Time, Space, and Reality

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Time, Space, and Reality

by

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Abstract

I am a mixed media artist working primarily within painting. I make layered, photo-based works that come from dreams and my own photographic archives. At the moment I am making oil paintings on board. What interests me the most is the nature of reality, including perception, memory, time, and dreams. I create environments that I like to call my own mindscapes; imagined places that have the potential to become real. I am engaged in creating worlds that are “in-between” reality and the imagined, dreams and waking life, conscious and unconscious.

My work engages and expands within the tradition of Western art history, more specifically, painting. I see my paintings connected to Greek and Roman wall frescoes, medieval panel painting, and with other more modern and contemporary art forms such as photography, film, comics, and video games.

Through the use of sketches, digital enhancement, and paintings, I create an alternate world in which the observer recomposes the story using different elements that I provide, in a way that the same scenario can be recreated in an infinite number of ways.

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Let me tell you why you’re here. You’re here because you know something. What you know you can’t explain but you feel it. You’ve felt it all your life, that there’s something wrong with the world. You don’t know what it is but it’s there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad.¹

-Morpheus to Neo, in “The Matrix”

Introduction
I am interested in creating paintings that describe a shift in the perception of reality. A place and time that has the potential to be part of a real world, but that is also operating in a time of its own. I am not interested in recreating dream worlds. I consider my dreams to be the inspiration for my work, but I feel the need to go beyond merely recording them. I feel that I must create, elaborate, and expand my own “mindscapes.” I produce universes where the laws of physics are slightly different, a world populated by beings who look like us and behave similarly to us. A world that we can believe is real, but understand it to be elsewhere, a parallel universe.

My paintings are the visual representation of this parallel universe. I do not want the viewer to just sit back and enjoy the show, as we would while watching a Hollywood movie. The experience should feel more like an experimental film, or a video game where we can go back and forward, stop and start again, manipulating time and the outcome of the story.

Time might seem fleeting and unstoppable from our mortal perspective, but it may not be linear, even if it looks that way to us. In the same perspective, my work should not be read as a linear narrative where there is a beginning, a middle, and an end.

We think in terms of past, present and future. To some, there is only the past, the present does not exist, and the future is only moments filled with potentiality; to others, the past is gone, and the future is not here yet, so all we have is an eternal present, the “now” is all there is, and all there always will be.

In my work I draw inspiration from the past, the present -the now-, and the imagined future. My paintings are just instants brimming with potentiality. My mind has been conditioned with rational knowledge and logical thinking, but I want my paintings to rest on
temporal quicksand, an unstable ground where nothing is certain and the observer can make his or her own story.

Dreams
Dreams are part of the tapestry woven throughout our lives. I have always been interested and intrigued by dreams. This interest comes from my personal belief that dreams are an extension of my waking reality. It is a sub-existence, or a parallel reality, something happening in real time, but far away in a distant dimension, and yet, right next to my physical world. Although I have been interested in dreams for some years now, it wasn’t until recently that I started using them as source material for my work, specifically, in paintings (fig. 1). Dreams are among the most personal and mysterious of human experiences, and the more I read, the more I think about it, and the more I research about them, the more fascinated I become about at how little we know and understand dreams.

Throughout human history, people have always incorporated dreams into their everyday reality by seeking to analyze, interpret, and decode those dreams. People have speculated about dreams across cultures and ages. For some, they were considered a message from the gods, for others, they were a warning about a calamity that was about to happen, or they were simply viewed as a general guidance in life. For example:

“Ancient Egyptians said that Gods revealed themselves in dreams. They also saw that dreams gave warnings, advice, and prophecies. The ancient Egyptians understood that in dreams, our eyes are opened. Their word for dream, rswt, is etymologically connected to the root meaning to be awake.”

Since antiquity, artists, writers and philosophers have pondered the question of dreams, their meaning, origins, and purpose. References to dreams can be found in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Bible, and Homer’s Iliad. A more consistent, or rational investigation into dreams can be traced back to Antiquity. Such is the case of Aristotle in his writings about dreams (On Sleep and Wakefulness). One important argument made in his book is that he disagrees with previously held beliefs that dreams were purely reli-
igious in their nature: He claimed that dreams are not foretelling and not sent by a divine being, but that they are shaped by our actions, and that they are as well a source of inspiration for our behavior. Aristotle goes on explaining that prophetic dreams are most times a mere coincidence, that fulfilled dreams are the consequence of having repeated dreams. Another important writer was Artemidorus, with his pivotal work “Oneirocritica” which is a treatise on dream interpretation and the impact of conscious experience on the nature of the dream.

Figure 1. Example of writing; recording a dream immediately after it happened

However, dreams as inspiration for art is a relatively recent development. An example of a visual artist that come to mind is William Blake (1757-1827) He claimed to have had “Visions” while dreaming and even receiving lessons and instructions by archangels
(fig. 2). In Europe, the Romantic\textsuperscript{1} movement emphasized the value of emotion and irrational inspiration. “Visions”, whether from dreams of intoxication, or through initiation ceremonies, served as raw material to produce works of art. In the 20th Century, Salvador Dali (1904-1989) is well known for using dreams as his main inspiration.

![Figure 2. William Blake, The body of Abel Found by Adam and Eve. 1826. Ink, tempera and gold on mahogany, 12.8 by 17 inches](image)

While my work can not be considered to be solely about dreams, they are an essential and integral aspect of my process. After all, they are the very first part in my art-making practice. Professor Barry Mazur\textsuperscript{1} puts it better when he said that “I don’t think dreams solve problems. I think they can help you realize that you have a solution”.
Perhaps dreams are not my main inspiration; I consider them to be one of my source materials. All this material comes from somewhere deep inside me. There are people in strange places and actions taking place, but I know that all this alien world is part of me, maybe it is me, and who I am. August Strindberg\(^1\) describes this world in a very poetic passage:

>“Everything can happen, everything is possible and probable. Time and place do not exist; on an insignificant basis of reality, the imagination spins, weaving new patterns; a mixture of memories, experiences, free fancies, incongruities and improvisations. The characters split, double, multiply, evaporate, condense, disperse, assemble. But one consciousness rules over them all, that of the dreamer; for him there are no secrets, no scruples, no laws. He neither acquits nor condemns, but merely relates; and, just as a dream is more often painful than happy, so an undertone of melancholy and of pity for all mortal beings accompanies this flickering tale.”\(^1\)

This alternate rendition of the world offered by dreams is one of the main reasons why I am interested in them as source material for my paintings. They are unique forms of expression that come from the deepest recesses of my being. Dreams are in a way, the other you, one who is free from the everyday constrains of society. They follow no specific order, or emotion, or political view. Also, whatever the reasons for dreaming, or any special symbolism, and interpretations that they may have, they come from inside: They are an unbreakable part of who you are.

Dreams are considered by scientists to be a separate form of consciousness. I like to view them as a distinct form of reality. A place at the conjunction of the everyday reality, imagination, and inner desires. A place in between worlds that is not well defined either, by science, common sense, or any specific form of physical laws: a place where you are the actor and the spectator.

Many people describe a dream as being in a movie theater. Carl Jung\(^1\) wrote that “A dream is a theater in which the dreamer is himself, the scene, the player, the prompter, the
I see my interaction in dreams as a video game. I am the player and the character, and the exciting thing is that the images that remain in my memory, look like a video game. The strange realism, the textures, the desaturated colors, the lack of a central light source, and even, the way people and other creatures move about, they are all indicative of video game aesthetics, and I have been incorporating these visual cues into my paintings.

In my current series, the first step is dreaming, and the process is as follows: I have a dream, wake up after the dream, spend a few seconds trying to remember the visions I just had, and then get up and write down whatever I can recall. Sometimes after the writing is complete, I make simple sketches. This is a good moment for me to put together a narrative. When I say narrative, I mean visual narrative, a storyline based on specific moments throughout the dream that have become relevant to me. These moments in time (dream time) are put together in panels, as in a comic strip, or a movie or video game storyboard.

Storyboarding
Throughout my art-making process, I am constantly thinking of ways to present the images that are in my head. One thing I do is to make sketches that most of the time
end up as small storyboards. At this point, I start choosing what images from the dream to use, and where to place them. I begin composing the work’s narrative; it all needs to make sense somehow. No image is more important than another, at least not yet.

I need the spectator to understand that the entire painting is the main character and not one particular panel. “This phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole has a name, it’s called closure.” This term -closure- is the name given in comics when we must complete the story because only bits of information are available to us, and, oddly enough, we carry out closure every day. We are constantly looking out for patterns, filling in the gaps to make sense of reality.

In my work, I create realities, imagined and personal, yes, but they are real to me, nonetheless. These realities have an important component running through them, time. Every narrative needs time: time to be made, time to be presented, and time to digest the information, but most importantly, it needs a flux, a progression. I must work on a good panel to panel sequencing in order to give the illusion of time passage.

Time is an ever-shifting tapestry that changes hues with each observer. Time and the passage of time is an interesting concept. Time is everywhere, and it affects us all in many different ways but is nowhere to be seen, or touch, or feel. It cannot be counted or measured with any conventional device and yet, it is there, or out there, somewhere. We feel it or think we feel it, when an orange turns from good to bad, when we remember that a year ago we were in another city, when we see the sky turning dark and we know that the day is almost over, when we see a picture of ourselves and realized how much we have changed, how much time has passed, how much time has changed us. Time is reflected in change.
We have developed the concept of time out of the necessity to navigate what is usually called reality. To some scientists, philosophers, and thinkers, there is a gap in between time as we experience it in life and time as it is understood by science. In his book *What Makes Time special* Craig Callender argues:

“no one conception of time emerges from the study of physics. Like any other body of knowledge, physics changes (sometimes through wholesale theoretical revolutions, other times via modest alterations or even new interpretations) and our conception of physical time changes accordingly. Time itself doesn’t change, but our understanding of it does.”

It seems that the passage of time is more directly related to our own perspective in life and less on reality itself. We define reality based on our particular physical make up and by our knowledge of the world around us. This knowledge comes from our interactions with the world and that which has been learned or passed down to us by previous generations. Perception is key in understanding reality, but the information is collected by our senses and then edited by our brain. Each sense has a distinct modality that channels information to the brain through a specific nervous system pathway, but there is not one specific sense for timekeeping. The brain relies on bits of information from here and there to have a sense of “Time”. We gather information from senses to measure the passing time. The speed of the data getting to us is different so the brain must edit it to make it seem like we are experiencing a specific event at one precise moment, and not at intervals. If the senses are limited regarding the information they can perceive, and furthermore, the brain edits this information to make it a little more streamlined, then we have to assume that our perception of the world is incorrect, or at best incomplete.
Image Making

My use of photography is based on the ideas and sketches that in turn are based on dreams. In this part, I follow my writing and the sketches, but at any given time in the
entire process, I might change things, like the order of the panels or what image goes in a panel. I invite people (models) to these photoshoots and give them the ideas and concepts behind what I am trying to accomplish. Next, I start composing the image that I will paint from.

Figure 4. Sequence of digital sketches for the first panel of Balcony Scene

Using photoshop, I “stitch” these images into the composition. This step is an essential part of the process because it is what gives the overall work the impression of a continuous story unfolding before the viewer’s eyes. Even though I use what can be called a disruptive narrative, I need to pay attention to the composition and the overall structure of the panels. I am interested in creating a visual flow in which the viewer receives just enough information to generate a story, as in the four frames in figure 5 taken from the film Psycho by Alfred Hitchcock.
This process can be tricky. On one hand, I do not know the whole story or at least, the complete meaning of the story, but I want the viewer to collaborate with me in the sense of finishing the story, or better yet, to create a whole story based on the bits of information that I have given them in the final painting. Scott McCloud writes, “Our perception of “reality” is an act of faith, based on mere fragments.” Moreover, I need my painted fragments to generate the illusion of reality. The synchronization of the many parts -panels- is key for the whole to make sense. With the use of non-linear narrative and the division of the painting into multiple panels, I am able to manipulate time, the viewer can go from one panel to the next one, or they can go jumping around, experiencing the painting as they please. It is important to me to create a visual flow for the viewer to follow and realize that they are not getting the whole story, and maintain things interesting for them to keep going from panel to panel, from one moment to the
other, from one moment in spacetime to another time and place. Another way of thinking about this synchronicity is to connect it with cinematic time.

Cinema and Time

With cinematic storytelling, audiences are willing and able to suspend disbelief. They are transported to other times and other worlds. And all of this is experienced in a different way than that of common reality, or mental time. This category of time is equivalent to dream time. Many things can happen in a very short lapse of time, or something that in real life would take only a few minutes or seconds, in cinema could take much
longer, or at least, it could be made in such a way that our experience of the event seems more prolonged than in real life. This time dilation or contraction can happen because the audience has lost contact with their immediate reality, submerged in the story, and it is experiencing cinematic time rather than what we usually call “real time”.

![Four frames from the movie Run Lola Run, 1998](image)

A film is also called a moving picture, or a motion picture. If we take a moment to think about what a picture is, we imagine a static image. Cinema adds a real time dimensionality to pictures, or images moving, that gives us the sensation of reality. Films are made up of thousands of still images or frames, and when all of these frozen images are put into motion, we get the impression that they are “moving”. Our eyes and brain can recognize that a film is a series of still images but for practical reasons it makes us believe that what we are seeing is actually in motion. It is an illusion of movement through speed, but not real movement.
It could be said that a photograph is a frozen moment in time; it has trapped something that was fleeting and untouchable a second ago. If one is to take many photographs of a real time action and then run them in sequence, then, each individual photo becomes part of a series with the added component of time. In our minds, a film is not a collection of still images, but an independent entity with its own time/space that functions slightly different than our own space/time. A film is a temporal progression of images that becomes, in a way, a separate reality.

Other Artists, Similar Realities

Michael Borremans, *Pink Shoes*

The painting *Pink Shoes* (fig. 7) by Michael Borremans¹ is a diptych. We can see the lower legs and feet of a man (the figure looks like that of a man). The left foot is pointing straight at us while the right foot is positioned at forty-five degrees from us. He is wearing dark pants. The shoes are more casual with no shoelaces, like moccasins. The sock seems to be red (we can only see the one on the right foot). Otherwise, the colors are very muted, almost black and white. The man is evidently in contraposto, resting on the
left leg. By looking at the painting, one can guess that the reference is a photo and not direct observation.

![Two images of a painting showing a pair of legs and shoes.](image)

Figure 7. Michael Borremans, *Pink Shoes*, 2005, oil on canvas, diptych, each panel 19.75 by 25.25 inches

The overall look is that of a film still, something from early color cinema. The two images are identical, like consecutive stills from a movie, but because they are made by hand, they possess slightly different qualities. The viewer may get the impression that they were painted by two different individuals trying to copy the same photograph. The values and tonalities in the painting shift a little as if the photograph(s) was taken at different times of the day or the studio lights were changed by small degrees.

The painting is titled *Pink Shoes*, but we see very little of that color. The shoes are a very diluted pink, more of a brownish tonality, closer to grey than to pink. The artist's palette gives the impression of a very old family photograph, with colors that have mostly faded away. Alternatively, we can think of it as a black and white photograph that has been hand colored. This adds to the overall ambiguity of the painting, are these two separate photos painted to their own specifications, or is it the same image that has been painted slightly different?
We might think that paintings like these are a form of questioning truth, or how well we know what we are looking at. However, according to the artist, he sometimes makes multiple canvases until he is satisfied with one result, and sometimes he likes two results and shows the two panels as one painting.

Still there is validity to the “questioning the truth” argument, but there is also the element of concentrating deeper when confronting a work of this type (the same image repeated) When there is one panel of one image, we think of things like subject matter, who this person is, what he/she is doing, where is he/she located, etc. I believe that when there are two or more identical or similar images, our focus shifts to the nature of reality, so the question is, what passage of time are we looking at?

Eve Sonneman, *Cropdusting, Clovis, New Mexico*

Photographer Eve Sonneman is mostly known for her photographic diptychs. Her work can be described as snapshots, like street photography, except that she does not limit herself to the streets. Her work ranges from urban settings, to countryside, to seaside.

*Cropdusting* (fig. 8) is typical of Sonneman’s diptychs. The setup is in the countryside, more specifically, a crop field. I imagine that the crop is wheat, but the photo is not that clear; it has the snapshot aesthetic proper of her style, and I am not good at identifying crops. But for the purpose of the photograph, it does not really matter what type of
crop or plant is being grown. It is a brown field, like the ones that are almost ready to be harvested or the ones that have just been harvested.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 8. Eve Sonneman, *Cropdusting, Clovis, New Mexico*, 1978, diptych photographs on Ci-bachrome paper, 20 by 30 inches

The horizon line is crooked on both panels. In the panel on the left, the horizon line is going up on the right side, and the one on the right panel is going up on the left. The two horizon lines almost meet in the center, giving the impression of a small, triangular hill, but also the feeling of instability, that we are not standing on stable ground as if an earthquake or some other calamity was taking place. Together, the two images give the notion of parallel worlds colliding, creating a disturbance in reality itself.

There is one element that adds to the idea of instability and violence, the airplane. In the image on the left, the aircraft is in the middle of the composition and it is coming in the viewer’s direction. In the panel on the right, the aircraft is flying away. It is the type of aircraft used to fumigate crops; nevertheless, I cannot help but think of a movie clip from World War I where a very similar aircraft was used to drop bombs or the famous “cropdusting” scene in *North By Northwest*.¹ This sense of anxiety is present throughout Sonneman’s work. We see everyday events unfolding in front of us, quite unimportant in
themselves, but still, there is an expectation of something about to happen. There is the sensation that something is missing, or that a frightful event is about to take place, that the reality been presented to us is somehow not what we consider our reality. All we are left with is our imagination to continue the story ourselves.

**Peter Dreher, *Tag um Tag guter Tag***

Peter Dreher¹ is a German artist who is mostly known for his ongoing painting series *Tag um Tag guter Tag.*¹ (fig. 9) The setup of his still life is in a corner of his studio, where an ordinary glass sits on a white surface with a white background. There, the artist renders the transparent empty glass, always the same glass. Since 1974, the artist has returned to paint the same glass more than 5,000 times. This ritualistic practice of painting the still life over and over, day and night, gives the series a religious connotation.
Dreher lived through World War II and lost his father in the eastern front. He also lost his home during an Allied air raid. Like any other German of his generation, he grew up in a country that was divided and scarred. *Day by Day, is a Good Day* is a series of paintings that I would argue are more related to self-healing than they are about painting. By depicting this empty glass many times and over a long period of time, the artist gets closer to the act of making a mandala where the practitioner makes, or draws, or paints it to have it destroyed at the end. It serves as a spiritual guidance tool for establishing a sacred space and as an aid to meditation.

Dreher does not destroy his paintings once he finishes them, but what is important to him is the act of making them, the process. In the time he spends making them, he spends quality time with himself. He immerses in a process of observation: observing...
the glass and observing himself. There is the time observing the still life, the time spent making them and, most importantly, what the finished paintings reveal about the artist after making more than 5,000. In a way, this is a very similar approach to that of Giorgio Morandi. Over a period of time painting the same object, one can see little differences here and there, not only the lighting conditions and the time of day, or value and tonality, but changes in the person making them. The thickness of the paint, the amount of value, the speed of the process, the technique employed, and the finish and overall quality of the surface.

In his more recent paintings, there is evidence of changes that reveal a more stable and patient person. The surface is flatter, with less evidence of the paint brush, except in the finishing highlights. These works are also more polished. The artist is taking his time to make them; he is older and wiser; there is no rush to get somewhere. Through the act of Mandala/Glass making, he seems to have found a little more art.

Three artists, two mediums: painting and photography; but also three ways of employing repetition to mark the passage of time. The multi-part aspect of these works, whether in two panels like a diptych or in thousands of iterations, is concerned with time as understood through representation. It is important that all of these examples are clearly figurative, referencing people and things with whom we share our world. There is a time gap between one side of Borremans’ diptych and the other; between the airplane approaching, then receding, in Sonneman’s photographs, and in the epic succession of
Dreher’s renditions of his empty glass. In addition, there’s the time viewer spend reflecting on the time inferred by this repetition.

The separation of my work into multiple panels is of extreme importance to mark the passage of time and to give the viewer a chance to fill in the gaps. The transition from panel to panel functions as a bridge connecting the images to one another and forming a narrative.

I can see my painting *Homecoming* (fig. 10) to be in conversation with Borremans’ *Pink Shoes* (fig. 7) My painting is based on two photographs taken a few seconds apart, and they look almost identical. It is understood to be the same place and very much the same time. In Borremans’ painting, he uses the same photograph but both panels are painted slightly different, giving the impression of two separate photographs of the same event and almost at the same time.
In Sonneman’s case, her work relates to other works such as *Kissing the Monster/Becoming the Monster* (fig. 11) and *Balcony Scene* (fig. 15) These works are set in a specific place, but we see in the images more clearly the passage of time. The action is
different; there is a continuation. Time has passed, and the action is changing into something else.

Figure 11. *Kissing the Monster/Becoming the Monster*, 2018, enamel and oil on canvas, 41.5 by 56 inches

With Dreher's paintings, the relationship is based on the rendition of the same object, or character, at different times. If we see his paintings one by one, it is easy to conclude that they are the same. However, if we look at them side by side, then they look more like a comic strip or a roll of film from a movie, telling us the life story of a glass. In my paintings, some characters seem to be doing the same action at the same time, but in other panels, if one is to look closely, we would find differences that make us question if this is the same person, doing the same action, and at the same time.
Lars Elling, *The unfinished Dance Floor*

The dreamlike, square painting by Lars Elling appears to be fragments of memories, stitched together by a person intent on not forgetting. (fig. 12) The Norway based artist is a storyteller, layering images evoking childhood memories interwoven with some
trauma and unpleasant past events. The painting can be seen as a burst of memory, a description of a moment, where reality and poetry come together in a unfinished, painterly fashion.

Figure 12. Lars Elling, *The Unfinished Dance Floor*, 2014, egg tempera on canvas, 67 by 67 inches

There are three teenaged girls in the foreground, one at the center of the composition, and the other two dancing with each other while looking at the central figure who is leaning a little on the wall. The lone girl’s face is not visible; instead, there is a big splash of paint obscuring her head and upper torso, as if a cake had exploded right in
front of her. Layered on top, there is a crude geometrical drawing, rudimentarily following the contour of her dress. This character appears in an odd stance, as if insecure of herself. Is she waiting her turn on the dance floor? Has she being left out of the dance, either by choice or because she is not really welcome to the party? There is also a dog in the left foreground, heading (left) away from the action, but looking back towards the dancing girls. A man and woman are dancing in the background. They seem to be older, and based on the depiction of their bodies; they are dancing to a different tune.

The girls are inside a house or some form of building that has been cut in half, or maybe it is just built half way, or painted half way. The structure has a crawl space as you can see a cinder block on the corner supporting the structure. There is a simple ramp going up to the “Dance Floor”. It is a simple structure to the like of an improvised frame house or a manufactured home. It has walls, a roof, a floor, and one visible window.

The two dancing girls are turning their heads toward the girl standing in the middle of the composition. Their faces have an inquisitorial demeanor, as if asking or expecting something from the girl they are looking at. They dance, turn their heads, and ask, all in a simultaneous move. They even seem to be a little dismissive of each other. There is some interaction, but only in the physical world. These three do not give the impression of being emotionally connected. And yet, the interaction seems to be more psychological than physical. I would argue that there is an acknowledgment of presence, but not real acceptance of being present. The center figure is wearing a white dress, long white stockings, and white shoes. Her stance and different pictorial elements set her apart, she is the oddity, the different one, but the artist has placed her as the main character in
this visually complicated painting. The explosion emanating from her hands could be interpreted as inner rage, a desire to break away from her unwelcoming companions. It could be a reference to something the artist experienced in his past, or something related to someone he knew. This triangular explosion may even reference a bunch of flowers.

![Image of Inland Empire movie still](image)

Figure 13. David Lynch, film still from the movie *Inland Empire*, 2006

The whole scene is reminiscent of a David Lynch\(^1\) movie, where we see visual absurdities happening, yet we realize that there is much more to read between the lines. I am particularly thinking of *Inland Empire*\(^1\) (fig.13) where the visual experience is more important than an specific narrative. We are presented with discordant characters and yet there is a sense of cohesiveness and unseen connection among the players. The
separate and unrelated parts coming together unexpectedly is one of the elements that make this painting interesting. I can see an element of “Neo-noir” in this painting as well throughout Elling’s body of work. The sensibility and style of the work, with the interplay of light and shadow, the blurring of the lines, a form of non linear narrative, and a reference to paranoia and alienation are elements I find that connect this work with film, especially dark, Film Noir movies.

Figure 14. Everything’s Good, 2018, enamel and oil on canvas, 63 by 90 inches
I find many similarities between Lars Elling’s work and my own; the dream-like environments, the inconclusive narrative, and the overall atmosphere. Elling’s paintings are single panels, but if two of them are placed side by side, it would still function as one entity, we could still believe that they belong together. Even in some of his paintings, as in figure 12, the different sections of the painting can be divided into multiple panels and
become what in comics it is called a super panel¹, as in figure 14, where the same image is split in half to add more meaning to what it’s already there. My work can be place into a single panel and have that sense of multiple narratives. I have the feeling that El-ling and I have shared tastes in life, that we might become friends if one day we meet.

**The Painted Image**

As I mentioned before, I am interested in creating paintings that describe a shift in the perception of reality. A place and time that has the potential to be part of a real world, but somewhat different. I am not interested in re-creating the dream world.
I want to create a universe where the laws of physics is tuned in slightly different, a world populated by beings that look like us and behave similarly to us. A world that we can believe is real, but understand it to be another world, a sort of parallel universe.

To make the paintings have this “otherworldly” feeling, I am using an aesthetic reminiscent of a fresco painting, something that can look like a fading image, or an image coming to life from some misty reality. This quality is the case with the painting Balcony Scene (fig. 15). The painting is made up of four panels. In the panel on top, there are three women in a balcony. They are looking to the side as if something unexpected caught their attention. Two of the women look alike, they could be sisters, twins perhaps. They are in a building and are situated in a high floor. There is a city in the distance, and an open field divides the city from the building the three women are in. The relationship to this background is what makes it seem that they are in a high floor. On another panel there are two of these women in a balcony and the remaining two panels are a close-up of their faces. There is an understanding that something is happening to the left of them, but there is no answer to what that might be.

It is worth now mentioning that in describing and analyzing my paintings I go from top to bottom and left to right, as in reading a text. However, writing about the panels is different from viewing them. We see all elements at once, and the viewing eye goes here and there. The observer should jump in varying directions when “reading” the paintings and come up with their own storyline and sequencing.
In the painting *Running Away from Soldiers (modified version)* (fig. 16), I am getting closer to photorealism and give the impression of movie stills. In this one, the narrative
is a little more complicated, and it involves multiple characters and different situations. It reads more like a Hollywood action movie, and that is because each of the characters is involved in a different activity while still connected to one another.

![Figure 16. Running Away From Soldiers (modified version), 2019, oil on board, 62 by 57 inches](image)

The painting is composed of multiple panels. Twelve panels in total, three large panels on the top row, six small ones scattered throughout the middle and the bottom of the
composition, and three larger ones at the bottom and middle section. The first panel on the top (top left) shows a woman with a green jacket, the type issued by the U.S. Army. There is a wooden area in the background and she is holding on her left shoulder some green tube that is not immediately recognizable. This young woman has her hair tucked in a bun and she is in profile, with only part of her face been represented, from where the eye socket starts to the back of her head. Her identity partially obscured, she is facing to the right, where the second panel is.

The second panel shows a young woman turning. The background is a building with an architecture style of late 19th century. There is a gray double door to where the woman seems to have been walking towards before something or someone got her attention. She is slightly turning, and a little surprise shows on her expression, but she is not afraid, as if whatever got her attention is not menacing, or that she knew beforehand that something was there or about to happen. She is wearing a black vest and a sweater underneath. Her gaze is directed towards the right, at about forty-five degrees from the viewer’s standpoint.

The next panel is the smallest of all three top panels; it is as tall as the other ones but narrower. It depicts a rocket launcher with a scope on top and it is pointing to the right. We now understand the nature of the tube in the first panel. We only see the hands holding it but not the person. Only one fingernail is visible, and it’s painted red. In the background, we see tall bushes and a gray sky.

The small panels (six) are close-ups of different events throughout the painting. If we pay attention, these close-ups reveal the same characters doing the same actions but from a dissimilar perspective, or at different moments, or even, wearing different outfits.
The first of the three bottom panels reveals a woman in profile holding a rocket launcher, very much the same color as the one in the first, top panel. The painting depicts the face of the woman with dark hair tied in a bun. We also see her upper torso, and she is wearing a black, tight outfit with long sleeves. She is wearing sunglasses and two small earrings. The background is composed of bushes, the same color as of the others throughout the painting, and a big expanse of gray sky. She is pointing the rocket launcher to the right.

The middle panel, in the center of the composition, shows a man sitting in an interior space. There is a painter’s palette hanging on the back wall and gives the impression of a halo, like in a Medieval Icon painting. Next to the palette there is a picture of himself from the following panel. There are some items on the table forming a small still life. Towards the back, there is a vase with some paint brushes; there is a pack of cigarettes and a glass with amber liquid in it, liquor perhaps, and an old fashioned and portable film camera in the front. This camera looks similar to the one depicted in one of the small panels. His left elbow is resting on the table and the hand is straight up and holding an unlit cigarette. The man has a hard-to-read expression, like a smirk. It is not clear if he is talking to someone or if he is smiling and he is looking towards us.

The last panel on the bottom presents us with the same man and here he is carrying a gun. The background is undefined with what looks like a dark gray sky and some bare trees. There is a wooden fence that seems to be part of a deck. The man is wearing a green jacket like the one the figure in the first top panel is wearing. He is carrying a shotgun across his left shoulder. Like in the middle panel on top, he is going in the direction opposite of the viewer and turning. He is almost making eye contact with the
viewer and his gaze is ambiguous. This description of the twelve panels moves from left to right and top to bottom. It is an order of reading and it serves the image I have used. But the artwork is also visible all at once and the viewer gaze is not necessarily anchored to the eye movements of readers.

Conclusion

Ever since I was very young, I have been searching for other realities, the hidden ones. I have been focusing on the strange and uncommon, the uncanny and the other-
worldly. Some people might call it the abnormal, but I guess, like in the film, *Young Frankenstein*¹ I could call it A. B. Normal. I have been searching for these hidden realities in history books, in 19th Century Russian novels, in Science Fiction movies, in video games, and other unconventional sources. I must admit that I am surprised to have found what I was looking for within myself. Not in art history, not in alcohol, not in fleshly desires, and definitely not in the news. This “abnormal” world has always been there, and I did not notice it. It has slowly been creeping out and letting me know that it has been present all along, informing me that I need to pay more attention to myself, not to the outside world. Now I can say that I have finally found something that is truly worthy of my time, both as an artist and as a human being.

In my current body of work, I have been creating places, characters, and events that come from deep inside of me. As mentioned before in this writing, I call them my own “Mindscapes”. It all starts with dreams that are fed by my own experiences, desires, and anxieties. I quickly move into action to bring to life these unique and atypical worlds. I try to bring forth time outside of time and places not found on maps.

I believe that there is the “real” physical time, by which the 4th dimension is composed of, and “mental” time such as in movies, where the viewer is willing and able to suspend disbelief, and is transported to another times and and other worlds, we have the ability to perform this task whilst engaging in other mental activity.

My goal is that my audience immerses itself in my works to transport themselves to different times and places in order to get a glimpse at my inner world.
Notes


2 Tony Crisp, *(Dreams, health, yoga, body mind and spirit)*.

3 Aristotle, 384 BC-322 BC, *(On Sleep and Wakefulness)*.

4 Artemidorus Daldianus or Ephesius, 2nd century AD, *(Oneirocritica or The Interpretation of Dreams)*.

5 Romanticism was an artistic, literary, musical and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century, and in most areas was at its peak in the approximate period from 1800 to 1850.

6 Barry Charles Mazur (born 1937) is an American mathematician and the Gerhard Gade University Professor at Harvard University.

7 Johan August Strindberg (1849-1912) was a Swedish playwright, novelist, poet, essayist and painter.

8 A *Dream Play* was written in 1901 by the Swedish playwright August Strindberg. It was first performed in Stockholm on 17 April 1907. It remains one of Strindberg’s most admired and influential dramas, seen as an important precursor to both dramatic expressionism and surrealism.

9 Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology.


12 Craig Callender, Ph.D. (born 1968) is a philosopher of science and professor at the university of California, San Diego.


14 Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) was an English film director and producer. He was known as “the master of suspense”.


16 Borremans, Michael. (1963-present) is a Belgian painter and filmmaker.


18 Sonneman, Eve. (1946-present) is an American photographer and artist.


20 Dreher, Peter. (1932-present) is a German artist.

21 Tag um Tag guter Tag could be translated as *Day by Day Good Day*, but it can also be *Everyday is a Good Day*.
22 Morandi, Giorgio (1890-1964) was an Italian painter and printmaker who specialized in still life.

23 David Lynch (born 1946) is an American filmmaker, painter, musician, actor, and photographer.

24 David Lynch, Inland Empire, (Film, 2006).

25 Neo-noir is a contemporary motion picture rendition of film noir. The term film noir (popularized in 1955 by two French critics, Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton) was applied to crime movies of the 1940s and 1950s, most produced in the United States, which have an 1920s/1930s Art Deco visual environment. Information taken from Wikipedia.

26 In comics, a super-panel, or multi-panel, is where there are two or more consecutive panels sharing the same background.

27 Mel Brooks, Young Frankenstein, (USA, 20th Century Fox, 1974).
Bibliography


Lynch, David. *Inland Empire*. 2006; Absurda, Studio Canal.


