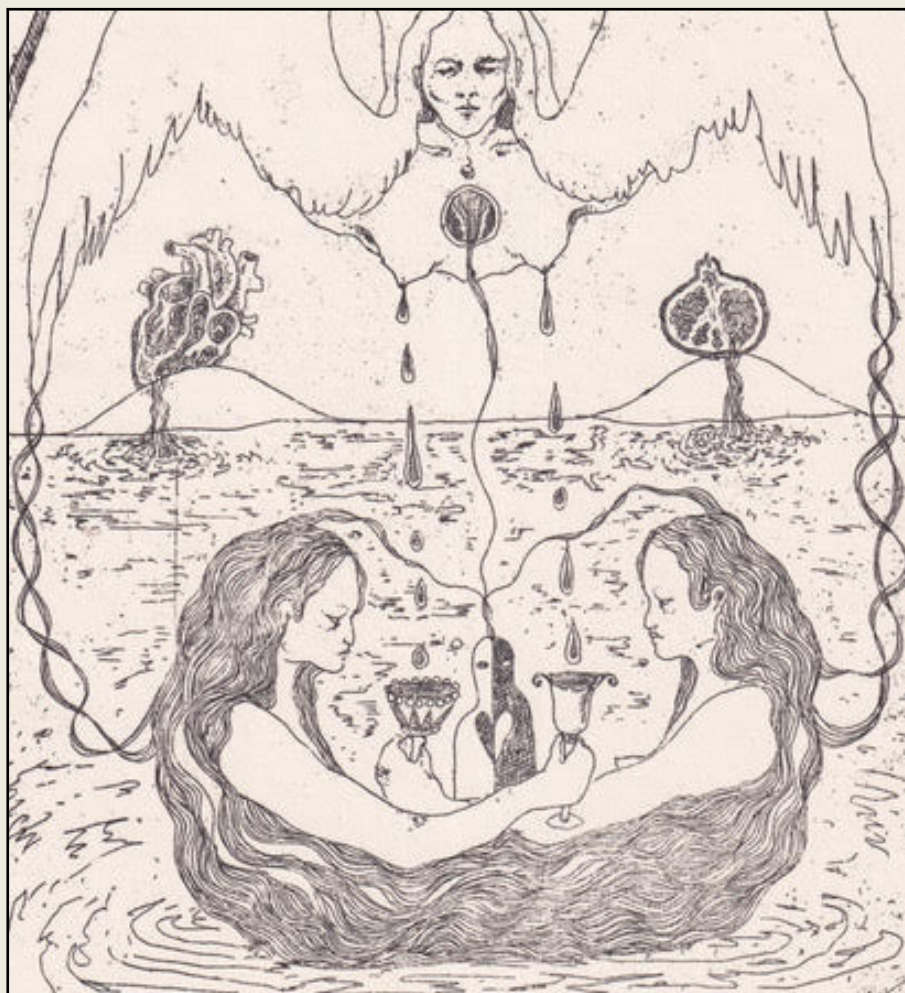


# Grass Stained Heart

A Solo Show By Nooka Shepherd

Essay by Dr Chantal Powell



SOHO REVUE



*Book design by Jake Pearce*



In the 13th century there was a practice, when asking a favour of a Saint, to make a pledge and bend a coin as a physical token of the pledge. The conversion of something commercial and worldly into something spiritual. In the late 1600s through the 1800s this evolved to a practice of taking coins and engraving them with initials, dates or images and then giving them to a loved one. These “love tokens” were offerings of devotion, reminders of heartfelt emotion, physical manifestations of loving human connection presiding over commodity.

Whilst I was in conversation with Nooka about her paintings and hand-crafted objects she commented, “they are like love tokens to world”. Yes, at their essence this is what they are – offerings between Nooka, the people who look at them, and the world we inhabit. More specifically, the ecstatic world that people have forgotten or are yet to experience.

Nooka’s tokens are a call to a re-enchanting and re-souling of the world. Like a Siren’s song there is a spell being spun and a dance being drawn out giddily towards the stuff of fae and folklore, mystery and magic.

**C**orporeal forms slide into otherly spaces, boundaries blurring in a place where harpies, hares, seraphs and humans cohabit.

We are in deep need of the re-enchantment Nooka's love tokens offer us. In the Western world we collectively left the enchanted world behind us with the rise of modern science of in the 16th/17th century. The age of enlightenment bought division – a split between spirit, matter and soul. We turned to the empirical and rational, to what we could explain and measure, and ultimately to what could be utilised and consumed. We rid ourselves of superstition, we banished mythical creatures. The cost of all this was a cost to soul and a disconnect from the symbolic. There was a dematerialization of spirituality, and a de-souling of nature. Psychologist Rollo May explains, “what we did in getting rid of fairies and elves and their ilk was to impoverish our lives . . . our world became disenchanting; and it leaves us not only out of tune

with nature, but with ourselves as well” (Rollo May - *Man's Search for Himself*, 1953). Nooka uses Faerie as a point of unification - the crucible where inner meets outer. A place between the underworld and the heavens where we can peer behind the curtain to see our own world through a kind of magic mirror. She explains that it's “not something divorced or separate and not something entirely safe either. Like how magic or love or being alive are not safe things but they are wonderful and powerful”

It is clear that Nooka is immersed in the enchanted world. Embedded within her are the woods she grew up in within Morden Bog. A childhood communing with the tangled, boggy, wetland and wood of her home has taken permanent root within her soul. She describes it as utterly fluid, slippery and uncontainable, constantly reflecting ground and sky. In that place vegetation lives with Dionysian force, it dies, decomposes, new things grow out of it. Alchemy takes place.



*The Woodshed, 2023*  
*Oil on Panel*  
*10 x 17cm*

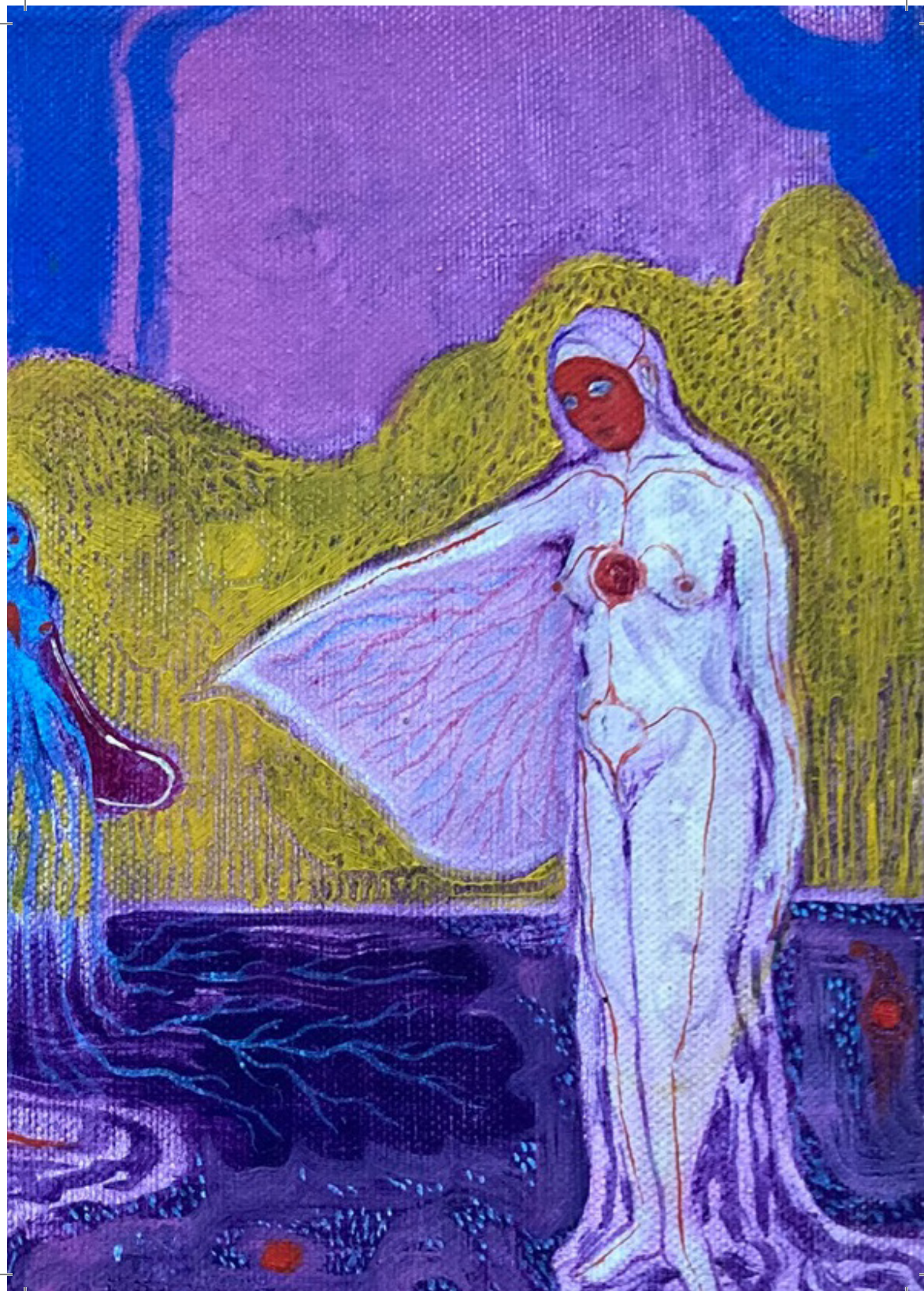




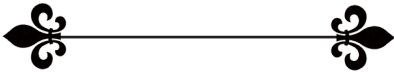
*Land Over the Mountain, 2023*  
*Oil on Canvas*  
28 x 23 cm







The woods taught her about the role of decay and fertility and of the tension between the grotesque and the beautiful. As an artist she now offers back to us this image of the cooking pot. To our culture that fears decay, death and illness she offers it back as something fertile and transformative.



Her artforms cross a variety of mediums from etchings, ceramics, salt dough puppets, to embroidered cloths and clothing. Her first love however is painting – in particular she delights in oils and watercolours for their translucency and luminescence. She describes how watercolours dance between chaos and order, her considered marks being pulled at by the watery unpredictability of the medium. A dance that undoubtedly reflects her flow in the imaginal realm where Carl Jung says “conscious and unconscious are united, just as a waterfall connects

above and below” (Carl Jung - The Conjunction, CW 14, par. 706). The colours in her paintings can be jarring, disorientating in their almost nauseating enchantment and yet at the same time they are celebratory and full of abandon. In *The Movement of the Planets* an androgynous human-animal form in sunset orange bridges the space between earth and sky, reminiscent of the arching body of the ancient Egyptian goddess Nut creating a canopy over the earth with her body. The sky is a wonderfully sickly yellow bringing corporeality into play with ethereality. Nooka is constantly working with this alchemical union of opposites.

In many of her paintings blood vessels or mycelial networks connect bodies and vegetal forms. A meta pattern. The network of our brains have the same pattern as plant roots. Through this collective memory image the artist reminds us that all is one. Life force pulses through synaptic points of focus – nipples, heart centre, an embryonic egg form - underscoring the web of life we as human and non-human are in communion with.





*Movement of the Planets, 2023*

*Oil on Panel*

*58 x 57 cm*





*Self Portrait as an Egg, 2024*  
*Oil Pastel and Watercolour on Paper*  
*21 x 29.5 cm*

**N**ooka's magical-symbolic images are populated with archetypal animals and beings. Taking a prominent role in a number of this exhibition's paintings is the shape-shifting, trickster rabbit/hare who chimes with the artist's exploration of hybridity and skin shedding. Like the psychopomp Mercurius the hare is lively and delightful, disappearing underground (into the unconscious) and reappearing in the blink of an eye. Associated with the moon – the rabbit/hare is also a symbol of the cyclical nature of life. In Egyptian mythology hares were believed to be androgynous, shifting between genders in relation to the moon which was seen as masculine when waxing and feminine when waning.

Other archetypal characters that Nooka works with are those drawn from the mythic/monstrous feminine - giantesses, hybrids (such as sphinxes and harpies) and demonesses from old tales and the cultural psyche.

These worlds we are offered shimmer between seen and unseen, mortal and immortal. They take us into the space of "Double Vision" that Blake spoke of - a deeper perception achieved by combining outer vision with inner vision.







**D**on't be mistaken in thinking this is about escape, a momentary dalliance from "reality". It is the opposite. A call to open our perceptual gateways wider. To not just see but to engage with a world that is beautifully ecstatic. Aisthesis is a Greek word that preceded the word aesthetics and was concerned with beauty in the wider sense. It is a physical activity of perception that psychoanalyst James Hillman describes as "taking in" or "breathing in" or a "gasp". It is through gasping the world in he says that transfiguration of matter occurs through wonder.

For 'Grass Stained Heart' Nooka also presents new ceramic works, embroideries and a series of etchings depicting her own personal tarot major arcana. The ceramics take the form of puppets and human-vessel hybrids. They carry in them the joy of meditative making, of imbuing simple materials with life. These are creations that want to be touched, held, activated. Like humans crafted from clay and breathed into life these objects have been given something of the artist's being. Talking to Nooka about her em-

broidery pieces it's clear that this is a ritualistic process through which she imbues the fabric with a sacred weight. There is repetition and intention within the creation of the sewn image. Tying the knots is weaving a spell. She describes the surface worked on as skin pierced with thread to create blood vessels or veins running through it. As the creator she tattoos the fabric body with life – a magical process. When she embroiders onto clothing there is a twinning that occurs – the wearer's own body and then a second body, a soft protective armour, worn closely next to it.

Nooka is in a historical line of esoteric thinking artists who have been drawn to create their own major arcana tarot images. The tarot invites intuitive working and artistic interpretation. In 1977 Ithell Colquhoun created a Taro in the form of 78 enamel abstract works by applying colour automatically without conscious thought. Colquhoun believed each person, upon meditation, would discover the meanings they needed in her abstract taro colour forms much like the association technique used with Rorschach ink blots.



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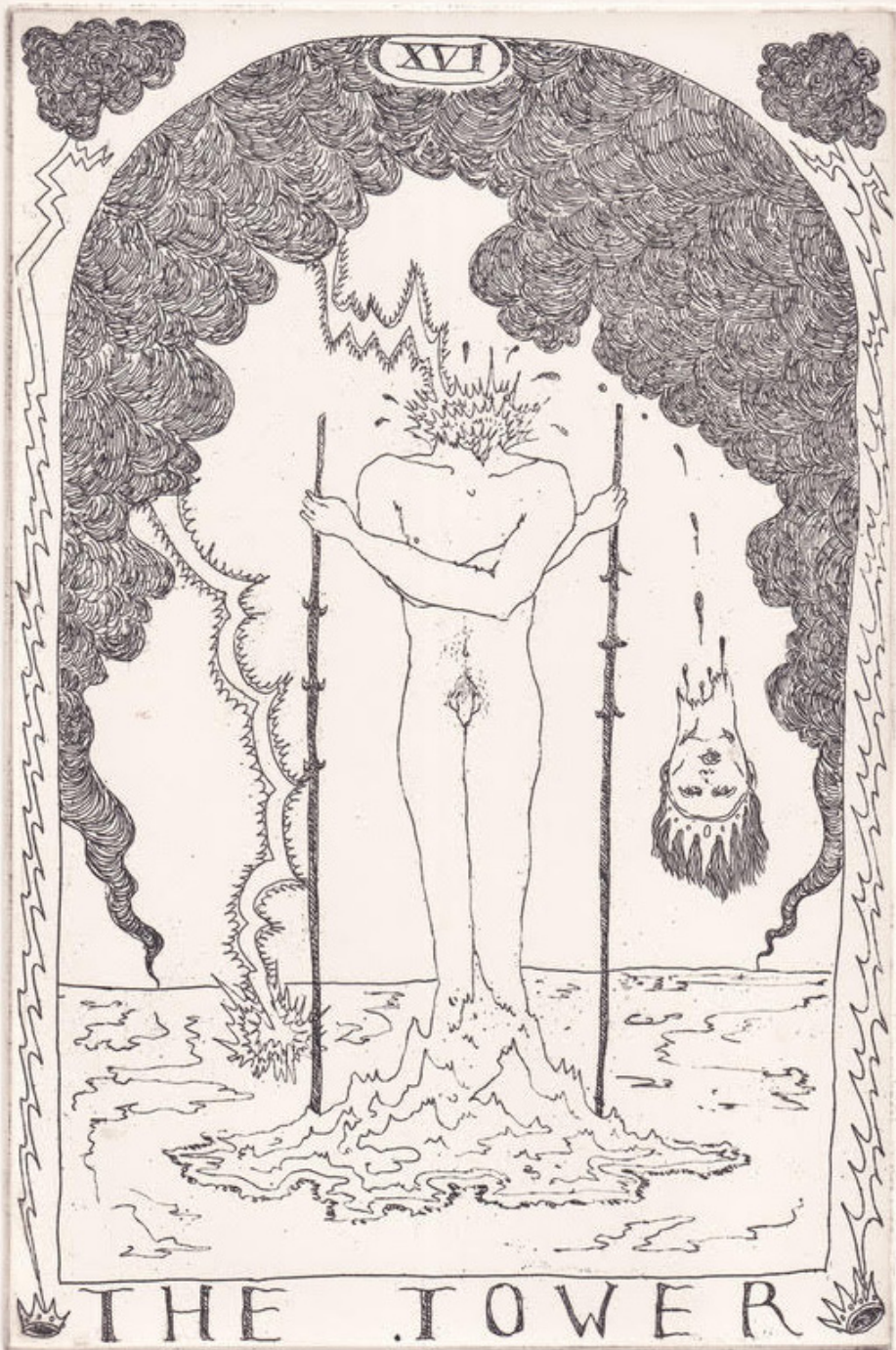
THE MAGICIAN





THE FOOL





THE TOWER

**L**eonora Carrington created her major Arcana deck in the 1950's. A coloured deck adorned with gold and silver leaf that was rich in symbolism and Carrington's passion for gender equality, cultural diversity and ecological engagement.

Nooka works with the narrative form of the Tarot in a similar fashion to Carrington and the traditional well-known decks such as the Rider-Waite-Smith deck. These decks contain many symbols of archetypal energies. The Lovers is the union of opposites. The Empress is the great mother, The Magician the disrupting energy force of the trickster. The suits are also associated with symbolic elements – cups are water, swords air, wands fire and pentacles earth. In a 1933 seminar Carl Jung said of them “These are psychological symbols with which one plays, as the unconscious seems to play with its contents”

The major arcana that are produced here are a potent set of hard ground etchings that will eventually be expanded into a full tarot deck. This

monochromatic, disciplined line-work is a departure from the colour of her paintings but consistent with her ritualistic embroidery work. Etching has much in common with her spellbound stitches.

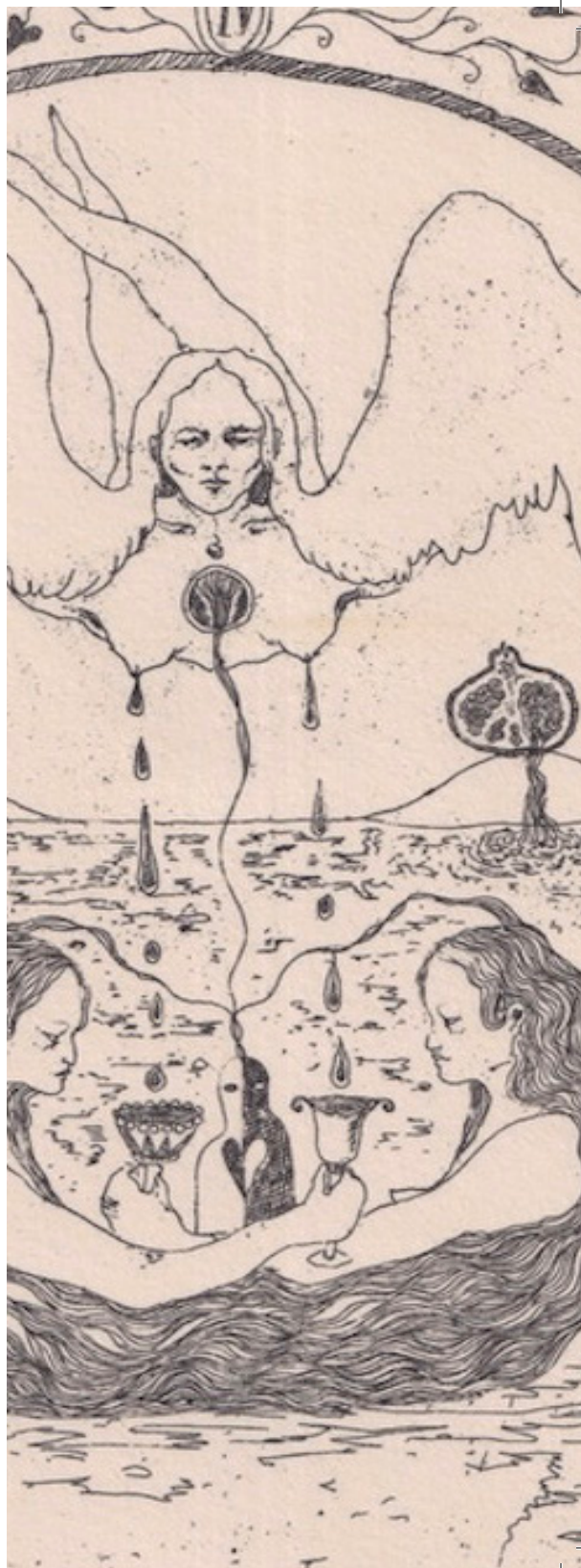
These etchings are votives of archetypal imagery filtered through the artist's personal symbolic language of animism, ecology and folklore. A harpy is dripping life fluid from her nipples into The Lover's drinking vessels. The Magician takes the form of an alchemical Rebis, a metaphor for the harmonious union of opposites: spirit and matter, soul and body, light and shadow. This Rebis is metamorphizing into leaves and roots whilst being encircled by a pair of black and white serpents.

Black and white snakes warring or entwined are another symbolic representation of the need to unite opposites. In a vision Carl Jung described, “I see the divine child, with the white serpent in his right hand and the black serpent in his left hand” (Carl Jung, *The Red Book*).



The exhibition 'Grass Stained Heart' is Nooka's creative act from the imaginal realm - a communication with the unseen. It is her joy and delight in the bizarre experience of being alive. Meister Eckhart states that, "When the soul wishes to experience something, she throws an image of the experience out before her, and enters into her own image."

This is what Nooka has done with her love tokens and she wholeheartedly invites us to respond. Love tokens were not to be traded they were gifted. Imbued with love, delight and hope. She offers us this gift - a remembering, and honouring, the spirit of things, the essentials of experience. Secrets of the soul.



The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry, no matter how small, should be recorded to ensure the integrity of the financial statements. This includes not only sales and purchases but also expenses, income, and transfers between accounts.

Secondly, the document highlights the need for regular reconciliation. By comparing the company's internal records with bank statements and other external sources, discrepancies can be identified and corrected promptly. This process helps in detecting errors, fraud, and unauthorized transactions, thereby safeguarding the company's assets.

Thirdly, the document stresses the importance of maintaining proper documentation. All transactions should be supported by valid receipts, invoices, and contracts. These documents serve as evidence and are essential for auditing and tax purposes. It is advised to keep these records organized and accessible for a long period.

Finally, the document concludes by stating that consistent and accurate record-keeping is the foundation of sound financial management. It enables the company to make informed decisions, track its performance over time, and ensure compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. By following these guidelines, the company can maintain transparency and build trust with its stakeholders.