

The Image that Selects You

by

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[.....]

*School is the place where I did my growing
They fill your brain to overflowing
They tell you this is all stuff you need to
be knowing
School is the place where I did my growing
Just when I got to like it it was time to be
going*

*God's just a story someone made up long
ago
Before they had books and TV shows
I don't believe in him and I ain't afraid to
say so
You know god's just a story someone
made up long ago
But it's hard not to be superstitious
despite all that you know*

*Life is a story don't you doubt
Bad times give you something to talk
about
The next time you feel you're all worn out
Remember life is a story
Don't you doubt
It only takes a day for everything to turn
around.*

**--- Jeffrey Lewis, "Life"
1998**

IN THE BEGINNING

There was a bang, a whisper, a wet sheet, some good advice, an urge to drill and a divining rod to find the water and the elements' reactions to it There was the rust beneath the hull of a sunken ship, stones to shore, carpenter ants ascending an oxidized tin roof, colors running into others, downward until dried, evaporated. Water that recycles itself and pools wherever it is put, rediscovers the shipwreck. In preschool I painted portraits of dark-skinned people from other continents and animals reminiscent of those in Old World lithographs constructed from the written descriptions of explorers, where a giant squid was the Kraken and the hippopotamus looked otherworldly, though not much stranger than it looks in reality. Images conjured from the resounding vibrations of ancient moans that I had not known prior to their appearance on the paper before me: a means of illustrating that which was in my mind. The paintings were a product of the frustration, created in order to eradicate and elucidate the confusion I felt from others being unable to see my ideas – they were meant to be proof. Much to my shock, I came to understand that people assumed my creation of images through painting was the result of a singular vision while I had presumed them to be a collection of mutually recognizable forms. My role as an artist would never again be so pure as then; I have been searching ever since for the residue of imagination, scraps fallen to the wayside during a lifetime of academic tool-sharpening in many disciplines. As Buckminster Fuller said, “I have spent most of my life unlearning things that have proved not to be true.” Thinking back to this time, I know that artmaking was the closest I'll ever be to my yearned invention, the “Dream Projector.” Picture a beam of light emanating from the forehead with images of what one has conjured the night before in order to circumvent the frustrating verbal circumambulation of descriptions that result from attempts to recount the arena of the nightly movies played out within the mind...and recursively, an attempted description of the Dream Projector exemplifies the need for said invention. I

may never be able to accurately demonstrate the complexity and multi-dimensionality of my dreams. Others imagine a time machine – should this come about in a distant future, might somebody use it to travel back to 2012 with a Dream Projector?

Early childhood paintings were prototypes for future works that would eventually concede to the visions of others. Pulled into windmills of ideas that dissatisfied or confounded expectations of punctuality + containment: the rules of a game I did not know I'd been playing.

WHEN IMAGINATION AND DELUSION SPOON

I shot an arrow into the air, / It fell to Earth I knew not where.

--Inspiration drawn from a Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem via an episode of *The Twilight Zone*.

Artifice, Oedipus, edifice, Tesla and Edison, Artemis and Apollo. Hank Williams nicknaming Hank Williams, Jr. after the ventriloquist dummy Bocephus. Whether or not Bill Hicks was on the “ride” in life or boarded it in death. Like the small end of a bone-shaped stick headed straight toward Niagara Falls on the Canadian side. If this is how the air smelled 3.76 inches to the right of a dumpster in Muncie, Indiana, on a Thursday at 6:07 PM, three days after termites flaked away from a splintered shard on the sole of a musky carpenter’s boot and took up new residence among the garbage’s trash. Such a scent should have been celebrated as that of the wet rock clutter near a mud dauber’s nest directly beneath a waxing gibbous moon on a Saturday night. We encourage the “small things” without counting them. And The Mud Dauber, being the kindest of all wasps, shares its diet of nectar + black widow spiders with granddaddy longlegs, the praying mantis, toads, monkeys and some birds, all of whom might gather together in the rain for Weird Al Yankovic’s TED Talk.



Figure #1

Falkor & Atreyu

Mixed media on canvas

38 x 48"

2020

Consider *Falkor and Atreyu* (fig. 1). Like an entomological chat roulette, these figures came about through a matchmaking of anthropomorphized marks, materials, bursts and pauses of time, clustered and not, tightened and not. I applied a base layer of white gesso and mottled it with titanium white acrylic while wet, then applied white chalk pastel in a swirl of white variance to see which element popped out where. From there I added yellow spray paint, then some red, and scratched the two together in wet states – sprayed sap green above those and guided all from there with chunky graphite and charcoal. In come some splashes + puddling of several discounted house paint mis-tints, a few blasts of liquid rubber that create a black pepper-atop-water sensation that scatters quickly

from a drop of soap. Who would emerge? A memory of mine buzzed in from beneath the bin and recognized a few friendly childhood faces. So, I delivered these old pals into uncharted territory that would become theirs to manipulate, and Falkor emerged with a squirt of Flipper in mind. The *NEVERENDING STORY* perseveres in a strange painting, unfinished.

There is sincere liberation in imagination; illusion and omission are not all lies.

GARDENING

Knock knock

Q: *Who's there?*

A: *A slew of gardening metaphors for painting.*

Q: *A slew of gardening metaphors for painting...why?*

A: *I know, trite as roses and equally as presumptuous. But I'll never outgrow the comparisons.*

Picture the rectangular canvas planter, white-soiled gesso, seeds of pigment + all types of hoe-y brushes, palette knives, my fingers and frequent splashes of water that participate in the sowing of inch-by-inch and row-by-row. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily I also paint from dreams. I see the growth potential in each move, then I see the growth in real time literally with the addition of a plant that becomes the result of other marks; on the flipside, plantlike marks become stand-ins for other objects. Both the garden and the canvas are bordered by flagstones.



Figure #2

Cocktail Desperado

Acrylic, ink, graphite on panel

16 x 12"

2018

Consider the piece, *Cocktail Desperado* (fig. 2). Here we have an image of David Byrne reading a newspaper. His pants have been constructed from floral motifs I hold in mind,

built up through scratched layers of ink and gesso, washed away in watery passes to reveal residual scratches. The puddling of washes produces the illusion of weight through gravity itself – integral to all that we observe in life, it is crucial that pieces showcase and highlight the nature and manipulations of their elements. Plantlike growth = growth like plants. We know the nature of materials and rub our chins at their culmination of forms. The screaming difference is that I need most pieces to be out of my face upon completion, whereas each plant must be 'til death-do-us-part. Perhaps anew each season, but like the perennial bachelor I will be here waiting for them to return and renew my inspiration.

THE MANUFACTURED GROOVE

I have been trying to mine the unifying particles of collective imagination. Maybe every critique is akin to an Agatha Christie novel. The “whodunnit” factor is inherent in who did the Art. No part of the piece is above suspicion, and the mystery rewrites itself often through reactive mark-making and conceptual conjecture. Guesses, theories that stab at unravelling the narrative are not unlike *Game of Thrones* fan theories; the work commands the imaginations of its witnesses. After talking about an idea, some part of the brain considers it \ / checked off. There is satisfaction in the exposition of a thought; suppose this was what Sol LeWitt was chasing, but also what writers of fan fiction achieve. Ideas, memes, viruses: “When you plant a fertile meme in my mind you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell,” Richard Dawkins wrote. By downplaying an idea, one is attempting to tame it, possess it, alter it by perspective and judgment, then reprocess & sell it under their own brand. Who decided that distant dead stars are discrete objects and not holes punctured into the heavens like thumbnails pressed in Jell-O or cigarette butts extinguished in snow? Could cosmic patterning be akin to mesh from a screen door pressed over congealed bacon fat producing greasy starry

worms when the boogeyman calls it a night and forgets to turn off the stove?
Conjectured movements of mind and hand are anchored in the manipulation of matter.



Figure #3

A Chance Encounter
48 x 58"
Mixed media on canvas
2020

Consider *A Chance Encounter* (fig. 4). Like a blooper reel from *The Blair Witch Project*, this piece negates its own horror. A suspension of suspense, it offers commensurate doses of cartoonish humor and hovering uncertainty. Mystery functions as content above its secrecy, the specificities of which are unimportant to the comprehensive whole. The

narrative ascribed by the viewer compounds the mystery – much of it masked not only in the imagery but also the exploration of the black ground that houses creatures enacting an unmoralizing fable. Acrylic, oil, tempera, spray paint, latex, ink, charcoal, oil stick, and gouache all stretch, compete and complement one another in a series of reactions against the delineated figures comprising mostly raw canvas (left and center) and an encroaching zone of fish and foliage occupying the right side of the painted picture plane. In the same way one manages the nitrogen cycle of a fish tank, it must be measured in its entirety knowing that some parts are left straining, working harder for elements than others.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN

...in his rage [he] drove his right foot so far into the ground that it sank in up to his waist; then in a passion he seized the left foot with both hands and tore himself in two.

--Grimm's Fairytales, 1857 edition

An irate Rumpelstiltskin rips himself in half; lost his battle within the tale. Hansel and Gretel lose their way somewhere. As in many fairy tales (grim and not) there is a certain “call to adventure,” the first stage of seventeen espoused by Joseph Campbell in his assessment of the monomythical “Hero's Journey.” All create a space for others to inhabit, assess and position themselves. Aesop was able to boil situations down to direct simplification of morals. But sometimes Harrogate fucks the watermelons and goes to the work camp and Cormac McCarthy debunks Aesop's slow and steady victory.



Figure #5

Do Not Go Yonder, Bong Boy
22 x 30"
Mixed media on canvas
2020

Consider *Don't Go Yonder, Bong Boy* (fig. 5). A scared boy at the bottom right is confronted with the demons of a forest that lies before him. Usually unseen, they bubble forth with ghastly taunts and toothy jeers tittering and moaning a call to action. A carnivalesque entrance shriek-yawns at the boy, daring him to enter through a fluorescent green Close-Encounters doorway, causing him to lower his bugle, whose residual sound is inhaled by the thicket of ominous faces. Sound travels through the air

and falls to ground, I know not where. Like Charles Burchfield's marks that conjure soundwaves of crickets, cicadas, thick air and respirating flora, these specters imbibe and regurgitate the margins that surround them. Culling from the memories of a children's book (fig. 6), I reimagined the boy stumbling into the cacophony of my adult life.

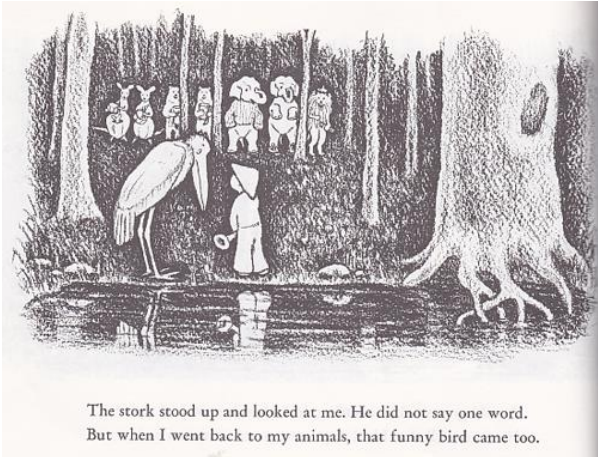


Figure #6

Excerpted illustrations from *In the Forest* by Marie Hall Ets.

Original publication date: 1944.

THE PAST

*It's funny, but it's true
And it's true, but it's not funny
Time comes and goes, but all the while
I still think of you
Some things last a long time.*

--Daniel Johnston

I've pissed on the windshield of a cop car, ridden eight-deep in a tiny auto racing down a mountain to the tune of "Spanish Bombs" at full volume surging sonically on full cylinders. In that moment death felt close, running hand-in-hand alongside the mystery of when and how it might express itself. We climbed over the monoliths of Highland Cemetery, snuck into abandoned warehouses and smashed crowbars through windows making sounds to exaggerate the following silence. Time is a flat circle and a human construct – leaden circles dissolving in the air above Mrs. Dalloway's balcony. I follow the alphabetical layers of thought, and hope to someday land at Z.



Figure #7

Our Rival Gang

Acrylic, latex, graphite, charcoal, spray paint, frisket on canvas

48 x 36"

2020

Consider the piece, *Our Rival Gang* (fig. 7). In the house where I currently live, dubbed the “House of Love” at some point during the past 30 years, we have a rival gang of raccoons. The House was constructed on Byram River in Greenwich, CT, in 1896. I imagine the raccoon clan had run strong before then. Nowadays, they occasionally bust into the art supplies and hand-paint our walls. After a lack of turf-wars since moving to New York from Tennessee, I latched onto this rivalry and painted their leader: the biggest racoon I have ever seen. I knew I needed to paint him back. This particular painting began after a meditation on wooded areas of the Northeast, subject matter aided by a conversation with *Bread + Puppet Theater* performers coupled with the story of Hazel Drew’s 1908 murder in Sand Lake, NY, as recounted to me by cousins who live by the lake where it happened – a story that would become *Twin Peaks*. After much canvas turning, frisket-layering (a liquid masking agent), spray painting and smudging, I saw the eye of that giant raccoon emerge and felt it my duty to confront and applaud him.

UNWARRANTED

I have always felt the urge to be near loved ones in the nighttime. Emotions are heightened at night. Younger: Crawling into the parents’ bed, pleading with brother to keep our shared door open, sneaking one of our dogs into my bedroom, sleepovers where friends would build forts to protect against the figments of *mothmen* who crept beneath windows. Sometimes we spoke with numinous entities through the Ouija Board. We once spoke with Kurt Cobain...or was it me? Post-pubescent: Late night phone calls, the

sneaking-in of friends through the back door beneath the weeping willow tree, ghost stories and illegal campfires in the woods that upset resident rabbits that turned into quick-moving shadows amongst the brush and were subsequently recreated by the shadows of our hands. As Thelonious Monk said and Thomas Pynchon reiterated, “It’s always night, or we wouldn’t need light.”



Warren Piece
Mixed media on canvas
70 x 48"
2019

Consider *Warren Piece* (Fig. 8). Gridded by rectangles – two pillows, comforter or sheet – within a rectangular bed on canvas we find some bunnies. Two borne from shadows are suspended atop a sheet of silver paint that has been partially rubbed away to showcase the liquid masking agent beneath. Initially constructed with screens in mind, the 180-degree rotation became something of a cafeteria tray providing an arena for warren construction. While the shadow rabbits appear in hopes of adventuring with *Prince Achmed*, a dancing swine took residence in the upper left portion, though at times he becomes a yellow-bellied-up rabbit, mac n’ cheese on Pizza Friday, depending on your horoscope. In order to protect all three from *Watership Down*, lightness pervades the padding of the canvas salvaging only the shadow-puppeteered forms as one may peel the congealed film off the surface of a separated mixture or drag magnets to move the metal filings around a *Wooly Willy* board.

DUMBO

Dumbo the elephant is a non-vocal protagonist. Trains sandwiched by buildings, *think I can I think I can I think* clatters over passes and under the heat of panini presses. Repetition finds itself self-indulgent and ambitious while stuttering through its anachronisms. Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass, one does not need to be vocal to be a wanderer. Like jukebox quarters painted red and given to patrons by the bar owner, he counts how many were used to play songs when he empties the machine at the end of the night. A carnival ride turns to calliope sounds, described by Tom Waits as “electric sugar;” some shoes from long-legged riders drag beneath carousel horses, zebras, dragons, elephants – carved wooden figures moving dependently and grimacing. Perhaps

some shoes could pivot the driving motor counterclockwise if their heels dig into the platform deeply enough?



Figure #9

Dumbo Does DUMBO
Acrylic, ink, graphite on canvas
54 x 66"
2019

Consider *Dumbo Does Dumbo* (Fig. 9). Like a slow-drying Rube Goldberg Machine with invisible mechanisms and no simple conclusion, paint is initially applied in mechanical strokes echoing the roundabout construction of forms framed by arches and truncated by the East River's edge. Sections of still-drying paint are effaced by slices of hard graphite,

densely-pigmented ink, scraping and scratching away of intricately painted sections to make way for an elephant tourist that obscures the history of that which came before: that which comprises the painting's foundations. I have seen it submerged in water – photographs and watermarks tell more recent stories that obscure many of those that came before.

ENTITLED

Titling is a reversed chronology alerting the *reader* to certain driving aspects of a painting. I say chronologically-reversed because the titles are assigned upon completion or near completion, working in tandem with a piece to ensure the ongoing evolution of these paintings – so that they do not die at the doorstep. Titles retrospectively extract motivations, discoveries, rebukes, regurgitate a culmination of has/hasn'ts, were/wasn'ts, nods to the whats and nots that are concurrently being defined in wandering tails chasing tales written into the canvas. Sometimes serving as fine print for paint, graphite, etcetera's lease on canvas and the canvas's lease on a wall, the pieces beseech camaraderie from willing cosigners – the audience led to a source by *E.T.*'s Reese's Pieces rather than M&M's or cattle-prods. I am requesting a rented space in viewers' minds unchaperoned by vague titles that allow for more than a bible's-width distance at middle school dances. Like the universe/micro-verse that expands toward a slapping endpoint that claps back to redistribute all components in a cosmic game of Boggle, the images within my works may be deciphered by the marks found within them all.

Where David Shrigley doodles a piss stream onto asphalt near dust hammered out by Anselm Kiefer onto Katherine Bradford's saturated brushes appropriated by a wayward Duchampian disciple looking for a means to cheap nail polish and poppers. "They are working and inventing because they like it! Economics has become a spiritual thing. I must admit it frightens me a little bit. They don't seem to see the difference between working and not working. It's all become a part of one's life. Linda! Larry! There's no

concept of weekends anymore!” spoken by Spalding Gray, as written by David Byrne in *True Stories*, 1987.

He thinks to himself that the progress of human thought is analogous to the alphabet—each successive concept represents a letter, and every individual struggles in his life to make it through as many letters as he can. Mr. Ramsay thinks that he has plodded from A to Q with great effort but feels that R now eludes him. He reflects that not many men can reach even Q, and that only one man in the course of a generation can reach Z. There are two types of great thinkers, he notes: those who work their way from A to Z diligently, and those few geniuses who simply arrive at Z in a single instant. Mr. Ramsay knows he does not belong to the latter type, and resolves (or hopes) to fight his way to Z. Still, he fears that his reputation will fade after his death. He reminds himself that all fame is fleeting and that a single stone will outlast Shakespeare. But he hates to think that he has made little real, lasting difference in the world.

---Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

- A: the canvas
- B: the water
- C: the brush
- D: the waste
- E: the distraction

A: pulling out a hair

B: dropping a hair on the floor

C: you could step on that hair

D: I need to wash the floor anyway

E: you might bring it into the bed

F: I need to do laundry anyway

G: but it could get in the sheets and into your mouth

H: well I'll be asleep

I: but you could wake up choking on it

J: well then I'll swallow it

K: so then you'll digest it

L: I hope I would

M: then it'll go into the septic tank with the cockroach I flushed

N: yes, eventually

O: oh, but we're already at O, so later than this

P: there will be more cockroaches

Q: then your DNA will mix

R: if it works like that

S: along with the rest of our DNA, and the food we've eaten..

T: all to one place, yeah

U: so maybe the next cockroach will be...??

V: still a cockroach.

W: but one borne from us + neighbors' waste?

X: is that how you view reincarnation?

Y: I've thought so before, so it makes sense for me to think it again...

Z: soon you will flush us both down the toilet.

"Why did the chicken cross the road?"

"Why?"

"To get to the idiot's house."

"Knock Knock:"

"Who's there?"

"The chicken."

So who is the 'idiot'? It's either all of us or none.

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Janosch with “Little Bear and Little Tiger, 2016
Reucher, Gaby
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Rod Brasfield with “Bocephus” ventriloquist dummies, ca. 1950
Getty Images



Rod Serling, ca. 1960
CBS Archives/Getty Images