

A Dark Wood

We all suffer times of crisis. The exigency may be physical, spiritual, or psychological. We feel helpless and lost, unsure of what to do to extricate ourselves from the darkness that surrounds us. We lose our bearings. All directions seem the same. We sense the danger lurking in the shadows—whether seen or felt—will harm us if it is not conquered. We may panic, run, or flail about blindly trying to force a way out, often making our situation worse for our efforts. During these times of stress we need a sign, a light, some form of guidance or physical help to free us from the strain and confusion.

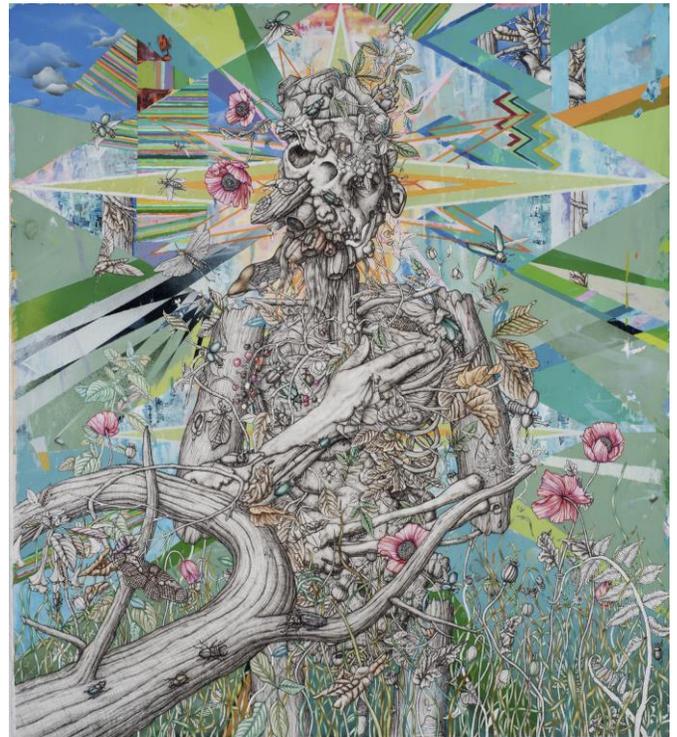
Dante begins *The Divine Comedy* with a character who has lost his way in “a dark wood.” The dark wood is a metaphor not only of a crisis of faith, but a crisis of humanity. He has lost his spiritual compass, even how to be with and treat other people. His character must survey the punishments of Dante’s taxonomy of evil—a full immersion into darkness—before he can understand the depths of his fall, before he is able to find a way to a dim light of hope.

In the exhibition *A Dark Wood*, Art House Gallery and Curious Matter explore the theme of being lost in the darkness of our fears, doubts and negativity. As Dante tells us, there are many aspects of the dark wood and the artists presented here have each interpreted the richness of the concept through a range of media and methods.

Ben Pranger visits the text of Dante directly with his “Dark Wood.” Each of his tree-towers presents a stanza from the opening of “Inferno” in Braille. At the start of his series of Braille works Pranger embedded pegs in live trees in a forest. He has since brought his work back to the gallery, but only those who know the Braille system can understand it tactilely. The rest of us remain confronted by the mystery held within the stand of logs and dowels. The first book of *The Divine Comedy* is “Inferno.” Dante has organized the decent into the abyss as a series of circles that become incrementally smaller. The 8th circle describes a black lake of boiling pitch in which the souls of corrupt politicians are immersed. If they are caught above the surface they are torn to pieces by demons with large claws.

Clark Rendall calls back to Dante’s description of this punishment with his minimal painting “Black Lake” from his series *Bodies*. Text accompanies each work in the series. For “Black Lake” Rendall writes: “Below the surface, where no one can see you, moving in all directions, at the same time.”

The “Inferno” is the hopeless and lightless place where Dante describes many of our earthly sins and his ideas for their proper punishments—punishments that the perpetrators may have escaped during their lives. Ethan Hamby, with his sensual, multi-object ceramic work “Visceral Fern,” suggests a wave of temptations to entice us, or perhaps a



John Rapple, *Fractured Vision*, 2015, Acrylic and spray paint on paper

plague to warn us not to stray from the true path. The dark wood metaphor extends beyond the richly detailed world that Dante created. The threat of nuclear war, the runaway environmental crisis, our dependence on unnatural food to feed an ever-growing global population are just some of the evils we are perpetrating on ourselves that contribute to the expanding malaise of our psychic and physical darkness.

With his painting "Untitled," John Keefer sees the enduring presence of world conflict and global destruction as a symptom of our internal darkness. With little hope of finding a peaceful resolution to the political and spiritual differences that separate countries and religions, there is cause for concern as to where these divisions are taking humanity.

So, where does all of this doom and darkness end, if we are to "abandon all hope"? Daniel A. Bruce's interactive sculpture, "Fortune Telling Boulder," for the cost of only a quarter, may have the answer.

The dark wood is a dismal place, a place where finding an answer to one's dilemma may seem futile, even impossible. Yet, we all must slog on through these dim times, even through the blackest abyss, because the dim light of our hope must be bright enough to see us through.

THE ARTISTS:

Meg Atkinson, Aaron B., Milcah Bassel, Daniel A. Bruce, Emanuele James Cacciatore, Peter Everett, David French, Ethan Hamby, Jee Hwang, John Keefer, Ross Bennett Lewis, Dave Mishalanie, Nazanin Noroozi, Ben Pranger, Jon Rappleye, Anna Riley, Robert Schatz, Jill Scipione, Philip Swan, Lisa Taliano, Arthur Brusio, Jessica Demcsak, Jang Soon Im, Casey Inch, Dae Young Kim, Todd Lambrix, Joan Mellon, Daniel Morowitz, Sarah Pfohl, Jon Rappleye, Clark Rendall, Dept. of Reparative History, Linda Kamille Schmidt, Linda Tharp

About Art House Productions

Art House Productions, Inc. is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization founded in late September 2001 by writer and actress Christine Goodman. Art House began as informal gathering of poets and community members in direct response to the tragedies of September 11th.

About Curious Matter

Curious Matter is a contemporary art gallery. We offer exhibition and curatorial opportunities to artists at all career stages. Curious Matter collaborates with artists and arts organizations in presenting, curating and jurying exhibitions, events and tours. Curious Matter LLC is a sponsored project of Fractured Atlas, a non-profit arts service organization.

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Opening Reception: *Second Friday*, February 10, 2017, 6:00 – 8:00pm

The Noyes Arts Garage of Stockton University: www.artsgarageac.com (609) 626-3805
The Noyes Museum of Art of Stockton University: www.noyesmuseum.org (609) 626-3420

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