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Prologue

'I thought: I cannot bear this world a moment longer. Then, child, make another.'

Madeline Miller, *Circe* (2018)

In 1996, I went to a Greek island to write a novel about a nineteenth-century fairy painter. Twenty-five years later, I returned to write about women artists and the spirit world.

In Greece, the idea of magical women is nothing new. For more than twelve centuries, the High Priestess at the Temple of Apollo - also known as the Oracle of Delphi - counselled mortals, and even today, each mention of Athens invokes the goddess of wisdom and war. Recitations of Ancient Greek poetry always begin with an entreaty to the nine female Muses - the source of all inspiration. Their mother, Mnemosyne, is the goddess of memory.

Both periods in my life were times of great transition. In 1996, I was a painter working as a waitress who was becoming a writer; little did I suspect that on my return to London, I would become an editor at a contemporary art magazine, something I had never imagined or planned. Two decades later, I left my job at *frieze* to write full time. Everything felt hopeful and precarious; to make such a leap involves levels of self-confidence I wasn't entirely sure I possessed. But something needed to change. The relentlessness of it all had worn me out: the juggling involved in trying to write alongside a full-time job, the endless daily decisions, the keeping abreast of every twist and turn of the contemporary art world, and