Stage V: A Visual Interpretation of My Dreams

Timothy M. Arroyo
Governors State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://opus.govst.edu/theses
Part of the Art and Design Commons, and the Fine Arts Commons

Recommended Citation
http://opus.govst.edu/theses/53

For more information about the academic degree, extended learning, and certificate programs of Governors State University, go to http://www.govst.edu/Academics/Degree_Programs_and_Certifications/

Visit the Governors State Independent Film and Digital Imaging Department
This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses at OPUS Open Portal to University Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Student Theses by an authorized administrator of OPUS Open Portal to University Scholarship. For more information, please contact opus@govst.edu.
STAGE V

A Visual Interpretation of My Dreams

By

Timothy M. Arroyo

A.A.S., Robert Morris College, 1994

B.A., Columbia College, 1998

THESIS PROJECT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts,

With a Major in Independent Film and Digital Imaging

Governors State University

University Park, IL 60466

2015
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ............................................................................................................................................3  
Thesis ................................................................................................................................................4  
*Sincero* ..........................................................................................................................................17  
*Déjà vu* ..........................................................................................................................................18  
*Fish Boy* .........................................................................................................................................19  
*The Three Graces* ..........................................................................................................................20  
*The Corset* ......................................................................................................................................21  
*The Siren* .........................................................................................................................................22  
*Ecstasy* .............................................................................................................................................23  
*The Mad Hatter* .................................................................................................................................24  
*The Wish Master* ...............................................................................................................................25  
*Alex’s Compulsion* ..........................................................................................................................26  
*The Messenger* ..................................................................................................................................27  
*Only One Leads To You* ....................................................................................................................28  
*The Angel* .........................................................................................................................................29  
*The Apparition* .................................................................................................................................30  
*Eu’s Vision* ........................................................................................................................................31  
*An Unobtainable Outlet* .....................................................................................................................32  
APPENDICES ......................................................................................................................................33
ABSTRACT

*Stage V: A Visual Interpretation of My Dreams* is a project based on the visions of characters, which I have encountered during dream states. The title is derived from the fifth stage of sleep, also referred to as REM sleep for the stage in which dreaming occurs. This project has its basis in the psychology of dreams, and the interpretations of my own dreams. All imagery created for this project will be extracted from my personal dream journal entries, and my interpretations of them. I will photograph each element used in the final photographic illustrations, and I will use symbolism, metaphors, and titles for each piece to assist the viewer in identifying the purpose of the body of work, and hint at their interpretations. Some hints will be obvious and easy for the viewer to relate to, such as running in place, while others will be more complex as I rely upon my own interpretations of the dream imagery.

My thesis project is Fine Art based, consisting of digitally manipulated photographs and textures to create surreal environments, and enhancing the viewer’s sense of traversing a plane between the conscious and unconscious mind. I will produce 16 images for this project, and each will be printed onto photo rag Fine Art paper for a tactile texture to enhance the narrative, using archival pure pigment inks for longevity. Each print will be mounted onto 18” x 24” wood panels.
I have always been a ‘dreamer’; often having similar dreams as others such as dreams of falling, losing teeth, and being stuck in place. I have also had my share of nightmarish dreams, and had encountered the devil in two of them. I had not given any thought to documenting these dreams; in looking back I feel the reason for it was a lack of purpose for the imagery. Besides, I would often forget my dreams, and never really gave too much thought about their meanings.

My mother had purchased *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Sigmund Freud for me at a yard sale, when I was a teen. I read a portion of it, but felt that his interpretations were false and based on his own beliefs, and the idea of interpreting my own was not something that crossed my mind. I did not think about the symbolism within the dreams, or their origins in the ‘real’ world. However, as I matured I learned how to manipulate some of my dreams. For example, I learned how to move quickly in the reoccurring dreams where I was stuck in place, and I also learned how to fly, which came in handy in the dreams of falling. I feel that these manipulations arose out of a sense of survival. Someone once told me that if you ever hit the ground in your dream, you would die in real life. As much as I felt it was nonsense, at the same time it did make sense to me. I would often wake from the falling dreams, or nightmares, to find my heart racing uncontrollably, so I can see how if someone had a weak heart the dream may hold dire consequences on the physical body.
It wasn’t until 2001, when I had one of the most intense dreams of my life, which would lead me to documenting some of my most visually interesting dreams, as well as lead to the development of this Thesis concept; **Stage V: A Visual Interpretation of My Dreams**. I call the dream *Sincero* [see pg 17], which is also the same name I used for the image created from it. It has served as the signature image for this concept, and the inspiration in the creation of the other 15.

*Sincero* is one of my most telling self-portraits. In this particular dream, I was walking through a dimly lit black space, which I later referred to as a gallery. As I walked through this gallery, spotlights would turn on one at a time directed at individual pieces of art. There was a narrator in the darkness of background, whose voice I heard, but his face was never shown. As we walked through the gallery he would describe to me what we were looking at. If it were not for this voice I would have been the only person in the gallery, and probably have no idea what I was doing there. The narrator’s voice was eerily in the sense that it happened to be my own voice. I was essentially speaking to myself in the dream. But the dream became stranger when we came upon one particular piece. It was a bust on a pedestal, and the narrator spoke saying to me “This is *Sincero*….” He went on to explain to me what the piece meant, but I could not recall the meaning, because I immediately sketched out, and wrote down what I saw when I woke up. I felt that the visual was the most important part of the dream, and as I sketched it out I forgot the narrator’s descriptive words.
The piece I saw was a sculpture of my own bust sitting upon a stone pedestal. There was a rectangular cut in my chest, with a stage in place of my internal organs, with the exception of a heart. My hands reached forward and held open red velvet curtains on either side, and on the stage stood a puppet, which also resembled me. The puppet was suspended on strings, and stood boldly on the stage speaking loud and clear for all to hear. This recollection was the image that I sketched out, and since I had forgotten the words of the narrator I came up with my own interpretation of the piece. Which is that I have always been a very shy person, I have struggled in my communication skills since a very young age, and I was never able to speak to my parents, nor any loved ones for that matter, about anything of significance in my life. As I matured and weaved in and out of relationships; mostly due to my inability to communicate; I learned from those experiences taking away important lessons on how to work through my communications to develop a strong bond. I feel this image reflects that maturation process.

At the same time the two figures in the image are occupying the same space; one being controlling of the other. The larger figure occupies the physical space, but with a bit of reason we can conclude that the smaller figure couldn’t possibly occupy the same space physically, and that it is being used as a metaphor for the subconscious mind. With that reasoning, we can conclude that the smaller figure is occupying a metaphysical space existing only in our minds. The two figures are
in an apparent struggle for control of the mind and body, which is essential for the occurrence of psychomachia, or the battle of the souls.

I hope you can now appreciate the significance of this piece in this body of work. As for the title; Stage V; it was named for the fifth stage of sleep. The first four sleep stages are referred to as NREM (non-Rapid Eye Movement) sleep stages, and are the lighter and slower stages of sleep, which naturally lead up to the fifth stage, also known as REM sleep. In the image below [see Figure 1] I had created

Figure 1: Stages of Sleep graphic poster; developed as a supplement to formulate conceptual process.
a graphic poster to represent the five stages of sleep, which used keywords to represent various stages of dreams from the lucid dream to the intense dream, where I could be in control. I created this to provide direction for this project.

“During REM sleep we have significant brain activity along with muscle atonia, which means that our muscles are effectively paralyzed, except for the muscles that move the eyes, the diaphragm (for breathing), and the heart. During REM sleep we experience episodic bursts of rapid eye movements. This is the period when we experience dreams. If woken from this stage of sleep, you are likely to have vivid dream recall about 80 percent of the time. The best way to think of REM sleep is as a highly activated brain in a paralyzed body.”

As I learned how to document my dreams, for one using a pencil to write versus a pen, as the pen will stop writing when lying and writing up, I began to think about the interpretation of the dreams I was having. Symbolically I would encounter the number three in various forms in many of my dreams, as evidenced in some of the images from this project; such as the three fish in Fish Boy [p 19], the three women in The Three Graces [pg 20], the three faces in the The Siren [pg 22], the three keys and doors in Only One Leads To You [pg 28], and the three body segments in Eu's Vision [pg 31].

I wanted to know more about them, and so I took to the internet to find my

---

1 Renata Riha; “Sleep Your Questions Answered”; pg. 15; 2007; Dorling Kindersley Limited
answers. Unfortunately, there were many interpretations of the same image, or number in this case, and so once again I abandoned the notion of finding commonality amongst my dreams. Until one day when I experience the most vivid déjà vu walking down a hallway at a school I had taught at many years ago. I literally completed the sentence of a student whom I’ve never met; word-for-word! It was the strangest thing to ever happen to me. My initial conclusion was that I had to have heard that exact phrase subconsciously from another person at the same school, at some point. It was the only way to explain it, and it made complete sense to me.

It was this logic, which served as the basis for the image *Déjà Vu*, which is another self-portrait. The concept of this image is that the slide carriers superimposed within my head are holding slides, which represent collected thoughts and imagery from birth until the present. These images are stored in the subconscious mind only to be illuminated at various points in my life as dreams or déjà vus. I feel that the mental control I have acquired in my dreams, is because I am already consciously aware of some of the images in my head.

Now that I have provided an understanding of the concept behind this project, I’d like to discuss the actual imagery produced for it. Initially, I felt that this project were to serve as a form of therapy, where I could look into my thoughts and dreams and learn more about the meaning of my existence, but as I created *Sincero*, I learned that it was really about unleashing a form of creativity.
As I looked back at the significance of the symbolic number three in my dreams; I found it to be representative of creation in various forms, whether it be spiritual or embodied in creating new life [mother, father, and child].

In 2001, the year I developed this concept, Adobe released Photoshop 6, and made the application more excited by adding the Liquify filter to push, pull, and even destroy an image at the pixel level if having too much fun. There was an entire world of creativity to explore. Even so, in the creation of Sincero I had been presented with a challenge; a challenge to create something unique from a vision, and to create something no one has ever seen before. Another challenge was in how to handle the curtains I was holding open in the dream. For this I chose not to use curtains, and not use the Liquify filter to push the pixels around, but instead attempt to recreate a photographic technique using digital media, which is the Polaroid emulsion lift. In order to do this a print was made of my self-portrait, the emulsion was then cut down the middle of my body with a knife and manually pushed towards the hands, which created a natural appearance of wrinkled skin. The print was then scanned, and the manipulated section was digitally combined with the original in Photoshop. This is just one example of my efforts in challenging the technology, and pushing it to its limits. It was a very exciting exploration, which carries on in my work to this day. Although now my experiments are mostly in the output of an image, and how to make each photo one of a kind.
Each of the photos created for this series was the result of some form of exploration as a means to an end, because the photograph can have limitless artistic, and expressive possibilities. I have always kept that in mind whether I was experimenting in my personal work, or in my studies as a Master’s student. For example, my very first photographic inspirations were the works of photographer Jerry Uelsmann. Jerry is a master printer, and uses multiple negatives to create his unique photographs in the darkroom. In a presentation Jerry gave at a Society for Photographic Education conference he “urged photographers to consider the darkroom to be ‘a visual research lab; a place for discovery, observation and mediation … Let us not be afraid to allow for ‘post-visualization.’ By post-visualization I refer to the willingness on the part of the photographer to revisualize the final image at any point in the entire photographic process.”

My style of editing and Uelsmann’s are similar, however, the way we create our images are nothing like the other. My photos are created from digitized images photographed on film or digital cameras, and manipulated in software on a computer, whereas Jerry’s photos are shot on film and created via experimentation in the darkroom. I feel that I have more room for error in my work, as I can easily delete a photograph to replace it with another, or quickly change my vision with the click of a mouse. With that being said, I would have to agree with his notion of post-visualization, although at the same time, I personally

---

2 Robert Hirsch; “Transformational Imagemaking: Handmade Photography Since 1960” pg 53; Focal Press; 2014
stress Ansel Adams idea of pre-visualization, of knowing what an image would look like before the camera shutter is clicked, as this is obvious from the crude sketches I have made for various documented dreams [see Figure 2].

Figure 2: rough sketches from my journals for Sincero and Fish Boy.

This notion is great for a straight photograph, but when it comes to creating composites from multiple images; the sketch serves merely as a loose interpretation of an idea, which can become something even grander, as an idea can change from one moment to the next.

Although our works may differ, there are still other similarities in that “Uelmann’s darkroom creations revived the nineteenth-century art of combination printing. With consummate skill, he exposed his light-sensitive paper through a series of enlargers, each holding a different negative. The results, which can now be seen as the precursor of the Photoshop era of blending images, disturbed the conventions of the photographic time-space continuum. The work’s
innate photographic believability generates a psychological friction that viewers find fascinating.” ³ Which holds true when referencing works based on dreams.

I have found that one of the challenges of working with digital images is the notion of a three-dimensional space. This space exists within a photograph, albeit the photograph is two-dimensional by design. In order to create a successful photo composite; all images must be realized in three-dimensions. The x and y axes, or height and width of an image are always apparent, but the z axis has to be known to the creator of the images. The z axis is the depth of the image, it is the space where the shadows reside, it is what makes the image really come to life, and cause the viewer to question its existence. I believe that I have mastered this space to unite both space and time for the viewer in the creation of a seamless image, in a way that they may find themselves questioning if they have been somehow pulled into the dream along with me.

Each one of the images I have created utilizes a minimum of three photographs. Starting with the base image, or the photo onto which the composite is primarily built upon; then there are additional photos used to build up the scene, and each one has some sort of photographic texture applied at the end. The idea of the texture as a top layer is to provide a visual plane separating reality and the surreal work. The texture serves as a barrier separating the planes of the conscious and the unconscious mind, as if in a dream. This notion is further enhanced with the

³ Robert Hirsch; “Transformational Imagemaking: Handmade Photography Since 1960” pg 53; Focal Press; 2014
addition of a liquid coating applied over the print. The coating creates a tactile texture, which invites the viewer to interact with the art, essentially inviting them to become a part of the narrative.

Regarding the coating of my printed works; it is not applied as a gimmick, it is being utilized in this series to enhance the narrative of the dreamscapes. It was not an afterthought, however, the application of a coating, or embellishment as found on prints such as *The Three Graces* [pg 20] were applied in regards to creating an original work of art.

When I say ‘original’, I am speaking in terms of the distinction between an original print, and a reproduction of the image as some other form of output. Walter Benjamin writes in his 1936 article *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, “The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity”\(^4\), which I would argue is one of the most challenging considerations in working with digital images. In traditional film photography, the negative was always regarded as the original, but even the negatives were manipulated in their development times, or in the aid of dodging and burning in the darkroom for a perfect print. I do not wish to argue the semantics of the film original, but rather discuss the challenges of creating an original work of digital art with a basis in photography.

---

\(^4\) Walter Benjamin; “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”; Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung; 1936
In this current day of photographic output, which I prefer to use over the word printing, as there are many forms of output, which are not printed; a single image file may be used to reproduce hundreds, if not thousands of times with no apparent separation in quality. So the question may be asked of which is the original; is it the first print that was produced, or is it the image file? If so many exact duplicates can be made, then the file itself must be the original, which makes sense, but when a composite of no less than three photos is created, which one then becomes the original, and will this confusion have an impact on the inherent value of the image.

Walter Benjamin also notes that “Lithography enabled graphic art to illustrate everyday life, and it began to keep pace with printing. But only a few decades after its invention, lithography was surpassed by photography. For the first time in the process of pictorial reproduction, photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions, which henceforth devolved only upon the eye looking into a lens. Since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction was accelerated so enormously that it could keep pace with speech. A film operator shooting a scene in the studio captures the images at the speed of an actor's speech.”

In terms of digital capture, and digital output, there are literally hundreds of different means of capturing images, as well as outputting images. The internet

---

5 Walter Benjamin; “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”; Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung; 1936
has become a means of sharing imagery, and making an original file accessible to
the masses, and with each reproduction of said original comes the loss of it’s
‘aura’. Walter Benjamin also points out “that which withers in the age of
mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic
process whose significance points beyond the realm of art.”\(^6\) And goes on to say
that “even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one
element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it
happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to
which it was subject throughout the time of its existence.”\(^7\)

Therefore, the act of embellishing my prints was another decision made out of
necessity. I may have one file capable of producing thousands of exact duplicates,
but I will only have one printed piece, which will maintain its “presence in space
and time.”

\(^6\) Walter Benjamin; "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"; Zeitschrift für
Sozialforschung; 1936

\(^7\) Walter Benjamin; "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"; Zeitschrift für
Sozialforschung; 1936
Sincero
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
Deja Vu
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
Fish Boy
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
The Three Graces
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
The Corset
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
The Siren
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
Ecstasy
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
The Mad Hatter
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
The Wish Master
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
Alex’s Compulsion
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
The Messenger
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
Only One Leads To You
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
The Angel
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
The Apparition
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
Eu's Vision
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
An Unobtainable Outlet
18” x 24”
Archival Pigmented Inks on Photo Rag Paper
APPENDICES:

Equipment Used:
Canon 6D dSLR
Canon 40D dSLR converted to Infrared
Canon 70 – 200mm 2.8 lens
Canon 24 – 125mm lens
Lomography 85mm Petzval Art lens
HP z3100 printer with Lucia pure pigment inks

Output Supplies:
18” x 24” wood panels
3M 24” roll adhesive
Hahnemühle William Turner 310 Photo Rag Paper
Hahnemühle Matte Varnish for Canvas
Golden Heavy Gel Medium
Amaco Gold Leaf