

NIGHT

WALK

Hannah Bays

3rd - 12th June 2023

Asylum Studios

I open the book to find a handwritten note. It says, “You Have Promises to Keep and Miles to go Before You Sleep”. I chose that book because I’m looking for something on coincidence. I turn the book over to the cover, *Re/Search*, my go-to resource for anything counter-cultural – devised and conceived by the mysterious V.Vale, a San Franciscan punk-publicist with an interest in the occult and the deviant.

Being in the world is a hard confluence of competing observations, housed within, latent primordial drives. A robin said to be reincarnated from a dog, relentlessly headbutts my windowpane. There’s a mild burning sensation under the left side of my skull, I believe somewhere, a flamingo will lay a gigantic egg, piranhas must prowl The Amazon, and the upward geometries of this room, lay perpendicular to the taste inside my mouth.

And so, synchronicity is another option available on how to perceive the world. Clinicians will quietly guide you towards reason, determinism, causality – as they generally misunderstand madness. Perhaps confusion is the real pathology. It’s not madness itself, *as madness is confusion of levels of fact*. When tiers of experience get shuffled, the only sane thing to do is to prioritise reordering.

Hannah flicks through pages of old magazines in her house. These magazines are records of fragile memories spanning decades. A knife is taken to cut the outline of a lizard from a bygone WWF publication, collaging memory from a hazy, undetermined past. Time displacement, not retro fetish occurs. This is the re-ordering of the primordial gloom with a simple slice of the razor blade – beings that predate humans, featured optimistically in mid-century encyclopaedias, find themselves in an alien world, slithering over idealised, eerie kitchen interiors.

When Time has been objectified by the dials of a wristwatch, wicked demons from a prehistoric Hades burst the glass facade. This is their pact. These fractal splinters are frozen exquisitely onto cotton duck, beneath a murky zone — hinterland of unknown time. Painted gestures snap, the confidence of a sharpened calligraphy. Where frequent electric colour stabs, the witness is lanced (we are no longer passive viewers here).

I’m reminded of John Heartfield, the bite of his razor directed towards pure evil on an industrial scale. Danger and death lurk too in this arena, yet instead of the white-hot rage against hypocrisy – humour, love, and a heightened sensitivity flourish. This is a synchronised mourning – the world before, and there still is a world now.

I Google “You Have Promises to Keep and Miles to go Before You Sleep” and am taken to a Robert Frost poem, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”. The initial line of the final stanza reads “The woods are lovely, dark and deep”. I’m left thinking synchronicity works too; it’s greatest gift best remains mystery.

Grant Foster
April 2023

Footnote (italics)
The Letters of William S. Burroughs 1945 to 1959, edited by Oliver Harris, 1993
p.128



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In its relentless production of image, the stuff of paint may be likened to the unconscious underworld of psychic substance; a fluid, mutable matter, that since antiquity has been compared to mud or molten metal.^[i]

The id is a chaos, 'a cauldron of seething excitement'^[ii] out of which image is formed...

Within the paintings of *Night Walk*, creatures appear like omens or Familiar spirits such can be found in European folklore. These beings are reminiscent of mythic guides on the foggy threshold of inner and outer landscape, invoking ideas of Magick or mysticism.

Three Fates and The Owl Glass reimagines the figures of Greek mythology responsible for determining the thread of human life - here in the guise of ominous owls. The runic symbol Algiz (associated with protection and spiritual connection) and the Water element symbol (of psyche and the realm of emotion) appear faintly on their feathered chests, as they watch over an hour glass made of tiny bones. Each owl embodies a different personality, the first a blind seer – the second Overlord, and the third, a shapeshifting, unpredictable deviant, most likely to snip the cord.



Snowflakes gently fall, they nestle in crevices on the skinless, red-raw body of a creature from the deep. *Sensitive Soul* depicts a fragile anatomy of interconnected networks, delicate sinews and open orifices. This vulnerable being of heightened sensitivity lurks behind a curtain that divides it from the murky beyond. As in all the paintings of *Night Walk*, it finds itself in an indeterminate landscape of interior and exterior elements – hinterland of psychic experience, feeling its way. Here, everyday objects become vessels embodying memory - past and future. How naturally jewelled rings become chains become worms become flesh.

The human figure, when it does appear, is a small player grappling for survival in a topsy-turvy world of bottles, rocks, soft toys and giant worms. A gothic eye squints at anxiogenic subjects, but alienation is not lamented, instead the catalyst for cutting up and re-assembling reality in the production of new meaning.

A cold blue body lies across the bottom of the canvas – umbilically tethered to a mushroom cloud worm-like entity – a miasmatic personification of 'evil' imitating the tree of life. With a face of *almost comically* cruel intent, it also, (like a lot of beings in the paintings) belies a dark humour. Affirmation and discord strike a precarious balance.

Oil paint is explored materially - sensitively here, aggressively there, with an almost alchemical belief in its transformative effects. Some of the works were born of spontaneous painting, whilst others started life as fragments of images gleaned from books and magazines cut up so frequently their remains resemble flimsy paper skeletons. Source material scraps, scavenged over decades and hoarded for their 'double vision' – operate on both quotidian and 'spirit' levels, to evoke new and ancient forms.



Nature is a temple in which living pillars
Sometimes give voice to confused words;
Man passes there through forests of symbols
Which look at him with understanding eyes^[iii]

^[i] Plato, Republic, 375 BCE (363 c-d)

^[ii] Sigmund Freud, New Introductory Lectures, 1933 (p.98)

^[iii] Charles Baudelaire, Correspondances, 1857

Hannah Bays (b. 1982) is a London based painter who graduated from the Royal Academy Schools, London, UK, 2015. *Night Walk* is her second UK solo exhibition.

Recent exhibitions include: *Twenty-Nineteen*, Campbell Works, London, 2023, *Muscle Beach*, Kupfer Projects, London, 2021 (two-person exhibition); *The End*, Chalton Gallery, London, 2020; *Modern Love Vol. 4*, San Antonio Abad, Mexico City, 2020; *The People's Mandate*, Metro Auditorio, Mexico City, 2020; *Where we are*, Mercer's Hall, London, 2020; *Creekside Open 2019* prize winner – selected by Brian Griffiths, APT Gallery, London.

Residencies include the *Malevich residency*, Lake Como, 2021, *Dover Arts Club Drawing Room Residency*, 2020, *Eton College Artist in Residence*, 2018 and *RRU Artist in Residence*, Liverpool, 2018. Bays has work in a number of collections including Jerwood, Hiscox and Soho House.

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List of works



Sensitive Soul, 2022
80 × 70.5cm
oil on canvas



With Bated Breath, 2023
85 × 80.3cm
oil on canvas



Three Fates and the Owl Glass, 2022
127 × 107cm
oil on canvas



A Single Drop, 2023
145 × 190cm
oil on canvas



LOVE2, 2023
179.7 × 140.2cm
oil on canvas

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List of works



Dialling Tone, 2022
135.4 x 105cm
oil on canvas



Vertex, 2023
105 x 80.5cm
oil on canvas



Tether, 2021
90 x 130cm,
oil on canvas



Beached, 2021
110 x 76cm
oil on canvas



We the People, 2022
80.5 x 70.5cm
oil on canvas

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List of works



Symbelwanc, 2022
152.5 x 101.8cm
oil on canvas



Augur, 2023
187.5 x 76.2cm
oil on canvas



Sentient Lamp, 2022
150.3 x 120.4cm
oil on canvas