Artists and their dream art

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INTRODUCTION

Dreams are visuals of the mind. They are a narrative type of media that carry information that is released through sleep. Visualizing dreams is sometimes difficult when the memory cannot do justice; but once remembered, they are often of interesting, joyous, frightening, mysterious or ridiculous natures. Dreams are visions and realizations that we all experience at various levels of life. As an artist, I am influenced by the ideas, imagery and experiences that happen in the dream world. My enthusiasm has been shared by other artists alike, in all eras of art history. I will discuss some of my work as well as other artists who have chosen to use dreams as an expression of their art. Gustave Courbet, Odilon Redon, and Giorgio de Chirico are among some of the artists I will discuss.

Many artists use dreamlike qualities but do not necessarily use dreams as stems for their ideas. They are very worthy of mentioning because they possess characteristics such as emotion, symbolism or fantasy in their work, that are important in dreamworks. I will point out dreamlike qualities that Salvador Dali, Rene Magritte, Max Ernst, and other artists exhibit in their work. Each of these artists has a wonderful way of expressing his or her ideas, which is an inspiration for me in my work.
CHAPTER I
CREATION OF DREAMWORKS

Sometimes, when lying in bed trying to release most of the day's stress, there are millions of thoughts that run through one's head. Dreaming can sometimes be something to look forward to: a new episode in life, or a tidbit of a wonderful experience which will flash in one's mind. A twitch will occur in a leg or arm. Blackness overcomes the mind. A few colored dots appear; the dots increase. They begin to create something, dancing here and there into an array of images that slowly come together, evolving new scenery. Although this seems as if hours have past, it has only been a matter of minutes. The ground starts moving. There is an obstacle ahead. Jumping over it is the only logical answer. Is it too big? Is it moving? Will it be easy? There is no choice. The obstacle cannot be avoided. Jump! The obstacle was too big. Awakened by the unsuccessful jump, it is a relief to know that falling did not occur: it was only the beginnings of a dream. Putting these visions into words can be a relatively easy task if the memory can do justice to the dreamed event. Expressing these feelings and visions into a piece of artwork is different. Communication must be expressed through the media.

If I choose to portray the impression of an event before a dream, I would start with a general subject most everyone had experienced. A good example is an obstacle in one's way. The legs are moving too fast
to stop or go around. One jumps! A great twitch darts through the body, awakening by the images portrayed in the mind.

To illustrate the construction of a piece before a dream, I will start by constructing a bed, which is an important part of the event before a dream. When the person has been abruptly awakened, the first thing he feels is the bed. The bed is reality. I will use clear acrylic plastic to cover the bed to give the illusion of being in a different and unreal situation, but still a bed. I will use some type of obstacle such as a barricade, a log, or a large sleeping animal. This obstacle will have to be oversized, proportionally larger than the bed itself to act as the dividing line between the dreamworld and the familiar bedroom. A direction of some kind will have to be indicated. The viewer's eye must be directed so that the dreamworld of running and meeting this obstacle will be observed first. Then the obstacle will stop the eye abruptly as if the sleeper has been awakened. From here, the viewer will observe the more realistic side of the piece and will realize that this is the reality of the dreamer, the bed.

"Your Bed is Your Lifesaver" is a piece portraying an incident after a dream (Illustration #1). Here I have used the bed to relate the viewer to the reality of sleep and dreaming. If a person has a nightmare, he is imagined to be tossing and turning restlessly in bed. Unpleasant scenes run past the mind, constantly developing into an exceedingly uncomfortable situation. Perhaps the dreamer is being chased by bad men with the intent to kill. I have distorted the bed slightly to convey the feeling of unease. The mattress is bent in a
crooked wave, the bedspread is in full movement, and the bed posts are bent over in the pressure of the situation. The dreamer has finally broken down or has been caught in evil clutches. The dreamer awakens in a panic, the vision of a soft pink life preserver is hanging sincerely overhead and the dreamer is safe at home in bed.

I have used the bed as a symbol of my thoughts and interests concerning dreams. The bed is a physical state of mind; it denotes sleep, slumber, repose, or to bed down. It may be interpreted in many ways; however, my interest in depicting the bed goes hand in hand with the other dreamworks I have created. The bed is an object whose function is for the purpose of resting one's body on a day-to-day basis. Sleep is the key word that makes the concept of the bed so important. Sleeping releases the unconscious areas of the mind into worlds and situations that can contain fantastic sequences of haphazardly associative imagery: dreams.

Gustave Courbet, a French Realist artist, expressed his interest in dreams and the unconscious in a similar manner. He completed a group of paintings that show sleeping, daydreaming, somnolent figures. This series can be thought of as a related group of images, intentionally painted to go beyond a descriptive view of reality. The paintings can function as significant studies of scientific thought of dreams and the unconscious, while at the same time reflecting traditions of sleeping models for the study of art. They also served as personal expressive representation of his own sentiment toward women.¹

There are many conflicting delineations of his artistic goals as well as personality traits. His interest in medical and scientific
considerations about sleep and dreams was overlooked by his contemporaries and even by art analysts of today. Some of his most famous works deal in the realm of sleep. Courbet wanted to make his paintings reflect his internal thoughts and goals while at the same time show his knowledge of scientific talk about the unconscious.  

Author Rene Huyghe analyzed the sleep series in a book he wrote on Courbet. He stressed that sleep served as a contrast to enhance the physicality of the women Courbet painted. Here he speaks of Courbet's painting "Sleeping Women" (Illustration #2):  

The two bodies are relaxed, immobile and deeply asleep, completely free of any thought or emotions so that their purely physical appearance is revealed in its undisturbed splendour. It seems as though Courbet's worship of the visible and concrete world has resulted in a 'leveling' approach to nature--he tends to repress the spiritual side of man because it is disturbing to the cult of the material. . . . It is strange that no one has noticed how central a role the theme of sleep plays in Courbet's work, and the way he keeps returning to it like an obsession. It is his most distinct consistent theme.  

Courbet's personality can be seen as thoughtful and complex. He was an artist who incorporated his seemingly simple subject matter with many allegorical and symbolic keys to his character as well as scientific and intellectual thoughts.
When I want to portray a dream directly within the dreamworld, I will use a little more abstraction in a piece. "Railroad Fright" is a good example (Illustration #3). This piece stems from a dream of being hit by a train. The structure of the piece resembles the railroad trestle and track. It blatantly displays the yellow and black stripes of railroad crossing gates. A fluid plastic road is gracefully positioned over the tracks. In a blind instance, a bloody red object of no particular shape or representation rudely interrupts the clean space of the road. It is slightly violent with its two small bloody shards. However, the concept is more violent than the piece itself. Sometimes in dreams when something dangerous or hazardous is about to occur, the impact of the occasion seems to be of smaller consequence than in waking life. So the piece I have created does not appear as violent as a true train accident would be in waking life.

Abstraction of a situation is an important aspect in my work concerning the dreamworld. Sometimes I feel that it is unnecessary to tell a story using readily identifiable objects. It helps to convey the feeling of situations as seen in dreams because oftentimes dreams will appear fuzzy and confusing. In "Railroad Fright", what is the unfamiliar object that has apparently had an accident? Was it an animal? Poor thing! Has someone lost their red coat? In dreams, questions are often left unanswered.

"Mild Crash With Little Result" (Illustration #4) is a piece that is also associated with the dreamworld and the realm of abstraction. It is a situation created to give the impression that something has happened, but not within the waking world. In this case, a graceful table top is
disturbed by two abstracted forms in the shape of patterned ribbons. The impact the ribbons have upon the table top is just a little jolt, causing slight upset with the smaller table atop. The impact is present with a reaction to follow. These are characteristics of dreams, a slow motion of unpredictable events.

Giorgio de Chirico is an artist who depicts his subjects in a way that is often very incomprehensible and is no longer an illustration of an actual experience. He takes invented forms and situates them in unusual fictitious space. He creates worlds of Italian elegiac squares, with silent statues and vast shadows. It is a dreamworld in his own imagination, recalling heightened sorcery in the depiction of deep distorted background perspectives with the presence of some sort of object. "The Conquest of the Philosopher"\(^5\) (Illustration #5) is an example of a dreamwork that holds these characteristics. The verticals in the painting—the tower, the buildings—are used with an exaggerated perspective to create tension somewhere. A locomotive, an image Chirico uses over and over, chugs by. The time is 1:28. Has someone missed the train? The shadows of two figures mysteriously show from behind the building. These shadows, in addition to the shadows the buildings cast create a whole and new story within a story. What is the significance of the artichokes? The out-of-context vegetable curiously sits in the foreground of the painting.

A wonderful description of Chirico's "The Melancholy of Departure"\(^6\) (Illustration #6) by James Thrall Soby vividly demonstrates Chirico's dreamworld imagery:
"The Melancholy of Departure" conveys the panic of dreams in which a train must suddenly, against all odds, be caught for reasons of terrifying importance. Yet it can also suggest the strange calm which comes after hope of reaching the platform has been given up, and there is nothing to do but return to a vast station and wait for time to become meaningful again.\footnote{7}

This is an important thought Soby has pointed out about Chirico's obsession with trains. Chirico displays trains repeatedly in his work. Perhaps it is a dream that consistently haunts him, just as the theme of 'the crash' haunted me in my dreams. With the use of abstract elements in his work, Chirico's dreams become transcendental in their reality.
CHAPTER II
FANTASY PLAYS A PART

Fantasy is something that can be considered a part of the dream-world in the daytime. Daydreaming can easily turn any situation into a fantastic materialization. Do cups and plates in the kitchen sink dance about while there is no one watching? Maybe the furniture moves to enjoy each other's company. Maybe the clothes in the closet hurry back to their original places upon hearing a person enter the room. No one notices objects slightly misplaced. The changes are so insignificant and irrelevant to busy, occupied people. But maybe it happens.

Two pieces I did on this subject depict these types of situations. "Kitchen Cups at Play" and "Window" (Illustration #7 and #8), depict, respectively, two cups dancing subtly over a watery tablecloth, and a window mysteriously opening up when no one is home. These two works are very simple in content; nevertheless they indicate a power of their own which include movement, mystery and delusion.

Painter Donald Roller Wilson vividly displays a fantasy standpoint in the dreamworld (Illustrations #9 and #10). In his graphic use of photo-realism, matchsticks and pencils explore the room as well as the air contained in the room with the freedom of uncaged living beings. The fantasy can lie directly within the everyday life in which one lives. Electric pickles guide the way for a man in his suddenly electric boots to experience something only found in dreams. The realism Wilson uses
in his paintings gives a clearcut outlook on the subject of fantasy. One looks at these paintings and wonders, "Are they photographs?" Was the artist fortunate enough to catch the seemingly inanimate objects in action? Dreams and fantasy can sometimes share a fine dividing line with reality. When waking from a vivid dream, one often wonders if the event actually occurred or if it was only a dream.

Odilon Redon, throughout his career as an artist, showed a great interest of dreams in his charcoal drawings, pastels, and paintings. Redon said, "Fantasy is also the messenger of the unconscious . . . nothing in art is achieved by will alone. Everything is done by docilely submitting to the arrival of the 'unconscious' . . ." Redon worked in a fantastic world in which he exhibited the clarity of one who has visions and treated his imaginative situations as if they were real occurring phenomena. He said, "I cannot be denied the credit of giving life to my most unreal creations." Many of these creations took the form of monsters. "The Smiling Spider" (Illustration #11) is a charcoal drawing of a sly looking, smiling spider which possesses human-like facial characteristics. What universe does this creature come from? This projection of images are those seen in the most unusual dreams and nightmares.

Redon's enthusiasm for fantasy and dreams is a wonderfully simplistic description of the real world. His unelaborate use of fabricated characters helps me to more strongly convey my intentions for depicting dreamworld. He uses a magical power to give life to his many fantastic representations of life and nature.
CHAPTER III
CHOOSING A DREAM

Most of my ideas for my work stem from dreams that I have experienced. While having the ability to recall many of them, there are only a few dreams I choose to create a piece about. The piece will usually illustrate one moment in a series of events. The dream must contain easily-identifiable images. If images in a dream are too abstract, it is hard for me to decide exactly what I want to portray. If the images and story of a dream are more graphic, I can take those images and include them in works that are more clear to myself and the viewer. The content of the entire piece may be confusing, but clearer images result in a clearer perception of what was intended. The content of dreams is often very ambiguous in the meaning and/or understanding of the dream. If I choose to create a piece about a dream with this kind of nature, I must make it clear that ambiguity is the main intent of the dream (Illustration #13).

Oftentimes I will have a recurring dream, and a subject will come to me again and again but not necessarily in the same context. For example, I may dream that I must get to a very special event. I am usually pressed for time and cannot find the appropriate attire. The clothing I wear must be correct for the occasion in order for me to give the right impression. I stand in front of a large closet with more than
enough to choose from, but nothing is right. Time is ticking by. I try on one outfit; it is not right. I try on another. It is not right either. This goes on until I am too late.

I would choose to create a piece on this specific subject because it causes anxiety in me. The more thought I put into the subject, the more resolved the situation becomes in my mind. If a dream is often recurring, it is important enough for me to make a statement about it.
CHAPTER IV
SIZE RELATIONSHIPS

When images or objects with different size relationships are juxtaposed in a work of art, one can often experience confusion. A hallucinatory effect can overtake the work. In the same way, dreams have this effect on the mind. An example of this idea is a painting by Dorothea Tanning titled "Family Portrait" (Illustration #12). In this uncanny picture, the four beings seem to amount to a family; however, in a very unreal way. The family members' physical size relationship to one another is extremely out of proportion. The size of the daughter is in proportion to the table, chair, the dog, and the room. The gruff-looking mother is much smaller, with her tiny face peering through her large head and body as she feeds the large begging dog. To the daughter, the dog is just a small family pet. Hanging monstrosely overhead is an image of the father. He invades the entire space of the room with his blank glasses hovering over the table. Is he a spirit? His presence is almost ominous. As the daughter stares blindly into space, one gets the impression she is the one who is dreaming this whole situation.

I have constructed a piece that contains various different size relationships to create confusion and dreamlike qualities. In "Baby/Dog Confusion" (Illustration #13) a large, flat paper-doll-like mother with her dog at her side are poised over a set of bowling-pin arranged
babies. They are all contained within the limits of a giant playpen rocker with large playhead washers for the babies' amusement. Underneath, rows of babies watch the giant baby-filled dogbone with almost an amusing joy. Are the babies the issue of this piece? Is the dog and the bone the issue? This type of confusion is recurrently present in the dreamworld.

Salavador Dali exploits devices that bring emotional feelings of confusion, paranoia and nervousness in his surrealistic work. Dali uses a commonplace vocabulary of everyday life and changes it into descriptive nightmares in a disturbing metaphorical sense. He can take a normal action such as eating at the dinner table, and transform it into the materials of a bizarre drama. "Autumn Cannibalism" (Illustration #14) depicts two figures executed in a way where they can easily become interchangeable. The identities of the cannibalistic figures are dissolved into polymorphic beings. The first image can replace the second image at any given moment of perception. This induces a paranoid state in the viewer who is already confused about what he has initially seen. "Nothing is what it seems to be because everything is really something else."

Dali's paintings are viewed and remembered in a vague and uncomfortable way. Unconscious symbols such as meat folding softly over the edge of a table or a spoon dipping easily into a milky body part indicate commonplace notions transformed into frightening images. Hard geometric forms change into soft curvilinear shapes with deep, rounded shadows that disturb safe, rational reality. We are left feeling
confused and nervous; his cinematic style involves us too closely for comfort.

Dali utilizes size relationships in his work in a very natural manner. In "Autumn Cannibalism", the figures are initially distorted so that the knife held by one of the hands is proportional to it, but the hand is out of proportion to the rest of the figures and objects. Dali's main intent is to confuse the viewer. Size relationship is a tool he adds to the list of elements that bring on different emotional responses to the viewer.
THE USE OF SYMBOLISM IN DREAMWORKS

When I use symbolism in my work, I do not use the same symbols described in dream analysis by Freud, Jung, or any other psycho-analyst. My symbols are of my own invention, helping me to say the things that are important to me in my work. Symbols make up a large part of dream analysis but I feel that I must analyze the symbols in my dreams in such a way as to create the impression I felt while I was dreaming. I want to depict my dreams, not analyze them.

In "Baby/Dog Confusion" (Illustration #13), there are some symbols that tell the story of the piece. The story is this: I once dreamed that I had a baby in my arms. Also my dog was present. In some instances in the dream I felt as if I were a very regimented mother, teaching her child to grow up in the proper manner. However, intermittently throughout the dream, the baby was absent, and only the dog was present. Then many babies appeared, happily doing what babies do. I stood there over them as the baby sitter. Oftentimes people without children have pets they treat as children, babying them and teaching them to be obedient. Considering this, a great confusion came over me as I thought about which situation actually existed in my dream.

I came to the conclusion that the ambiguity was the whole point of the dream. In "Baby/Dog Confusion", the large dogbone filled with babies symbolizes the toy that babies play with the 'Ultimate Rattle'.
However, one very infrequently finds a rattle for an infant in the shape of a dogbone. But, a dog's toy frequently takes this shape. So the symbol of the baby-filled dogbone has an ambiguous meaning. Is the dog the true root of the situation in being a substitute for a child? I have tried to illustrate the mystification of my dream.

Another piece I made that deals mainly with symbols is "That Shrine Out There, What's It For?" (Illustration #15). This piece was created in honor of a fictitious supernatural being I call the 'Dream God'. I created this shrine imagining it to be of monumental scale. It sits out in a field of tall grasses and has been neglected for years and years. It later becomes a tourist attraction with people visiting it, amusing themselves by trying to decide what its purpose may have been. Little is known about why it was made. People travel to see the shrine but do not understand its existence; just as many tourists travel to different countries to see shrines about which they have no background information. They see it only because it is the attraction to see while one is visiting that particular country.

The symbols on the shrine carry the importance of its existence. The four large figures on the legs of the main structure symbolize four generalized states of being that play roles in my dreams. One figure is shown crouched, hiding the head with the arms and hands. This signifies cowardice--being afraid of pain or danger. Another figure is shown passively standing with extremely droopy shoulders. This denotes a lack of resistance to a situation; not active, but acted upon. The figure with the outspread arms and legs suggests energy and enthusiasm, a lively interest, and excitement. The last figure is one of
a dog. This signifies animal, or animal instincts that are often present in the human being. The smaller symbols along the top of the structure are ideas or objects I have used in other works concerning my dreams.

All of these symbols are impressions reflecting circumstances that continually appear in my dreams, as well as other people's dreams. They are the basis from which I start my ideas for new dreamworks. Even though the viewer may not be able to interpret these objects in the same way I have, the intent of the piece for the viewer is to observe a shrine. This is the essence of the dream. A visitor to the shrine observes the structure but does not understand its total meaning. Only the creator knows its semantics. However, it is still honored.

Max Ernst is sometimes considered an artist of the depths of dreams and the unconscious. He pursues his artistic allusions often-times in symbolic motifs. He juxtaposes unrelated subjects to one another, forming a meaning through symbols. This is not to say that Ernst deals mainly in symbolism; however it does play a part in his work. In "St. Cecilia (The Invisible Piano)"\(^{15}\) (Illustration #16) Ernst takes his ideas and uses them for visual indication of the unconscious and the dreamer. The female figure is walled-in, with a large masonry structure built around her. Each brick possesses an eye, while the woman's eyes are covered by the wall, preventing natural contact with the environment.
In a book written by Uwe Schneede about Max Ernst, a passage discusses "St. Cecilia" in symbolic expression:

The fact that the masonry has eyes has a relevance to physical blindness; even he who is unable to see his visions; and when an individual possess the eyes of the imagination, objects have eyes to see 'him': The name of "St. Cecilia" has overtones of 'caecitas'. cécité, blindness. Max Ernst was later to say of frottage that it was a 'means of ridding oneself of one's blindness' (bib. 64). Dissatisfaction with merely optical perception leads to a search for complex possibilities of experience, in which the visible and the unconscious mingle. This interpretation becomes a theme in its own right, which finds symbolic expression in the motif of the walled-in figure.16

Ernst was absorbed with the image of the eye throughout his life as a painter. This obsession centered around the Oedipus Complex and the idea of blindness and/or sight. Oedipus blinds himself when he discovers that he had married his mother and killed his father. This is a symbolic way Ernst uses the myth to depict the loss of sight, as in "St. Cecilia."
EMOTION

Emotion is an element in the visual arts that artists feel important in their work. The viewer can experience the work as well as enjoy or object to its contents. "Zoo Viewers' Heartbreak" (Illustration #17) shows an emotional quality of pity and emptiness where stiff helpless animals are posed on small plastic platforms. Their dreams are of freedom but they are doomed to live in this environment for the rest of their lives. The present atmosphere is a tamed panic to escape the limitations of the zoo-like structure/building. Overhead are two plastic, pseudo-people, observing the animals in their sadness.

I have created an atmosphere that brings the viewer into the realm of a zoo-confined animal. The animals are more real-like than the identity-less figures observing on the outside. The viewer can relate more to the animals than to the faceless, unreal people, and allows the viewer to feel the emotions of the animals.

Rene Magritte does not necessarily deal in depicting dreams; however, most of his works carry dream content that emphatically exists in the dream world. Magritte as well uses emotion to carry out his fantasy situations with very strange contents. He plays optical games with the viewer, hoping to arouse a new perspective in his use of everyday but often unusual objects. An example of this is "The Fair Captive"17 (Illustration #18), a painting of a large easel and painting
Zoo Viewers Heartbreak", Christine Clark, 1983.
on a beach. There are a few unusual occurrences in this painting, the most outstanding element being the flaming tuba. The tuba is an image often recurring in many of Magritte's work. It is seen out of its normal context, which tends to display a disquieting presence. The fact that the tuba is on fire is even more distressing because it takes a turn from the normal behavior of a musical instrument.

The second element that carries a definitive emotional quality is the painting-within-the-painting. Are we looking at a painting of the exact landscape behind the painting? Or are we looking at an open picture frame set on an easel? If this is the case, then where is the rest of the easel? The flames from the burning tuba leave a reflection on the canvas which tends to confuse the issue just a little more. "... we are brought again to the notion of the canvas both as a pane of glass which allows the spectator to 'see through' reality, and as a metaphor for painting as a window on reality ..." Magritte's work can direct a viewer's emotional state to react to a given situation. This added element of his already quizzical and striking work intrigues and inspires me to look at the emotional facet of art.
CONCLUSION

Artists use dreams or dreamlike ideas in their work as imaginative inspirations. The mystical experiences one can become involved in are endless. I want the viewer to become entangled in the visions I have contained in my subconscious, keeping interests in illusive states. Salvador Dali insists on controlling the spectator in a confused and uncomfortable way; while Gustave Courbet allows the physical presence of sleeping figures to invite one into a dreamworld. A parallelism to this idea lies in the use of the bed. In my work, I use the bed to denote sleep, dreaming, the unconscious or the state of being in a dream.

Oftentimes artists feel the need to release subconscious anxieties. The most logical solution to this release is through actual managing of media. Expression is a great gift, especially when one can portray his or her thoughts through art.

Dreamworks show different points of view and different inventive directions that only the imagination can create. These directions rest on emotion, symbols, abstraction and fantasy. In any way illustrated, dream art is an interesting contribution to the art world with an endless number of possibilities. Pictoral statements concerning dreams of the unconscious put the real world aside; reality is encountered daily with allowances for a little fantasy in life. I am not satisfied with the mere depiction of external objects. I want to express my concern of
dreams in an unreal and fanciful mode. I feel the need to amplify a subconscious experience and elevate my mind into the region of mystery; along with the anxiety of the often unresolved dream. I want the viewer to see the unexpected appearances of my work which hopefully verges on the enigma.
FOOTNOTES


2. Ibid.


6. Ibid., plate 24.

7. Ibid., p. 38.


11. Ibid., p. 30.


16. Ibid., p. 52.


18. Ibid., p. 99.


