



# BEYOND THE RATIONAL

Elysia Crampton’s music dips into the “dark, generative ocean” of the mind.

By Joe Bucciero

*Since her early releases as E+E, Elysia Crampton has jammed together sounds from disparate genres and geographical locations to articulate an immersive method of cultural commentary and personal storytelling. Spots y Escupitajo, her latest LP, dismisses conventional musical form, juxtaposing several 10 to 20-second audio clips that she calls “spots” with flowing, song-length tours through a world of processed electronics, sound effects, vocal signatures, and, more specific to this release, the sound of a slowly moving piano. Compared to previous albums, this one is spare, in a way that can feel elegiac; indeed, a press release for the record notes that it honors Crampton’s deceased grandparents.*

*In the below interview, Crampton discusses how her personal history and certain conceptual frameworks team up to undergird her music. Her statements build on a variety of sources, weaving together such notions as “becoming-with,” attributed to the theorist Donna Haraway, and the stories and traditions of her people, the Aymara, an indigenous group from the Andean region. Elysia Crampton plays with Earthly and L’Rain at Park Church Co-op in Brooklyn, on November 4.*

**Your work bespeaks a strong political point of view. What are some challenges you’ve faced as an artist interfacing with and through the digital world, where meaning is easily distorted and taken out of context?**

I’m always treading the irrational in an attempt to uncover the project—beyond value logic, beyond linear time and progress, often having to contradict myself in order to get to where I need to go. Beyond the rational lies a dark, generative ocean that exceeds any value judgment or ethical assignment we would confer upon it, though it’s something like an ethical demand that leads me there, toward that night.

The more I live—making mistakes, being messy, tasting and touching this life where

the anti-colonial is continually given (as we are irreducible to coloniality)—the more I find it unnecessary to seek clarity or wholeness, or even what one would consider an individuated standpoint. An example would be a clear-cut political view, able to fit neatly into a packet of lessons. I’m learning that those desires are, in many ways, detrimental to the project. What is the project? I’m still learning that, as it is something felt out in a kind of synesthetic anguish and ecstasy not just my own—a demand, a queer desiring for the abolition of what has been called subjection, an end to imperialism and coloniality as things that prefigure such forms of capture. It’s a desiring born from the movement of becoming-with.

**Your live performances encompass a lot more than just the music on your records. What informs their set-up and the stories you’re trying to tell?**

From an Aymara perspective, there isn’t really such a thing as a static, self-enclosed “being”—a stable ontological bedrock that sits below or behind stuff. For us, movement is key to elaborating who we “are” and how we move through the many space-times; perhaps a term like “becoming” is more apt than “being,” though still carrying its own limitations. From that notion of movement as being, performing the songs in different spaces allows others to feel how they are affecting, even altering, the music—how all of us form and are forming the field of force they emerge out of. I’m inspired by the audiences that attend and share those spaces with me.



Illustration by Aubrey Nolan

**Can you explain the story behind the title of *Spots y Escupitajo*?**

The title, “spots and spittle” (in English), is a reference to the figure to which the

album is dedicated: *chuqui chinchay*, or *ccoa*, the flying feline [in the Aymara tradition] that guards dual-gendered or trans bodies. Oral tradition and the old colonial chroniclers give us stories about the “spittle of the sun,” or *intiptoca*, and how that relates to chuqui chinchay, the queer feline deity I mentioned, who at times embodies this idea of excretion as tears on the face of the divine. In such instances, images of sorrow seem to carry connotations of a generative or creative act. It is the speckling or spotting on the body of the feline that shows they belong to the liminal space-time we call *taypi*, that generative place where opposites co-mingle, where paradox thrives, where world-reversal, or *pachakuti*, is imminent (and immanent).

**The sound of the piano figures prominently on *Spots y Escupitajo*. What drew you to the instrument? Does it work as a signifier or is it more simply functional?**

In a way, I wanted to honor my disability. On a technical level, I lack education in sound engineering as well as the skill set required to navigate much of the technology my friends and peers rely on in order to make music. So I wanted to follow through with my own lack of ability—socially, medically, sonically speaking—and not attempt to conceal any of that but implement it as a strength, or just as-is, no excuses or wordy explanations. The keyboards I used for that fake piano sound—the Yamaha and my Roland—I’ve had them since I was twelve, so you could say it was also a way of honoring my long relationship with those instruments.

**Do you approach making music differently now than you did as E+E?**

Not so much. I mean, I don’t make edits [of other people’s music] that much anymore, but it’s not out of any real decision to stop—just organic change, I suppose. I still edit my own recordings and performances the way I would edit any other music files. The genres I defined are all still in my music, elaborated in different moments—whether purposefully, coming from a place of wanting to preserve my family’s legacy, or haphazardly, from being in dialogue with friends, or out of traveling for work. My newest record, which should be released in early 2018, sort of looks toward and revitalizes some of the sounds I tried developing before I started releasing work under my own name. □

# NEW YORK NEEDS ALL-AGES VENUES

The Titus Andronicus frontman makes a case for venues that put music first.

By Patrick Stickles  
As told to Emilie Friedlander

*Patrick Stickles got his start playing rock music in high school, when he and his friends would gig around New Jersey, performing in parents’ basements and at school events. Later, the raucous, politically uncompromising punk music he would go on to make with the band Titus Andronicus would find a welcoming home across state lines, in the all-ages venues of late-00s New York City. Ahead of the band’s forthcoming show at a newly re-opened Market Hotel on December 14, Stickles speaks about the importance of these spaces for artists and fans of independent music.*

Patrick Stickles: My earliest experiences with the all-ages/DIY thing happened back in high school, when my friends and I began to play in rock bands. In suburban New Jersey, there weren’t many opportunities to play out besides at school events, so we would put on shows in parents’ basements. Occasionally, somebody would go big and rent out the VFW hall or the Elks Lodge. We really had to create our own opportunities, since nobody else was stepping up to do it for us. We didn’t yet understand the ethical implications of DIY—it was based on necessity.

In 2005, when Titus Andronicus was just starting out, the only places where we could get gigs in New Jersey were run by these sheisty promoters who would do unscrupulous things, like requiring that young bands purchase a bunch of tickets wholesale which they could then sell to their friends, eating the cost in the event that they couldn’t find enough “customers.” Basically, the promoter was trying to pass the buck to us; it was kind of a “pay-to-play” situation.

When we got a bit older and started branching out, playing in New York City was really exciting because we had heard all the legends. We got a big thrill to go and play clubs on the Lower East Side, but in

many ways, it was the same as it was back in Jersey. Usually, the person working the door would question the people coming in about which act they were there to see, keeping track so the promoter could know who was really bringing the heads in, who had the “draw.” If you didn’t have enough check marks at the end of the night, you probably wouldn’t be asked back, regardless of the quality of the performance. As a result, Titus Andronicus wasn’t asked back to too many of these clubs.

The way a lot of these old-fashioned clubs make their money is not by selling tickets, but by selling alcohol. They care less about making money at the door than they do about making money at the bar, so they don’t really want kids in there who can’t drink and spend their money that way. This line of thinking reduces the art and the artist to no more than a means to an end when, in truth, art should be an end unto itself. The value and vitality of an artist doesn’t necessarily correlate to how much their audience can drink.



Illustration by Aubrey Nolan

It was around 2007 when we started getting invited to play at venues in Brooklyn like Don Pedro’s and Death By Audio, and that was a totally different vibe, because it was about the *music*. These shows were being put on by people closer to our age who weren’t as concerned with making a buck, but with providing opportunities to young artists they believed in. This made for a much more welcoming, supportive, and stimulating environment, one where you didn’t feel just like a cog in a machine.

I think sensible people agree, now more than ever, that discrimination of any kind is categorically wrong, and this definitely includes age discrimination. Art should be accessible to anybody who might need it, anybody who could get something positive out of it. Enjoying it shouldn’t be based on how old you are.

When the mission of a space goes beyond making money or selling drinks, when it is not governed by discriminatory policies, it puts a different value system in place. Ideally, that value system involves making the spaces safer and more inclusive, so that everybody feels like they can come in and have a good time without being marginalized or threatened. The best venues exist as a kind of “temporary autonomous zone,” one that offers a more equitable alternative to the oppressive society outside. This is something that I care about very deeply, as I have seen too many shows ruined by violence, to my great disgust. When the primary objective of a venue is to profit by getting people drunk, that can enable reckless, aggressive behavior and create a lot of toxic situations.

Furthermore, all-ages policies are beneficial to all because young people are usually a lot more excited about music. They’re experiencing the scene for the first time, and they’re starting to understand that artists are regular people, just like them. Oftentimes, these kids are coming in from out of town, where they don’t have as many opportunities to see bands, and they’re attending because they really want to experience the music, not because they want to party or get a buzz on. When you have that kind of vibe in the room, that kind of enthusiasm and gratitude, it can be very infectious. It’s harder to be a jaded cynic when you see the young kids really feeling it. You might be reminded that you were just like them once, and get back in touch with a part of yourself that’s maybe been buried for too long.

If you’re a kid who can’t get into 21+ venues, it can feel like the artist and the art exist in a whole other world, one to which you don’t have access, but that isn’t true. Those barriers that have been put up are just arbitrary business decisions made by the venue management. When the artist and the audience are on the same level, it demystifies the process and encourages young people to get involved, whether they’re making their own music, promoting their own shows, or even starting their own record label. This keeps fresh energy coming in, which benefits the entire scene.

I’m hoping that the return of Market Hotel will remind people of the positive things that can happen when the music is prioritized over the money, the alcohol. Hopefully, it’ll inspire the kids of today to keep the fire burning and create opportunities for the next generation. Keeping these values alive will make for a happier, healthier scene for all of us. □