

ARUSHA

GALLERY

Axis Mundi

*Whiskery tips to the branches and a gaunt
darkening in the leaves are a sign of disease.*

*There is a writhe in the trunks, knuckle
and burr, a lost-wax grief to fissured bark.*

*This year the buds never looked more
mythological - pollen dusting everything
with gold. The god who can see the future's
hanging there and if we don't feel sorrow,*

*we might as well be dead. Underground
the trees' sickness shares a root system
with my pathogenic rage. Its spores mist
my eyes so, walking through the tunnel of ash,*

*I see not light at the end of the end but a twist
in the road, an impassable wall, gloaming.*

Linda France¹

In the hot summer of 2022 the artist travelled the length of the UK to attend two funerals. From the relative green of the north to the parched lands of the south, her constant roadside companions were dying Ash trees, their raised skeletal branches failing to ward off the continuing Ash Dieback epidemic. In the poetic Edda the World Tree *Yggdrasil*, a tree central to the cosmos, which shivers and groans as a precursor to a series of cataclysmic events that unravel the world of gods and men, is an Ash tree.

¹ From *Startling* (Faber and New Writing North, 2022)

In *Axis Mundi* McLachlan draws on motifs from comparative mythology and her experience as an archaeologist and end of life doula to explore the mediumistic capacity of ceramic objects. The exhibition, which is orientated to the cardinal directions, includes totem-like ceramic figurines, boxes, vessels and headrests. The central piece, *Axis Mundi, 2022*, which shares the title of the exhibition, recalls *Yggdrasill*, the sacred Ash tree. An eagle sits atop the tree, birds perch in its branches, animals and humans live under it, and in its roots dwell serpents and reptiles. It represents the concept of the World Tree as a means of ascent to an upper, 'heavenly' realm or descent to a lower underworld.

This idea of travel between worlds continues in the works *hic jacet* and *Potnia Theron*, both of which are ceramic headrests. For the Shona people of Zimbabwe, who believe that a person communes with their ancestors in a dreamscape, the headrest is considered of great importance for forming a connection between the living and spiritual world. Headrests were often so closely associated with the individual who used them that they came to stand as 'containers' of their owner's presence or identity, and so after the owner's death they became a means by which the deceased could be contacted.

Animals play an essential role in the exhibition. At the intersection between humans and the natural world, they carry symbolic meanings and embody human values, while remaining grounded in Nature and its constant cycle of death and renewal. Through fusing potent symbolism with an evocative, elemental material language, McLachlan's exhibition engages with an ancient preoccupation: to commune with life, death, and the afterlife through material culture.

Rosie McLachlan (b. 1982) received her MFA from Newcastle University, and a BA in Archaeology from the Institute of Archaeology, University College London, during which time she also studied at the Slade School of Fine Art, London. Her work has been exhibited by Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art (UK), Arusha Gallery (UK) and Cavin Morris Gallery (New York), amongst others.

McLachlan uses clay, which she digs from rivers and moorlands, to consider elemental forces such as death, regeneration and the natural world. Her work is informed by an ongoing study of archaeology, comparative mythology, folklore and thanatology.

McLachlan's ceramic works are wood fired over 4 days and nights in an anagama kiln, an ancient type of pottery kiln brought to Japan from China via Korea in the 5th century. The long firing process is a devotional act, and the resulting sculptural works, transformed by heat, flame and ash accretions, have an elemental, totem-like quality.