

PRUDENCE FLINT

Second Lesson

3rd October – 7th December 2024

How it strikes a lesson

*The dream does in fact concern itself with both health and sickness, and since, by virtue of its source in the unconscious, it draws upon a wealth of subliminal perceptions, it can sometimes produce things that are very well worth knowing.*ⁱ – Carl G. Jung, *On the Nature of Dreams*.

If we are to assimilate anything from Carl G. Jung's hypothesis *On the Nature of Dreams*—or the long line of distinguished conversation on the subject—is that the potential to unpick it is as vast as it is endless.ⁱⁱ That is to say, 'illusions are to the soul what atmosphere is to the earth. Roll up that tender air and the plant dies, the colour fades.'ⁱⁱⁱ The peculiar nature of the dream not only floods us with a view of the infinite but tugs us down to another life, a dream world. Down the rabbit hole we go. Suddenly you find yourself surrounded, visions come to in waves, swilling around you: either sinking or swimming, you are emersed.

Plunging us back into her ecosphere of the magnificent and the dissociating, Prudence Flint, hinges upon and returns to one of her many subjects; the psyche. Working from model-sittings and memory, Flint's meticulously and beautifully rendered oil paintings are composed by drawing basic shapes on linen; erasing marks and formulating spaces for bodies to emerge, distort and project, until the painting and the implied interior begins to present itself. Soft, supple and subdued as her pastel-worlds can initially appear, they speak to something 'other'. But what that other is or what it implies, is open to the viewer's subconscious reading.

Plausibly we can envisage how Flint follows the "necessary blindness and covering up that is intrinsic to the process of painting",^{iv} however, we are relatively left in the dark as to whether these paintings are mere dreams or associations. And are they of Flint's, or are they of yours, or rather, are they purely constructed fictions to punctuate Flint's *mise-en-scène* and to tease out parables (personal and impersonal) to work-through. All are true, but how to choose correctly? The most evident answer is this: the paintings, to me, have remembered, repeated and worked-through^v to something *else*. Gone are the days of the warm colour palette, fluffy mohair cardigans or tactile lime-green socks under leather sandals. There has been a shift. The clocks have changed, the daylight is dying, and night is looming.

The painting, *Witch Hunt*, becomes the perfect exempla: Flint's female protagonist appears stilled on all fours in the dead of night. Crawling on the flattened grey floor, her flesh now rounded by hues of green and crimson, her ankles and wrists diminished in scale, so that the focal point, the natural gaze, hits the top of her left exaggerated thigh. She is perhaps quietly assimilating, imitating or metamorphosing into the feline stretched out behind her, the sole occupant of one of Flint's characteristic 'beds'; or on second thought, is this mysterious figure trying to silently escape the hunt, of which the painting's title implies.

At their core the paintings connect with the psychosomatic tensions of the inner self to subtly encroach onto the viewer's own interior—muddying the work's presupposed narrative to

confound and draw us in for a closer inspection. An artfully placed knife in the painting *Birth*, with its blade a mere centimetre away from the protagonist's ritual, re-birth, or sorrow, (or more prosaically *washing*, water splashed on the face, falling into a table-situated, small pink washing-up bowl) begs to question the objects significance... But given the unobvious complexity of everything in this painting; the odd shape and confining size of the room - as if closing in upon itself - the dress hanging too far away on the wall, and the shallow window or mirror beside it, the knife becomes an accepted, if not expected, normality. Moreover, who, what and why is there a second figure standing, passively poised, unnoticed even, to the left of the abluting figure?

We are reminded again of our lesson here... it is the second one after all, that in the dream you mostly find *yourself* negating (negotiating?) foreign territories: catapulted into scenes of the strange and the indifferent, all masquerading behind a plausible 'personality' of a past time. *Split* (all paintings 2024) is another clear example of Flint's ever-so-cleverly-constructed claustrophobic enclosures. With Ulysses' sailing boat; a miniaturised luminous green vessel moving silently between the two sirens bathing together in an under-sized tub. We are, once again, confronted with two seemingly identical figures, but placed by the artist in differing positions and in different attire, one nude and the other in her Flint-archetypical bra and knicker set, her hair braided to the side. Water streams down from them both into the bath and over the boat like pouring rain.

We feel we have undoubtedly *unearthed* something here, in *Second Lesson*, as a body of work, and as an experience of walking-in, cold, into a collective space where everything perhaps bar us, knows exactly what is going on. A strange eeriness moves around Flint's perfectly-lined and thoroughly executed walls. Intoxicating our senses and eschewing our understanding. The tangible line between intimacy and intensity; ritual and worship; the strange and the indifferent all come to question. And to say that there isn't a simple nor explainable narrative or supposable theory to glean from would be, to me, exact; instead in Flint's worlds you glide slowly, from room to room, collecting the artfully placed fragments, objects, clothing, or lack thereof as to establish the wish verses the fulfilment. The dream verses the reality. The present, future verses the past. It is through these novelistic twists and turns that Flint unpacks and distorts her lucid-dream-like figures to place us, like a miniature figurine, into an inescapable world of the unknown, peppered with armour.

ⁱ Carl G. Jung, *On the Nature of Dreams, Collection of Works, Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, p.281-282, Trans. Gerhard Adler and R. F. C Hull, Princeton University Press: Princeton, USA, 1970.

ⁱⁱ See Jungian theory on dreams, and further historical texts on the potential and potency of the dream. See Aristotle, Descartes, Plato, The Odyssey, Freud, et cetera. Many have believed that a dream, and its interpretation, can provide information toward the past, present and future events.

ⁱⁱⁱ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, Penguin Modern Classics: London, UK, (1928) 2019.

^{iv} Prudence Flint, '*Prudence Flint's character studies' interview with Rosa Ellen*, ABC Radio National, July 2023. <<https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/the-art-show/prudence-flint-art-openings/102514082>>

^v See Sigmund Freud's *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through*, 1914 paper. Whereby he methodically layouts his analytical technique and processes. Freud believes that the present mind contains the past, but often this is unrecognisable to the subject. Freud hypothesis that it is through remembering that we can work-through our questioning and habits of repetition.