

Karen Fiss, PhD  
NAOMIE KREMER'S *SEER*

Who is the Seer in Naomie Kremer's video? The giant eye which fills the screen, or the female figure who, with eyes closed, explores her darkened sphere – a seer who doesn't actually see? Or is it perhaps the viewer, us, invited briefly to gaze through this strange portal onto an unfolding cosmic world? Is this eye a "window onto a soul" or something else?

Though most visitors will encounter Kremer's film at a random point in its repeating loop, and not necessarily from its beginning, the work does indeed have an image-narrative thread, starting with an amorphous ovoid – a shape vaguely vulval or even larval –that quickly opens up to reveal a psychedelic moving world. This uncanny peephole is now recognizable as a single and omnipotent eye, filmed at such close range as through a microscope, so that the insertions of each eyelash is visible in almost grotesque detail. The hyperrealist frame provides a strange contrast to the colorful animated universe inside. The view inside the eye's frame is more through a telescope than a microscope, expanding out into the cosmos. A spinning sunflower occupies the place of the eye's pupil, only to then explode outside of the frame—a "big bang" revealing a marbled sphere - planet, earth, eyeball - floating in what seems at first an azul celestial sky, then transmuting into watery waves and iridescent grasses.

The imagery evokes in many ways a creation narrative, Genesis: darkness and light, sky and water, the appearance of earth and plant life, and perhaps the first Eve rather than an Adam? In Kremer's play of micro- and macro-scale, the female figure is both the "apple of the eye," centered in the iris, and the colossus of the world, a floating Amazon filling nearly the entire globe.. Is she the Creator or the created? Is she the power behind the omnipotent eye or its object?

Eve, as "the mother of all living," corresponds in many ways to Asherah, the Canaanite mother goddess worshipped in early Israelite tradition, and closely associated etymologically with sacred trees, as Eve is with the tree of knowledge. Asherah's role in Creation, however, was long suppressed in mainstream Judaism, regarded as a threat to monotheism through association with ancient idol worship. More contemporary scholars have

since vindicated Asherah, excavating her tradition as a divine Earth Mother and source of wisdom. Jewish ancestors communed with her in the wilderness, in what has been interpreted as uniting the transcendent “feminine” and “masculine” aspects of the Creator.

In contrast to the all-seeing giant eye framing the imagery, why is this central female figure moving in this universe with her eye’s closed? She stretches her arms and hands in various directions as she explores her world and naked form, not through her gaze, but through touch. The competition between the senses of sight or “scopic power,” and touch or the “haptic realm,” has been debated in western philosophical traditions ever since Plato. Sight has long been privileged as the superior human sense, linked to intelligence, understanding, truth and enlightenment: “Seeing is believing.” Vision has reigned over the other senses – touch, taste, smell and hearing – because these “lower senses” have been typically associated with the body rather than the mind.

Feminist writers, in particular the French theorist Luce Irigaray, critiques the privileging of vision, or “ocularcentrism,” as a patriarchal construction that devalues the feminine and female desire, which she argues was more about the “haptic” sense of touching than looking. Sight has no more access to “objective truth” than any of our other senses. After all, the sun is a source of illumination, but also of blindness.

The feminist rejection of the visual regime reflects a parallel critique of ocularcentrism in the early avant-garde. With the advent of modernism, the hegemonic dominance of sight was challenged in particular by Dada and Surrealist artists, who believed that the rationality and progress associated with the positivism of vision was largely responsible for the technologies that made the destructive warfare of WWI possible. Instead, they turned inward to the more subjective and uncanny world of the unconscious and dreams.

Connected to their rejection of sight as the “noblest sense,” the eye was a frequent and obsessive theme for Surrealist artists such as Magritte, Man Ray, and others. As historian Martin Jay explains, these artists took this imagery in two different directions. Magritte and Breton regarded the eye as a window onto an interior landscape. Jay contends that they wanted to

“restore the Edenic purity of the eye,” a window that didn’t open onto a predictable Cartesian perspectival space, but rather to an internal dreamscape: “a liminal plane between reality and imagination, foreground and background, external and internal worlds.”

In the second camp, exemplified by the 1929 film *Un Chien Andalou* by Luis Buñuel, the eye was often mutilated or transfigured into objects with a similar shape. In the seminal sequence from this film, a cloud floating in front of the moon transitions to the slicing of a woman’s eyeball with a razor (the filmmaker actually employed a cow’s eye to stage the slicing). Jay notes that in this scene “the third eye of the Seer is deprived of its spiritualized and elevating function, and instead associated with sadistic or erotic impulses.” It lacked “divine spark,” and thereby was an organ to be scorned.

In stark contrast, Kremer can be said to have restored the eye’s “Edenic purity,” while at the same time resisting its historic association with patriarchal scopic omnipotence. In her version of Eden, knowledge and understanding can be equally explored and acquired through the other senses of the body, such as touch, perhaps recovering the feminine subjective and pleasure Irigaray and other French feminists were seeking in their critique of ocularcentrism.

The ending of Kremer’s work, marked by the blinking of the giant eye followed by a quick succession of identical blinking eyelids, one nested in the one before, *mise-en-abîme* like, until the opening is closed, recalling an early vanguard technique in silent film used by the Surrealists and other makers. Literally called the “iris out” technique, the camera’s iris, the ring controlling its aperture, is incrementally closed, gradually darkening the outer edges of the image until its illuminated center disappears. In Kremer’s film, the sudden closing of the “aperture” comes as a surprise, a playful gesture, that ends our brief entry into her colorful and expansive hidden world. It is perhaps a reminder for us to see, touch and feel expansively whenever we have the chance, as well as to create our own opportunities to do so. Kremer writes about the preciousness of these glimpses in her poem *The Eye of the Beholder* (2024), inspired by the *Seer*. The poem concludes:

*Unbidden  
Once beheld  
One is beholden  
In the blink of an eye  
Subject, object  
Verb and reverb  
recycle in cycle*

*Once, out of time  
Longing set in  
In time for a touch  
The touch of the land  
On feet, in hand*

*...  
Brought this wonder  
To behold  
An ending beginning  
Since time  
Never stops  
For no one*

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