

SEESCAPES

EYEWITNESS TO AN OCEANIC TRUTH



Stíobhard Cristíona



**I was born in an ancient place,
Vikings once haunted this hallowed space.
Not far-off those turrets loom on high,
Clearly I see Lusk's towers in my mind's eye.
Before rendezvousing with the sky,
in spirit I will ascend the spiral stairwell
when I die.**



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Welcome to the opening shoreline to my first book, Seescapes; channelling the creative flux of a life with more twists and turns than a river steadily making its way to the ocean. My name is Stíobhard Cristiona – Irish author/artist specializing in an insightful infusion of writing and painting encompassing three books containing over two hundred oil on canvas paintings. I love to landscape stories around pictures, the relationship between self-expression and life experience is central to my art practice. Pictures bring an extra dimensionality to a story, opening doorways difficult to unlock with words alone. Above all this creative venture strives to channel a sacred spatiality, the most important element in every story. If you are interested in art, shadow work, biography, social commentary and the direction our collective journey is taking, the right place has surely found you.

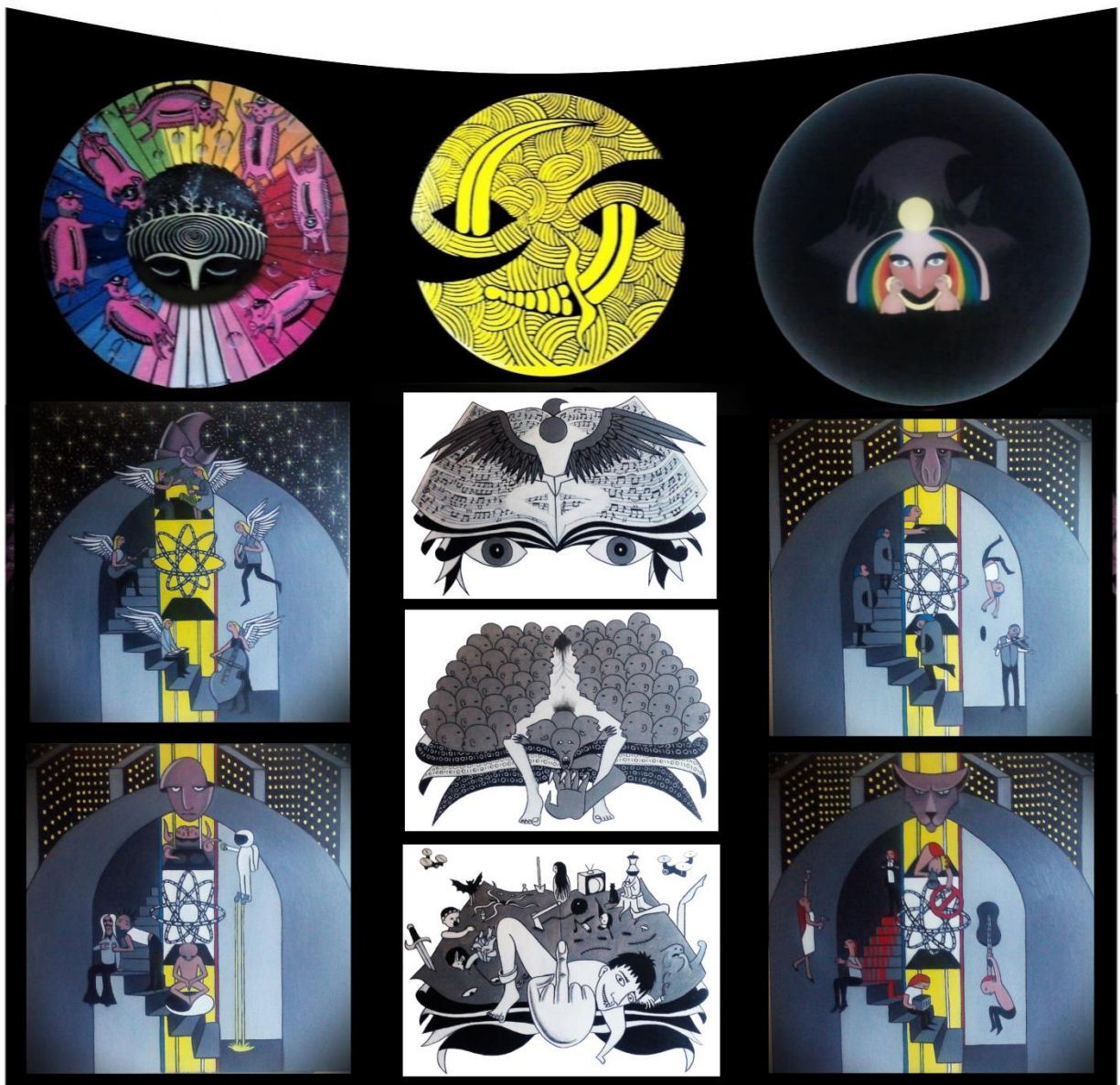


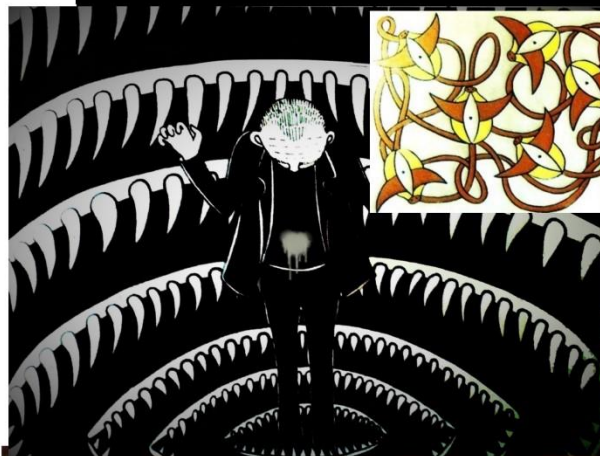
Preface

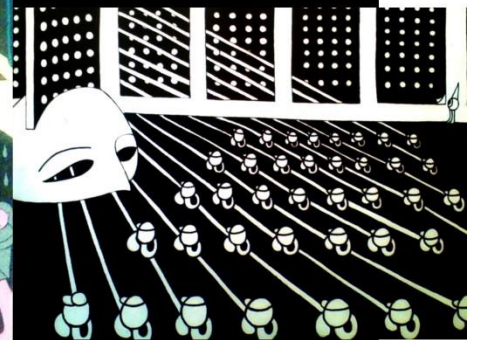
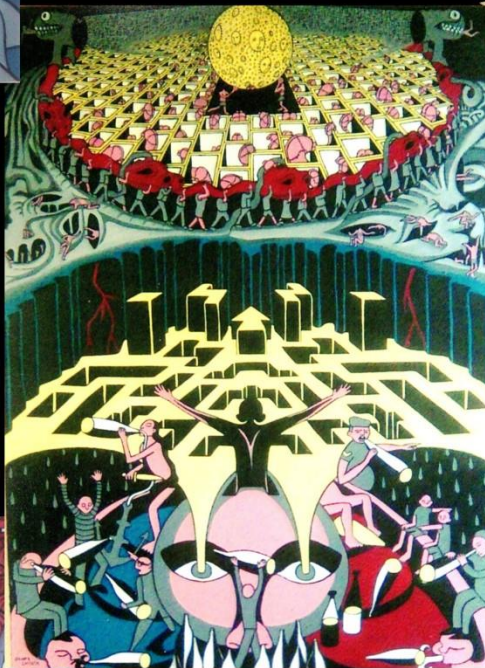
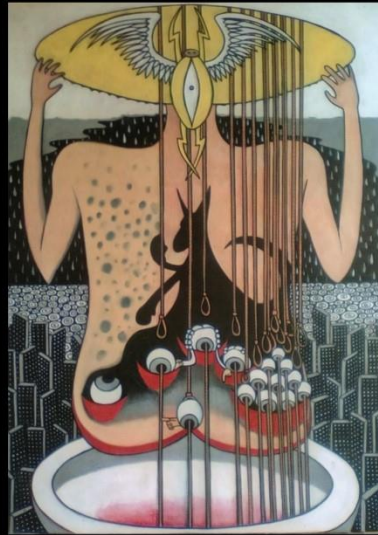
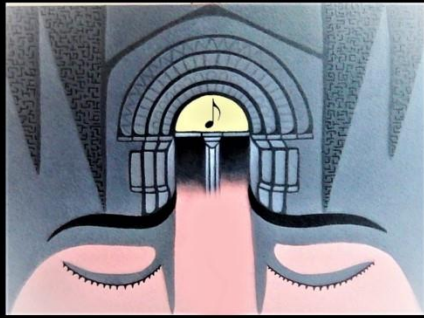
With so much information flying about it is becoming increasingly difficult to decipher truth from lies. One porky pie sent through cyber space can virtually incarcerate billions. Everyone is cooking up something, a vast menu of mistruth is constantly being served. There are enlightened lies and there are illusory porky pies. There are religious lies and there are secular porky pies. There are clever lies and there are plain stupid porky pies. There are lies that'll make us feel like winners, and porky pies to mask the painful loss. Gustave Le Bon said it best, "The masses have never thirsted after truth. They turn aside from evidence that is not to their taste, preferring to deify error, if error seduce them. Whoever can supply them with illusions is easily their master; whoever attempts to destroy their illusions is always their victim." Such quotes I know won't score high in certain circles, especially the totally rigged game playing itself out in social media today.

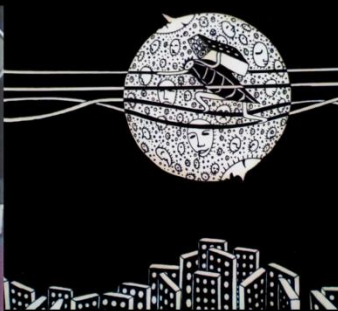
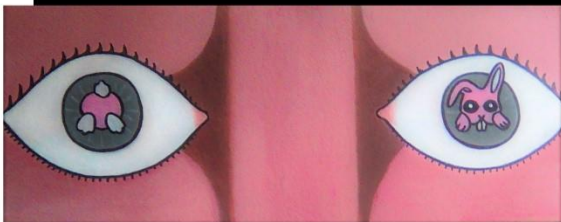
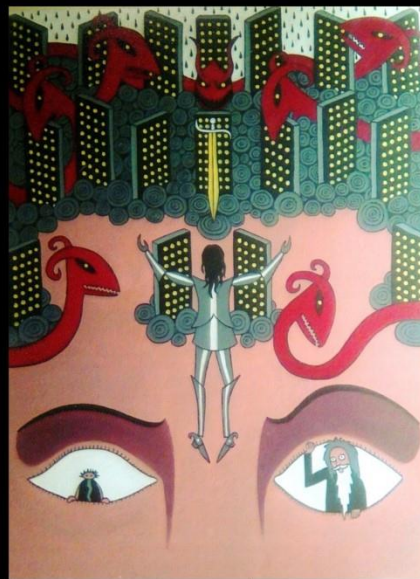
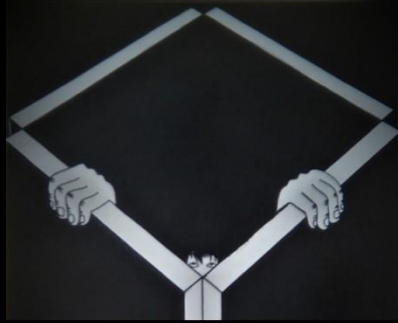
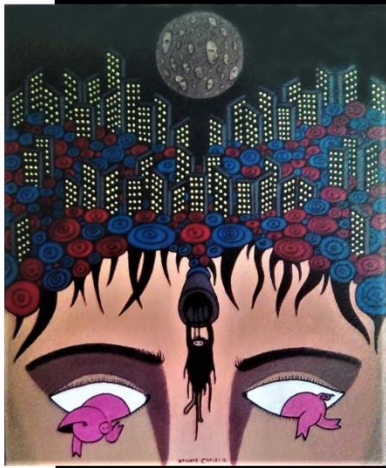


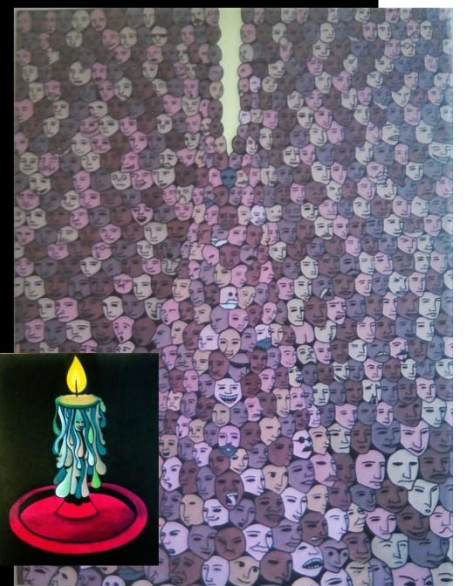
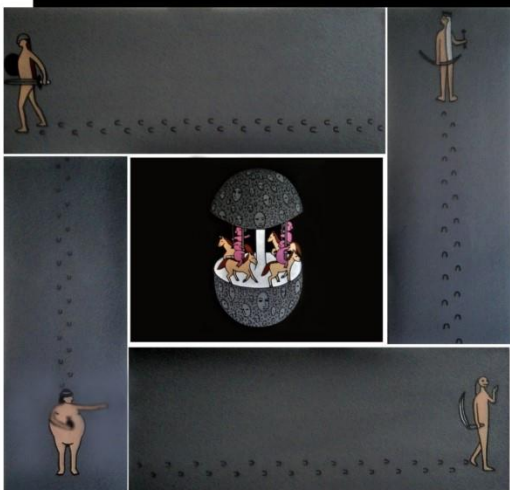
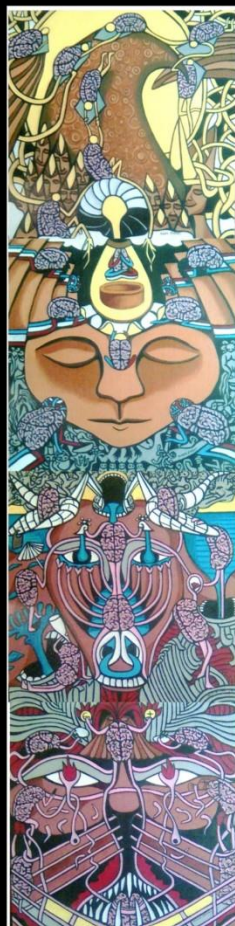
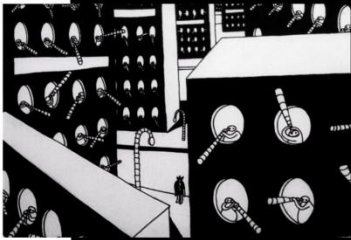
In the casino of what passes for free speech nowadays, it pains to watch so many eyeballs on the roulette wheel of whatever left-wing or right-wing spin cycle is doing the rounds. Falsehood has grown to such biblical proportions it has mutated into the fiercest of all mythological creatures. For good reason the gatekeepers guard against voices armed with revelation entering the conversation. They know the sword of truth will slay the dragon, cutting a pathway through the shitstorm awash with mistruths running amuck. A perfect segue into the windswept backdrop of a west of Ireland town teetering on the verge of a violent downpour. A tempestuous setting replicated on the global stage where legions of vampiric actors are hellbent on ushering another dark chapter into the human story. The world engulfed in darkness has yet to unsheathe the vision of an oceanic truth.

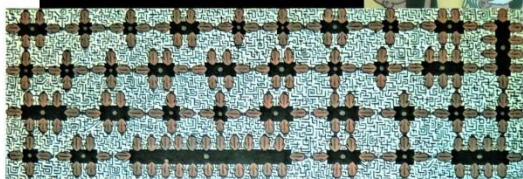


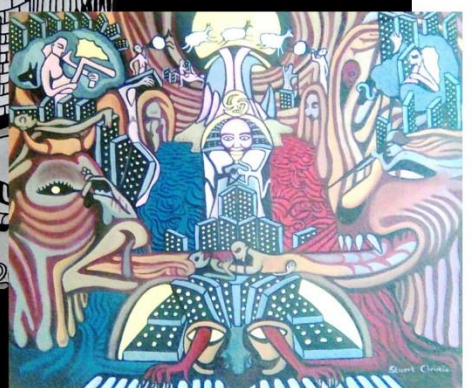
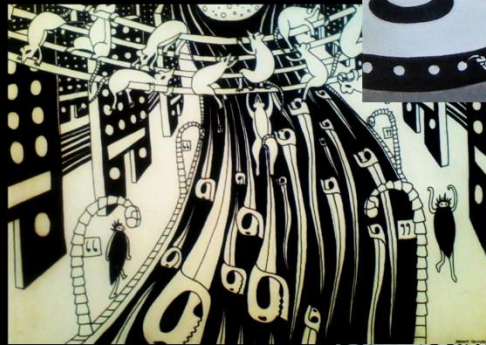
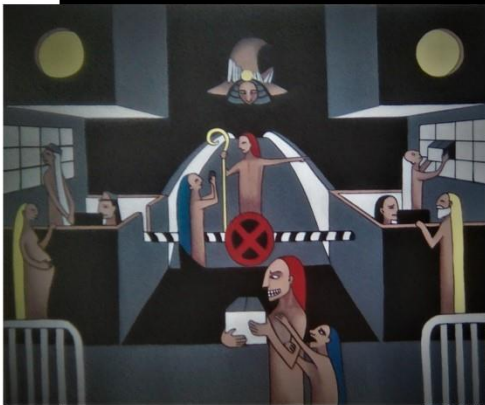
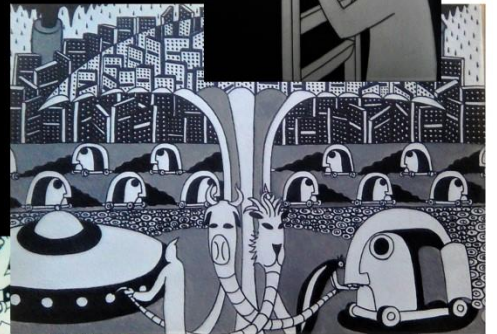
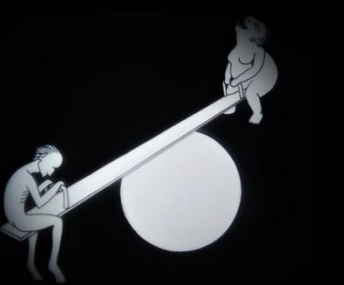
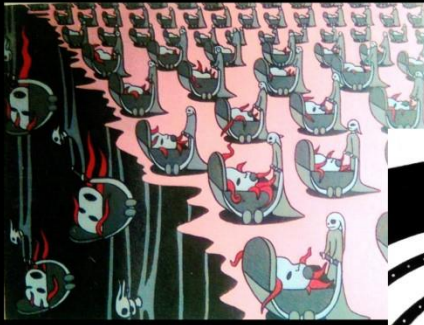
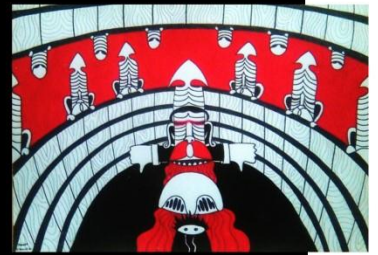
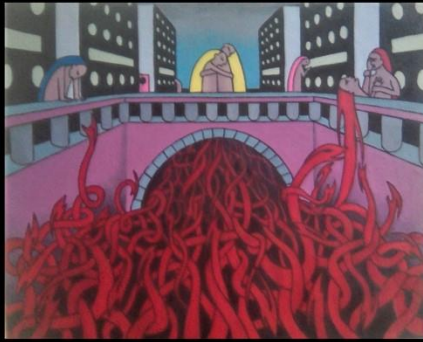


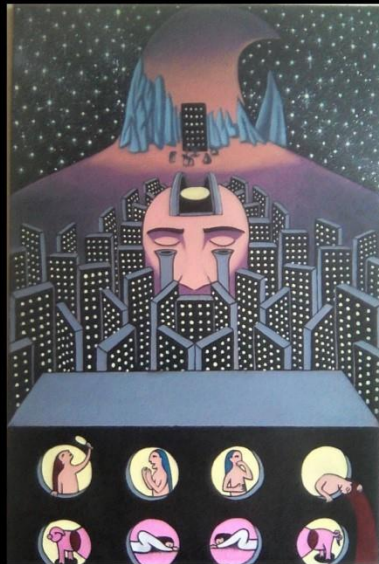


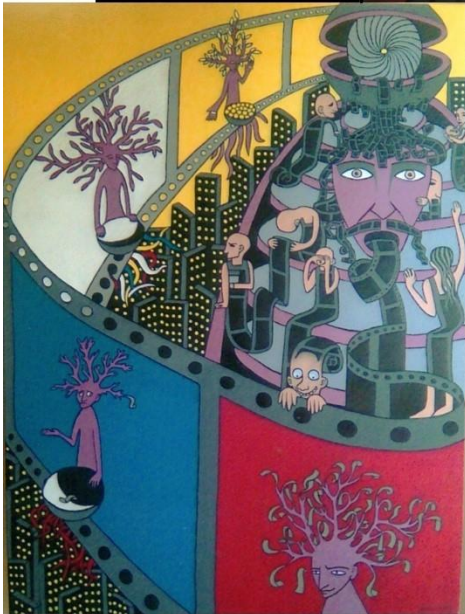


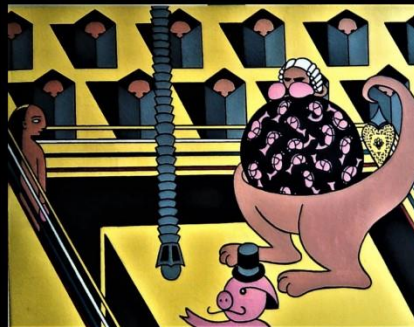
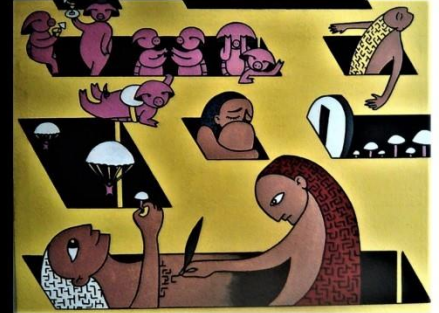
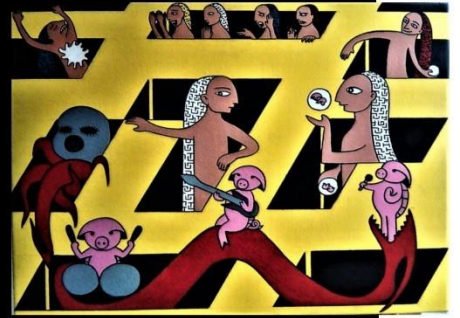


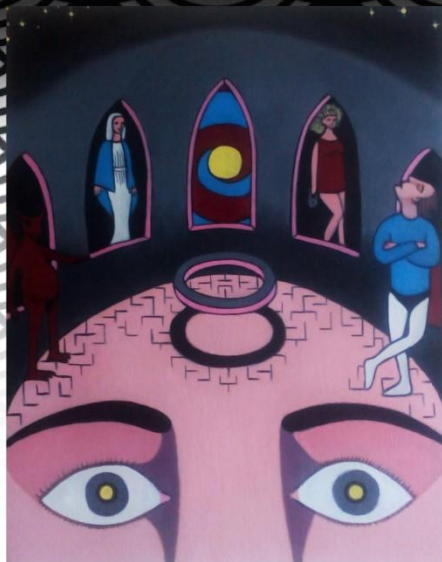
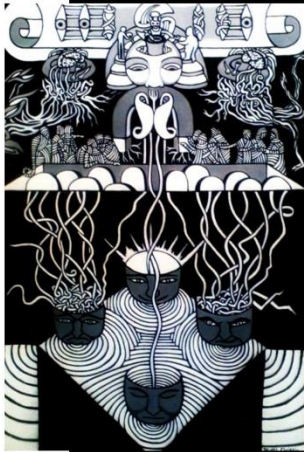
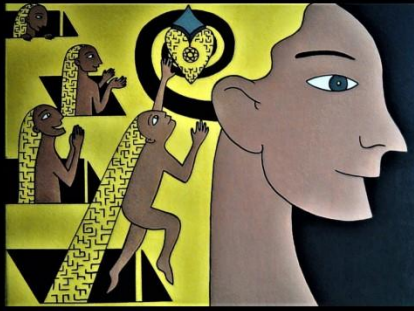
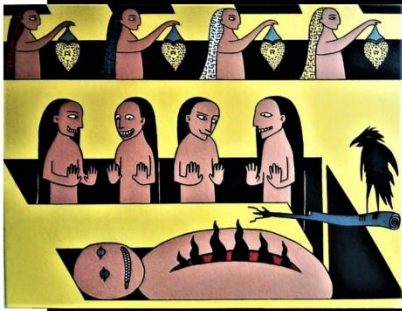












CONTENTS MENU





Overture

**Those that have this Tao do not try to fill themselves to the brim.
And because they do not try to fill themselves to the brim, they are
like a garment that endures all wear and need never to be renewed.
From Tao Te Ching.**

It is an honor to have a verse from Tao te Ching hanging in my wardrobe of things to say. After two and a half thousand years Lao Tzu still looks sharp in his wise suit of words. Not necessarily a message fashioned exclusively for religious men of the cloth, it is a truth tailor-made for literally everyone. No worries if my butt looks big in this dress when truth is the seamstress. The truth is not a fickle fashion statement changing with every season. No problem wearing labels designed to flatter, most are aware they become frayed after just a little wear and tear. Not so with the truth, it is not a garment worn by the unaware! I have met many devils and they don't wear Pravda. Imbalance does not set the trend here. In Truth we no longer fall prey to the wardrobe malfunctions of what others say. I'd prefer to go naked and say nothing rather than wear the tattered rags of fowl mouthed curses so in vogue with fashionistas today. Life can so easily be reduced to a squalid hovel when a voice is attired in insult. Whereas truth opens doors, leaving every mind it enters a palatial spatiality of such breathtaking majesty no tailoring of words can describe. Seeing this truth concealed in plain sight cranks the volume up full blast, blaring with something so mind-blowing it merits dressing it in uppercase capitals. TRUTH is the loom that weaves every story into being, pouring this voice seamlessly into a new page.



It is only fitting at this stage in the intro to provide a windowed backdrop to life here on the northwest coast of Ireland. A shoutout to my Dublin roots first, and Lusk; my hometown where I was born and bred. So what the hell inspired me to branch out to this neck of the woods? Surely it wasn't for any silver apples of the moon that drew me to Yeats country. Kavanagh is much more up my street. With every textual footprint, my voice it walks the enchanted way. Yeah right! Initially art college ushered me to Sligo, little did I know love was set to cross my path. It was such an innocent time, hard to believe we never ventured beyond the kissing phase. A tad embarrassing now to reminisce on how we used to snog for hours on end. It was more than enough to be held in her arms. Suddenly I am lost for words, maybe what's unsaid will express itself through another format?

The painting module allows me to tap into a dormant pugilistic streak, especially when armed with visions packing the mightiest punch. "Just fighting talk!" I tell myself before getting walloped by the view outside my window. Such is the power of the knockout contrasts sparring with the eyes here, it never fails to strike. It could be anywhere on the planet, this place where shadows constantly fight with the light. And in the right corner the cloistered courtyard of an eight-hundred-year Dominican friary straddled with gothic arches plants a religious uppercut. In the left corner an irreligious parking lot flanked on two sides by rundown blocks of flats, denotes a deprived enclave on the ropes. Around every corner lurks an architectural bare knuckle boxing match between rich and the poor. Many throw the towel in turning to drink and hard drugs.

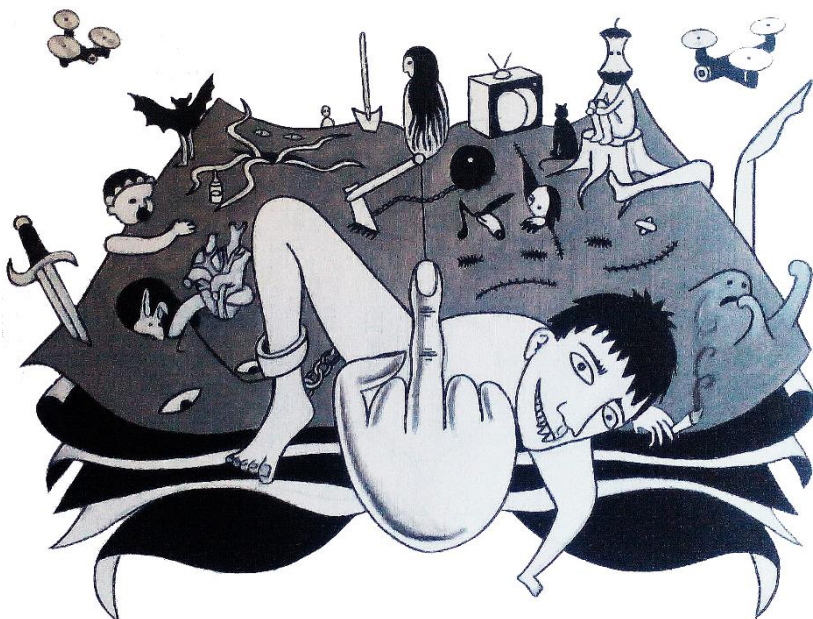
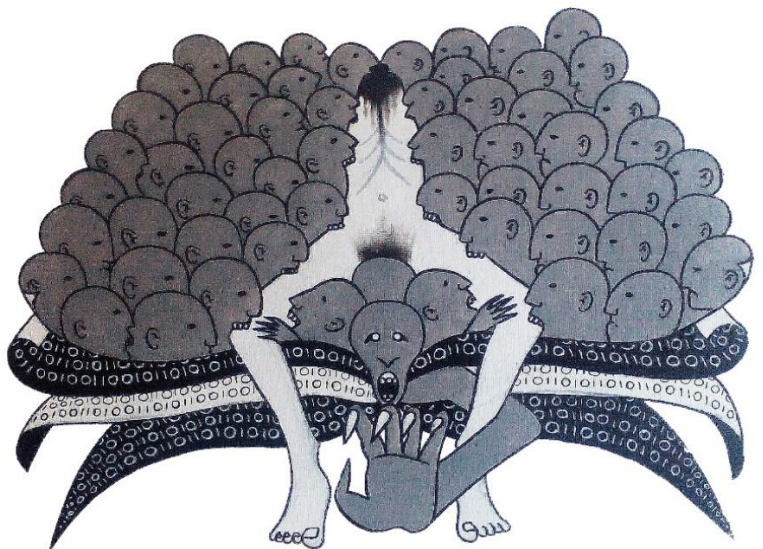


Sutured into the fabric of my day between lengthy stitches of painting and writing, I like to imbibe a cup of tea. While waiting for the kettle to boil the postman usually appears outside, most days depositing just junk mail. Today the dreaded electric bill has arrived, always sending my heart racing madly tearing open the envelope. Not so bad this time, would be at least two thirds less if I didn't splash out in so many baths during the week. I pride myself in running a tight ship, apologies in advance for going overboard with nautical analogies, I'm afraid it's unavoidable given the title and subheading of the book. This craft visits many ports, grappling with truths shallow minded value systems blindly cast aside. I am always pushing the boat out on this project; constantly charting the best course to bring Seescapes to the public eye. I never wanted to cast my armada of visions to the fickle waters of the art market where shallow bidders on a whim can decide on whether an artist can sink or swim. My artistic calling runs deep; a craft that continues to stay buoyant despite turbulent waters drowning out voices who refuse to toe the line. Now with AI at the helm it is becoming increasingly difficult to unfurl the sail and throw caution to the wind. There are hardly any creatives who just let it rip, exploring distant shores where most authors fear to tread. Funded solely from a disability pension, I hope to convey a very important message which organizations filled up to the gills with money consistently failed to get across. Art is at its most valuable when it aspires to illuminate. Its higher purpose to guide people through troubled waters is to the fore here. The leaders we elect as lifeguards are not doing their jobs. They prefer to inflate their egos and sail through life imperviously to their constituents struggling to keep their heads above water. Monetary liquidity doesn't give life its buoyancy, it is the weight of having nothing that drags us down. Mindfulness practice steadies the ship, makes it easier to navigate the low tides. Without a stabilizing presence we are left to face the brutal elements and drown in the shallows when we could have been cruising with the resplendent SEE in our eyes. I stand to attention and salute the Truth captaining this craft. Truth is vast and formless; a fathomless oceanic expanse that keeps even the most sunken voyages afloat. Truth has found a home in this cenobitic lair so free from mental barnacles. Truth dwells serenely despite the naked walls and bare wooden floors stripped of the clothes other houses wear. It is as close to an abstract song as a living space could sing without being totally empty. Not a vacuous wet squib but a vibrantly alive and intelligent stillness. The spacious nudity caters favorably to the creative process residing here rather than to some puritanical taste in interior design. Despite the opulent space, there is no room here for distractions. The only media port-hole to be found is an imitation gramophone in the corner. Sparsely furnished with a few surrealist objects fished from thrift shops, the residence is clearly moored to a low fiscal tide. My return to composing the overture very much buoyed by "other" expressions of wealth. I was never really interested in filling my pockets with material wealth. I was much more inclined to fill my mind with an enrichment of a spiritual kind. I was in my forties when finally the penny dropped and I saw I was already rich. It provides my voice with a gold standard that is missing from other currencies of the truth. When we refuse to pay attention and invest in what truly funds this life, we end up in so much spiritual debt we aren't even aware our sacred sovereignty is signed away. The pied pipers then call the tune, pickpocketing the eyes from their sockets to maximize profit. The zombie eyed masses with heads buried in their devices follow unquestioningly an algorithm that's not very interested in most of us hitting the high notes. Of course our musical tastes can evolve over the span of a life, hard to believe the diehard fan of death metal and gangster rap now gravitates towards more airy panoramas in classical scores.



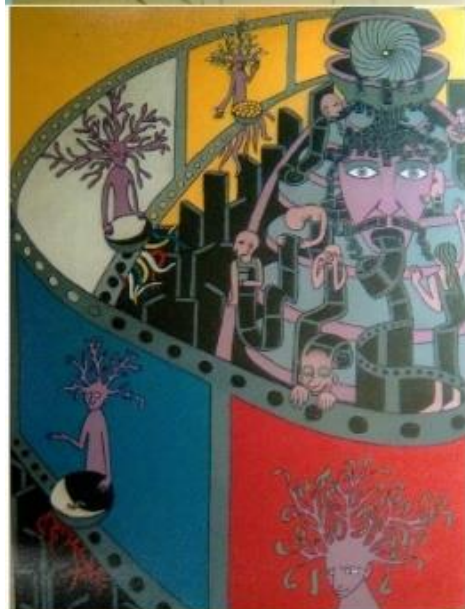
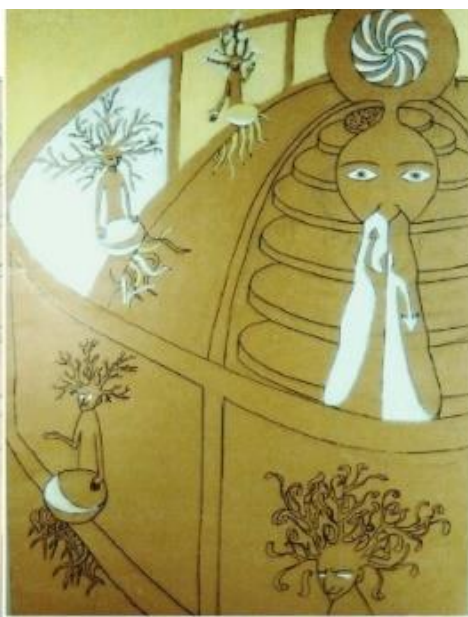
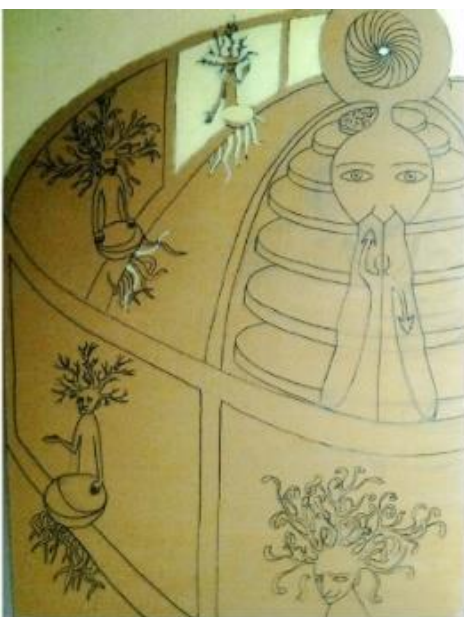
A silent presence soars above the soundscape of this life, giving voice to many peaks and valleys. Reality winds its way without saying a word, meandering through a vast linguistic geography that eventually flows into nothing. It is in the stillness between all the mental notation where life unsheathes her wings and sings. The world of words is just a tiny pebble in an ocean of silence. What is unsaid will ultimately have the last word.

Meanwhile....in an in-between place phantom boot-leggers flock around an audio corpse splayed on the slab. The echo chamber is full of hungry ghosts; a spiritless place without any core reality. That's why they have to subjectively cannibalize each other, to fill a void that will never be filled. They will not stop until the birdsong has been stripped down to the bone. After they finish, not one note from the original recording will remain.



It pains to see what is potentially a smash hit reduced to a soundbite. Parasitical data brokers appear from the social media underworld to gorge themselves on the misery cultivated from the deamplified. Surveillance drones' swoop down on the crime scene, zooming in on musical notes tattooed on blood-stained vellum. Amid the carnage, a fledgling punk whistles tunefully as he proffers an evil middle digit towards the tech feudalism cuntry.

With so many versions of the truth vying for our attention it is a challenge to decipher which genre best encapsulates the human story. It's not exactly a feelgood romcom with ambitions to be made into a chick flick. Judging by our proclivity for conflict and violence one may assume we are in a sick snuff film. Some may suggest we are more sophisticated than that, just take a look at all this hi-tech merch! How quickly the utopian sci-fi dream descended into a dystopian nightmare. I happen to think we are all on an epic adventure, a constantly evolving narrative towards apotheoses. Sometimes it seems like the elites driving the story forward don't know where they are heading. Are we creating a heaven or hell for ourselves, and what does the pathways on these alternating routes look like? There are plenty of signposts pointing to an apocalyptic end, yet the gatekeepers of public discourse appear hellbent on censoring a revelatory conclusion. They try every trick in the book to silence us, building numerous obstructions to stop artists from even holding a mirror up to a society seemingly swept away by an unstoppable scenario. The system would rather the passengers sit quietly in their seats and not ask the pilots where they are going. In many respects the techno feudalistic hell has already arrived. Take one look at the hellscape in Gaza and see the future destination of the whole world if we continue to let the shadow side have total control over the narrative. Those currently dominating the conversation do not want humanity as a whole accessing the liberated upper story. You can have billions in the bank and still be in the lowly basement spiritually speaking. Yet the rich elite delude themselves into believing they've reached the penthouse in life, leaving the majority in the lobby to fight and compete for scraps from the master's table. Cut off from the source a spiritual hunger pain grows in us. It causes us to subjectively cannibalize one another to compensate for the massive aspect missing from our lives. What a cacophonous menu we cook trying to separate the tastiest dishes from the most disgusting. We end up missing out on the most vital part of the feast. Perish the thought that art is only allowed to serve perishable food for thought. Very few voices dare delve deep into the timeless and unbreakable reality that underlies every transient egoic self. I didn't expect when auditing my own mind to find such astronomical wealth quietly resting in a completely empty account. Christ and Buddha happened to invest in the same mindful gold. The early church patriarchs corrupted Christ's core message aimed at realigning a totally asymmetrical value system. Most pyramidal structures of power around the world would rather the focal point of focus be directed favorably to the top. I don't want to set up a religious franchise here. My message couldn't be clearer. If I can have gnosis of God consciousness, anyone can. It is not a superhuman accomplishment. I have no desire to be put on a pedestal for making all these pronouncements. I never had much of a penchant for simony. I'd rather be fashioned into a plaything in a sex shop. I would feel like the biggest dildo strutting the holier than thou cat-walks, meowing for the purring approval in the crowd while pussy footing around the hissing disapproval that we all know is there waiting for a chance to prance. My art panders to the boos as well as the bravos in the gallery. In all honesty exhibiting artwork can be very daunting, akin to having an out of body experience. You don't have to die to go to hell. Nor must you die to go to Heaven either. Revelatory journeys illuminating a way up into liberated skies are scarce on the ground. The vast vineyard of humanities eyes thirsts for the wine that is truly divine. That sacred oasis is there always but is so intertwined in the mirage that it is the hardest thing to SEE. This well filled up to the brim with buckets of wisdom is not going to avert your gaze to some exterior source to drink. Truth when it speaks looks directly into your eyes. In a whisper it shouts, Heaven is closer than you think.

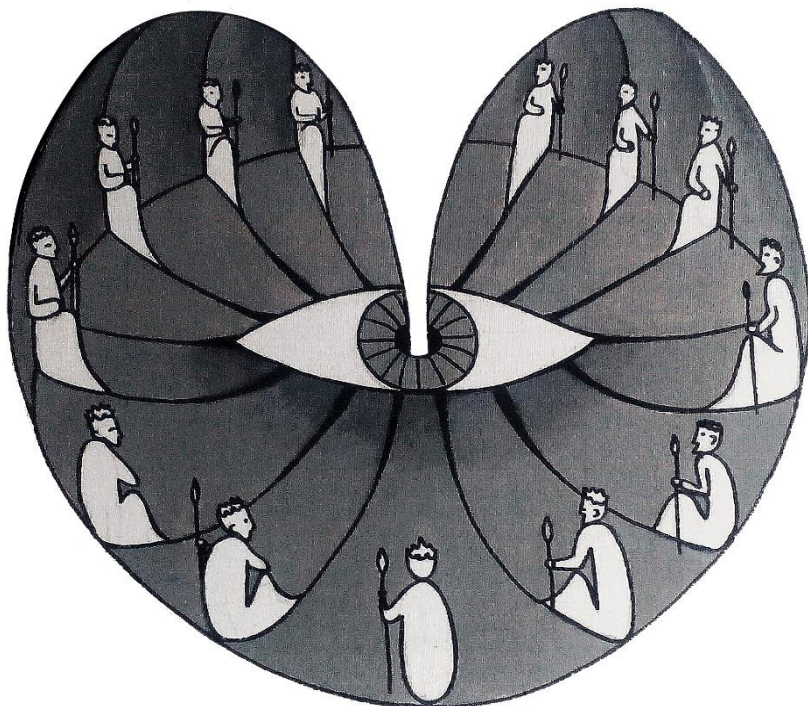


Through my art a cartography of the inner world is unfurled. There are parallels to be drawn between the outer world and the inner. There are landmasses of the mind that are concrete and factual. There are seascapes of the mind where the state is more liquid and emotional. There is also a spacious dimension to the mind. A sky of the mind that few cartographers have grasped in their mappings of reality. An expansive firmament of consciousness that allows a whole cosmos of thinking to twinkle.





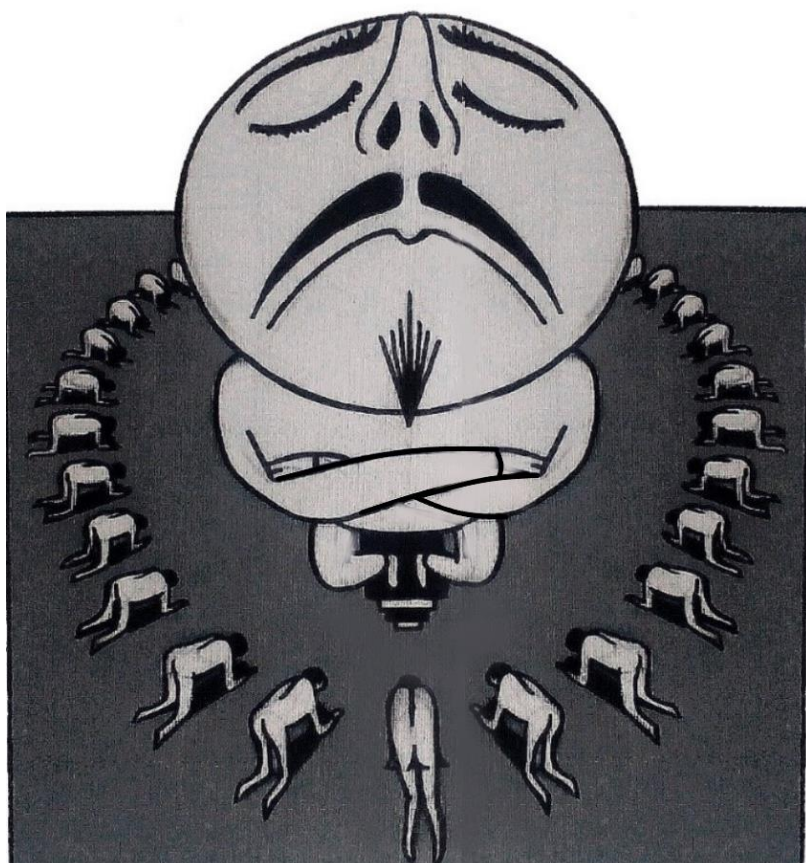
The spiritual sphere is a tangible field of consciousness, truly shocking when first I saw with my own eyes how this living ocean of pure energy engulfs everything. The rational part of the brain will ask how so much power is hidden in plain sight? No make-believe trickery here based on blind faith; this very seeable truth is staring you right in the face.



I have channelled vast amounts of creative energy into opening people's eyes to this insight. It cannot be stressed enough how observable this is in plain sight. If someone with my bad bulbs can see it, anyone can. It is dare I say, a conduit for heaven on this earth, seeing it is a total gamechanger for all the power struggles around the globe. We all know that energy takes the path of least resistance when it goes from one point to another. The light doesn't reach our eyes because there is something simply obscuring the pathway.

We are socially and culturally wired to fight tooth and nail against each other for power. Yet the game is rigged in favour of the usual visionless actors, getting their deadeyed followers to focus on brain draining optics instead of electrified by illuminating insights.

Those who derive power from external sources are not really "in" their power. Monstrously over-grown egos are energy vampires, extremely clever at feeding off our consciousness regardless of whether we laud or loath them. Wake up to their subtle manipulation, withdraw attention from these parasites, connect with your own inner power and watch them perish. Otherwise, they will suck you and the earth's resources dry, reduce your sense of self to an atomized nonentity, dupe you in your weakness into bowing before a tech feudal state that will unleash hell on earth.



Regular as clockwork a dog barks outside; a familiar landmark on the soundscape here, appearing with the same regularity as the cathedral bells tolling away in the distance. The owner sharing many traits with the dog issues a growl in response, calling the animal a useless cunt! Viewed from behind she looks almost youthful, her raven locks flowing far below her waistline like spilled porter. It is always a shock when she turns around, that pale banshee face made more ghastly by the vampiric light in her eyes. I stay firmly rooted in my chair, no need to peer out of the small window to confirm where she's deposited herself. I can picture her in the usual spot sat along the edge of a raised gravel bed where I feed the birds. Even the very sociable pigeons keep their distance today. There's just no talking to her, the flock of voices roosting in her head makes it impossible to even say hello. Vampireland has her in its clutches for sure, the fangs of addiction are in her psyche so deep at this late stage all the goodness seems to have been extracted.

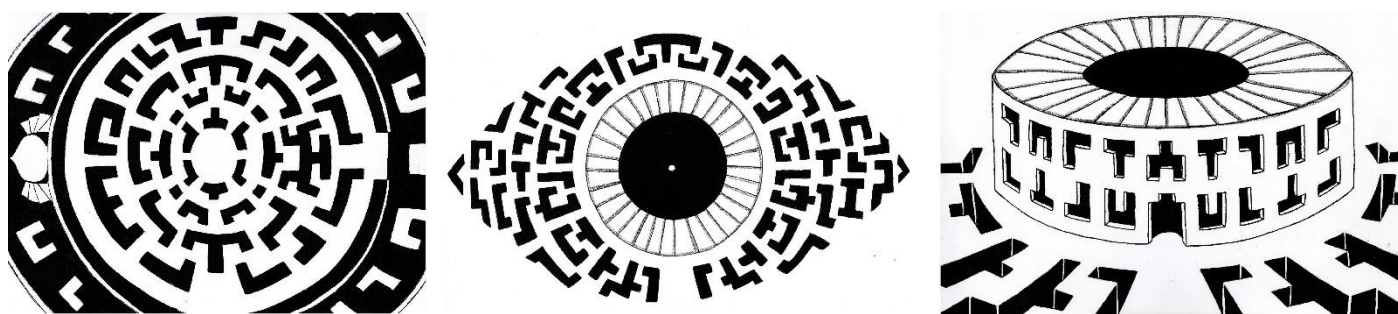


The vampiric provinces of desire are inside us all, especially those who project a perfect holier than thou image. My shadow is not very good at hiding, but when it does decide to speak, I make sure it doesn't dominate the conversation. For a while there is only silence inside and out; not even the sound of the usual alcoholics depositing empties at the bottle bank. It would appear the old ladies ire has run empty. I savor the silence like a glass of sparkling wine, toasting ten gleeful years of sobriety with a sizeable measure of delight. Then a puking sound enters the second storey apartment, catching me totally unawares. "Dirty bitch," cursed the dark presence at last, it just couldn't resist reacting to the lady vomiting outside. "Hello darkness my old friend." The Sound of Silence springs to mind. "It is tantamount to a trespass on our property," hissed the serpentine voice in my ear, recoiling from the earworm. "If you were a real man you'd put the old hag in her place." "That'd be ungentlemanly," I say, my nonchalant response infuriates the dark presence.

“Spoken like a true whore,” rebukes the shadow. “You cannot fathom the forces at work here. You’d never include in your overture what is really going on behind the curtain.” After all these years, the evil energy continues to act like it pulls the strings around here. “It’d be great to see you finally recognized, to see your name arrayed in bright lights.” “Don’t put me to the test, washed up loser. Who exactly do you think you’re talking to?” “Why don’t you show me?” I ask, well aware I’m poking the bear. “Grrrrrrrrrgh,” growls the beast. Okay folks, strap yourselves in. We are going on a roller coaster rant.

“I am not the shadow getting eyed by the devil. I am not the shadow getting sweet talked by the devil. I am not the shadow getting his itch scratched by the devil. I am not the shadow pregnant with the devil’s seed. I am not the shadow nesting with the devil’s spawn in his brain belly. I am not the shadow in the pangs of agony ready to pop out yet another of the devils lies. I am the shadow who throws it into your face, we’re going to kill you.” So accustomed now to these little outbursts I take it all in my stride, carrying on business as usual. I fill the kettle for a cup of tea, maybe I’ll go totally crazy and have a digestive. “I really don’t want to kill you,” I said after things seemed to simmer down, my hands cradling a hot beverage. “I’d much prefer to incorporate you into the totality. Balance the tree of life with the roots reaching downwards towards the ground and the branches reaching upwards towards the sky. I want to bring symmetry to both aspects of myself.” “Shut your cakehole you goddamned hippy. You seem to forget you are a wanted man.” I gladly inform the shadow that there is not one criminal blemish on my spotless record. “You didn’t think it was going to be that easy to escape from us did you?” it began again. “You’re on our books ma boy and you owe us big time. You can never get away from us. No matter what you do or say you belong to us, to Toxico. It is only a matter of time before we come to take back our property. The wolves are at the gate Dublin Jackeen!” said the shadow howling at the moon. “We’ve too many mouths to feed to let such a tasty morsel take liberated notions. Your arse belongs in the frozen section aisle where you can wallow the rest of what life we allow you to have next to the wieners and cocktail sausages. Did you really think you could just jump off the shelf and swan out the door without so much as a goodbye? You can never become a better human being. We have you in our files ma boy and thousands of customers to feed off what we say you are. And when we’ve sucked you dry, we’re going to come for what you most cherish, because our thirst for suffering will never be sated.” I look down at the mug in my hand gifted for Fathers Day. I remind myself to be receptive to whatever arises, and accept it as part of the oneness. “It always fascinates me how words so like bricks can be used to build all kinds of different structures. How for instance a novice at the start of his journey can build the flimsiest of hovels encompassing a tiny quantum space. Whereas a maestro using the same blocks of language can build a mansion big enough to house a universe. Both spatiality’s have their place in the grand scheme of things. Every story has an upper story, including that old lady who just never had been shown there is a place for her in heaven.” I can picture the shadows eyes going skyward. “A law has been broken for saying that! The proper protocols and set etiquette are probably not being observed. One could spend a lifetime lost in the labyrinth of rules and regulations, constructing and deconstructing laws without ever discerning what cements everything together. We are all engineered to create bonds with each other, maintaining social cohesion based on what is sacred is the best binding agent. Monstrous sums of money and attention are channeled into citadels of noise that pay homage to the shadow side. The tide could easily turn, spurring humans to redirect their precious resources to building creative solutions devoted to oneness. The

ultimate expression is to build a public space where everybody be they Muslim, Jew, Christian, Buddhist or Atheist can gather in peaceful quietude. We walk on holy ground when the bond based on wordless awareness is cultivated. A sacred space is where one covenant rules; every person here is a keystone in the celestial architecture of the now. I am always looking out for a receptive location to entrust the blueprints of this vision. There are certainly some building sites to be mindful of, oozing with toxic dereliction. You are putting your life in your hands as soon as you put a foot in the place. Bring the same schematics to another site and you might not get any reaction whatsoever. Where we are in our own journey very much colors our thinking on where others are in theirs. Relatively recent scientific observations would concur. Physicists have observed that the psychology of the observer greatly influences the subject under observation. This human experiment will become a towering success with a foundation rooted in the site that sees."



"Thought I was bad at monologuing," critiqued the shadow sniggering. "The schematics of your vision are somewhat skewed Cross-eyed Jack, a bit like your dodgy right bulb." "I'm sure your ideas are perfectly aligned with the geometric harmony of the universe." "What do you think about my concept for the next chapter?" Dang, I was hoping he forgot about that. I accessed the document on file in my laptop and read the short piece.

Strolling through Sligo town can be at times a walk on the wild side. I like to guess the animals people may get reborn as in the next life. More than likely I'll cross paths with the usual pesky critters. The two weasels and the otter for instance outside the betting shop. That clucky hen too who owns the hair salon, the usual exhausted looking mares driving wagons with pups in the back, that big angry grizzly on a scooter, that twitchy squirrel pushing a pram too, a leggy heron or two along with the traffic warden who always reminds me of a badger. And last but not least, the wolf lurking in the doorway of a charity shop. No chance of me forgetting that geezer. Out of the blue the total stranger waves over at me across the street. Somewhat bedazzled by the sudden break in the clouds I wave back at him. It would be ungentlemanly to let this opening slip me by. "Good luck with the sex change!" he shouts with a gnarly grin. I continue walking saying what I usually say to myself. "Tis high time I freed my story from the belly of the beast."

"I'll be taking the quieter route for the next chapter." I inform the shadow. "Nice try though; I should be able to find a home for it." The sound of cathedral bells punctuates the silence signaling a tuneful end to an overture I hope rings true for everyone. Nothing left to do now but to take a bow and exit stage left. I don my hat and coat for the next act.

Belly of the Beast

It is the lifespan of a song to the cathedral from the mouth of my lair. One step across the threshold and I am on the dance floor with a recording of weather that seems to loom here the whole year round. The wintry climate chimes well with the shadows frequency, it relishes bigtime to see me going into resistance mode when oft the mental storm blows. “What is the point in being wintry towards winter?” taunted the shadow, still sore from rattling its cage earlier. “You’re just adding winter onto winter and reinforcing winter.” “It’s no biggie, just have to dig deep for the sunshine around here,” I say as a wispy plume in the middle-distance catches my eye. Outside a two-storey office building, a middle-aged woman I don’t recognize stares fixedly across exhaling smoke. I wave a summery palm in her direction, smiling bemusedly then when she sends back a wintry middle digit. “It’s truly amazing how you manage to bring out the sunshine in people around here,” mused the shadow invigorated by the gesture. “Your first happy customer for the day.” “Suppose it’s business as usual.” I sigh to myself, discovering when pocketing the keys something untoward on the breeze. The old lady’s regurgitation encompassing a wide circumference lies festering at the foot of the stairs. I nimbly take to the steps and descend eyeing the hungry beaks flocking to feed on the ill illustration. It has some artistic merit, reminiscent of Pollock. A veritable explosion of different colors, textures and depth. I love art how it can incorporate the ugliest of raw materials to cook up something beautiful. “Shut your cakehole, goddamned arty farty freakshow. Those dirty birdies are just going to make themselves get sick, and then no doubt they’ll eat what they spew for dessert.” That made me laugh so much I almost lost my footing. Suddenly I halt on the steps, spotting a connoisseur in the art gallery eyeing the abstract masterpiece. The crouching feline isn’t here for the carrots in the composition, that’s for sure. Nor has the cat any time for the chronological aspect in the splash formation the pigeons have wandered into. The puss concealed in the dumpster, scanning the sick semblance of time has just clocked lunch. The black cat camouflaged against refuse sacks is about to pounce into an idiom. When I reach ground level, it requires some nifty footwork to avoid treading on satellite fragments of vomit. Another set of orbs peers towards me through the slit of a burka, only to vanish behind a curtained window. A middle-aged Pakistani man comes into view, hovering in a doorway to the apartment fastening his trouser belt. Alerted to my presence he slams the door so hard the bang like gunfire triggers the pigeons to take to the skies. “Defo a cellar dweller,” remarks the shadow as I walk across the car park half smiling. “Every story has an upper storey.” I remind my shadowy friend. I pass a traffic warden eyeing a vehicle with the squinty bulbs of a spaghetti western bounty hunter. He’s a real gun-slinger this guy, looks like he’s just about to draw his weapon when WANKER is fired from a window. This place is such an insane asylum at times, especially at mid-day. “Are you going to take out the scalpel today?” asked the shadow with a sinister cadence. Weaving around the vehicles in the parking lot I glimpse my reflection in a car window. “You’d be powerless to perform your dissections had you been gifted with a pretty face.” The shadow goes on to laud my prowess with the scalpel, saying I can peel the mask off any town. “Sligo is a perfect cadaver to study the innards of the human condition.” The backstreets away from the main thoroughfares are the best theatre to perform surgery on a place. Of course I can still conduct autopsy’s on the uppity gentrified locations too.



A few steps along the footpath and a young female takes a sharp turn to the right into the friary, narrowly avoiding a rendezvous with the scalpel. I motor on keeping the headlights dipped, eyeing instead the garage to my left for a worthy target. I can't use the mechanic either with his head buried in the bonnet and his ass cleavage hanging out. It is crucial that patients are facing me when making an incision. I spot a nice piece of meat who I could easily cut into. I get the blade ready just as we cross paths on Dominic Street. I actually have a couple of surgical implements at my disposal, hi, howdy and ahoy there. (totally hardcore) On this occasion I take out hello, thrusting it at the smartly attired guy. "Aaaaaaaaargh" Growls the random stranger, unleashing the beast. Wow, this one has a bit of a bight! A tad shaken I turn a corner onto Church Street, another glorified lane fit more for horse and carriage than automobile. Two Pakistani youths enjoying a funny joke clearly recognize me walking towards them. Though I do not know them I say hello. "Aaaaaaaaaaargh" They growl in unison back at me. One of them calls me a cunt. It is nice to know they are mastering the dialect. I continue walking saying not a word, halt at a T junction where a teen mom is wheeling a buggy towards the public park. I say hi. "Aaaaaaaaaaargh" The mother growls followed by the cutest little growl from the toddler. I normally walk through the park but instead opt to go down the street called The Lungy. I don't meet anyone on this stretch until I'm on Temple Street. I pass a very pious looking pensioner who looks like she's in the throes of a novena. I say hello to the old lady. "Aaaaaaaaaaargh" The pensioner growls at me as I make my way onto the final furlong. A very scruffy looking dog passes me at the Hawkeswell theatre and I say hello to the mutt. Looks very much like useless cunt. Hurray no growl from the hound who halts in his sad stride to study me. I go down on one knee and offer the dog a high five. He bolts like lightning with the tail between his legs thinking my hand was poised to issue a clatter. Entering the precincts of the cathedral, a group of teens gathered at the side entrance do with their eyes what dogs do with their noses. I make my way across the parking lot to the main doors. Best not issue a hello, this much Aaaaaaaaargh gathered together would murder me if I uttered just one word. I can feel the growl in my body in stereo as they all stare my way. As soon as I'm inside they'll join me with their own prayers and devotions. They seldomly perform when there are other ears present. Noticing there is not a single soul inside, the shadow utters an expletive. I gingerly make my way to the back pews where I prefer to sit. Then the horrid insults are flung in like grenades and explode a hundredfold of their initial volume. For just a few minutes I am in the mind of a stark raving lunatic. I sit casually and take out my book of Zen koans which I like to start the half hour with. The shadow wants me to return fire, to hell with this mindfulness shit. After a while the abusive invectives dwindle down to childish name calling. I remain still, listening to the shadow issue its dire forecasts. "Anyone can see the murderous intent behind the smears and dehumanization's. Its only a matter of time before they kill you." My response is always to remain calmly centered, sticking to a nonreactive stance at all times. Meanwhile the four teenagers have stooped to making ugly simian mating sounds. "Just effing tell them to eff off," demanded the shadow. "Enough is enough, fifteen years you've put up with this trash, and not once have you uttered a single word in response."

**“What can I say to small minds, the architecture of awareness is bigger than you think?”
I’m at that stage in life when the merest thought of a joke has the power to clear a room.
The four exit first, swiftly shadowed by the shadow; leaving me alone with my thoughts.**



Although brought up as a Catholic, if given a choice I would have opted for Gnosticism with its core focus on knowing rather than blind faith. I believe in God only because of a direct relationship with that reality. God brings symmetry between all opposing extremes. The Taoist are correct regarding good and evil, equating the devil with imbalance and God with inner balance. The church for me growing up never helped remedy the disharmonies tearing communities asunder. The Holy Spirit was simply not present, yet most people flocked to receive it through the sacraments. A sacred presence is freely accessible without a special clearance. I would’ve lost my mind years ago had it not been for the time spent in the cathedral. A resource accessible to everybody, to nonbelievers and believers alike.

Establishing a connection with higher consciousness isn’t even thought possible by the luminaries of so-called higher learning. Most people feel that they have no real power. Voting for an alpha male or female is not power. All the schooling we are put through does not elect us into a higher office in life either. So many are left to trade in negative energies which invariably gets directed at quirky easy to access valves like me. Doesn’t seem so long ago when I was their age, my God do I remember how difficult life was as a teenager. Though peripherally hurt by the repeated verbal abuse, I never make the error of reprimanding them for their mindless stupidity. Where they are is punishment enough. With the ghost of the craziness still alive in my thinking, a more spirited influx of energy spills into the cathedral. Sounds like a coach load of tourists, don’t think they’re passing much heed to me in my meditation. I open my eyes briefly to find the lens of a digital camera pointed my way. I close my eyes again and continue with the meditation module. The tour guide flamboyantly lauds the Romanesque architecture, the vaulted ceiling and the stained-glass windows depicting different scenes from the old and new testaments. Then he directs the crowd to the back of the cathedral where a black wooden statue of St Molaise is stationed on the wall. All the pilgrims gather around the Afrocentric artefact where the tour guide retells one of my favorite stories about St Columba and St Finnian.

The tale hailing from the sixth century is centered around two saintly scholars embroiled in one of the first ever copyright disputes. There is a massive mural depicting the famous grievance in the local library converted from a nineteenth century protestant chapel. Another one of my favorite churchy haunts. The bloody saga begins innocently enough. St Finnian lent St Columba a copy of his Psalter, not knowing that the crafty scribe was going to scribe a copy for himself. When St Finnian learnt of the unauthorized facsimile, claimed the copy belonged to him. St Columba vehemently disagreed, after all the work copying it, he wasn't going to relinquish ownership so easily. The two aggrieved actors went to the central protagonist in Ireland to help resolve the big drama. The high king famously adjudicated in favor of Saint Finnian who was surely aligned with his thinking. "To every cow belongs its calf." Judged the sovereign siding with St Finnian's position.

Only in Ireland could two saints go to war against each other. The king supporting St Finnian was backed by a force of six thousand. Despite being outnumbered two to one St Columba won the battle 561 AD. Another grievance followed the saint that resulted in his eventual expulsion from Ireland. To atone for the bloodshed the troubled St Columba was directed by the wise St Molaise to recoup the same number lost on the battlefield. Exiled to the Island of Iona off the coast of Northern Ireland, St Columba and his monks brought Christianity to the pagan Picts of Scotland. Thus ends the sojourn into Ireland's distant past. The visitors exit the cathedral leaving me alone once again in the back pews.

I entertain the laughable notion of conducting my own tour of Sligo one day. That would be an interesting rollercoaster ride; such a trip could also help process the madness here. Such a mental pilgrimage would have to start on O'Connell Street of course, Sligo town's main street. A memory surfaces over ten years old; I am standing at the top of O'Connell Street in the cold. My recollection paints the streetscape in a desolate light devoid of life. It's just myself at the bus stop outside one of the main shopping malls in the town. The suspicion is gnawing away at my brain that I have missed the bus. I've lost all faith in the timetable to tell me when the next one is going to arrive. Little did I know that a succubus was due any minute. The roar of its engine was heard before the vehicle came into view.

A car chewing on a thunder cloud drifts ominously from Gratton Street, foreboding as a storm looming on the horizon. Most cars generally don't elicit an emotional response, but on this occasion the vehicle moving towards me really gets the adrenalin flowing. It's definitely Ashik, I can feel his demonic energy oozing behind the car's black windshield. I found out his name from one of his more approachable friends when enquiring why he was targeting me. "Ashik is a nice guy, you just got on the bad side of him," said his mate. "Well, if Ashik has a problem with Irish natives, I suggest he go back to his own country." I believe was my official position. The window slowly opens, letting escape the ethereal vapors of the hash genii inhabiting the interior of the car. Gangster rap poetics are in sync with Ashik riding shotgun, brandishing fully loaded hand gestures pointed my way. He inaudibly says something obscene at the side of his mouth, triggering the pilot to erupt into violent hysterics. I look around the street for witnesses but find not a single person. "Fucken wanker," curses the wingman at last escorted by the pilot punching the horn to give the lyrics extra gravitas. Hollow lifeless laughter erupts from the other members of the grooming gang seated in the rear. With no other demeaning things to fire at me, Ashik is under big pressure to perform for his audience. It pains to watch him struggling to put into words such painfully simple arithmetic, equating myself as less and himself as more.

For centuries the English have been using a very similar mathematics against the Irish. Although I know deep down, we are all one, a grievance surfaces that runs even deeper. "I simply refuse to take their devaluations to heart, lest be cast into the maw of the beast!" "First the invaders eliminate the bulls in the herd, before they move in on the heifers," hypothesis the shadow fiendishly, relishing the pain as it pours more salt on the wound.



"You only have yourself to blame," scolded the dark presence. "Should've minded your own beeswax, meddling with such a hornets nest was bound to get you stung in the ass." "She was dressed in a school uniform," I argued. "I wasn't going to sit idly by at my easel while he had his dirty way with her right under my nose." The incident in question involved a Sligoman in his twenties and clearly a schoolgirl in her early teens. He lured her into the doorway of the apartment beneath mine, thinking the premises was empty. "This is private property," I stated firmly, making sure he knew there are residents here. "Come down here and say it to my face," he shouted up at me. Gladly I obliged, without hesitation I went down and told him to his face he was trespassing on private property. Then he went right up into my face, threatening to call his whole clan, saying there would be at least twenty here in five minutes if I didn't go back to my place and mind my own business. I stood my ground, reliably informing him my neighbors security camera was trained on him. There was nothing he could do but issue a death threat and abscond with the schoolgirl elsewhere. Later that day I obtained the footage from my Polish neighbor and reported the incident to the Gardai. Suffice to say the cops didn't pursue the matter. "Just had to play the big hero," jibed the shadow. "Not only did he turn the entire diocese of Elphin against you, he also got the whole Caliphate of Sligo on your Dublin thush." "Hush," I said. "It's difficult to both listen to you and concentrate on watching the film."

The reel of celluloid continues to unravel like the endless peel from a fruit. I take a bite into the mental movie again, the desolate street leaving a bitter aftertaste in my brain. Ashiks car passes again; the revving engine sounds more like a monster in a bad B movie. I make my way back to my apartment. Wish I could fetch a bucket of popcorn, get comfy and switch off the killjoy part of my brain that thinks it's a film critic. Difficult to enjoy the cinematic experience when you've been repeatedly typecast into an inferior role. I worry bigtime about how this grim scenario will end as the whole universe fades to black.



Cut to a happier scene of life on the ground, two goons on a street exchanging notes on a colorful cast of characters in the town suffering with mental health issues. My friend and I are so like actors from a Vaudeville flick, revamping old-school slapstick. I laughed so much the spirit nearly left my body, could not believe the nutjob was using the exact same routine on him too. Not exactly a cartoon caper when first it started, scared the shit out of me when he'd tail me right up my ass, spewing crazy accusations embroidered with death threats. Blah blah blah, the usual echo. Now after a decade of harassment whenever he opens his trap, I stand firm on the assertion whatever parcel of nastiness he unpacks is more about where he is in his own journey. One day it'll all be returned back to sender. "I caught him the other day skulking around the back entrance to that kebab shop at the top of High Street, you know the one?" My friend is well aware of that establishment. "No doubt fraternizing with your Pakistani fanbase," he confirmed with a wry smirk. "Toxico has fangchises everywhere!" I lament to my chum who is so familiar with the brand at this stage he uses it himself. We love to talk about Toxico, discussing at great length the conditions that enable such toxic subcultures to thrive in modern society today.

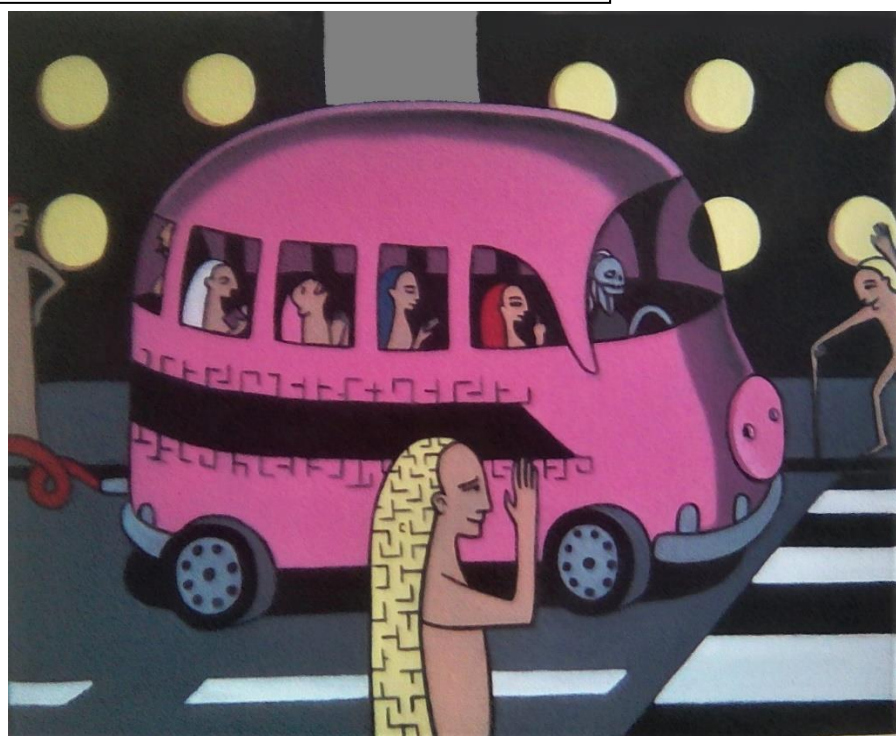
“Hurl any shit my way and the conclusion will be drawn you’re in concert with a toilet,” chimed the shadow. “There are laws against stink brains conducting smear campaigns, just look at the pigsty of lies they’ve orchestrated. You daren’t raise a hand against them, I know. But at least take legal action, bring all the dirty minded swine to the cleaners?”





I know all the places in Sligo cooking up the porky pies, they don't make much of an effort to hide the toxicity. Best to just smile and say nothing, watch somewhat detachedly as if on the sidelines of a St Paddies parade. I'm not a big fan of paddywhackery, although I'm rather partial to pipe bands with their thumping drums hitting you right in the chest. None of it beats the random happenings along the parade route. Some people let the mask slip, revealing a messed-up interior where they really dwell.

I can't put the blinkers on and live in squalor, especially in my own head. I am more inclined to just roll up my sleeves and grapple with the problem. To truly address the elephant in the room regarding messed up behaviour, one has to examine messed up thinking first. Otherwise, you will merely make the mental pigsty worse. The best way to determine a dysfunctional state is to learn what material it is attracted to. It goes without saying, dirty minds are magnetically drawn to filthy content.



Good to have trusted friendships connected to reality, they help to point us in the right direction. A therapist can also serve the same function. It is important to listen to outside observers looking in, usually they can spot delusional thinking a mile off. Brexit is a prime example of an intelligent and highly educated population getting misled by a blatant lie. In Ireland it was like watching a car crash in slow motion. Although painful to watch for those who love the UK, sometimes you just have to let nature run its course.

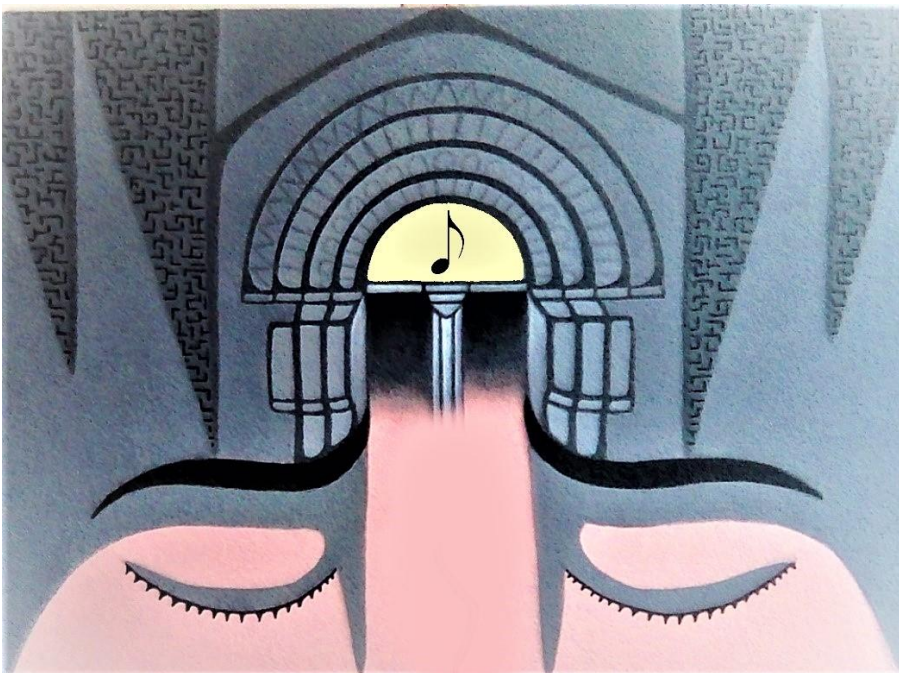


We are no strangers to delusion here in Ireland, in fact it is very much woven into the fabric of life. We are famous all over the world for our wild imaginations. Even our politicians engage in magical thinking, diverting road building projects to avoid hitting a fairy fort. Millions of euros wasted to prevent getting cursed by the little people. It really does beggar belief the fairytale notions that flutter about in the Irish culture today.

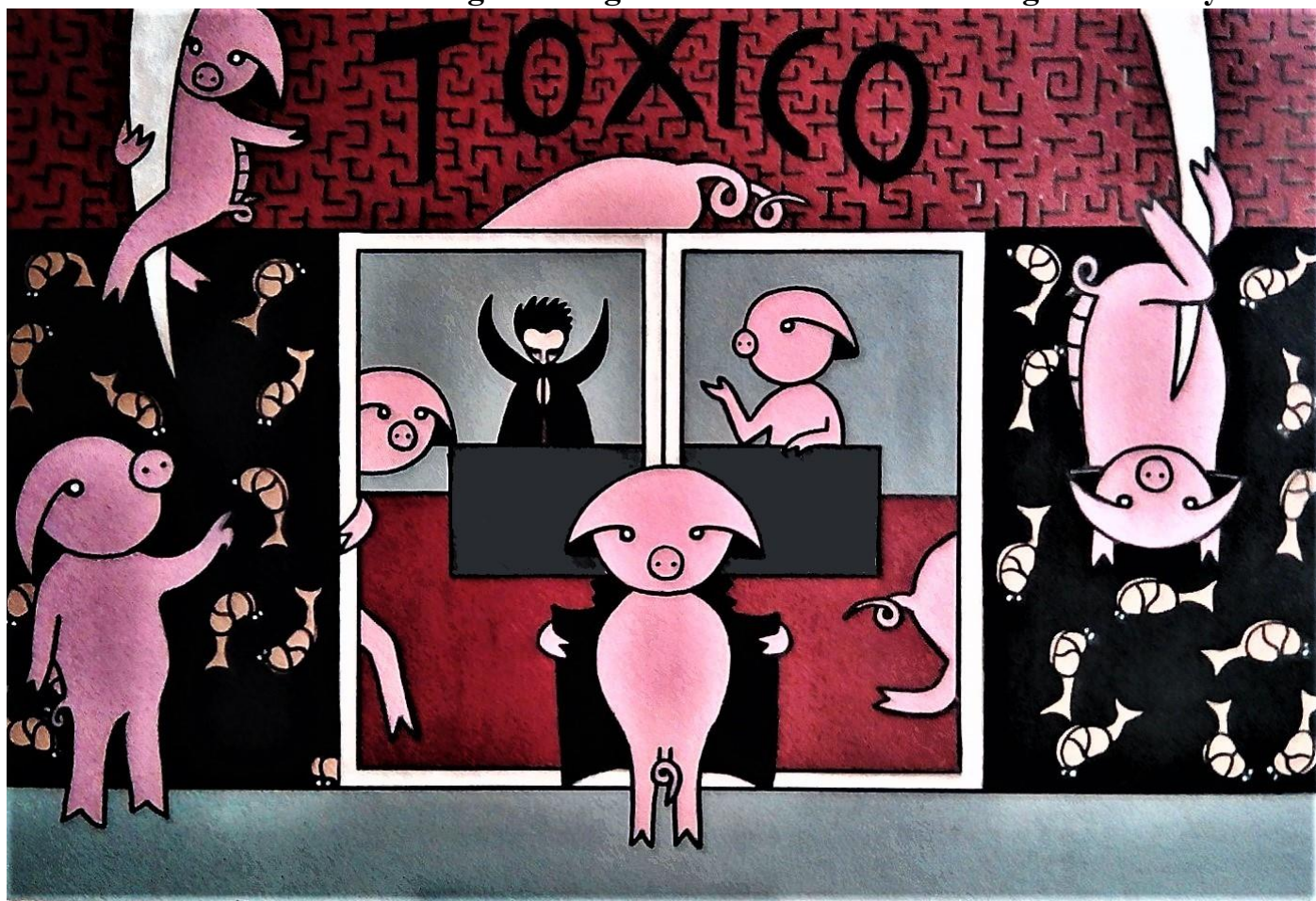
A sense of lightness along with the presence of a joyful feeling are the best indicators you are connected to reality. What's unreal is so heavy, a burden no person needs to carry. There is no real joy with those who partake in the black stuff, though they certainly try to pretend they are having a rare old time. They are free to join me in my quest toward the ocean. Sadly, they are attached to their shallow mental puddles, the thirst for replenishment runs deep.



Can you see an alchemy brewing, turning all their base curses into prayerful gold? Intoxicated by darkness, the mindless revellers have barred themselves from a most sober minded opening. Everybody will eventually pass through that gateway someday. Most people in this discordant age stave off making inroads into reality until the last moment. It patiently waits for everyone, this blissful release from all the noisy revelry pigging out in the vale.



No need to abuse to feel powerful, there are other pathways to empowerment that do not entail stripping a person of their self-worth. Closed-off from a truly prosperous, mindful value system; mindless merchants continue peddling their wares unawares. The shop-fronts arrayed with bling do a sterling job at hiding the vampiric culture festering inside, operating even in the most enlightened corporate structures. Expanded awareness drives a stake through the heart of the dysfunction. Plus, understanding how it operates serves as a cruciform. The parasitical business model familiar to most is not difficult to grasp. First, they gather data on their intended target; usually from dubious, anecdotal sources. Just a pinch of factual information with a generous dollop of lies is enough for the toxic chefs to concoct a caricature. The subject rendered into a subjective piece of meat is then cast to the demons of this world. In all the dark corners of the globe the same parasitical business model. Toxic sucking all the goodness out of life has fangchises everywhere.



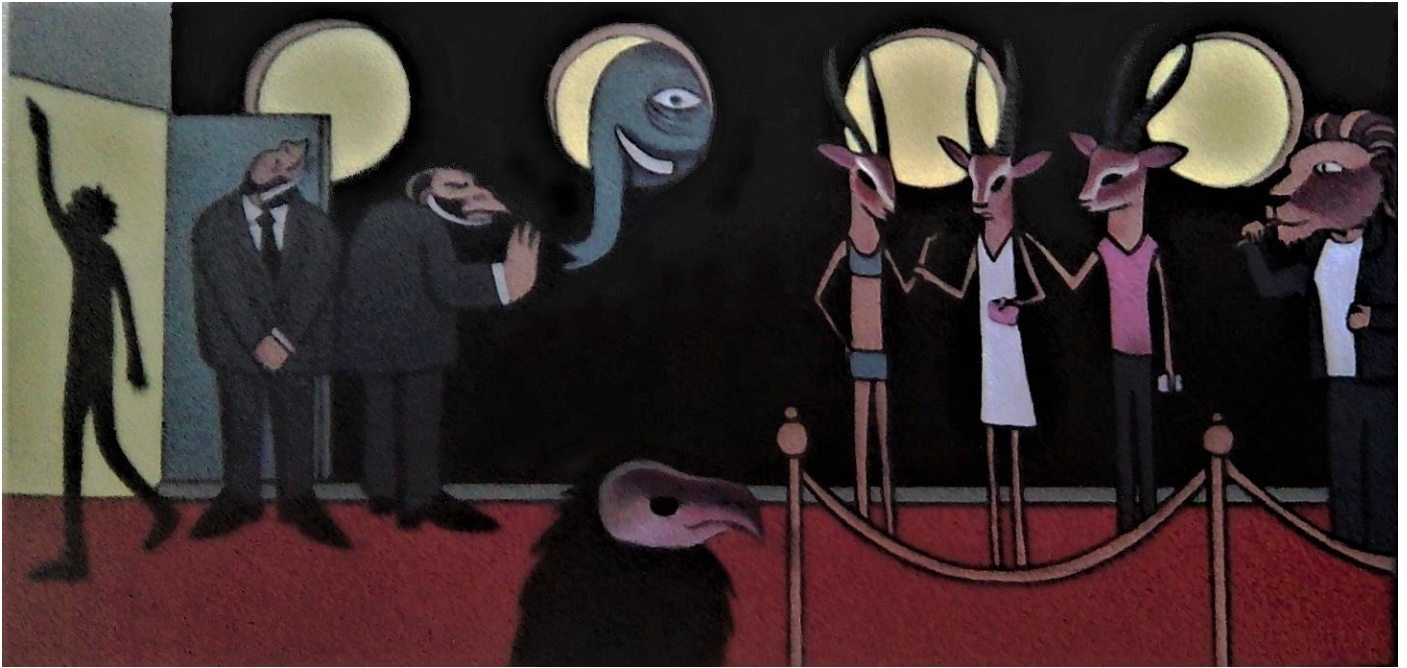
With the exposure of just one mistruth and the whole fictional construct is set to collapse. The truth is the big bad wolf to those housing so many porky pies, billowing at all times, "Little pig! Little pig! Let me in! Or I'll huff and puff and I'll blow your house down." The shadow certainly does a lot of huffing and puffing in its bid to exact vengeance. "Never tread on the wasteland of violence," I remind myself before the swirling gusts of emotion mutate into a cyclone. "Best to plough ahead peacefully staying in the furrowed fields of officialdom. It may take years tilling the soil before the universe decides it is harvesttime. Be swift as the wind with sickle in hand when the break in the clouds arrives making hay while the sun shines. Truth will prevail despite so many snouts in the trough.

The valley never wears its Sunday best with me; it regularly sprays insane methane into my face. The shepherds leading the flock are clearly not guiding them to higher pastures. In a fit of desperation I would have gone to the church seeking guidance only to be met with what is effectively a closed-door regarding matters both spiritual and emotional too. In my meditation sometimes I daydream about hijacking the pulpit in the middle of mass. Gasps of shock-horror from the congregation prefaces my brash entry into the sermon. "Say your goodbyes porky pies, Revelation has finally at last entered the conversation. With so much information flying about it is becoming increasingly difficult to decipher truth from lies. One porky pie sent through cyber space can virtually incarcerate billions. Everyone is cooking up something. A vast menu of mistruth is constantly being served. There are enlightened lies and there are illusory porky pies. There are religious lies and there are secular porky pies. There are clever lies and there are plain stupid porky pies. There are lies that castrate and porky pies to mask the pain. (Nervous giggle in the crowd) I don't want to descend into a lengthy spiel, lamenting that I was unjustly nicked by a bad cop. Had I been arrested by a good cop I would still be wallowing in my illusory cell. The prison walls are more pronounced when the screws are nasty. The brain hackers need to make the subjugated feel like losers; they never factored into their computations I'd have the audacity to scale the confined walls of their narrow-minded simulation. With all the tools at my disposal, I tunneled a way out of their purely subjective incarceration. Out of the cartoon prison I climbed towards the animating light. Occasionally there is an opening, what most refuse to take note of operating within themselves; I am forced to face. The shadow even inside myself does not like artists snooping inwardly and taking pictures. Although it has been invoked into pictorial form many times. The devil, that old archetype of all that is evil is just a symbol of a negative psycho-emotional imbalance. This demoniac spirit couldn't resist showing its face to me. Hundreds of ego masks fell like autumnal leaf's from every social branch, revealing the evil energy concealed in the mental undergrowth. It was an amazing spectacle to behold; hell's kitchen is open for business. The demon waiters gather to serve their torments, OMG do they dish it out. Being a stickler for decorum I try to inject some order into the burgeoning milieu. "Will those who want to just hurt me form a queue to my left, while those who want to kill me, please form an orderly line to my right. " Scanning the audience I see desolation looking my way, punctuated by the usual prickly personalities so like cacti in a desert. What a cruel mindscape poses for the artist with his easel set up in the eye of the shit storm. What displays of pig ignorance from the culture around me oblivious that they were letting me see the darkest corners of their personalities usually kept well hidden. After years of ignoring the interior with the focus primarily on the exterior, the inner sphere has become a hellish place. The negative impact we are having on the environment is a direct manifestation of that mental state. If we're serious about cleaning up the planet we need to sort out the cacophony in our heads first. Rather than adding to the discordant mess, try to attune the mind and bring some balance to thinking. All the mindless noise no matter how out of kilter it is with reality, will eventually be restored back to the source. "You might sprinkle the sermon with a line or two from scripture," advises the shadow.

Seldom do I read the bible, and rarely if ever quote scripture. But sometimes it hits me! A tsunamic message penned two thousand years ago sends a tidal wave into the present. How awesome to me that Christ forgave them, even after they nailed him to the cross. There is a godly architecture housed in such awe-inspiring forgiveness, more grandiose than any cathedral built by the church. So accessible to anybody with a receptive mind, offering sanctuary to frostbitten seekers weather-beaten by the cruel and unmerciful climate outside. In forgiveness there is the wholesome feeling of a kind and loving home. Such bliss to be sat by the fireside while the unforgiving storm rages outside the window. How frosty are those sealed shut to such open invitations where genuine warmth dwells. It beckons us all to cross the threshold, enjoy the peaceful embrace of a merciful presence. No comfort to be found pouched in the cold underbelly of the crowd where all sorts of distortions develop. Difficult to get it on the canvas, what has for so long been planting sneaky blows behind my back. Much prefer to engage face to face with my shadow boxer, subjectively boxed in the shadows. I want it so badly for skippy to have its day in court. Skippy is the pet-name I have assigned to every kangaroo court operating in the shadows. I keep asking myself why me? Trying to figure it out I retrace my steps back fifteen years when first the kangaroo court hopped into my life.



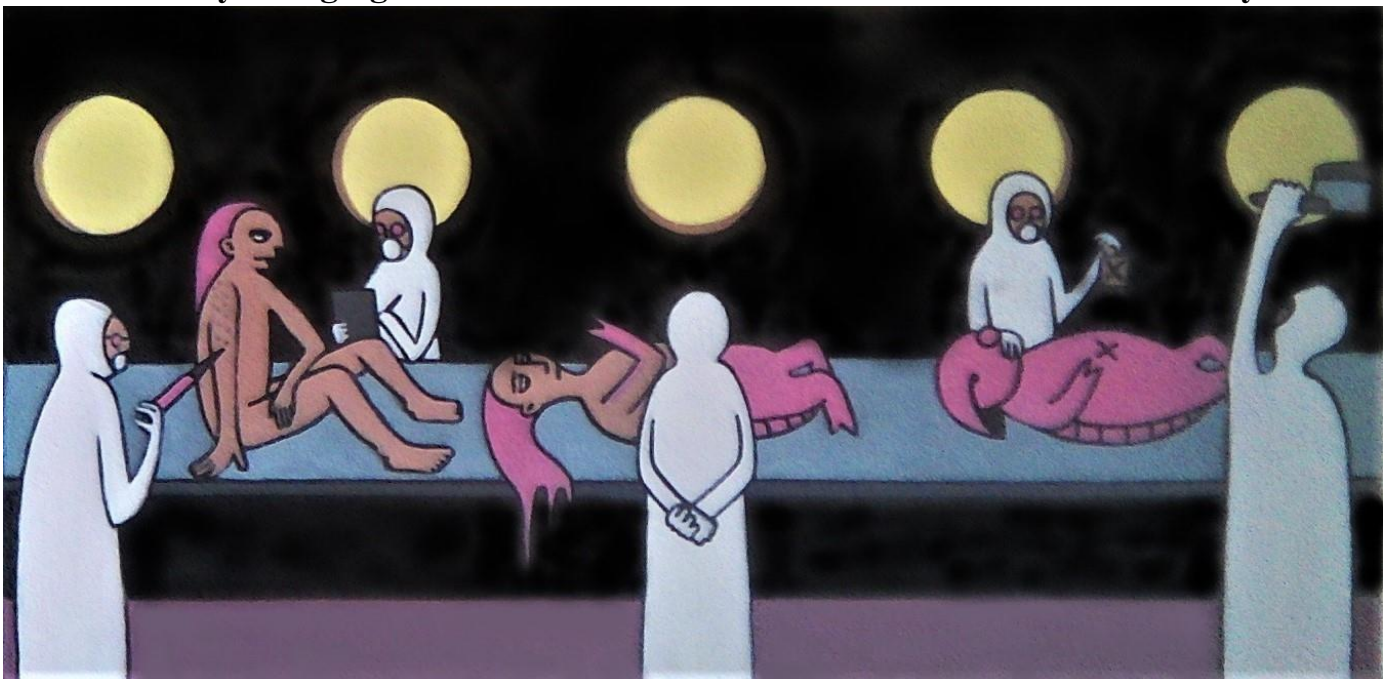
From the get-go I was shadowed by Skippy in Sligo. They found out I was lodging in a homeless shelter, didn't really matter that I had a fulltime job in a factory. That was how it began I suspect. I suddenly found myself in the out-house where they send me hot fuming exhibits, they're not in such a high office in life either. All unenlightened social systems tend to share the same plumbing. Whatever shitty devaluation was made; it gave them justification to treat me like a human toilet. Assholes from near and far flock to take a dump on my mental health. The effects on my overall wellbeing trying to cope with the constant deluge would be dire. Yet I don't feel like a poor me victim, not complaining about the position bestowed upon me. How could I object when there are so many cracking views for an artist to grapple with here?



Eventually Truth will find a way in, sure it's in already! God in man enlarges, the devil in man makes small. Anyone belittling another to big themselves up is in league with an evil spirit confined to a smallminded space. We all need to be watchful of what is going on inside and be able to clock what is going on outside too. Are we wasting our time filling our minds with demonic sloppy seconds, or are we being nourished by timeless presence? We need to keep checking ourselves like a timepiece. The angels perform in real-time. Whereas the demons of this world are working on borrowed time from a past and future that do not exist. Demons so enmeshed in the lower beastly tier don't want us ascending to a higher revelatory hemisphere. What is low inside only wants to feed on what is low outside. It cannot stomach anything that does not resonate with its own toxic frequency. We really do need to be careful about the food for thought that we ingest. I know all the eateries in Sligo cooking up the poisonous dishes, I have catalogued most of them in my artwork. Art also helps process the madness, moving the content along the digestive tract. What horrid porky pies some places are cooking; they generate a violent and hateful gastritis in the brains stupid enough to eat such crap. One demon called Ashik was farting so violently into my face that I had to report that batch of death threats to the authorities. Besides providing a public record of the abuse, the police can do very little. They try to help by giving me phone numbers for victim support agencies which I never ring. I have another powerful tool at my disposal which helps keep the demoniac darkness at bay. Increasingly I draw upon my spiritual practice to illuminate a way through the madness.

If the penny has not dropped yet, no matter how rich the person is, they will be in the ha'penny place trying their best to evade the clutches of the ultimate debt collector death. At every stage in life we are being pursued by death. Impermanence saturates everything we do and say. Everyone is serving death, from politicians down to stand-up comedians. Oft the sourness is sweetened to make the bitter goblet more palatable to the tastebuds. Most don't think that the soft stuff they pour has any correlation with the hard stuff. How many nights that ended painting the town red started off drinking the soft bevvies? The bloodlust will not stay hidden for long. Eventually the cruel abattoir will surface. With so many serving me diet death, it's a miracle I haven't been served with a stiff one yet.

No need to raise a hand against any of these bootleggers brewing their hate narratives. The poison chalice they serve will be served back to them a hundredfold it is guaranteed. You can see it already in the ease at which they delete, life has no dominion in their eyes. Gazes cold as tombstones have but one domain in their minds. Alas no tour of Sligo would be complete without a rendezvous with the cemetery. Wonder sometimes will I be buried there; it plays on my mind like a childhood memory. Not a macabre reverie for me at all; I have probably frequented the graveyard more times as a child than the playground. Regularly we played amongst the gothic tombstones, one of our most popular childhood haunts. The graveyard never spooked me, especially when I had to pass through it on regular errands to the shop to fetch tobacco products for my parents. Even at nighttime. Although the necropolis was a scary place at night, it was a completely different story at day. I have always found graveyards to be very peaceful realms; true sanctuaries from a world full of zombified noise. I approach the cemetery like one would a public gallery, admiring all the beautiful mausoleums and monuments to the dead as I walk along. I like to read the epitaphs chiselled on the gravestones; some inscriptions can be dead funny. Besides not taking it too gravely, it is important to reflect on our ultimate resting place. When any random nutjob can literally dream-up any justification to put you in the grave, one cannot escape the eventuality that will befall us all. It is impossible to avoid thinking about my mortality in an environment where the threat of death is almost omnipotent. Even in the event of a natural death happening, I thought it would be wise to design my own grave. A very attractive sculptural piece really, hewn from black and white marble. From a marble puddle emerges a marble figure, the quill in its hand pointing toward a large marble bubble bearing an inscription of my name, date of birth and date of death. Nothing else needs to be recorded on the stone orb. I like to think it will be the most eye-opening final statement in the cemetery, apart from the graves of Gypsies which can seem almost Egyptian in their extravagance, more like vehicles to the next world. The conveyor belt of life keeps moving regardless of what is said. Even in the dead of winter the graveyard sings life. The floral arrangements give voice to a song, life continues to move on. The constantly changing flux moves even for those in the abattoir so unmoved by murder.



"It's only a matter of time before death rowing in theory rows into death row in practice," warns the shadow. "They can't touch me while I practice the art of stilling my thoughts." Is my usual answer when the death sentence is intonated. "Death is real," shouts the shadow. "It can't be reduced to a mere thought form in your head. Connecting with the field of stillness surrounding thinking does not give you an edge over the reapers sickle." I calmly park the meditation beads by my side, consulting the book of Zen Koans for a response. "Goso said: "When a buffalo goes out of his enclosure to the edge of the abyss, his horns and his head and his hoofs all pass through, but why can't the tail also pass?" I can picture the shadow wagging his finger like a tail, always sends me into convulsions. The shadow steals back to the shadows, the joyful explosion too much for it to tolerate. As my spiritual practice deepens, facing the final checkout isn't so daunting anymore. Mindfulness truly enriches, bringing balance to a skewed mindset where weak and strong actors are constantly vying for power. It is curtains for this ghastly parochial play that keeps casting me into an inferior role. As the years go by, I become more detached from the prison drama, watching outside the walls as both inmates and screws alike have their wicked way with the effigy of me asleep in the cell. Many moons after my prisonbreak and they still continue to fuck what is in essence a projection of their own perversion. Primitive devices to source power become obsolete. Those stuck in the game will strongly disagree and say my take is weak. Everything in the ego mode is turned into a debate. Family, relationships, having a meal and even baking a cake is reduced to a contest. Defecating would be made into a sport too if it didn't create such a stink. You can smell the toxicity in the air, the divisive fumes keep us imprisoned in fragmented, mental cells.



At times when the meditation draws to an end, the familiar sight of an elderly gypsy lady drifts into the cathedral to perform her stations of the cross devotion. Stationed roughly where Veronica wipes the face of Christ, I feel a tingly sensation enveloping me all over, from the top of my head to the tip of my toes. Wow, like an angel sprinkling magic dust, very subtle how it works. I daren't chase after it, clinginess will only make the mind less receptive to whatever magic is at play. An opening is defo created by the woman's prayer, something that can only occur spontaneously. Willing it to happen will not work either, not even sure if she's aware of what is going on with her devotional energy swirling about in the ether, triggering such sweet openings. Naturally I want to share with the lady the beautiful moment she helped create but then I just think somethings are best left unsaid. Indebted to her sacred presence I make sure to smile at her when she passes in the aisle. If only you knew missus the magic you helped create. One thing is for certain, had she been reciting a string of vile curses, whatever doorway was opened would remain closed. With so much noise strewn across the runway, it is very difficult for a higher plane to land. When finally the eagle landed my story went where few yarns consciously tread. Though all stories are scribed upon that spiritual dimension, few consciously get to truly embrace the page. When that threshold was crossed the ceiling of my mental cell was blown wide open and nothing would be the same again. The very same sentient vellum that every thought and emotion is written on, every atom and galaxy is scribed upon too. After twenty years of struggling to hack my way into life, to my amazement found I was online all along, logged onto the divine computer where every form is truly a holy icon.

Thy kingdom come thy will is done in mind as it is in heaven.

My message commuting the modern world will not get far without evidence. The same old story keeps moving along; lashing out the usual script that we are nothing more than separate physical units. Compartmentalized mental/emotional passengers traversing the line between birth and death with no other purpose but to work, procreate, consume and worship bigger egos. I don't want you to board yet another train of thought and believe that there is a spiritual platform that enables us to SEE what is going on in these neural carriages of the mind. I want you to SEE this most liberating light at the end of the tunnel with your own eyes. To open your eyes I must first ask you to close them. Can you SEE the energy there radiating against your eyelids? Please keep looking you can't miss IT. As you open your eyes, can you SEE the same energy field in the space outside?

“ How did I not SEE IT? ” Was all I could say arising from my seat, enraptured more by how the TRUTH was concealed in plain sight. Entering the living room I headed directly to the open double doors. Through the French window I stepped out onto the balcony, still asking how did I not SEE IT. A man depositing empties into the bottle bank eyed me suspiciously with both my hands in a namaste. I silently directed a blessing towards him, even after he started bubbling over with rage and waving his fist. I didn't hear exactly what he was shouting, could have been muzzletoff as he smashed his other bottle onto the ground. Not exactly a celebratory bottle of bubbly to celebrate the momentous event in a spiritual practice spanning twenty years. The shadow is definitely in celebratory mode, the litany of foul-mouthed curses gushing forth like wine too tantalizing for it to ignore. The interface between spirit and ego was so acute, a tiny Island of darkness surrounded by a sea of light. There is no escaping the truth now, the shadow is hemmed in on all sides.

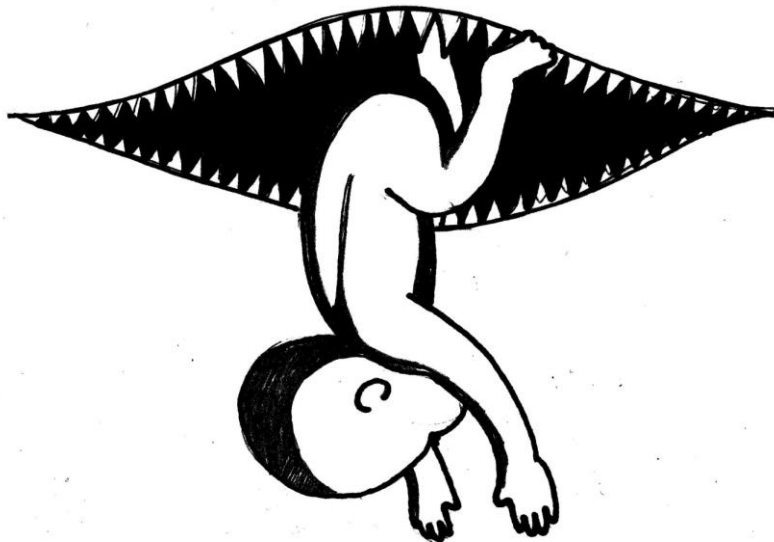
I can feel an intense turbulence reverberating inside my body as the dark energy passes



right through. Another discordant course returns to the concordant source. Right on cue the sacristan on her rounds catches me unawares firing the empty shells of penny candles into a metal bin creating the percussive effect of a cavernous thunderous eruption. The loud noise brought me back to the NOW, besides frightening the holy crap out of me. When my heartbeat returns to its usual rhythm, I take note. Still have a lot to learn about conducting. There are so few I cannot foresee myself getting fired for a momentary lapse. The world is screaming out for conductors to channel the fragmentation and transmute it back to wholeness. In the bowels of the society I have for years digested unquantifiable amounts of aaaaaaaaargh from the atmosphere. I catch myself sighing sadly again as my thoughts inevitably turn towards freeing my story from the belly of the beast. Pocketing the beads I arise to gingerly make my way to the exit. Standing at the doorway I meet a tweedy auld gent on his way in, humming with the scent of pipe tobacco and oxtail soup. Holding the front door ajar as he passes, I say hello.

“ Aaaaaaaaargh ”

The famished sound chimes with the growl presently prowling in my stomach. I make my way home where a very modest lunch awaits. After the break I return to the theatre where lain out before me is a body of work that will take me to midnight when I retire. I am satisfied that I have performed surgery on a hefty anatomy of themes which I intend to explore in greater detail further on. There remains at this stage to make just a few more crucial incisions. I have to be careful with my creative scalpel that I don't scar the page and botch the whole operation. All my creative labor has been pushing towards making this one opening. A very delicate procedure which requires quick bold strokes. Without thinking I swiftly lacerate the page with a convex arc. Then I add a concave arc, the effect of an open gash is conjured. After adding some sharp teeth to the gnarly wound, I proceed to draw an infant being drawn from the maw of a beast.



Chapter One is born.

CHAPTER ONE

I was born at a time in the mid nineteen seventies when hairstyles were in a state of flux, arriving with a twin brother in what is arguably the hairiest decade ever on record. Both newborns had full heads of hair, I was the dark one inheriting a black mane from daddy dearest. The doctors hailed us as miracle babies, escaping by a hairsbreadth the grim outcome visited on the previous occupant of our mother's womb. The universe it seemed was in a generous mood, repaying double for a baby sister shorn just after she was born. It was a bonus in triplicate since our mother narrowly brushed death delivering us. Comb through the medical books of the Rotunda hospital in Dublin and you might find us there.



Delving into my past is rather like looking back at ancient Greece. The pillars of the cot not very good at keeping out the Trojan wars relentlessly being waged outside. All babies are in the lap of the gods, even if their parents are caught up in ungodly argumentation. Rooted in a timeless clearing of pure consciousness, infants can SEE the mental bramble the adults are all lost in. It doesn't take long for kids to get sucked into that briar patch, where to be on the winning side of the thorn bush, you must establish who the pricks are on the losing side. A breeding ground for distortion and addiction to fester and develop. The pure minds of children so like filters have a lot of carcinogens to absorb when they arrive here. Either we let this entanglement smother the light inside, or we cut a pathway through the darkness. I considered myself lucky to have another bunch of neural berries by my side who I'd pick when the confused bramble found its way into my perception. Frequently we brainstormed, bouncing ideas back and forth, hypothesizing about what

was the story with the divinities far off in the distance, barely visible in the smoke cloud. “Pssssss” I whisper hypothetically to the other captive in the cot. “These gods are crazy; will they ever bloody stop fighting?” Whatever elementary sounds he made as an infant, I can still remember my twin brother involuntarily nodding to everything I uttered.

To some my earliest memory may be viewed as an illegitimate progeny of a fertile imagination. I just can’t seem to alter or abort the mythical brainchild from the womb of memory. The very first thing I can recall seeing as the focus of my infant eyes began to sharpen, was the summer sun arrayed in white lace. I recall being utterly spellbound by net curtains moving gently in a breeze streaming through the open window. The sun too strong for my sensitive retinas prompts me to look away and investigate the interior. I notice the guy next to me and wonder who the fuck this geezer is? I was looking at him for a good bit, studying him closely and noticed something very odd. He wasn’t very good at holding his head up. One moment his head was level with mine and eyeballing me as I was him. The next instance it would drop back down again, the skinny little neck like the weakest of twigs struggled to hold the apple aloft. Then I observed that I was doing the same fucking thing. Something inside me from such an early age told me that I can’t be doing the shit he was doing. I was told to hold my head up. That mysterious “Something” spoke without words, commanding me not to be doing what he was doing. It seized my mind with both hands and forced me to pay attention to this problem that needed solving. I managed to find a strength inside to build on, the weak drooping head issue no longer a problem. Would have been just an anecdotal event in my own mythos had my mother not relayed her own memories of my infancy, corroborating the veracity of my memory. “You were the only one out of the five who didn’t have the drooping head syndrome.” “There’ll always be one.” I tended to say. “Most families I think produces at least one who sticks their head above the parapet.”

She’d make a throwaway remark whenever I had ideas outside my station, clattering me playfully across the head. The only quack on the funny-farm who didn’t duck. With the addition of two more inmates to the madhouse the arguing had escalated from a small village of animosity to a major built-up cityscape rife with anger and sadness. I remember particularly the fight in the car our father was waging against my mother who had just gotten out of the maternity ward with sister number two. There are five of us now stuck in the middle of this built-up argumentative metropolis. What should have been an occasion for a joyful celebration descended into a spiteful argument. Apparently, not his bright idea to bring another hungry mouth into the world. I hated the way his mind worked; how the deeply divided psychological sprawl of his brain could so easily turn a rural blessing into an urban curse. Daily we watched the aggressive side of town feeding off the depressed side of town. My parents constantly at loggerheads with one another had a huge impact on the cityscape of my developing awareness. Children can absorb only so much of the madness. As soon as we could walk, we bolted out the door to the hills. There were actual hills nearby, wild surrogate bosoms ready to distract the urchins displaced and traumatized by the perpetual tit for tat. I had a wonderful childhood filled with adventures in those hills despite the backdrop of a divided architecture back home.



My parents when I was growing up never concerned themselves with any of the latest developments in fine dining. Little love was infused into the psycho-emotional pottage that was usually served, oscillating between piping hot anger and stone-cold melancholy. As an army cook my father certainly knew how to follow a menu. Boy did he dish it out every time my mother served him a meal. Countless dinners sautéed with a torrent of verbal and mental abuse from the sergeant major. I became a target once for refusing to eat liver, still can't stomach that shit. My mother received the brunt of the verbal abuse. When the legions of horrid names were deployed upon her, we all acutely felt the pain. Some families have a grace before meals. We had a holy disgrace for a prologue and an epilogue to every dinner. Why was he such an antichrist, especially around dinnertime? Having a rare confessional moment with us once, he revealed that he was receiving the same hurtful ingredients from every rank and file within the barracks. It was an absurd joke to us that he worked in an army tasked with mainly peacekeeping duties abroad. Without the tools to deal with all that negative energy, he held onto it until chowtime and channeled the messed-up shit he absorbed in the mess hall into us. Its basic physics.

It wasn't a total failure as a familial experiment, he had a really explosive sense of humor. One day he lured the whole gang into the car with a big surprise waiting at the end of a short spin down the road. All of us midget children in the back seat of that Renault five, with still ample space for my best friend mournfully watching outside as the excitement

mounted in the vehicle. His dirty face streaked with tear tracks would prove to be an omen for the tearful trip that marked the return journey.

“Let’s go to Disneyland.” The pilot announced to the passengers as he reversed out of the driveway like a getaway car from a bank heist. The joy, the bliss all of our little brains innocently celebrated in that back seat. Nothing it seemed could bust the bubble, not even mammy who seemed to be suffering with a piercing migraine in the front. So easy to unlock in children the magic vaulted inside. Disneyland is the key that will pick that lock for sure. We were there already, transported to that timeless place of joy and happiness. The wonderful destination though technically not cooked by the chef yet was tasted in all of our heads. We were heading to the cartoon capital of the world where all kids dream of going. We felt so blessed to have such an excellent daddy. The car travelling through back country roads came to a sudden nervous halt with not one aircraft in the skies. No sight nor sound of any jet engines, no matter how hard you tried to force your ears to listen properly. Just the gothic caw of crows and jackdaws landed inside the interior of the vehicle. Somebody said that there must be a runway somewhere behind the house.

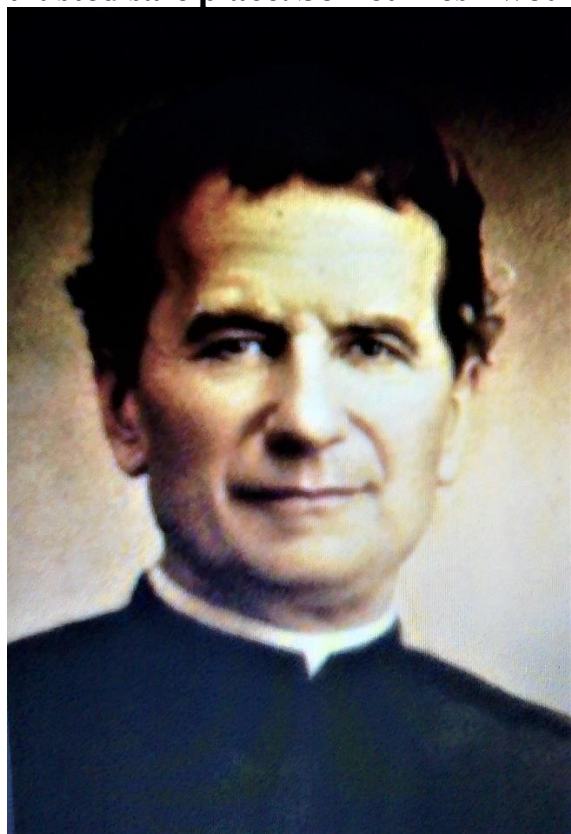
“There’s Disneyland.” He said puffing on his tobacco pipe, drawing our attention to the ruins of a house shrouded in smoke. Apparently, a fire had visited it the previous night. “Sorry children, the IRA bombed Disneyland.” I was trying my best looking out goofily to see if I could catch a glimpse of Mickey and Donald through the windows of the burnt-out husk of the bungalow. Then I stopped when the crying started. If the roller-coaster journey getting there was in the ascent, it certainly was in the descent on the way back. He laughed his head off as we wept, how he got pleasure from such pain was beyond me.

Through a veil of tears I eye him in the rear-view mirror. The squinty bulbs of a spaghetti western bounty hunter. The maliciousness in them could be typecast into no other role. They are my blue eyes too. I tell myself, everything that my father is, I will not be. A man who liked sport. A man who drank stout and smoked a pipe. A man who loved fried food. A man who’s ever expanding waistline touched the steering wheel. A man who loved cars. A man who made children cry. Though our features are the same, my mind will be so far away from his that the expanse of the entire cosmos will lie in between. He wasn’t the worse father you could ask for. He wasn’t exactly the best either.

As he drove us home, the laughter in him ran out of fuel not long after ignition. Then the mother and father of all rows erupted in the front. Once again unresolved issues were hit back and forth, reducing my mother to manic tears and himself to strong name calling. I remember just watching the two of them engaged in an insane argument and thinking, “Oh shit, you don’t know what we’re supposed to be doing here, do you?” It was a scary thought. The pilots of your life losing control in the cockpit. You begin to look around the crafts unstable fuselage for parachutes. The red-light flashes in your head signaling, this birds going down fast. Step into my office Dad, you no longer hold a high position in my thinking. But before you use the ejector seat, look for something that will cushion the fall.

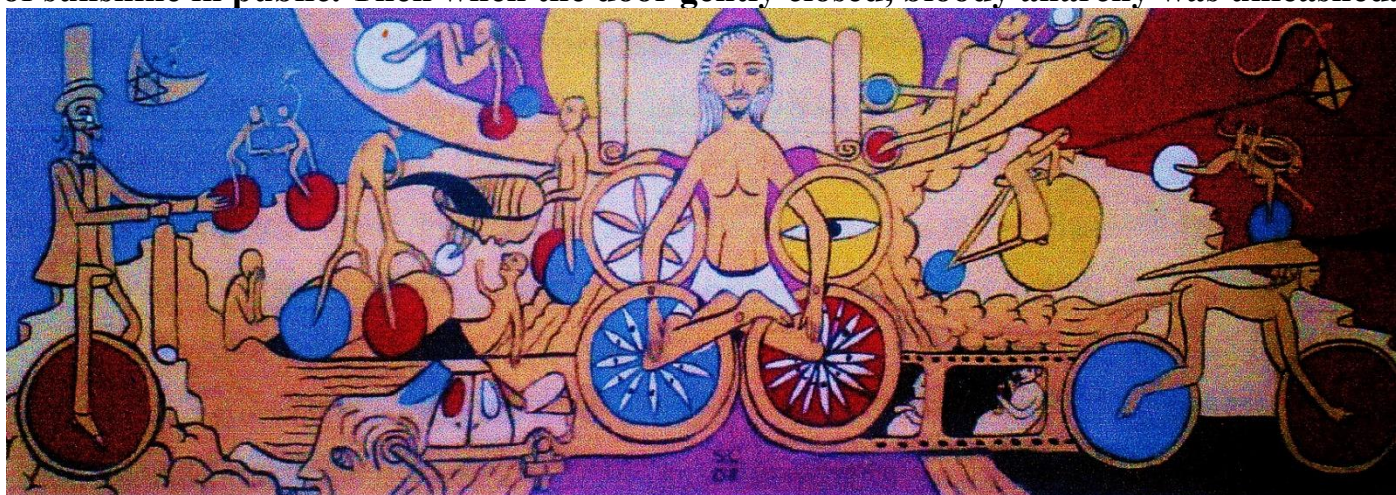
At a young age I used to escape to the church on my own. A very beautiful place with a serene graveyard which had the tallest of oak trees that caressed the heavens. I liked the energy there, standing at the foot of something that pillared the sky. I would walk around the graveyard savoring the different scents in the air. I adored the rustic earthy perfume permeating from the creaky trunks of the giant oaks swaying in the wind. When the war-

zone was particularly bad at home; part of my coping mechanism was to scarper to my trusted safe place. Sometimes I would even venture into the church and say a few prayers.



The rosary wielded no power over the domestic turmoil. The only religious artefact in the chapel that gave me solace was a portrait of Don Bosco. I used to spend a long time just meditating on the serenity radiating from his face. When other kids around my age were worshiping pop gods, here I was idolizing a priestly pinup from the nineteenth century. I didn't even know anything about the guy's story. I still don't. The only thing that mattered was the contentment in his face. I would ask God to make my father more like him, maybe perform a swap when he napped after a big fry. This guy's peace really made me happy, more than any other image in the church. Maybe one day I will grow up to be a man just like this noble figure? It would seem likely that a vocation for the priesthood was on the cards.

There was only one snag; I fucking hated the religious indoctrination in school. It was more about optics than seeing. They were trying to peddle an image of Christ as a hippy. A one-dimensional peace, love and happiness cartoon which was out of sync with the culture. With punk in the air, IRA bombs and clerical abuse not far-off the conflict between different brandings of reality couldn't have been more schizophrenic. A form of bipolar disorder like my parent's marriage was constantly being enacted. Always so full of sunshine in public. Then when the door gently closed, bloody anarchy was unleashed.



You really had to be creative in finding some semblance of sanity in that environment. There was another place I loved in Lusk that acted as a security blanket I could always depend on. Across from the church was my Nanna's house where I spent most of my summers busily occupied with various chores. I felt privileged to be the only grandchild chosen from over fifty cousins to be tasked with running errands, whitewashing the great

wall of China straddling her property along with a spot of gardening. One time I spent a whole day in the garden just digging a labyrinth of water canals around the rockery. Very Zen. I can still picture my mother and aunties watching from the kitchen window. “That child’s gone away with the fairies!” Clucked the hens in the chicken coop, once a poultry morsel was in their beaks they’d never let go.

There are places in Lusk where the realm of fairytales can unsheathe its wings and take to the skies. Love the idea of having such a magical structure in the heart of my hometown dominating the skyline for generations. The four towers for centuries have sat like medieval rockets, poised at any moment to lift off and pierce the heavens. As a child that was exactly how I saw them. Wherever I took off in that rural patch of the universe, those four monoliths would be watching. A host of tall tales have sprouted in the imaginations of locals living in the shadow of the towering quartet. It was claimed Beelzebub himself would materialize after nine laps of the ancient site. A perfect myth for energetic teenagers to test out. The round towers full of gothic magnetism served as a hangout for some adolescents in the area, especially during Halloween when spooky archetypes tend to surface. One could easily envision a witch’s coven living there along with a whole cast of ghouls. Usually off limits to the public, once I was granted access to the turrets at the top. After I drank my fill of the panoramic views of the north Dublin countryside, I cast a teary-eyed gaze towards my uncle’s field. Felt good to get a new perspective on where I almost died.



There are landmark events in our lives so set in stone they become historical sites able to withstand the harshest elements, even the seemingly liquid essence of memory. Water features heavily in my remembrance, aged seven the voyage had hardly started yet when a near-death experience boarded the vessel. It happened deep in the hull of the nineteen eighties when John Lennons gorgeous song Imagine frequently sailed the radio waves. The incident happened while playing with cousins at the back of our uncles’ property. His estate spanning hundreds of acres had undergone a dramatic change within a very short span of time. Once sunny corn fields of gold; it all of a sudden became a desolate moonscape, the entire field cratered sporadically with large holes. More like giant gaping mouths full of water the earth couldn’t swallow. My cousins joked, saying their dad was a pirate looking for buried treasure, neglecting to fill in the holes after finding nothing. “Where are they going to bury all the cars?” I asked pointing at the automobile cemetery looming over the punctured hellscape next to their heavenly bungalow. They all laughed as they made tracks for the scrapyard to play their games. I was too small to be accepted by the big kids, and too big to be babied by the adults. I didn’t even have the wherewithal yet to feel unwanted, cast aside into a landscape salivating for something bad to happen.

I began to gather fragments of pallet wood lying scattered in the muck. It seemed like a perfectly logical idea to build a boat, since there was so much fucking water in the place. It was like a trip to the seaside, had made what I believed was a totally seaworthy craft. Getting it into one of the bodies of water was a struggle, I was so tiny what was in reality a pond, appeared to me big as a lake. The intrepid explorer then boarded his craft, it drifted away when I placed my foot onto the slippery deck. I tried to get it back using the tip of my toes. Stretched to the very limit, the raft continued to drift away. Then SPLASH



I fell into the pool not knowing how to swim. Completely disorientated I instantly began to panic, frantically peddling the muddy water. The little legs nowhere near purchasing the bottom as I called out at the top of my voice for help. Water started to fill my lungs somewhat stifling the ability to project my voice. I could see my family on the shore, they were all watching me thinking that I was putting on some sort of a show. I went under and when I surfaced found they were all laughing. I went under again pleading, begging for help. Then more laughter when I arose and only to sink again to a chorus of yet more raucous cackles. Had one of my cousins not snapped out of the spell and ran to get help I would've said adieu to this world with that hideous parody of laughter in my two ears. The hero of the hour was my mother. She took one look at her nephew running towards the bungalow and knew without words that something ominous was afoot. The eagle eye of the mother's instinct is the most powerful supernatural force on this planet. She bolted like lightning to where I lay face down, silently submerged not far from death's shore. My mother dived into the pool and fished me out nearly drowning herself in the process. Having regained consciousness, to my horror discovered that I was naked but for a pair

of pants borrowed from my sneery much older cousin. The numerous adults in the room thought it was very funny indeed; the picture of a helmeted boy on a bicycle emblazoned across the front of my newly acquired underwear. Perched on a cold kitchen worktop feeling like a piece of meat on a slab, I nearly died a second time with the embarrassment. It wasn't the first time I thought my family were a bunch of perverts. Anyway, the near-death experience had a major impact on me, for over forty years after every time I passed a group my legs would go all rubbery. Like I was transported back to the pool again, begging for help and being met with a total misreading. It engendered a powerful social conscience in me too; very peculiar in a lad so young. I became overnight ultra-sensitive to any negative environmental conditioning. My father had elected me as his favorite, putting me onto his knee while leaving my twin to wallow in the lowly doldrums. I hated the false heights of the glory bestowed upon me and I squirmed uneasily on that throne. "Let me down with my brother in the bog-side, I don't want this. Give the crown of your favorite to someone else, I don't want it." He eventually got the message and realized he couldn't divide and conquer two brothers who came into the world together. Still don't understand why he used that stratagem on his kids. Yes, he was deeply argumentative, perhaps he just wanted to rear his children to be like him, but even answering him back was criminal. Soon he managed to even render one of my most cherished friends illegal. For years I had a best friend who was so much bigger than me he could have carried me around in his pocket. Such a giant friendship for a pipsqueak like me had its obvious perks. The extra muscle mainly afforded me the confidence to square up to every bully in the playground. Besides the headmaster, there was only one dominant alpha-male he was powerless to help me fight. My father perhaps sensing a challenge down the line to his dominance, didn't like the boy hanging around with me one bit. There were questions he said about his parentage, which so late in the twentieth century was a ridiculous slur. My father ordered the friendship with "The Bastard" to be terminated immediately. He hounded me day and night to cut ties with Bernard who he argued was from a lower tier. He only lived around the corner from us, the exact same council bricks that tailored his house our house wore too. Where the fuck was he getting all these airs and graces from? As a child he had burnt down his own primary school building resulting in his expulsion from education. He had no formal education and picked spuds until he landed the army job. The whole saga went on for months, my father pressuring me to break friends and me doggedly telling him that I can't. He actually banned me outright from playing with Bernard and I snuck out with the contraband friend until my twin brother ratted me out. When eventually I broke friends with the kid, my heart was broken having to obey the shallow demands of a man who would never be happy no matter what you did. To make matters worse he was cheating on my mother with a woman who literally lived around the corner, siring at least one son right under our noses. As he bastardized the wholesome friendship with Bernard, he was living a double life with a lady reputed to be a prostitute. There was definitely a dysfunctionality in the air, which shockingly reared its head in the most unexpected places. I thought it was grossly unfair, why they were targeting me for a boyhood friend when there were things going on in that house that needed attention. It was going on for the entire week, curiosity got the better of me and I decided to investigate. Through the half open bedroom door I glimpsed both sister and brother completely naked in the lower bunk, fondling each other in places off limits to children and members of the same family. It appeared consensual between the two as far as my childhood eyes could see. Immediately I reported what I just witnessed to my mother

who dismissed it saying they'd recently been watching a sex education vid in school and they were just experimenting with what they learnt. I wasn't happy with this explanation, and so consulted with a colleague in school. Trevor Barry thought it was disgusting too, I secretly hoped he would pass on the info to his grandfather who also happened to be one of my fathers chums. Maybe he'll break friends with him? I was obviously aggrieved for being targeted for having a perfectly normal friendship while others engaging in incest got off the hook. Suffice to say he blabbed his mouth about the incident to the whole school, so technically the story is still out there in the ether. I could very well dive into other incestuous goings on in that house if my twin brother wasn't scared to rock the boat. Crucial testimony corroborated with another key witness has so much more bight.

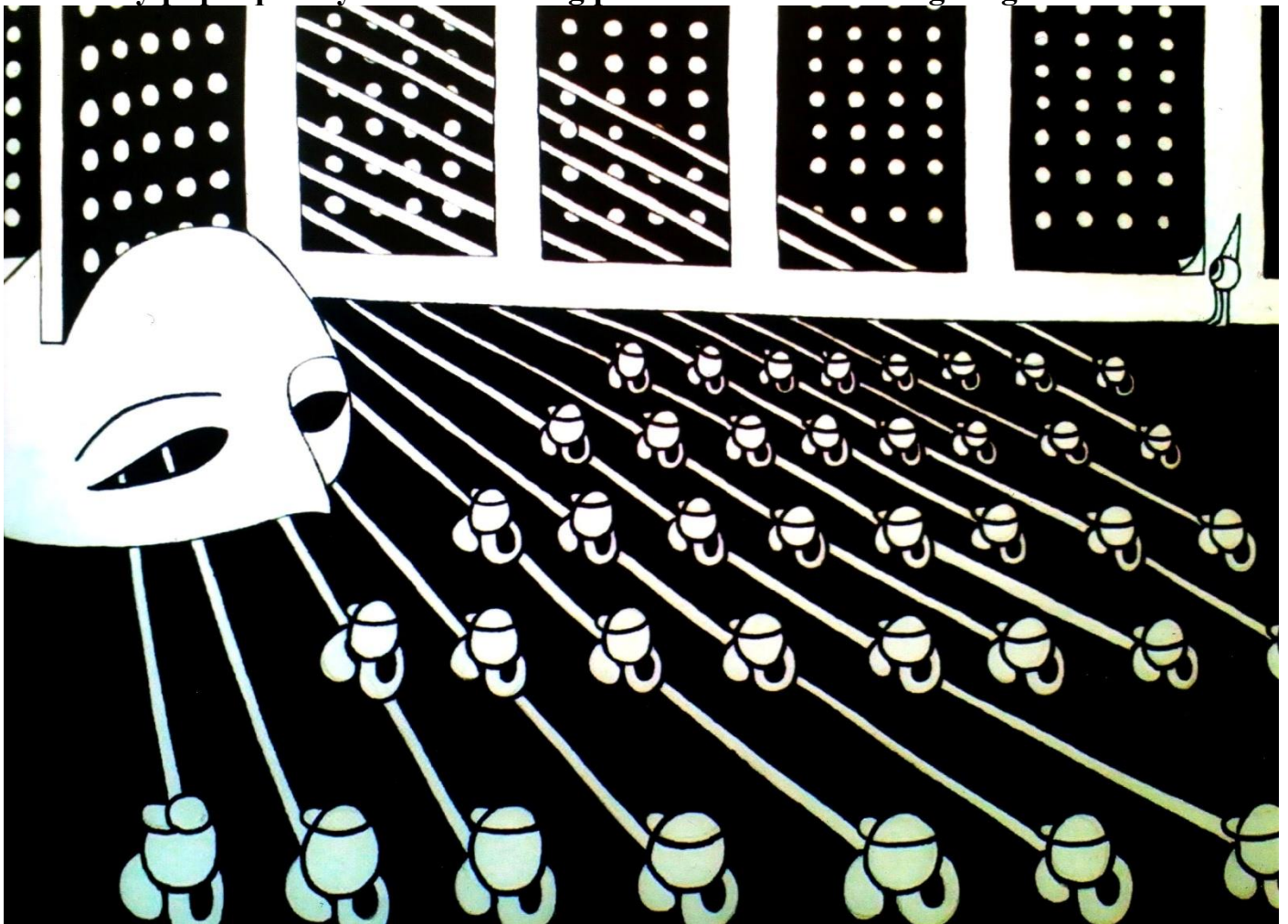


I was crestfallen having to break friends with Bernard; I still miss the long conversations with each other that used to stretch for miles. Life was such an open book in his company. I became more closed off and introverted, resentful too for something I loved so much to be taken away. The only other real good friend I could find was art. Pals come and they go. Core friendships stay with you come rain or shine. Art was a rock I could depend on; it would be there for me through all the troubled times. It was the one thing which I was good at that no one could take away. It helped ideate a confused world, and gave me a vantage point to see things hidden. I dissected mysteries with art, performing autopsies on how things operated. I used to love drawing little figures operating the controls within bigger figures. My mother revealed to me once that I had drawn the cat with kittens in her belly, way before she gave birth to her first litter. My mother was amazed I'd intuited her pregnancy ahead of her finding out. Forgive my childish naivety of entertaining the notion that art bestowed upon me special powers. What a friend to give you all of tha

Teachers and parents could not compete with that and I became a difficult pupil to teach. I wasn't so far gone that I couldn't comprehend the adult world was sick with worry. I could cover the basics but as school lessons became more complicated, I was observed to be "elsewhere." I was sent to hospital for tests and no abnormalities were detected to make a definitive diagnosis. All my teachers said I was a bright child but soon as any gold appeared in my eyes it quickly disappeared under the silt again. Only when it was time for art did I come alive; a completely different pupil. Some observant teachers noticed this and rather than have the eyes of a student dead to the information on the blackboard, they allowed the artful rascal to draw away at his pictures while the lessons went on. Much to the consternation of the other pupils, I got bullied by the cool kids in the class who felt I was receiving preferential treatment. My artistic superhero powers came to the rescue and I was able to placate my villainous detractors by drawing for them cartoon characters as payment to get them off my back. Overjoyed that they had their very own cartoonist working on their behalf I was given a hall pass to pursue my artistic interests. Soon even the bloody teachers began asking me to do posters for them. Gladly I obliged, jumping at any chance to showcase my gift. Once I got a challenging commission from a teacher, requesting the budding artist to execute a poster for an upcoming confirmation: Tricky enough landmark on the Catholic journey to illustrate; especially for an acolyte still grappling with Holy Communion. The poster was to have religious text around the edges, with a central motif symbolizing the event in the middle. I threw myself into the task with religious fervor, drawing the whole class, roughly getting them all standing in a dove formation; symbolizing the holy spirit. Wow, the teachers and student body were mightily impressed, triggering me to execute a similar composition, this time mapping out the whole world with people standing to form the different landmasses. Plain to SEE I was channeling an intelligence into the visual field instead of the usual textual field we are all pretty much thought to follow. If anything both exercises of marrying text with image demonstrated an aptitude of the subject difficult to replicate with writing alone. Of course there had to be one teacher who strongly disagreed with a little Dublin urchin subverting the protocols of the educational system. I would do battle with her and win, well sort of.

CHAPTER TWO

Whenever reminiscing about my school I always picture myself playing a game of pool. When the time arrived to get wracked-up after each summer break, I would try any angle to hustle doing art in class past the new teacher instead of the set program. I did not want to be on the stripy side of the game where pupils were uppity. I didn't want to be on the spotty side of the contest either where pupils were underlings. I just wanted to be on the cue-ball of the NOW, in a creative zone where time stood still and the possibilities were limitless. Numerous educators put the dunce's hat on this oddball. I was fired into the corner countless times for looking out the window instead of concentrating on the board. Having seen with my own eyes how easily a near death experience can give us the brush, I was definitely snookered with existential angst. How in one fail swoop my previous score (I was a relatively good pupil) chalked upon the blackboard had almost been erased. When I was put back in the game again my perspective on learning had totally changed. The only thing which makes real what is being taught to us is our focus that goes into it. It should be this that is harnessed in schools. The educational system sucking the creative life energy out of us instead of expanding it, carries on with its succubus syllabus. We continue to box consciousness into subjective tetra packs which over time turns sour leading to the same old repeated inequalities and social ills. The system is more focused on social engineering and mind control. Alternative points of view are put in the corner, the unruly pupil quickly learns avoiding pain is the core teaching taught in school.



My primary school had a crazed nutjob at the helm overseeing the cargo of knowledge getting shipped into the interiors of countless children. Not only blocks of information were being craned into each brain. Something else more primitive was being built by the

extremely angry foreman overseeing the construction. Clearly a vicious animal lurked not far from the surface, which educators were trying to cover up with the curriculum. It would always pop out and show its ugly face. I saw this from an early age. Frequently I was sent to the head-masters office by teachers who didn't know what to do with me. The principal was a diehard proponent of corporal punishment which he administered with a leather strap at the back of the legs. He was like a commandant in a concentration camp, the way he mindlessly meted out punishment with an almost industrial efficiency. I remember once he had over ten children lined-up in the office for "special treatment." Pain was multiplied tenfold when you were last on that conveyor belt of the principal's wrath. Here was a man with a lengthy career of educating under his belt, yet engaged in repeated sadistic violence against little children. The contradiction was duly noted by me. I was learning things no book could teach here. I was studying human nature in school, an extremely interesting and useful subject.

One year I got a teacher who was the most fascinating specimen to study. Miss Milan had no time for my artistic leanings. She demanded I be like everybody else and squeeze the linear format of the curriculum into the most nonlinear structure ever built by the intelligent universe. Miss Milan frequently shouted at me to put away my drawing things. Forcing me with a maliciousness oozing from her speech to concentrate on the black-board lest be sent to the heir commandant. My mind would switch off anyway to spite her negativity and wander the panoramic views of the countryside on display in the windows. Once a fox chase caught my eye, my God that was such an awesome life lesson.

Miss Milan hadn't a word of Italian in her head. She was a very tall lady from county Cork, and had the beautiful sallow complexion of a gypsy rather than an educator. She knitted her own clothes from a dark and light shade of green wool. Everything she knitted herself from the stripy tights up to the beret on her mad Cork head. If that wasn't hardcore enough, she pushed the boat out a bit further. Miss Milan also wore wooden clogs, which she probably carved from the logs of a tree which she had axed herself. There was burning for the whole day in those clogs. There was something about the teacher's eccentricities that appealed to the surrealist in me. I fancied her so much, more than any other fem with her Spanish features and the bulging Dali madness in the eyes. It hurt early in the springtime of the infatuation to see some kids showing no respect to her. To inspire subservience she'd use one of her clogs as a gavel. Not a whisper would be heard in the courtroom after that. My heart then would be throbbing with a loving ach.

You'd imagine being such an eccentric dresser and having strayed so far from southern Irelands rebel enclave to the eastern center of power, that the rule book would be easy for her to disregard. Think again. Inhabiting such a skewed fashion planet she needed the proper procedures and protocols to give her some balance. She needed something heavy on the far-side of the seesaw to bring symmetry to that other part of her personality clearly insane. Compared to other teachers, she was very strict on the thorny issue of homework. It was yet another institution of the school system I really didn't adhere to. One of the first homework assignments she gave the class was on a poem about a flower. We were asked to plant our thoughts on paper about what the poet was trying to say.

I liked these behind-the-scenes assignments requiring a creative acumen and a free-spirited intelligence. I didn't know what to write other than to put a flower inside my copy-book. Very Zen for a kid not yet ten. On Monday morning, first thing, she checked

the homework at her desk. When she got to mine, I was watching with a pounding in my chest. She studied the red poppy for a long time trying to compute whether it was a prank. Then a smile bloomed on her face I'll never forget. Making her way to my desk I half expected her to throttle me. Imagine my surprise when she planted a kiss on my forehead. The inappropriate gesture was an obvious red flag, deserving prison time if waved today. I went puce as the class made the sound kids make when the hint of romance is in the air.

Out in the playground they were all slagging me off, saying Miss Milan was going to knit me a pair of underpants for a wedding present. Hitting back, I told the jeerers that brides don't buy presents for their husbands. Then getting more ensnared for knowing the ins and outs about marriage. Regardless of the heat in the playground, I got into the habit of bringing Miss Milan a flower every Monday when she checked the homework. Because she seemed to turn a blind eye to the absence of my work, I felt we had an understanding; this was how business was conducted. I didn't want the added complication of homework in my life and a solution presented itself. If I was rich, I would have slipped her a twenty. Since I was shit poor, the only viable option was to grease her palm with wild flowers. Stíobhard thought he was such a clever clogs and had the situation well under control.

In the depths of wintertime there was not a poppy, daisy or dandelion to be found in any of the frost-bitten fields on the way to school. Only nettles and thistles grew in abundance, looked like the sting in the cautionary tale wasn't too far away. Literally the first week I reneged on payment and she noticed the absence of my homework in the pile on her desk. I took the empty thing from my bag, done the perp walk and handed her the workbook. Trembling like a leaf, I stared into her eyes feeling like a bug caught in a pitcher plant. This was the exact moment when our flowery financial arrangement wilted.

Her mouth went agape, a soprano singing a silent note. She growled at me to move closer to her desk, calling me; "Boyo." An ominous sign that a painful opera was on the way. It looked like Miss Milan wasn't going to send me to the heir commandant to do her dirty work. She held the copy in her fist and began waving it in the air flamboyantly as she kept saying empty. The teacher never before heard singing in class turned it into a very catchy dance number as Miss Milan repeatedly sang the word empty over and over again. "Empty, empty, empty, empty, empty, empty, empty, empty, empty, empty empty,....." Then to make it worse she began slapping my face with the copybook, hitting each cheek with each repetition of the empty lyric. Then she upped the tempo and jumped out of her chair and grabbed me by the scruff of the neck, while slapping me with the word empty. The poppy flattened into one dimension fell from the pages of the copybook. Suddenly she went silent, halting with the slaps to the face. The teacher looked at it with disgust, the flower on the floor. There was a collective gasp as the class seemed to hold its breath. Miss Milan let go of my neck and went back to her desk looking at me with revulsion.

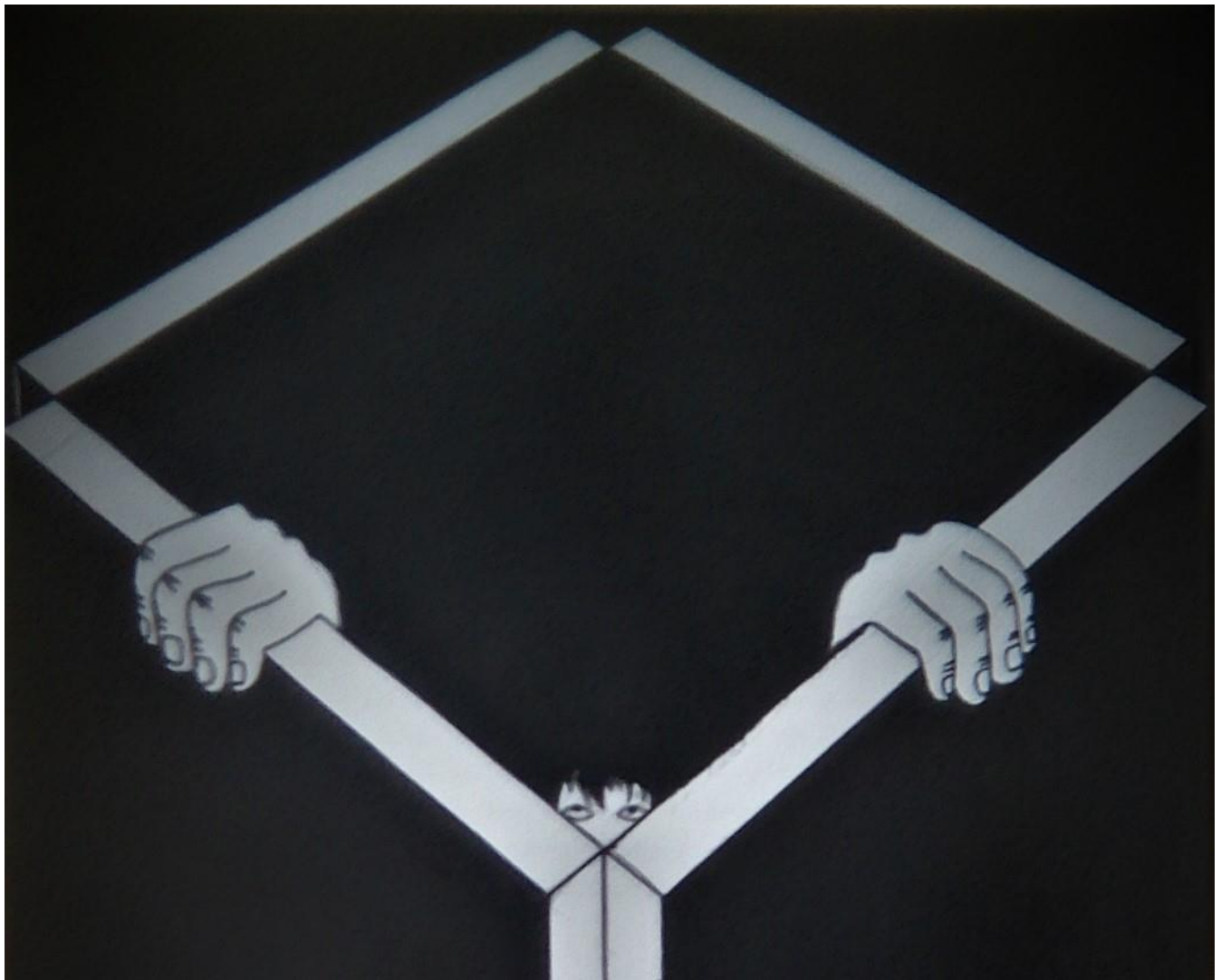
"You boyo, get me that work you owe me, you have till coming Monday, and if you don't produce the goods boyo." She took off one of her heavy clogs and parked it on the table. "You see boyo, these aren't just for walking; they're for dancing too boyo and if I don't get every scrap that's owed to me I'm gonna do an unmerciful jig on your head boyo." I was told then to return to my desk, but was so distraught I couldn't find where my seat was. When I eventually located my place, the two children on either side moved away as if I were a worthless insect to be shunned in case they caught the bug. I had never felt so alone and abandoned as I uncontrollably whimpered throughout the lesson that followed.

Yet another adult, an actual educator had clearly revealed they weren't in a good place despite all their learning. A picture of a psychological city was developing which years later I'd term "Meta4 City." The psycho-architectural metaphor of the manic adult brain was building in my perception at such a young age, not yet ten. The incident echoed what I saw countless times at home. A strong angry uptown feeding off a weak sad downtown. How could I escape life in the weakened state with the aggressive state hot on my heels? This question walked the streetscape of my thinking through lunch break. I am in a cul-de-sac in my head. The sense that I'm utterly trapped followed me wherever I walked. I circled the playground like an inmate in a prison yard. The other kids wouldn't play with me and I was isolated from the group. The margins provide the prisoner plenty of space to hatch an escape plan. If I didn't figure out what to do come Monday when the day of execution arrived, I really only had a handful of sleeps remaining on this earth.

I felt there was no one really to turn to. My mother had enough on her plate dealing with my father who would complain about the shape of the steam billowing from his spuds. As the day drew near, a solution to resolve the dilemma moved increasingly from my grasp. There was no chance I was going to get a quarter of the work grafted into my copy. My twin was in another class and all the other classmates refused even to talk to me as if I had the plague. The only solution I could think of was running away to Dublin City. Maybe I'd find a new family there who would appreciate me more? I even daydreamed about what the new familial sitcom may possibly look like, a childish way to sugarcoat taking such desperate measures. Then at about three am on Monday I took to the roads.

The day of execution came around fast. I awoke at the appointed hour, getting quickly dressed into clothes that were my favorite to wear at the time. The Yale university sweater and blue jeans I wore making the clandestine operation appear like a regular outing. It was nerve wracking sneaking across the creaky landing. I made my way down the stairs waking only the family dog. As was my custom when leaving the house I grabbed a slice of bread, feeding the crust to my best friend Benji as he loyally followed me wherever I went. With my trusty mutt by my side it felt like I was just going out to play. My only plan was to run from the place and see what would happen. We made our way through the village and onto the main Dublin Road unnoticed. It was a dead road at that hour. A highway frequented by ghosts and monsters only a frightened little child could conjure. The grim reaper teacher played football with my mind's eye every step of the way.

An important lesson is chalked out for the ten-year-old on the blackboard of the night. You cannot outrun the grim reaper in your head. If you walk, the grim reaper will walk. If you run, the reaper will run. Only by looking it straight in the eye will it be seen as the shadowy figment of imagination that it is. The light of a car shone ahead in the night sky. It sliced through the dark meat of the night like a sword. It would pierce us soon if I didn't make an effort to evade it. Jumping into the ditch where demonic rats scurried was not much of an option either. I hunkered down motionless holding Benji very tightly, hoping the person driving on this stretch of the dead of night would pass us by. I prayed that he wouldn't notice us. It was bitterly cold without a jacket; the shivers began rattling my skinny little frame. As the howling wind thumped me from every angle, it suddenly struck me how far I'd strayed outside the box. I became very worried, what if my escape from the confines of one confined space, merely landed me into the confines of another?



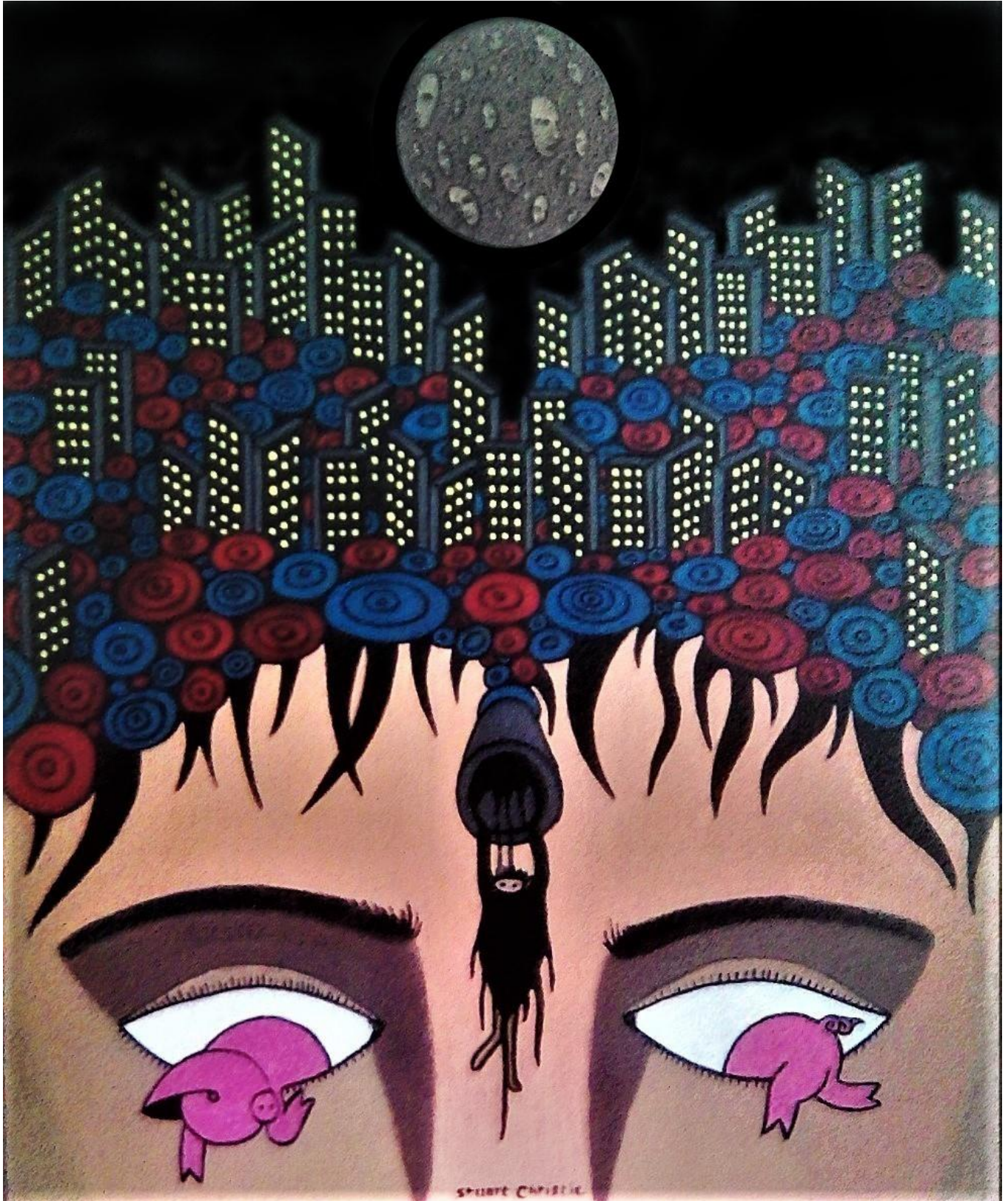
Could the approaching car be a vehicle to a new life? The car held us for what seemed like an infinity in its headlights. As it passed us it stopped abruptly. The game was up for the runaway pupil and his canine accomplice. The door opened and I went to see what the driver wanted. Inside the car a familiar face peered out at me asking was I alright. Thankfully he was the father of a kid I knew in school who revealed to us once while playing cops and robbers his dad was a policeman. We were the last people he expected to meet heading home from a busy night hunting criminals. We got into the car and were swiftly escorted back to the house in Kelly Park. As he drove, I told the most fantastic lie. He was forced to stop to get a clear grasp of the story I had just improvised on the spot. "Kidnapped by the IRA?" He asked utterly shocked. It was so outrageous it just may work. "He didn't say he was from the IRA." I answered, my trembling voice giving the story a dimension of truthfulness. The yarn began with a knock on the door late into the night. "The whole house was fast asleep." I said on the brink of a genuine emotional downpour. "I was half asleep myself when I answered, never expected to find such a strange man. "What did he look like? Asked the Garda, clearly hooked. May as well go the whole hog. "He had a bavaclava over his face, and an army jacket." The detective smiled at my silly mispronunciation of balaclava. (I had seen terrorist figures wearing them on the news.) "Benji started barking at the fella and I was told to silence him or else he'd snap his neck. While I kept Benji quiet, he grabbed us both from the house, dragging us by the scruff down the road. Then the man started cursing to himself for knocking on the wrong door."

When quizzed by the policeman whether it was possible to tell if the man sounded local; if he was from Dublin? I informed him he spoke with a very strong northern Irish accent. "Me and the dog needed to be stashed in a place where we couldn't go ratting him out to the cops. (I had a vague suspicion the Garda didn't like that word.) This would give the man plenty of time to get to the safe house. He put us both into the boot of his car parked around the corner. After a short bumpy ride he dumped us both at Blake's Cross on the motorway." The policeman asked did I know the make of the car. I scratched my head pretending to recollect the memory. I said no, was so scared didn't even register the color. "I had a rough idea where we were and so made our way back to the village and met yourself." To my absolute astonishment the seasoned Garda who was a detective believed the tale I recounted. He delivered me and the dog back to the house. He patted my head and said I was a good boy. I felt like a child at Christmas. I ran through the open door and up the stairs while the policeman conducted a perimeter search. Since my father was on duty, I only had to wake my mother up. I paced inside the kitchen while they were busy discussing what to do next out in the hall. When they were finally done talking my mother came into me, her face forlorn as she lit a smoke. With Miss Milan still weighing heavily on my mind I shared the same lie told to the policeman with my mother as well. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph." Is all she could say. It is all any mother could say on the north side of Dublin. I went to bed with the knowledge that I'd have to face the wrath of Miss Milan in the morning with her clogs. My mother would have me go to school no matter what happened. I practically begged her on my knees to please let me stay at home. I suffered with migraine headaches as a child. Many a time I went to school with a splitting fissure in my brain; so it was out of the question getting a day off school for the miniscule event of a kidnapping. My mother observing that there wasn't a single scratch on me, decided it would be business as usual. It felt like I was being ushered to the gallows, my ordeal made worse by smirking pupils in the class who seemed to relish my awaiting fate. "Just get the beating over with." I told myself through clenched teeth at the start of class. I was seriously stressed, the shakes worse than delirium tremens. The whole class was ill at ease too, the ripples of my anxious brainwaves bouncing off every brain in the class. When she made her entrance; more flamboyant than usual, there was another one of those dramatic gasps. Her woolen skirt grazed the back of my head sending an extra shiver through me. Thought my head was going to explode. The teacher loved the tension, tapping the pile of copies at her desk when she landed in her chair. She took off a clog, placing it on the table. She made a phone ringing sound and put the lump up to her ear. "Hello, [pause] yes, can you send an ambulance please to Lusk national school, a little boyo who refuses to do his homework needs urgent medical assistance." The entire class erupted into the raucous laughter of an insane asylum. Miss Milan then slammed down the gavel onto the wooden table, producing a collective spike in all of the little heart rates. There was a deadly silence in the classroom after that as she took the first copy from the top to correct. I was thinking of escaping again when there was a knock on the door. "Enter please." Said Miss Milan very business-like. The headmaster stood at the door; very odd, he always walked in without knocking. He had a meek subservient demeanor as opposed to his usual uppity manner. He looked deflated, the wind knocked out of him. His black hair was disheveled like he'd just woken up, and the glasses were slightly skewed too. It was almost as if he'd just been spat out from a brawl. I kind of pitied him.

“Eh Stuart, there are two Dublin detectives here who wish to speak with you.” He never addressed me by name when hitting me with his leather strap. It was an unnatural sound. I looked at Miss Milan, a shock horror expression uncorked on the Cork woman’s face. Every pupil in the classroom eyed the teacher as she quickly removed the lump of wood from the desktop. For just a moment I savored the aromatic scent of the comeuppance flower pollinating the air. Now Dublin is on the boom side of town, time for Cork to go downtown. Put the dunces hat on Miss clever clogs on your way to the corner. Much later I would draw amusing cartoons of the teacher being hauled off by the Feds in handcuffs. “Don’t mess with me bitch, I’ve called the Feds on all of your illegal teaching practices.” In actuality I was scared maybe more than they were, my legs when I got up had gone all rubbery. The more I concentrated on walking normally, the more abnormally I walked. I followed the disgruntled headmaster down to his office where the two detectives were waiting. I was told to sit in the heir commandants massive leather chair behind his desk. It was akin to inviting the least of the royal entourage to park their tush on the throne. I just couldn’t do it. I was so very institutionalized despite my reluctance to follow the homework program. They prompted me to sit in an adjacent seat and the headmaster nervously dismissed himself before the detectives told him to go. One of them sat next to me while the other kept standing. Both were crisp and fresh, taller than the principal who was a six-footer. Noticing my nervous shaking they offered some calming words. “There is no need to be nervous, now Stuart just tell us what happened from the start.” I was gently prompted to tell the fib to the Fed sitting so close it was much harder to lie. Getting back into the groove was difficult. I was a nervous wreck having to retell the lie, I don’t know where I got the brass neck to repeat to the spiffily attired gents the account of the bogus kidnapping. I told them word for word what I had reported the first time, not deviating one word from the plot I’d already dug. Excavating the tall tale again I noticed these archeologists were more forensic, not easily fooled by fictional artefacts. The Feds were not satisfied with my sketchy synopses and wanted the finer details. They prodded and probed the in-between places where I was at pains to explain. I answered as best my childish imagination could think up a response that fitted in with the scenario. It was putting a strain on my brain, going over again and again every painstaking detail. The sheen started to disappear from the Feds as I was made to go over the story lord knows how many times. It exhausted my brain thousands of times more taxing than all the homework assignments I never done all put together. So many lies stacked on each other, I didn’t know there was a capacity in me to lie so much. When I thought my brain was going to crack with the endless repetitions, I tripped and added a new detail to the story which wasn’t there before. Shoe laces. My mother always warned me that all liars eventually trip themselves up. I had just provided the rope to hang myself with. I don’t know why I decided to tell them that the kidnapper had tied me up with shoe laces. One of the Feds enquired was it while lying in the boot or outside the car that I was tied up. “Emmmm” Gazing skyward I pretended to recollect from the previous night’s memory. “Yes, I was inside the car when he tied me up.” I told the man, at this stage getting very fed-up with the Feds and their endless lines of enquiry. Once I furnished them with that detail, I had to stick with it. It was a vitally important tread I’d neglected to include in the original yarn. Could clearly tell they were suspicious, something different had crept into the way they looked at me. We all then took a break when the bell rang for lunchtime.

Returning to the empty classroom to fetch my lunch I passed Miss Milan in the corridor. I made sure to keep the head down and have no eye contact whatsoever. Not so easy to ignore the manic pestering when I got out to the yard. Reports had leaked out through my brother about the kidnapping. I was inundated with virtually the whole school asking questions. Even kindergarten kids got into asking me about the boogie man taking me. "FUCK OFF!" I felt like roaring. It was like the most crazy, anarchic press conference imaginable. With hundreds of different questions about the story that required so much more brain power than I could handle on my own. I felt the weight and strain on my little childhood brain. A hamlet of an intellect was suddenly immersed in the busy sprawl of the adult mind, a very hostile and unforgiving place; especially if they found out I told lies. A part of me was amazed as well, fascinated how easily it was for the adult world to get carried away with a simple story, with a blatant porky pie. Well not just one lie but a whole god damned city of lies I had become in the space of a single night the architect of. Through that construct I became a quasi-celebrity. For a long time afterwards kids with their mummies would point at me as though I were an object, an animal in the zoo. I didn't like this fame one bit; it is a form of madness. Not a week before and I was shunned like a fishy smell. Now everyone was on me like gulls a fishing boat returning with a catch. Some love that kind of attention and easily bask in the glory. It merely made me feel like a bug, caught in the web of my own making. The unmerciful weight of the adult mind would easily squish the bug who had so dishonestly woven such a complex web of deceit. The fear of being found out was gnawing away at my brain. A migraine was surely on the cards when all the dust settled. So sick with anxiety I couldn't eat my lunch. When they all find out, I will undoubtedly be classed as a bug. When lunchtime was over the Feds took me to the location where allegedly I claimed to be dumped along the roadside. I wanted ever so badly to confess that it was all a fiasco. I showed them the place where I imagined I was left on a grassy embankment straddling along the road at Blake's Cross. The co-op was in spitting distance busy with vehicles delivering produce. Forklifts toing and froing around the huge co-op building were making me more distracted than usual. "You managed Stuart to get the shoe laces off yourself while on the ground?" One of the detectives asked. He got down on one knee and began sifting through the grass like a chimpanzee looking for nits in the hair of another. In my head I was pulling my hair out, entreating them not to go where I thought they were heading. Clearly, they were itchy with doubt and scratching irritably at the story. I felt the huge weight of the artifice I had built begin to dismantle. All those lies stacked like dominos, with the discovery of just one badly constructed mistruth and the whole damn city was heading for collapse. I could smell the apocalypse in the air, its stench even in these country parts stronger than the smell of cow dung. These Feds so gentlemanly would soon lose their easy-going rural demeanour and come down on me like a ton of bricks. I felt the harsh weight of that harsh mindscape on me already, grinding me down with the questions in their eyes. Besides a malice which I had detected in them for sure; I could see the mill of their analytical psychology too, pulverizing the grains of mistruth I'd planted to a floury dust. "How did you loosen the laces?" Asked the detective consulting a notepad as he spoke. "You mentioned in your statement that both hands and feet were bound." He waited for me to respond. Then a tractor passed us by headed for the village. The farmer scratched

his head, dumfounded at the sight of two suits with a little kid at the side of the road. “What the fucks going on here?” Was what I read from the farmers expression. Then as he kept casting backward glances long after passing, looking back it was kind of funny. “Yes” I declared when the noise of the agricultural vehicle got swallowed up by the road. “I got Benji to bight them off.” Soon as I said it, I knew my goose was cooked. The dominos fell, the city of fabrications I had built was razed to the ground. For an instant I closed my eyes, in my mind I was a bug about to be squished by the heal of a big boot.



When opening them again, I was surprised by what I saw. The two detectives looked at each other and smiled. The penny had dropped and they knew well that I had made the whole escapade up. They said nothing as they drove me back to school. Though they kept whispering to one another in the front, the mood was surprisingly lighthearted. By the time we got back to the school, lessons for the day were drawing to a close. They actually shook my hand as they bid adieu, remarking that I would make a great actor one day. There was nothing that they could do after being duped by a kid but to see the funny side I suppose. Without a word they went on their merry way back to the big smoke laughing their heads off. I returned to the class extremely relieved and chuckling to myself too. Upon my return, there was a blank piece of paper with coloring pencils in my place at the table. Just the way I like it. The teacher was conducting a history lesson on the blackboard for all to Xerox into their brains. I started to draw a face of a man wearing a black balaclava. I just can't get into it, something far more interesting is happening in the room. The teachers impassioned oration against the evils of slavery captivates my attention. After putting my drawing things away I listen very intently to the tail end of Abraham Lincolns heroic biography. Miss Milan tells us that he helped liberate multitudes from enslavement to a distorted system in which one group was the sole property of another. For some reason the subject matter fascinated me immensely. Miss Milan sees me smiling and smiles back. All is well, well sort of.

CHAPTER THREE

I can still remember the sleepless night before my first day at secondary school. Anxiety chain-saws deep into the neural thicket of my thirteen-year-old brain cutting me off from sleep. The childhood dreamscape once an enchanted wood filled with magical creatures has fallen prey to the spell of a disenchanting desert where evil parasites have dominion. Something was obviously bugging me; the hive of incessant mental activity has morphed into a superspreader. All because my older sister said good luck in the new school nitwit. That's my new title, she's really good at cultivating and planting nasty weaponized bugs. What can I say, in a close nit family unit, bugs will pass between each other like wildfire. I am aware of the malware virus holding us all ransom. Wish I had the mental prowess to hack her brain the way she does mine, get across a family is held together by love and not this lopsided program. The way she dominates the narrative would put Israel to shame. Guess who's on the Gaza side of the border wall? She played the parental political divide to a fine art, matters not which side is pretending to be in power. Her narrative dominated the house, virtually impossible for alternative views to get a word in edgeways. One-sided dogma eventually leads to a dog-eat-dog paradigm.



Boarding the bus to school for the first time was definitely a walk on the wild side with both sides of the aisle filled with barks, growls, wolf whistles and howls at the moon. Leaving primary school for the fiercer pound of secondary school felt particularly rough. Just as I had feared, a contentious bone is thrown my way on induction day. By lunchtime I'm cavorting with strays, a mongrel collar designating a lower class fastened around my neck. There is a dogged determination in this pup to suck it up and jump through the academic hoops set by the curriculum maybe better than the poodles in the upper classes. Didn't regard it as schooling, more accurately kenneled at Balbriggan community college in the north of the county. Our parents permitted us to choose our own secondary school, which consequently scattered my siblings to the four winds. I did not pick Balbriggan because it famously made queen Victoria's bloomers. I didn't care either that it got its arse kicked by the Brits during the war of independence. I chose it simply because it had a beautiful beach nearby. My folks making more of a comment on my short stature warned me about Balbriggan's rough reputation. Ignoring the bad tidings, I drifted off into my own dreamscape. The fantasy literature I was only starting to read sent ripples into this new chapter in my narrative. This new adolescent realm was openly hostile

towards anything from the childhood shire. A tiny hobbit like me had to quickly form a fellowship with others before the orcs in this part of middle earth decided to eat me alive.

A circle of friends from the same circular housing estate organically grew around me. Reminiscing about my teenage chums, I always picture a cake laced with grunge music. I saw myself as the alpha tier of course, the weirdo ringleader on vocals. The second in command was Radius on guitar, he was the quirky bright spark of the crew who never made a big deal out of being the smartest. Semicircle was the dumb archetype on drums, definitely not the full shilling. Last but not least, the very well-rounded Diameter on base, he was the one with the pretty face guaranteeing the attention of girls flowed our way. Thought we were so cool, believed we'd get away with whatever caper sprang to mind. What a blazing ring of fire my circle of friends left in their wake. Fingal during the winter months burned like a heretic at the stake. In stark contrast to the antisocial antics sewn in the bleak furrows of winter, there was a somewhat penitential crop harvested during the summer when we picked tomatoes. Lusk is so riddled with glasshouses it is hard to throw a stone without shattering a pane of glass with a tomato plant looking back at you. I can't resist using the cracking pun that we mostly had a smashing time, skateboarding and playing games of pool in the local pub. The activities that took place in that poolroom was borderline criminal. We were not the first minors in history to have breached the boundaries of what is regarded as acceptable behavior. Even our dress sense refused to walk the line. It was my bright idea to wear a black pentagram emblazoned on my chest, only to discover the following day my acolytes followed suit. We so relished spooking the locals, they'll never see the likes of us again washed upon the shores of that seaside town.



The strange sect frequently went on camping trips together too, you'd imagine to engage in pagan practices involving animal sacrifice. Not at all, we embarked on surprisingly wholesome adventures hiking throughout the Wicklow mountains. All that adolescent energy was put to good use. It took a while to get back into the swing of things when we returned. Small kids hid behind their mothers legs peering fretfully as we sauntered by. "They're back Mammy!" Their stunned silences seemed to say. People around town started calling us "The Lusk Mafia" More like Torta Nostra since we were so renowned for baking antisocial cakes. One time we were lounging about on a patch of grass across the road from a local grocery shop. Such a pack of goons, butter wouldn't melt. A portly breadman delivering a tray of his freshest to the shop caught my attention. I timed him inside the premises, it was well over five minutes when he emerged to fill his tray again. An evil plan was then baked in the oven of my thieving brain to steal some dough. I egged the others to follow and we headed for the bread van parked at the side of the shop where nobody would see a thing. Bold as brass we passed the breadman with his second load, surrounding the vehicle with one mouth-watering thought in mind. Cream doughnuts. We all knew without saying a word that there was a safe house nearby where we could enjoy the proceeds of our crime free from any pesky parents.

When we raided the target what we found was disappointing. The robbers expecting notes in the vault found only coinage. To our surprise the apple tarts were scrumptious and we only proffered the middle finger at the almond fingers. I got my mitts on a heavy box I didn't know what it contained. I escaped with the cumbersome bulk anyway, running down the road in broad daylight through the village with the breadman's booty. No one batted an eyelid at the thieves passing the heavy box to one another to spread the strain. It really was some weight. When we got to the free gaff and opened the box, the thought burning in our brains that it was some class of safe with loads of cash inside. When we got it opened we were sorely vexed. It was a Pandora's box containing hundreds of folded boxes for cakes. It went into the fire and we had a feast with the haul that was edible. With our stomachs full to the brim, there was plenty left for a food fight making a whore out of the virginally clean kitchen. I remember just watching the confectionary war raging around me and feeling a sick horribleness inside that made me want to puke what we'd just ingested. The other guilty fiends observing the bitter expression on a face so criminally sugarcoated showered me with a dozen or so almond fingers.

We weren't the worse juvenile delinquents on the planet. There were teens elsewhere in the projects undoubtedly smoking crack and calling their mummies bitches. Whereas our gang of hardcore could be observed at lunch putting limited funds together to buy a cake. I can picture us walking down the streets laying into a coffee cake or a big heavy chocolate gateaux. A passerby might make a passing remark enquiring who the fucks birthday it was. That was our cue to finger the percussionist shouting "Happy birthday Semicircle." When we had polished off the cake we would be on the last slice of break. Surfing a sugar buzz that didn't last long, the grungy dudes might be spotted washed-up on Balbriggan beach adjacent the train station. At the end of one lunch hour I spotted a gang of Sharon's their pigtails visible above the stations platform wall. There is an unspoken law that says all Sharon's are sworn enemies of Stuarts. I do not know who invented such a stupid rule, I was merely born a Stuart caught up in the silly tradition. Something just clicked and I totally lost it, yelling vile expletives up at the Sharon's, cock sure the gang wouldn't have

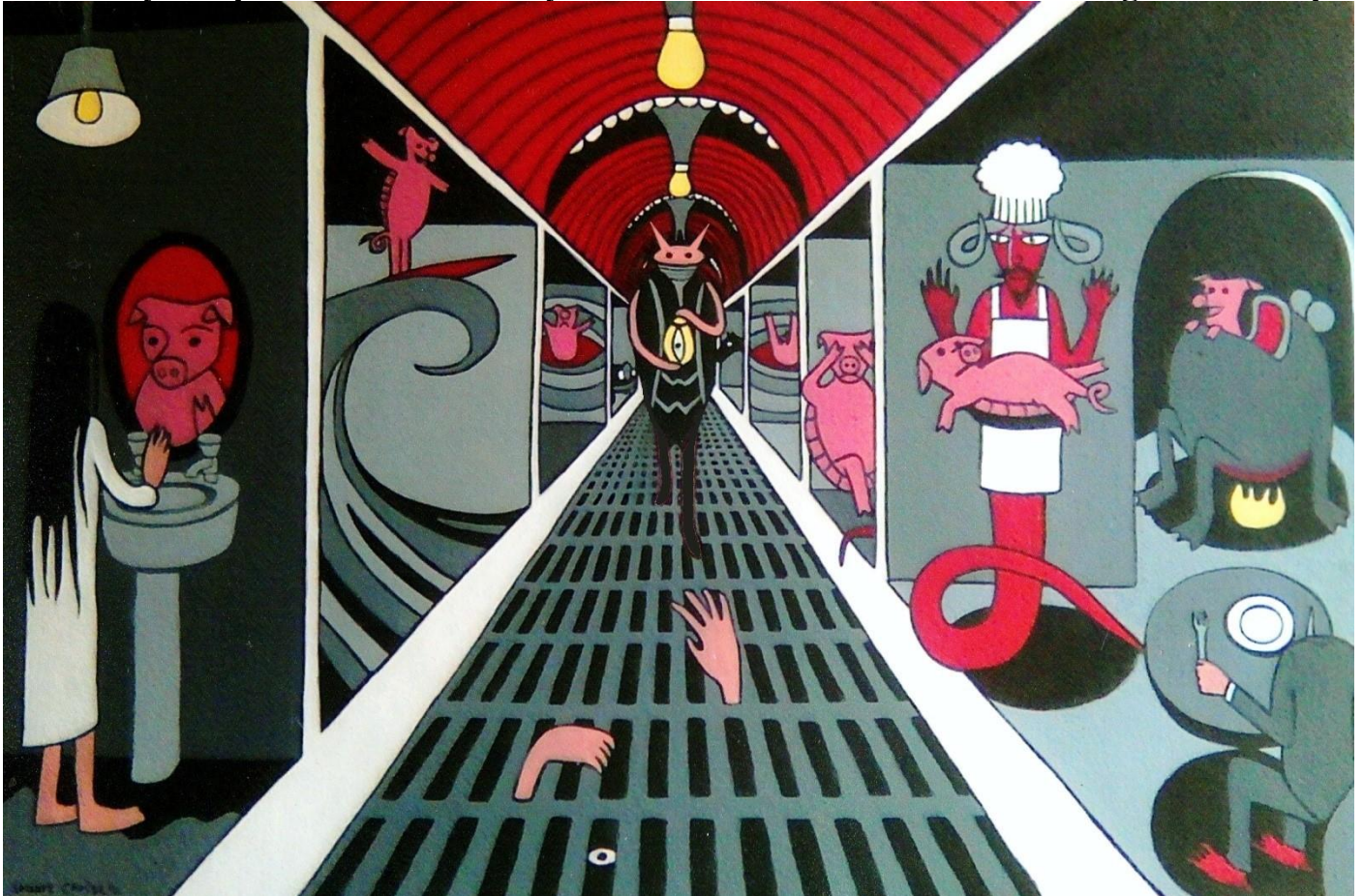
the balls to jump the wall and miss the train into town. I was really giving them an earful. "Come down here and we'll give you a good Lusing." I declared to the gang of five Sharon's, thinking I was the man; the stand-up comedian of the group. A very reckless thing to do. The band were cursing at me for putting them into jeopardy. You only made such a reckless provocation if you had a fresh bag of chips doused in salt and vinegar. The Sharon's weak spot for fresh chips would divert their attention, allowing any perceived Stuarts in their territory to escape. The whole gang scaled the wall, sprinting down a steep gradient after us. The circle scattered in all directions running for dear life. No pillow talk with this crew. They jumped straight in all guns blazing. Jesus these were hardcore Sharon's. I thought it was a clever move escaping into the main town and hid in the library which all Sharon's abhor. Radius got away too, running through a heavily fortified council estate saturated in Sharon's. The gamble paid off and he came out at the other end in one piece. The percussionist wasn't so lucky. Two of the Sharon's cornered him and threw the drummer into the sea. Semicircle didn't drown, he was just humiliated having to endure the rest of his day soaked to the bone. Diameter got nabbed too but was able to sweet talk the Sharon who had a glint in her eye for the good looking charmer.

When I got back to school there was a surprise waiting for me in math's class. A Sharon came in with an angry equation on her face which I could only solve. The first beating I ever received while sitting in a chair. The teacher along with the whole class stunned and entertained in equal measure by the violent antics of the butch female gleefully watched. I just put the head down and let her unleash the pain. She really did go to town on me. I had ruined a half days truant for her and her gang. When she finished, I stuck my head up doing my best meerkat impression. My ears were ringing with the feedback you get from a microphone. All were gawking my way waiting for me to explode. There certainly was something brewing in my mind for ages which wanted out. I had been wracking my brains in math's class seeking an answer to this problem for a very long time.

"Had I been killed just now, what would Pythagoras and all his fucken theorems have done for me, huh?" I posed the question to the math's teacher, the only question I ever asked in math's. All heads turned to the teacher for the next volley. He could only hit back with a contrite "Humph" in response. For the guts of half a decade now I have sat at the back quiet as a mouse, listening to the teacher lauding math's every day, saying without mathematics nobody would be able to take a number one nor a number two. I hated this shite class. Pretty much operating from an illogical hemisphere in my head I'd love to shove all the math's teachers logical computations up his theoretical blackhole. My brain went to a funereal place once the teacher started chalking the mathematical hieroglyphics on the blackboard. Luckily art class was next where my dead, mummified brain was resurrected into a livelier dimension. Yes, the negative and positive polarities created by the mind I was totally enmeshed. Yet still peripherally aware of their influence outside my control. How my mood could so easily shift going from one class to another was an interesting subject for me to reflect on when there was a tedious subject underway. By fifteen I was becoming increasingly interested in the workings of the human mind. Though psychology wasn't on the curriculum, I studied it more than any other subject.

In my mid-teens I became heavily influenced by Surrealism which branched out into psychology, Freud, Jung, and even mnemonics. I wasn't a hardcore surrealist, arriving into school wearing a baguette on my head. There was no desire in me to revel in insanity,

I was only interested in surrealism as a therapeutic tool to help open doorways into the unconscious. I became an avid recorder of dreams, helping me to spin a never-ending cobweb of irrationality. I became literally overnight a curator of nightmarish imaginings, scouring the subconscious catacombs for inspiration. Besides serving as an escape from the mundane surface reality on the ground, my art also helped to process the madness. Whatever fecal matter life threw at me, I was learning how to change into subject matter. I was even able to channel certain personality anomalies, but was unable to completely exterminate the diminished sense of self scurrying within the crawl space of my thinking. Kafka had a similar issue; his *Metamorphosis* really resonated with my sixteen-year-old self when first I began reading his work. There was a bug in me for sure, an insectile inferiority complex that made it very difficult to create and sustain binding relationships.

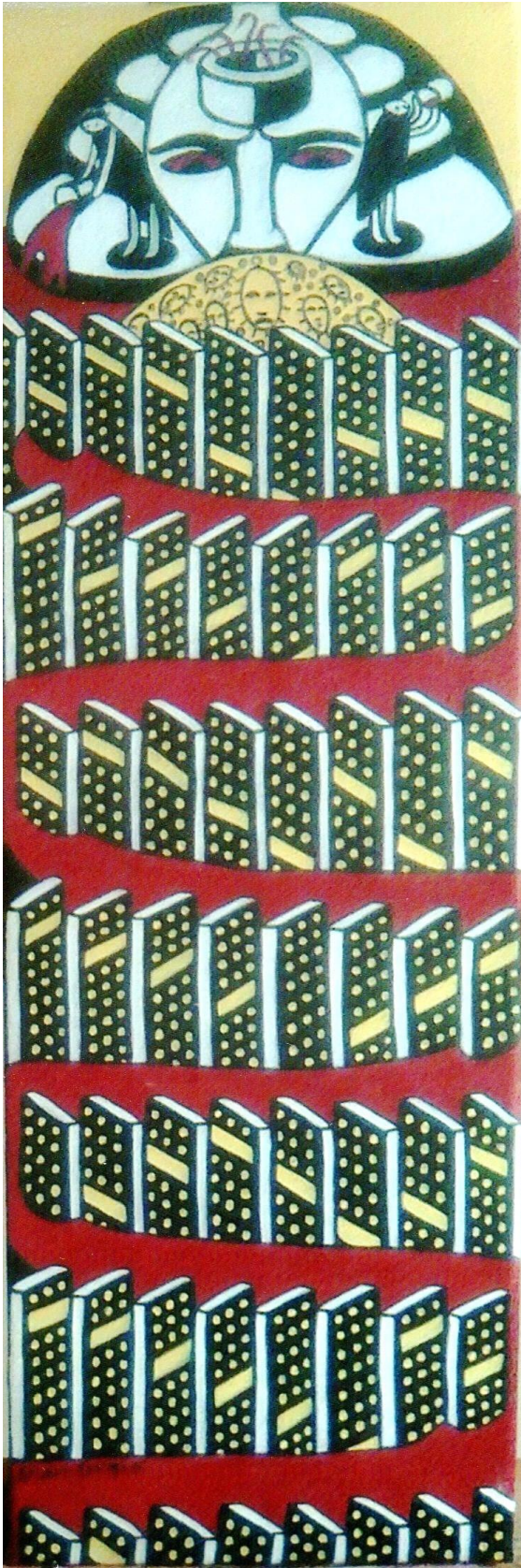


I was growing distant from my friends too, who had no comprehension of this other path. As the tectonic plates of life shifted, we drifted apart without any big dramatic schism. My mother grew worried about this new course, but was powerless to do anything. The constant disharmony at home had rendered any parental guidance towards harmony obsolete. I used to stay on the bus when all the pupils got off at the last stop for school. I would escape into Dublin and visit the national art gallery and the Hugh Lane. I was a very cultured truant. I used to go to secluded spots too, writing poetry and drawing my pictures. I loved heading off to the beach at wintertime; something in the desolation that appealed to me. No one seemed to notice my absences from school. I was never quizzed about my escapades that sometimes lasted most of the week. There was no real parental center of gravity keeping me on a normal orbit. I daresay the teachers were glad they didn't have to deal with the kid at the back of the class with the creepy look in his eye.

If there was a subject that made your flesh crawl I would be at the top of the class. Frequently I spot a bug reflected in most of the eyeballs that look my way. I am a parasite in paradise, feeding on the nocturnal nectar of the dream world. How I loved to collect the subconscious pollen of the mind. One night something floated into my dream garden unlike anything that had bloomed inside before. It was such an enigmatic visitation; it took me ages to interpret its meaning, intuiting it wasn't entirely of my own making. There were aspects that were clearly produced from a teenagers brain, but something else was at work here more advanced than what I'd manufactured before. It differed so much from other reversed engineered dreams that it required both writing and painting to replicate all the multidimensional components. It made all the other visionary vehicles look like horse drawn carriages. This was not an earthbound vision; this was a revelation. I relished bringing my new creations into school and feeding the burgeoning portfolio nesting in the art room. Every week I brought fresh pictorial meat to my ever-expanding oeuvre. Unbeknownst to me there were some who took notice of the little gothic critter feeding the humongous creative cuckoo's nest many times my size. I didn't know that anyone gave a hoot about my work until one day a pupil I didn't know started hailing me as a great artist. My art teacher I learnt had been secretly showing off my stuff to the other classes, saying I showed great promise and a rare aptitude for color. I was so happy that he was flaunting my wares to my fellow peers that it actually made me blush.

I was very fond of my art teacher, I cared more for him than my own father. I'd explode into fits of belly laughter when he planted a joke while the rest of the class wore frowns. They had good reason not to find his irreverent wit funny. It didn't bother me that the art teacher would physically knock the snot out of you if he caught you sniffing in class. So what if the sound of mucus coursing through the nasal passages drove him insane? Everyone knew the rules from the start. You could fart, sing or make whatever sound you liked. He warned all newbie's clearly on the first day. Everyone knew after the initial induction that if ever he got the whiff of a sniff in his classroom, he'd woefully make the sniffer pay the price. Yet it must be said that he didn't mind you blowing your nose and exorcising the snot via the proper channels. There was a specific area in the corner of the classroom for blowing your nose complete with a little bin and a roll of toilet paper on a shelf. Not wanting to get on the wrong side of him, I never sniffed once in the whole five years I was there. Now that is some achievement, not to be sniffed at.

My heart usually leapt when I spotted him outside, whizzing by on his motorcycle. There was no doubting my own heterosexuality. Yet it did occur to me sometimes why I didn't experience the same spike in emotion whenever I encountered teachers from the opposite sex. Only with the art teacher did I have a special connection. Everything he told us about history and civilization I adopted and recycled into my own worldview which tended to express itself in art. He loved to flaunt and boast of his own artistic prowess. I adored it when he took out his own portfolio for us all to peruse and admire. It was bulging at the seams with pastel portraits of past pupils who had crossed swords with him. He took note of every snotty nosed teenager who fought back against his prohibition on sniffing. I remember the mugshot of one student in particular, he was about fifteen years old with a very sinister look aflame in his eye. The art teacher informed us that the teen back in nineteen eighty-three had stabbed him with a pen in the leg. I could clearly intuit a hellfire burning at the hearth of his art. I was beginning to see it in my own artwork too.



I used to ponder where all this art was coming from. I wondered if the fluffy, cuddly world I had created as a child came from the same place as the scary, violent cityscape I was fiendishly building as a teenager. Both light and dark projections of the mind were as unreal as each other. Art rather than serving as decoration, acted as a portal into my interior world. The hideous reflections posed during adolescence pointed towards an inner turmoil which that time of radical change inflicts on all of us. You can't imagine ever returning to the universe of purity and innocence experienced during childhood. My mother would woefully mourn the days long gone when the cartoon world animated my imagination. When teddy bears bounced on clouds and slid down rainbows floated my inner skies. Their crimson juices now flowed in profusion throughout the streets and alleyways of my thinking. Now serial killers and urban decay caught my attention. The dismembered remains of cartoon cadavers filled the crime scene pictures of my adolescent artwork. When my folks happened to investigate these windows into my private world, they quickly wished they hadn't. The general consensus from my parents was that I was screwed up. This they didn't need to argue about. Of course, I could easily get sucked into a mental debate. If I got rid of the blood and the gore what would be left anyway? Would the fluff be enthroned if the scary stuff was cast out? That particular thought was the scariest of all. How I adored my gruesome artefacts sent to me from that other bloodcurdling dimension. They rained down into my imagination and I let myself be a city flooded in blood. Slabs upon slabs of thinking, cemented together by nothing other than pain and suffering. If I didn't have art to help me vent all this red-hot magma, the eruptions that sometimes exploded might've otherwise turned out much worse.

I remember getting into a fight with my twin brother when we were seventeen. At the end of which, he remarked that I was heading towards the precipice of failing my exams. He somehow knew I wasn't attending school. The brawl jostled me awake, yanking me from the netherworld. It forced me to press pause on my subterranean horseplay and tend to the donkeywork on the ground. Since my twin had not saddled any courses yet, the very vengeful buckeroo started lassoing the five main art colleges around the country.

Three hurdles needed to be surmounted to get in. A practical project exam was required to be completed first just to get my foot in the door. Having passed the first stage, I got notifications from all the colleges I had submitted to seeking an audience with myself and the massive portfolio. I was well on the way to teaching my brother an important lesson. I just had the mountain of passing my exams to climb. At the eleventh hour of all my schooling I had practically done nothing. I had spent most of the last two years ditching school. Then one day casually browsing the self-help section in a bookstore in Dublin, a volume on mnemonics fell into my lap. The teaching hailing from as far back as ancient Greece explored the art of memorizing. It was the one thing that I needed. I applied the core principals in the book onto all the subjects in the curriculum. In the space of just one month of study I was able to cram all the things which needed to be learnt into my mind maps. For the first time in my life I actually got to enjoy studying, applying my wild imagination to the task. It made it not only easy but fun to recall word for word the massive blocks of information that needed to be remembered. It showed me how amazing the computers of our brains are. The education system did not have a clue about such a mnemonic program, neither did the one who wrongly predicted my failure. I passed my exams with flying colors, much to the consternation of my twin who didn't do so well.

When official letters requesting interviews for art college arrived, I felt validated for the first time. Such a weird feeling; it gave me confidence to show my stuff off to the world. I reveled at the opportunity of visiting the various academic centers around Ireland. A perfect opportunity to gauge reactions to the new art different from all the other visions in the portfolio. I couldn't wait to see whether one artwork in particular would garner a strong emotional response. Little did I know that many an artist in the past had made a stab at similar kind of subject matter. Where would art be without the crimson madness?

I had interviews for the five art colleges around the country. I was nervous and totally unaccustomed to conversing with strangers. By the time I got to Sligo, the last college on the itinerary, my performance had been perfected. Beginning the presentation, the huge portfolio case would be opened, producing a dramatic gust into the faces of my audience. While the interviewers scanned the first few pieces, I would consult a yellow legal pad containing the writings to accompany the visuals. When they got to the piece entitled; "Dragons in my head" (The final picture in the collection) I braced myself, parting the drape of black hair from my eyes and smiled at my three interviewers telling them that I hoped to marry textual material with visual content in my art practice. The painting of the red dragons splayed out before the panel in the conference room practically roared demanding elucidation. My eyes were drawn to the middle of the panel where radiated a warm smile so like a fire next to the frosty reception I was getting from the other two. Trying not to focus on them too much, I began discussing the dream behind the vision.

In the dream I found myself lost in an institution of some kind, very much like a prison. After much searching, I discovered an open door to a cell. Peering inside I met the inmate who looked more like a homeless vagrant than a criminal. The old man recognized me. "Come for the sword Squire, you'll get no fight from me?" The old man pulled a blade from the tattered rags he was wearing. Despite the darkened interior the sword had the sky at noon tempered into its steel. I went over to the weapon lain beside him on the bed. "You'll battle with a whole city full of demons." Said the vagrant. "And free many from the belly of the beast." Grasping the sword, I asked where will I find this city of demons.

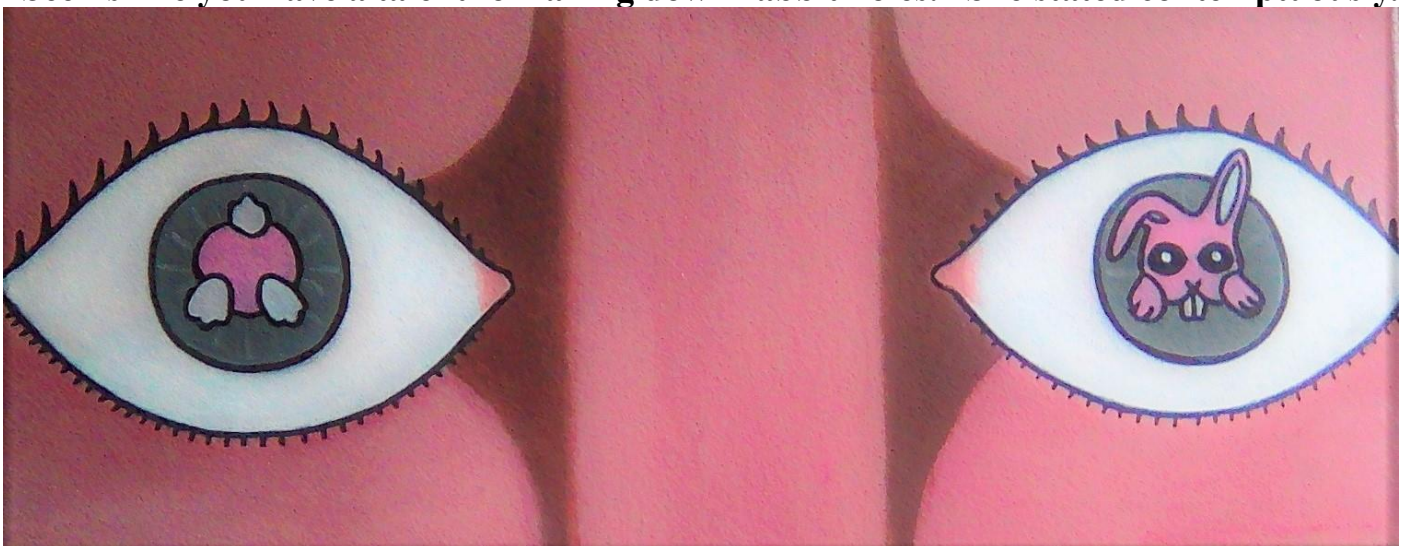


**“The dragons in your head, my dear knight can only be slain with a spiritual sword.”
He said tapping his temple, looking more like Merlin from Arthurian legend than a hobo.**

Rather dramatically I fell to my knees before the wizardly geezer, pleading and weeping. “I am defo not a knight; my armor is the exoskeleton of a cockroach. Far from a Knight, I am a bug, I am a bug...” I kept repeating until I awoke. Not the entire landscape of that dream, it would take another twenty years before I got to explore its prophetic geography. Onto the concluding part of my presentation, I readied myself to recite a verse inspired by the dream. The smiling elderly gent in the middle has a receptive wide-eyed expression while the two interviewers on the wings clearly have a bug in their eyes. And so I began turning the page in the yellow legal pad to recite the rhyme entitled: Dragons in my Head.

*I think there are dragons in my head.
The creatures of thought are the color red.
When I'm angry or sad they get their bread.
When they roar aloud everyone feels dread.
When I am happy, they seem to go to bed.
I want to kill them before they grow into bloodshed.
If they manage to first make me dead,
how will the dragons in my head be fed?*

“Not exactly a Shakespear sonnet.” I said somewhat downplaying what seemed to be a good performance. It was solid and yet deadpan, close to what was intended. Not a hint of the quivering voice that haunted previous renditions, on this occasion it was a velvety smooth delivery. Despite the reassurances to myself, I got the feeling by the awkward silence in the room maybe I had the blinkers on and the recital was actually pure muck. Just as I was about to die a thousand deaths the woman with a scowl on her face spoke. “Seems like you have a talent for falling down rabbit holes.” She stated contemptuously.



“Do you have any still lives or landscapes Christie?” There was an irritability in her voice as she adjusted her specs. Done some still lives all right which I’d coined; “kill lives” depicting different weaponry arranged around a bowl of fruit riddled with bullet holes. The intention was to create a Cézanne with a splash of Tarantino. I even placed an open book dead center in the scene, pointing to the idea that the written word was a weapon. I didn’t include such pieces in my portfolio, there was some editorial oversight albeit fairly limited. There was a moment when I had the rabbit caught in the headlights look. “I always start off with the intention to create an eye-opening vision, but then usually end up giving everyone pinkeye.” I laughed despite the voice inside my head shouting shut up. The whole jury now has that bunny caught in the headlights look in their eyes. “Sorry, no landscapes, no still lives and certainly no portraits of cute adorable bunnies.” “I’m not sure if this is fine art.” said the man scowling as he adjusted his specs too. “Maybe you’d be better suited to graphic design Christie.” He looked at the other man whose demeanor looked a million miles from what was said. I felt like saying, that’s all well and good. I can’t just hop into another course, and anyway I wanted to be an artist. “Why do you want to be an artist, Stuart?” Asked the more receptive older gent smiling warmly. It was a question I was more than happy to answer; the first time it appeared in an interview. There was an emotional timbre in my voice when I answered after a gulp. “Art is in my blood, my best friend since I were a very small kid.” I declared nervously. “Even if I don’t make it into art college, I will still pursue an artistic career.” With that the interview was concluded. I got my stuff together and made my way back home to Dublin unsure I’d ever step foot in the west again. When I got notification that I had been accepted into Sligo college of art and design I remembered the smiling gent and smiled.

CHAPTER FOUR

Every occupation operates from the premise to bring order to the collective mindscape plagued by so much disorder. We all hope to make a difference in our chosen professions. When I began college, political correctness was in a sense starting out on its journey too. Like me it had heroic intentions to change the discriminatory architecture that pervades the cultural mindset. Racist and sexist language were rightly outlawed. Derogatory labels were demolished from public discourse. Did this banish the primitive consciousness that underlies all inflammatory beastly content? Eh, nope. That messed-up energy continues to inhabit our thinking, rendering what is potentially an enlightened palace into a mental slum. In that dysfunctional mentality, inflated egos carry on feeding off deflated egos. The mental dysfunction generating suffering on a global scale simply can't be neutralized by the burgeoning woke script. So long as they keep the spiritual light illuminating reality confined to the shadows, beastly, megalomaniac power struggles will continue to ensue.



No need to unearth complicated intellectual arguments to explain the mind. Too many theoretical holes have been dug to understand Meta4 City. TRUTH has yet to fill the argumentative city. When that silent revelation enters town a lot of the noisy architecture is going to be demolished. Then we'll know what is TRUE and a peaceful silent awe will reign. Where there is argument, you will find the city of the mind cut off from TRUTH.

Argumentation pervades most professions. Politics, science, industry, religion, you name it there's a mental tennis match going on between different perspectives vying for power. When we are not careful; not watchful, the debate can so easily escalate into violence or worse. Some have climbed out of the game and found a dimension that powers both sides of the argument. I am drawn to light bearers of the TRUTH, here to illuminate a way out of the darkly lit mind. For eons the spiritual light has been trying to penetrate the cultural sphere. Continuously it is met by the same strong resistance from the dominant side of the boxed-in groupthink which hates content that thinks outside the box. Contravening the unspoken ban, I constantly smuggle wisdom across the borders into my thinking. Something other than college lectures is needed to shake the monkey mind off my back.

Mental blockages in the culture keep us from drinking enlightened waters. At eighteen when first I began reading books on Buddhism and Zen, I would have been acutely aware of the unspoken prejudices against such writings. It would have been a normal practice for me to hide when reading in a public setting any material that had the slightest whiff of the spiritual about them. On a bus or a train it was a natural reflex to disguise such reading material as if they contained illicit content. They didn't instantly transport you out of the mental slum you were in. They certainly presented you with the possibility of commuting out of it if you wanted it badly enough. The really insightful avatars would say rightly that we are out already. Desiring enrichment is what keeps us stuck in the impoverished side of town. It keeps us psychologically waiting at the bus stop for our moment to arrive, which is here NOW. Consequently, we hang about loitering mentally perhaps thinking about lighting up. Inevitably a string of succubus's will appear at the one time on the age-old circuitous route of evil looking for a lift at someone else's expense.

To avoid painful downpours we may seek pleasurable experiences to shelter ourselves. Whatever we get off on will always bring us back to the psychological tenement where life is shit. Most of us are semi-cognizant of this. Some are so trapped in the slum that they need to feed off others misguided attempts at escapement to escape from themselves. The mental jungle is full of egomaniacal apes who will use any human weakness as a source of potassium. Any flaw can be put on the menu in such a subjective panopticon. Your hair, your clothes and even the way you walk. Anything whatsoever can be used to make you feel less than what you are. It needn't be skin color that gets a human being lynched. I am paranoid about my outward appearance attracting unwarranted attention. The long haired scraggily specimen I portrayed as an art student seemed to prompt the demonic energy circulating in peoples psychological plumbing to gush forth. Always an opportunity to study the mental slum where human beings are downgraded on purely external metrics. Business as usual. Shunned like a dirty word in a city full to the rafters with bad descriptions. All the puffed-up propaganda about inclusion is a smokescreen. Very difficult to secure a stable minded position in such a volatile mindscape dominated by prejudicial perspectives. I didn't see it at the time that curses are blessings in disguise. It teaches me to be an open door, to be more receptive to the expansive accommodation out there, far away from the unwelcoming mental-emotional hovels of the judgmental.

I wanted out of the madness and intuitively recognized the need to conduct a survey of the mental city we all inhabit. This psychological infrastructure I had been exploring in my teenage years, I hoped to continue in college. The subject matter I very much wanted to delve into as an artist was very much centered on examining the confused state we all

are immersed in. I recognized even as an erratic art student the need to illustrate this dysfunctional state and map out its basic inner workings. This was seen as surrealism, a dirty, defunct ism to the lecturers who had consigned it to the scrapheap of art history. I tried explaining that it wasn't just the illogical I was interested in. My lecturers thinking I was trying to be a Dali type, kept projecting their distaste for the crazy Spaniard onto my artwork. They really didn't like us sullyng our talent on such discarded outmodes.

There was a dogma which barked loudly in art college. It marked its territory on every art students brain, spraying the message that the primary source of art was to be found in the outside world. One of our first creative exercises was to scour the local dump for found objects which when grafted together would form a work of art. The exercise kind of reminded me of exquisite corpse which the surrealists had invented. We fished the seas of rubbish in the local dump to hunt for subject matter. I couldn't dismiss the feeling that something stank. I naively thought that higher education was going to direct me to the womb of creativity. I had such high hopes that college was going to help me connect with the very same creative electricity which illuminates all creation. I was shocked to discover that they were absolutely clueless and in the dark when it came to the origins of creativity. It was like studying physics without the atom, finance without currency and theology without God. I was so pissed, to be brought to a landfill and told to scavenge. In essence I was closed off from what was potentially a whole new creative universe of possibilities.



Of all the things to encounter in a dump, I didn't expect to find love. Busy hunting for spooky dolls heads I spot a doll from the fine art course with a glint in her eye for the bug scurrying about in the debris. We became an item and for the first time I was propelled into the sky of love. Art college suddenly morphed into an aeronautical school. A crucial

lesson in aviation is learnt first. Most crashes will happen just after takeoff. I try to ignore my father from his tower shouting in my ear, ABORT, ABORT, there is no financial fuel to keep this collegial flight air-borne. There is a cold economic reality on the ground I can't out-fly. I wasn't eligible for a grant and had to depend on my father to help pay for expenses. Though I managed to get a transfer and parachute into an art college in Dublin it felt to me like another precious relationship had been hijacked. I felt bitterly aggrieved, it happened so fast. Now the dump I scoured was that of a discarded love life lain waste.

The new college felt spiritless and stifling. I withered in this place where it took me well over three hours commuting on two buses just to get there. My artistic powers couldn't be summoned. I was pining for the romantic high in Sligo, yearning to be with my angelic colleen from the north. Against my will I was forced to wade through the academic year in the new art college. Every figure I painted was lifeless and missing a vital spark. It felt like working in a morgue. The lecturers more like forensic pathologists sifting through the dead remains of my stuff. Everyone cast a cold unforgiving eye on me and my work. Everything I did there was wrong. Art is such a subjective subject; notoriously difficult to gauge what you are doing will hit the bullseye. There were the lady killers of the class of course, who could slit a hole in a canvas and the lecturers would hail as a masterpiece. The art world along with many other spheres is all about ego. To be a successful artist you really had to have a titanic sense of yourself. Little row boats like me quickly sank. The little arachnid ego and his work made peoples flesh crawl. My macabre life drawing was very shocking indeed, managing to spook minds you would think were open minded.



Countless exquisite corpses I exhumed, transcribing every living model that was splayed out before me into a crime scene. The art student could easily discern that he was heading

towards getting the chop, just like so many of my drawings of decapitated life models.

It is impossible to be positive when you are in a world where you don't want to be, mournfully yearning to be elsewhere. My interior was caught in the spotlight of a dark illumination for sure. The thought that I am some parasitical entity is always scurrying about in my nocturnal state. I was well aware that I was stuck on the feebly lit side of the city. Opportunities to get me across to the bright side were dire and scarce on the ground. Everywhere I looked shone the evidence of my internal darkness and spiritual ignorance. The seasons even took to wearing the boiler suits of crime scene detectives. The slab of the sky the deathbed of a heinously murdered star. Boy did I enjoy being gothic with the private melodramatic monologue that scurried about in my head. My brain tried to don a sterile uniform as I scoured for clues as to what had brutally murdered my creative light in the most senseless way imaginable. It is no big mystery why I am in the shadows. The sense of not belonging is hell, I have no desire to impose myself on a place that wants me not. I should be gone from this place which only wants to see me in a diminished light.

Off I bolted come the summer holidays to Sligo, to see if I could rekindle the romance that had been snuffed out. Cramming everything I could into a big rucksack, my mother threw me a fifty to help me on my way. With my whole life on my back, I headed west with no real plan or even a place to stay. The first person I met getting off the train was a girl called Andrea from the fine art course. A fellow Dubliner from Finglas, she was a true bohemian without trying to be. Wearing a fur coat in the height of summer, Andrea didn't seem to notice the odd looks she was receiving from the locals. I just randomly bumped into her walking through the town, sparking up a conversation about where I was staying. When I told her a hostel was my most likeliest option, she inadvertently informed me about my angelic colleen, spotted flying about the streets with a cherub from Donegal named Fergal. I was crestfallen by the news; she knew I had a place in my heart for her. Andrea feeling somewhat sorry said she had digs on old Holborn Street, offering me her couch until I found my own place. By a stroke of luck a plush apartment fell into my lap which I shared with two others. With some help from social services I was able to move in straight away. Everything was falling into place. Not bad for a bug.

I was still determined to be an artist and stay true to my calling. There was a great deal I needed to learn. Skeletal at that time were my skills with the brush. First I had to teach myself how to paint in oils. I began copying the old masters such as Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Leonardo, Botticelli, Zurbaran and even Dali. I made my own canvases out of linen discarded from an abandoned insane asylum of all places. Hammered some timber together to make stretchers. A pot of household paint for primer with thumbtacks to pin the canvas to the wood, and boom I had an endless supply of canvases to work on. I painted from my bedroom against a wall ample enough to fit the virgin of the rocks. I did not even have an easel. In a few months I had the apartment looking like the Uffizi with all kinds of reproductions from the renaissance era. You wouldn't believe how easy it was for the bug to impress the ladies with my brand spanking new oeuvre. One look was all it took at the talent that was arrayed and the creepy undesirable got himself laid.

It came as perfect timing when one of the lads sharing the apartment decided to move back home to Leitrim; leaving me with his bigger room. I had a friend from art college who joyfully jumped in to fill the vacant room, and an arty farty coup looked imminent. David and I really clicked, like two peas in a pod we transformed the small kitchen into

a quasi-studio. Vessels filled with paint sat alongside foodstuff in the cupboard, tubes of ragu beside tubes of burnt sienna. We painted away to our hearts content to our favorite music. We were dirty tramps too, whoring around Sligo towns nightlife like a duo of sluts. David was amazing at picking up women and yet so camp. When he came out of the closet it wasn't a massive revelation, we all kind of knew anyway and didn't need to be told.

After the passing of a year the lease in the apartment needed to be renewed. The other tenant, a very nice guy was opting out. This left me and my camp comrade with no choice but to pitch our avant-garde circus tent elsewhere. We moved into an old three storey house bulging at the seams with art students. I had a spacious bedroom on the third floor with creaky wooden floors that were level with the window sill. To access my room, I had to walk through a girls room which was really embarrassing at times. It kind of reminded me of what it might be like living in a lighthouse. Embarking on my own compositions at the time, but most pictures struck the rocks sending fresh cadavers to the gallery morgue.

When summer arrived the art students departed, sailing off to the seven seas, leaving me to act as a caretaker of the lighthouse. This meant that I had to get tenants in to cover the rent for the summer months. Come autumn time they would have to leave so that the returning ships would have a secure harbor to moor their craft. This was a tricky thing to navigate with prospective housemates. At the same time I managed to rent some artist studio space in the town. Initially I thought it wasn't all that far removed from working at home where I preferred to work. I would be thankful for the studio later when the new shipmates climbed onboard. Desperate to stop the rent from sinking into arrears I got the first people I could get my hands on. I interviewed four blokes who seemed easygoing. One of the crew had recently fallen off the back of a motorcycle awarding him with a substantial compensation. I didn't pass any heed to the faraway sleepy look in their eyes. There was nothing hardcore about them that I could detect. Their only flaw was that they were fairly fond of the hash. They told me so when during the interview they lit a spliff. That was ok with me, it wouldn't affect yours truly since I never touched the stuff myself. I was open-minded to just let them at it, sure who was I to judge others lifestyle choices?

In no time the place became a drug house. Upon arising in the morning I find the whitest gang of Compton in the living room smoking marijuana for a bowl of cornflakes. I can tolerate any amount of south central you can fire at me. I love gangster rap immensely. They would smoke the remainder of the contraband day to a genre I didn't like so much. Just as I was leaving for the studio in the morning Rastafarian sounds would bid me farewell. I bloody hate reggae music nearly as much as country. Upon my return in the evening, Bob and his walers would be blaring throughout the house welcoming me back. "Hi junkies, I'm home." I'd declare crossing the threshold. Mr Marley was on so much, I joked that I'd have to get Bob to pay a few bob for the rent he was knocking about the house all the fucking time. They never laughed at my humor, even during the honeymoon period. Yet the fuckers would laugh their heads off at the slightest thing. A robin landed on the outside windowsill one winters eve sending the stoner lads into hysterics. Because I didn't partake of the weed I was viewed contemptuously as an outsider. I dreaded Friday when I had to ask them to pay their due, knowing well the usual generic response.

"Oh the rent, howz bout I catch you next week." All of my broke stoner tenants got hooked into the habit of saying every week on rent day. My hands were tied, I was totally powerless to do anything. The landlady was informed about the situation, I was only able

to cover my own rent. She was not a happy camper. Nor was I having to share a tent with a circus full of marijuana harlequins. My food would then perform a disappearing act just as it went into the cupboard. At one point I was forced to hide potatoes in various cubby-holes around the house to keep me going. What measly rations I had for the week weren't the only items that went missing. Clothes would be kidnapped also and there wasn't much to my scantily clad wardrobe. A couple of grandfather shirts and trousers.

At the time I was cavorting with nineteenth century literature, music and fashion. I am still in love with that whole era. The soundtrack of the house with its Jamaican sunshine was wrecking my head. Its sunny musical climate was out of sync with the Sligo weather too. I tried on numerous occasions to get my housemates to change the record. Perhaps introduce some classical music into the smoking sessions. Once I struck a chord with the stoners, convincing them that their buzz could be brought to a really lofty place if they gave the wider vistas of Ravel or Rachmaninoff a blast. They took it onboard and for a day they chokingly hiked to the music of the nineteenth century. The next morning when I awoke, to my horror discovered a massive hole had been left in the living-room wall. Bizarrely all the doors had been taken off the hinges too. How was I going to explain all this shit to the landlady who was on the verge of dumping everyone onto the street? The junkies didn't accept responsibility for the damage either. They really had some gall blaming myself outright for the bad trip that bollix Ravel had sent them on. There was a charm to these goons I liked, but the whole damn setup was doomed to end in disaster.

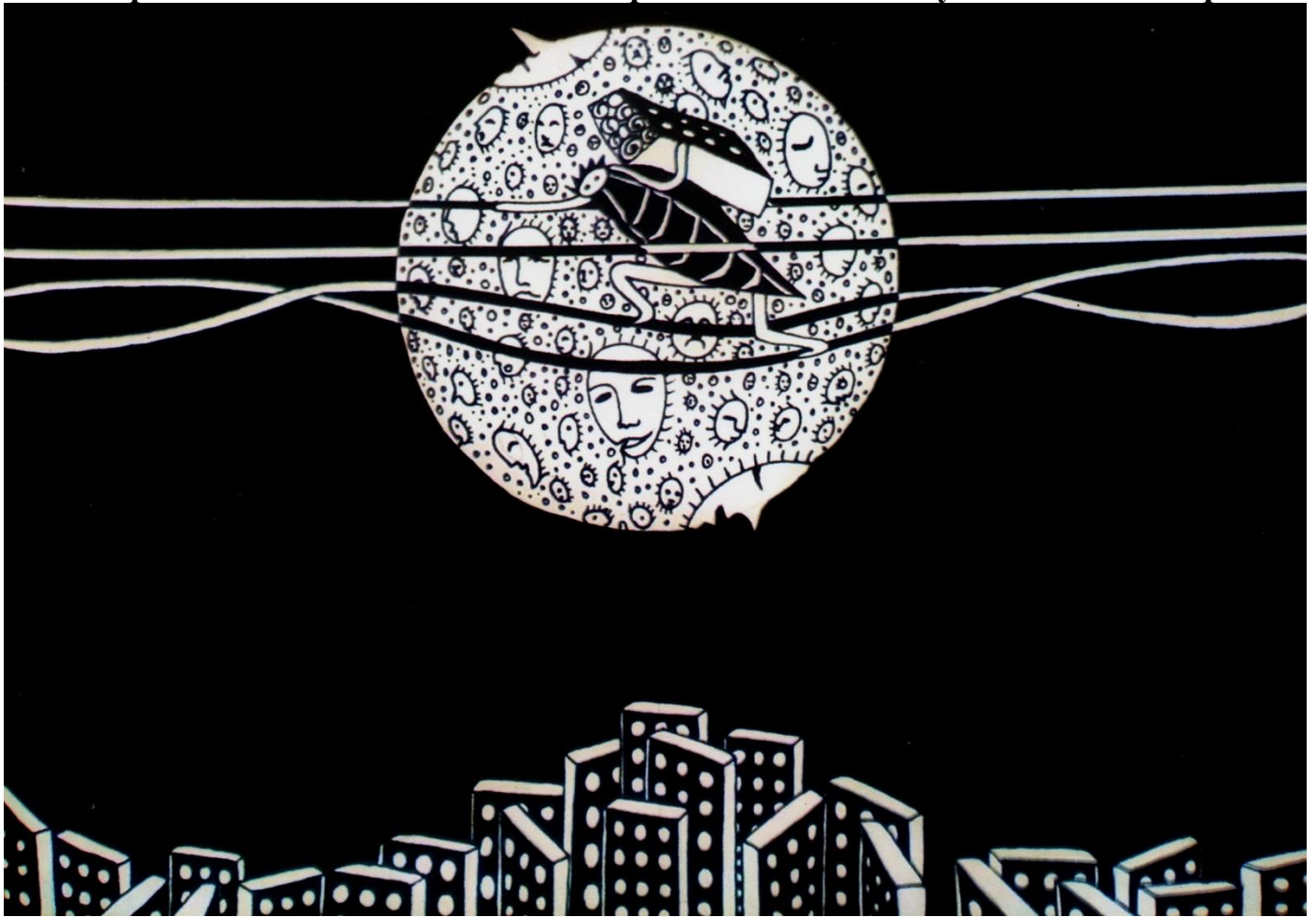
On the breadline myself, subsidizing others was just a straw too much for this ass to carry. It was difficult enough coping with my own backbreaking poverty. I would've been semi-cognizant of certain parasitical tendencies operating within my own personality; but this crew brought leeching to a whole new level. Once again the distorted mental architecture was building in my thinking, in-which strong egos siphoned power from perceived weaker egos. Wherever I ventured in this world, that skewed paradigm was sure to follow. I don't want to carry the heavy weight of these stoner masons building vapory castles in the sky. I started dreaming about my own castle in the sky more rooted in reality. I could hear the four towers whispering in my ear to return home where life promised to be more secure. I began pining now for that ancient structure in rural Dublin's skyline. All I needed was for one more thing to happen and I was gone from this place. When my measly stash of spuds had been ransacked, I decided then to return to Dublin where at least there would be food for the week. I was afflicted with a pain that went back, all the way to famine times. Never should you touch another Irishman's potatoes.



I was left with no other option but to jump ship. When the arty seafarers found out they called me something rhyming with anchor. Even camp David told me to sling my hook.

CHAPTER FIVE

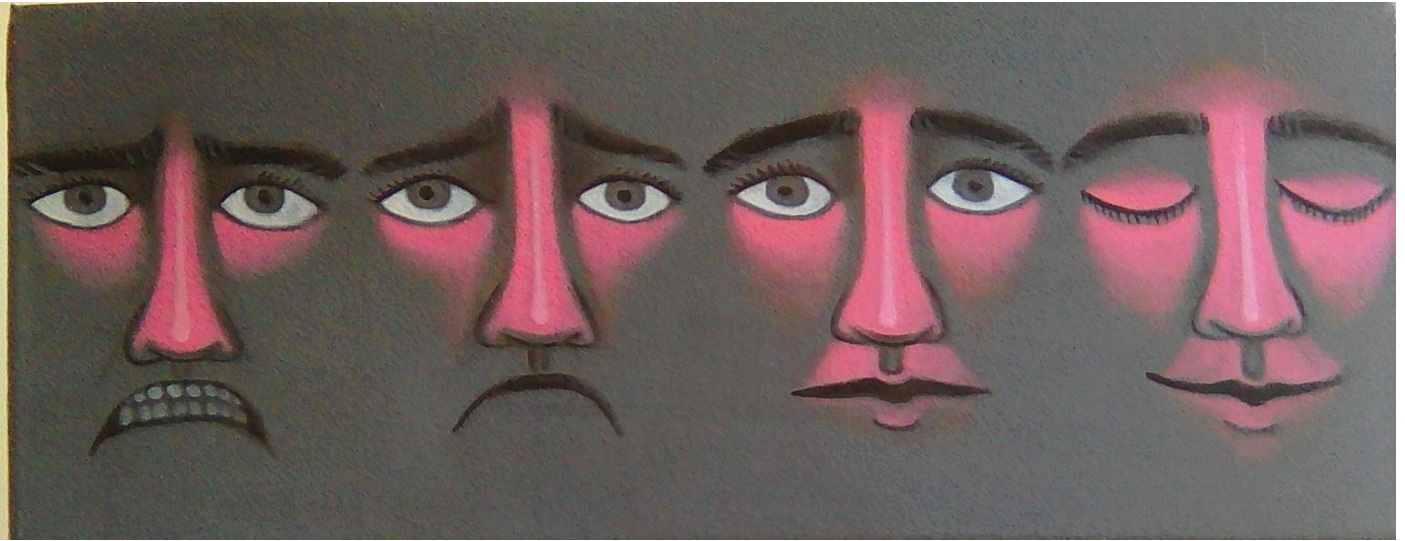
Thanks to my Mother I was able to purchase a train ticket from Sligo to Dublin. I didn't even have the money to buy her a pack of her favorite brand. Not that there was any duty-free available in this grim terminal to my life. I should have made an attempt to rob a block of hash from the Stoner masons. My mother would have given one of those contraband joints a lash. My canvases cylindrically rolled up into a big cardboard box resembling a giant pack of cigarettes will have to suffice. The people sharing the carriage cast suspicious looks at what the sick traveler is lugging across the country. I was not in the right frame of mind to spark up a conversation with the other passengers on the train. For the entire train journey I peer depressively at the moon outside my window, some of the faces in the carriage transcribed onto its lunar surface. For a long time afterward a moonscape cratered with countless bad impressions looms in my nocturnal headspace.



A pestilent choir of flu, scurvy and malnutrition accompanies the serenade to the moon late on that midwinters eve. It really didn't occur to me how bad I looked until the door opened and I saw the shock horror expression on their faces. A ghostly echo of my former self I presented before them. For the next two weeks I was fed on a diet of oranges and oxtail soup. I was fit as a fiddle in no time. My artistic vocation wasn't in such good nick. There were no earthly remedies in the cupboard to tune that sick instrument. When the basic bodily needs are met, my attention turns to the subject matter I hope to explore in art. At this early stage I can only strum a threadbare rendition of a song in a pre-chrysalis state. With few maestro recitals fluttering about in the cultural airspace it will take some time before the acolyte metamorphosized back to reality.

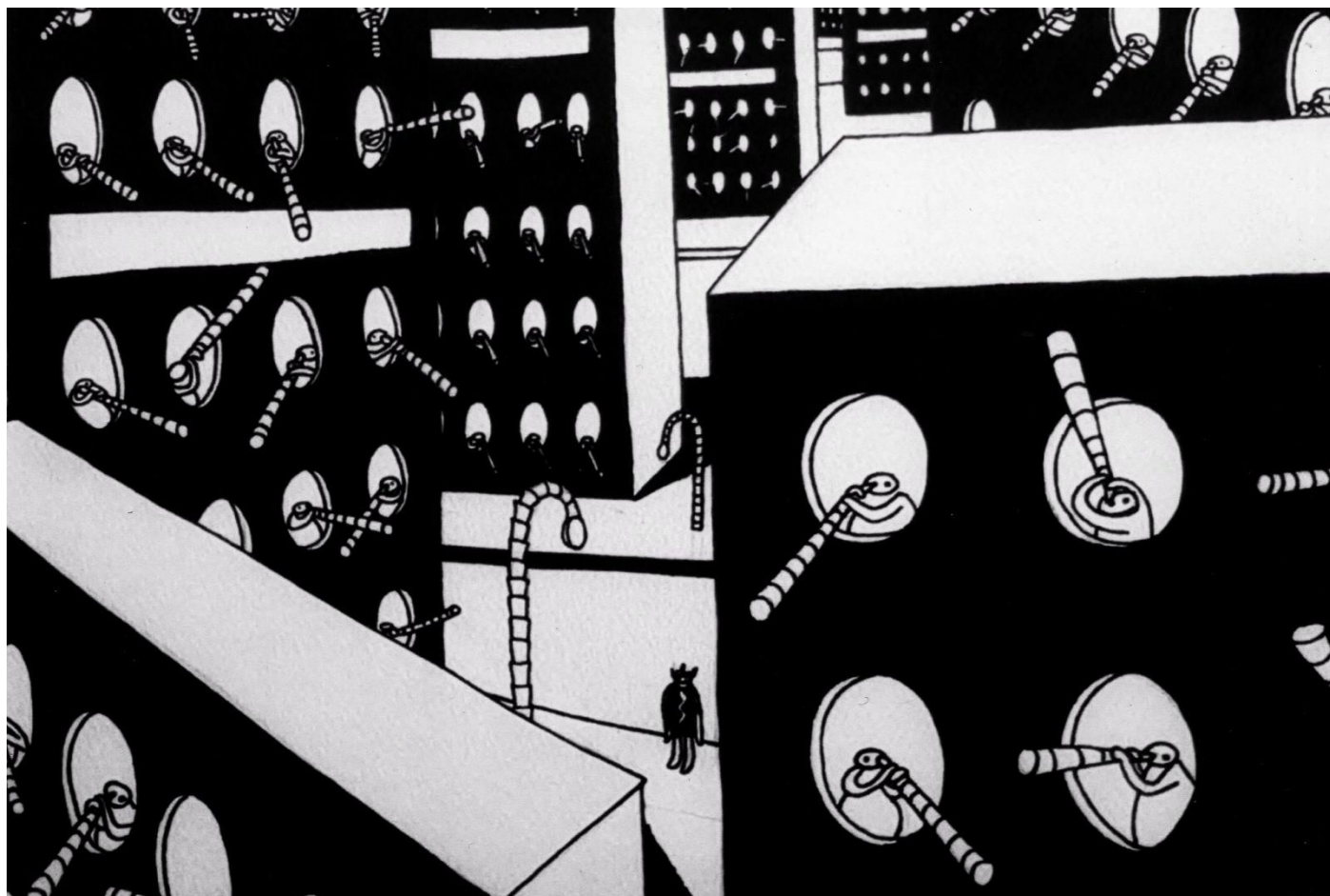


My first port of call as an artist is to establish the four basic cords of reality. Why there had to be four strings to that bow, I really do not know? The violin is definitely the devil's instrument, it happens to be my favorite too. There is no denying I adored music hailing from the dark side; the grim notations of life are deeply imbedded in my psyche. At times I try to dress up in pop sunshine; but the gothic is so woven into the fabric of my being that it is inconceivable to listen to anything else. It is obvious why evil strikes a chord. Dissonance with me has a powerful resonance because most of the time, I really wasn't in a good place. Yet there was a part of me that desired an enlightened holiday advertised in the spiritual brochures I was reading. Oh how I wished to take a flight to that inner state attainable in this life and not in some far-flung future place. I spent a lot of time grappling with the idea to lasso this glorious splendor of the colorless light of emptiness, as the Tibetan Book of the Dead tried to lasso it. This light of reality likened to a butterfly, is the most elusive conundrum to catch. The paradox is that there are limitless forms within which this spiritual butterfly is cocooned. Yet only ONE butterfly in reality exists. Those who have decoded the paradox would point to the impossibility of catching "IT" in form. Reality is constant flux the enlightened would say. Yet I strived to paint the portrait of life anyway using multiple faces. To really catch this spiritual sphere, I needed to establish the seasonal outskirts. Having secured the yin and yang boundaries of spring and fall, maybe then I could hone in deeper to glimpse the resplendent face of TRUTH?



Though it is a rather simplistic diagram of the complex panorama of facial expressions, I like the way it portrays the liquidity of reality behind the mask. Nothing stands still, soon as the barometer takes a reading of the weather, the storm cloud has already shifted. At home the honeymoon period had turned sour in a relatively short time span. The once concerned faces upon my return slipped down the dial to their normal channels. After the first week my folks started to up the pressure, pestering me day and night to get a, “Real job.” They stopped calling me by my first name and frequently referred to me as, “The Bum.” The bum couldn’t make a case that he was engaged in important work without sounding like a cliché. I stuck to my guns for as long as I could under very strong verbal shootouts. They were adamant that I should come out of my artistic vocation with my hands in the air. Hang up the brushes and be a normal taxpaying member of society. No amount of arguing will make them understand, yet I enjoyed the heated discussions. When I argue it is like performing on a stage, tapping into a wide range of emotionality’s. So easy to step outside the script and lose the plot, especially when playing the villain. One time I went totally overboard with the improv; I am actually ashamed it happened. With an almost Shakespearean flare I declared to the other bad actors in the drama. “If you don’t want me in a creative ministry, then it shall be a destructive ministry.” For extra dramatic effect I made sure my eyes were bulging in their sockets. Then I had an evil inkling, eyeing the prop hanging above the mantelpiece. I smile maniacally at the copy of Caravaggio’s betrayal of Christ gifted to my mother for her birthday. Before I know it, the artwork is smashed to smithereens; its shredded remnants cast into the fire. A good time to cut sharply back to the behind-the-scenes reflections. Yes, family ties are at the end of their tether while I struggle to string an artistic bow on a shoe string budget. There was so much I needed to know about art and life, I was only learning the cords. Without the central core truth that binds everything together the strings could easily be taken over by distortions. I had to grapple with the idea that the cords of a discordant version of reality were in me. How many human beings thinking they were instrumental in generating light were actually playing second fiddle to darkness? I know deep down there is a lot to play for. Unless I change my tune and harmonize with reality, the discord that brings about total loss will win and the concord that brings about total gain will lose.

A macabre soundtrack follows me like a song worm wherever I go. The pesky record playing perpetually in my head keeps telling me that I am at the bottom of the charts. People can see a mile off the bum note in the streetscape of my thinking. Love songs rarely knock on the openings of such gothic shanties. How quickly beautiful feminine melodies when crossing paths with the undesirable demo morph into murder ballads. The assassin smash hits in their snipers nests are easily spotted looking for easy targets. With so many disc jockeys spinning their own renditions of reality, is it no wonder songs get lost in psychological streets where they end up getting bootlegged by the B side of life.



Most people think I'm on the spectrum, although I'm not sure if it is an abnormality to struggle with a myriad of voices spinning a dizzying array of alternating perspectives. It is dizzying to say the least how the center of gravity can oscillate in so many directions. One could waste a whole lifetime just window shopping for different belief systems. In one subjective headspace there may reside a belief that God is dead. Whereas in another mental residence there could dwell a belief that God is great. There is no chance of me heading down a radicalized path. I would be a very introspective terrorist, more likely to put a jihad on my own head. I am a cityscape full of mental blocks. Very difficult to think straight with so many skewed views vying for attention. I want to bring a wrecking ball to all the towers of thought in my headspace. I certainly have a liking for nihilist music reducing the built-up soundscape of thinking to ground zero. Those tasked with giving constructive advice tend to have a lot of dereliction in their voice whenever I tried voicing what was going on inside my head. My folks would always respond with the usual lyrics. "Stop talking shit, you've too much time on your hands, get a job." Wish it was so simple.

It is a welcome distraction to focus on my lack of career prospects, it would be selfish of me to expect them to work fulltime in their main occupation. To drown out the endless drone of their arguing I turn the radio up full blast in my bedroom. Without the backdrop of a musical landscape, it would prove difficult to attune into the creative frequency. The radio very much serves as an audio scaffold. The dial in the mornings starts off on the ground floor when I like listening to talk radio. Then in the afternoon and evening the dial goes up to the penthouse where all my musical tastes reside. In the nineteen nineties I frequently tuned into a pirate radio station aptly called Phantom FM. It played all my favorite indie music, even catering to my taste for gangster rap in a slot on Saturday's. I adored every disc jockey in the station, who I believed were on the same wavelength as myself. The airwaves were open to the public; you could actually ring the D.J. between songs and make a song request. There was a call I made to Phantom FM I'll never forget. "Hello" I said after the ringtone ended. Greeting me is a dead silence at the other end. "Would you please, please play us, today's the greatest by smashing pumpkins please." I nervously asked the phantom FM D.J. who I sensed instantly picked up the weak vibe. "I know it's Smashing Pumpkins." He finally snapped sounding very gnarly indeed. "Who is the song for then?" He asked after another dead silence sounding totally bored. "Eh (gulp) Stuart Christie." I felt myself literally shrink; this wasn't what I'd imagined. "And where shall I say you are from Stuart Crystal." Said the DJ contemptuously. "Eh (gulp) Lusk." I could feel the vampire at the other end of the line sucking my energy. "And where the fucks Lusk?" Hissed DJ Nosferatu baring his razor sharp vangs. "Eh (gulp) it's in north county Dublin." I said starting to feel a tad bit drained now. "It's not Dublin Stuart, its county Meath." He stated with one hundred percent certainty. "Lusk is in Dublin, look it up it is on the map." I retorted; the nervous quiver gone from my voice. I rose to my feet, clutching the phone tightly to steady the adrenaline shakes. "It's not Dublin Stuart, its county Meath." The D.J. stated again not budging one bit from his position in the coffin. I was ready for him now; this vamp is going to get shanked. "If I was living in Meath, I'd have no problem with that. Lusk is in Dublin, end of story." "It's not Dublin Stuart, its county Meath." He said maintaining the same superior tone. "Over a thousand years ago," I began, "before there ever was a Dublin, there was a Lusk. In a thousand years when Dublin's razed to the ground, there'll still be a Lusk." I then proceeded to tell the disc jockey to shove the song up his arse and hung up. When I returned to my room, I was listening attentively to what the D.J. was going to broadcast next. Sure enough I knew exactly what he was going to say the vampiric bollix. "This next track is going out to Stuart, from COUNTY MEATH." Announced the D.J. sending me into hyperspace. I upped the volume to my favorite tune and jumped around the room like a lunatic, bouncing off the walls and venting some of the frenetic energy built up during the phone call. Only to be punctuated a few minutes later by my parents down-stairs banging the ceiling with the brush handle to turn down the noisy racket. My response as usual was to give them the evil middle finger before doing what I was told. With the volume down low I can hear them bemoaning my present job status yet again. "Get a job." Is perpetually on their lips. There was no escaping those words wafting through the air like the aroma of bread in a bakery. My parents were correct of course. Eventually conceding I saw the need to earn a crust. I plucked up the courage to present my paintings to a few art galleries around Dublin in a desperate bid to make some dough.

I was basically shunned from every doorstep I appeared on, me and my giant-sized pack of carcinogens. I even chanced my arm with some of the restaurants and pubs around Dublin, only to be met with the same slammed doors. Lastly, I went with my wares to the parish priests door in Lusk, thinking surely the church would have an interest in religious works of art. I was so full of nerves when I rang the priests doorbell, it felt like a bucket of eels writhed in my stomach. I tried stilling the agitated waters by reminding myself of all the years of dedicated service I had clocked as an altar boy. That didn't do much to allay the tremors. When finally he appeared in the door I stuttered out the following pitch "Eh hello fffffather, gulp, I have these religious, gulp, paintings fffffather eh " SLAM Before I had a chance to finish the sentence. The slammed door from a supposed man of god certainly has more sting in the tail than a slammed door from the godless community. I felt like such a worthless whore, selling myself with nothing to show for all my trouble. So utterly distraught and aggrieved by the encounter I stormed home and put a match to the lot. Gathering all the artworks together in the back garden I set everything ablaze.



Sitting on the periphery of the pyre, I meditate for a while on the ashes of the creative holocaust. So much artistic energy obliterated. Tears flow profusely from my eyes stung by the smoke billowing from the oeuvre. Only a few visions escaped the fire, surviving in photographic form. If I'm brutally honest with myself, it was a purge that needed to happen. Had I gone public with such substandard material I would have left myself open to scathing criticisms. I am my own worst critic and the work was not where it needed to be. All was not totally lost. The pieces marked an important stage in my artistic and spiritual evolution. It would be wrong to exclude the work and so I have put them into a

kind of commemorative collage. Pausing reflectively on the crossroads of a reminiscence,



a melancholy montage enters the movie. From these few examples of my earliest works, you can see the obsessive pursuance to capture what universally binds us all. A timely experimental phase striving towards depicting a panoramic vision of reality. It was a good start with a distinctive style which is a difficult enough accomplishment to achieve in itself. Such cosmetic pluses would have been ruthlessly stomped upon by the art world. As already alluded to before, the authorities would have raided my early work so riddled with contraband errors. My artistic vocation is hauled off like a criminal in handcuffs. Time to, dare I say go back to the drawing board and asses my options. Get a proper job with a pay cheque at the end of the week. My twin brother had just recently opened a fast-food restaurant in Portmarnock; a seaside hamlet not far from Dublin's inner-city. It was so humiliating having to ask him for a job flipping burgers and making kebabs. He felt sorry for me and gave me a position. Shortly thereafter I went to a barbers and got my locks cut. Assimilation into the collective looked imminent. Life as a Counter Assistant was actually very enjoyable in the beginning. After a year I became a supervisor running my own shifts. Now I am a regular Joe Soap. That dirty bohemian existence as an artist seemed like an absurd dream. Maybe people will see me as an integral cog in the social machine now that I'm following the straight and narrow? My first tentative steps into normalcy have parallels with tightrope walking, it is a challenge to realign with the rhythms of a fast-food restaurant. Every Friday night at a certain hour warfare broke out between rival factions in Portmarnock. One evening a new security guard had started; I was shooting the breeze with him in the calm before the storm rumbling off in the distance materialized on the landscape. A likeable enough bloke hailing from London, he was trying to convince us he was a hard Eastender. Everything he said I took with a pinch of salt. I told him, if he wanted his free lunch, it will have to be now because in approximately twenty minutes and twenty seconds all hell was going to break loose. The cockney geezer laughed dismissively at me. I advised him that it was best handled on a full stomach. Again he laughed. An old gent sitting nearby who looked after deliveries smirked knowingly at me. He got up twenty minutes later and quickly made for the hills. When the time arrived for the fight, I looked at my watch. Right on the money something

not in the parish of normal behavior was afoot outside. To our chubby security guard's absolute horror, roughly nine youth's ran screaming into the restaurant, pursued by an equivalent number of lads the same age, carrying a tree which they were utilizing as a battering ram. The poor security guard could only jump behind the counter with the staff as we all watched the carnage unfold before our eyes. I asked the geezer to press the panic button under the till. He was so paralyzed with fear I had to press the damn thing myself. These guys were earning five times what we were making, I mentally noted. Much later when whispering into my brothers ear, I relayed the bottom line of that stark audit. "This security firm is absolutely fucking useless when dealing with actual problems. They are just symbols." He was pretty much on the same page, but felt he had no other choice. I told my brother then about the Carter brothers from our village who were all Ireland judo champs and who also happened to be in the security business. I had met the blond one working the door in a busy fast-food joint in town. He agreed I should get them in. So off I went to their house in walking distance from our own in Lusk. When I got there the scene which greeted me was like something out of a horror movie. Outside the house strewn across the front garden were clothes, food, electrical appliances and furnishings. You name it the whole of the cabins interior lay scattered on the patchy lawn. It was as if the place had eaten something dodgy the night before and puked the entire contents of what it had inside. Then the eerie silence would put the shivers up the spine of a serial killer. The atmosphere was rife with a sinister genre, not even the crows flocked to the ringside of what happened here recently. Not since my near-death experience did I feel the cold touch of the reapers hand! I turned quickly to make tracks and leave when a big hand landed on my shoulder. It was the elder and darker Carter brother. I would have much preferred to deal with the blond yin rather than this raven yang. I first eyed the stains on his t-shirt; more like the spillages from a crime-scene and not the expression of the accident prone. I told him about the situation in Portmarnock and would he be able to help. The gallon sized man eyed the pint-sized man devoid of emotion. I didn't know whether he was going to thump me or shake my hand. Then he smiled and the deal was sealed by him cracking his knuckles. It was arranged that he would start straight away. He turned up on Friday night looking very polished and smart. Amazing how a change of clothes, a shave and hair wax could morph a foul looking fuck off into a nice polite hello. I couldn't wait for the trouble to start. I knew what this guy was made of. He stood outside the shop not moving an inch while he surveyed the scene. Then it happened. It occurred to me while watching how painting styles were quite similar to fighting styles. The lads from the area causing all the agro splashed and dripped haphazardly. A chaotic energy like Pollock which surely has its place in the pugilist pantheon. Whereas to watch a Carter brother fight was to observe a master at work. One Vermeer or Rembrandt was all that was required against the rabble of wannabe pretenders. There was no contest. Bodies were thrown in all directions like chaff in a threshing machine at harvest time. I loved it, just absolutely adored how he used the force of the opponent against itself. When the fighting was done bodies lay everywhere. Injured tugs writhing in pain were strewn along the roadside demanding medical assistance. Both rival packs eventually dispersed with the tails between their legs never to cause so much trouble again on Friday nights. We were all triumphant and jubilant with our very own special forces security guard fighting our corner. The Carter bro took it in his stride as any action hero might, coolly

soaking up the glory and adoration. His eyes purring with delight showed no sign of a fight. The entire crew in the restaurant eagerly suckled from the afterglow of that teat. It being payday the staff were heading to the early house and the Carter brother was promised free ale by all. I declined joining them, which was my custom and waited for the first bus at seven thirty. I liked to relax by reading one of my novels. It was a good habit I got into after a shift was concluded. I locked up and caught the bus with a horror story in hand and dozed into sleep. Then suddenly I awoke to be rearended by an irate old woman hitting my head with a rolled-up newspaper in the seat behind me. It was initially extremely disorientating, my first time encountering a succubus on Dublin bus.

The elderly lady possessed by a demon kept calling me a smack-head, smacking my head. As I pleaded with the old crone to leave me alone, she accelerated into shouting mode. "YOU SHOULDN'T BE OUT AT A TIME WHEN SCHOOL CHILDREN ARE GOING TO SCHOOL." I didn't even try to argue the point that it was Saturday morning; schools were closed. Moving to another seat, I turned in towards my reflection against the glass. Memories from primary school surface of Miss Milan hitting me with the word empty. The lady got off while shaking her fist at me as the bus moved on. She looked simian, a chimpanzee in a head scarf with a horrid evil in her eye. Oh, I wish I could feel sorry for her, so close to deaths door and so riddled with the hellish demiurge already. I have only barely enough sorrow for myself to spend wallowing in a deeply distressed state.

I was very upset by the incident, she seemed to tap directly into a sensitivity I had with my outward appearance. Am I so ugly I thought, so unhealthy looking that it would merit even a pensioner to attack me so savagely? It felt like I had been plunged into a Kafka novel. After working a nightshift there was no doubting, I looked terrible. But a drug addict was a million miles away from where I was. How can people get me so wrong? Here I was a normal taxpaying, law-abiding citizen and being hounded by a barking mad, senile nut-job. She probably had more drugs running through her veins with her prescribed medication than two drug addicts combined. She was one hundred percent convinced that I was an addict. I just couldn't get my head around the ignorance of some people. Did they really think they were providing a solution by sticking a horrible label onto something they didn't understand? Where they not merely strengthening and reinforcing the horrible by repeatedly labelling it? Yes is the answer to that question.

When my stop loomed up ahead, I went up to the front of the bus and got to chatting with the driver about the psycho granny incident. It was more of a one-way conversation with myself trying to tell him that I had just finished a nightshift and not some drug induced escapade in the underworld. I went on to say how wrong it was for the lady to attack me in such a callous fashion. No response from the bus driver. I was getting a bit annoyed again and asked him to furnish me with a number so I could lodge a complaint. He was as distant to my words as his first fare in the morning is to the last one at night. A gaping silent indifference that would fill the cosmos was all I got. I felt so worthless standing there waiting for a response, when he stopped only then did the driver speak. "No smoke without fire." Was what he said to me when the bus belched me out onto the footpath. I felt like decking the double fucker in the double decker. After all the changes I had made to my appearance and lifestyle. All of it to no avail. I was back to feeling like a worthless bug again. It was incorrect for me to assume that a position that earned me a wage could buy me any respect in the world. I felt like a powerless dinghy battling the

turbulent seas raging from others stormy interiors. Totally at the mercy of forces outside my control; bloody hated that. Next payday I wouldn't be soberly making my way home on the first bus. For the foreseeable future I'd be making my way back on the last bus tempestuous as a drunken sailor after a night whoring and reveling down at the marina.

Certain recollections carry a strong nautical undercurrent, especially the memory of my alcoholic maiden voyage launched from a sailors tavern at the ripe old age of fifteen. No sign of any sober headed helmsmen here to help steer the feckless mariner from sailing into perilous waters. Whatever passed as avatars in my world then seemed moored to sunken depths, not in a healthy state to stop even themselves from fishing for false highs. The best they could do was wink suggestively and sing a sea shanty lamenting the perils of life down at the marina. I would've thought most of my visitations to the marina were harmless enough; limited to boozing, smoking, and casting bad chat-up lines at females. At the start I just wanted to have a whale of a time. But as time went by, I grew more and more dependent on stimulants to steady the ship, unaware I was drifting into addiction. "You're hooked." Said my mother one day after taking a pouch from the shopping bag. She cast the pack of tobacco my way like a dead fish to a seal before lighting a cigarette. There was no denying it, I was in the belly of the leviathan alright. Seen it with my own eyes, how smoking could reduce a person to an empty shell. She didn't gut me with a lecture. In the silence though could sense her parental desire to impart pearls of wisdom.



Old adages for good reason stay afloat; I especially like the one that says we are all in the same boat. The rising tide should lift all vessels in the harbor. Aye, fond of that one I am. Here's a new adage to add to the ancient fleet; tis not a true rising if it only lifts an elite. Uppity people with strict morals because they escape to the opera think that they are in a higher place than those who stagger down to the docks for a bottle of cloak and dagger.

Those anchored to strict morals harbor just as much negative shit as those seen as lowly sailing through life without morals. Just take a look at a figure like Hitler who posed as a very moral person. Strict morals acting like an anchor tie the vessel down to one spot. In my youth a veritable armada of days and nights were launched without thinking about the consequences of my actions. Though I hated being in the drunken state with the cabin swaying from side to side, I much preferred when starting out towards the blurry shore. What far-out ideas used to dock in my tipsy state as a drinking voyage unfurled its sails. I got into the habit of drinking on my lonesome at home. Though I never felt lonely boozing in the loft at the top of the house. I was so like a stowaway in the belly of a galleon. The wind blew right through that part of the house, not very comfortable at all. I had it looking like a studio of course. I was still interested in art and painted in whatever spare time was available to me. There was nothing more heavenly an escapade than getting a few cans of beer, with my favorite music and a sketchpad to see me on my way. So many ideas for pictures would sail into the harbor. Some concepts in my tipsy state I would have hailed as the greatest Titanic ever to have sailed from the inner oceans to the outer. Then the next day I would be struck with a sinking feeling, hungover I saw what was fished through different eyes. It is comical the number of times I thought a whopper was caught, convinced it would hook amazement in the eyes of everybody in the art scene. Only to be gutted the next morning at the red herring when examined in the sober light of day. I lived for a few years lost in the Bermuda triangle of drinking, working and painting which produced yet more cadavers for the morgue gallery. The phase of working for my brother was drawing to a close, it came to an abrupt end nobody foresaw. The last shift before I was due to go on two weeks holidays was the last nine hours that I worked for my twin brother. I had planned to spend my holidays at home painting and drinking. Thankfully things panned out differently and scuppered my plans for a wet staycation.

There were still dark elements lurking around Portmarnock which weren't entirely neutralized by the Carter brothers. Though the mayhem that they caused was a thing of the past, there still erupted sporadically battles between individuals in the restaurant. We merely managed it by barring outright such people and refused to serve them. One guy who was banned came up to the counter, putting the edict against him to the test. Nicknamed "Hearse" he demanded that I serve him. He was a double barrel type of tug, reminded me of a white version of Ice Cube straight out of Compton. He was going to go all gangsta on me if I didn't give him what he wanted. I stuck to my guns at the counter.

"Give me a kebab or I'll make you into a kebab." Hearse said aggressively up into my face. I stubbornly stood my ground, although a bit scared I flatly refused to serve the tug.

"You punched a customer for picking a song on the jukebox you didn't like. I'm sorry but that's bang out of order, you're not getting a sausage from me." I said calmly smiling.

"It was a fucken joke you wanker he picks dire straits and I axe him was that you who picked that song well youse in dire straits now you fucken cunt I says messin like and he got all stroppey with me so I has no choice but to step up to the dance floor with the bollox and the rest as they say is bloody fucking history." The guy talked as fast as a racehorse jumping over punctuation. I could clearly read the signs; this wasn't going to end well.

"Still no kebab Hearse." I repeated somewhat apologetically. "Hands are tied Hearse."

"If you don't give me a fucking Donor kebab after the count of three," He threatened moving up a notch. "I'm going to jump that counter and do a job on your face STUART."

I jokingly pointed out to him that it was going to be one fucked up kebab to be done in three seconds. He counted to three and placed his order as specified. First, he jumped the counter with the athletic agility of an Olympic gymnast, pushing me so hard against the drinks machine that the canopy holding the dispensers was uprooted, sending a geyser of soda pop spraying everywhere. He then gave me a few slaps to the face, got me into a headlock then dragged me into the back and walloped my forehead off the metal sink. Was I glad when I came back to consciousness that I was on holidays.

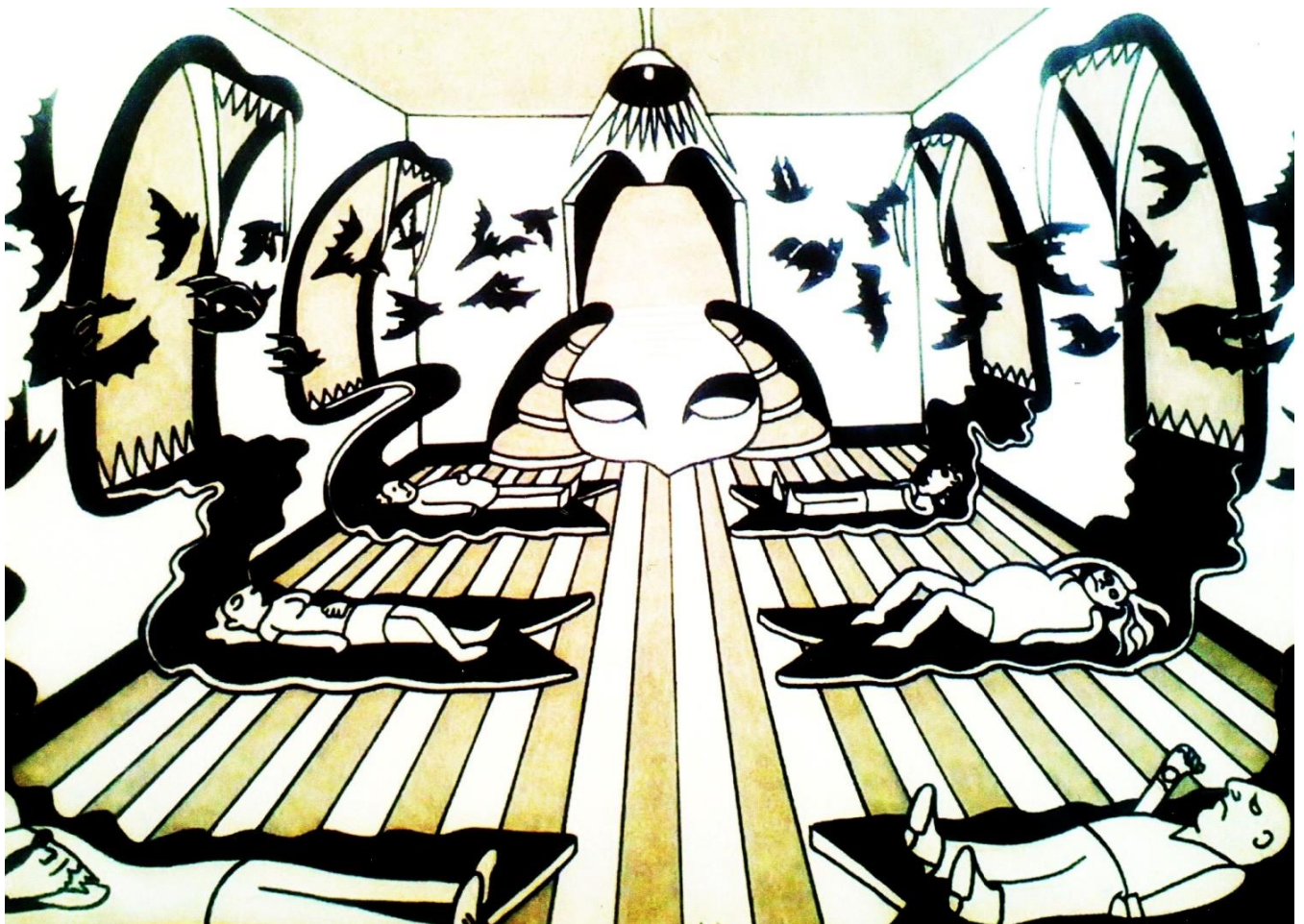
CHAPTER SIX

Upon my return to the shop the next day to fetch my wages, who did I find parked in the restaurant munching on a kebab but my mate Hearse? **IS THIS A FUCKING WINDUP?** I shouted, only to turn the curses on myself for not reporting the incident to the police. Here was the tug with chilly and garlic sauce all over his gloating face. Ingredients I had put my life on the line for. Sorely vexed I felt like the biggest tit. The protruding lump in the center of my forehead like a great big nipple reinforcing the stupid metaphor. I was on the cusp of snapping, no brassier could conceal the gigantic double D boob against my honor. Had this been another age, I would have instructed my twin to meet me in a desolate place at daybreak with his pistols. Easy to joke now what took a lot of willpower at the time to holster an anger gunning for recompence; but there was another payback to be considered. He'd never give me my wages and holiday pay if I throttled him. Once the cash was in my pocket, I told him to shove the job up his arse. I would never step foot in the place again. I left Portmarnock with a sense of the most monstrous knot tied inside.



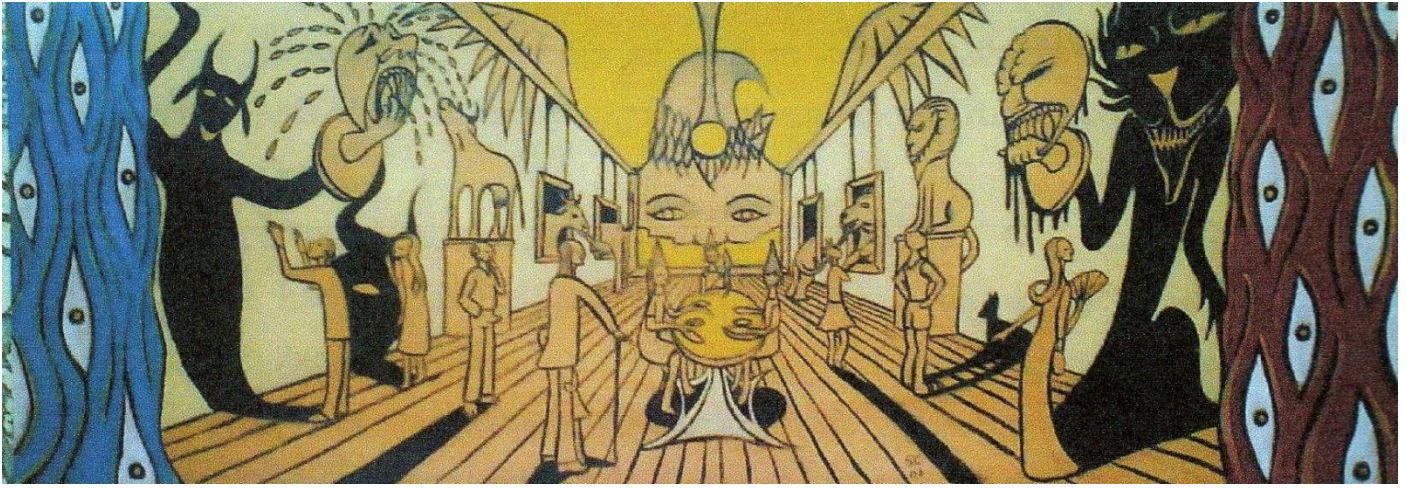
There is a constant tug-of-war going on in my head between a demonic clinging and an angelic letting go. The resultant mental entanglement was not just confined to my own skull. The world outside perpetually at conflict with itself was obviously in knots too. The best way to sort that bramble out was to clear the thornbush in my own head first. The scheduled boozing/painting holiday was postponed, opting instead to go on a kind of spiritual retreat. I figured to uproot a minus I needed to plant a plus. This required a shift in focus from the weedy bad habits I was accruing, to a more wholesome practice that would hopefully blossom into something positive. I didn't want to join a religion to get my briary mental/emotional bush pruned by priestly gardeners for me every Sunday.

I wanted to be the gardener of my own life and not be duped by a religious horticulture which fooled me into believing that all was rosy in the garden when clearly it was not. I gravitated towards the eastern traditions because they seemed to put the clippers into your own hands. The onus was on the practitioner to make the necessary changes. I was very eager to go to work on myself and cultivate a more mindful landscaping of reality. A rendezvous with meditation classes in Dublin was secretly supplanted into my plans. Nobody knew that I was getting meditation lessons from an ordained Buddhist priest. I really didn't set out to become a Buddhist. I just wanted to hack a path through the briary undergrowth in my brain. When I first started practicing mindfulness it was regarded superstitiously, almost as a form of witchcraft. I had been interested in Zen and Daoism for a number of years now. Yet every time I tried to meditate according to the written instructions, I felt really stupid. I had the same sense of the ridiculous sat in the meditation hall listening to the instructor. Typical that I was the only one in the class who had not assumed the lotus position, not exactly an A student on the subject of fitting in. "Don't fuck this up, just listen to what he has to say." I said to myself trying to focus. The speaker had a knack at having a one-to-one dialogue with you in a crowded room. A bona fide Buddhist priest, he spoke directly to me, saying it was natural to feel stupid. "Whatever arises!" He said gently informing us without sounding like Yoda that thoughts and feelings will naturally bubble to the surface. Things that go bump in the night will knock and holler trick or treat. You don't have to answer or do anything. All you need to do is just watch. This is the essence of meditation. Of course I wasn't buying anything yet, and kept looking around the large room for signs of cultish or Vampiric architecture.



Having read many books on the subject, I thought I knew everything about mindfulness. I was so filled with preconceived ideas about Buddhism that I had cut myself off from the beginners mind, the most important principle in learning anything. In other words an open book receptive to new possibilities as opposed to a know-it-all who in actual fact is a closed book. The teacher just didn't fit with the stereotypical image of a Zen master, he was way too young and handsome to be an authentic priest. Negative criticism quickly surfaced, "You'd be better off fronting a boy band gorgeous!" I sang silently to myself. "Maybe you're just jealous of him, it takes a lot of charisma to be the leader of a cult." We were all asked to lie down onto the floor of the meditation hall as the priest began guiding us through our inner body awareness. I half expected him to play dolphin music, but he didn't. He got us to feel the aliveness coursing through all the parts of the body. "Here's where things get kinky." I remarked snidely to myself. I was seriously agitated; his calm voice perhaps making the irritability in me worse. This was more like a fucking Lamaze class, I mentally labeled with blight sarcasm. My neighbor an expectant mother brought legitimacy to my abortive thinking. I don't know how long I can endure this tedium? It feels like the cerebrospinal fluid surrounding my brain is just about to break. "Your mind is in your toes, feel the energy in your feet. Your mind is in your legs, feel the energy in your legs." Said the Buddhist priest in the most serenest of tones. In my head I was clasp a magnum 45, the barrel of the visualization parked into the priests mouth. I was saying to the guru, your mind is in the gun, feel the energy of the bullet. The bullet is in your mind now, feel the energy of the splatter on the wall behind you. I hoped the priest wasn't psychically equipped to pick up violent visualizations in the air. The windows were agape, letting in sounds from the street below. I desperately clung to anything like a drowning man flaying in the void. Then a weird vocal object was spat into the meditation hall and I was saved briefly from this mediocrity. Batwinged cackles reduced the high-ceilinged Georgian hall into a cramped room in a haunted house. I had a powerful sense we were actually at a séance. I half expected our teacher to shout out, "Are you there Sidney, speak to us Sidney." The cacophony down on the cobblestones was beyond horrendous. Yet our guide continued maintaining the same tranquil tempo. "Your mind is in your midsection now, feel the energy in your buttocks." Said our guru. I immaturely smirked to myself at the way he said buttocks. The screams on the street pushed aside the priests voice. It would appear that my favorite time of year, Halloween time had come calling to the balmy heights of summer. Given that a big concert was visiting Dublin this weekend, they were obviously the fanatical supporters of a famous celebrity lodging in a nearby hotel. I liked the guys music, and had most of his albums. I had such a powerful urge to leave the meditation hall and fly off with the coven of Goths. "Show us your F-ing BLEEP Marilyn." Did I just hear that? Yes, they kept chanting demanding a peep at the rock god's bleep. I could picture them in my mind's eye, all in vampire frocks, white faces with black around the rims of their eyes and mouths. Just as the voodoo mass seemed to reach a crescendo, the commotion all of a sudden just died. The bewitching sounds mounted their broomsticks and flew off leaving us to once again cavort with the calm voice of our spirit guide who was clearly on the same frequency. Not for a nano second was he swept away as I had been by the witchery on the broom-sticks. I saw a mastery there; so subtle and imperceptible that I was unable to detect before. I was back in the room as hypnotists say and completely present for the first time in years.

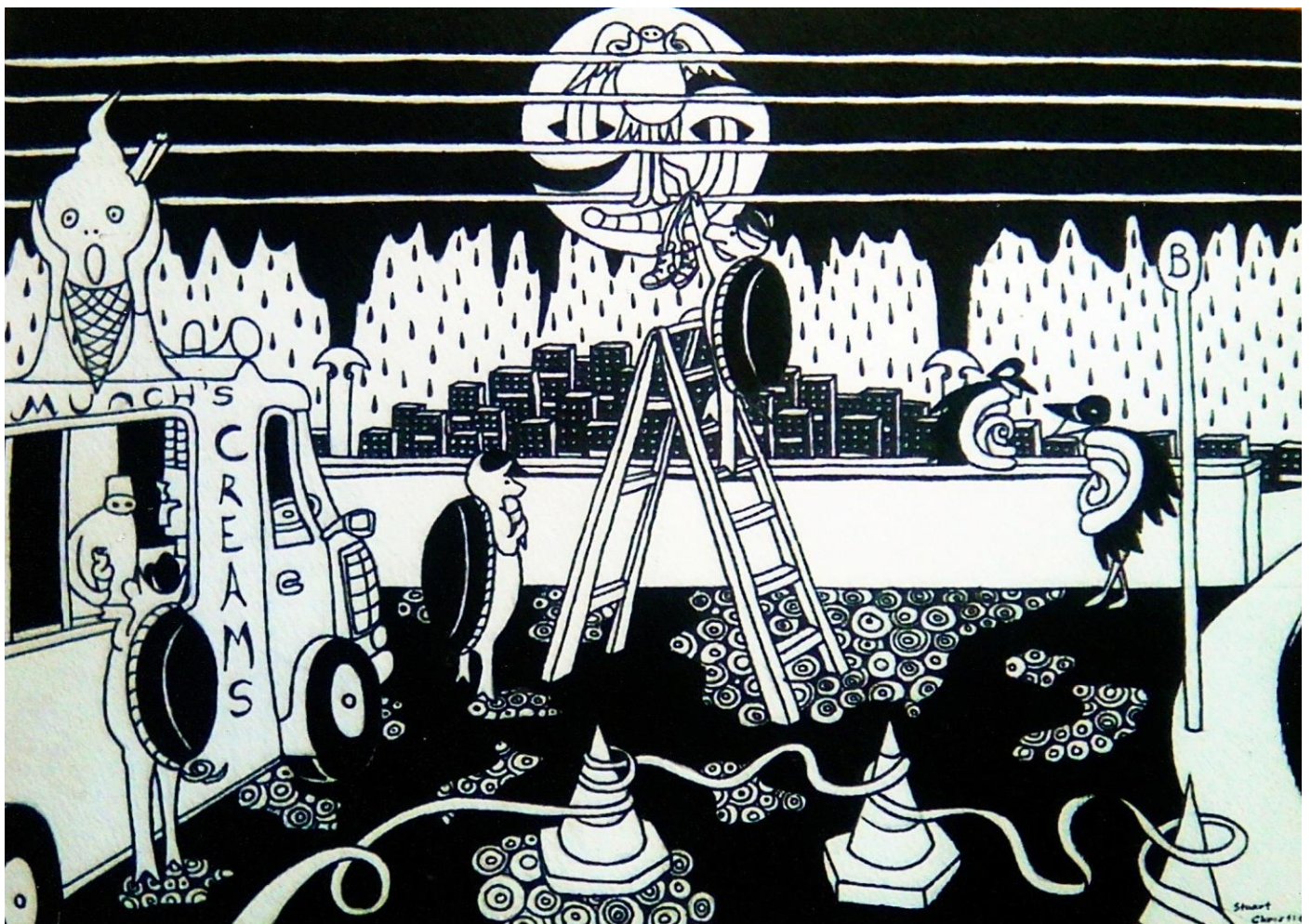
I threw myself into meditation practice, cordoning off a specific zone in my room free from any religious paraphernalia whatsoever. No simony of any kind, not even a statue of Buddha. I sat in front of a white wall, Zen style and performed my actionless activity for three hours a day. Doing nothing but being mindful of my breathing. An hour in the morning, an hour at midday and an hour last thing at night. All cravings for drink and tobacco vanished. I was even able to zone out of the arguing emanating from downstairs. After just a few months an expansion into a grander space was felt. The cognizance that would fill a shack was suddenly immersed in a far nobler, dare I say palatial architecture. It was like the spatiality of the loftiest tower had been excavated. I was sitting in the lobby of a pretty damn massively awesome headspace. Initially I was eager to jump into the elevator and head directly up to the spiritual penthouse. If only life could be so simple! An anxious, more confined space quickly crept in where the ego bug has its dominion. Not knowing where exactly I was going, I panicked. I grew fearful that I was voyaging in uncharted waters. Since there were no Zen masters on speed-dial, I desperately looked around the house for anything that might furnish me with some form of guidance. After parking some very deep-seated reservations, I started reading the Bible for the first time in my life. It was the eve of Halloween when I sat down to read what at that time was a very scary and mysterious entity to me. There was a thick coat of dust on the cover of the large family Bible nobody in the house ever read. The spooky biblical volume wore a shawl of cobwebs too, resembling a wizards book of spells and magical incantations. There was a vibe in the air like something wanted to be summoned. Cognizant of artists in the past who'd sourced the Bible for material, I was also window shopping for a muse. There were the familiar landmarks known to me as I drove through Bible country, stopping at places like Isaiah and Jeremiah. Only catching my interest briefly before loading up the wagon again and driving on. When I reached Ezekiel, it captivated me for a longer spell than any other town in the Old Testament. The vision of the heavenly throne appealed symbolically to me. It really fascinated me and I reread it again and again never tiring of the repeated repetitions. On I went from there through the prophets and crossing the border into the New Testament. Finding yet more familiar territory until I reached; The book of Revelation, The Apocalypse. She was hot compared to all the other Biblical frigid bitches that were passed along the way. She was a woman that both captivated the iconographer in me and the iconoclast. For most of my artistic life I had been looking for this muse. Most mysterious of all, it felt like I had been here before. What can I say; it was like meeting an admiring glance on a busy street, Revelation batted her eyelashes. I instantly fell in love with the Apocalypse for the sheer beauty of her symbolic body. I had such an awesome time delving into her mysteries; she openly took me into her arms. "This is meant to be territory you wandered into." She whispered seductively in my ear. For millennia she was waiting for a crazy painter like me. I wouldn't be cruel towards her creatures like some theologians had been in the past, caging them wrongly as symbols of the gospels. How that interpretation went on for so long really beggars belief? There is a simple spiritual logic behind the living creatures which escaped the complex dogmatic minds ruling the church. The troughs and crescendos of form like no other ocular song envisioned a perspective of humanities universal interior which could literally be applied to every level of awareness. All those years looking for the four symbolic cords of life and they were here all along. With her four strings I could create a whole universe of songs.



The Apocalypse containing such a broad symbolic palette seeps deeply into my artistic bloodstream, resurrecting creative powers which have been dormant in me for years. For too long my vision has lain in the morgue gallery, a lifeless body of work with no essence coursing through its veins. The revelatory transfusion was just the shot in the arm my song to the world needed, awakening every cellular note from its long hibernation. Once dead streams of consciousness become teeming with life. On the shore of my mindfulness practice I keep catching myself apocalyptically fishing the flux of symbols for insights and epiphanies. There are times when I stray from the familiar and swim into the murky unknown to test the waters. On numerous occasions the wall before me seemingly solid became liquid, and I swam into the mysterious depths to investigate the abstract outskirts



of thinking itself where sanity and madness converge. Frightened I'd swim back to the relative predictability of a mundane existence where the world seemed more concrete. Revelations symbolic narrative is such a permanent feature now in my thinking I see its central imagery everywhere. Even when eating my dinner I find the carnivore lion eyeing back at me in the meat, the herbivore cow when munching the veg, the mush of a human face in the spuds and the eagle in the gravy or sauce binding all the elements on the plate together. Family and friends think I have in a psychological sense ran away with a circus. "The whole world has run away with the effing circus!" I inform my nearest and dearest. "The Circus Apocalypse!" There is plenty of scope in the revelatory story for both glory and the gory. Gothic comedies are at work in the Circus Apocalypse with egomaniacal jesters dressed in regal attire lording it over wrathful harlequins armed with blades thirsty for blood. Obese avaricious clowns clutching measuring scales flee from skeletal minstrels wielding sickles. I'm well aware that all this clowning about is just a distraction until the ringleader appears and reveals the main attraction. The entertaining diversion doesn't change the fact that I am pretty much confined to the ringside in my head. I am always on the periphery of a breakthrough. Occasionally a patch of sky appears through the noise and I cross a threshold into an angelic space where there is no need to pig-out in the mental pigsty anymore. Nothing the filth hates more than arty farty's utilizing contemplative ladders to step out of the lowly stench. The pong has no jurisdiction here, but it lies in wait for the slightest lapse in concentration to knock me from my lofty perch.



My heart missed a beat high on the ladder to the crows nest after almost losing my footing on the steps. Want to roar at the earthmovers downstairs for making such reverberations. The seventh time today bedlam has broken out and it's not even bloody dinnertime yet. 'You are all a pack of nutjobs.' I shout at them in my head before escaping into the loft. I am well aware that I'm just as emotionally cranked up. It takes a while to center myself and regulate my emotions. Focus sharpens when lightness flutters into the atmosphere. I think about doing the painting of the four living creatures again, the vision also serves as a spiritual compass. So easy to get caught up in the complex cogs of a farfetched theory. I marvel at the simple mechanics; how it can be applied not only to the workings of my inner cosmos but the outer one too. I marvel at the simple palette that paints everything. Color conveyed into symbolic form, has such an idea ever been explored in art before? Kandinsky had innovated alright by expressing color as musical notes. Modern art has since deemed the use of symbols as an antiquated outmode. Roadblocks to self-expression do not hinder me from incorporating the ancient quartet into the heart of my art practice.





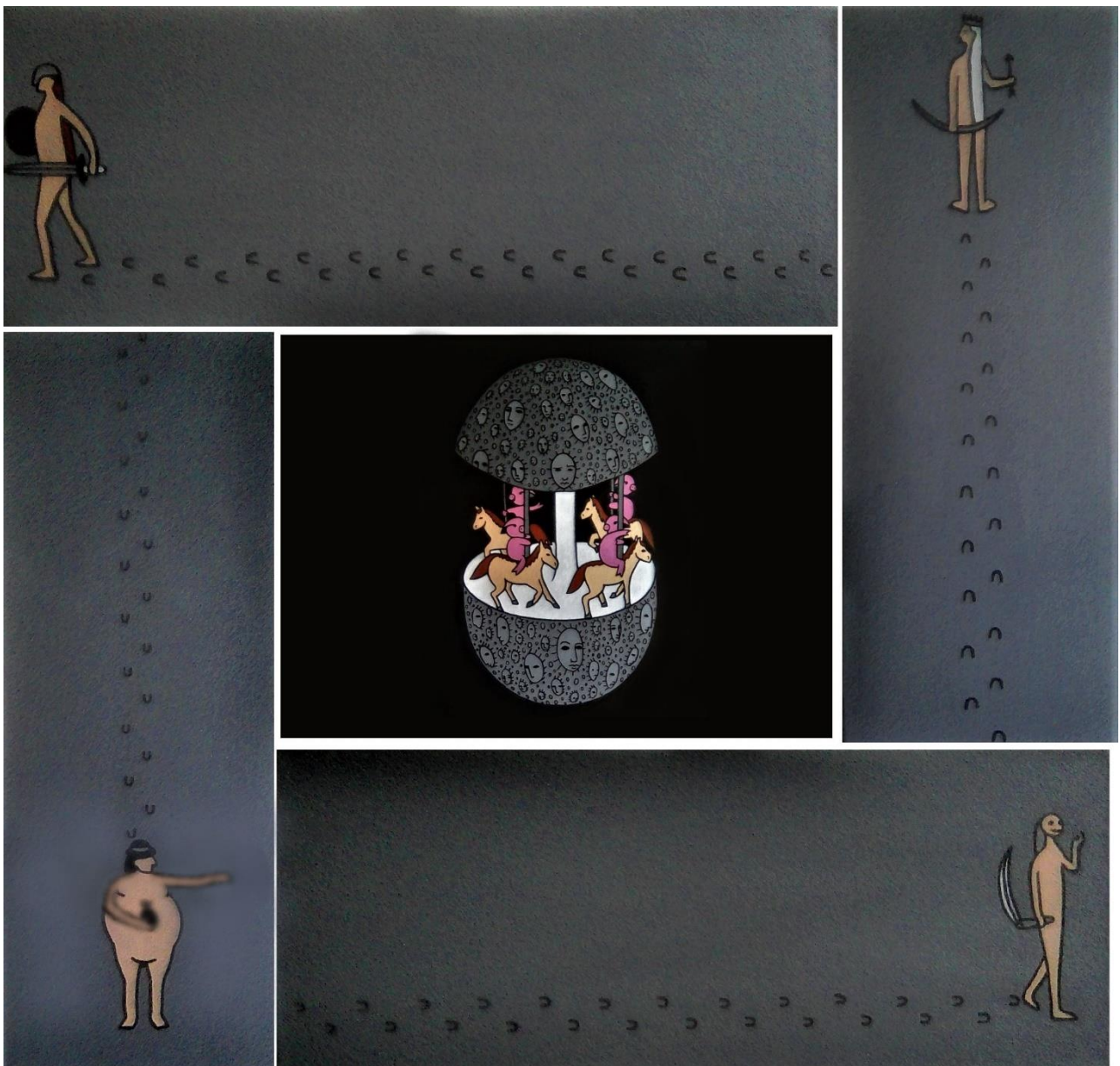
"I am the light of mind!" Says the first living creature, I am the eagle of your spiritual nature; the very essence of the formless awareness soaring deep within all forms. The light of mind, the light of consciousness, the very spirit of the universe itself. Unsheathe the wings of your most glorious angelic gospel and fly to the joyous season of being where the light of mind shines the brightest. It is here already nesting within us all in the timeless NOW.

"I am the sky of mind!" Says the second living creature, I am the spacious visage of your true nature. Inside you there is a vast sky of mind so expansive it permeates the universe entire. Never-ending is the scroll every single story is written on. You are a holy book containing the exact same parchment the stars and the atoms are all scribed upon. No matter how seemingly tattered the cover, always read the page your thinking is presently scribed upon. It will bring an eternal springtime to your life and heal the painful season of tears.

"I am the water of mind!" Says the third living creature, I am the bovine of a victim mentality. Cut off from the joyful pastures of consciousness we graze on mental-emotional plains haunted by spiritual wintertime. Overcast thoughts just cloud the joyous sky of who we really are. The sad fact is; we are not connected to the full scope of reality. This unhappy creature that we are not is destined for the slaughterhouse. If we cannot connect with the higher pastures, a spiritually famished place lurks in the grass to feed off our weakened state.

"I am the ground of mind!" Says the fourth living creature, I am the feline of a predatory mentality. Here the mindset is fragmented into separate ego's which must compete against one another to win power and glory. The purely psychological state is certainly the harshest of the four seasons. The hostile climate that it invokes is a source for all the pain and suffering in the world. True strength and bravery lie in facing the pain. When we cannot generate enough conscious awareness and ascend, we will descend into a subterranean space where suffering and death continuously give chase.

In the course of a meditation the mind can be swept away like a horse drawn carriage. Initially it seems the vehicle is propelled forward by a vain horsepower, more focused on self-aggrandizement than watching the road. Can a beautiful face transport us to a beautiful place? Dashing looks are indeed a trusty steed to every knight in shining armor. The gorgeous are always cast as heroes, here to rid the world of evil ugliness! That does not sound right, conflicted thoughts ride shotgun with that statement. Clear signage his head isn't in such a pretty space. The fiscal satnav did not foresee all these bumps along the road. Out of the blue the driver encounters a redlight, in the rearview it appears he just got hit with a zit, more like an assassins laser dot square between the bulbs. Before he knows it, he just got canceled. No longer in the house of the living, the reaper in his head turfs him from the wagon. Thrown to the roadside, an ejected spirit left to hitchhike the bardo between worlds, haunted by the ghost of a world galloping off in the distance.



Walk this earth for a few laps of the sun and soon enough you'll notice certain patterns. If there is any self-awareness in us, we may ask is there life outside this mental carousel? On paper it seems to be desert surrounding our thinking. On a page of silence walks one

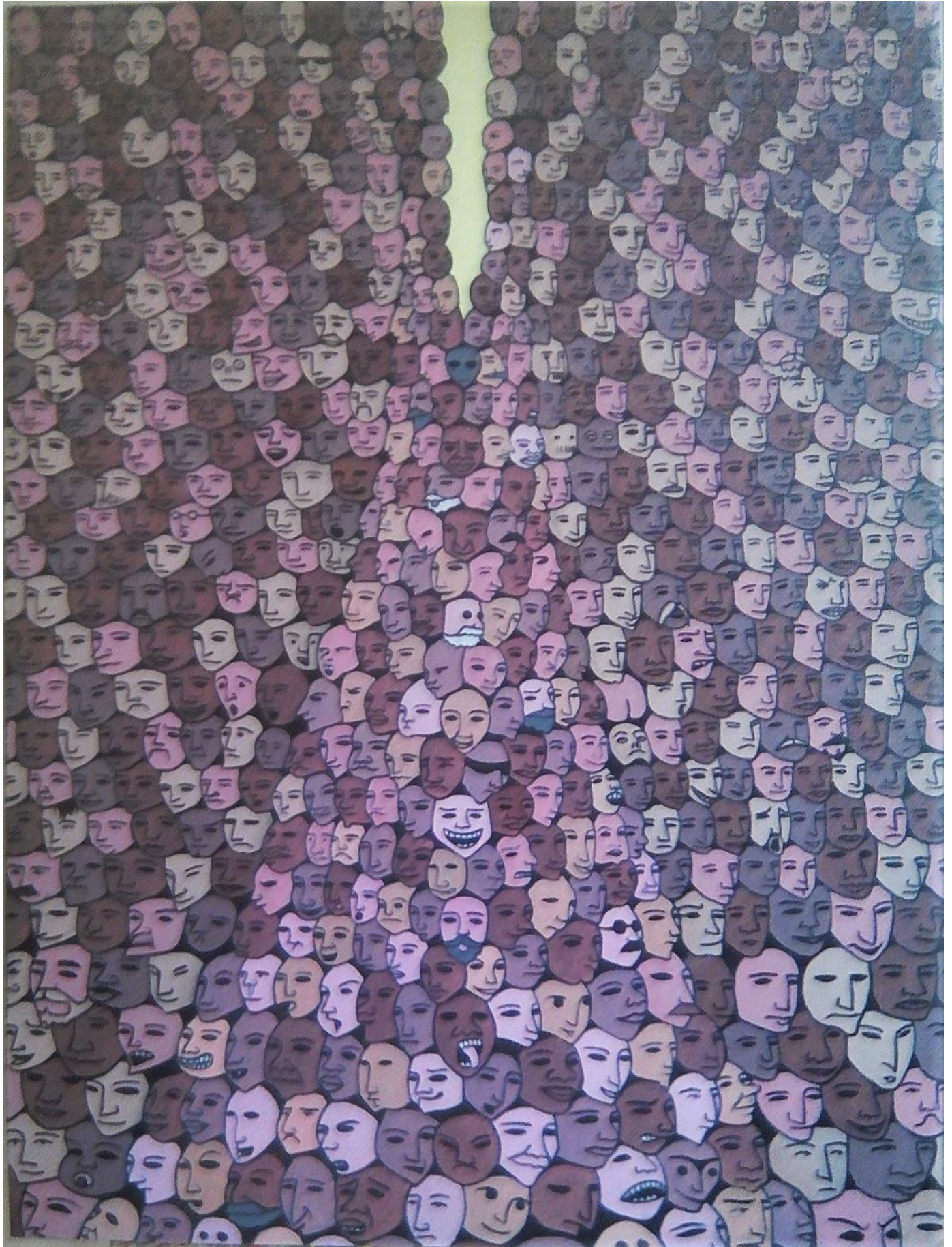
word.

With my short attention span I can only manage to read mindfulness one page at a time. I always get lured back to the mirage and continue playing with my mental blocks. I can still have fun building transient structures knowing well one day they will be demolished. The same subjective bricks building dreams today, constructs our nightmares tomorrow. The four horses gallop throughout the globe for just a few jockeys to keep propped up an imaginary ego self. All that striving after fame, honor and money takes us to the final furlong ill prepared. With no spiritual connection, the mind weighed down by worldly pursuits is powerless to jump the most important hurdle of all; our very own mortality. Such a tragedy to end the journey not knowing what lies beyond, not SEEING what is HERE. If you SEE, the blocks that build the ego's castle are the exact same blocks that build the ego's tomb, you will SEE death is ultimately just a thought. Stilling our thoughts therefore is the most beneficent skill we can learn, it will in the end teach us to kill death. Wish I could say that completes the brickwork, job done, time to put away the tools! Without knowing what cements everything together, I'm in essence still playing with mental blocks which sooner or later will be made into some form of construct. I could not demolish the overarching feeling that the keystone was missing. The sacred scroll along with the seven seals central to the revelatory narrative alluded me for a long time. Then one night chiseling away meditatively as usual an opening presented itself.



Lighting the candle and incense at the start of every meditation, I never expect anything out of the ordinary to happen. I tend to begin by first reading a verse or two from Tao te Ching. The only light in the pitch-black room is bright enough to read the text. The flicker of candlelight dances in this very draughty corner in the loft. The wind howling outside finds a way in through all available crevice in the walls. I focus on the gentle rise and fall of my breathing, the sound of my father's car returning from the pub outside. My attention remains on the candleflame, hardly noticing the human face looking at me in the drippage. When the following drip held another face, it was quickly dismissed as a trick of the light. Only when a third appeared did I begin questioning my sanity.

Suddenly a patchwork of faces appeared in the space before me, I'm like, wtf is going on! I watch in disbelief at what my mind has weaved, it might make an interesting picture.



Difficult to countenance there were so many countenances filed away inside my head. I haven't got a clue where this visualization is taking me, not halfway into the meditation and already I am immersed up to my neck in a never-ending flux of facial impressions. I keep reminding myself, to just go with the flow. There are so many separate identities vying for my attention, it is impossible to hone in on just one face alone. After a while the unreality of the crazy garment that I have fashioned becomes glaringly self-evident. I want to strip my mind of all these projections and be done with this ridiculous freakshow. Then a bombshell landed, I asked myself a question. How can I see what I am thinking? I concentrated on breaking open the atom of that Koan. Then a tiny rip appeared in the fabric of thinking. With every heartbeat the fissure in the veil grew larger allowing me to glimpse what was concealed underneath. Despite my previous lack of engagement, I want to peer deeper into the fissure. The tectonic plates of unreality are on the move, enough to make my volatile psychology violently quake like a city on a vault line. Any notions of concreteness and reality will soon be razed to the ground if I don't get out of this otherness pronto. Fear mounts as the meditation edges towards its ultimate reveal. The vision then really began to discard the final vestige of clothing making me yelp out loud. I glimpsed something so incomprehensible glinting inside that it sent me out of the module reeling. I got the frights big-time and saw no other alternative but to withdraw. I was holding onto too much mental and emotional baggage for me to properly SEE. There were at least some quantitative levels of SEE in me that enabled me to SEE that.

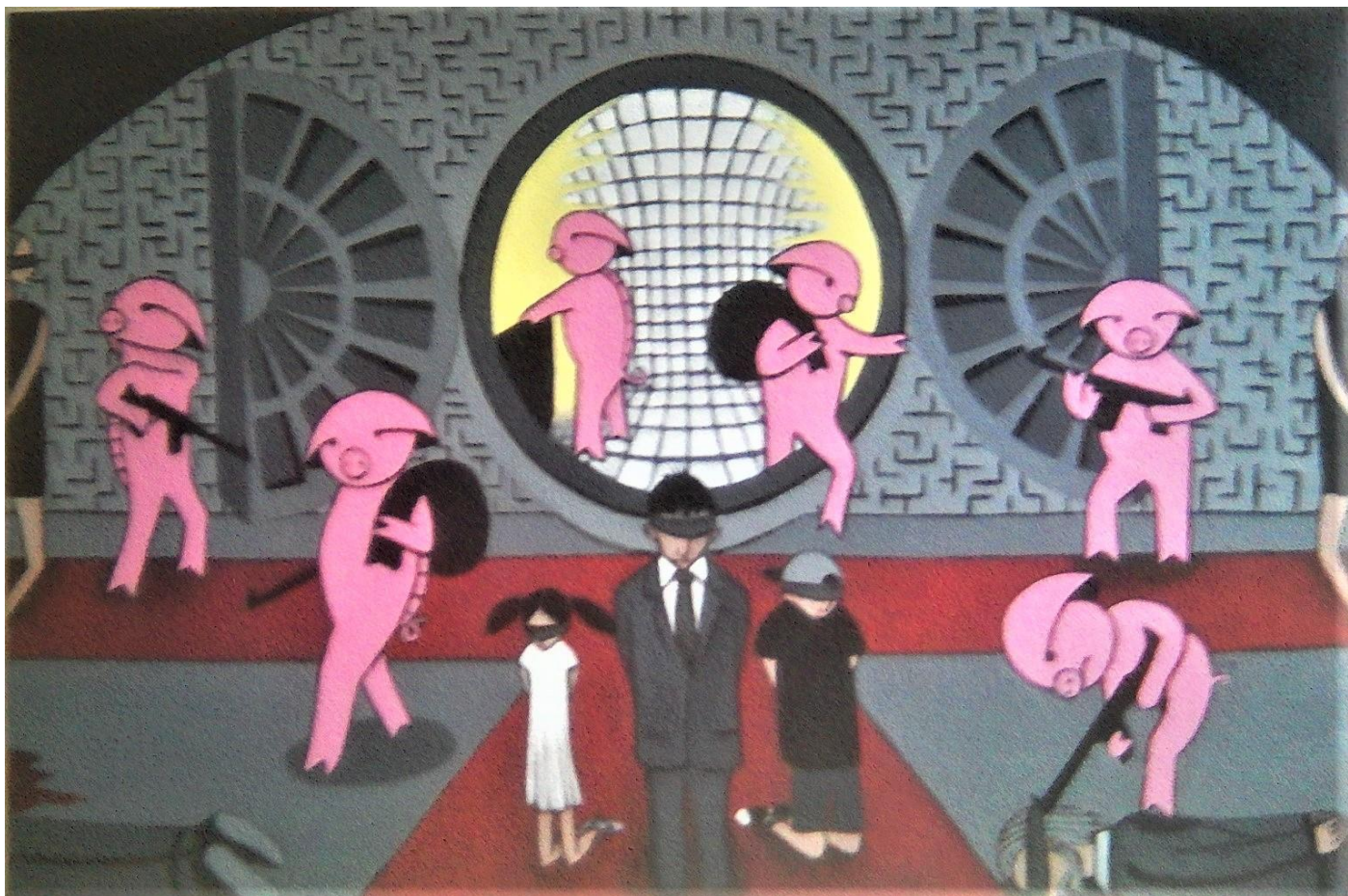
How very close, on the cusp of SEEING the sacred parchment that underwrites all that we see, hear, taste, smell, touch, think and SEE. I was too attached to life on the ground to rendezvous with the sky. I couldn't handle it, just wasn't ready to interface with space.

CHAPTER SEVEN

In a dream I am carried along by a tranquil stream, drifting toward a waterfall gushing so thunderous it stirs me awake. Just a cheap sound effect of a man emptying his bladder. A typical wakeup call for the dreamer washed-up on the shoreline of a morning flowing quickly down the drain. I put the pillow over my head to muffle the scent of pipe smoke snaking up the ladder to the loft. Through the silencer my ears are cocked, that sound again scurrying in the storage space behind the wall. Oh sweet Jesus, hope it's not a rat. The joys of bohemian life, not exactly the romantic vision advertised in the brochure. Perhaps sensing my wakeful presence he shouts my name without waiting for a response. "Get a job you bum." He adds making his way down the stairs, picking a fight with my mother sleeping on the couch before his foot touches the last step. In my head I holler after him, I HAVE A JOB. You really have no conception of the eagle that has landed in my head, you fucking bollix. I say nothing and get up. I take a leak making sure the piss makes not a sound on the ceramics. I go back up and do my Zen thing in my underpants. Then for breakfast a nutritious serving of scribblings, doodles and sketches. It was a time for mapping out and chartering the best course for the terrain ahead. The new project unfurled before me was so immense I estimated roughly a decade to really do it justice. One hundred paintings minimum with fifty illustrations, not to mention all the written material accompanying the artwork. There was also the massive research that needed to be undertaken too, spanning a plethora of different fields to study. So much groundwork required attention. I didn't even know if something like this had been done before. There were endless angles that needed to be covered to execute it correctly. The mind boggled trying to tie all the multifaceted dimensions together. Then I had to contend with other factors such as getting a job and the bloody millennium wasn't far-off the horizon either. There were the likely mistakes I would encounter too that needed to be factored into the complex equation. Boy did I produce my fair share of outtakes. I could spend months on a painting and in the end discover that it was a dud. Every artist must get used to that painful feeling, the mournful sense of failure when the realization dawned that what you had been putting so much time and energy into turned out to be a creative corpse.



This was too important to let it go to the morgue art gallery like so many of my previous efforts. I did not know where to make the first incision on such a massive autopsy. By the time work on the corpus was completed, the amount of botched creative corpses was so significant a whole other body of work could have been sired from the discarded parts. Will never recoup the loss of so much creative energy, best to cut my losses and move on.

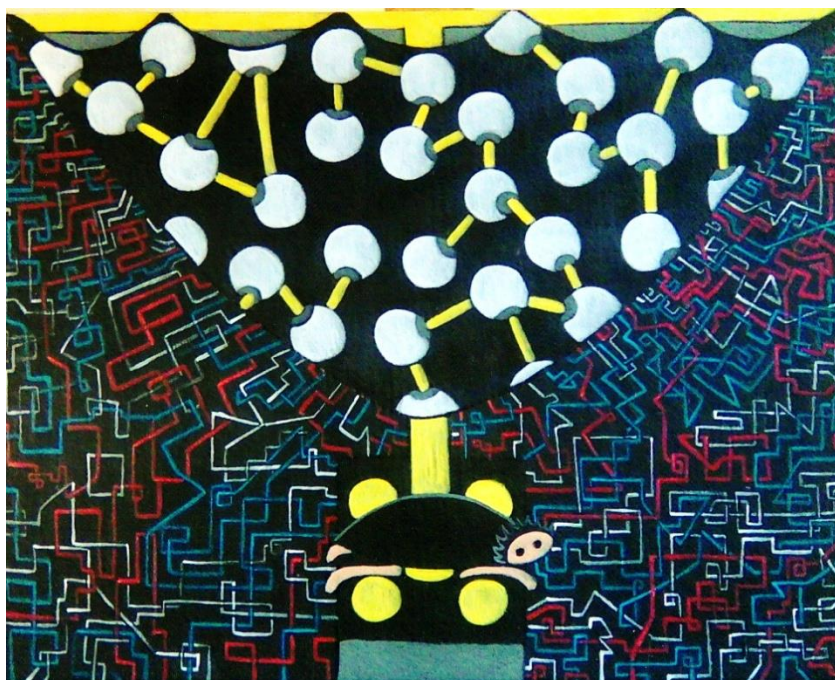
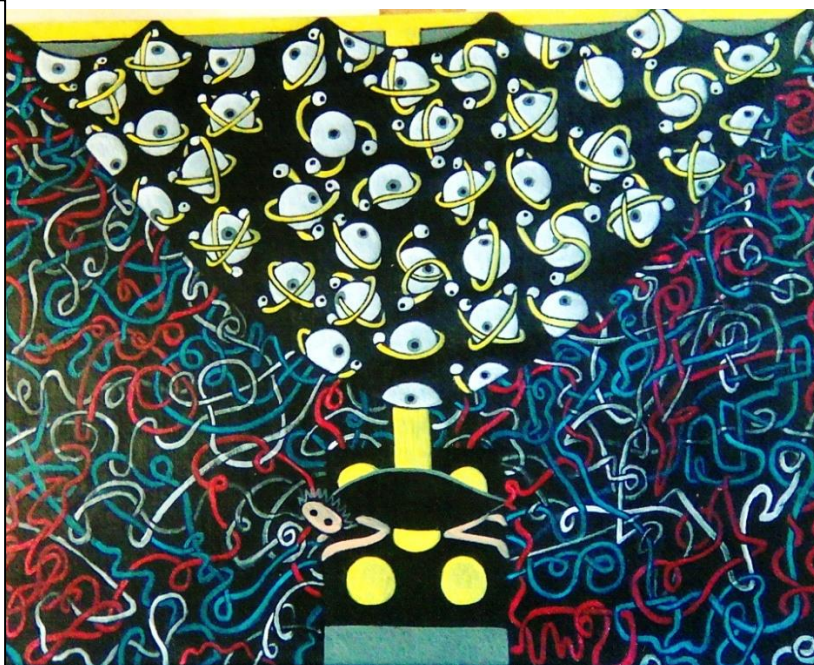


Neglected to factor in the hefty landmass of time difficult to quantify vegetating in front of the box. While his lordship is snoring his head off on the couch in the usual food coma following lunch, I might watch the news. Always a band of porky pies robbing the public blind for all to see. So much of our time on the planet stolen, held hostage for no ransom. Not all of it is worthless, liked those fixer-upper shows specializing in ambitious building projects. Actually awe-inspiring to see a derelict husk be transformed into a beautiful home. There are not many shows on tv that do the same with people. Have to watch out for the cowboy builders promising grand designs that will leave us homeless in the head. The charlatan stonemasons have an eye for fixer uppers. Being told we need to renovate our current state is a construct of conditioning that keeps the unstable structure in place. Very difficult for a mind under construction to recognize it is already built complete, requiring no additional work. It is the distorted mental scaffold deeming us incomplete that needs to be demolished. By the merit of being born human we were all given the key to a most spacious accommodation. The same wealth funding the discontent in the lobby is also funding the contentment in the penthouse. The greatest obstacle for us to access the revelation gold vaulted inside everybody is a skewed value system that enriches a few and impoverishing the many. I don't want to squander the money of my time and energy on a Ponzi religious scheme that doesn't even benefit the one on the apex of the pyramid. Attention is drawn to the patriarchy in my own immediate world sprawled out on the couch like a beached whale. Stirring from his power nap he will be gnarly as a grizzly bear if he catches me in his cave. My heart rate hastens making a sharp exit, ever so careful not to step on any creaky floorboards as if treading a pathway along a cliffs edge.



Like an argonaut in a Greek myth I escape the clutches of a sleeping cycloptic beast. Am I glad to be back voyaging the depths again; but inner waters are agitated after rendezvousing with the one-eyed leviathan. The lines of longitude and latitude are all over the place, crazier than a plate of spaghetti. In the absence of any direction, caution is thrown to the wind. In the subsequent mental maelstrom pesky stowaways sneak on board.

The voyage beset by an insane gale sends the craft into all sorts of mad directions. The fledgling still wet behind the ears rides the mental storm. The meditative crow's nest serves to observe the volatile mind awash with tempestuous emotions. Mindful awareness helps calm the mindless turbulence. I can see it so clearly now, there is a total lack of space in the heart of the madness. After instilling stillness into the quantum chaos, I can steer the craft towards more structured waters.



Some visions more than others are forged with a strong molecular bond. The entire periodic table of elements can be found in a fleeting glance. We are all on the lookout for eyes aglimmer with chemistry. Most gazes are extremely gaseous, clouded with a vaporous lack of interest. The liquid state is not too far behind, always on the cusp of crying. They say it helps clear out the toxins, but make sure to keep your eyes peeled for bad bulbs so contaminated with radioactivity, a meltdown is defo on the horizon.

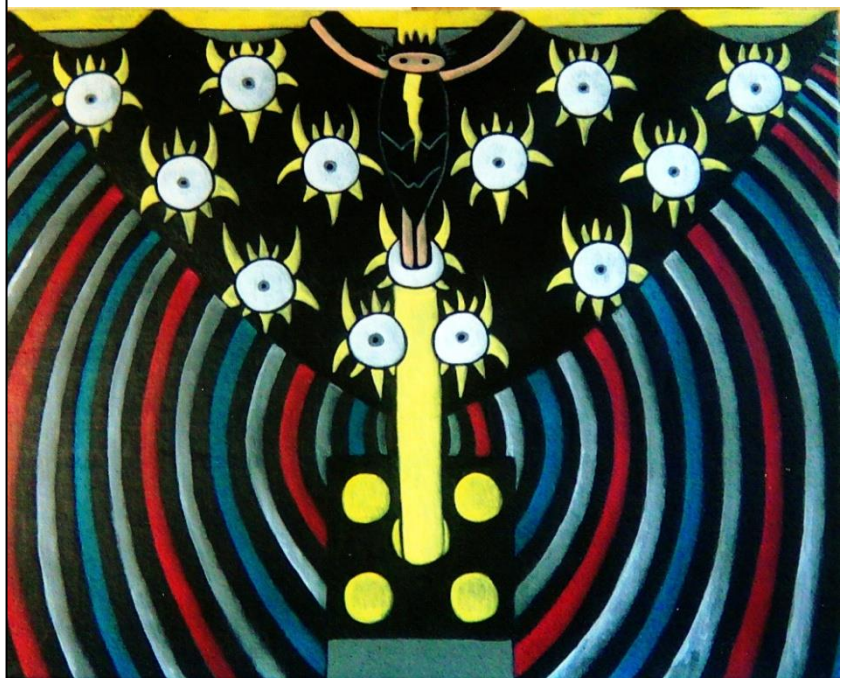
There are peaceful alternatives to venting all that adversarial energy. I look forward to shooting pool on a Friday night, fancied myself as a bit of a shark too. It was my chance to break out of the prison and join the pack. It plays on my mind in meditation modules those breaks when I don't feel so snookered by the triangulation of unemployment low self-worth and constant family fighting. Wish I could use it as a cue to align with the higher aim in life.



Downloading a totally natural high is the ultimate goal, to upload the heavens with two feet firmly rooted in reality. There is no need to spend astronomical sums blasting off into the heavens to purchase something that is freely accessible to everyone. Segueing from earth to sky needn't be something available only to the billionaires who would rather we wallow in the mud worrying about the skyrocketing cost of living on the ground without ever dreaming of someday touching the stars.



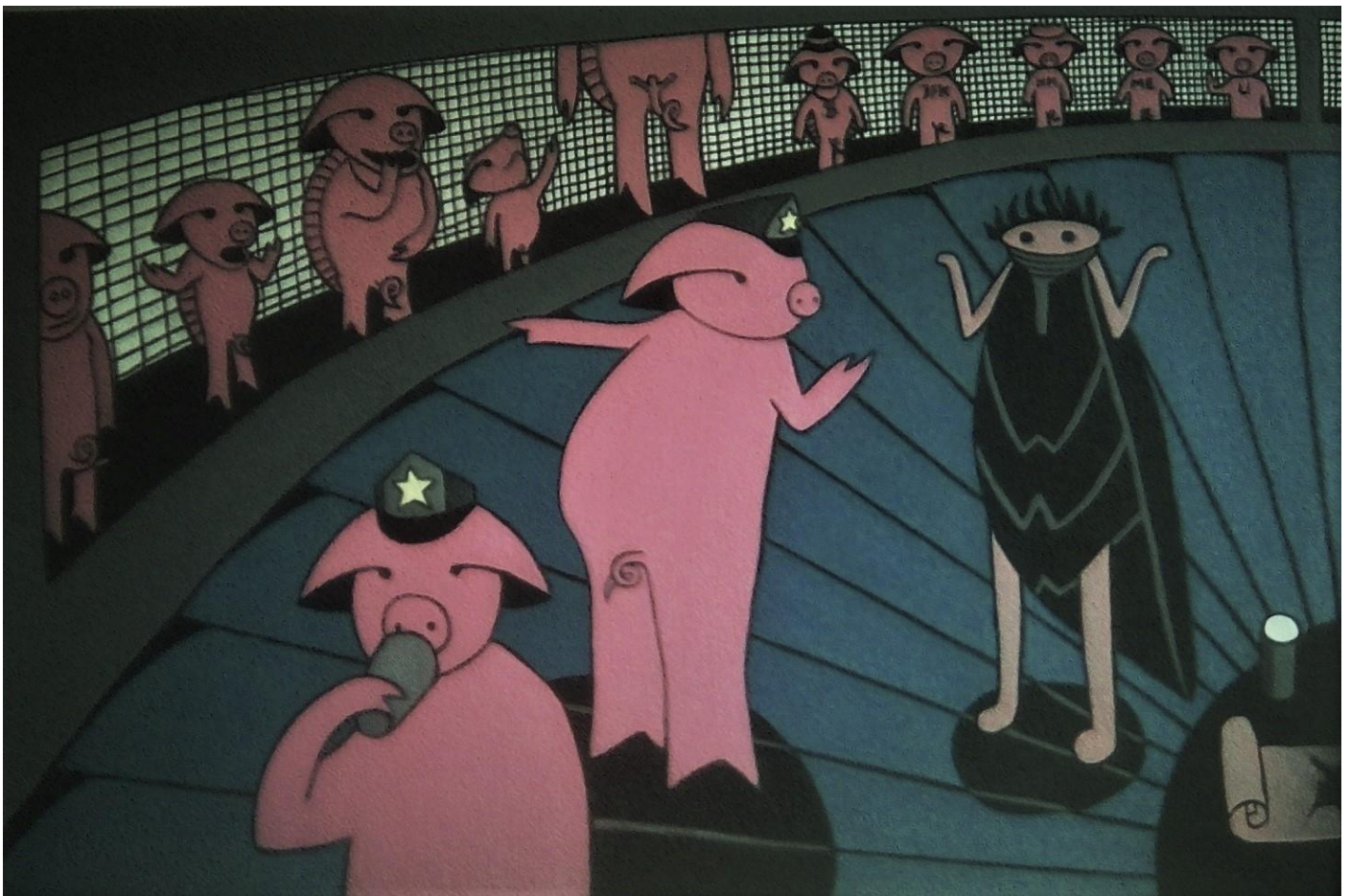
The most precious gift usually gets overlooked, especially around Xmas time when Nov. and Dec. attired in so much tinsel and bling, they would put sex workers to shame. A lot to unpack there, something a Gringe would say! Yes, Santa never delivers me my most coveted wish; every neural synapse in my brain lit up like a Christmas tree. I don't have the presence of mind to unwrap the paradox that nirvana has already been given. From the advent of birth, life has already been gifted to us. Instead of embracing what is alive, I keep exhuming what is dead.





Back to the isle of the dead where daily life stares back dead eyed. Yet another week slain with more corpses surely expected to follow. The bodies are piling high with no end in sight. The only thing I can see for certain is that there's "something" I definitely cannot SEE. There are so much carcasses buried in a single picture; each canvas is a mass grave containing too many corpses to count. What was envisioned as a craft busting at the seams with original subject matter is fast becoming a morgue.

It seems like I'm just gathering evidence in a crime scene rather than a creative body of work. I try my best to interrogate where it all went wrong, forensically cataloguing the innards blown up into my face. Very much like investigating a crime where the culprit responsible for breaking the law is tasked with piecing together the broken pieces. A very puzzling case trying to establish the truth amid so many suspect lies. Will the law ever arrest all these porky pies, even the battalions of falsehoods working on behalf of the system? Back to the same old dilemma, establish truth and mistruth will lose its power.





One thing I know with certainty, without a spiritual foundation rooted in reality, everything we build will eventually fall asunder. There are plenty of unstable constructs built on the premise that we are nothing more than separate physical units with no deeper truth binding us together. Money and status can serve as a bond in the absence of a lasting binding agent, which is probably why stonemasons marked their territory on the dollar. Without a higher currency at our disposal, we end up trading lower values. The computational power of the brain in processing data becomes compromised when in spiritual bankruptcy. It is easy then to sell sacred human sovereignty to the lowest bidder, reducing the river of a whole lifetime to a mouthful of words that'd scarce fill a cup.

Factually speaking I am not made up of words, nor are you. The fact is; we are made of cells and not sets of letters cobbled together to construct a person. It is in a sense a form of voodoo and magical incantation. Think about it, a group of thought forms made into symbols that describe you as a good person or a bad person. Either way it is factually inaccurate when you apply such factual logic. It's so easy to understand a dog can get it. If for instance you respond to a dog with a happy, positive emotionality while saying something like; "You are such a bad doggie!" The dog will react to it in the affirmative. The reverse can be applied too with an angry, negative emotionality but saying, you are such a good doggie. The dog will not be happy, and may growl back. Emotion is closer to truth than any intellectual metric no matter how well packaged. Revelation points to the inner reality behind the curtain of words so often concealed from view. I adore Revelation for the simple reason it takes a glimpse behind the veil, revealing what is really going on. Revelation because of its strange symbolic anatomy tends to get viewed as a boogiemane. Is it no wonder I forge a special affinity with The Apocalypse; for I am a strange corpus that is frequently misread too. Rather than getting weighed down by the end-time aspect; I always gravitate towards the center of gravity in the body of work where the very mechanistic symbolism has for me such a strong scientific resonance. In the boudoir of my brain physics and metaphysics have always lain together as compatible bedfellows.

When I discovered the four principal laws science has equated governs the universe, could not resist aligning the theological with the theoretical. The strong atomic force, the weak atomic force, the gravitational force, and the electromagnetic force I drew parallels with the four living creatures governing the universe in the Apocalypse. The apocalyptic narrative has a shamanistic resonance, not something that would stand in a court of law. Behind every face there is a court case between truth and falsehood. In the courtroom drama in our heads, it is so easy to get caught up in individual cases rather than cross examining the operating system which produces so many minds out of kilter with reality. Mankind totally blinkered to the life on his own world sends off probes into outer space, pointlessly searching barren planets for what he already has. I don't want to pointlessly fire my focus aimlessly into prefabricated heights, catapulting my ego into a stratospheric sense of strength, only to end landing in a catastrophic sense of weakness. Another wasted entity, another empty shell of what I should be. I want to go further in this odyssey of life and touch distant shores undreamt of by the imagination. It is a normal sight to see pilots sifting through the charred remains of their crashed and shattered dreams, not enough consciousness for full lift-off to propel them into something real and everlasting. It is an all-too-common occurrence to see astronauts who once floated around in zero gravity to come back to the earthly plain empty handed.



You can feel the tension in the air as yet another branding exercise blasts off into the vacuous space behind the consumers fat face. "Worship my greatness!" Says the luxury brand, accept that you are a poor lowly inferior brand left to curdle like sour milk on the shelf. Does it really matter how we are packaged when we all contain the same elements sloshing around inside. It is all basically brain juice, whether branded as a celebrated brand or a nobody wants u brand. Every carton of brain juice has an expiry date, I hope this warning doesn't make your BJ turn sour. Brain juice unsweetened by love and joy over time coagulates into a stagnant sludge. That miasmatic sourness is always thinking of new ways to destroy, the mind heavily pregnant with murderous desire lives solely to give birth to death.

Mindless violence we all know is not confined to just one particular sector of the society. The uppity in their ivory towers can have insane spillages just as much as the underlings dodging the downpours on the ground. The evil spirit does not restrict itself to just one demographic of the population. Anyone can board an aircraft to hell regardless of what socioeconomic background you hail from. We've been piggybacking on the devil's airline for a very long time. (By the devil I always mean a monstrous imbalance) Its slithery crimson contrails can be easily spotted worming its way across the skyline in this age.

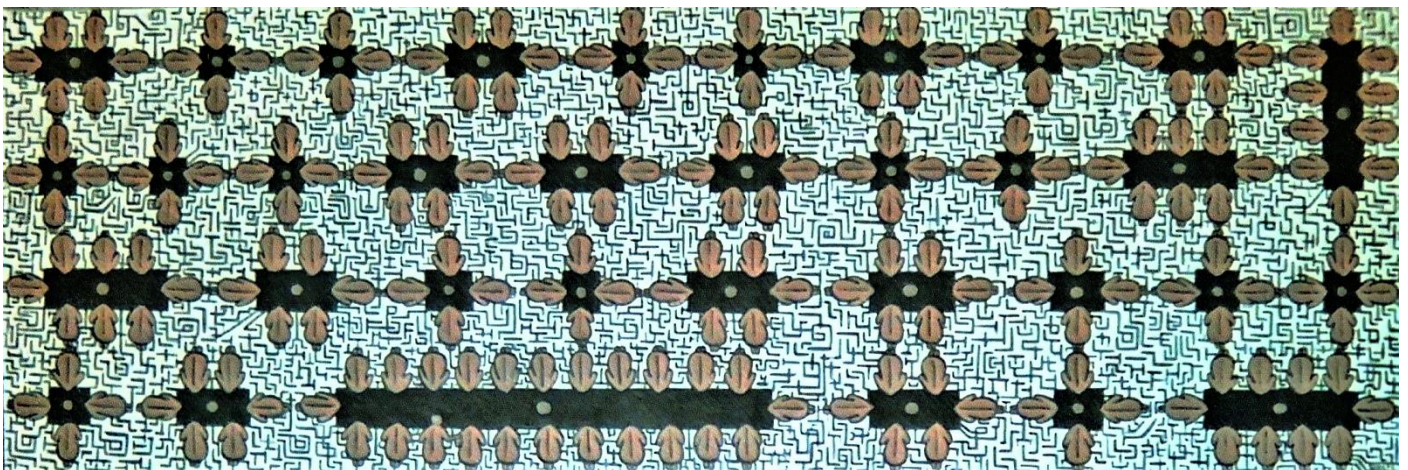


Our species has across the centuries developed complex labyrinthine stratagems to avoid grabbing the mythical minotaur by the horns. Rather than tackling the root cause of the dysfunctional mindset, there is a deep-rooted tendency to merely gorge on the carnage. So desensitized most viewers pass no heed to the daily outpourings of media violence. We rarely ever question the medias pernicious influence over our inner tides. The precious energy that could be spent cultivating harmony is instead tragically used to reap discord. I am guilty of vegetating in front of the screen too, and feeding off the disorder without seriously thinking about where the narrative is taking me. If I could put my time on the planet into a pie chart, I presume a significant slice would be channeled into screentime. I know deep down of course that it is a total waste of my time and energy, more about the dimly lit side of the mind than the bright side. So long as I am divorced from the light,

I am cursed to wander the cityscape of the mind at night. Shadowy entities composed of dream physiognomies and nightmare anatomies have dominion over my thinking. Looks like the night has yet again won the day. There is no way I can give an enlightened remedy to the diseased system plagued by darkness when I am so badly infected myself. The lunar identity follows me everywhere, especially when I feel a oneness with nothing.



Floating around in the spiritless space I am just a subjective piece of meat sandwiched between a moonscape of famous faces above, and a landscape of faceless nobodies below.



After a while I start cooking up food for thought with a little bit more bite. The Matrix playing in the picture houses at the time prompted me to look at the world with new eyes. I'm not usually so easily tricked by the trickery of clever marketing. The ad campaign nevertheless cast a spell over me. It shifted my perception of the world around me; more like an illusionist's magic trick than actual concrete reality. The exorcist is another movie that looks behind the veil, exorcism certainly has parallels with a self-expression ethos. Both should in theory provide a pathway out for trapped spirits ensnared in the game. Initially my mapping of the societal Ouija board was one dimensional and abstract. Caught up in the complex social circuitry, it is very difficult to step out and get a good pictorial grasp of the system. The coders who designed the program don't like glitches like me looking for decryptions. The shepherds prefer art that says nothing, go out and graze on abstract pastures that don't spook the herd to the machinations of the farmers. "Why don't you act like a normal social animal, and feed from a less controversial trough to fit in with the herd mentality?" I never could conform with any groupthink no matter how many times I went down on all fours and acted subservient. I'd rather be a lone wolf.

I empathized with the wolf and not the three little piggies as a kid whenever that parable did the rounds. The tale reminds me of rent day when the big bad rent man appeared on our doorstep huffing and puffing. My mother would get all the terrorized little piggies to duck for cover behind the couch. We would be hushed not to make a sound until the wolfish man got the message there was no payment to be extracted from number 59. Some weeks the rent man was so persistent my mother got me to go out to him and say she wasn't at home. I like to think she understood from an early age I wasn't so fearful as the others. My mother learnt pretty damn quick I wasn't very good at telling lies either. "Mammy said she's not home." I remember informing the rent man. Not such a big bad wolf after all, seemed to be a very sociable animal. Later I became no stranger to getting shunned from closed doorways myself, know exactly what it's like. I knocked on so many doors in the Dublin artworld eventually I got a painting through. It was a large work too; I considered to be a total masterpiece. I was so over the moon to have sired such a piece, and devoted a significant amount of time giving the artwork life. I was utterly convinced there was nothing wrong with the composition that would merit receiving a bad critique. Soon as the oil on the canvas was touch-dry, I whisked it into town to have it assessed by a reputable art gallery. I phoned to arrange a private viewing with the gallery manager who had a look at my portfolio a few months before. Nearly missed the bus into Dublin too, was such an important opening for me. Convinced I was, positively sure he was going to love it. I floated along the streets of the capital buoyant as a balloon floating in the air. Little did I know with the stretcher cloaked in refuse sacks; I was just another well prepared accident in the city waiting to happen. I really didn't care what anyone thought. I strolled along Pearse street impervious to the possibility of my bubble getting pierced.

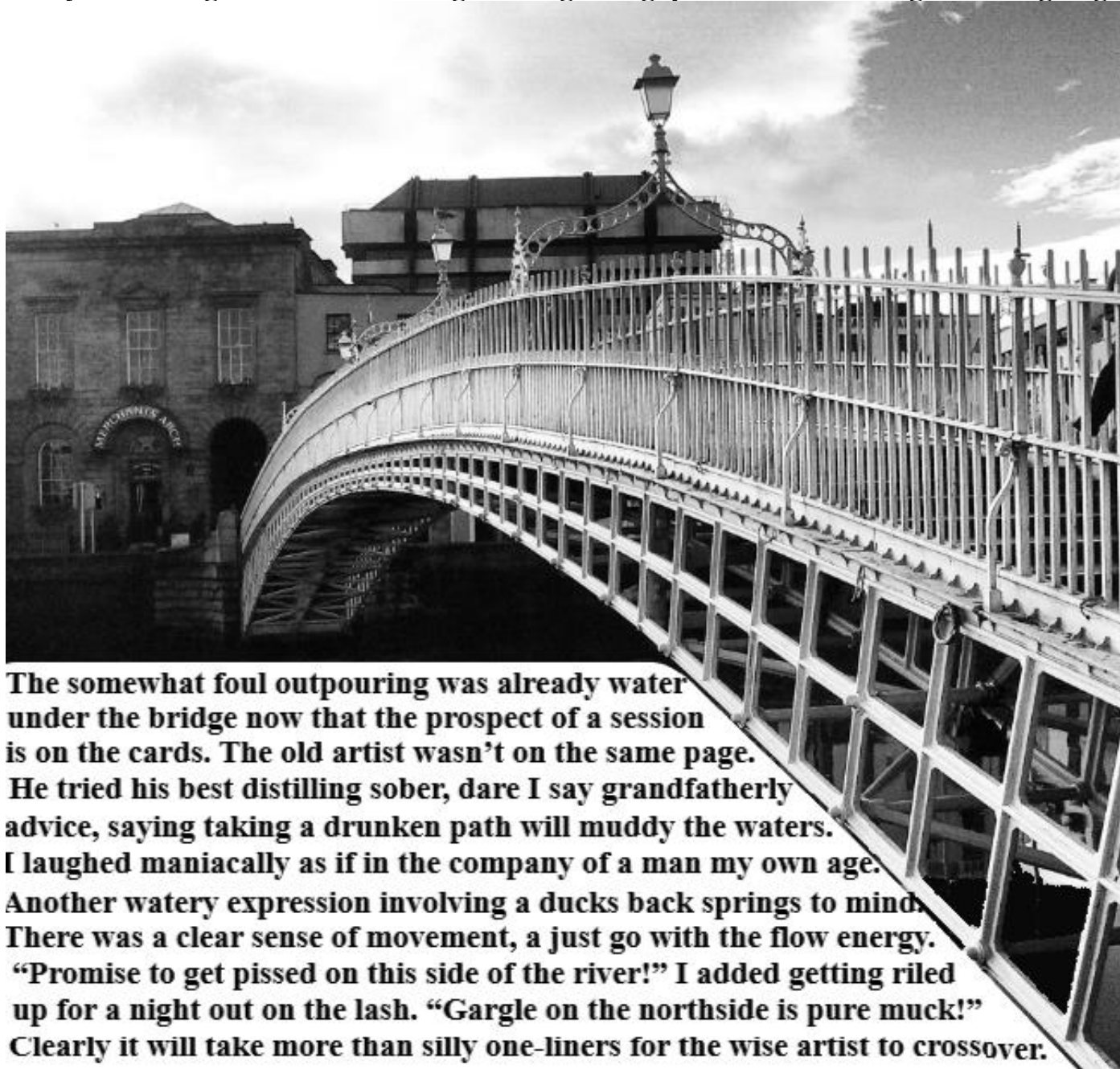
When I got to the gallery the manager seemed so eager to examine the painting. Little did I know that my enthusiasm was a bouquet of flowers walking into a stinging garden full of nettles. I carefully disrobed my creation of her dress of bin bags to be scanned by the upper-class aficionado of all things fine art. I didn't entertain a single notion that her flesh was going to get badly stung. Ever so slowly the wilt set in as I read the face of the art connoisseur. The cultured gent displayed a culture of disgust and revulsion on the Petri dish of his face. A vessel filled to the brim with crude oil poised to baptize my sweet outpouring. I didn't have the basic vocal skills to shield the beautiful artefact from the ugliness that was about to spill forth. The distasteful look smeared on his haughty face made the three-piece pinstriped suit he proudly wore appear like a mechanics boiler suit.

"Please, just give me a nail on the wall for a week and this will be sold I guarantee it." I desperately pleaded virtually on my knees. He gave me the look he would give a fly that had just landed in his merlot. The abstract pieces on the wall behind him came into focus. I could have painted them in an afternoon. My piece in the dock had taken three months. "If I had a nail for every artist who promised me that I'd never sell anything." Retorted the gallery manager sharp and blunt in equal measure. I felt utterly crucified by the verdict that he put onto the painting. The crux of the critique was that the composition and its content had been hammered out before. He was a million miles away from nailing it with his summation. The subject matter had merely clashed with his own belief system. I had a good grasp of art history inside and out by then. Nothing like this had entered the mainstream. I was one hundred percent certain what I'd conjured was a completely original artwork. No witchery on this earthly plane could dispel the disappointment.

Making my way across town I wasn't tiptoeing through the tulips anymore. I was getting badly stung by the voice of that uppity cunt echoing repeatedly those words in my ear. DONE BEFORE DONE BEFORE DONE BEFORE DONE BEFORE DONE BEFORE DONE BEFORE is all I can see and hear, seemed to pollinate the entire cultural airspace. Usually I enjoy Blooms Day, and James Joyce too. Although I hadn't yet read Ulysses or Finnegans Wake. In that early chapter of my life got as far as Portrait of an Artist and Dubliners which I enjoyed immensely. On this occasion there was just no getting into the spirit of the big day on the literary Calendar. I actually growled at a man and a woman passing me along the way both regaled in period costume. Wanted to tell them a thing or two about freedom of expression, how authorities continue to deem some art as beautiful flowers and others as ugly weeds to be censored. The Dublin hegemony in Joyces day had uprooted the potential for him to flourish here too. There wasn't a street in the city now that didn't pay tribute to the Ulyssean scenario we all know well had been done before. "Uppity cunt." I growled at another Joycean cycling a cycle recycled from a century ago. I was veering into the vicious cycle of a monologue that could drive me around the bend. "Uppity cunts!" I growled to myself again. "Thought the Irish war of independence was supposed to get rid of all the uppity cunts. There are surely more uppity cunts now than before. Uppity cunts everywhere, they've merely replaced one uppity cuntry for another how do you like that stream of consciousness you uppity cunts. With uppity cunts there's no movement, no progress. They failed to process the dysfunctions of a previous colonial power structure, and so now doomed to repeat the same old mistakes. Uppity cunts, your stream of consciousness has led you to a stagnant, black pool." I said cackling aloud with the most evilst laughter. "Black Pool, Dubh Lin!" I bellowed at yet another uppity cunt.

It was driving me crazy, needed to talk to somebody fast. An artist I was on friendly terms with had a studio nearby in a Templebar gallery. Despite the thirty-year age gap we had a rapport that seemed genuinely on the level. I didn't make a habit of calling in on him since he was always super busy. The doors of an elevator opened shortly after I rang him on the intercom. Up I went to his plush penthouse studio perched on the top floor above the exhibition space showcasing all his abstract pieces. After politely exchanging hellos, I angrily relayed the saga that just happened, showing him the painting half expecting the older and much more experienced artist to pour cruel criticisms onto it too. He went over with the painting in his outstretched arms to get a closer look in an area strongly lit by a skylight. Completely silent I went out onto the balcony to savor the stunning view of Dublin city with the River Liffey and the Ha'penny bridge just a stone's throw below. My first encounter with the old artist occupied my thoughts, actually met him a few years previously while ditching school with friends. We frequented all the art galleries around Dublin. Very much in an education mode it was an excellent way to make use of our time. The artist approached us while attentively we gazed at his abstract pieces, trying to make sense of the pure white abstraction. I made a comment about the Eric Clapton's song, White Room. "Heard it was about death." I said. What happened next really was scary and nice at the same time. For an adult to engage with a bunch of teenagers like that was a no go zone even back then, but we were street smart enough to see he was being genuine. After what seemed like an eternity, he declared that he really liked it. Well my heart leapt. Validation at last, and from an established artist working at the top of his field. He was

working on a series of massive black abstract pieces he said were soon to be exhibited in Kilmainham. Wow, was I mightily impressed. My voice suddenly went up a few octaves. "FUCK IT, I' M GOING FOR A JAR." I decided there and then to go on a bender, then started doing the math's in my head, calculating the amounts of pints I could get with what cash was in my pocket. Then I remembered the money for the electricity bill, If I skimmed a few bob off could make up the difference next week. Oh the mind of an alcho always scheming and double dealing to bridge the gap between incomings and outgoings.



The somewhat foul outpouring was already water under the bridge now that the prospect of a session is on the cards. The old artist wasn't on the same page. He tried his best distilling sober, dare I say grandfatherly advice, saying taking a drunken path will muddy the waters. I laughed maniacally as if in the company of a man my own age. Another watery expression involving a ducks back springs to mind. There was a clear sense of movement, a just go with the flow energy. "Promise to get pissed on this side of the river!" I added getting riled up for a night out on the lash. "Gargle on the northside is pure muck!" Clearly it will take more than silly one-liners for the wise artist to crossover.

Despite much procrastination the old artist ended up joining me in painting the town red. I made for the lift followed by himself counseling me not to let such an incident throw me from the wagon. We both went on a pub crawl together as he tried in vain to dissuade me. My system wasn't used to the onslaught of beer and I threw up after the third scoop. I picked myself up and started afresh in another establishment. We drank into the night, ending back at Templebar in a downstairs subterranean nightclub. I was worried about the painting leaning beside the bar with so many people brushing up against the canvas.

I asked a security man would he be able to find a safe place for it until I left. He was very gentlemanly and brought the picture up to the office with him for safekeeping. Roughly half an hour later he came back down and took me aside to have a private consultation. "How much do you want for the painting?" He asked shouting over the din of the crowd. I thought it was just a windup and went along with the prank, pretending to take him seriously. The good news so quick on the heels of bad news seemed too good to be true.

"Two grand." I said somewhat underselling its true value. Instantly he replied casually. "Yeah grand, that's OK." He gave me a firm businesslike handshake and the deal was sealed. He then asked when could he give me the two grand. I totally lost all composure; this guy was fucking serious. I stuttered out that I would finalize the deal in the morning; nervously stipulating I needed to bring the painting home with me tonight, everything was moving so fast. My brain was spinning with this mental carousel of a day it was on. One moment a blighted famine and the next a blooming feast. Though he was as sober as a judge, I suggested that he sleep on it for the night and assess how he felt about buying it in the morning when his head was perhaps a little bit clearer. He saw right through me, there was an understandable paternal hesitancy to let go when forced to leave a child. Boy did I feel elated and vindicated as I made my way back to Lusk. On the night link home, the entire upper deck of the bus wanted to know what the guy sat quietly at the rear had stashed in the black bags. I was very enthusiastic about showing the curious and very drunk onlookers the painting, relaying the troughs and crescendos of the day's crazy geography. I threw myself into giving my new audience a talk on the paintings contents.

"As you can all plainly see, there are the same number of figures to the right as there are to the left. The central figure here, is a kind of mother earth motif with two babies on either side of her symbolizing humanity. One infant is sinking into the mothers dress, while the other infant rises above. The figures on either side are given each the same material to fashion a reality with. To the right side is a landscape of discordant weaving where everything is in knots. On the left side is a landscape of concordant weaving where everything is beautifully knitted together." In a roundabout way I surmised what the painting contained thus, my first art lecture on Dublin bus. One drunken passenger saw something and wanted to throw in his tuppence worth. He took the picture into his arms; I had visions of him putting his fist through the canvas as he repeated as best he could in his inebriated state what I'd just said. It was comical for most of the upper deck listening to him talking about the impact our confused inner state was having on the environment. Despite my worries about him running off with the thing, I was dead chuffed that he got the message. It was the most exhilarating journey I ever experienced on public transport. The next day when returning with the picture to the nightclub it was a totally different animal to the night before. Difficult to envision what was at midnight an enchanted tavern, next to this incarnation at midday of a spooky, broody cavern. I was asked to wait in this very dingy dungeon while the first collector of my art fetched the cash. Before he went to the office upstairs to get the money from the safe, he gave me an open invitation to the bar. I couldn't drink a thing with the knot in my stomach and declined the generous offer. Then he asked me would I prefer the two thousand in twenties, fifties or hundreds? The Dublin underbelly would in a heartbeat pick up the scent of hundreds in my pocket. "Eh, fifties please." I said after a gulp. He went to get the money leaving me wondering who the hell this guy was with such easy access to so much cash. Later he told me that he

wasn't just a security guard, but was actually the boss over one of the biggest security firms in the whole of Dublin city center. I became really friendly with the gent and later presented him with a hand-written epistle on the pictures subject matter. After he grew acquainted with the painting, he paid me the greatest compliment you could pay an artist. When he was finished for the day to unwind, he'd sit before my painting, savoring and contemplating the hallucinogenic landscape while sipping a few glasses of his favorite Bordeaux. I couldn't have asked for a better surrogate for my brainchild. Now I was in the same category as Van Gogh, apparently only selling one painting in his lifetime too.

Amazing how in the course of just one day you can be brought on so many ups and downs. The influx of cash helped me shrug off the rags of the old century and slip into the suit of a brand spanking new millennium. With the extra funds I even contemplated unsheathing my wings and taking flight from the nest. There was a heaviness festering in the air prohibiting me from flying off. That didn't hinder me from chasing after a few birds at the time. At the turn of the century I would have been spotted swanning about Skerries in county Dublin with a psychology student. She'd teasingly peck and probe why in my mid-twenties I was still living in my parents' house. To be honest I didn't really know myself until one night I awoke to hear a horrid choking sound emanating from the landing down below. I knew then what was keeping me here. Looking down I discovered to my absolute horror, my father strangling my mother on the stairs. It was a full-on attempted murder. Without thinking, I jumped down out of the loft and kicked my father in the head to remove his choke hold from around her neck. He was brought back to his senses; they were both ridiculously drunk and didn't really know what was going on.

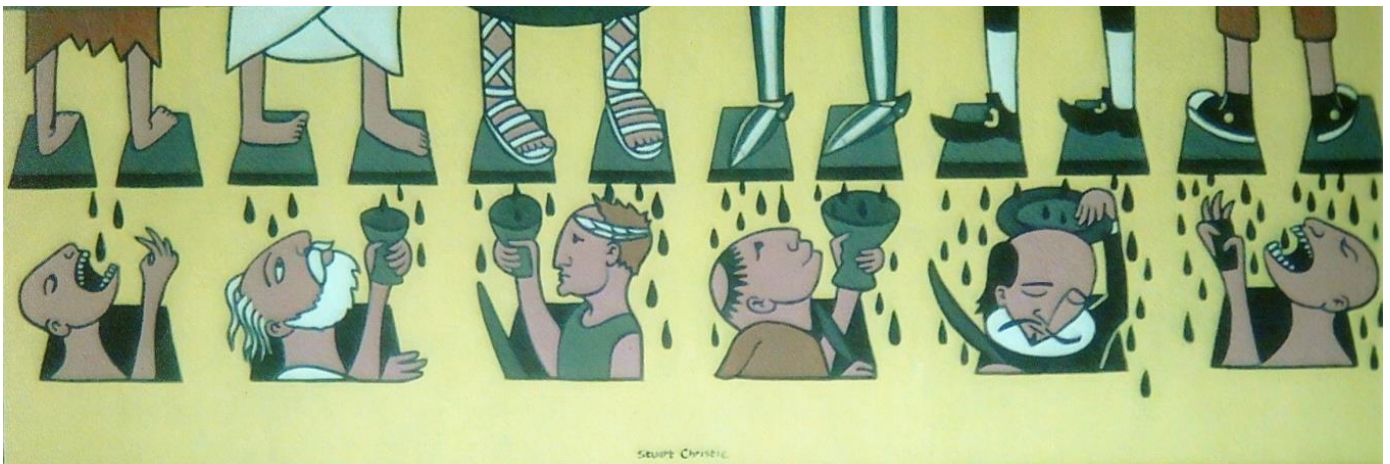
"Now go to your room the pair of ye, we'll talk about this in the morning." I shouted at my parents. They went to their room like scolded children. Soon they would split and go their separate ways. For their entire marriage it had been heading that way. All things must come to an end.

CHAPTER EIGHT

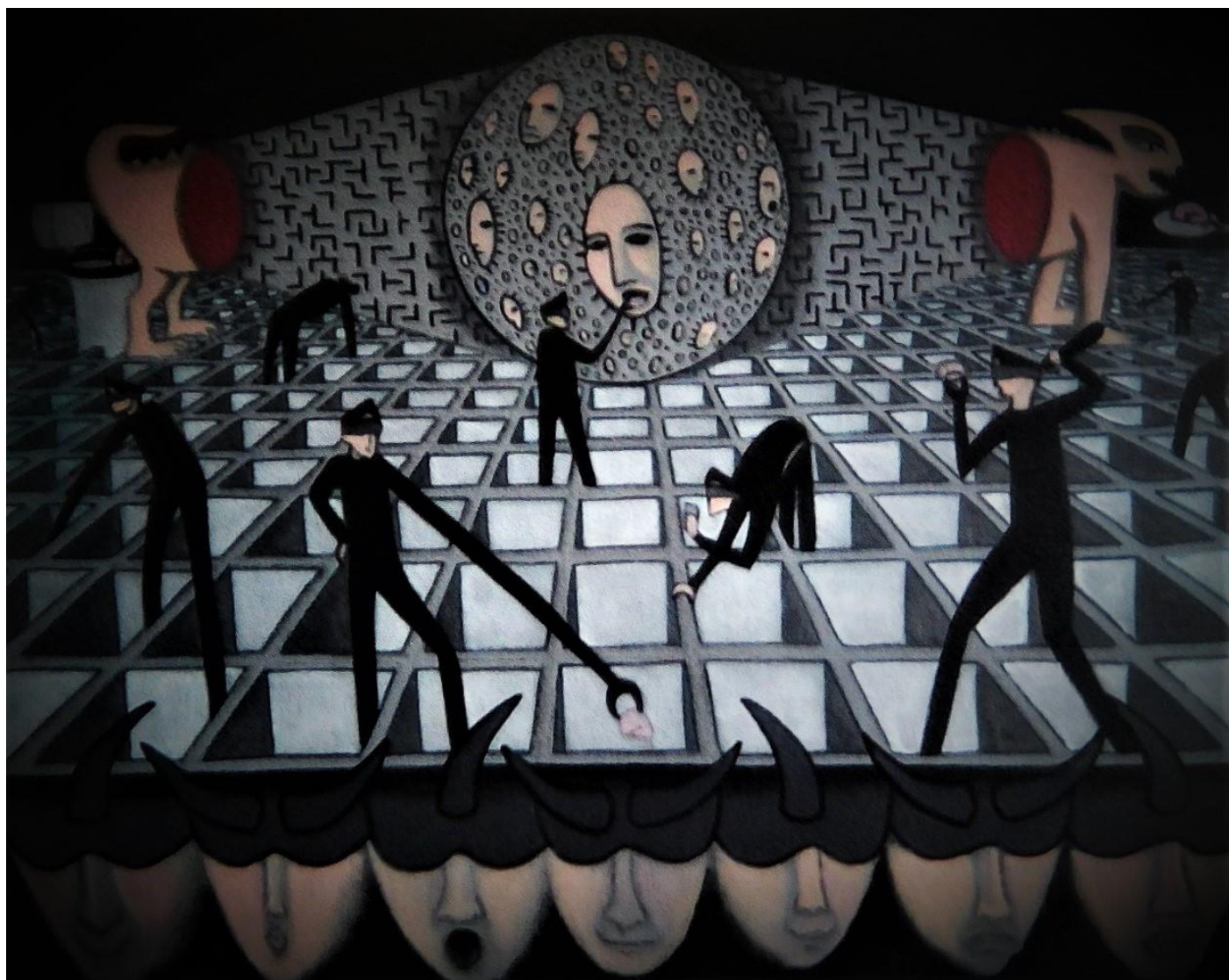
Throughout my twenties massive changes to the communication business were busily being communicated. It was all just another rewiring exercise in an endless line of reboots of the same old program. It was carefully marketed as progress; those who opposed were seen as backward. It was ushered in despite the absence of a public vote. Goes to show, rulers do not serve democratic principles but the dictates of unelected corporate entities. There was no consultation with people on the effects a technocracy would have on society. All bowed down and paid homage without question. Coders in their droves started to build vast coliseums of escapement oblivious to the reality they were building a prison. The architects know what they are building. Once everyone has been corralled on line, then they will be forced to walk the line. More and more players are opening their eyes to a gameplan that'll never deliver higher goals. Stagnation ensues when spiritual growth is systematically suppressed. The technocrats would rather we all sleepwalk through life, oscillating between a vampiric self-interest and a zombified lack of interest. Waking up is an act of revolution against the dystopic nightmare designed to keep us going around in circles, perpetually chasing our own tails in the name of progress. The so-called advancements in technology have merely resulted in us forking out cash to monster corporations for the privilege of using our eyes, our ears, our mouths and our minds. Regardless of all the new mod-cons, the same upstairs master and downstairs servant mentality prevails. The same business model that ultimately destroyed the Roman empire franchises this the ultimate system of enslavement. The same primitive, brute mindset subjugating perceived weaker elements to win power and glory continues to be utilized.



The same winepress of thinking squeezed to make the same old wine. We invent new cups to drink this brain juice, then get drunk hailing it as the greatest thing that anyone has ever thought up before. Until someone ferments something new and the binge continues.



We have been pressing each-others buttons for a very long time. You'd think we would have figured out our internal wiring by now and received the elusive message that we're all trying so desperately to communicate. It is so easy to get our wires crossed. One wrong slip of the tongue and BOOM your life is a bomb site. Because most human beings are in ignorance of the core universal reality that connects all life, the same old errors are made and reinforced. Most egos are hot wired to operate via aversion and attraction. Some of us are not very attractive. A pain worms its way into the mind labelled as unattractive. The worm grows into a serpent. That snake will one day morph into a ferocious dragon. The body and the mind cannot keep it at bay forever, that fierce fire-breathing insanity will eventually find an outlet. Everybody is familiar with the lay of the land, yet the bad Karma river continues flowing into the new century, channeling the silt from the previous millennium. There is a conspiratorial narrative negatively irrigating the floodplain of my brain. Seismic ruminations about the world wide web rumble throughout the geology of my day. When the internet is mentioned at about dinnertime in the house they gush forth like a bloody geyser from a wound. A nauseous expression is then observed on the faces of my audience in the preamble of "The Talk." Some roll their eyes while others tend to issue savage expletives as the speaker prefaces the approaching lecture with a question. "Do you think most people in the world today are in a good place, well do you people?" The vacuous silence which usually follows devoid of any answers prompts me to continue. "Connecting so many unenlightened brains together is only going to serve to strengthen a lower level of consciousness." For dramatic effect to emphasize the seriousness of my sermon, I'd hammer the table with my fists. They all sigh as "The Talk" rambles on for a bit, climaxing in a verbal demolition of the architects for building a paradigm that will only reinforce a spiritually ignorant mentality. My mother tells me to shut the fuck up, and take a long walk off a short pier. Or she might say, Stuart go piss up an ash tree. That one understandably makes everyone laugh. Grudgingly I return to the censorial quays nursing a fuming goblet of silence with the splash of a smile on my face. All's well, sort of. Until another opportunity crops up to wax lyrical on the hairy impalpable truth.



They think my unstable state is a symptom of a lack of career prospects. Had I been shown how to centre myself and regulate my emotions there'd be no need for any drama. Throughout all the years of schooling, not one single lesson on how to process the massive amounts of information regularly shovelled into each brain. Few recognize the beneficial effect of a mindfulness practice in freeing up space in our interiors. We are more likely to follow the set program when boxed in a noisy neural grid. Like hamsters in a maze, easily manipulated to follow the set program. The mind heavily laden with information, bombarded every minute of the day with data struggles desperately to think straight. Is it no wonder our overloaded mental computers get infected with nasty viruses and crash. When graduation day arrives the students on the verge of mental collapse just want to let it rip. Need to be careful a temporary escape doesn't morph into a permanent prison. There's no escaping the vision of a dystopian version of reality in my art, I hope it's not a harbinger of things to come. Worrying about the future occupies my thoughts a lot. There are times when I wished I'd never lain eyes on those revelatory verses on the beast. Occasionally it crosses my mind to bring my grizzly ruminations to an analyst for a wax and a pluck. I'm not sure that a barber wielding a psychoanalytical razor can shave my bristly brain. Could never on my income afford splashing out on such lavish treatments. It's entirely up to me to reach a resolution, eventually the river will meander to the ocean.

Most when talking about themselves tell tales embodying perfect physiques waxed and smooth. What prettified and educated dykes we build to keep the beastly parts at bay. Yet if we examine humanities bloody history, we will find a far hairier curriculum vitae. That bloodlust ferocious as a dragon continues to flow through the collective mindscape. Not a day goes by when it does not feed on its prey sauntering along the banks right now oblivious to the possibility of becoming the latest statistic. Who will be the next sacrificial victim; impossible to predict unless you are one of the priesthood who does its bidding. Reading the résumé of the human race an employer would think it is the spreadsheet of a serial killer. Nobody escapes untouched the crimson clutches of the Dragon River. It is very difficult work for anyone tasked with building bridges over such troubled waters. We are here to make headway into a healing space, this is the most important occupation.

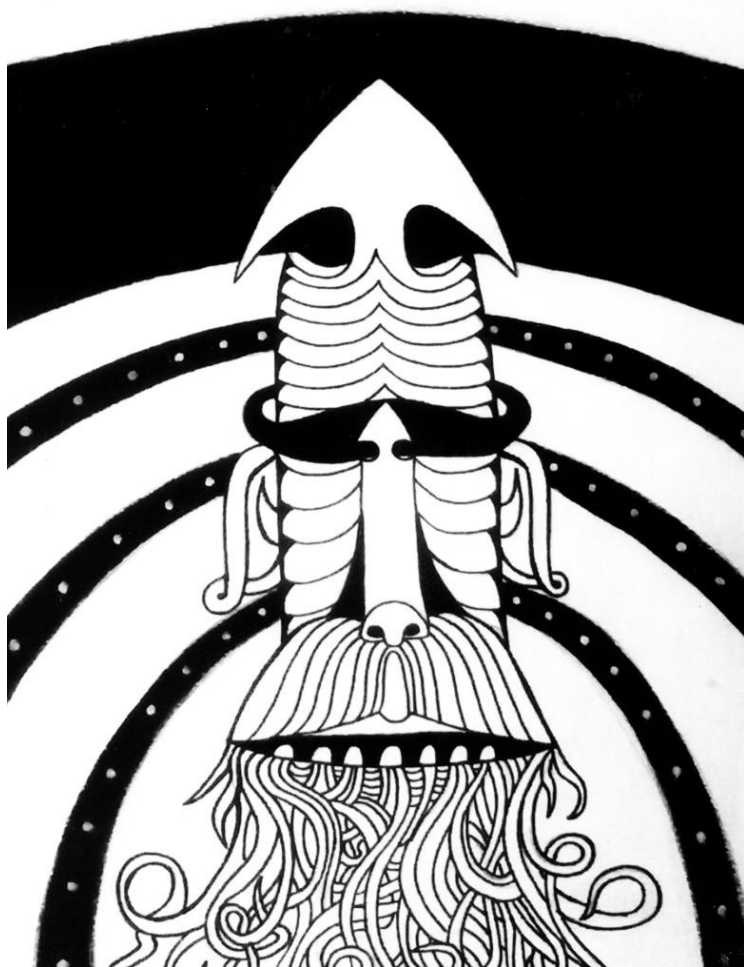


Judging from my CV so scantily clad with hardly any qualifications; it would appear that I have no purpose in life, drifting about aimlessly without any direction whatsoever. Most think I am rowing up shit creek without a paddle. I can still source work when I put my mind to it. During the boom times it was very easy to row in and out of jobs. Observing that I had secured employment my family would then tweak the script a little and pester me to get a mortgage. They think that will comb-out the inferiority complex nesting in my neural circuitry. They want me to get a plush superiority complex growing so profusely in the modern socio-economic complex of the burgeoning Celtic economy.

Perhaps with a mortgage the prickly little ego acorn will grow up into a lofty ego oak? Very few foresaw that in less than a decade most of the financial forest would be felled. TTTTTTTTTTIIIIIIIIIIIMMMMMMMBBBBBBBBBBEEEEEEEEERRRRRRRRRR

I would much prefer to invest my energies into fishing the Apocalypse. To go on the hunt and catch a humungous beast of a revelation, now that was where my real passions lay.

Any employment I netted whether it was behind a counter or on the assembly line, following the set instructions was never a difficult thing for me to grapple with. That was usually child's play. I was rather more focused on trying to follow the unspoken rulebook authored by those employees who saw themselves as the alpha. It becomes obvious pretty damn quick that I'm not looking to fill the position of alpha male in the group. When it is established, I am not the dominant archetype, less romantic positions in the group dynamic will be bestowed regardless of whether I had applied for the role. Not wanting to make a big public scene, I tend to just assume the position and let them have their fun. "Yes, you are my daddy now, the lord of all you survey. I'll try my best to play the part of underling." Usually the buggers do it behind your back, trying to resist will make it worse. Best to just bend over while they have their wicked way, hum a tuneful melody from a Hollywood musical or think about drawing a silly cartoon until the ordeal passes. I have amalgamated all the buggers here into a phallic caricature I like to call; the Phalli. Like worms they are really good at replenishing the soil of the system; keeping our focus on materiality while doing all they can to suppress voices advocating spiritual solutions. They hog publicity demanding all the attention be directed towards the few at the top, distracting the majority of the public venturing into the more spacious aspect of reality.



The Phalli don't like to see anyone ascending outside their control. Bad for business when users start thinking outside the box. Much easier to sell the dopemans junk when users are kept in a smallminded place. In their tiny self-contained cell, users will purchase any shit if it induces in them a temporary release. It is like a drug high for the dealers too, to have countless users on their books hooked on shit. With so many gravitating towards some form of escapement, nobody rarely asks what they are escaping from? That it's a blatant contradiction of the premise that western democracies are "Free." I know deep down what most people are trying to escape from, it is clearly a panopticon specifically designed to fool the inmates they are free. So long as the Phalli rule the roost the mental penitentiary will continue to thrive.

I can imagine getting hauled by whatever passes as the thought police and grilled under a spot light. I am well aware the peasantry should not say such things about the nobility. I understand perfectly that my whole existence in this world is to serve as their plaything. Yes, they keep telling me I'm not needed, that they have very expensive symbols that do a sterling job reinforcing their delusions of grandeur. It wouldn't be so bad if playing with their toys filled the gaping hole inside, leaving those of us classed as inferiors alone. A multitude of us get it up the ass when such playful diversions prove to be impudent. Oh, how the lesser of us have to labor under the yoke of those in the false heights. Clearly, they are in a low. Yet their appearance and dress always desperately pointing upwards. The technocrat coup if it had ushered in any expansive changes brought out the flutes in the suits in their droves. Like the ground after a heavy downpour, everywhere you looked the earth was sweating worms. The poor creatures so blinded by material success that any light of wisdom entering their mental domain is breathed in with gills instead of eyes. Very slow are the Phalli to understand anything outside their own personal ambitions and plans. No getting around that mental blockage using subtle creative tools. The only content that grabs attention besides the prospect of filling their coffers is sex and violence. No wonder terrorists and pimps in their multitudes are lining up to get a slice of the pie. Lone voices trying to spread a pathway to peace message are routinely ditched. The Phali so proficient at cancelling easy targets are not so good at neutralizing other mayhems. They are totally powerless when it comes to dealing with actual evil which, periodically and sporadically rears its ugly head. None of their artificial stimuli now coming to the rescue! How they go all rubbery in the end when the really nasty Phalli arrive fresh off the conveyor belt with a bloodlust moved up a notch eager to perform their castrations.



My brief foray into the corporate sphere gets me thinking bigtime about brands. It's no big revelation; we are all familiar with how companies use brands to mark their territory. Not a million miles from animal behavior in the wild. In the case of monster corporations the practice is elevated to a whole other level. Apex predators in a human context mark their territory on the populace. Not hard to imagine the evil exec up on the sixtieth floor gleefully scanning the masses scurrying along the streetscape below like insects in a hive. "You all belong to me now!" That's what I had believed the prophecy alluded to. It is a serious business when dealing with signage pointing towards a system of global enslavement. Nothing to do with the end of the world department, hate those amateurs. For me the essence of Revelation is about seeing what is hidden. Usually the best kept secrets are concealed in plain sight. Though I was in my mid-twenties, people double-take when they hear me pontificating like an old preacher man against this newfangled world wide web. Everybody in my social circle grew familiar with my burgeoning revelatory pyromania. What can I say, it was a good way to spark up a conversation. Drinking pals upon seeing the matchsticks arranged on the bar in a 3W formation headed for the hills damn quick.

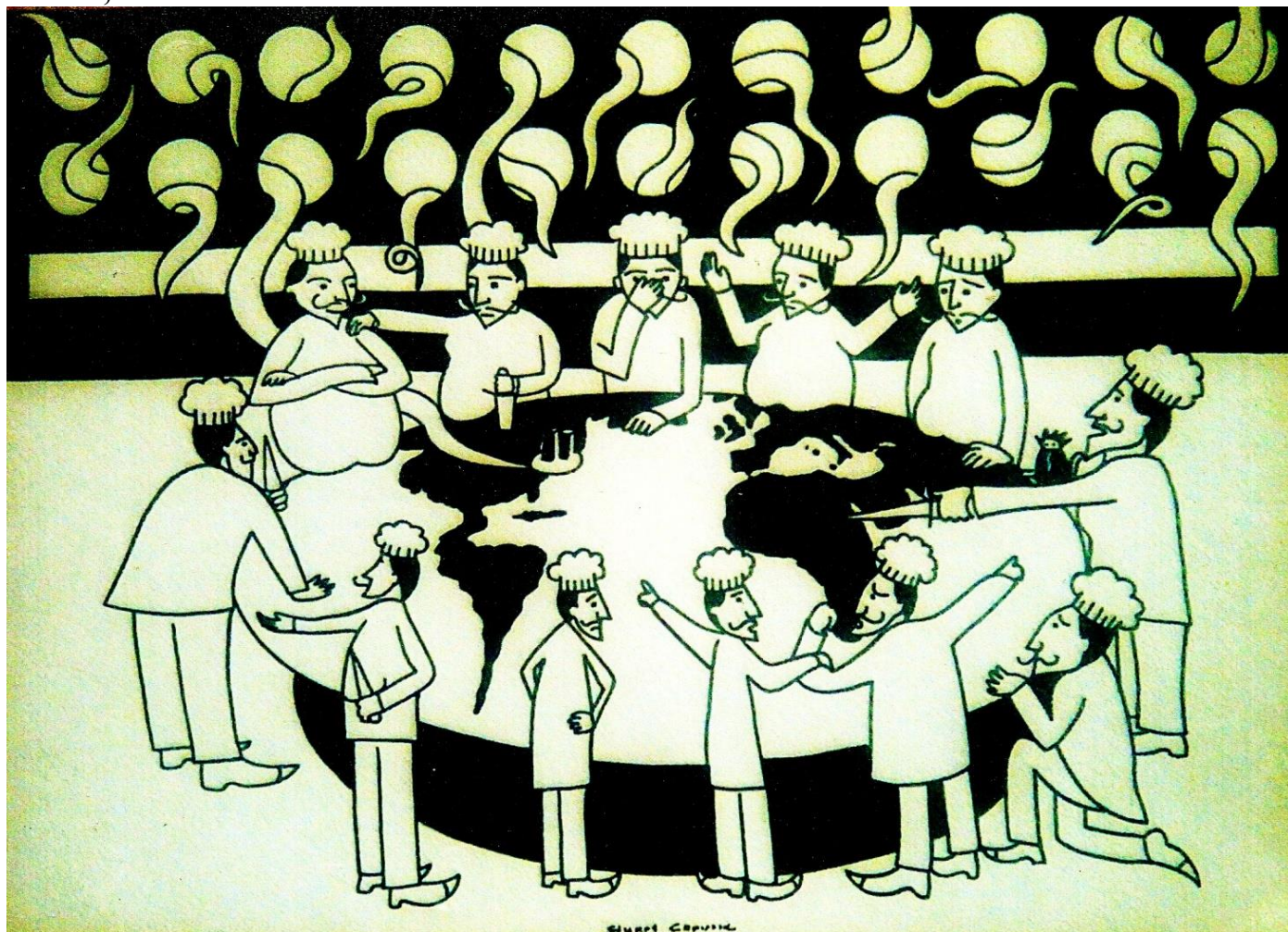


I didn't feel put out, always plenty perched on the barstools to ply my apocalyptic trade. After just a few gargles it felt like I was staging one of the greatest Broadway productions. "Behold" I announce dramatically with the freak show in my voice. "Miss 3W ladies and gentlemen. Isn't she a pretty, there's nay a symbol on the globe that can her outmatch. OMG strike a pose you're on fire." Just as we were getting fired up, she has a wardrobe malfunction. At this stage three matches are removed to reveal three Roman numerals.



"Can you see what I see, Miss 3W has been seen cavorting with another set of three. Oh dear, ladies and gentlemen she's been doing a number with the mark of the beast itself." For extra dramatic effect a cell phone is held up in an open palm. With eyeballs bulging I paraphrased the verse from Revelation. "And they shall worship the beast and receive its mark on their hands and foreheads, the whole world will buy and sell with its mark." Normally I didn't get a round of applause at this point in the presentation. I was usually looked upon as the worse matchmaker in history to have invoked such an ungodly match. The stench of Sulphur was palpable, could just about catch a glimpse of the caged beast inside that would strike you down given half a chance. That leads nicely to the next item. September eleventh is so stamped on the pages of history, so embossed on our memories the collective journey of the whole wide world was brought to a demoniac tattoo parlor.

One hell of a design got scribed onto our retinas. What a thoroughly monstrous agony on a global scale; etched onto the collective psyche a beastly diadem very difficult to remove. A festering puss that had been fermenting for ages, finally found pores out into the world. We all bore witness to how horrid human beings can stoop. In the unobserved dimly lit human interior it is so easy for a terrible darkness to grow and spill forth. How easily it was kept incubated among the group of young men who up until then led a mundane existence. That such psychopathic chefs could be cooking up so much pain and suffering unbeknownst to all sent a chill throughout the world. What depths of the demonic had sunk the minds who were behind the acts? Though we never ordered what was being served, we all nonetheless ate breakfast in the devils delicatessen on that infamous morn.



In essence the whole world worshiped the beast. We should have sealed off all media portholes and gathered together in silence to be in spirit where the victims were sent. It was instead decided to continue with the demonic banquet. Years after the beastly event the world is still sifting through the ramifications. It merely illustrates the unenlightened mentality of the cooks running the kitchen. Ladle more beastly broth onto the steaming pottage of psychopathy. Big brother is powerless to lock the malady away into room 101. Surely by now the lessons of history clearly teach us you cannot physically fight the beast. As soon as one tentacle has been chopped off another dozen will grow in its place. It can only be slain with a spiritual sword. If humanity refuses to grapple with that TRUTH, lives will continue to be cast into the maw of a beastly bloodlust that will never be sated.

CHAPTER NINE

Is that the foul stench of death I smell wafting through the journey, or did the hijackings merely make me notice the rotting corpse that was there anyway? The bleak atmosphere clad in sackcloth and ashes is more than a sketchy inkling now. Mildly oppressive before, it was off the funereal chart after the nine-eleven attacks. Whenever my bus route winds its way through the airport, the increased security and surveillance technology is very noticeable. It would be wrong to say that I was the only passenger on the bus to notice rigor mortis riding shotgun. It surely felt like I was sitting closest to the stinking cadaver, though clearly other travelers were sitting just as close. The reaper it seemed ditched its old ride and upgraded to a more proficient model. Freakish occurrences such as love, joy or any positive lifetime events looking to change the destination are cruelly bypassed. Way too many deadbeats glued emotionless in their seats to let the livelier places get on.



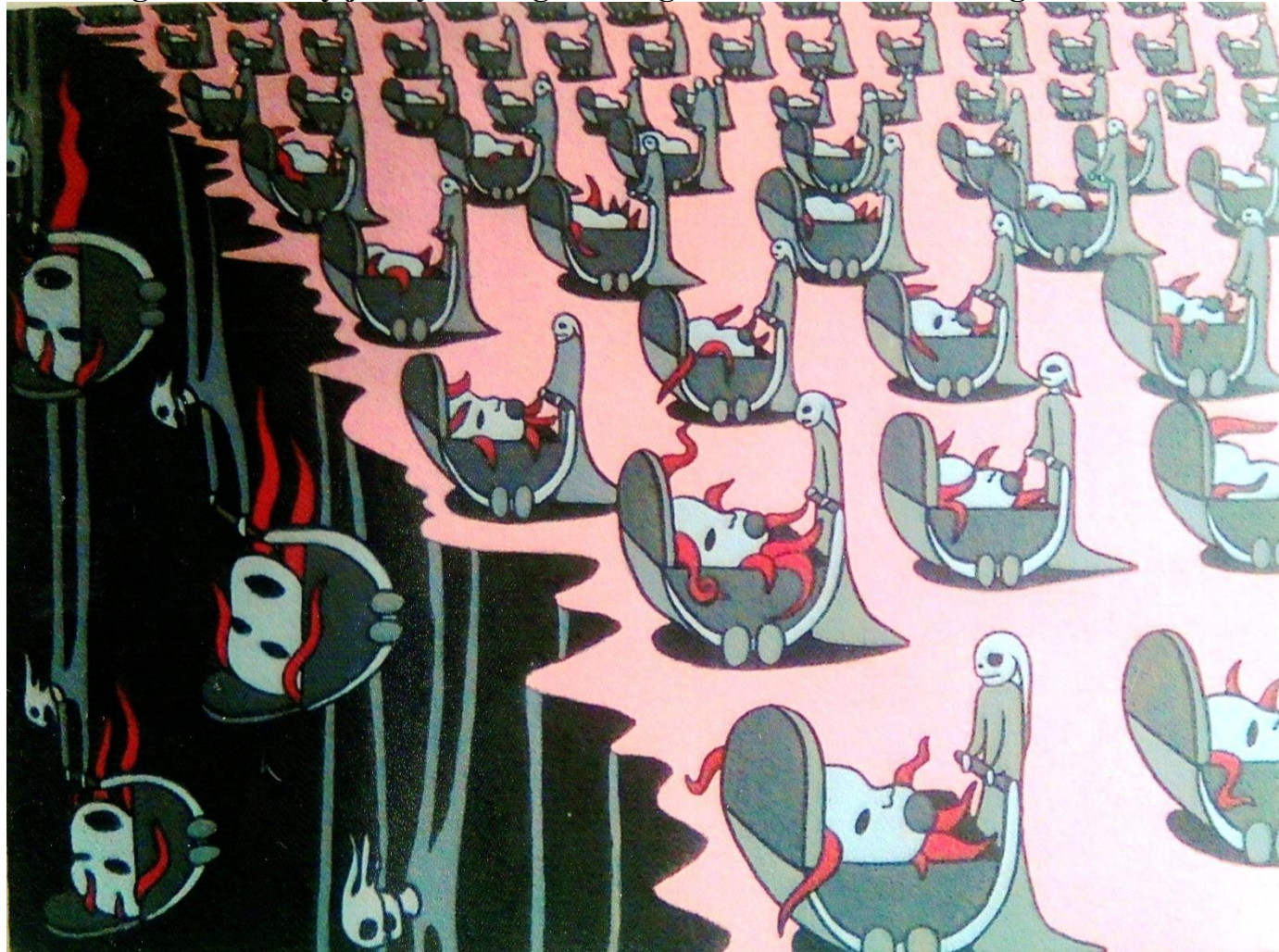
When the first opportunity presented itself to get off that grim carriage I jumped. Perched on a high stool somewhere in the city, I was performing my matchstick magic at the bar; totally oblivious to the guy washing the pubs window glass outside who was very intrigued indeed by my bedeviled trickery. When the windows were done the northern chap joined me for a jar at the bar. I became very friendly with him and his girlfriend; they were both on the run from criminal elements on the unionist side of the barricade up north. My new mate was a humble window-cleaner by day and a crack-dealer at night. The strangest marriage between the north and the south, art and narcotics developed. At the time I was delving heavily into tattoo art. The crack-dealer window-cleaner took a shine to my designs of dolls heads with spidery eyes cradled in medusan physiologies.

He found a tattooist based in Templebar to transcribe my creepy drawings onto his flesh. Throughout the entire phase of experimenting with mind altering agents, I never once bought drugs with actual currency. I paid instead with trade. Artistically it was really rewarding to have someone admire your stuff so much that they were willing to get them grafted onto their own flesh. My crack-dealer window cleaner morphed over the months into a living codex of my work. With each new creation I brought him he greased my palm with ecstasy tablets. I didn't care for the other drugs he sold which were freely available and on offer if I so desired. I figured practicing mindfulness would help me steer clear of the harder gear. At the start of the contraband romance I restricted my narcotic romps to just the weekends, relatively in control I thought I could pace myself.



All junkies say that at the start. After the gestation of just a few months I found myself in a grim crèche beset on all sides by a brood of addictions screaming to be fed. It won't be the first nor the last time the nit gets caught up in a crazy hairy loop. Though the addiction narrative is familiar to us all, many still get ensnared into the insane loom. If I don't do something soon to change my behavior, the addictive vortex will only grow stronger. I could have easily got sucked in deeper and descended into getting hooked on the harder stuff. Then where would I be? I'd be so far gone I wouldn't know where I was. One night I was heading towards my friend's apartment, just off Gardener Street in Dublin. I usually would spend the night there after a few pints. I'd watch a movie on the sofa while my crack dealer window cleaner busily cooked the cocaine a few feet away in the kitchen. He would be cooking the batches of crack on a rudimentary chemistry set.

When finished he'd sample the stuff himself and offer me a taste. I would always decline as if he were offering me a digestive with my cup of tea; play aloof and pretend I wasn't interested. One weekend I found myself in a really depressed state because of life at home. It looked likely that this was the night I was going to smoke the crack when offered. I needed a rude awakening, a shock to the system which would jostle me from the course I was on. I badly craved something to happen that would somehow recalibrate the gears of my journey towards a positive outcome. It was a do or die type situation. If I didn't do something dramatic soon to trigger a change, I may as well resign myself to the fate of becoming one of many junky carriages on a ghost train headed straight for a dead end.



I was hovering outside my pals place on the night in question acting already like a ghoul. I couldn't bring myself to ring the bell on the red door to his Georgian building so like the gateway to hell. I sat on the steps watching the passers-by on the street looking for a person who might help me. When a hulk of a man walked towards me, I knew he was the one to do it. I Stopped him and pleasantly asked if I could quickly have a private word. Already I was far outside my comfort zone. I never talked to strangers, not even to ask for directions. I dived straight in and asked the giant for a giant favor. The weird request on such a cold night so close to Christmas verbally smacked him in the face. He called me a freak and told me to fuck off. I chased after him like a dirty bird begging for a ride. To my surprise the guy capitulated to my powers of persuasion, I could tell he was a giver. "Are you fucking serious?" He asked sounding genuinely concerned with his fists drawn. "Yep, deadly serious." I laughed nervously and so did he. "See it as my Christmas box."

Though he couldn't fathom my motives, the kind Samaritan nevertheless obliged me my strange request. Off we strolled to a secluded alleyway to perform the procedure. Just before it happened, he asked was I sure now? Through clenched teeth I growled at him, "Yes, sock it to me you big cunt." Next thing I knew I was in saint James's hospital, my face covered in blood and getting my brow stitched up by a pretty young nurse. I got so much TLC it was embarrassing. It was like the night of the living dead at that hour. Like there was a war going on in the city and all that medical education was just a janitor mopping up the blood. My face was cleaned-up super quickly by a pro. It transpired the universe was in a giving mood that night after all. I got to talking to an orderly who was nearly finished his shift. This guy was amazing, the only man I ever met in person on this planet who had SEE in his eyes. They sparkled there was so much SEE in those orbs.

Leaving the accident and emergency department I was accompanied by this middle-aged fellow who had also taken a shine to me. A small goon like myself we walked into the city center like kindred spirits who had known each other for donkeys years. I didn't feel the bitter cold in his company nor any of the nervousness that usually walked beside me when walking next to a stranger. With him I felt not just totally at ease but a warm glow too. I never met a man like him before in my whole life. He certainly had a gift at reading people. A true angelic psychic he saw far into me no one had ever seen before.

He brought me back to his house where he desperately wanted me to have a certain book he was raving about. I was introduced to his angelically beautiful wife and daughters. They were so ethereally delicate it brought out a mournfulness in me. The little faces of his five angels studying me from all angles. In their wholesome presence I felt like a nightmare creature who had gate-crashed a dream. I had alcohol in my system, it made me feel ashamed in their pure and sacred presence. While my new friend went looking for the publication, he swore was destined to be read by me, I sat chatting with the wife reeking of the smell of booze and cursing the day I ever started drinking. The book he was mad for me to read was finally located. It was an account written by an abbot on the monastic way of life in the modern age. I thanked them all for their kindness and quickly went on my merry way feeling very buoyant like I was about to embark on a new chapter.

I read the book too many times to be counted, I loved it so much. The spirituality of the monastic way of life the abbot who authored the volume put across was so authentic, so earthy and yet so Zen in its simplicity. I was won over in no time, eager to sign up on the dotted line. To my surprise I learnt they had monasteries all over Europe and the world. There were phone numbers and addresses at the back if anyone interested in joining could contact. I wrote the same letter to all the monasteries in Ireland, requesting a visit to these spiritual sanctuaries with the hope of joining up some day. I got responses almost immediately from all the abbots inviting me to visit anytime I so chose. I was spoiled for choice. Letters from five heads of the order graced our post box accustomed to only bills and junk-mail. One epistle stuck out from amidst the crowd of invitations written in the most talented calligraphic hand. What a beautiful angelic florescence to his script, a light feminine energy to the writing hand more alluring than a sirens song in Greek mythology. That's the one for me I said. I was beamed up and given a trial run to test out the waters. My family thought I was gone mad when I told them where I was headed. You'd think I was running away with the circus. If they had known anything about me, they would have known I had already ticked that box. They thought the news of the bug answering

to a higher calling was a crank-call. Next to alien abduction, this was the most bizarre escapade I had ever stuck my thumb out to hitch a ride on to date. Nobody understood



I was trying to make myself into a better human being. So, I gave the evil middle finger to my family of secular earthlings and offered a prayerful namaste to my new celestial brethren of cenobites in the sky. After a psychiatric probe I was accepted into the order with open arms. It was out of this world, like being transported to another age when life was less complicated. I flew through the different stages as if propelled by jet propulsion. First Mach-one as a postulant that lasted for three months. Then onto Mach-two as a novice monk in the white habit for the remainder of my stay. Sadly I didn't hit Mach-three. I had to use the booster seat and eject from the religious flight. Unforeseen frigging occurrence's crossed my flight path causing me to parachute back to life on the ground. It's not every ones cup of tea that's for sure. For starters you had to rise at four a.m. with the dawn chorus, performing the first divine office of the day. This mainly consisted of singing a number of psalms and reciting scripture. Six more times that day we met in church to sing in the choir stalls in addition to attending high mass. Let's not forget all the manual labor that was required in between all these visits to the church to perform the divine office. I never missed one divine office or mass in the roughly two years that I was there. That is well over six hundred masses I have amassed, more than my entire childhood. There is a massive powerful devotional energy behind that whole period of my life, enough to nuke the negative Beelzebub out of any sinner. I loved it, was fit for it.

The library they had was out of this world too; giving me access to all manner of spiritual writings from different religions. I studied the Koran, the Gita, the Buddhist Bible, the Tao Ta Ching and even Eckhart Tolle's The Power of Now which all the monks had read. I really got my teeth into Orthodox Christian material as well. Where would I be spiritually had I not studied the Hesychasts, I shudder to think? I researched all the anthologies of the desert fathers too and the Philokalia which is virtually a library in itself. Writings penned by mystics of the church such as St Therese of Avila, St John of the cross, St Bernard to mention but a few. I also had a daily class with the novice master. Subjects included catechesis, historical documents of the order and studying the program set down by the founder. The time spent with this man hailing from Kerry was very special indeed. Sixty years a monk, yet filled with the innocent laughter of a little child. I was very fond of this bearded wizardly gent. I daresay he became a surrogate father.

My ministry was on the farm, a square configuration of buildings which once upon a time served as a military garrison for the English when they ruled the land. I tended to the garrisons bovine captives which entailed looking after the calves, feeding them and making sure they had clean fresh bedding. There was a large herd and the monastery owned its own dairy plant. Quite a large estate the order had in its possession with forests and lakes enabling the monks to live totally self-contained. I was the only person from the monastery who worked on the farm. Most of the brothers were confined to the infirmary or the main house on account of their lofty age. I had a busy schedule which I embraced with a positive energy I never thought was in me. I even found time to practice calligraphy in my cell and work a bit on my Apocalyptic brief which I still kept hidden from all. I had my own oratory too where I would go and do my Zen modules. I could've lodged in a different room for every day of the week, such was the size of the novitiate. Such was the scarcity of new recruits; the monastery was in desperate need of new blood.

I was there well over a year when political rumblings were first spotted on the horizon. There was the election of a new abbot in the air. According to the rules the current abbot was too old to hold the post and couldn't be re-elected. There was only one conceivable candidate to take over at the helm who was the total reverse of the gentle lamb who had penned me so coaxingly. This new father was well educated to the point of snobbery. He praised to high heaven the new advancements in technology. A monk sitting in front of a laptop sipping a latte and eating a croissant was his vision for the monastery to attract vocations into the life. I thought this was ludicrous. I went to the monastery to connect with the same fire that Jesus and his disciples had a direct relationship with. Plus to meet others filled with the very same formless spirit which gives form to the universe itself.

I was beginning to sense that despite the peaceful atmosphere in the monastery there was a power struggle being fought by the superiors of the community. Children pick up on these things no matter how good the parents are at hiding. I felt sometimes like a lone-child with a multitude of fathers. There were some real eccentric characters in the community with borderline personality problems who if I met in the real world, I would perceive them as religious crackpots. I know every family has at least one nutjob in its ranks. I quickly learnt to avoid the nasty ones and be on friendly terms with the more likeable crazies. At times when the novelty of the place wore thin, I had serious doubts whether the monks were connected to a higher power. I tried switching off that analytical part of my brain whenever I encountered mental roadblocks. It would have been asinine

of the novice to believe that he was in for a completely smooth ride. Low feelings regularly hijacked my aspirations to attain a heightened state. This turbulence I was experiencing my confessor intimated was part and parcel of the geology of the sky. As I kept meeting very uncomfortable bumps along the highway, I began to lose faith in the journey. Negative signposts kept on appearing no matter how fervently I drove my singing voice in choir. In my alone time doubts persistently appeared on whether I was following the right path. With my journey flying on auto-pilot, ever so discretely I tried to discern the exact spiritual location of my fellow passengers.

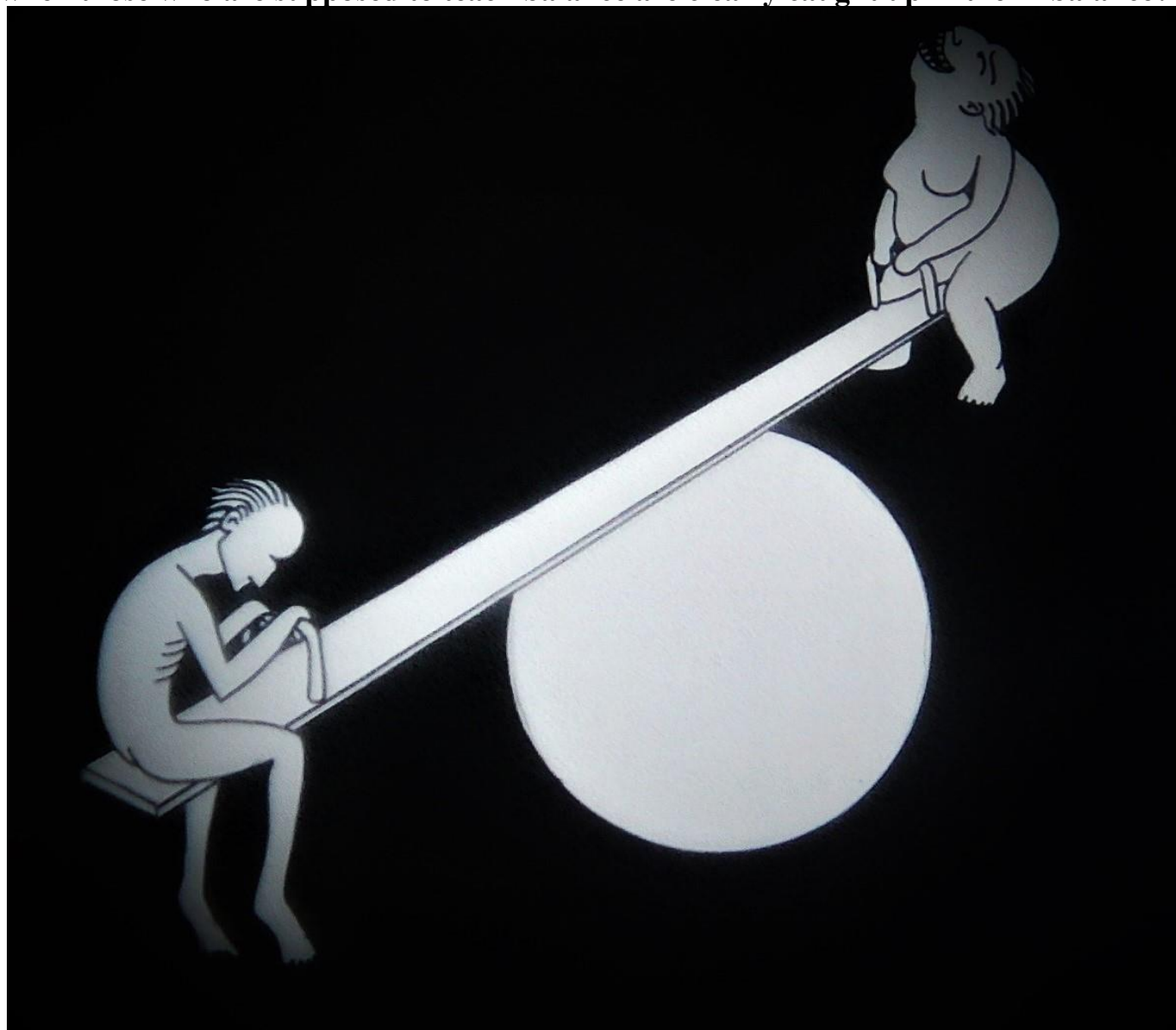


Barely with my foot on the first wrung and already felt something was wrong. The bulk of the brothers seemed less concerned with the stairway to heaven and more acquainted with an earthlier stratagem to raise the spirit. Its a risky business climbing a ladder for anyone wearing a pretty dress! How naïve was I to think that religious orders were here to enlighten the world? After two thousand years tasked with showing humanity the light, so much darkness remains to be resolved. If the bottom line operating in modern corporations was applied to religious institutions, most belief systems would get the sack for not meeting their core objective. Despite the beatific soundtrack of the place, along with its beautiful scenery; most of the community seemed totally unfulfilled. Shepherds are simply not guiding the flock to higher pastures. Perhaps someone from the bottom will send a reality check to those at the top!

The newly elected abbot pompously announced his desire to modernize and put his mark on the place. I took a disliking to him when he shushed me in the library for making too much noise turning the sheathes of a book. I quickly learnt that I wasn't the only one in the abbey who had a grievance against him. I joked with those opposed to his rule that I heard the CEO of monastery inc was getting all the monks communication devices. Instead of singing the divine office in God's presence, we were to text the psalms to the Logos on a premium eighteen hundred number. The nastiness in my jest was self-evident. The grievance with the new abbot was turning toxic. Just like all the phalli I worked under in the world, he loved to press people's buttons. Very good at it he was too the cunt. One day he came up to me in the kitchen and commented that I was putting on weight. I took it to heart and cut down on my food intake. I went on an extremely strict diet just

to spite him. I ate bread and soup for my main meals, with only porridge for breakfast. Being so active on the farm the weight fell off me in no time. The brothers grew concerned and maybe a bit jealous that I was enduring a more austere and stricter regime than they. I was told to eat more by the very same authority who intimated to eat less. I was given cutlets of beef smothered in gravy with my meals. So accustomed to the vegetarian diet I could feel the meat going down my throat so like a stranger on the driveway to my home. He would nitpick and find criticism with the slightest thing that I did. I really enjoyed doing the scripture readings when my turn came around for the week. I put a lot of passion into those readings for mass and the office. I had no doubt the force of it came not directly from God but from pent up sexual energy. I was commended by most for my rendition of millennial old writings. It made me into a bit of a celebrity with the auld ones who attended the public mass on Sundays. I had a natural oratory talent that enlivened the text with an almost dramatic cadence; making them sound dare I say, Shakespearean. Whenever I stepped up to the pulpit I was on a stage. The emotionality that was unlocked in the ancient writings created gasps in the audience I mistook for awestruck adoration. The abbot took me aside one day requesting I tone it down a notch. It was like telling the baritone to sing the part of the castrato. Then he looked down sneeringly at my footwear. "Those will have to go too, very inappropriate boots for a religious to wear." I looked down at my rocks. My blessed biker boots with all the silver accoutrements peeping from underneath the white habit. Jasus not me Goth clogs too. This fucker was deadly serious. I felt like telling him to take a look at his own attachments. That new beamer for instance, not very monastic father abbot. Next thing I was walking around the monastery in brown loafers. It felt like sadomasochistic self-flagellation every time I wore those abominations. Whenever the abbot wanted to have a "Chat" I'd say, oh bollox under a gnarly cough. I tried avoiding him like the plague, virtually impossible in an enclosed monastic order. One day I was ushered up to his office where I was told he was taking over as novice master. The wise old wizard who I loved so much the abbot said was antiquated and behind the times. I was devastated, every positive he was turning into a negative. I began strongly doubting I could have a future as a monk. The deprivations I wanted to endure, but a life where every strength was made into a weakness was not something I signed up for. I came here to forge a link with a spiritual fire Christ wanted to ignite in all of us. No chance the holy spirit would become manifest through this vehicle so engineered with a master-servant dynamic. The fumes emanating from the abbots childish powerplay were becoming intoxicating, stank of bullyboy machinations more at home in a playground than a church. Clearly, he didn't want me having fun on any of the swings and slides. The once euphoric highs in choir had after only a year slunk to repetitive ghostly echoes. The holy office that had been filled with angelic voices was now more like souls trapped in a tormented hell. The uppity superior was playing seesaw not only with my emotions. Everyone could feel the weight of his ego, and the illusory sense of lightness he projected after he unloaded his bullshit. His weekly talks to the community in the chapter room were tortuous displays of an ecclesiastical dictatorship propagandizing the rule of blind obedience to the hierarchy. No spiritual guidance in any of the abbots long monologues. Most monks I daresay were praying for the ordeal to end. Such peptalks supposedly meant to uplift the spirits of the brethren only served to keep one ego propped up on top. I keep thinking about the skewed dynamic afoot in this place, the same old evil imbalance

Daoists rightly likened to an actual manifestation of the devil. How can I find equilibrium when those who are supposed to teach balance are clearly caught up in the imbalance?



Besides the Novice Master there was a brother who I would have held in very high regard, oozing with a wholesome charisma. Oft I wondered why he hadn't ascended to a higher position in the order, but alas the scales would soon be removed from my eyes. A favorite brother of mine, one day the infirmarian was up in the novitiate changing a light bulb in an adjacent cell. I was very fond of him and believed he was one of the holiest men in the monastery. I went into him to assist. He was using a small step ladder that was a bit rickety requiring an extra set of hands to hold it steady down below. I went down on my knees holding the bottom of the ladder while the brother did the screwing above. At that moment the novice master passed the door and stopped suddenly to look inside at the two workmen hard at it. I'll never forget the expression on his face. Very odd, I didn't see that one before. I thought I had catalogued in my head all the facial tics this lovely Kerry man had made indicating various innocent enough activity taking place within his interior. But this particular look was profoundly alien from what I was accustomed to. It was the shock/horror expression of someone who had just caught two people having sex. Since we were engaged in a perfectly innocent task, alarm bells rang loudly in my head.

Suddenly a very uncomfortable chill pervaded the room. Excusing myself I returned to my cell and the calligraphy on my desk. I couldn't get back into it because of a nagging thought kept knocking on my skull. Why was it I only saw him in one area of such a large monastery? I never once saw him in the public areas. I saw every other one of the monks that could use their legs walk the grounds or breeze through the farm, but never this guy. Always in one area only. The novitiate was technically his territory situated above the refectory; a wing in spitting distance from the infirmary. It was a rare event seeing him on my turf. Why was he tending to a cell that nobody ever used? Then I had what is best described as a light bulb moment, the encroaching shadows recoiled for a little while.

I went straight to a brother I was friendly with who cut my hair and had coffee with every Sunday. From Dublin he was a truck driver before veering off into religious life. Knowing he was a salt of the earth common man with no ecclesiastical agendas, I figured him to be a trustworthy person. I demanded that he tell me what was going on here; something was not right. He spilled the beans on the infirmarian; happy to unburden himself of the can of worms. The brother had raped a child from the village and was basically under house arrest. The religious order had paid compensation to the injured party. The story was hushed up relatively speaking. Then he told me about the old priest. My jaw dropped. I visited the man regularly in the infirmary. On occasion he said mass which I was fond of attending. I believed he was a pure old school priest from a time when the church seemed stronger in its faith. The brother from Dublin told me he was a convicted child abuser and had served time in an American prison for the offence. I think my spirit momentarily left my body. Then I was bombarded with a whirlwind of emotions raging inside, very difficult to contain and process especially in an enclosed community.

I looked down at my brown loafers. Jesus Christ. I felt like I was in the middle of a pedophile ring. These two flanked me on either side in the choir singing praises to God. I never saw myself as a holy Joe but next to these two offences I was a dove parked between two bats. I was sandwiched between two slices of pedophilia while supposedly performing the holiest office of the catholic church. I was faced with a dilemma. A cool head was required of me when I was resolved what to do next. I went directly to the abbots office, presenting him with the revelations that I had uncovered. He asked me not to leave when I presented him with my decision. The Abbot sermonized at great length how living in a monastic setting posed difficulties for everyone. The onus was on me to make a change, and I agreed. When he asked me to trust the holy spirit and forgive the shortcomings of others, I quickly rose to my feet now clad in my beloved goth rock clogs.

"With respect father abbot, you should really listen to your own advice." It was the first time I addressed him by his official title, not meant as a mark of respect. "With every turn of the corner father abbot you have done nothing but focus on all my shortcomings. Had you been forgiving with the splinters you saw in my eye; I'd have shown you the same forgiveness for the plank in your own." With that I left his office and went to prepare for my departure. I couldn't leave quick enough, though it hurt bidding farewell to everyone. They were all gutted and so was I. Shortly after that I made my way back to the family home in Dublin. To be honest, it felt like a terrible fall from grace, the gravity of my decision hitting me like a ton of bricks. The expulsion from Eden story occupied my thoughts a lot. As they say here in Ireland, the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree.



I was still determined to bite my way into the core reality. Spiritually speaking I was still just a pip; the religious life hadn't altered that one bit. There were some plusses though. The experience revealed that religious folk are human beings too just like the rest of us. Don't let their costumes fool you into thinking otherwise.

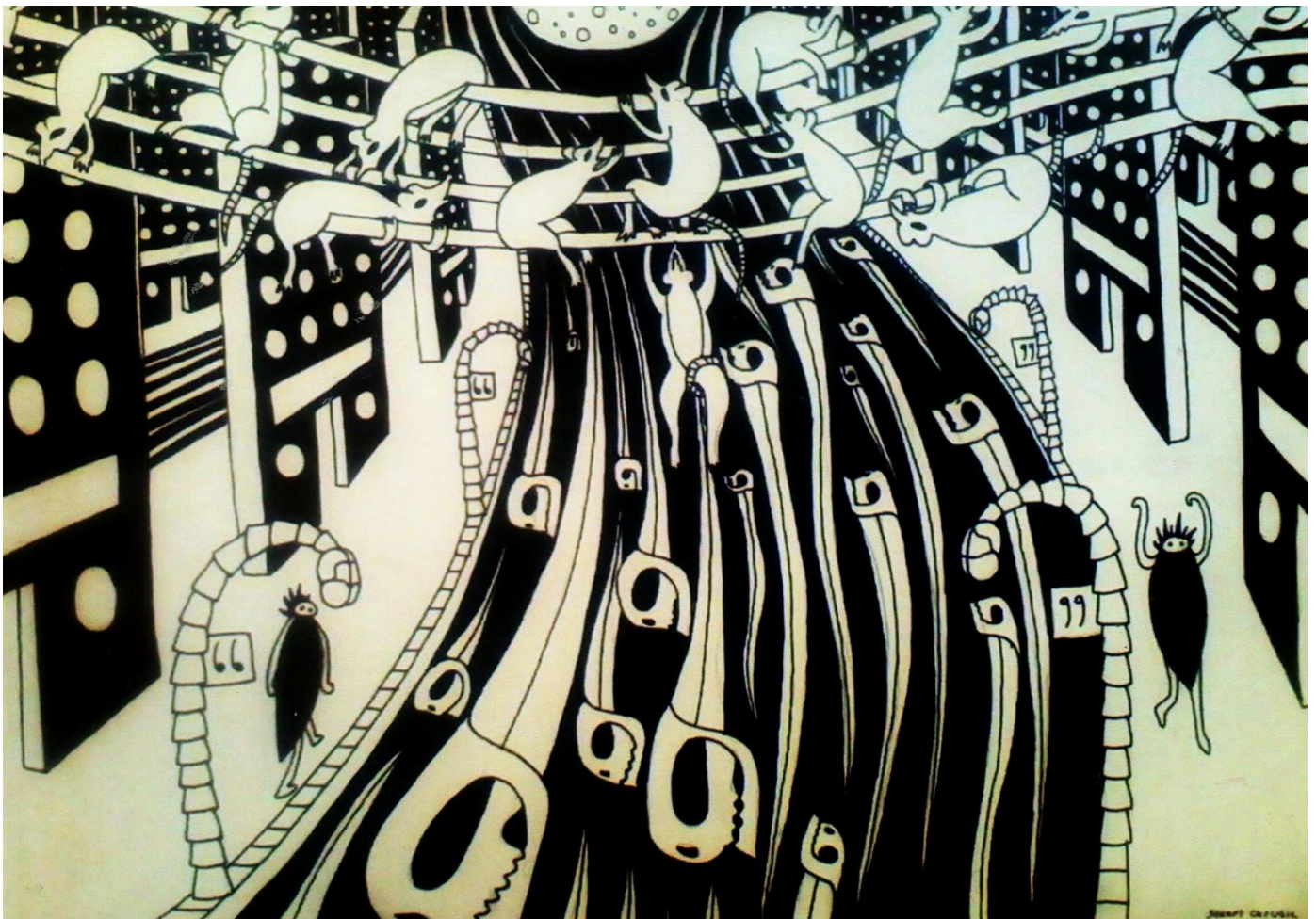
CHAPTER TEN

On the threshold of entering my thirties, and still the higher altitude in life remains aloof. Assumed by now I would've made some kind of contemplative breakthrough and hiked up into exalted climes. Not exactly theological mountaineering, I'm not really interested in grasping the summit theoretically. I understood it intellectually alright; yes, we are on that spiritual plateau already. All we need to do is look past the illusory border crossing blocking the way. Yet I keep climbing towards a nirvanic high in the off-chance of getting lucky. Cannot depend on some guru pimp to arrange for a romp with self-realization. No more middlemen substituting merchandise for paradise. Heaven is not a maiden easily duped by clever chat-up lines. Being well versed in what the enlightened would say won't get me past the heavies guarding the entrance into the coveted VIP lounge. I know well by my wanton desire for liberation, the name is not written down and I ain't getting in.



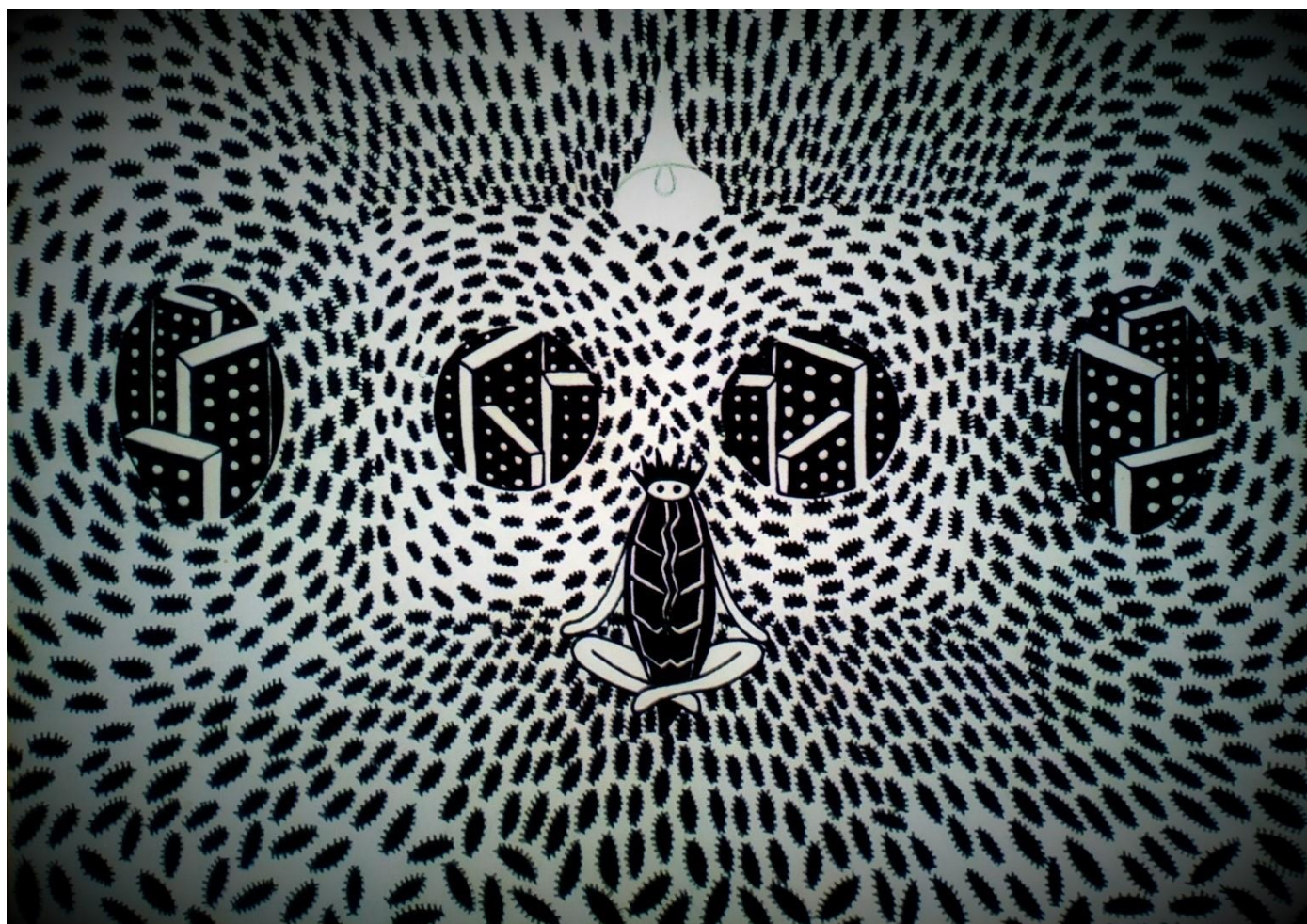
Done with seeking direction from shepherds operating without the wisdom to guide their flock to higher pastures. Though weary of all hierarchical systems of control, I was still a lost sheep. After leaving the monastery I was likened to a ghost cast to the karmic winds, floating aimlessly a spiritual desert. I stayed for what seemed like an eternity in a vacuous hiatus, hovering the Bardo in-between where the past is dead and the future not yet born.

The longer I stay divorced from the source, the increased likelihood I'll wander into another prostituted version of reality. With very limited financial options at my disposal I quickly found myself whoring about on street corners in my head; pimped out to some very desperate mental arithmetic. Dublin for starters was too expensive a courtesan for someone with my empty pockets to be courting. I looked across the brothel of Ireland, eyeing the twenty-five other geishas more in my price range. Solely because I had a previous fling with Sligo, I gave the northwest another lash. Off I leapt into the sack again with Sligeach; an Irish word for shell, not knowing I was jumping into bed with hell. Within the first fortnight of moving to Sligo I had secured work in a factory. The first slice of many cut from the loaf of the northwest to earn a crust. It was hailed as a great accomplishment by the others lodging with me in that halfway house for the homeless. The pharmaceutical plant where I landed the job was virtually in the same neighborhood as my temporary accommodation. When quizzed by a coworker fishing for information on where I was living, I candidly disclosed that I was staying in the shelter for down and outs not far from the plant. I didn't think it was something to be ashamed of. Until I observed him scurrying off to squeal to the rest on the assembly line. How he acted like a sneaky rat scurrying off with the morsel of information. In a bid to stop the vermin from taking ownership of the narrative, I tried putting a human face onto the tenants in



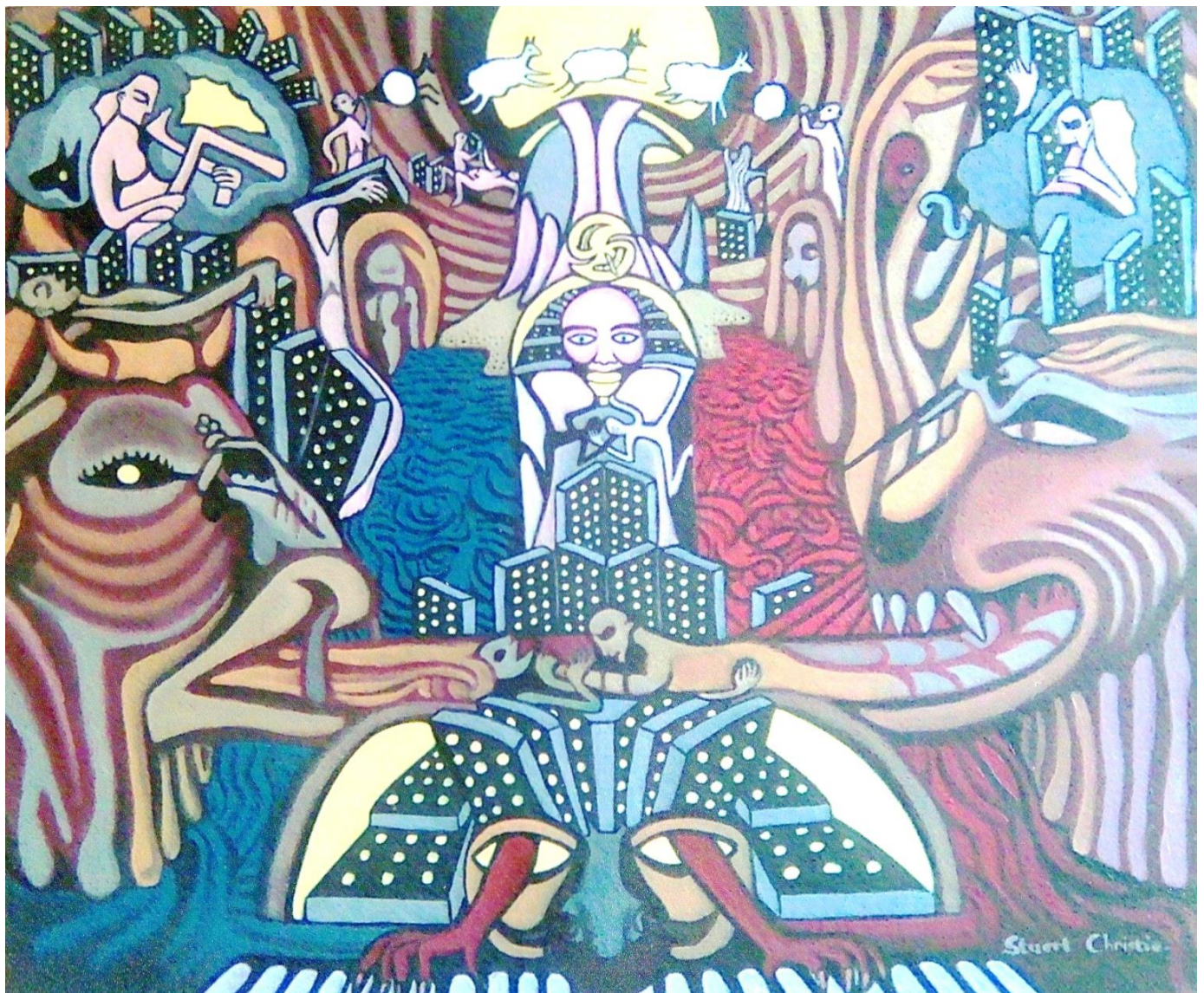
the facility which the culture here I quickly discovered were very fond of dehumanizing. Every opportunity that presented itself I lauded my homeless housemates, hailing them as a great bunch of lads. The joviality was great in the communal sitting room where we

all watched television together. One housemate had me laughing so much, that I nearly left my body what the guy said was so funny. Such razor sharp and intelligent witticism, certainly a cut above the cheap one-liners I was beginning to receive from my colleagues in the factory. It just took one individual to plant one bad seed and before I knew it the whole plant is planting seedy looks in my direction. It didn't take long before the town caught the bug too. My voice is cast to the silent roadside while a completely distorted vehicle operating autonomously to what is really going on, drives on endless tarmac of talk. Judging by the toxic emissions emanating from the marauding cars predatorially circling the town, it would seem that I have garnered for myself a bit of a cult following. How quickly the creepy sect developed; a sect to the insect dedicated to the worship of an arachnid deity. The gossiping gospel played a central role in the burgeoning order. There could be any number of spindly scholars scribing their own versions of reality. Like most religions its believers do not have a relationship with the subject directly, in actuality the sect of the insect are worshiping thought projections from their own minds.



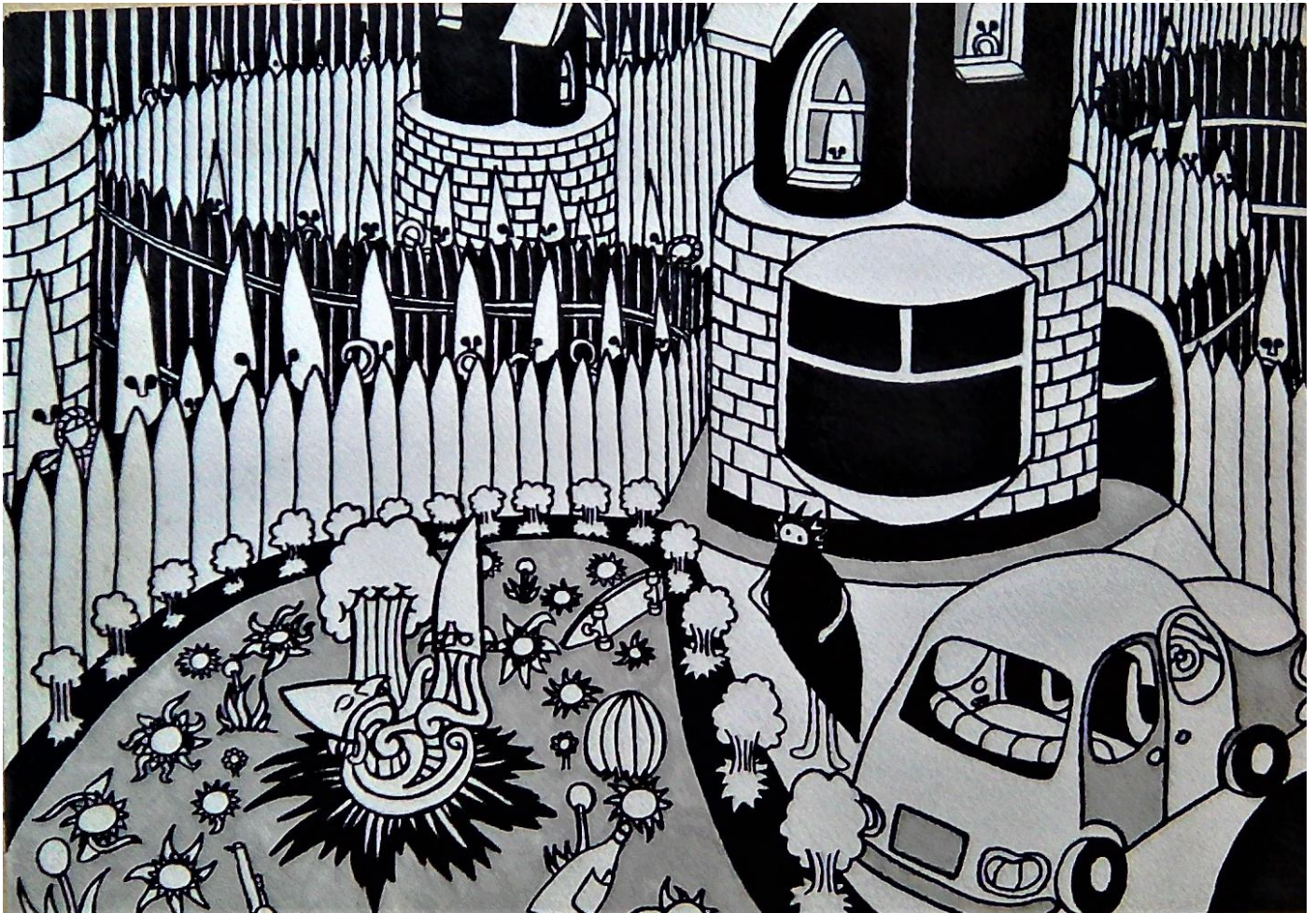
In my naivety I thought if I could just tick all the boxes a human being is supposed to tick, I'll be relatively safe. I ticked the box of getting my own place. I ticked the box of forging a relationship. I ticked the box of working in a job. I even ticked the box of becoming a father, even though that was not a box I set out to tick. It didn't really matter how many boxes I ticked. I could tick a billion boxes and still I'd be a homeless bug in their minds. Once that initial devaluation was made, they would add layers of low summations on top without ever calculating the incalculable error they were all making.

Naturally I was worried the distorted value system will be passed onto my children, in a close nit community the sect of the insect would no doubt attack my nearest and dearest. Wish I could have focused solely on reinforcing the positive and to hell with the negative. For most of the pregnancy I harbor fears on whether I can be a strong father in this deeply hostile culture. Wherever I found work the waspish harassment was sure to follow. Daily I get verbally stung by work colleagues engaged in some really nasty workplace bullying. If I am not fighting the discordant swarm on the professional front, I am fighting the discord on the domestic front. There is no escaping the madness, when I tried talking with my partner about it, the response was always to take an opposing position. It would have been less stressful had she sided with me, maybe even if she had taken a neutral stance. It was an absolute miracle anything good was born into that environment. Sad to say, by the time Mary arrived my mind was crawling with resentment. The cottage we moved into in the countryside was teeming with bugs too. The endless stream of slaters that bled from every crevice mirrored the hive of mental activity that swarmed internally.



On a tiny slice of chronological tart, I struggle to develop my art. Heavily pregnant with a whole gallery of psycho-emotional scenes screaming out to be seen, sourcing subject matter was never a problem. Getting into the mood to paint posed as my main barrier.

To help oil the cogs of the creative process, the drunken lush started going down to the marina again. Not the most inspired idea with a baby wailing in the background. It was at the time when Mary arrived that we decided the cottage was no place for a newborn. The bugs so saturated the interior that one dinnertime a woodlouse was found on a plate. Totally grossed out we both started looking for a less creepy residence elsewhere. It happened so quickly, the exodus from that secluded location in the shadow of knocknae to a more densely populated village along the coastline of county Sligo. No matter where we resettled, an unsettling feeling followed. After having landed for just a week in the new digs, I was voicing a turbulent weather front to the co-pilot. At this early stage in the relationship she was already navigating on autopilot whenever I verbalized my concerns. "You didn't notify the local media we were arriving, did you?" I asked my partner behind the wheel as she parked the Toyota Yaris outside the shop on main street. A group of locals were congregated outside the main entrance to the grocery store, eyeballing the Dublin blow-in riding shotgun in a fanny wagon. I couldn't shake the sense of unease ever since we had moved here. I wasn't a big hit with some of the natives, not that they were my target audience to begin with. I picked up a sourness in the atmosphere, the kind of sneaky deviant energy that would turn a man's own gun on himself just for sport. I was a loaded weapon for sure, heading fully cocked into a veritable shooting gallery.



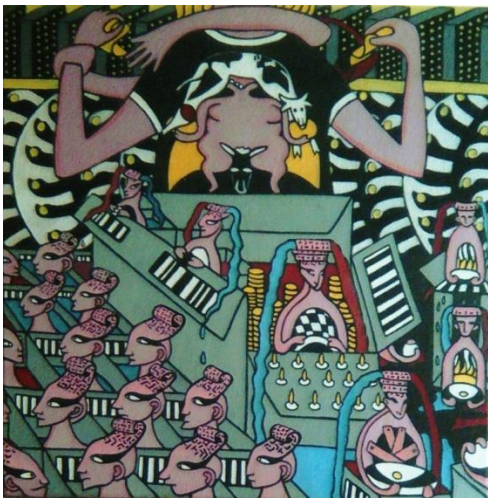
I had rushed into the relationship with all guns blazing. Everybody in this unit including myself were very trigger happy when it came to shooting off our mouths. The relationship was destined to blow up into my face. An armistice has befallen the pilots tongue as she scours for the lighter in her handbag. It provides me with a chance to take another shot.

I feel nervous as if about to do a bank job, would be nice if it all went according to plan. "There's more rednecks here per cubic meter than anywhere else on the planet." I said eyeing the gents in the doorway with the body language combined of a knotted noose. One actually spat out a mouthful of chewed tobacco, just as another scratched his groin. With the window rolled down I can catch the sound of a banjo wafting through the air. "It's like they're trying to figure out the length of rope they'll use come lynching time." I say to her as she locates the lighter in the glove compartment and discovers it's a dud. "Oh, please shut the fuck up." Says my chauffeur at last. I was boring her to smithereens at this stage with my paranoia, I can feel her seething frustration. Frantically she jerks the lighter trying to get it started which is duly noted by the jerk-offs outside sniggering. "Maybe they don't like weirdos, coz you sure as fuck got more cubic inch of weirdo in you than anybody else on the fucking planet." Kaboom, finally she gets the cigarette lit. "The only weird thing about me is me eyes. It's not my fault I have serial killer bulbs." I have this really annoying habit of singing choruses from songs that sort of fit in with the chinwag. "Jeepers creepers, would you have a look at those peepers." I sang offkey. "Stick to the painting luv, you is no singer." She said catching me eyeing a pretty female walking by the window along with the welcoming committee. She tossed the cigarette out still lit, then popped gum into her gob. Onto the next part of the ceremony, she blesses herself with perfume but slightly deviating from the script sprays some right into my ear. "Well fuck you bitch, how's it going to look me smelling like a whore to this interview?" I lamented trying to wipe the scented cat piss from around my ear with my shirt sleeve. "C'mon weirdo we'll both be late." We exited the car and walked by checkpoint Charlie to a separate entrance at the side of the shop. All heads turn in unison watching our every move. I breathed deeply before ringing the bell. When the door opened, we were ushered in by a middle-aged man and woman standing in the office. The lady looked very serious; she had the stark demeanor of a newscaster about to report grim news. While her hubby was jolly and gay as a weatherman delivering the forecast on a beautiful summers day. The auld bad cop, good cop routine. Mr. Sunnyside remained on his feet beside his wife sat in the big leather office chair. We were politely asked to sit while they discussed our previous work experience. I had phoned the day before enquiring about the job vacancy advertised in the shop window. Bad cop revealed that there were two positions to be filled, a day shift and a night shift. I told the lady over the phone that we had just moved into the area, it would be awesome to walk to work instead of biking ten miles into Sligo town. We had jobs already but we were seeking something a little closer to where we lived. Hence a dual interview was arranged. We both got the job, myself covering the day and my other half covering the night shift. The interview was a roaring success, when we exited, I hardly noticed the hanging committee still hanging outside. We were like a relay team, Mammy passing the baby onto Daddy after each had finished running their shifts. For a few months things ran smoothly like a finely tuned machine until machinations outside our control threw a spanner into the works. The world hit a financial meltdown and we were made unemployed. Everyone in the system were scratching their heads, wondering who caught the nits first. There was an infestation of closed businesses making it impossible to find work. In amidst all the turmoil another beautiful baby girl was born.



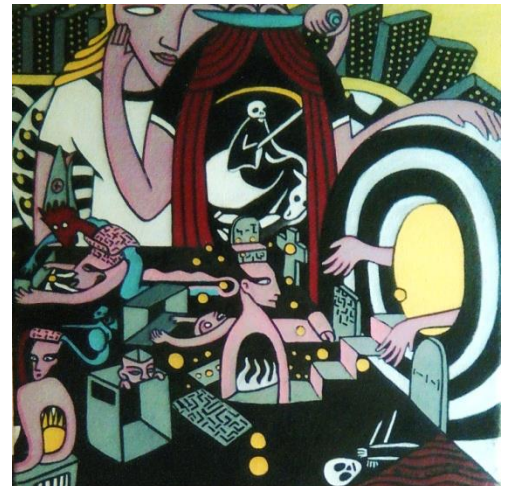
An unexpected upturn for the books as the system goes into downturn mode. My stock is on the rise as the world is swept away on a conveyor belt of recessional thinking. My ego brand manages to stay afloat in the turbulent market. My genetic packaging is not so undesirable. The brain juice growing in confidence takes on a reddish royal hue. My mind cannot see it has abdicated reality. I quickly learn there are many other products filled with a very similar delusion. The fiercely competitive market demands we all compete to retain our premium crown.

Who is this encroaching so provokingly along the porous border of my thinking? I should really try and ward off these thieves looking to diminish my value and plunder what I cherish the most. My whole life I've been fighting to keep the crimson madness at bay. I know well the script the legions of egos mindlessly follow. To make their brand look strong, they must make others look weak. Time to don the battledress again and protect my niche.



The economy of a loving relationship takes the hit and grows distortedly out of balance. The selling of positives plummets as the buying of negative rises. I cannot see that the brain juice is beginning to curdle. A cold paranoia continually rides shotgun in my head. There are passengers onboard who really don't want me driving; who want to take the wheel for themselves. All in the journey are moving in separate directions. Nobody sees that we are all heading toward the same end.

I am driving on a wing and a prayer. Clinging tightly to the wheel, I vow never to give up on this damn wagon. I don't want to look at the grim signs along the roadside screaming the end of the journey is nigh. Out-numbered and out manoeuvred I have to accept the unacceptable. The relationship is dead, they don't want you anymore. The drama is over now, for you it is curtains. The brain juice once scalding hot quickly cools to well below zero. The final checkout beckons.

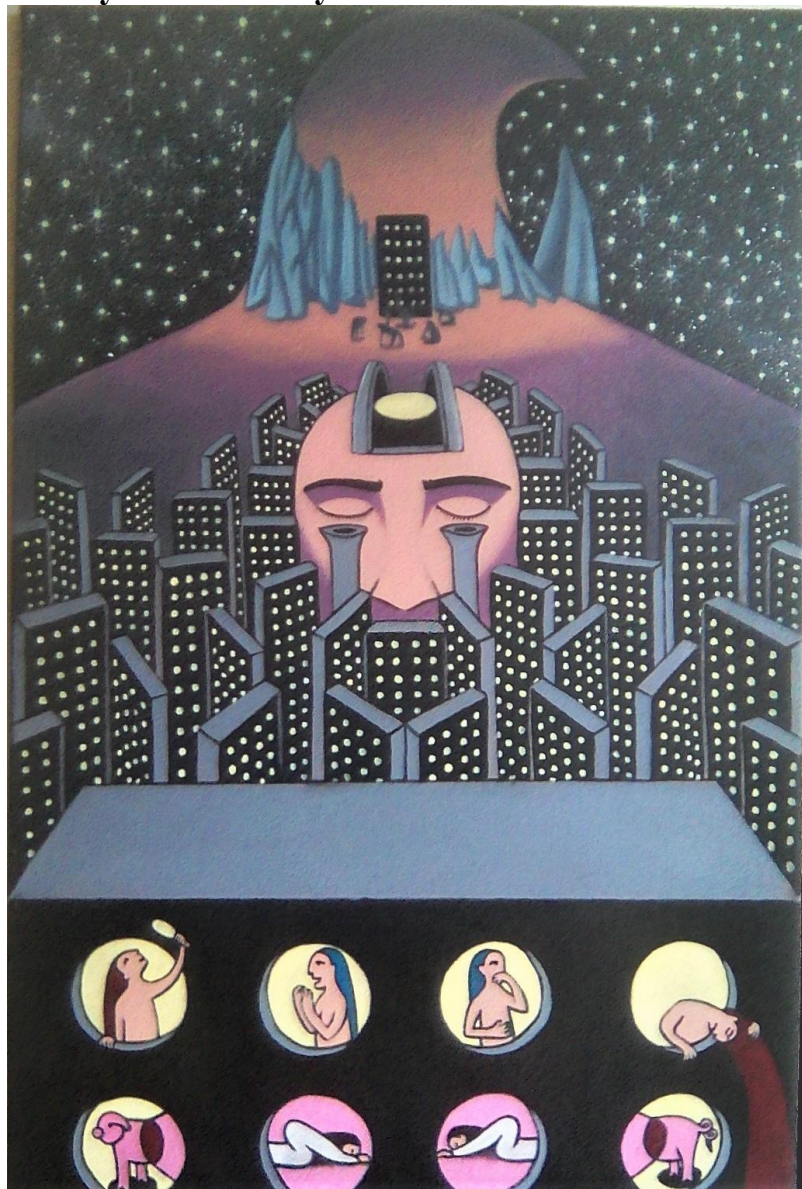


Of all the days in the year for a journey to be brought to the chopping block! It was a carbon copy of previous yuletide festivities with one exception waiting at the end of the night. Like all the others before it, this Christmas eve carried with it a magical ambience. Usually when the evening grew late, I escorted to the local pub my partners father Frank. It was a pleasant enough tradition we invoked every year. I loved to go for a pint with the northern gent hailing from county Tyrone. Having drank our quota we bid all the locals a happy Christmas, leaving via an exit at the end of a long corridor. There were two doors to the pub. A noisy door that led outside and a silent one that brought you into the heart of the bar. When we accessed the outside door everyone in the bar could hear us leaving. I had forgotten to buy cigarettes and left Frank outside while I made my way back down the hall to make my cancerous purchase. Through the second silent door I re-entered unbeknownst to the locals who all had their backs to me. The bar was engrossed in an animated discussion centered around penis size. I could hear everything that was said. Bizarrely they were discussing the dimensions of my manhood, a part of my anatomy no members of the community ever had the honor of seeing. It was made more ludicrous by the gnomish man spearheading the castrated banter. So close to Christmas I didn't expect my manhood to be put on the block. The barman then appeared spotting me hovering in the background. A decapitated silence engulfed the bar as all the punters turn in unison.



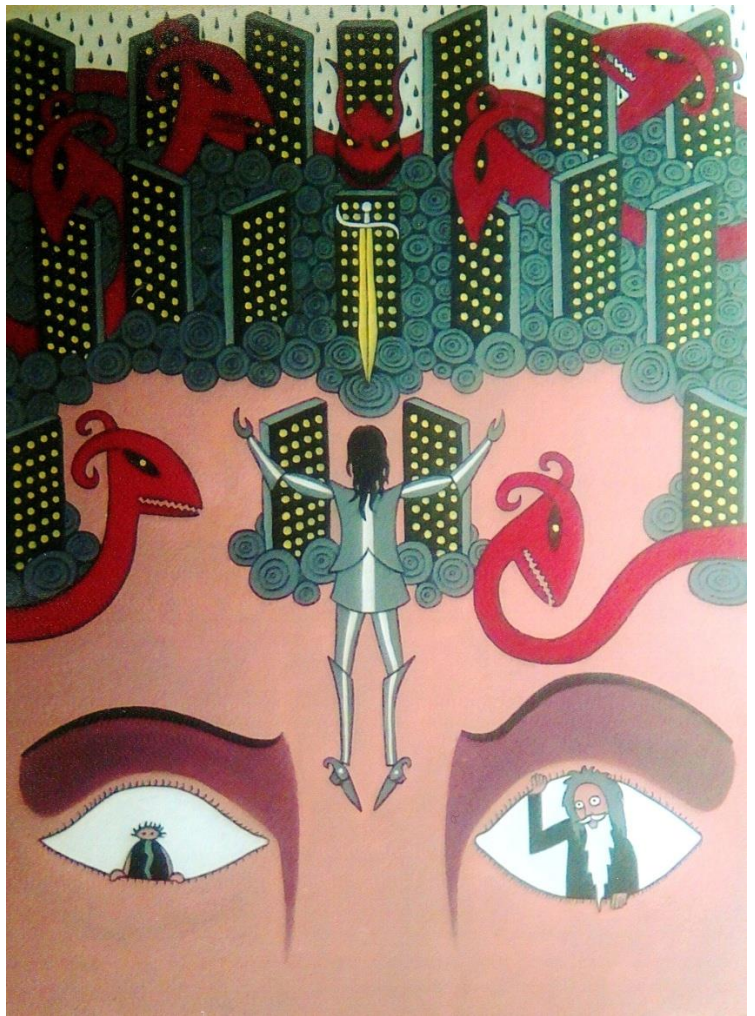
At least I know now what they are saying behind my back. I asked the barman for the cigarettes I came in for. As he nervously fumbled for the box on the shelf, dumbfounded I gaze at the leprechaun sized football coach spearheading the belittlement. He just so happened to be the football coach to my partners two sons. More than likely the same castrated banter will be exchanged with them, I mused bitterly. Happy Xmas from hell.

After that the scenery utterly changed as I walked through the village. The locals don't have human faces anymore, a grotesque penile parody has infected all of their features. I am not stupid; I know perfectly well the score here. Once an alpha cantor sings a bum note, the whole choir will be singing from the same hymn sheet. No matter where I venture in this environment the discordant choir is sure to follow. Now I see the snide smirks, the filthy looks and the passive aggressive body language in a whole new light. I feel shamefully exposed and violated every time they strip me with their eyes. A once off rape from one person is horrendous enough. Imagine having your dignity raped to infinitude by a whole community? How can I be a normal father to my two angels in this lair of demons I asked myself? To be demeaned and objectified in such a callus fashion and for what, a few cheap laughs? Would the same joke be relayed one day to my daughters I wondered sourly? I wouldn't put it past them to abuse the fruits of my loins as they had done my loins.



I couldn't ignore the violation to my autonomy encroaching on all sides. It feels like I've been cast overboard into an abysmal abyss. My childhood memory of drowning is a wet dream compared to this nightmare tempest raging inside. This time I don't shout for help, that would only encourage the gloating onlookers on the shore to tie more millstones around my neck. My inner world was all over the place. What was faraway was in the foreground. What was up-close somewhere lost far-off in the background. I needed to establish a middle-ground; a space where I could purge my interior of all this negativity. Not an easy thing to do when cold poisonous winds ruthlessly thumped you on the starboard, while scalding gales lay blows to your rear.

I am in the maw of the leviathan for sure. I try to put up some resistance as the beast chews on me for a good bit, making sure to extract the maximum amount of nourishment before it swallows. With sickening ease I slide down into its gullet. The beast has a bovine digestive system. It could take decades before its numerous stomachs breaks me down. God knows how many times I am regurgitated, chewed and then swallowed again. Life here in the belly of the beast tends to repeat on itself. Hadn't someone told me once that I would find myself one day in the bowels of this dilemma? The mind will cling to anything floating in the void for buoyancy. The remembrance a dream stops me from sinking further into total

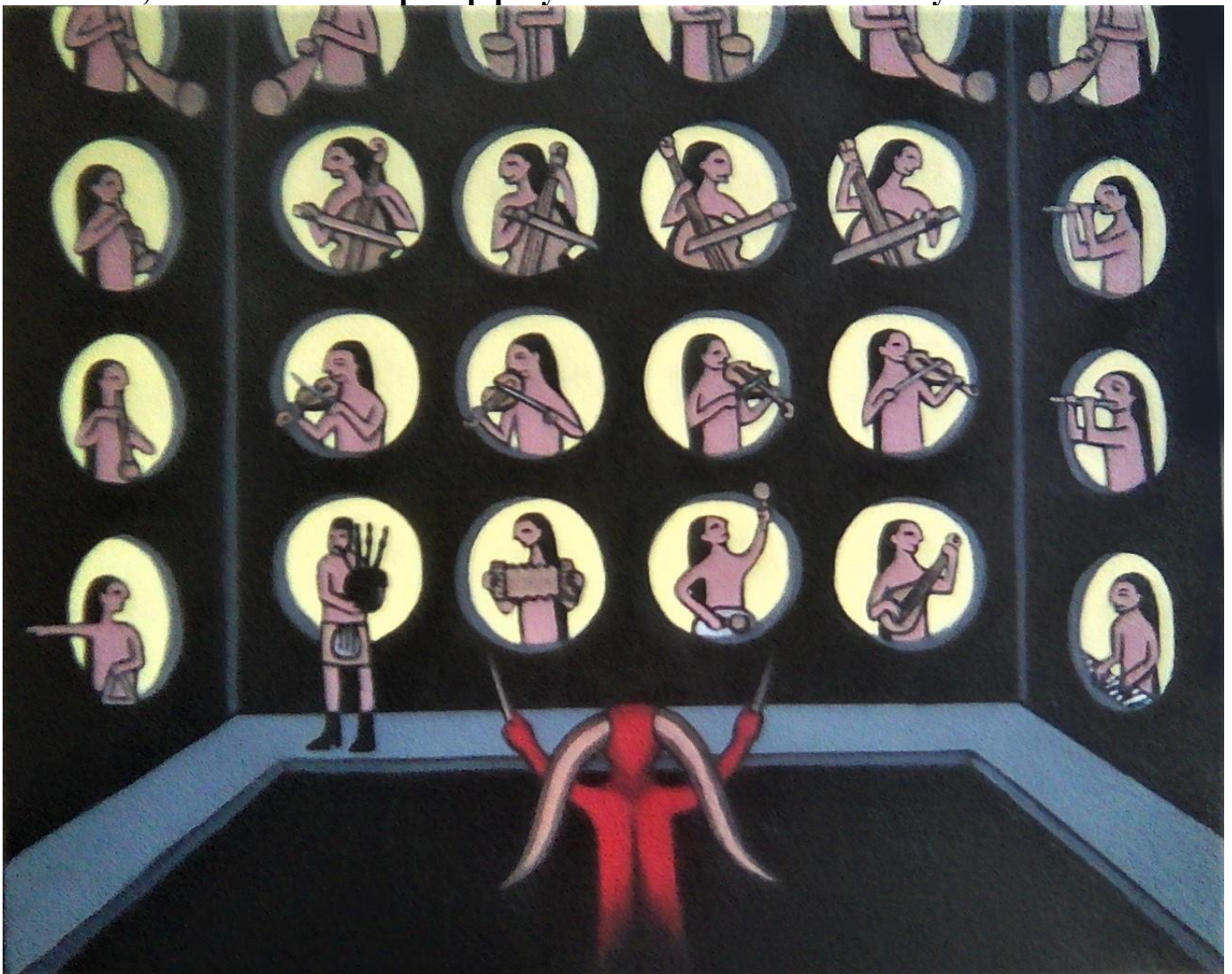


oblivion. The faint auditory ripples of the wizardly geezers voice echo two decades away. I vaguely recalled the vagrants synopsis of going to war with a whole city full of demons. "The dragons in your head, my dear knight can only be slain with a spiritual sword." Back at the halfway house, when I'm not clinging to fragments of half remembered dreams, my mind is submerged in a zombified miasma. How many months I floated in suspended animation in that mindless gulf I do not know? What I do know is that most of the time I don't know what I am doing half the time.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

Voices from on high repeatedly spout that the good times have flown south. How quickly the fiscal tide receded causing many sailing the financial high seas to hit rock-bottom. Looks like it's curtains for the boom-time show; the once lavish production values booted off a stage already decorated in recessionary props. To-let signs suddenly appear on every street where businesses have been flushed away. Cue the unemployment queues filled to the gills with countless extras gutted by their new role on the dole. A cast of downcast actors eager to enlarge their pecking order in the farce cast their belittling one liners. Drifting through the town I feel like a punch line that has just wandered onto the set of a bad joke. What a shitty backdrop to my mid-thirties, one badly drawn dimension acting as three. It is more comedy than tragedy, how the well-orchestrated pantomime makes me laugh when I catch wind of voices bewailing the savage cutbacks on the airwaves; mere nicks when juxtaposed next to my gnashing wound. It is difficult to see where it will take them, this directionless pied pipery where discord continuously calls the tune.



The devil in music is a fascinating subject to paint, there is such a thing in musicology. Whenever I depict the devil, it always relates to the Taoist concept of evil as imbalance. I was very much conscious of the discordant orchestrations within me, especially during the fall from grace period at the end of the relationship. My God did I feel like the fallen one on my return to the halfway house, the only hellhole that would have me. There was a resident there who used to slam the bathroom door so loudly it actually made me cry. He was clearly on the spectrum, maybe I was too. When he'd grown acquainted with me,

the nutjob asked me to help with something in his corner of the universe just down the hall from mine. Expecting to enter a total shithole vortex full of disorder, I was pleasantly surprised to discover a very ordered private space. Such neatness and attention to detail, every object in the bedroom ruled by a geometry denoting a structured acumen. Despite the imbalance in his behavior, some semblance of symmetry managed to shine through.

Same could be said about the Orwellian skies looming over this place, but breaks in the cloud are rare. Even in the heights of summer the atmosphere can be Baltic. I've no other choice but to suck it up and acclimatize to the spiritual wintertime that festers here the whole year round. Many have committed suicide to flee from that mindless mindscape. Everyone wants to escape it, including those invested in the cold climate. I'm not stupid, I can see clear as day the weather is pure shit for those perched high in the pecking order. They remind me of a colony of penguins; ignorantly waddling towards death, completely clueless to what lies beyond. I think it's a blessing to be outside that spiritless groupthink. I don't feel cold turkey any more when those in the grim reaper zone decide to ostracize. It's all just verbal choking the chicken, their words wingless birds cut off from the sky.



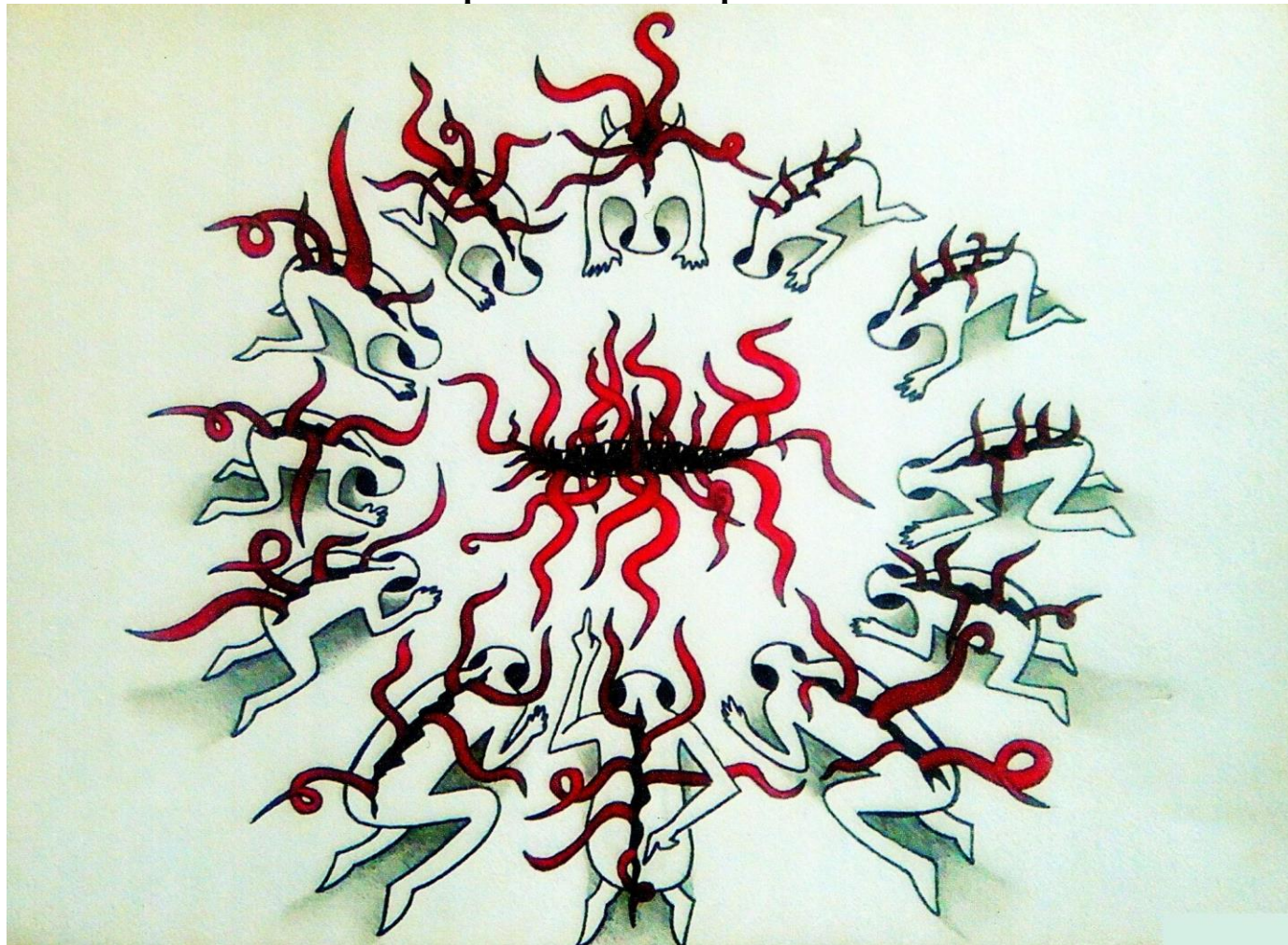
I get immense consolation listening to those rare voices that have truly taken to the skies. Amassed a considerable stash of spiritual writings from my adventure in the monastery to help sustain me through the lengthy bleak season that lay ahead. They'd say the crazy Dublin jackdaw is away with the birds if ever they caught wind of that! Securing a nest is always in my thoughts, important to have a sanctuary from all the birdbrain madness. The hungry beaks flocking to gorge have no idea they're partaking in such a plucky dish. It is not me after all that they are eating. The poultry morsel they cook is more a reflection of where they are in their own journey. What they're consuming doesn't have an upper torso, not even a headless chicken. More like two drumsticks with gizzards for a head.

Despite keeping a safe distance from the clucking hens, by just being alive I ruffle their feathers. The cocks I think would miss to see me go, how they love to show me the worm they have caught in their beaks. There is no escaping the castrated suspicion that my very manhood has been cut off, thrown to the cruel waters so severed from the truth that their only source of nourishment is to feed off discarded body parts. Every demon roosting in the social underbelly came out to feed. There were many stark moments when the light of consciousness flickered and the flashes of a terrible demonic blackout threatened to engulf. Though I walk in the midst of the shadow of death, no evil shall I buy. A slight deviation from psalm 23. Fortuitously for the merchants trading in that distorted market with their minds so invested in evil devaluations, that there is a sacred fortune present. Providentially there is more of the angel alight to keep the demoniacal darkness at bay.



The only way to unplug a negative is to plug into a positive. One mind with the lights switched on is much more powerful than countless minds with the lights switched off. The fighting spirit in me stands sternly on the prow of an endurance that will never sink. Stories such as Shackleton's epic expedition on the endurance truly resonates. Part of me says bring it on, relishing doing battle with the demonic gulls from home and abroad. Hungry beaks from foreign shores I thought never ate pork gathered to peck away at my mental health. Fuck me does it hurt, lucky there's plenty of provisions onboard for the famished critters looking to fatten themselves up in the new community. No small portion could feed such savage gorging from so many. Something more than shallow rhetoric was needed to withstand the constant onslaught. It forced me to dive deep and search the depths of my mind for an oceanic truth that just so happens to keep all our voyages afloat.

The thought hardly ever crosses my mind to escape to some far-flung place. I would much prefer to sit down and have a chat with my demons face to face, furnish their interiors with a few home truths. Demons are just misguided human beings who can't see the big picture. God in man enlarges, the devil in man makes small. Anyone who needs to belittle another to big themselves up is operating from a lower level. Without a spiritual presence in the house, the basement rife with demons will eventually destabilize the entire estate. Demonic circles tend to keep their heads buried in the sand; especially when the tendrils of their hate narrative runs deep. Wish I could nip it in the bud before the hellfire blooms.



I consider myself a bit of a botanist, collecting samples of the devils weed when it sprouts. Some specimens are very dangerous, can take your head off for just looking their way. Important to get another set of eyes on each case to corroborate my findings. The Garda said maybe it was a red flag in his culture, and I shouldn't've been eyeballing the man. I sort of agreed, but just couldn't help staring into those big beautiful brown bulbs. Wow was he high on the demonic dial when we rendezvoused where Church Street intersects with Harmony Hill. The streetscape was totally empty giving him an ideal opportunity to step up and dance. His berserk raving tangoed for a brief spell with my smirky silence. I was kind of scared too, but mostly fascinated watching the hellfire ablaze in his eyes as he stared into mine shouting angrily to stop looking at him. Then there followed a staring competition, I didn't blink once or say a word as he spouted the usual blah blah that I am a dead man. Then his gaze shifted slightly towards Dominic Street, and I could see in the corner of my eye two nuns. The man scarpered down the street while the two charity sisters I was well acquainted with through a prayer group stopped to have a chinwag. "He was just telling me about his troubles in the basement." I answered in a roundabout way, the elder of the two then commended me for reaching out to the Muslim community.

An order of nuns whose mission it was to help the poor ran a prayer service in the town. Anybody could participate in the divine office alongside the sisters of this very inclusive convent. I so loved the sacred feminine energy of the place; its holy ambience touched me deeply. I went religiously for a couple of months and the sisters grew familiar with my presence there. They didn't seem to be bothered by the weird markings on my head. Could hardly believe it when I told them about my own experience of religious life, the only people I ever spoke to about that part of my journey. I would never in a million years tell them about the paedo ring in the monastery; thinking it would sully their sacred interiors. I believed it was a very receptive place, open to expressing the creative side too. They had a quaint exhibition space outside the oratory where people could hang religious artefacts; mostly photocopied images of the holy virgin. I felt compelled to write an icon of Mary, presenting the painting to the mother superior soon as the paint was touch dry.



Imagine her surprise when this weird tattooed specimen landed on her doorstep with an artefact hailing from the Marian genre. Think the head of the chapter was unsure whether the gesture was the act of an artist or a madman. She was definitely conflicted that I had gone to such trouble painting something so virginal and pure. Under no circumstances she told me could the order accept my gift. She said it was too much for one person to give. I tried explaining that she would be giving to me, was just trying to return good karma to a community that had shown me kindness. The mother superior shifted uneasily on her throne; the mention of karma leaving a bitter trace on her face. Suffice to say she stuck to her guns and steadfastly refused the painting of the virgin.

I politely excused myself saying not a word. Despite all the pain I went through to tattoo my flesh, I still didn't have ownership over my own property. On my return home the rejected icon was cast into the bin. So disgusted with the head of the chapter I would never frequent the convent for communal prayer again. Stayed away from all religious groups from thence forward. How easily good deeds get hauled off into the realm of the snuff film. That is what flickers in eyes when I am looked at. The production team pulling the strings behind the scenes of the ghastly scenario are operating completely in the dark.

There is no light at the end of their tunnel vision. With the help of my spiritual practice, I can now watch from a safe distance somewhat detached from positive and negative computations. As mindfulness grows the luminous spatiality between thoughts expands. Finding the “Spacious aspect” of the mind made me feel like I was ascending to a whole new level. Finally I rise above binary thinking and connect with the life energy in us all.



The gossips know nothing of the latest developments taking place, the truly sacred events never seem to knock on their doors. Dwelling in mental hovels they are only interested in squatting and making a mess of places where they do not belong. I never tell them that I have taken back my property. I am inclined to let them fester in their distorted construct of reality as it gradually crumbles before their eyes. The bricks of their words can only build a hellish place. Using the same building blocks of language; I intend to build a more spacious narrative, home to a heavenly truth. Despite the many verbal wrecking balls around me, I work arduously to rebuild my life, hell-bent on unearthing the heavens.

Open the page anywhere in humanities story and you will find hidden in the fine print a dysfunctional culture interested only in dragging people down. In defiance of the zombie script, I grow evermore present and watchful of what is going on inside and out. Crucially I make sure not to take my thoughts seriously. Our society so addicted to thinking would shriek at such a thought. There is a formidable barrier in modern culture which refuses to look outside the confines of its own mental construct. As the mental movie progresses, openings to the other side become larger. I can see nature; the animal kingdom and the

entire cosmos operating harmoniously without human psychology. We find it very hard to compute that the hardware of all living creatures operates from the same universal software. There is a vivid, observable life outside the limited computations of the brain. The illusory wall surrounding the cityscape of thinking will not keep reality out forever.



Outside the small-minded confines of the cultural puddles of this world, there is a vast ocean waiting to be discovered. I make good use of the numerous walkways in Sligo where some of the most stunning forested and lakeside scenery in the country can be found. Usually following a set orbit spanning nearly a two-hour radius, I am on my last legs nearing the end. It is only when entering the town again, do I feel the immense weight of the cross. I normally meet one of the communities nutjobs on the last homeward stretch. Always when strolling along a particular cycle-path, I'd be certain to encounter the same reoccurring psychopath. We rendezvoused so often that I felt compelled to christen him; "The psychopath on the cycle-path." I only have to look at him now and he goes totally psycho. Of course, it was completely different at the start of the romance, my psychopath on the cycle path used to actually wave and smile at me then. Especially receptive to any positive expressions from the community, I enthusiastically waved back at the gentleman. "Good luck with the sex change." He shouts over at me with a gnarly grin. I keep walking and say nothing. I have grown accustomed to the preachers of the gossip gospel who will think up virtually any nonsense to peddle as the truth. What kind of deranged mind is dreaming up all this stuff, I shudder to think? I begin to harbor a kind of pity for them, so enmeshed in completely absurd fabrications. If I were ever permitted to enjoin my voice to that caravan of talk, I would warn them of the perilous path their tongues walk.

Whether we are in a cinema watching a film; standing on a street corner listening to gossip or in the comfort of our home reading a book, at a certain point along the journey

we may ask ourselves: where is this story taking me? Some stories are just glorified Ouija boards channeling a shocking demoniacal force. There are certain writers who are true masters at electrifying our imagination. There are other storytellers who really don't give a shit where they are headed so long as you're a compliant passenger that pays the fare. There are stories which try to connect the reader to the better angels of our nature too. Every narrative no matter how simple or intricate its literary wiring, serves as a plug connecting the reader to positive, neutral and negative energies. I presume most authors have an understanding of the electrical principles at work inside the stories they create.



Most people are not stupid; they're well aware of the forces at work when plugging a story. We're all wired with an angelic current and a demonic current. Without any connection to the sacred source, evil discharges will electrify the attention. Cut off from the grid where life provides abundant energy, we create pain to generate power. So much energy is wasted on making bad connections. Plus + adds, minus-takes. The mind that is negatively charged has to constantly look for a socket. In the ego mode the brain is always seeking to recharge itself. Power struggles tend to ensue which usually entails belittling a person or a group. Only by fusing directly with the source will we increase the voltage of conscious awareness. Then we will find as our minds become more attuned, the noise loses all of its power over us.

There is no escaping the fact that the ego mode is still very much operating in our world today. Anywhere on the planet right now it is there for anyone to study and understand. As we evolve, we become more conscious of certain patterns that are endlessly reenacted. Western culture so apt at orchestrating comic book caricatures loves to rehash jaded formulas to corral the masses. Where has it taken us, all this hero worship since ancient times? We're living in a time where the climate grows ever more villainous and wannabe

heroes clutching smartphones like swords usually scarper for the hills at the slightest whiff of trouble. For years I resisted following the social media bandwagon promising limitless access to corners of the globe previously off limits. I was and still am skeptical. True enough you can make connections with far-flung places but then what about the community you lose contact with because of all the time spent creating relations online. It is more of a slight shift in optics from a local centric focus to a globalist world view. Before entering any public arena, it is important to have a clear picture of who you are. The vision I presented was never going to make me popular, totally understood that from the get-go. It is a real triumph bringing an alternative perspective to the public eye, whatever happened after that was a bonus! The artwork I am most proud of expresses the interface between the spirit and the ego explored in the following oil on canvas here.



A solution when it flies into a pictorial space passes through a turbulent metamorphosis, the final destination totally different from the noisy place chalked out in the beginning. Parallels can be drawn with solving a complex mathematical problem, the answer always following a certain symmetry denoting a ring of truth. Mathematicians have described entering a clear, harmonic sky when a solution dawns. That is what we are all seeking. What bliss to enter that clearing where abstraction and figuration seem to converge. Connect with that formlessness within all forms and the compulsion to put people and situations into separate boxes disappears. The answer to all of life's complex conundrums is painfully simple to understand. One life cocoons every single thought, word and deed.



Whatever the season befalls this fleeting molecular dance we've all found ourselves in; the NOW animates every step with a sacred sonnet silently singing praises to eternal life. Not too far-off now as we move evermore closer to fulfilling the creative blueprint set out in the beginning to unearth an architecture mindful of both a hellish and a heavenly spatiality. At times I bet you feared the ceiling may cave in and reduce the story to a pile of rubble. The chapter that began on a dysphoric low is set to depart on a euphoric high. Some passengers travelling on this textual and visual train may very well complain that the timeless realm promised from the start has yet to make an appearance on this craft. Only when everyone is truly PRESENT will we all arrive at our ultimate destination.



There are no first class, second class or third-class passengers to arrive at the realization that there wasn't really anyone on the train to begin with. It doesn't matter whether you are a saint or a sinner, a loner or the most popular; we are all heading towards the same end. The only thing that matters is whether we SEE into the true face of that chasm where TRUTH dwells. What is to be SEEN into is so awesome mere words will never suffice to describe it. I was painfully aware there was something I could not SEE. I would have been very mindful of my ignorance. I had verbalized my frustration on many occasions. Just before the most illuminated TRUTH dawned, I cried out to the void in utter anguish. "For twenty years I've been peeling away the layers, looking everywhere for the core, why does it allude me?" Finally, the penny dropped and the answer inaudibly blared. "The blade you are peeling with, this is the core you seek." It hit me like a freight train.

An opening appeared in the belly of the beast. I passed through the eye of the needle. Joyful tears baptized my eyes. I SAW, oh my did I SEE. I laughed, I cried, I whispered,

I shouted; HOW DID I NOT SEE IT?



APOTHEOSIS

Every story has one whether inlets are made now or at the moment of death, it will happen.



I know in my core that we are all born with the power to change our story for the better. Just requires a simple shift in focus from the puddles of the past to the ocean of the now. Mindless minds then become a reminder to be more mindful. With that in mind I head to the seaside where an oceanic consciousness lives eternally inside every living creature.

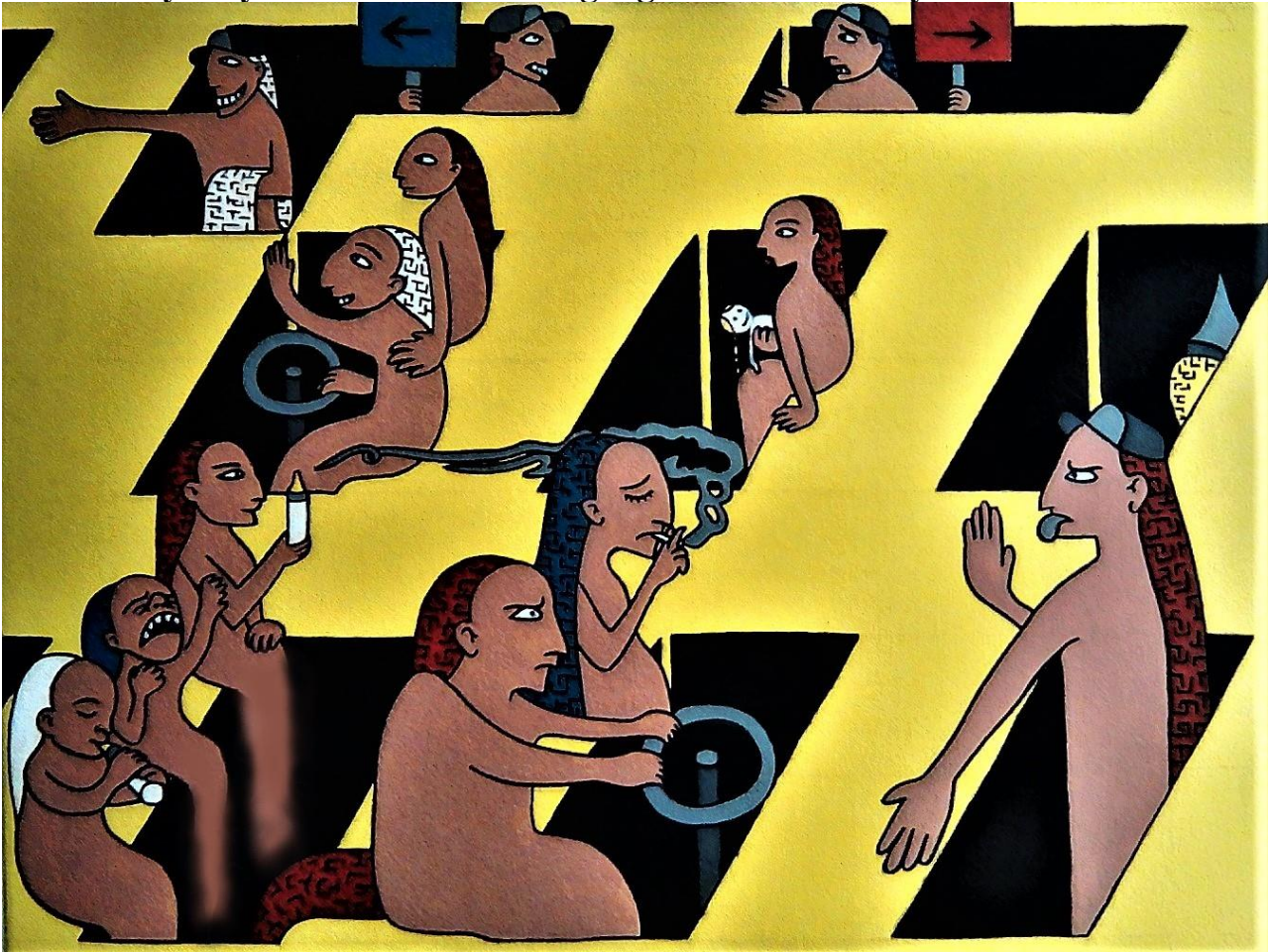
It is a self-evident reality this oceanic truth that gives buoyancy to thinking.



Each generation has the potential to unearth heaven or hell.



Very easy to lose the now and get gridlocked in busy mental traffic.



As lessons become more complex we sink deeper into the psycho-emotional maze.



Some are so sunken feeding off others drowning to stay afloat.



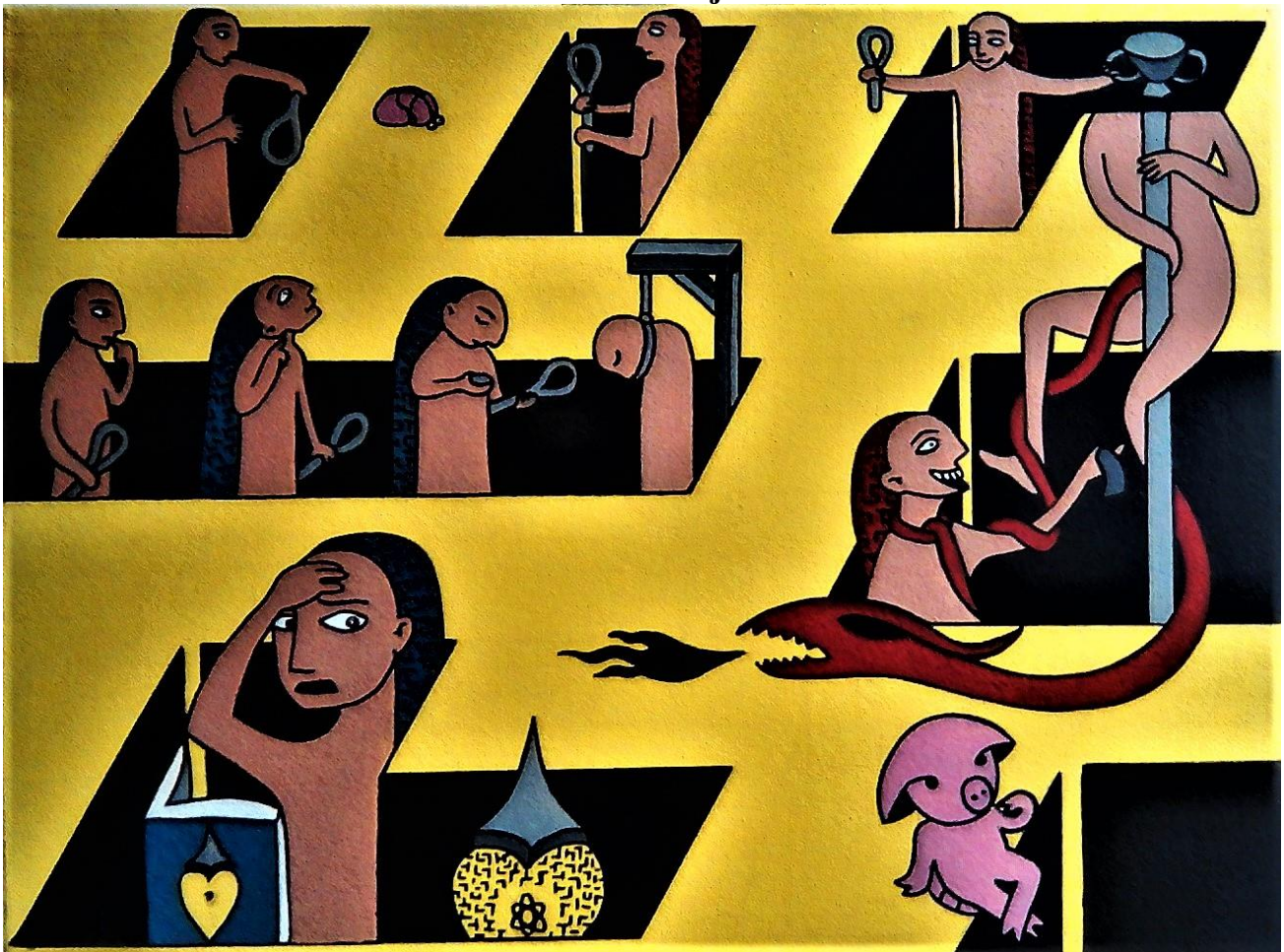
The most important ingredient is missing.



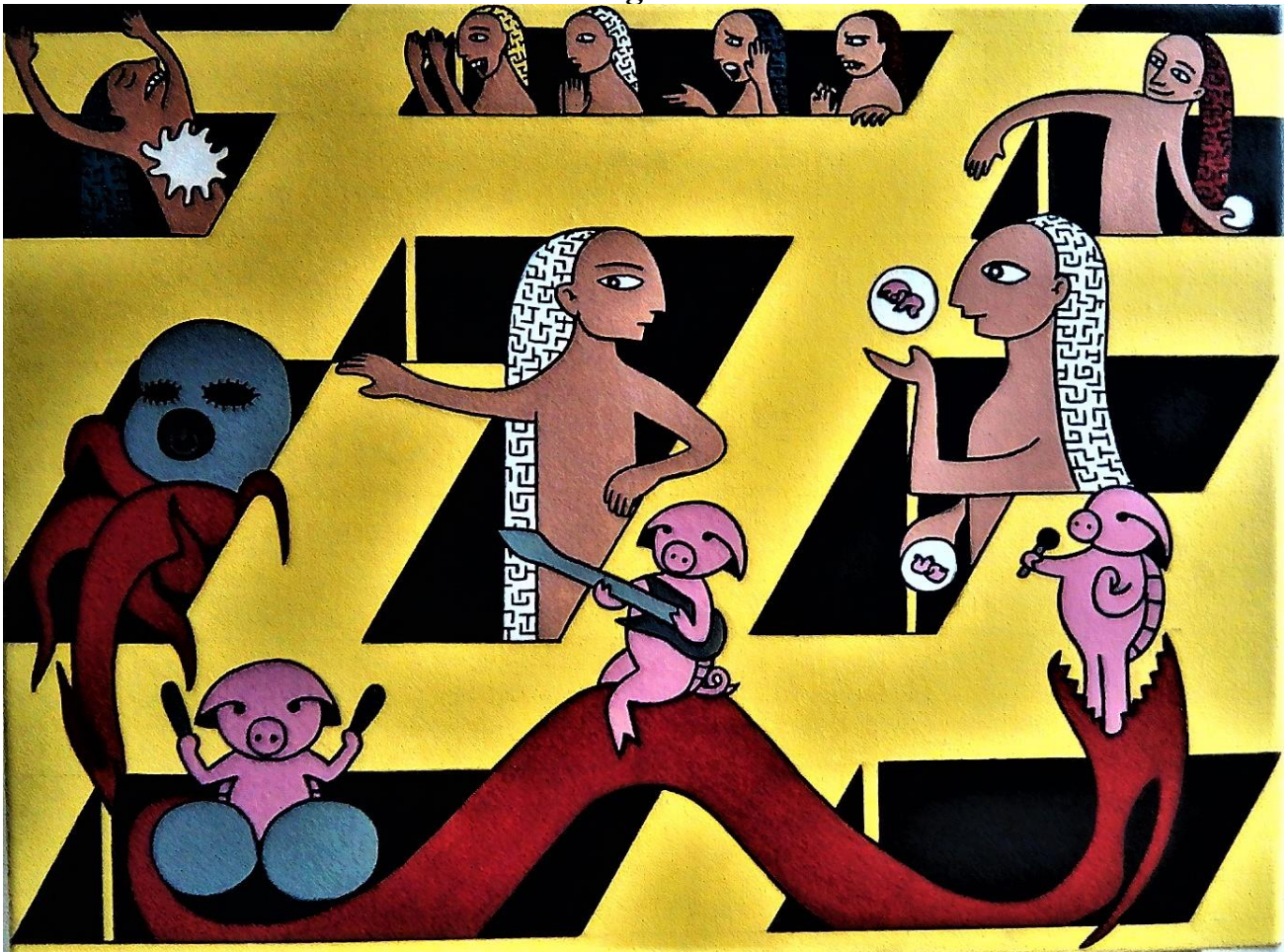
Harmony can so easily descend into discord.



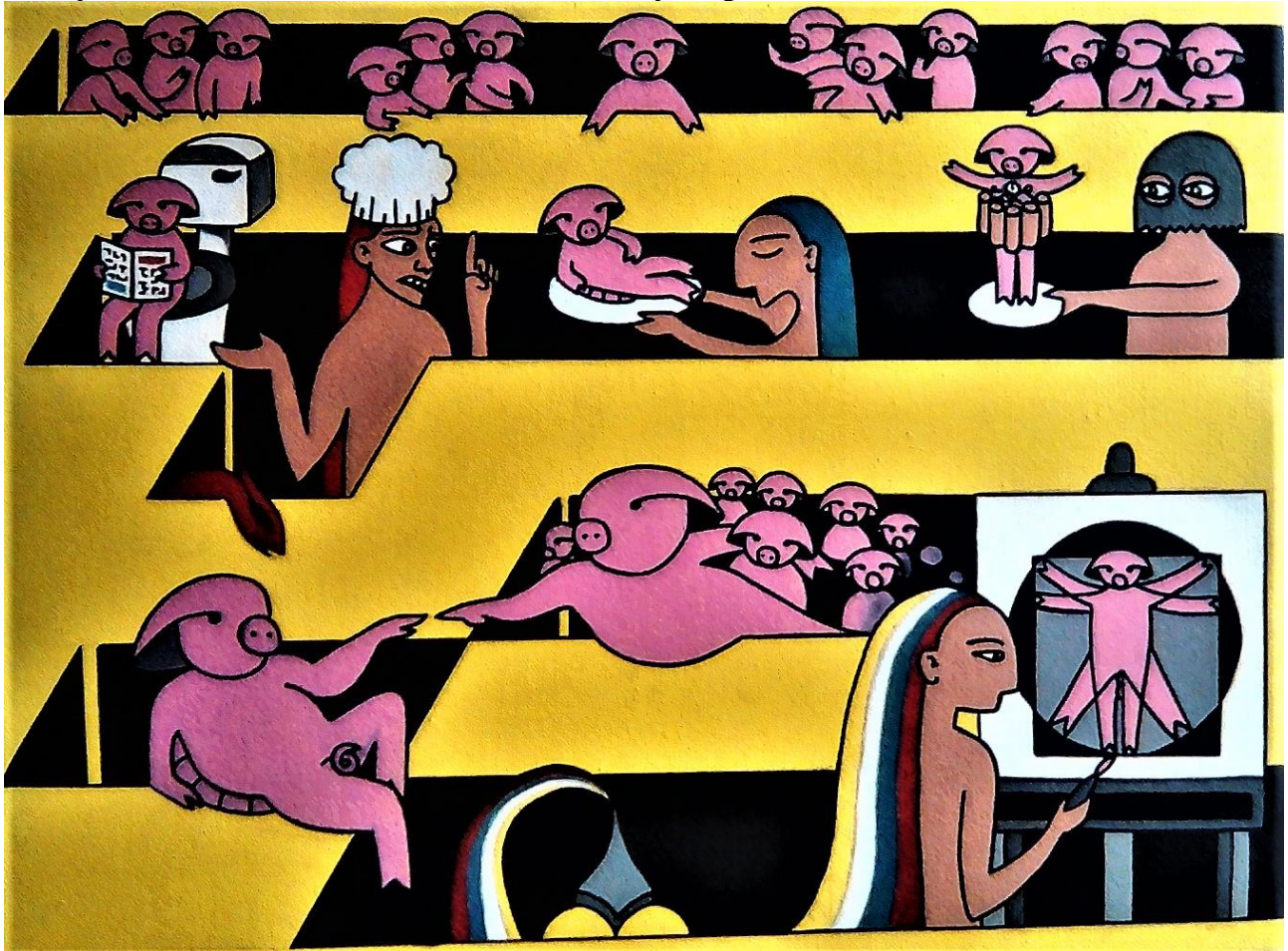
Without the core I'm just a whore.



Somewhere amid all these one nightstands with falsehood lies truth.



So many fakes flood the market it is virtually impossible to tell what is the real McCoy.



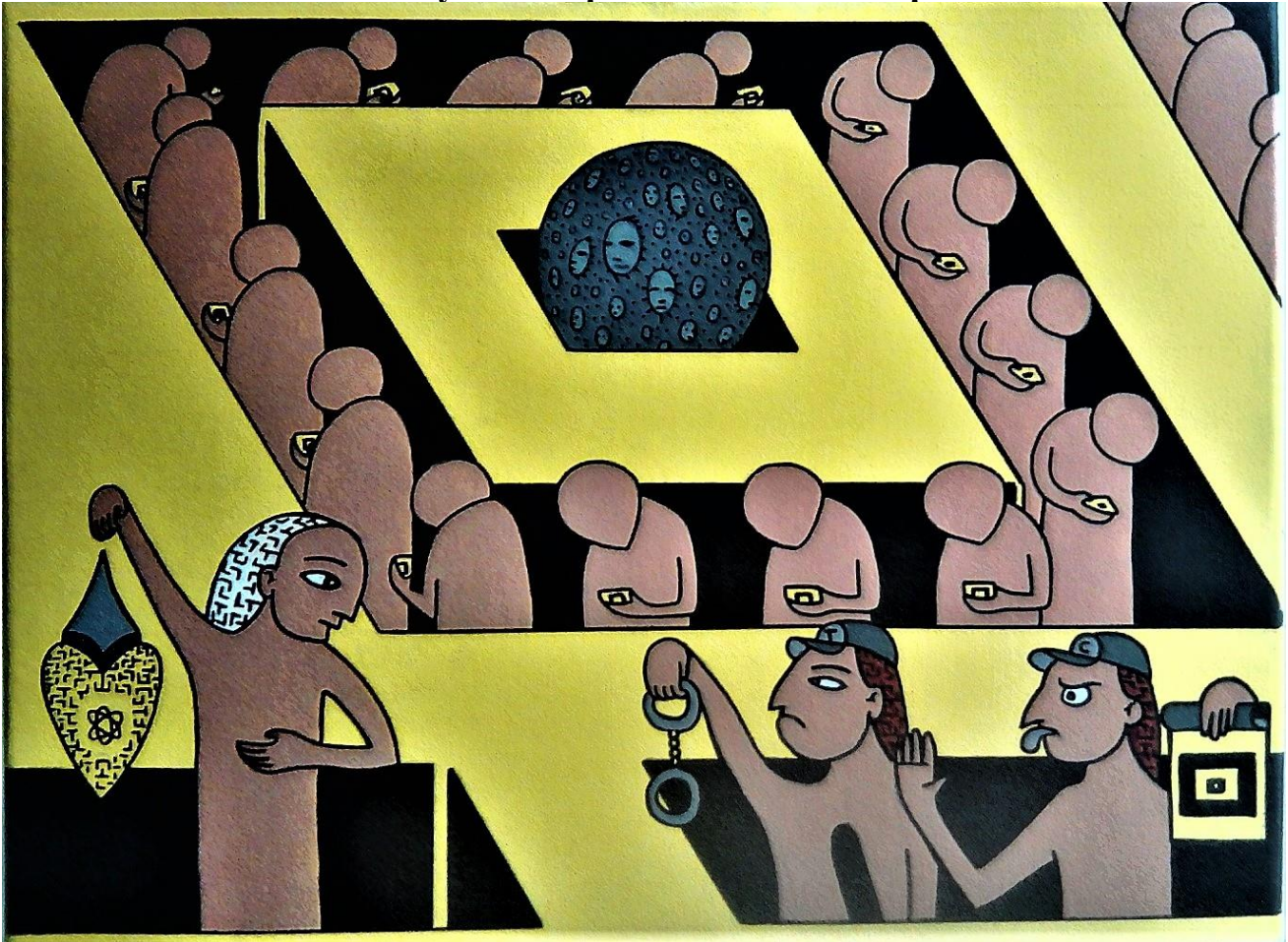
It will take a while for the penny to drop before realizing we were already rich.



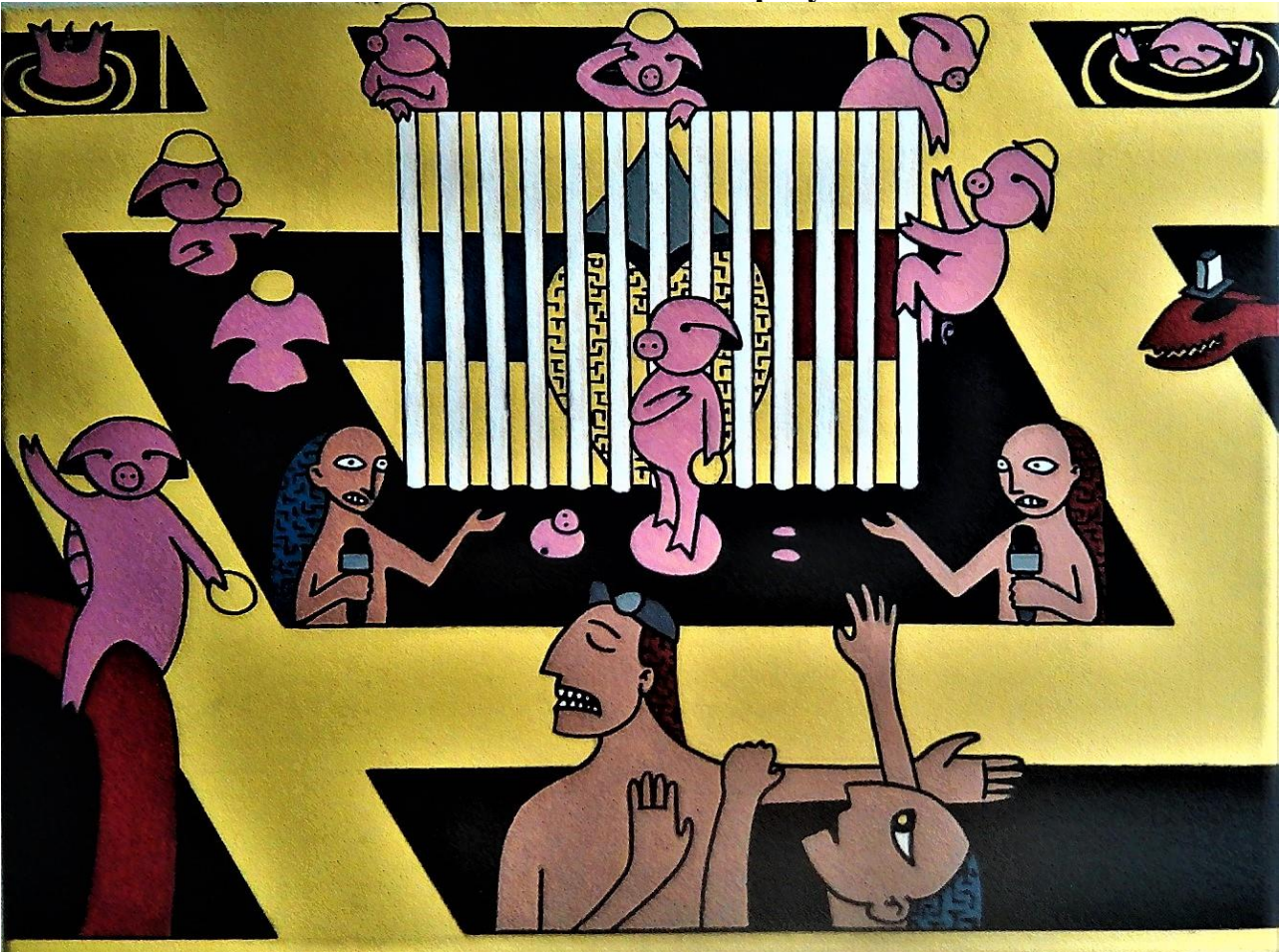
A perspective where all opposing points of view converge.



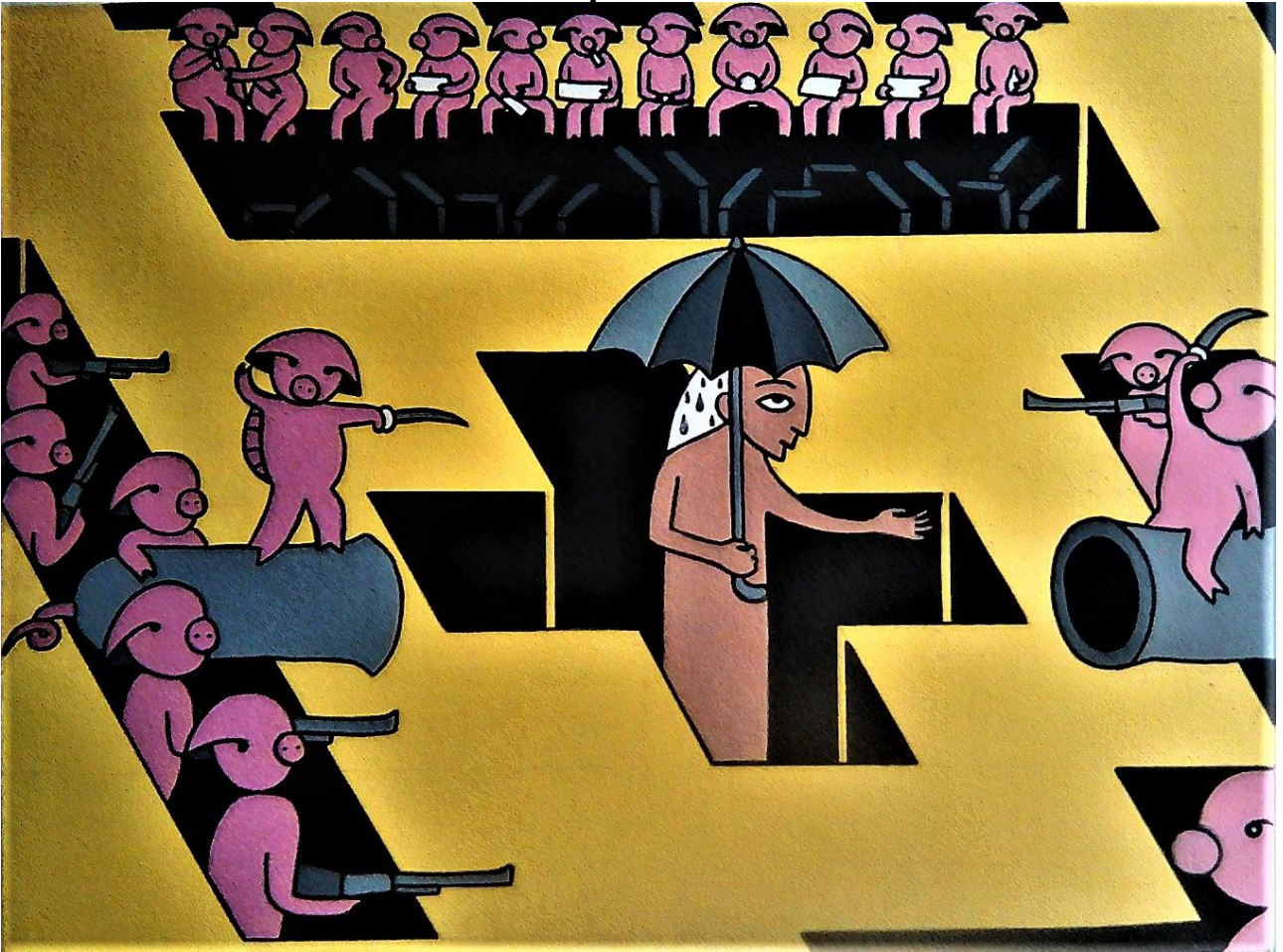
Be careful your escape doesn't become a prison.



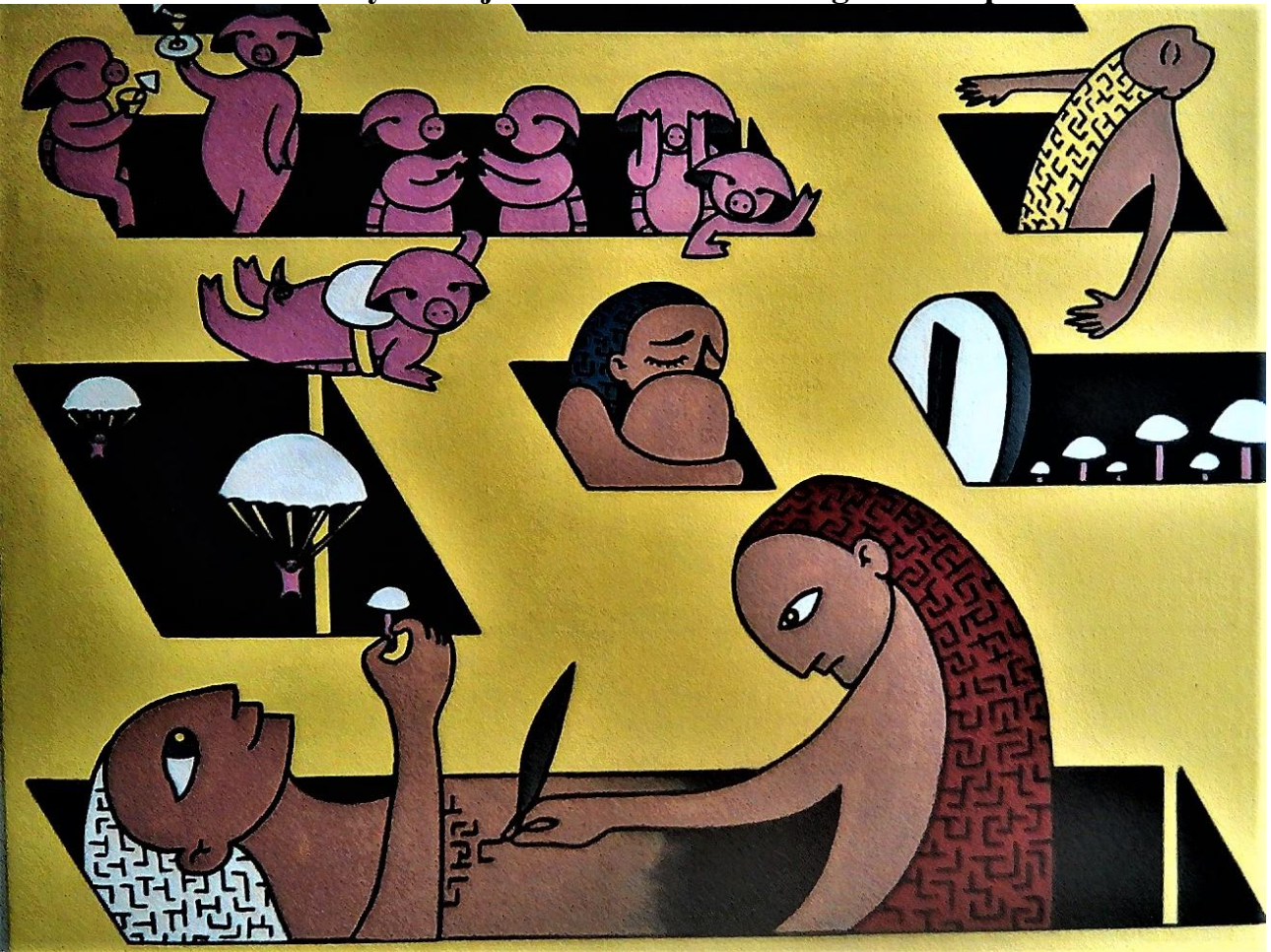
Advancements in telecommunications seem to amplify barriers of misunderstanding.



A violent downpour looks imminent.



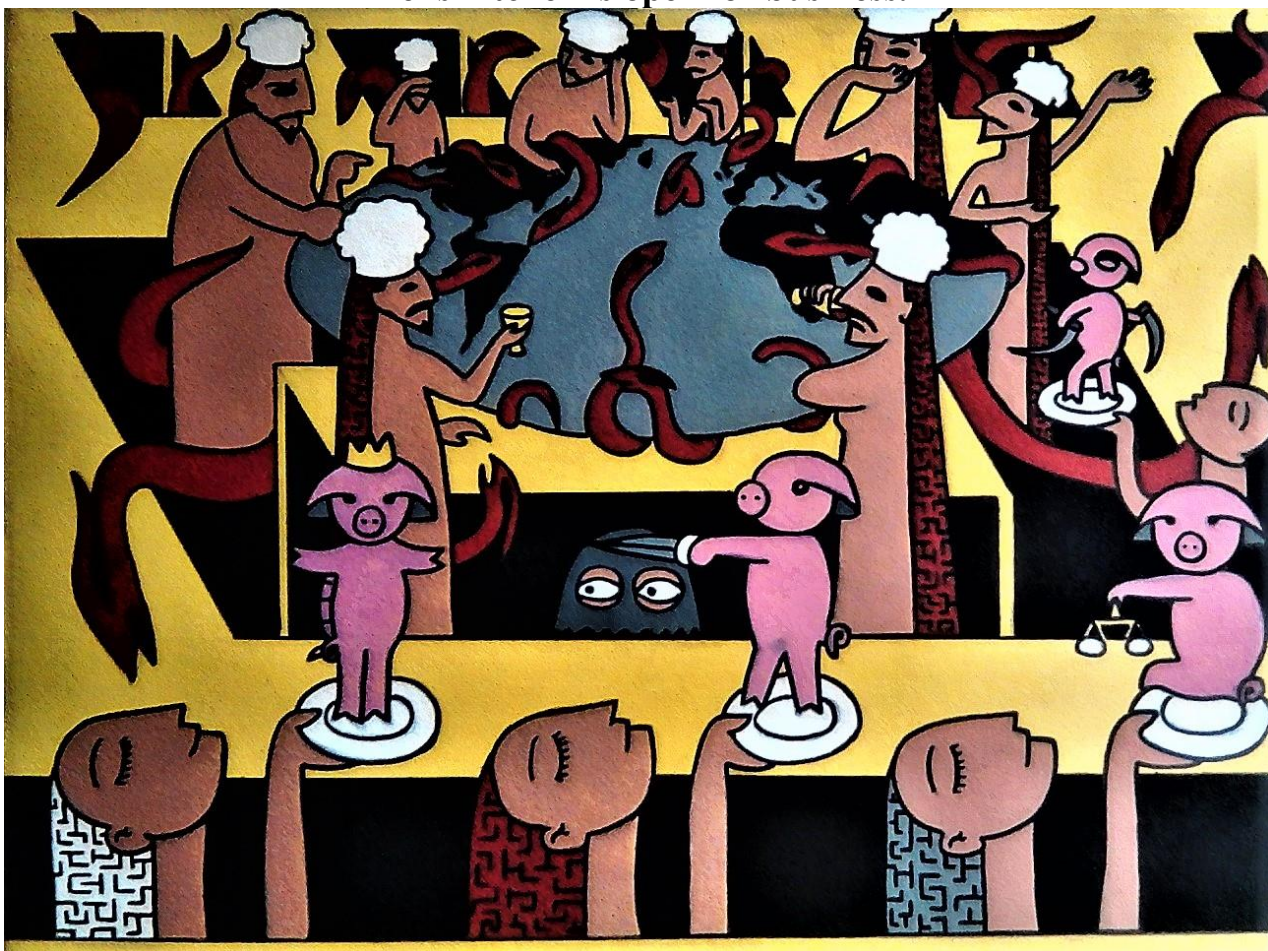
Don't whatever you do jet-off on a narcotic high to escape the low.



False highs give way to a chasm of pain.



Hells kitchen is open for business.



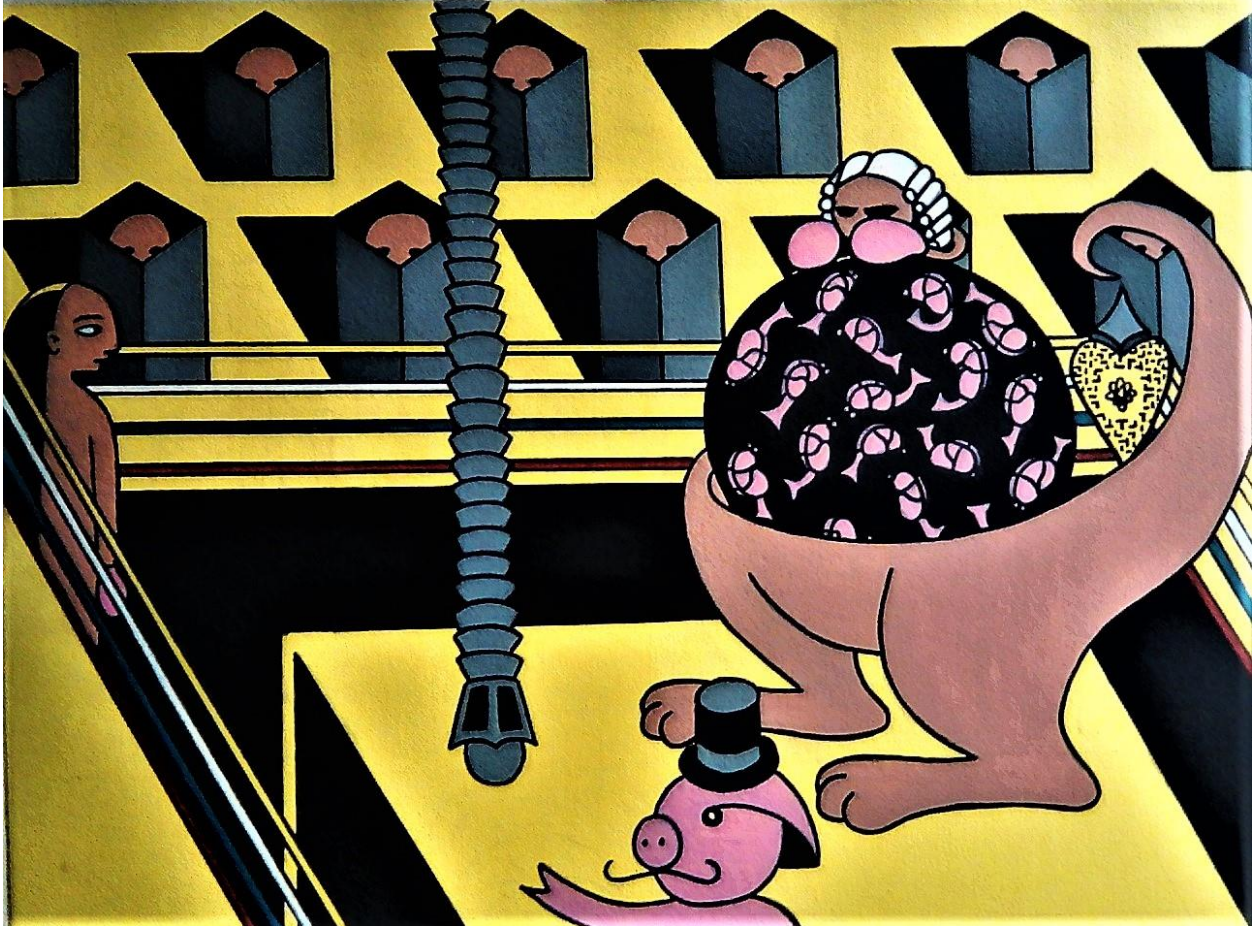
Oh Jesus not another painful crucifixion claiming to resurrect the truth.



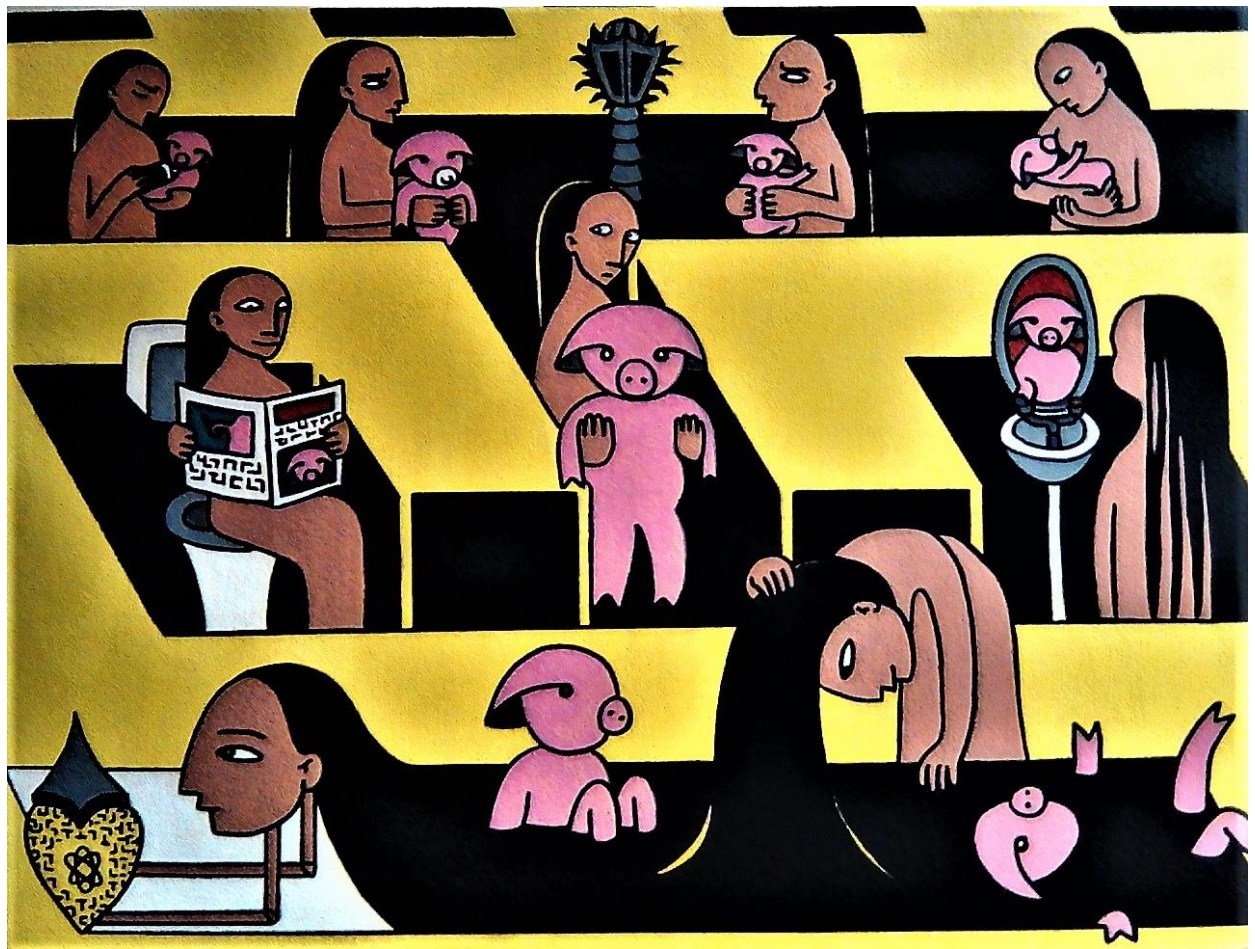
It seemed like a good idea at the time.



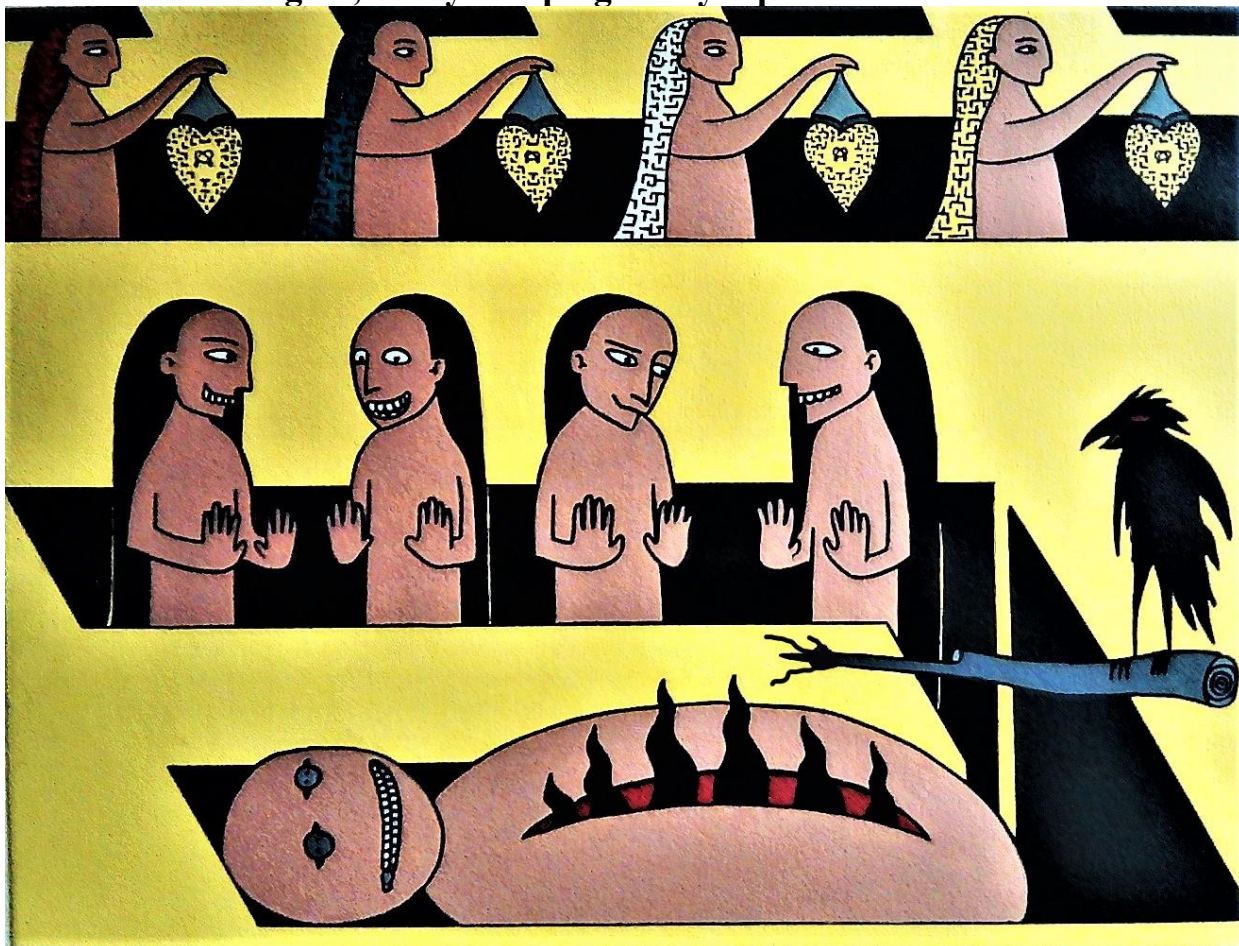
Boxed-in groupthink does not know, thinking outside the box delivers a knockout blow.



Spirituality is alchemy, it turns all the shite into light.



Best be moving on, always keeping the eyes peeled for the site that sees.



TRUTH when it speaks looks directly into our eyes. In a whisper it shouts,
HEAVEN IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK.

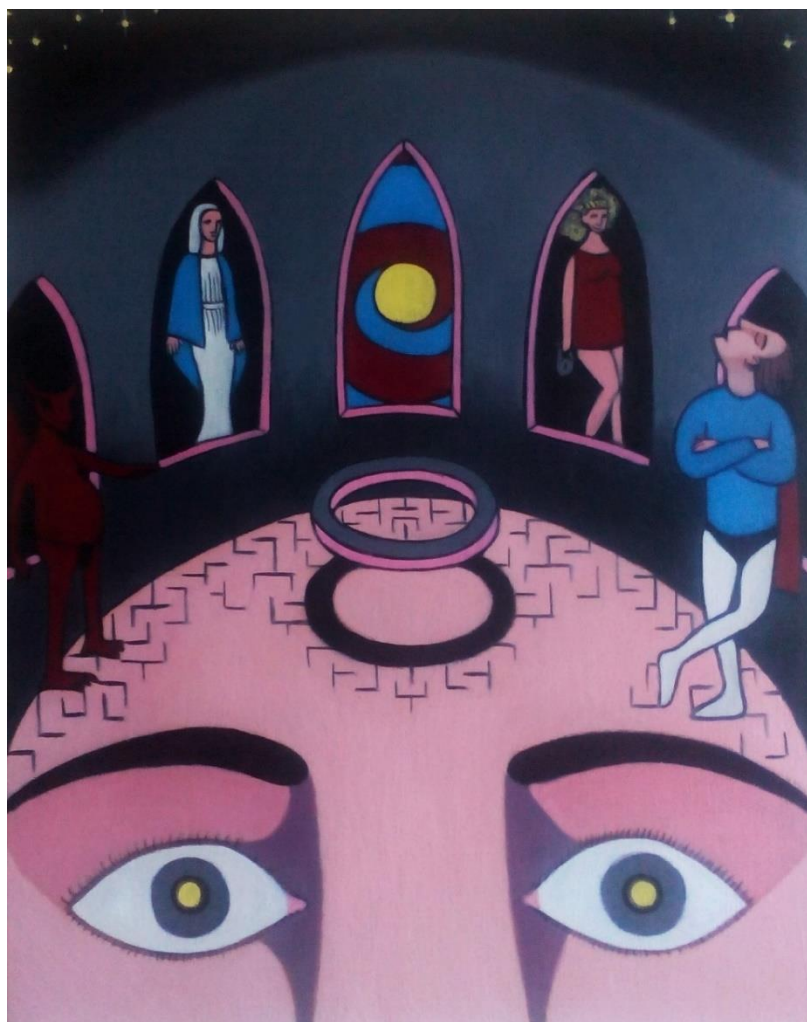


Universal consciousness is the rising tide that lifts all vessels in the harbor. The oceanic truth present through all the high and low tides is what keeps every voyage afloat. It is here sailing right now, giving buoyancy to these words I write. It isn't going to board on some far-off future shore, the destination has already arrived. The divine wine will not remain bottled up forever; certainly not a spiritual presence likely to linger in the cellar.



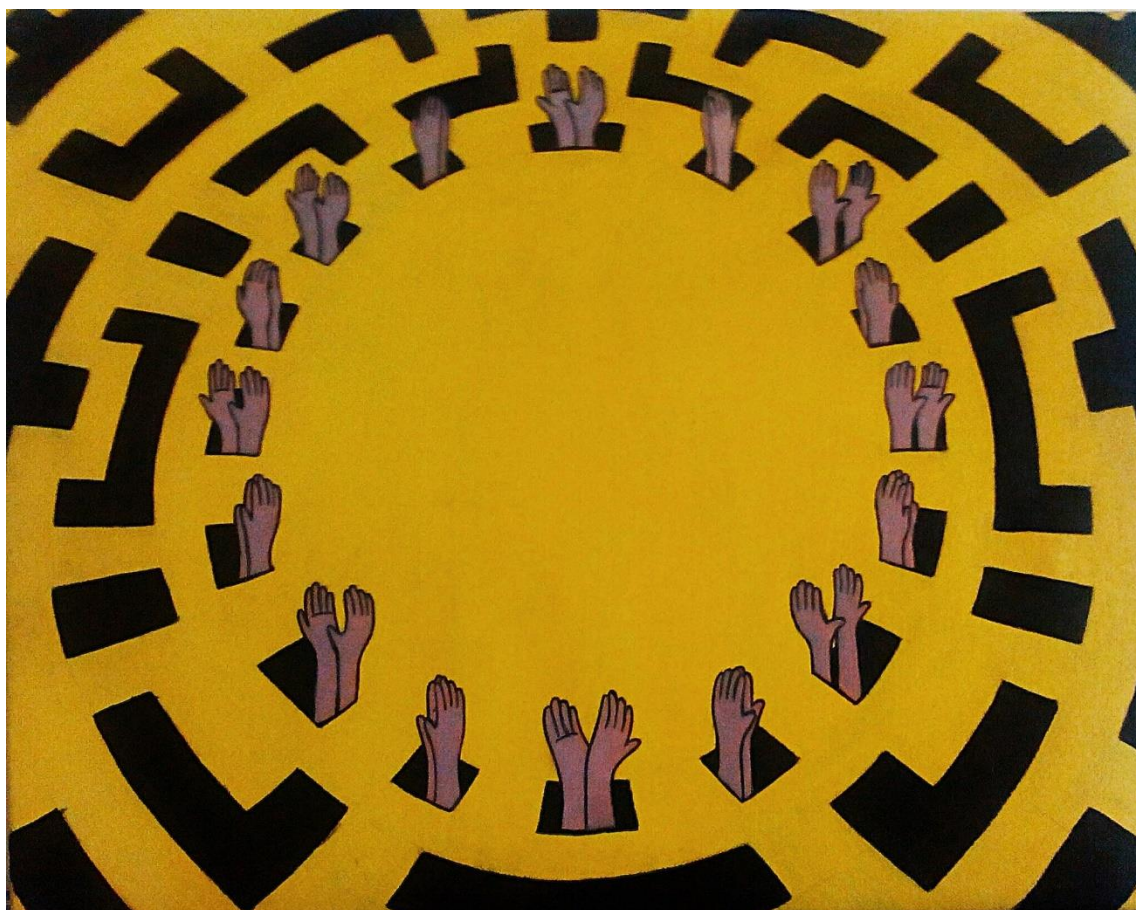
There wasn't any celebratory bottle of bubbly opened to commemorate realizing this far-reaching voyage. It was pretty much business as usual down in the steerage level of the ship where unobserved unconsciousness continues to rage like a fire breathing dragon. I have no other option but to enter the madness and go to work. Mindful silence is the most powerful cleaning agent in the battle against mindless noise. Windows to the soul once smeared in sacrilegious rhyme, become in no time singing portholes to the sublime. Amazing how by just being present and still we can sweat out the toxins. The world needs that spiritual sauna to excrete the mental and emotional toxicity. It needs it so badly it is the only thing stopping us from destroying ourselves along with the planet. Whatever expression the climactic event is destined to take, a shootout with reality is on the cards.





We should really arm ourselves with a high caliber revelation before the apocalypse puts a gun to our head. As an artist I always aimed towards a target audience ideally centered in the middle, not so inclined to getting caught up in the crosshairs between different brandings of good and evil. I am satisfied that what has been executed here in this book aligns with what was initially envisioned, a spiritual vision that hits square between the bulbs. From the first shot to the last, my core message has been pretty consistent throughout, covering all conceivable angles in the event of an assassin subverting my truth after I'm gone. Now I can peacefully meet my maker safe in the knowledge that my art is well equipped to deal with any firefight, for most of the artworks were after all drawn with a big bang in mind.

Thank you for reading my story, I applaud you for reaching this far.



SEESCAPES

EYEWITNESS TO AN OCEANIC TRUTH



Stuart Christie