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Marcel's Bedroom

Joseph W. Finnie
Bard College, jf4373@bard.edu

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Recommended Citation

Finnie, Joseph W., "Marcel's Bedroom" (2019). *Senior Projects Spring 2019*. 310.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2019/310

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Marcel's Bedroom

Joseph W. Finnie

Footer Logo

Marcel's Bedroom

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
Joseph Finnie

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2019

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisors Ellen Driscoll and Adriane Colburn for their time and commitment to my project. I would also like to thank the entire Studio Art faculty for their willingness to visit studios and provide critiques. Lastly, I would like to thank my family for their endless support.

I

Artist Statement

“Marcel’s Bedroom” is an installation guided by language and memory. In constructing the space, I sought a certain composition of discrete elements that would communicate to the viewer a particular sentiment. I used basic materials, shapes, and a white palette to first examine light, shadow, and form. Planes of light and shadow lead into one another and carry the viewer’s eye through the space of the room. In relation to one another, these elements act together, motifs reveal themselves and metaphor begins to transcend materiality. The eye is led to clusters of materials and textured fragments. Yet, the room has no single focal point and is ultimately about the atmosphere created by the relationship between the fragments.

In the abstract space of the room, there is a dreamlike air; it is no longer a bedroom, but the space still remains a room with corners and nooks. It is the room when one is drifting off to sleep in a state of half consciousness. It is in this state that rooms begin to transform; memories begin to amend objects, putting them in motion with past events. To say that this is Marcel’s bedroom is to say that it is a room in which Proust’s “vast structure of recollection” is present. In the end, this windowless room cutoff from the external world of time is a space for one to regain intimacy with their memory and imagination.

II

The Gray Silk Tissue

When he was thus engaged he generally wore glasses with gray silk tissue instead of lenses in the frames, so that the landscape appeared through a fine veil of muted colors, and the weight of the world dissolved before your eyes. The faint images that Alphonso transferred onto paper, said Austerlitz, were barely sketches of pictures — here a rocky slope, there a small bosky thicket or cumulus cloud — fragments, almost without color, fixed with a tint made of a few drops of water and a grain of malachite green or ash-blue.¹

In W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, the reader is introduced to Alphonso. At his lodge in the Welsh countryside, Alphonso would often paint watercolors of the landscape before him. Curiously, he would choose to paint while viewing the landscape through a gray silk tissue fixed to his glasses. Instead of blocking the scene entirely, the silk acted as a “fine veil.” The world seen beyond the threads of silk appear weightless; the silk tissue offers a relief from the detailed topography, colors lose their hue, and the physicality of the landscape is dampened. Through this veil, Alphonso purposefully obscures his vision and departs from any attempt to imitate the world *as it is*. Looking through the veil, Alphonso is representing an internal sentiment. He is, like the veil, covering the concreteness of the world with the abstraction of thought. Alphonso sees a world of loss, declaring “that everything was fading before our eyes, and that many of the loveliest colors had already disappeared.” The gray silk tissue offers a view of the future Alphonso anticipates. As time passes, the world slowly decays and

¹ Sebald, W.G. (Winfried Georg). *Austerlitz*. New York: Modern Library, 2001. (p. 88)

fragments. The currents of oblivion pass over the substance of the world, eroding form and color, and carrying them outside the physical realm.

In my work, I pursue Alphonso's melancholic veil. I drain my work of pronounced color and allow abstract forms to fragment. The viewer of the work becomes a part of an unfamiliar future. To look into the sculptural space is to lose the world one knows. The only colors and familiar objects that remain are worn by the viewer, marking them as strangers. At first, this produces a feeling of emptiness; the space becomes lifeless and doesn't appear to offer any signs to aid the viewer. It is difficult to orientate the self in this colorless future which conceals things in absence. Initially, there is no place the viewer can inhabit, but as time passes and the eyes adjust to the seeming monotony, substance is found in lines and shadows. In the weightlessness a lack of color creates, these things become more resonant.

Light is able to replace the vibrancy offered by color and bring forth the subtleties of the space. Life remains in the composition of basic elements, in the interaction between two intersecting lines, in the angle of a casted shadow, and in the dependence of one form on another to be lifted into space. The viewer uses these elements as a means of orientation and begins to inhabit the future place. As this takes place, one's imagination acts to occupy the space with new substance. Imagination and memory seem to be the means of overcoming this disassociation. To this future time, the viewer brings with them the colors of the past.

Remembrance resaturates the present with color.

III

Squirrels in the Winter

“But if it’s all white, how do the squirrels know where they’ve buried their hoard? Ale když všechno zakryje sněh, jak veverky najdou to místo, kde si schovaly zásoby? Those were your very words, the question which constantly troubled you. How indeed do the squirrels know, what do we know ourselves, how do we remember, and what is it we find in the end?”²

² Sebald, W.G. (Winfried Georg). *Austerlitz*. New York: Modern Library, 2001. (p. 204)

IV

Alice

‘Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?’

‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,’ said the Cat.

‘I don’t much care where —’ said Alice.

‘Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,’ said the Cat.

‘—so long as I get somewhere,’ Alice added as an explanation.

‘Oh, you’re sure to do that,’ said the Cat, ‘if you only walk long enough.’³

My work begins when one takes the hand of Alice. Without a clear path to follow and before the first step, it is right to wonder and ask: “‘Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?’” The art shares the Cat’s sentiment and responds to the viewer: “‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.’” How the viewer responds to this determines the freedom the artwork is given. With a predetermined destination in mind, a viewer suffocates a work to fit a single definition. If the viewer doesn’t care in which direction they go or what destination they reach, they can allow themselves to wander and stumble by chance upon an unexpected destination. However, an entirely apathetic viewer would fail to properly engage with the work. That is why it is important that Alice wants to get somewhere even though she doesn’t know precisely where. One must desire to reach a conclusion, it is that desire that ensures that they remain aware when wandering. But as the Cat points out, an end will only be reached if one walks long enough. The viewer must be persistent and capable of a long-term engagement with the work.

³ Carroll, Lewis. *Alice in Wonderland*. Ann Arbor: Border Classics, 2006. (p. 37)





