

In Search of the Miraculous

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While the title brings to mind P.D. Ouspensky's influential book of 1949, my intention in evoking the miraculous was rather to address the elusive nature of the creative process and the vague sense many share with Dylan Thomas' expressed thought that "you might never have been born, never been born at all." What were the odds?

The show was initially meant to be a gathering of artists whose work could be loosely defined as abstraction with a spiritual bent, albeit of the secular kind. It quickly became apparent that this would mean leaving out such greats as Arthur Dove, Bob Thompson, Charles Burchfield, Giorgio Morandi, early Mondrian, and others now part of this exhibition whose works were made available, artists who used representation as a springboard for their imagination.

Many who have chosen a creative life have aspired towards the transcendent esthetic experience, one that evokes elemental awe.

Where historically, it was powerful patrons who dictated, for their own ends, the narratives of their day, it was artists who found the harmonies, surfaces, and compositions to evoke the sacred on their terms.

In time they created their own, more subjective narratives and ultimately arrived at abstraction, but the longing to breathe life in the materials at their disposal in order to evoke a sense of wonder did not disappear along with what were once unquestionably and commonly held religious beliefs.

Harold Bloom put it best: "A desire for the consolations of a spiritual life transcends institutional, historical, and dogmatic structures, and belongs to human nature itself. No need for religion there."

With the early abstractionists came "no need for representation there".

But then closer to us we see De Kooning defying tenets of Abstract Expressionism with his "Women" series. There is Morandi who, after experimenting with avant-garde movements of his early days, focused on his beloved bottles as a vehicle for the way light enters our world; they were among many who found their greatest form of expression with "no need for not-representation there."

Abstract, figurative, expressionist, minimalist...I believe artists are more likely to embrace labels early on in their career, when looking to make a name for themselves, but as their practice matures, discard them. They realize that these designations get in the way of apprehending what

is most important in the act of seeing, burdening it with preconceived ideas.

The same guiding principle applies when gathering beloved works for viewing, works one wishes one could live with for the nurturing they provide, as much as it does to the decisions artists make while finding their way towards their fully developed selves. In many cases, the choice to live a creative life was made *because* they sensed it would help them become so, not just in their work but as human beings.

Beyond their obvious stylistic differences what the present works have in common is their being made, over long periods of time, with skill, imagination, and depth of feeling. It is a process which relies on intuition for pointing the way and intellect and sensitivity to materials to reach, if not an ideal, something which might come close.

It has been my experience that the awareness of our mortality is never far from the creative act.

It is present in the viewing act as well, as when we are moved to tears by the immense beauty offered by particular works of art, any of the arts. I suspect those tears, though tears of joy, may be linked to the awareness that moments of such immeasurable beauty will someday be taken away. It will all be taken away.

Nature can also provide such moments, but the difference is that the art experience was caused by something made by one of us, like ourselves flawed, vulnerable and temporal.

In 1921, Walter Benjamin purchased a drawing by Paul Klee titled "Angelus Novus." Now in the Israel museum in Jerusalem, it held a particular fascination for him and followed him everywhere he went until he fled Germany in 1933 and was forced to part with it. But the drawing remained in his consciousness and kept surfacing in his writings. It was on his mind when he stated that there are times when facing a great work of art, music, literature, it makes it possible "to understand a humanity that proves itself by destruction," a statement as true today as it was then.

Daily life disrupts and fragments our connection to our soul. Regardless of style, art reminds us of its essential, miraculous presence.

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