

Night Journey 59: How to Draw a Bunny in the Shadow of God

Possibilities are projections of the mind and actuality is the product of choice. The prerequisite for choosing is the ability to visualize potential and anticipate the consequences of impending actions. Choice is the internal confrontation during which the mind ultimately transforms the abstraction of possibility into the concreteness of being.

Art is created from the confrontational actions of choice and exists to confront and engage viewers in a constructivist dialogue. Art itself does not express actualities, but rather represents potentials that are the product of the imagination. It is the imagination that has the capacity to release art from reality to venture into the realm of the absurd.

It is often through the lens of the absurd that reality becomes more visible and understandable. It becomes a creative means to think about choices, actions, and complacency. Therefore, art is not factual, but merely the impetus for the mind's imagination.

Night Journey 59 fuses the title of a documentary on artist Ray Johnson, *How to Draw a Bunny*, with the philosophical term, "in the shadow of God," coined by Existential philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, in response to the Enlightenment movement. In the documentary, it was revealed that Johnson's last work of art may have been the performance of his suicide. The term imaginatively represents man killing God and ascending to God's throne. The connection I wish to draw from the fusion of film title and philosophical term is that man's faith solely in his own rationality results in suicide.

Rationalism challenges the existence of God. The 19th Century philosophical debate centered on the consequences of a world without God. Religion represented a moral code that enforced a social structure, and the absence of God was feared to lead to nihilism and the collapse of orderly, stratified societies. The intelligentsia was skeptical that common and uneducated people were capable of thinking rationally and acting morally without the threat of God. Therefore, a rational man deified by empirical knowledge must ascend to the guiding and ruling position of the displaced God to maintain the integrity and stability of the new world order.

The rationalist scenario, as philosopher Nietzsche pointed out, calls for the reevaluation of values. The universal religious moral code of behavioral conduct is replaced by a new code of national values favorable to the interests of a nation state. In creating a national moral code, murder, deceit, and theft can be sanctioned against all perceived enemies of the state. The world is divided into us and them, and humanity is lost forever.

The absurd lens of this painting is fashioned through the use of symbolism. The overarching theme is the light of Enlightenment, which leads to darkness and the fall of mankind. In the dark area on the left of the painting is a reproduction of Albrecht Duer's print of Adam and Eve. In the Christian religion, the act of Adam and Eve eating from the Tree of Knowledge represents the fall of man. The evil of Satan, represented in snake form, is the agent of man's fall from grace, leading to the justification and acceptance of human suffering as a condition of life. If

man can ascend to the throne of God, as depicted by the figure riding the cloud, then man must also descend to the throne of Satan. The head of the man-God is attached to the serpent of the Adam and Eve scene painted into the background; this suggests that man can be good and evil, as well as perceive himself to be good while being evil.

I make no allusions to reality in this painting. Night journey is a surrealist term for the dream; the entire painting visually reads as a dream and an eternal nightmare that has plagued humanity since the end of WWII. The nocturnal rabbit is often used as a symbol indicating the painting is depicting a dream, which would allow departures from rational reality. There are three characters in the painting that are drawing rabbits to symbolize the creation of their dreams, which represents the potential of their lives. The man-God is drawing Ray Johnson bunnies, suggesting a chosen path of genocide and suicide. The choices and actions of the man-god alter or destroy the dreams of future generations.

The last notable symbol in the painting is a bag of frozen cherries. Cherries, either on a window sill or visible outside of a window, have been used traditionally as a symbol of the paradise (Eden) that mankind lost due to its own actions, as portrayed in the story of Adam and Eve. The bag of frozen cherries is a 21st Century adaptation of the symbol; they have been placed inside a student's desk, where learning is meant to take place. The lesson we have learned is that being human means living in a world where we take care of ourselves and of our own, even at the expense of others if need be, and therefore we continue to live in a state of fallen grace. The lesson to be learned is that paradise can be found when we end human suffering for all mankind in a world where "them" and "us" become the all-inclusive "we." How we have wisely or irresponsibly chosen to act in the past presents the matrix for the future. The future is dependent on how we confront the choices of the present. This artwork, so absurdly structured, is designed to be confrontational by reminding its viewers that the future demands choices and actions to prevent the absurd from becoming a reality.