

Night Journey 61: Obeisance and Faustian Fever

The Obdurate Finality Deep Below the Roots of Thought and Memory

Night Journey 61 is the expression of two ideas originating from one painted image, necessitating the use of two titles to distinguish the dual meaning of the painting. The first, *Obeisance and Faustian Fever*, denotes my ongoing dialogue with art history and my desire to join the lineage of accomplished artists that have made relevant contributions to our culture.

The four figures on the left are appropriated from Kazimir Malevich's painting *Sportsmen (Suprematism in Sportsmen's Contours)*. Malevich, a pioneer in abstract art and creator of the Suprematist style, rejected figurative representations in favor an inner expression of "new realities," which were articulated in compositions of flat geometric shapes. In Malevich's viewpoint, the only true, enduring value of art resides solely in the feeling communicated through the artwork. He believed that the rigid structures of Suprematism were the most appropriate means of achieving his expressed goals.

The four iconic figures on the left are a translation of Malevich's Suprematist theory into a figurative format, comprised of and constructed with the abstract Suprematist elements, essentially making them symbols of his philosophy in a form more understandable to those unaccustomed to abstraction. In placing the figure I have developed to the right of these symbols, I establish it, not as a representational being, but rather as a vehicle through which to express ideas and feelings. I view my symbolic figure as a prisoner, not unlike Shakespeare's Hamlet, or Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, both of whom find themselves imprisoned within the reflections of their own mind, being, time, and world. It is a figure that oscillates between existence and non-existence. By placing my symbol next to Malevich's, I pay homage to one of the 20th Century's most notable creators, and align myself with Malevich's principal tenet that an artist must create new realities to best express himself.

Although our goals are similar, our styles are different, separated only by how we choose to use the same elements of art. The elements of art are the artist's base language and means of communication. All forms of visual expression evolve from the same foundational elements. It is the artist that narrows art's versatility; we do so in the service of our own expression. Therefore, one form of expression or style cannot be viewed as superior to another, but must be combined with others in unity to exhibit the full potential of art. The placement of my symbol figure next to Malevich's signifies that I am standing in the diverse lineage of ideas that comprise art history.

The second title, *The Obdurate Finality Deep below the Roots of Thought and Memory*, is a depiction of how we see and form judgments based on visual information. We are born with a complex visual processing system that enables us, even as very young infants, to see and to recognize the differences between family and non-family members. We are genetically

predisposed to recognize differences over commonalities, and our visual perceptions are governed by thought and memory.

In the painting, the figure on the right establishes itself as a strong focal point. Although this figure has many of the same characteristics as the other four figures, it garners more attention because its visual differences render it quite unlike the other four figures. Rather than acknowledging the figure's commonalities, one might just as easily decide that it does not belong with the others, based upon its visual differences.

Many individuals and societies throughout the world use the distinctive discriminating characteristics of vision to form the basis of their perception toward those who are visually different in their appearance or observable customs. When the focus is on differences, commonalities go unseen. Individuals lose their human distinction and become identified as "other." In this regard, the painting reads as a vision test chart, which illustrates how we are more prone to see differences than similarities. Understanding visual information requires thoughtful looking—it is the only way to understand the universal connectedness we have to all things visible and knowable.