

# Songs to the Sea



Frederic Leighton, *Psamathe*, 1880.  
Source: Wikimedia Commons

Victoria Myronyuk

Artist, performer, and theater maker Victoria Myronyuk shares an introduction and transcript from her audiovisual installation *Songs to the Sea*, shown as part of the group exhibition *Fragile State* in Liverpool and Odessa in 2019. The original installation immerses the listener in the melodic interpretation of the Greek myth about Psamathe, the goddess of sand, telling the story of her abduction by Aikos, transformation into a seal, and the loss of her son. An excerpt from *Songs to the Sea* can be heard on Solitude's website.



1

Psamathe traditionally sits on the seashore with her back to the audience,  
wearing a cheap silk dress  
from a European secondhand shop.  
Behind her shoulders, there are huge  
factory pipes with puffs of smoke.  
Dark hair is gathered in a bun  
on the back of her head.  
She has her hiking boots on her feet.  
Psamathe looks into the sea horizon,  
and occasionally shakes her head to the beat of the seagulls  
and to the blows of iron machines.

The excerpt is from an audiovisual installation featured in the *Fragile State* group exhibition, which was on view in Liverpool and Odessa in 2019. The piece envelops the listener in a melodic portrayal of the Greek myth about Psamathe, the Greek Nereid goddess of sand, detailing her abduction by Aikos, her transformation into a seal, and the subsequent loss of her son.

During my residency in Liverpool, I explored the Lady Lever Art Gallery, where Frederic Leighton's painting with the same title captivated me. It depicted a nude female on the seashore, facing away in a pose of melancholic anticipation. Contemplating this painting, I pondered the varying emotions associated with waiting, influenced by the shoreline. Reflecting in 2023, I revisited this painting and my perceptions of time.

Back then, I contemplated the sea as a unifying force between two distant shores – Liverpool and Odessa. Waiting on each coast held distinct emotions and illusions on the horizon. Viewing the sea from the Ukrainian side symbolized a quest for peace amid the precarious reality of a country at war in the east, a conflict yet to touch me



Victoria Myronyuk, stills from *Songs to the Sea*, 2018–19

personally. That year, my demon was a chronic illness altering my identity through intense medications. In Liverpool, a place of safety, I gazed back toward Odessa's direction, yearning for home and freedom not to be found »in the West.« Strangely, the sea from my native shore symbolized threat and unpredictability, while from the other side, it evoked thoughts of drowning and oblivion. Tranquility and calmness were illusory perspectives.

Psamathe, the goddess of sand, served as a metaphor for an element interdependent with the sea. Its materiality stemmed from tangible energy, not maritime delusions. I identified with Psamathe's story, drawn to her painful experience of corporeal mutation, believing vocal storytelling conveyed it aptly.

Today, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the loss of friends, migration, and another health crisis induced by major stress, the sea reflects a cemetery of grief. Listening to the *Songs to the Sea*, I mourn Psamathe's loss of homeland, identity, and loved ones. In these dark times, I increasingly believe in the transformative power of voice for pain relief and healing.

2

Aikos emerges from the sea,  
Europe's brother  
He left his island surrounded by high rocks  
and arrived on an unfamiliar shore.  
The ants scurry behind him –  
his slaves, gifted by his father.  
Aikos's movements are confident,  
dark eyes look into new spaces  
and into Psamathe.

3

Psamathe tries to answer Aikos,  
but she is unable to utter the words –  
they coalesce into a growl.  
Psamathe loses strength in her legs  
and falls into the sand  
it becomes more comfortable to crawl:  
her arms break,  
fall away from the rest of her body,  
the skin burns, peels,  
and dark blue scales appear  
from under the bloody cracks in the skin.

4

Psamathe is located on the coast  
of the Aikos island  
looking at the sea horizon.  
Next to her, there is her son called Fok.  
Aikos looks at them from behind.

5

A local healer tries to comfort Psamathe after the loss of her son.  
She changes her into black clothes,  
puts a black scarf on a head,  
and leads her across the island  
to a remote dungeon  
where the islanders gather  
for a collective ritual.

**Victoria Myronyuk** is an interdisciplinary artist, performer, and theater maker. She is temporarily based in a Polish village as a result of the war in Ukraine.

To listen to the accompanying audiovisual material, please access the online version of *Solitude Journal 5 – A Sound Was Heard!*



You will find the following material:

Victoria Myronyuk, Excerpt of *Songs to the Sea*, Liverpool/Odessa, 2018–19

The storytelling (the poetic interpretation of the myth) is in Ukrainian, while the melodic parts are spoken in English, Spanish, and some phrases in Georgian.