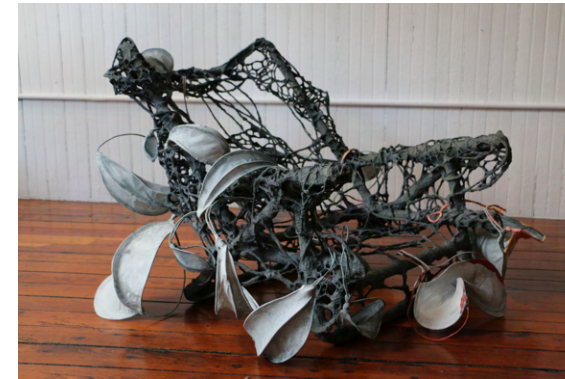
Once *She Dries* supports Global Coralition through proceeds from this catalog and donations received during exhibitions.



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[OnceSheDries.com](http://OnceSheDries.com)

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