



STRANGE NEIGHBOUR

THE DREAMER  
IS STILL ASLEEP

OPENING AUGUST 8 6-9  
AUGUST 8 - SEPTEMBER 6

*Hush; may I ask you all for silence?  
The dreamer is still asleep  
May the goddess keep us from single vision  
and Newton's sleep*  
- Coil, *The Dreamer Is Still Asleep*, (1999)

This exhibition takes its title from the Coil song of the same name, which is a tribute to William Blake. The selected verse is a paraphrased quote from Blake on the topic of fourfold vision. That is, to see the multiple significances everything has, in contrast to the rationalistic explanations of a single-vision, Newtonian mindset. Blake saw everything in his life as a symbol. Being rational, the single-vision person lives in a world where things are what they seem. To them the premise of fourfold vision, the idea that imagination could create reality would be sheer nonsense. However everything that exists in this world starts as a dream.

Viewing **Patrick Doherty's** work feels like being in a dream, or perhaps a nightmare. 'The booboisie bavardage' depicts a colourful, chaotic landscape with strange, disturbing scenarios. Confusing, yet oddly familiar and out of scale, a paradise of sorts illustrating frightful allegories, religious narratives and alluring pagan rituals. A visual outpouring of mythical beings and archetypal imagery seemingly dredged forth from the subconscious depths. I imagine giant tentacles stretching back to the ancient memories of our collective consciousness. This stream of hallucinogenic images, entwined with a macabre sense of humour creates an epic scene that it is full of occult symbols and cryptic messages to be uncovered.

In the work of **Sean Bailey**, symbols are simplified, trance like, contemplative. Inspired by the Astral Travelling Techniques of the prominent occult group, The Order of the Golden Dawn, Bailey's paintings are based on colored eastern elemental symbols used as focus points to create astral doorways. Through the techniques of visualization, intensive concentration and willpower, these images can be meditated on and used as a symbolic gateway into the astral dimensions, opening a doorway to the subconscious mind. These transcendental images are vessels of pure, vibrating energy, portals to an unknown world with potential magickal qualities. Bailey uses

a self-imposed system of rituals in which to work, acting as parameters to contain the direct energy of his painting. This combined with an improvised, meditative and intuitive practice creates room for subconscious direction and also chance to play a part in the creation of images.

**Naomi Bishop's** work is influenced by cultural rituals such as death ceremonies, shamanism and nature worship. She is interested in the ways in which natural and celestial phenomena are interpreted and developed into belief systems. For this exhibition she has created a series of drawings of ritual objects taken from her recent experience on a residency in Finland. In the work 'Sentinel' cyphers are carved into the stump of a tree, which appears like an ancient tombstone. These marks act as symbols for spirits of the dead to find their way from the burial grounds back to their ancestral homes. In 'Double-Edged Wand' we see an mystical divining rod, imagined for communicating with departed spirits. Pulsating, radiating with colour, expelling rays of light, emanating and attracting intense force fields, a conduit of energy from this world to another. Rock, wood, bone, salt – materials from the earth, are imagined to be implemented in these sacred, magickal objects.

In 'Conjuring' by **Benjamin Armstrong**, we also see intense, electrical energy. However this time the magician's hand is present, larger than life. The crackling force is something to be reckoned with. This image is reminiscent of the extraordinary energy, power and vitality of the wand suit of the minor arcana as illustrated in the Aleister Crowley Thoth tarot deck. Representative of the element of fire; intuition, purification, transformation and mastery are just some of the qualities that we can draw from this potent image.

'Victory' also reminds me of a tarot card, this time an ace of swords from the Rider-Waite tarot deck. In a similar, decorative, yet simple visual style, 'Victory' shows the element of air. Traditionally this card may represent mental force, original thinking and divine inspiration. Armstrong's version illustrates beams of rainbow coloured bright light breaking through dark storm clouds, and appears to be aligned with a reading of surmounting obstacles, cutting through confusion and seeing through illusion. Through the darkness comes light.

**Ben Cauchi's** work is predominately about illusion and is created in the aesthetic of spirit photography, which became popular from the 1860s onwards to provide proof of the immaterial. Auras and apparitions, séances and levitations, transfigurations and spirits of the deceased were popular subject matter. There is seepage of ghostly presence in the images of this exhibition, heavy, dark and foreboding. This work is about the relationship of seeing to knowing. Cauchi is influenced by stage magic and the trickery created by the stage magician. Here, Cauchi is the magician, he makes doors open and close by themselves, creates portals to other worlds, and inanimate objects are animated, as if by a paranormal presence. The hand of the magician is further implied by his analogue, alchemical photographic process, where a positive image is recorded directly to glass, creating a mirroring effect. The photographic medium itself a form of trickery and is also seem as inherently magical.

The artists in this exhibition have been brought together not only for the consistent themes of the occult and ritual in their work, but also for their attempt to gain insight into a question or situation by way of an esoteric, standardized process or ritual. By drawing on a rich and complex history of symbolism, and occult practices and systems such as the Tarot, creative visualization, intuition, meditation, and by utilizing various processes such as automatic drawing, alchemy and unconscious streaming, as a way to connect with or contemplate, the unknown. What is clear is our continuing fascination with the unknown, and the influence and effect of that which cannot be seen or explained.

- *Linsey Gosper, curator*

## ***The Impossible Set Free***

Recently Jeffrey Kripal (Professor of Religion at Rice University) has boldly stated, "Materialism is Dead." Perhaps this is not a surprising statement from a historian of religion. What is surprising is that someone like Thomas Nagel, author of the quintessential 20th century philosophical tome, *The View from Nowhere*, agrees with Kripal. In his recent work, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*, Nagel brings all the lucidity and Anglo-American philosophical argumentation for which he is famous to an argument that pulls apart the very idea of 'metaphysical materialism', as he calls the contemporary reigning scientific paradigm. In so doing he collapses the very foundations of scientific instrumentalism, throwing the pretentious claims of neuroscience, evolutionary psychology and any and all sciences that endeavor to assure that us we inhabit an absurd and meaningless universe up in the air, like so much intellectual confetti.

As an Anglo-American philosopher, Nagel hedges his bets. He makes no commitment to any alternative world-view: he is not a Theist or Deist, he is not a supernaturalist. He does not, in fact, know what to offer as an alternative to the irrationality of a science based on metaphysical materialism. Kripal however is not so conservative, not so beholden to a philosophical tradition that hesitates before the horizon of the unknown. Kripal is unequivocal when he says that in order to be truly considered 'scientific' the experimental sciences need to bring the 'Impossible' to the table.

The 'Impossible' are all those phenomena that experimental science has previously demonized to shore up its (illusory) bedrock of mechanism and materialism: cases of pre-cognition, reports of contact with departed souls, visionary experiences of all kinds and the various phenomena studied by parapsychologists and even a few 'straight' psychologists.

Admitting the Impossible into the experimental laboratory or even including it within a developing humanistic-scientific world picture isn't really all that big a deal if one recalls the shattering implications of quantum mechanics early last century. It was here that the mechanical materialist paradigm ('atoms and the void' as Lucretius poetically evoked Newtonian atomism *avant le lettre*) was fatally challenged. Atoms appeared and just as quickly disappeared within the quantum foam. An electron

spinning about in a particle accelerator could affect another particle on the other side of the universe simultaneously.

Simultaneously. What could this possibly mean in a universe previously conceived of as consisting solely of cause and effect: mechanical collisions between elementary, undifferentiated atoms, and the resultant transmission of dumb force? Obviously something was up, and this something has beleaguered the physical sciences ever since, leading to the well-known split in world-views of contemporary physics. As a result, any claim as to the consistency of science (its supposed claim to qualifying what is real and what is not) is patently absurd.

The recognition of an all-encompassing sur-reality is long overdue. In the past such a notion has had its champions. Gaston Bachelard developed his phenomenological science of "surrationalisme" in his various works devoted to the poetics of the elements: earth, air and fire. In this he was undoubtedly aided by the existence and persistence of Surrealism in the world of the arts and politics. André Breton had always recognised the poetic potentialities of the 'new physics', and he pushed farther towards an acknowledgement of the indigo horizon of the Impossible than Bachelard would countenance.

Way back at the beginning of the 20th century Albert Einstein wrote, "People like us who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion." But time is only one of the many persistent illusions that the sciences stubbornly refuse to recognize as a disciplinary hallucination. When one includes the Impossible itself within the purview of a greater Surreality, then perhaps the very idea of matter itself will shimmer and dissolve as just another scientific phantasm. At that time the Impossible will be set free.

***Leon Marvel, 2014***

Cover image: (detail) Benjamin Armstrong, *Victory*, ink and watercolour on paper, 142.5 x 138.5cm

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