

Night Journey 56: The Phantasmal Light of Memory of a Lost and Forgotten Time.

The initial impetus for this painting came from the rioting in Ferguson, Missouri, which produced an image of overly militarized police officers on the Internet. Prior to these visual experiences of human events, I had been watching a lot of documentaries on the Civil Rights movement, the Weather Underground organization, the Black Panthers, and the organized protests of the World Trade Organization. I had been looking for a reason to paint my all-time favorite hero and symbol of courage: Tank Man.

After China's brutal crackdown on the Tiananmen Square freedom demonstrations of 1989, where many unarmed demonstrators were murdered, a convoy of tanks performed a celebratory, snaked dance down a large boulevard. The tanks were stopped by a lone, courageous, and I would assume, outraged citizen with a shopping bag standing directly in the path of the lead tank. When the tank tried to navigate around the individual, Tank Man would reposition himself to continue to block the tanks. This was all caught on film as an astonished world watched the courage of one man's stand against the indignation of tyranny.

When I began this painting, I was watching a number of documentaries by political activists focusing on the social and reactionary political aftermath of the events of 9/11. They highlighted the aggressive military actions perpetrated on perceived and declared enemies of the state, both at home and abroad, and the erosion of civil liberties through the consolidation of power to the executive branch of the government that required less legislative and judicial oversight. In my mind, the images and information in the documentaries translated into the diminishing validity of one of our nation's symbols: the Statue of Liberty.

The documentaries, from the 1950's to the present, implied, if not stated, the large "silent majority" of Americans had no voice and assumed a position of avoidance of the injustice perpetrated to others while being blinded to the dangers of their submissive compliance. Thomas Wolfe, during his departure from fascist Germany in 1936, wrote an effective, poetic summation of the dangers of submissive compliance to governmental power. "They all felt that they were saying farewell, not to a man, but to humanity; not to some pathetic stranger, some chance acquaintance of the voyage, but to mankind; not to some nameless cipher out of life, but to the fading image of a brother's face."

In the movie *Vendetta*, the protagonist profoundly declares that citizens should not live in fear of their government; instead, the government should fear its citizens. Maintaining human rights and exercising civil liberties is a challenging task when the police are heavily armed with their oppressive military gear.

In this painting, the protagonist lives in a subservient state of fear where civil liberties and acts of courage are merely phantoms of memory. The intent of this painting was to create a surrealistic reflection of the world in which I live. Pioneers in abstraction, like Kandinsky and Klee, refer to painting as creating a harmony, as in a musical chord. The musical chord consists

of notations that are projected through a medium that creates an inner vibration and harmony within a receiver. The painting strikes that harmonic chord within me, as its outcome is in harmony with my inner feelings and the painting's intent.

The painting is now a separate entity, with its own reality, and it is now up to viewers to listen, see, and feel if it is harmonic or dissonant to their being.