

Horse Spirits



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Driving home after a day's hike I come upon a field of horses. The scene is picturesque. Sunset. Foliage. I pull over and reach for the Canon, but there's a problem: I'm new to this camera and not so good at capturing moving subjects in dim light. I try anyway. The result? 55 blurry photographs riddled with technicolor streaks like an iridescent fish.

Damn, I think. All outtakes.

Later that evening I nestle into my home studio. I throw open the window. Cool air hits my face and leaves chatter in the darkness. I revisit the photos.

Yep, still outtakes. But wait... what's this?

A phantom figure catches my eye. I zoom in for a closer look.

In the chaos of the image seems to reside something meaningful. The horse's translucent body frozen in liminal space brings to mind the Lascaux cave paintings meticulously sketched by our Paleolithic ancestors into rock walls by torchlight. Here, as in those images, the being's inherent ambiguity is revealed as we see him/her enmeshed in the landscape, shapeshifting like a cloud.

Childhood memories stir. How I felt an innate sense of wonder for the natural world and experienced my embeddedness within her like a cloud in the sky. How I was then taught to label the sky and the cloud and conceptualize them as isolated "things" strewn together only by scientific causality. How I, at some dreadful point, internalized the delusion of being separate from Mother Earth.

Writer John Briggs says, "We see a bird flying, and at once the adult mind says 'bird.' The child, by contrast, sees something that not only does not have a name but is not even a nameless thing: it is... a limitless continuum involving the air, the trees, the time of day, movement, temperature, the mother's voice, the color of the sky, almost everything."

While haunting, to me these images hint at what experiencing that continuum is like. Perhaps, if we're lucky, they might also offer a glimpse into what our earth-minded ancestors saw up close.

















