

MADELINE VON FOERSTER

Carnival Insectivora, 2013
Oil and egg tempera on panel, 16 x 20 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

W. ROYCE ADAMS

Hands

Memories of mother

look at my arthritic hands, gnarled, boney, crooked skeletal fingers covered in wrinkled, blotched skin, some areas spotted blue black and red brown like some camouflaged animal wanting to hide; one finger, more swollen at the knuckles than the others, bent almost to a question mark, making it impossible to form a fist.

Underneath all that lies the pain trying to get out, forbidding jars to open, dropping drinks, gripping pens that won't write clearly, clips too small to clip, shirt buttons refusing to slip into their slots, handshakes that bring a wince.

When did this happen? Where are my other hands?

But I've seen old hands like these before.

My mother's.

Yes, there in that shiny, silver-gray vessel designed for longevity under the ground, the top half of the lid open, providing assurance that the occupant would rest for eternity on soft cream-white, velvet-like fabric. I did not want to look, nor had need to. I held no desire to observe the artificially decorated lifeless body of someone I love; no, not a vision I wanted to carry in my mind or my heart.

But my father and brother, insistent in their grief, pulled me in, and the three of us stood before her, as a family, one last time. I refused to look at her face, but my eyes were drawn to her hands, despite the cosmetics, still gnarled, boney, arthritic skeletal fingers covered in wrinkled, blotched blue-black skin, almost hidden under the closed half of the casket lid. Those hands held much of the story of my life.

Those hands changed my messy diapers, tenderly bathed me, held me to her breasts, helped me as she taught me to walk. Her hands soothed when my cheeks and brow held fever. Her hands turned the pages of the books we read together. Her hands took me as she walked me to my first school, assuring me I'd be fine. Her hands played the music that made me dance and sing. And as I grew too youth-embarrassed to hold hands, her hands put up with me, pointed me in the right direction when I needed it, and continued to hold nothing but love.

They deserve this rest, those hands that threaded the needles that sewed all those clothes I took for granted, washed and ironed them, mended them when I roughed them. For years, those hands managed to open jars and cans, hold those heavy pots, stir the thick sauces, pit the