

ONE. Shari Weschler Rubeck employs a sumptuous and magical realism in her paintings. She paints reality, slightly distorted or out of tune with our usual perceptions. She paints a liminal layer, a page in experience between myth and modernity, archetype and personality. Pay attention to her masterful depictions of rocks and stones. Some look so polished and smooth you wish to grab them from the canvas. Her renderings of cloth are exposés of the material world where the transcendent is but loosely contained by fabric. Veils are hexes upon knowledge to prevent its transformation and release.

TWO. Without speaking for the complexity of Rubeck's beliefs, it might suffice to say that she spies messages of both historical and ontological import in the world around her. Stones are viewed as vessels whose innocuous forms conceal old secrets. They are painted here in almost ritualistic arrangements, tumbling through white space, implying communication beyond mere visual data. The ancient Gnostics found the Earth an illusory shadow of 'real' existence: "The world came into being through a mistake," they wrote in the Gospel of Philip. Rubeck is far more nuanced, but she too understands the material world as only one dimension of human experience.

THREE. "Reality is constituted only in the interaction of consciousness with its environment...Within the modern scientific paradigm...numerous indications arise that consciousness can play an active, albeit subtle, role in the establishment of physical reality."

Robert G. Jahn and Brenda J. Dunne, "On the Quantum Mechanics of Consciousness, with Application to Anomalous Phenomena," in *Foundations of Physics*, August 1986

FOUR. Philosopher Thomas Nagel famously asked, "What is it like to be a bat?" He argued: "Even if I could by gradual degrees be transformed into a bat, nothing in my present constitution enables me to imagine what the experiences of such a future stage of myself thus metamorphosed would be like. The best evidence would come from the experiences of bats." Subjectivity proffers enigmatic and unique knowledge, and its very existence makes the mind-body problem, in Nagel's words, "intractable." The creative act can resist this dichotomy by requiring both thought and physicality, with painting being a strong example. Rubeck is painting both backward and forward in time. She constellates unseen lines of connection, strands of union both loose and taut.

ONE, IN LOVE, THROUGH THE MANY

FIVE. "While we may know more about people connected to us through [social media] than people we talk to every day, what we know about these friends is equally available to hundreds of other people. These relationships are what sociologists call "weak ties"—friends or acquaintances we know only through one type of connection. It may be interesting to collect hundreds of such contacts, but we aren't likely to call on them for help on a daily basis."

McPherson et al., "The Ties That Bind Are Fraying," in *Contexts*, Summer 2008

SIX. Rubeck's work inhabits a nexus where communications both ancestral and modern collide. As humanity progresses toward what she imagines might be a "hive like existence," we witness disintegrating borders between self and profile, community and network, personality and performance. Within our increasingly digitized lives, these denotational boundaries between societies and social networks become less clear. 'Alive' and 'online' become almost synonymous. Technology has obfuscated our understanding of the human subject as an individual, but it has also pushed us toward a hasty renewal of faith in Freud's "oceanic feeling." All creation fuses, melting into itself.

SEVEN. "A symbol only has meaning from its relation to other symbols in a pattern. The pattern gives the meaning. Therefore no one item in the pattern can carry meaning by itself isolated from the rest."

Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 1981

EIGHT. Rubeck's earlier work, like the winking robot of *I Am Human #1*, hinted at the humanization of the mechanical. Now, she's visualizing networks, as seen in the *Random* pieces, which are among the most accomplished here. They cohere the ecosystem of the show, mirroring its overall shape. Rubeck writes that there exists "a pattern of predictability, but also a randomness." She sketches this "containment" by amassing colorful circles, stones, orbs of light. *Random Negative* (a seeming inversion of *Random Positive*) glows like a will-o'-the-wisp, never flickering but instead drawing the viewer deeper into meditation. It's an amoeba, a handful of seeds, a petri dish of collective memory.

NINE. The diptych *Cairn from Light to Dark* shows a sacred space, a meeting point between two somewheres. Two cairns try to meet across dimensions, but an endless gulf separates them. The periwinkle-colored aether of the sky plummets into a darker gray. Shades of Icarus, or Lucifer, falling from the heavens, slingshotted back into the sorry earth. This moment is suspended indefinitely. Chronos takes a nap, time a cigarette break. Offer incantations, mantras, utterances, confessions in this frozen minute. The cairns hear you, beeping like radio towers, circulating messages where none can venture.

TEN. “The truly creative type is bigger than his tasks or accomplishments, and never finds or even seeks fulfillment in the world of reality but only in the true spiritual world of creation.”

Otto Rank, *Beyond Psychology*, 1941

ELEVEN. Does creation suffocate or liberate some prehistoric impulse? If humans became human in their “urge to self-expression,” as Ernest Becker once suggested, then creation is in the lifeblood of cultural evolution. To create is to offer shards of time and self in an act of genesis. Rubeck leads an explicitly creative life, but she understands that creation is not solely making artwork. It can be grasped in a fledgling thought, in the brief, shining snap of a synapse. Dopamine, serotonin and all their neuronal friends are like pigments for cognition. Consciousness itself is artwork.

TWELVE. Ambiguity and mystery are enemies of today’s ruling epistemologies. As certain empirical disciplines become increasingly convinced of their infallibility, the need for creative expression of knowledge becomes more, not less, necessary. What can still be said in a world that shuns the unknown for fear of its depths while commodifying our innards —our likes and dislikes, our obsessions, our darkest Google searches— for ad dollars?

THIRTEEN. Rubeck is a metaphysical coder. A hacker of the spirit. Someone who can jailbreak the ever-nebulous “soul.” She unlocks an ancient logic that operates on an instinctual level, hidden from ordinary consciousness. Of course the contents of this wisdom cannot be fully explicated; to attempt a verbatim rendering would deprive them of their power.

FOURTEEN. “Truth is one and many...to teach us about the one, in love, through the many.”

The Gospel of Philip, in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, edited by Marvin Meyer

FIFTEEN. A girl’s head teeters atop a pile of rocks. Her noggin looks liable to tumble down at any second. She wears a dark green dress, its creases sharp and graceful. Light moves across skin and shadow provides muscle. What thoughts flutter inside her head? What cache of wisdom remains in those rough and silent stones?

- Alexander Castro
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