

Night Journey 62: *Black Square: In the Pernicious River of Darkness the Snake is Eating at Our Heart Again*

Night Journey 62 was conceived in homage to Kazimir Malevich's painting, *Black Square*, as well in oppositional dialogue to his theories as expressed in *The Non-Objective World: The Manifesto of Suprematism*. Malevich's Manifesto is premised on the idea that abstraction is an expression of an inner emotional truth that can be intellectually perceived and experienced. What is lacking in Malevich's representation of Platonic Idealism is the reality that viewer response to paintings can only be rooted in the phenomenal world they experience. Malevich's *Black Square* becomes a symbol that can associate to an emotion constructed from one's life experiences. "Feeling" is the product of life lived and experienced.

Malevich asserts that the truest form of idea and emotional expression comes through invention, rather than figurative imitation. In the painting *Black Square*, Malevich converted the black square into a visual symbol that he perceived could best communicate his intended narrative to viewers. Communication can be achieved only through the usage of an established symbol system. To express ideas, Malevich, as with all artists, was confined to a notational system comprised of the visual elements of line, shape, and color. The choice of how the elements of art are utilized in the visual production of ideas determines the artwork's classification as either figurative or abstract, as well as its association with a specific style or historical art movement.

In *Night Journey 62*, I appropriated Malevich's *Black Square* as a means to contemplate his painting as well as to explore associational feelings and relationships to the physical and ideological expressions of darkness. In Malevich's *Black Square*, the darkness of black is defined by the contrasting lightness of white. It would be impossible to conceive of one without the other, and each intensifies the others' attributes. We understand darkness because of the light, and vice versa. The contrast between light and dark easily evoke various dualities, for example, that of lightness of being vs. the darkness of despair and nothingness, potentiality vs. constricted stultification, right vs. wrong, and good vs. evil. Through abstract symbolism, Malevich has the potential to awaken any number of these responses within the viewer.

Like Malevich, I choose invention over direct figurative imitation. But unlike him I choose more specific narrative symbols that direct and limit the interpretative choices of the viewer. I am in fact presenting my emotional and dialectical responses to his painting. As an artist deeply rooted in abstraction and symbolism, I found it necessary to acknowledge Malevich's usage of the duality of opposites by making it the primary theme and compositional pattern of *Night Journey 62*.

Similar to Malevich's *Black Square*, the black shapes in *Night Journey 62* eclipse light, which visually defines their darkness. The two dominant eclipses represent the darkness of the human inner and outer world. Symbolic imagery in and around the eclipsing shapes creates narrative expressions of darkness.

The city scape depicting the Empire State Building I associate to Arthur Koestler's novel *Darkness at Noon*. The novel gives human character to the victims of the Soviet Show Trials, where the idealists of the Communist revolution were systematically betrayed and executed by fascist totalitarianism. What occurred in the Show Trials are examples of where idealism was eclipsed by the darkness that spreads from morally yielding to the misconception that the end justifies the means. I see a similar darkness at noon occurring to democracies where unrestricted practices of capitalism have an equally destructive dictatorial force capable of extinguishing idealism's benefit to humanity.

The eclipsing black square on the left is the primary didactic theme in the painting. Within the square's perimeter is where the very heart of darkness must reside. The placement of the heart is meant to draw comparisons to the uninhibited savagery of civilized man in Joseph Conrad's novel, *Heart of Darkness*. The heart is positioned within the square by utilizing the tree and serpent segment from Albrecht Durer's *Adam and Eve* print. This represents man's fall from grace, where innocence is lost and replaced with the knowledge of good and evil. With knowledge come choices of free will - to act either with or without moral responsibility. Also appropriated from Durer's print is the mouse restrained by the foot of the figure. This symbolic gesture represents the weakness of man, suggesting that man and mankind are prone to acting selfishly and immorally for self-advancement at the expense of others.

The figure is a symbolic individual imprisoned by a singular perception of an alienated self-existence wrapping around the unfulfilled emptiness of being. This portrait of human weakness stands upon children's drawings depicting interactions between serpents and individuals. Children learn the behaviors and actions of adults. Children do not create the world, they only inherit the world that is left to them. We pass our darkness on to our children and steal away their lightness of being. Our children will continue to act as we have acted.

The inner personal conflict of good and evil is portrayed by the eclipses in the figure's eyes. Good and evil, war and peace, are always the moral choices of individuals, regardless of the dictates and demands of societies.

In addition to Malevich's *Black Square*, *Night Journey 62* was inspired by the messages of the following quotes:

"If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being, and who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?" (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn)

"Most people live in almost total darkness... people, millions of people whom you will never see, who don't know you, never will know you, people who may try to kill you in the morning, live in a darkness which — if you have that funny terrible thing which every artist can recognize and no artist can define — you are responsible to those people to lighten, and it does not matter what happens to you." (James Baldwin)

I conclude with a Camus quote that best expresses the artistic intent of all my recent paintings.
“Artistic creation is a demand for unity and a rejection of the world.” (Albert Camus)