6. Dreams, the progeny of sleep

"We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep." The richness of the words which Shakespeare, in Act IV of The Tempest, placed in Prospero's mouth needs no emphasizing.

Dreams abound in art, as they do in the Bible. "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it" (Genesis 28:12). In Jacob's Dream (fig. 87), a painting by Nicolas Dipre, a 15th century Provençal painter, God, standing amidst a cluster of puffball clouds from which a ladder descends, blesses Jacob and announces to him: "The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed" (Genesis 28:13).

Jacob's haggard face expresses the fatigue of his journeying. At a place called Haran (which he later names "Bethel", meaning "House of God"), he sleeps with his head on a stone, dust in the folds of his loose-flowing garment. The whole painting is executed in pale yellow-browns and burnt reds, with the rocks standing out against a luminous sky that darkens towards the top of the painting. Lacking mathematical precision, the illusion of perspective is nevertheless in place. The immobility of the landscape and the stillness of the Patriarch are disturbed only by the motion of the angels ascending or descending the ladder.

Figure 87.
Nicolas Dipre
(Known in Provence, France, from 1495 to 1531).
Jacob's dream. Painting.
Petit Palais Museum, Avignon - France

In 1639, José de Ribera (1591-1652) produced his version of *Jacob's Dream* (fig. 88). In its use of the image of a shepherd resting in the countryside, it has a touch of the profane, and even the voluptuous, about it. Lying on a slab of stone, a tree inclining sharply behind him, Jacob sleeps with his weight on his left shoulder, his head in his hand. Demonstrating Ribera's delicate sense of colour, the register moves from saturated lilac through a range of violets to watered black. The divine presence and the ladder itself are suggested in the diagonal wash of light that illuminates the sky and brings Jacob's features into focus. In this work of resonant austerity, there is something timeless in the mysterious end-of-day atmosphere and something carnal in the gentle sweetness; a drama is nevertheless suggested. Ribera's supreme achievement in this painting is to have evoked the miraculous dream through an austere realism.

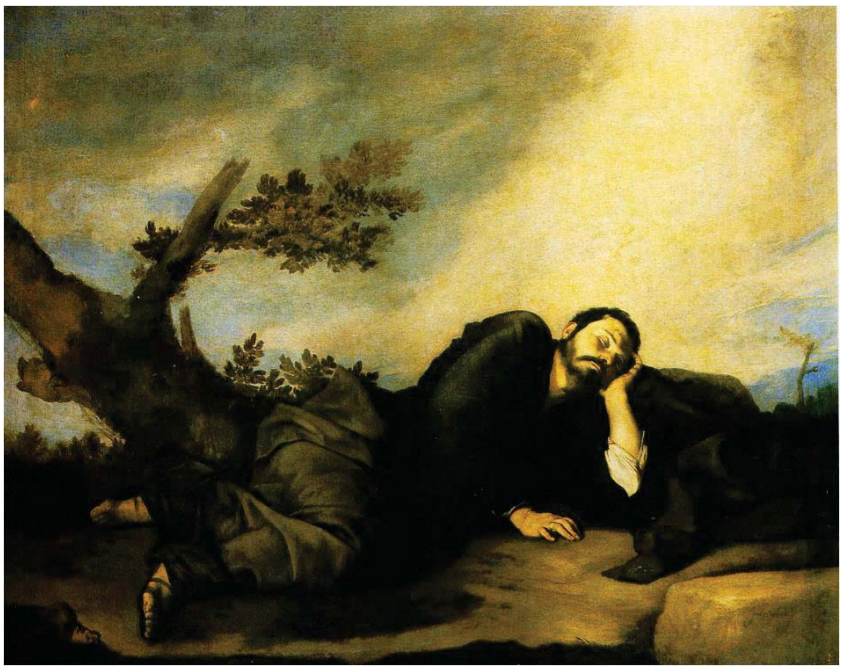


Figure 88. Jusepe de Ribera (Spanish, 1591-1652). The dream of Jacob, 1639. Canvas, 179 x 233 cm. Prado Museum, Madrid - Spain.

Marc Chagall's (1887-1985) staging of Jacob's Dream (fig. 89), in the form of a diptych, shows the Patriarch asleep while his dream animates itself all around him. On the left panel, acrobatic angels, reminiscent of Chagall's beloved circus, move gracefully around a rickety ladder; on the right panel, an angel bears the divine light in the form of a menorah illuminating the blue darkness. Chagall's characteristic intermingling of sacred and profane is fully in evidence in this painting.

Figure 89. Marc Chagall (Russia, 1887 - France, 1985). The Dream of Jacob, 1960-1966. Oil on canvas, 195 x 278 cm. National Museum of the Marc Chagall Biblical Message, Nice - France. ©ADAGP, Paris, 2012

As a medium of dreams, sleep is a favourable terrain for premonitions. Indeed, legendary dreams arise in sleep and prophetic storms are prepared, making sleep a fabulous springboard for the imaginary. The renowned Dream of the Magi (fig. 90), with its air of child-like credulity, shows the three wise men sleeping side by side, a circular blanket folding its embroidered stone over them. They decorate a capital of stippled stone in the chapter house of the Romanesque Saint-Lazare d'Autun Cathedral in Burgundy, France (12th century).

Figure 90.- Master Gislebertus of Autun (France, 12th century). The Dream of the Magi, 1130-1135. Saint Lazare Cathedral, Autun - France

With one hand, the angel points to the star that will guide them to Bethlehem; with the other, it awakens one of the sleeping Magi with a touch of the hand. Fulfilling its role of messenger, the angel thus links the astral and the earthly, the human and the divine. The four Biblical figures thus find themselves spiritually connected, thanks to a Burgundian stone-cutter who transposed the intangible into touch, the mystery of divine transmission into the solid and visible. A page in the open book of spiritual edification, could this sculpture, for those seeking the divine, show the way? In the undulations of its relief, it contains enough naïveté, innocent simplicity and affability to move, here and now, hearts to higher things. Nights were dark, then, and light could be found in the monasteries and churches of Europe, determined to develop the religion derived from a faraway desert tribe.

In what order shall we present the multiplicity of images featuring dreams and premonitions? Let us opt for a chronological order.

In pre-Renaissance paintings, where "illogicality" is a convention, the severity of the composition is often attenuated when it comes to painting a predella (a series of small paintings in a long narrow strip forming the lower edge of an altarpiece). In *The Annunciation to Sobac* (fig. 91), Pietro Lorenzetti's (1280-1348) panel of the predella of the Carmelite altarpiece, an angel announces in a dream to Sobac, the father of the prophet Elijah, that his son will found the Carmelite order.

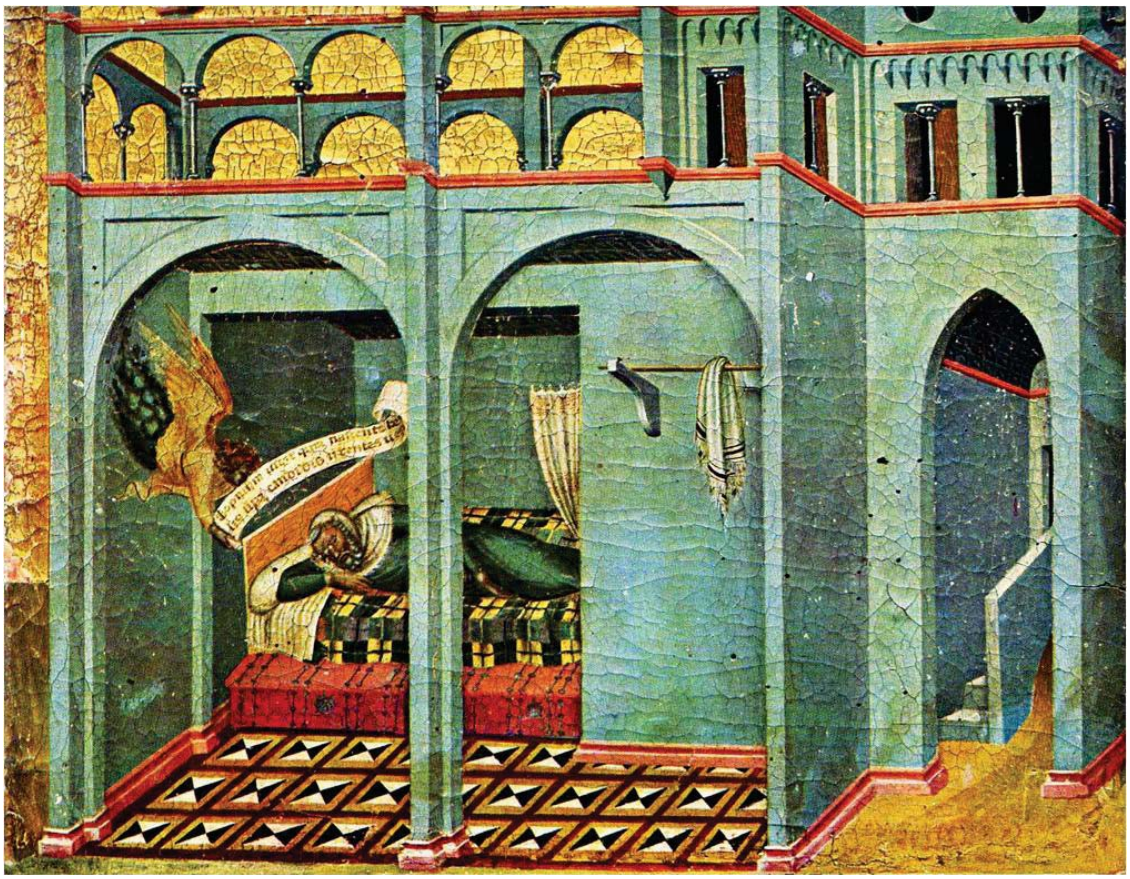


Figure 91.- Pietro Lorenzetti (Italian, 1288/90-1348). The Annunciation to Sobac, 1328-1329. Panel of the predella of the altarpiece of the Carmelites. Tempera on wood, 37 x 44 cm. Pinacoteca. Siena - Italy.

The sleeper lies in an alcove, clearly visible through the big openings in the architecture. The check pattern of the blanket echoes the geometrical motif of the floor tiles, while the dreamlike architecture features subtle gradations of green-grey trimmed in Siena red. Above, arches resting on graceful columns stand out against a wall of burnt gold.

Piero della Francesca, in Constantine's Dream (fig. 92), depicts the legend which holds that Constantine the Great was prompted, in a dream, to embrace the Christian faith (indeed, he was the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity). On the eve of the battle of the Milvian bridge on the Tiber, the dreaming Constantine saw an angel pointing to a cross in the sky and heard it say, "By this sign shalt thou conquer".

The scene takes place at night. We see, through the open tent, the emperor in his brightly-covered bed. In the foreground, two sentries stand guard, lit by the light emanating from the angel bursting in from above, while an attendant sits facing us on the edge of the bed platform. The sentries are convincing in their Roman soldier's garb; molded in three dimensions by the light, casting a shadow, they mark a break with the medieval convention of flat figures.

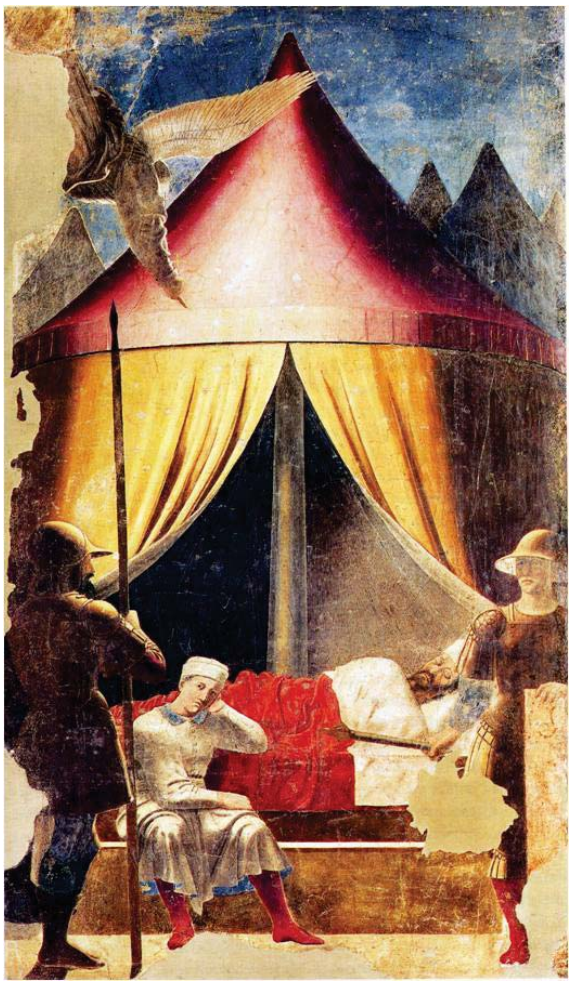


Figure 92.
Piero della Francesca
(Italy, c. 1416-1492).
The Dream of Constantine, circa 1460.
Detail of a fresco.
Church of San Francesco,
Arezzo - Italy.

The artist, in this geometrically precise composition, has light play a capital role; it floods the cone of the tent to great volumetric effect, and grades the colour of the curtains to suggest depth in space. As in the Dipre, Ribera and Chagall renditions of Jacob's dream (fig. 87-89), the effulgence evokes the divine. It is worth insisting on the volumetric effects Piero della Francesca, like Masaccio before him, pursued so audaciously. Indeed, these effects mark a real innovation, and are brilliantly realized in the rotundity and folds of the tent, the alternation of dark and light in the interior, and the subtle nuances in the rendering of the back-lit sentry in the foreground and the side-lit one facing us. The overall atmosphere is supernatural; everything is serene and alive. Constantine's Dream is a masterpiece that has become all the more valuable since the destruction in 1944 of Andrea Mantegna's fresco for the Eremitani Church in Padua.

In the West's storehouse of dreams, mutability rules: Ceaselessly the arts recreate the myriad forms dreams take. Or, to use a different metaphor: Infinite and open to all forms of interaction, the movie of humanity's dreams never stops unspooling. In the cinema of any particular sleeper, however, it may flicker brightly or not at all, delighting in being unpredictable, right up until the moment all lights go out for good.

In Antonio de Pereda's (1608-1678) The Knight's Dream (fig. 93), a young hidalgo dozes in an armchair before an allegorical table filled with items of vanitas: a bouquet of flowers, a bishop's mitre; books, coins, jewels; a globe, a gun, a clock; a violin, a sword, a mask. And in the midst of all this, a human skull reminds us of the transience of life, the futility of pleasure, and the certainty of death. Lest anyone miss the message, a lovely angel in the bloom of youth, looking at the sleeping knight, unfurls a banner that reads, Aeterna pungit et occidit volat (Eternally it stings and kills swiftly), the "it" referring to the bow and arrow depicted in the middle of the banner. The moralistic message, part and parcel of this Baroque genre, is beautifully staged by the still life painter: The careless sleep of conscience visited by the lightness of divine grace makes the darkness radiant.

Figure 93.
Antonio de Pereda
(Spain, 1608-1678).
El sueño del caballero
(The Knight's Dream),
mid-seventeenth century.
Oil on canvas, 152 x 217 cm.
Academia de San Fernando,
Madrid - Spain.

In The Shepherd's Dream, from 'Paradise Lost' (fig. 94), Fuseli, this time inspired by Milton's epic poem, once again depicts a world of imagination, dreams and the supernatural. Drawing directly on a verse where the poet speaks of revelling fairies by a forest bewitching a passing peasant, the painter shows these fantastical creatures linking arms and whirling above a sleeping shepherd, while a congregation of imps, fairies and elves busy themselves all around him. Connoisseurs of English folklore will make out Queen Mabs, the bringer of nightmares, sitting on the stone steps on the right, while the most observant viewers will notice the demonic incubus (given a central place in The Nightmare, fig. 84), attached to her by a chain, pointing at the sleeping man. The building behind Queen Mabs may represent the ivory portal, described by Homer and Virgil, through which delusive dreams emerge. Nightmare and dream, then, once again blend in Fuseli's work.

Figure 94.
.Johann Heinrich Fuseli
(Switzerland, 1741 - Great
Britain, 1825).
The Shepherd's Dream,
1762.
Oil on canvas,
154.5 x 215.5 cm.
Tate Gallery, London - G.B.

Ossian's Dream (fig. 95), by Ingres, is a large-scale depiction of a scene from James Macpherson's epic Ossian poems. (Macpherson's The Works of Ossian was widely influential; it gave a great impetus to the development of the Romantic movement and touched not only Walter Scott and Goethe, for example, but also Napoleon and Jefferson). In it, we see the Gaelic bard asleep, leaning on his harp, and dreaming that he sees his dead son Oscar (depicted in a warrior's helmet); Oscar's wife, Eviralina; Fingal, the bard's father, and Starnos, king of the snows. An Ingres filled with enthusiasm for the irrational funnels his filtered light from Ossian in the foreground to the parade of phantasmal figures in the background, extending like timeless statues into the picture's vanishing point.

Figure 95.
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres
(France, 1780-1867).
Ossian's Dream, 1813.
Oil on canvas, 335 x 194 cm.
Ingres Museum, Montauban – France

Puvis de Chavannes' (1824-1898) The Dream (fig. 96) is of an altogether different nature: Classical in its scenography, clean in its lines, the painting opts for a muted palette of chalky colors. The content of the sleeping traveller's dream is given by what the diaphanous female figures hold in/drop from their hands: roses, a laurel and coins; love, glory and wealth. As insubstantial as the dream itself, it would take no more than a blink of an eye to make these floating figures vanish.

Figure 96.
Pierre Puvis de
Chavannes Cecil
(France, 1824-1883).
The Dream, 1883. Oil
on canvas, 82 x 102 cm.
Musée d'Orsay,
Paris - France.

The contrast of these chimerical creatures with the exuberant figure in Moment of Creation, Harpy in a Dream (fig. 97), the work of another symbolist painter, Jacek

Malczewski (1854-1929), couldn't be more striking. Indeed, whereas in Puvis' painting the atmosphere is aseptic, not to say insipid, here the hallucinating dreamer is subject to a highly erotic charge. The man depicted in the painting is in fact a self-portrait of the artist, and it is no accident that he has placed the robust curves of his fantasy figure, a kind of carnal temptation, at the top of the painting. Is the artist expressing his own desire or is it the harpy who will end up pouncing on her prey? Smiling in her sleep, she basks in her own power: She knows the fascination she exerts over the man is irresistible.

Figure 97.
Jacek Malczewski
(Poland, 1854-1929).
Moment of Creation,
Harpy in a Dream, 1907.
Oil on cardboard,
72 x 92 cm.
Private Collection,
Poznan-Poland

Literally teeming with exotic life, Henri Rousseau's (1844-1910) The Dream (fig. 98) is as exuberant as the jungle it depicts. Amidst the lush equatorial vegetation, he places a pair of lions, a bird of paradise, a serpent, an elephant, a jungle inhabitant playing a horn, and… a shapely nude stretched out on a sofa, her pale white skin contrasting with its crimson velvet. Rousseau, customs official (hence his nickname Le Douanier) and self-taught artist, could have made his the Latin motto, Horas non numero nisi serenas ("I only remember the happy moments"). Indeed, only an artist as instinctive as he was, in tune with his genius and touched by grace, could evoke such uncomplicated charm. He believed himself, in all modesty, to be making an accurate observation when, as Picasso reported, he told the Spanish painter, "You're good in the Egyptian genre; I in the modern style".

Figure 98.
Henri Rousseau
(France, 1844-1910).
The Dream, 1910.
Oil on canvas,
204.5 x299 cm.
Museum of Modern Art,
New York - USA

In the 20th century, largely during the period between the two world wars, the Surrealists sought to liberate desire via techniques aimed at reproducing the mechanism of dreams. Painting was conceived as a site of privileged access to the imagination and its deeper truths, while the adoption of startling juxtapositions was to be its preferred technique. André Breton, the principal theorist of the movement, conceived Surrealism as the union of the real and the imaginary, two concepts usually considered to be poles apart. As he wrote in the first Manifesto of Surrealism (1924), "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality".

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), as devoted to theory as to practice, briefly subscribed to this vision. The year following the publication of the first Surrealist manifesto was also the year that he, the initiator of purely abstract art with his First Abstract Watercolor (1910), painted Little Dream in Red (fig. 99). Throwing off the weight of the past, he paints a fervour of parallel and intersecting lines, variously subdivided rectangles and whole or segmented circles against a ground where colour is applied in a gaseous or powdered state. The dream is conceived as a syncopation, an implosion contained within a netting of forms stretched across an undefined space where neither top nor bottom nor any sense of scale exists. In a word, the dream is cosmic, without beginning or end.

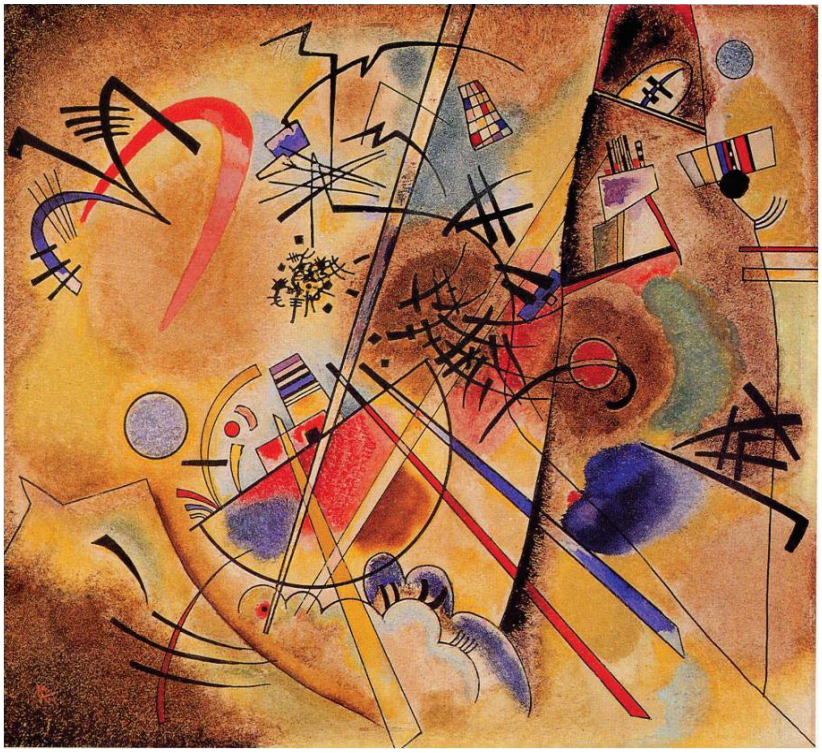


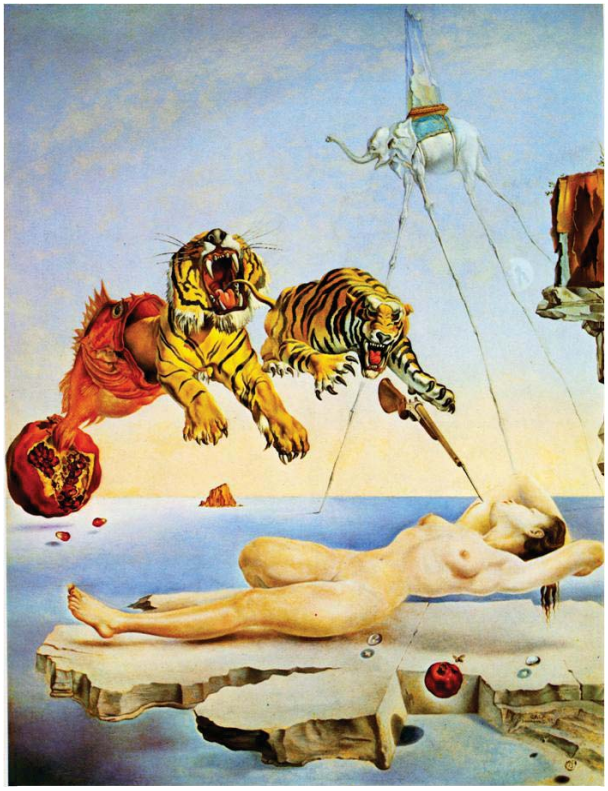
Figure 99. -Wassily Kandinsky (Russia, 1866 - France, 1944).
Little Dream in Red, 1925. Oil on paper on cardboard, 35.5 x 41.2 cm.
Kunstmuseum, Bern - Switzerland.

In 1931, shortly before the publication of the second Surrealist manifesto (which he signed alongside Luis Bunuel and Yves Tanguy, among others), Salvador Dali (1904-1989) painted his *Dream* (fig. 100). The bust of a woman imposes her blind presence on the viewer: her bronze skin is turning virescent, and her hair is as snaky as the Medusa's. In the distance, humanoid figures struggle before a red form that dwarfs them. In Dali's madness there is always method, and here that method produces a more coherent result than the artist's definition of it might lead one to expect: The paranoiac-critical method (as he calls it) is "a

spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the critical and systematic objectivity of the associations and interpretations of delirious phenomena."

Figure 100
Salvador Dali (Spanish, 1904-1989).
The Dream, 1931.
Oil on canvas, 96 x 96 cm.
The Cleveland Museum of Art,
Cleveland-Etats-Unis
© Salvador Dali, Gala-Salvador Dali Foundation/ARS, New York)/ ADAGP, Paris, 2012

In Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second before Awakening (fig. 101), Dali gives a fine example of his method of constructing dreamscapes. This painting, he said, set out "to express for the first time in images Freud's discovery of the typical dream of which the lengthy narrative is in fact the instantaneous consequence of a chance event which causes the sleeper to wake up. Thus, as the fall of a curtain rod onto the neck of a sleeping person might simultaneously awaken him and trigger a long dream that ends with the fall of a guillotine blade, the buzzing of a bee here provokes the sensation of the sting which will awaken Gala." (Gala, of course, is Dali's Muse and wife).



©Salvador Dali, Fundacio Gala-Salvador Dali/ADAGP, Paris, 2012

As if propelled by an explosion in the ruptured pomegranate, the evocations of the bee (the tigers' black-and-yellow stripes, the bayonet/stinger) surge towards the floating dreamer, while an elephant with string-like stilts and an obelisk on its back walks on the water. The burlesque imagination of the painter, with its "startling juxtapositions", displays the coherence of dreams. For Dali, dreams reveal the soul's tribulations, the soul which in sleep turns away from the external world to reveal its true nature.

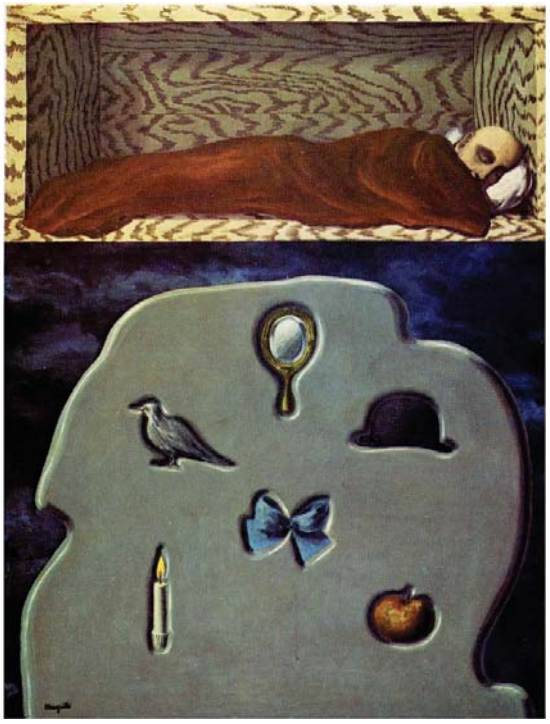
Figure 101.
Salvador Dali (Spanish, 1904-1989).
Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second before Awakening, 1944.
Oil on canvas, 51 x 41 cm.
Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection,
Madrid - Spain.

Dreams derive their substance from the medium in which they arise; they adopt particular disguises and intermingle with labile realities.

In Yves Tanguy's (1900-1955) *Dreamer (Sleeper)* (fig. 102), we float in a weightless landscape while the dreamer drowns: With the faith of the sceptic, the artist effaces himself in the airy green.

Figure 102.
Yves Tanguy
(France, 1900 - United States, 1955).
Dreamer (Sleeper),
Réveuse (Dormeuse)1927.
Oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm.
Private Collection, France
©ADAGP, Paris, 2012

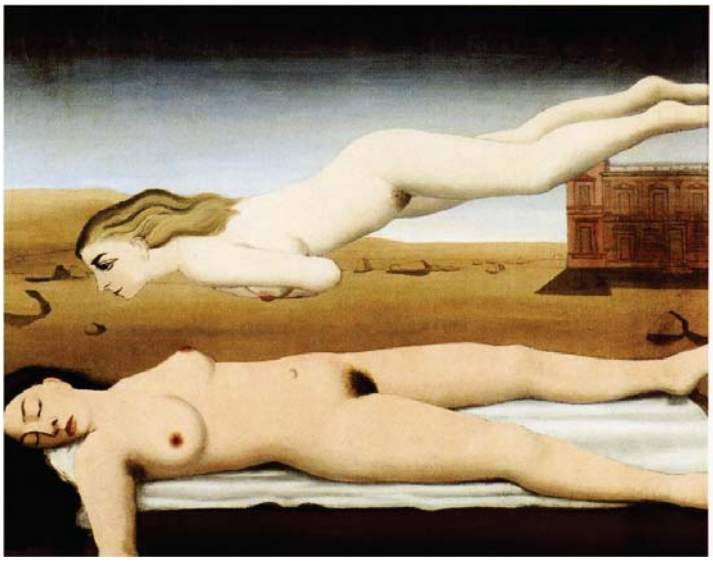
Art is unafraid to change forms; indeed, it tirelessly seeks to do so, since one of its very *raisons d'être* is to modify our perception of reality. It refuses routine in the shaping of a reality that belongs to it alone. René Magritte (1898-1967), with his deadpan sense of humour and deadly serious intentions, is one of the best illustrations of this principle. Master of the "startling juxtaposition" and the surprising shift in perspective, the artist has constructed a system wherein the ferment of the absurd contends with an ironic disalienation. With Magritte, art is to be found where one least expects to find it.



Mockery, acidity, provocation may all be harnessed as he attempts to remove himself from stale patterns of seeing and judging. In *The Reckless Sleeper* (fig. 103), unease and disorientation arise at the sight of a man sleeping in a sort of coffin while below him, everyday objects embedded in a stone tablet assert their banality. Just what does the dream consist in? The mystery remains.

Figure 103.
René Magritte (Belgian, 1898-1967).
The Reckless Sleeper,
Le Dormeur téméraire,1928.
Oil on canvas, 116 x 81 cm.
Tate Gallery, London - G.B.
©ADAGP, Paris, 2012

Surrealism and the metaphysical paintings were to mark a decisive influence on Paul Delvaux (1897-1994) style. In 1935 he painted The Dream (fig. 104), featuring a pale-skinned nude suspended above a serene sleeper, another female nude.



Will the wingless angel, this equivocal visitor, awaken the senses of the dreamer in whom desire still sleeps? Without any extravagance, Delvaux suggests the first stirrings of female love, foregrounded, substantial, and unaffected.

Figure 104.- Paul Delvaux
(Belgian, 1897-1994).
The Dream, 1935.
Oil on canvas, 148 x 173 cm.
Private Collection
©Fondation Paul Delvaux, St Idesbald/ADAGP, Paris, 2012

Frida Kahlo's (1910-1954) The Dream (fig. 105) offers a spectacle of the artist coming to terms with her pain. In a bed suspended against a cloudy sky, she portrays herself asleep under a bright yellow spread; from the base of the bed, as a sign of her fate foretold, the climbing shrub known as "Crown of Thorns" crawls up to cover her. On the canopy of the bed, that fate is made clear: The spectre of her death in the form of a skeletal figure lies stiffly on its side, explosives wound around its legs. The skull rests on two cushions, echoing the dreamer's pillowed head, while in its hand the skeletal figure holds funeral flowers (or is it a macabre bridal bouquet?). This silent allegory, then, is a vision of the death that for Frieda, bed-ridden for long periods with a broken back, would come fifteen years later. Here, as an exemplary Surrealist, the artist portrays herself simultaneously with her skeletal double, painting "the big sleep" before and after. In this Janus-like self-depiction, then, the artist has Janus, the god of passages and bridges, open the door to the future before having closed the one that shuts the present.

Figure 105.
Frida Kahlo
(Mexico, 1910-1954).
The Dream (The bed), 1940.
Selma and Nesuhi Ertegun Collection,
New York - USA
© 2012 Banco de Mexico Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./ADAGP, Paris, 2012

In the post-WWII period, artists maintained such formal inventiveness in the representation of sleep and dreams. Eduardo Chillida (1924-2002) offers a fine example. In the age of the atom and stainless steel, he takes up the tradition of Vulcan and works out of metal a Dream Anvil (fig. 106). The sculpture is forged from two iron bars folded into ellipses then made to represent the process of breaking up the dictatorship. The misfit between the dream-signifying object and the raw matter meant to transmit its message provokes a piquant shock. The tough and the tender, opposite by nature, here come together to seal a new alliance.

Figure 106.
Eduardo Chillida
(Spanish, 1924-2002).
Dream Anvil No. 9, 1959.
Iron, 47 x 55 x 32 cm.
Kunsthaus
Zurich - Switzerland.
©Zabalaga-Leku /ADAGP,
Paris, 2012

Jacques Doucet (1924-1994) was a co-founder of CoBrA (Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam), a group of artists created in response to the quarrel between abstraction and figuration.

Doucet's painting, *The Dream* (fig. 107), is an excellent example of his style of lyrical abstraction. There is magic in his colour variations, but the forms viewed up close, because of their instantaneity, appear to be a jumble of blobs, a meaningless assembly of viscous emulsions. Viewed from further back, however, they easily yield their charms, acquiring a consistency that resembles a suspension of pigments settled on the bottom of a liquid.

Figure 107.
Jacques Doucet (France, 1924-1994).
The dream, before 1970.
Private Collection
©ADAGP, Paris, 2012

Dreamy abstractions with an aura of the unusual: Such is *Dream* (fig. 108) by the French painter of Chinese origin, Chu Teh-Chun (b. 1920), a work at once fluid and discontinuous.

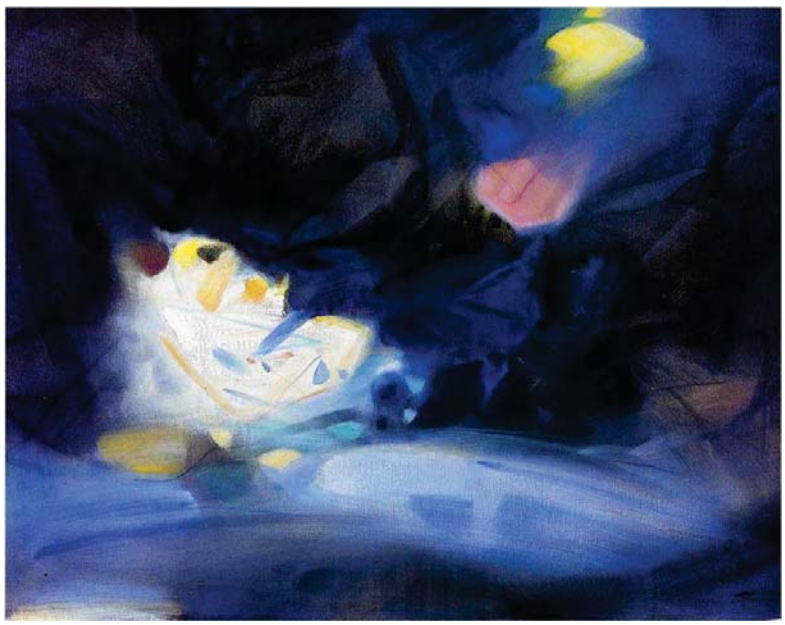


Figure 108. Chu Teh-Chun (born in China in 1920, works in France). Dream, 1992. Oil on canvas, 130 x 162 cm. Artist's Collection. ©ADAGP, Paris, 2012

François Arnal (b. 1924) inhabits a similar emotional zone, even if his Dream of Power (fig. 111) is, a contrario, a humorous, even delirious, euphemism for a restless aspiration (of the organs of sex, depicted in the phase of tumescence or detumescence?). Here, the unconscious is on full display, even if ambushed in the back rooms of sleep. This dream is object and vision bonded.

Figure 109.
François Arnal (France, 1924).
Dream of Power, 1994.
Oil and acrylic on canvas. 73 x 60 cm.
Artist's Collection
©ADAGP, Paris, 2012

In the Australian bush the Aborigines transmit, usually from mother to child, the techniques of assuring the memorial power of painted images; for this they use either pigments found in nature or—ever since the galleries of Sydney and Melbourne (if not Sotheby's itself) have attracted enthusiasts for their work—fast-drying acrylic paint. These images put synergies into play, synergies concerning not neurophysiological dreams but Dreamtime, the sacred Aboriginal era in which ancestral totemic spirit-beings created the world. It is preferable to see works such as these, characterized by an anthropological function, as spontaneous attempts at visual narratives of exorcism, as aide-mémoires for the community, or as reinforcers of tribal belonging, even if these days such paintings bear individual signatures. Otherwise, how could one interpret a work like George Milpurrurru's (b. 1934) The Artist's Mother Dreaming (fig. 110), a dream of Dhuwa honey where two characters standing back-to-back, ochre-colour against bark of eucalyptus, dance amidst containers lighter than air?

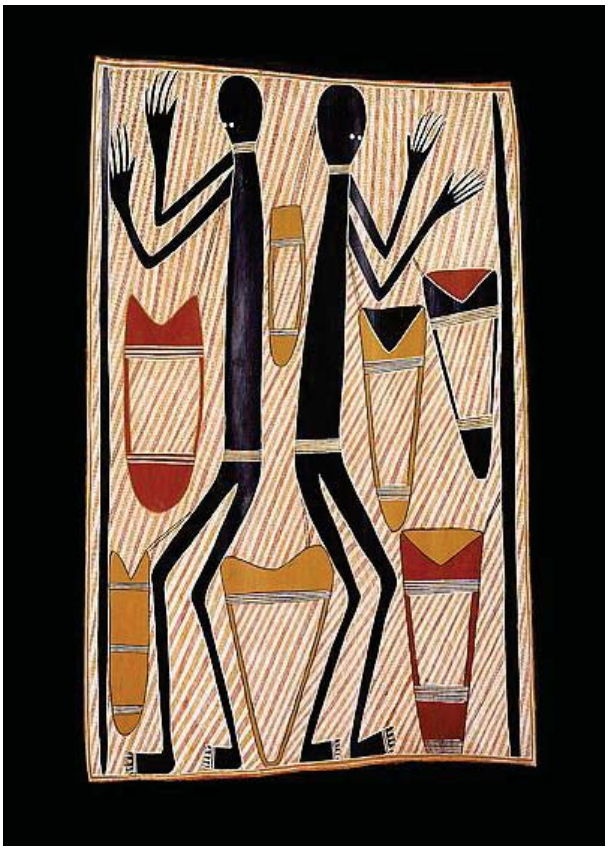


Figure 110.
George Milpurrurru
(Australia, b. 1934). The artist's
mother Dreaming, 1984.
Ochre on bark of Eucalyptus,
111 x 73.5 cm.
National Gallery of Australia,
Canberra - Australia.
© George Milpurrurru /
ADAGP, Paris, 2012