

Better sound through research

Elysia Crampton is the sound of now — whatever that is.

Photography Stefan Schwartzman Fashion Marcus Cuffie Words Fiona Duncan

MY MEMORY OF ELYSIA CRAMPTON is composed of sounding images that loop, layer, and feedback. She picked me up on Father's Day in Koreatown, LA. Over the course of four hours, we travelled downtown to a Little Tokyo mall then past Chinatown to Elysium, Echo, and Griffith Parks, Little Armenia, Los Feliz, and beyond—Elysia's stories transported us to Bolivia, where she was born, and Mexico, where she was young. Weyers Cave, Virginia, the Inland Empire, Berlin, Tokyo, Toronto, New York—from her driver's side seat (she's got a tall truck), Crampton conjured images of all. My favourite stop along the way was the Bahamas. "It was the first trip my family could afford," Crampton explained. "And it was still very budgeted, so that kept us out of the tourist zones. I remember gospel music playing everywhere. Gospel music in Burger King."

Elysia Crampton is a self-described "superlatively American" (as in, native to the South, living in the North) electronic musician with a new, second album out from Break World Records. Duly praised, *Demon City* is a 30-minute, two-sided collaborative work of vocal-free cacophony that's about — among many things — sovereignty, solidarity and Los Angeles as Crampton first encountered it in the violent 80s. Crampton cites artists and friends Rabbit, Why Be, Lexxi, and Chino Amobi as co-creators. She cites poet June Jordan, poet-theorist Fred Moten, and Aymaran activist Bartolina Sisa as inspirations. She cites Mexican trans writer Jamie Berrout, Total Freedom (aka Ashland Mines), and her grandma Flora in the dedications. She cites often.

Crampton's language is learned, diverse, and generously reflexive. Hurling terms like misogyny, homonationalism, and indigeneity are spoken with a feminine inflection that feels universally flirtatious. When she quotes, it's with reference, almost footnoted; she'll cite her source and how she came to it. Such communal communication is mixed with memoir and original poetic imaging, like Elysia's vision of "Godness" (I asked): "It's like this little clown fish that's slippery, resisting, always falling through, and always with this residual I can't get rid of, like connective tissue—it's this thing that touches and has been touched."

The first thing Elysia and I talked about were the limits of language ("enclosures," she said, "logocentrism"). Because of this, and because of the expansiveness of her life experience (every time I thought I got her chronology, we'd veer into new territory, like around an industrial part of LA, Elysia told me of how she worked as adult care provider; a few minutes later, she'll be an "unendurably shy child," then high on heavy drugs in high school, then transitioning, feminizing, without medical intervention, and the detours kept coming...), I feel compelled to state the obvious: representing Elysia Crampton wholly is truthfully impossible.

This has to do with how she presents herself. In my years as a reporter, I've interviewed hundreds of subjects. Most of us, in

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such publics, assume legible identities. (Conformity is to fit into set forms.) Crampton isn't so contained. Her being, as with her speech, goes, seemingly, everywhere — she's willing. So when I make to think of her, to share an impression, it is as I said in the beginning: looping and layered with feedback.

I see her bare hamstring tendon stretched like a violin bow as she pedal-steps her truck into gear. I see her fastening a "Service Dog" vest to the Boy, her pet Teacup Pom. I hear his raucous snarl and yap. I hear Cumbia music and Crampton asking me, upwardly intoning, if I have "a sense of home" as we glide around a bend of Elysian Park. I see hay-gold sunlight diffused through her windshield, her smile lines, fine cheekbones, cowboy booties, driving without a seatbelt. I feel the limbo she described in a dream. I sense a longing for home.

Being with Elysia Crampton felt like listening to her music. Like tripping around the world, into guarded after-hours and across violent state lines. Like wading through the murk of history; collective unconsciousnesses, genetic memory, myth. And like transcending, if momentarily, the chaos and fear of the Earthly plane.

There's this one drift in the second half of *Demon City* where the place-based sounds of the track crack open. From guttural beats, airhorns, and sounds that ring out like fireworks or gunshots, wet smooches, an intestinal squirm, planes taking off, a video arcade or coin money clanging, we're elevated by these seesawing strings that evoke a sky splitting open, Godly intervention. The strings cut to quiet, one deep breath of respite, before the noise rushes back in, for the final track. This drift reminds me of a moment with Elysia, in Griffith Park. We'd been talking for hours nonstop and after an outburst from the Boy (he was brutally barking at another dog), Elysia paused, looked up, and said, "Sometimes I feel like I hover around all this information because I'm trying to get to something that I still haven't got to." Following Crampton's gaze up, I saw a crack of sky, white light between ample green. I heard a stream behind us trickling, felt its cooling effect on the land.

Leather bikini BARRAGAN, Chaps WOMENS HISTORY MUSEUM, Underwear and boots ELYSIA'S OWN
Hair Brittany Moczek

