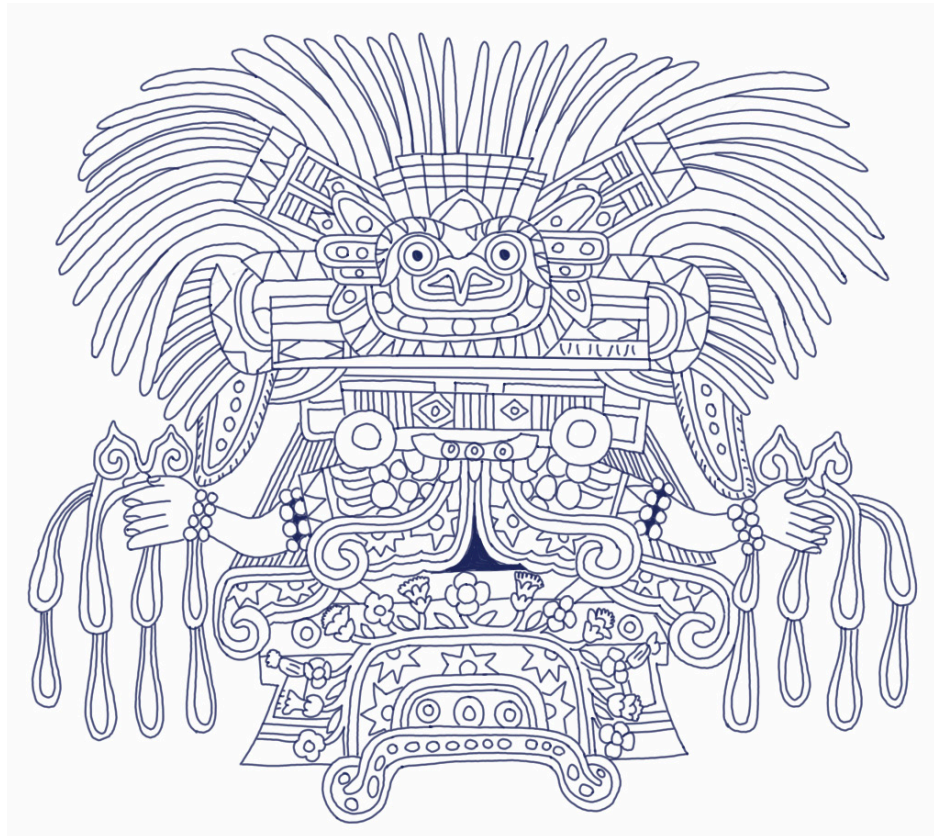


the witness

the witness
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Political Architecture : Critical Sustainability
The Royal Danish Academy, Copenhagen



the great goddess,
aztec

Breaking in was easy. All it took was a little jiggle and a pull of the opening in the woven fence and I was in. My dress snagged on the unravelled wire, as I crouched down to enter I heard a tiny rip. It was a warm-ish autumn day, the first after a week of continuous rain. The ground released vapours of heat, the sun having warmed it in the morning. It was now hiding behind the clouds, a typical Belfast day this time of year. As I continued along the overgrown garden I made sure to make as little noise as possible. The big, red-brick factory in front of me has been deserted for years, I think. My whole life I've never seen anyone go in or out. I've heard stories of junkies doing as I just did, entering without permission to get high inside, but I'm sure I'm completely alone today. The factory doors are wide open, inviting me to wander in. On the ground a mixture of rubble, cigarette butts, and moss covered what remains of the original flooring. I wonder how many people walked through this hallway on their way in and out each day. Apparently, when this factory, or mill, was operational, it was the largest in Belfast. Accounting for almost a fifth of the linen produced at the time. The noise gushing out of this place must have been deafening. Now all I can hear are my own faint footsteps, and a bird's wings flutter from time to time. The only inhabitants of this place are non-speaking organisms. The ivy wrapped around deconstructed walls. Mice and bugs in the dilapidated ceilings. Birds nesting in the



*ukemochi,
japan*

few pieces of roof remaining. And now me. I walked towards the weaving shed, its jagged roof enticing me to come closer. All but one of the skylights are broken, allowing the space to turn into a jungle. One loom is left in the very back, hiding among the weeds. It was more rust than metal, its broken machine parts lying on the ground beside it, peeking from the lush jungle floor. As I brushed it with my hand, flakes of rust fell and dispersed in the air. Coughing, I turned to leave. Turning away, I heard faint voices coming from outside. Very slowly I edged toward the door, trying to make out the conversation. It was a few women, with strange accents. They were arguing about the factory, its tumultuous past. Funny, it sounded like they were passing responsibility from one to the other concerning its closing in the 1930s. So it's been closed for ninety years. Suddenly, I lost my footing and stumbled forward, toward the door. I came into view of the women. Were they women? Now that I could see them, I wasn't sure. They were glowing, and transparent. Like memories from long ago. The one closest to me was tall, with gold armour and a long, flowing gown. The one to her left was beautiful. On her head a snake. Her colourful clothing and jewellery illuminating her darker skin tone. The third was clearly Ancient Egyptian. Clearly, not because I've ever seen a flesh-and-bones Ancient Egyptian. I feel they're recognisable somehow. She was holding a hand loom. As I came into view they all turned towards



me. Thus began the long discussion of the problem I posed. You see, these three women were, in fact, Goddesses. Ancient Goddess of weaving. They were in town as part of a godly trial concerning the demise of the Belfast linen industry. A trial that has been ongoing since the 1950s. That's how long it takes Gods to decide things. The three representatives sent to Belfast on a fact-finding mission were the Greek Athena, the Mayan Ichxel, and the Egyptian Tayet. In a manner resembling a James Bond villain revealing their evil plan to 007 before they intend to eliminate him, the deities unravelled the story of the trial. It seems that they were in charge of the lives of the people, mostly women, working in the weaving mills in Belfast. It was their apparent inattentiveness that brought down the largest industrial undertaking in the North Irish capital. One that would catalyse the assembly of many other industries around it, leading to the formation of the city of Belfast as it is today. Some courage was mustered on my part, as I began rebutting their apologies for the poor caretaking skills they exhibited during the decline of the linen industry. I assured them the fall of such a robust source of income for many Belfast inhabitants was not caused by them. That it was inevitable. That the rise of standard of living and the price of the so-called 'Western' labour would ultimately push out many of the most prolific industries out of Europe to South-East Asia and the like. Ichxel whispered something to the oth-



ers and in a blinding flash of light the factory was gone. Instead we were standing in a large, wooden room. The ceiling were wooden beams, the walls clad with wood panelling. The glistening hardwood floor below my feet smelled of ash and cherry. It was a sort of courtroom. I realised an assortment of what I assumed were Goddesses from around the earth were all around me. I was introduced as a 2023 witness and was told to go to the right of the room, where the other witnesses were seated. A woman dressed in a long dress with many layers of linen underneath, and another with a 50s hairdo were already there. Soon I was called upon the witness stand, where I re-told my analysis of the decline of the Belfast linen industry. This time, however, I continued to present day. I described a new project I was taking part in. One that suddenly sprang up in small nooks and crannies of the city, inhabiting unused spaces between buildings. My neighbours and I helped with the building process. It took us a few months, working on the weekends when the weather wasn't too foul. Slowly accumulating wooden beams and remnants to construct the trusses. Assembling the huge loom. And then at last, when we were done, yarn was delivered from the guys on University Road. They were in charge of repurposing used clothing into yarn for the rest of us. The first few yards of fabric were magnificent. As we cheered and clinked our bottles and cans, our guests applauded. Since then we've been weaving thick fabric



for covering parts of the roof. We have also bartered some of it with other neighbourhoods, acquiring fabric for transparent curtains and furniture which we have begun making. Even when only three people were in charge of the loom, the rest of us would sit below them, enjoying the rhythmic hum of the heddles, the shuttle moving back and forth repeatedly. I was adamant in my story. Weaving has not left Belfast. We were re-learning what was lost. What my ancestors were occupied with in their rural cottages long ago, and my grandmother in the mill along the river.



*the spider woman,
navajo*



