

**Encrypted Reverie:
A Visual Language of the Unconscious**

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April 16, 2025

“Perhaps life needs to be deciphered like a cryptogram.” – André Breton, Nadja

Introduction

Inspired by Spiritualism and automatic practices, my work explores the impact of the unconscious through the emotional lenses of tenderness, surreality, and paranoia. Carl Jung (1969) defines the unconscious as “the sum of all those psychic processes and contents which are capable of becoming conscious but are momentarily out of consciousness” (p. 3). This definition has guided my interest in revealing what lies hidden behind awareness. Navigating multiple mediums and adopting a mindset of surrender, I interrogate predictability, invite ambiguity, and allow scientific ‘unknowns’ to confuse and confound me.

In my practice, I respond to experiences that can’t easily be articulated through language—pulling from dreams, unfiltered thoughts, visceral sensations, memory fragments, and anxieties brought on by urban alienation. My creative work is connected to the broader human experience of curiosity and the inevitability of internal and external suffering. I examine the inherent biases of individual awareness or incognizance, which can be an informative tool for understanding impulses, desires, and feelings that deeply provoke our unconscious. The resulting artworks are encrypted with symbols, reveries, and experiences unique to the maker, making for a sweetly surreal yet haunted visual landscape.

Navigating Academia, Urban Life, and the Automatic

I grew up in a small township in northeastern Ohio. Here, the only nonsense that prevailed was the early morning rowdiness of the rooster. Cincinnati provided a large-scale community, the caveat being crickets no more, sirens and claustrophobia galore. Notwithstanding, this transition became vital to my growth as an artist. Urban overstimulation catalyzed a deep need to listen inward. Searching for authenticity amid the noise, I turned to automatic drawing.

André Breton’s Manifesto of Surrealism (1924/1969) defines automatism as “thought’s dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations” (p. 26). In everyday life, we engage in subtle automatic acts—biting our nails, doodling, finishing melodies in our heads. For me, automatism became a rich site where control and chaos converge.

My earliest automatic artworks took the form of lithographs. In *Spaghettification* (2022), I depicted a wizard on a train being sucked into a black hole shaped like a kidney bean. Also pictured: a citrus slice, an amoeba, a headless form, and a fly. A lyric from the “Cha-Cha Slide” is scrawled beside a handwritten question that gnawed through my unconscious: “What do you do with too much love?” This piece was a confrontation with the unconscious. Absurdity and sincerity mingled on the same substrate. The language of the image was spontaneous but not arbitrary. Black hole factoids, song lyrics, and cartoonish elements were embedded in my psyche. Automatism speaks the language of the subterranean psyche, where impulse aches to reach the conscious surface.

Night-time, too, plays an essential role in my process. When the diurnal world rests, nocturnal intuition stirs. Much of my work emerges from these liminal states between wakefulness and dream states. In this capacity, my critical mind softens, and instinct takes over.

Influences: Varo and af Klint

Two women artists, Remedios Varo and Hilma af Klint, support a large part of my creative leanings. In Nancy G. Heller’s *Women Artists: An Illustrated History* (2003), I discovered Varo’s *Creation of the Birds*. At first glance, it reads like a fairytale. Upon closer examination, it reveals a deep psychological influence. Janet Kaplan (1981) notes that Varo’s subjects often function as “schematic self-portraits” (p. 38), personified in strange forms that relate to Varo’s memory and identity.

Varo’s Catholic upbringing, paired with her father’s training in technical drawing, equipped her with the tools to build surreal narratives that were both spiritual and structured. She brought technical precision to mystical dreamscapes, leaving logic behind and creating a space for meticulous visual poetry to triumph. Her art bridges gaps between rational and irrational illustrated realities. The resulting tension is something I aim to achieve in my own compositions.

Hilma af Klint was introduced to me through the same Heller text. Her works stood out for their energy, fluidity, and symbolic significance. Long before the Surrealists formalized automatism, af Klint was painting complex spiritual diagrams derived from séances and premonitions. Her work was often grouped with Kandinsky or Mondrian, though her process was entirely different. Rather than abstracting nature, she channeled the unseen.

According to “Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future” (Mancoff, 2018), af Klint believed her works were guided by higher spiritual beings she called “The High Masters.” Her paintings carried visual codes, symbolic structures, and esotericism, depicting a metaphysical sphere understood through her intuition. She once wrote, “The pictures were painted directly

through me, without any preliminary drawings and with great force” (af Klint, as cited in Heller, 2003, p. 45).

Despite her original innovations, af Klint’s legacy was sidelined, as were those of Georgiana Houghton and other spiritualist women artists. The assumption that automatism began with André Masson or Breton erases these early visionaries. Their art wasn’t simply aesthetic; it embodied metaphysical labor.

Decrypting Reality: Spiritualism, Disintegration, and Unseen Forces

To decode the psychological framework behind my intuitive works, I draw on contemporary discourse and historic surreal writings. One particularly influential resource is the Disintegrator podcast, particularly the episode “The Great Outdoors (w/ Gordon White)” (2023). White explores how our relationship with the nonhuman world—spirits, landscapes, ancestors—is conditioned by modernity’s disconnection from myth, specifically in the West. The episode discusses how technological and social acceleration disrupts our sense of fluid evolution. I find artistic inspiration in the connection between apathy and entropy in a technologically consumed milieu.

Feelings of paranoia may result in this disconnection. Negative implications of paranoia can be re-interpreted as a sense-making mechanism in the absence of spirituality. It registers patterns, draws symbolic connections, and adds poetic structure to daily life. This form of pattern recognition mirrors the unconscious process of surrealist creation. Abandoning previously unwavering atheistic ideals, I investigate coincidence rather than dismissing it.

André Breton’s “Nadja” (1928/1994) further informs my conceptual language. In the first pages, Breton, as the narrator, opens with, “Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I ‘haunt’” (p. 11). This haunting is metaphorical and metaphysical. Our identities are shaped by who we remember, who we affect, and who or *what* we carry unconsciously. This idea became central to my painting *Whom I Haunt...*

Materiality, Process, and Personal Accounts

This past December, coincidences—clad in the clandestine—haunted me in waves. Looking through my sketchbooks, I encountered several ghostly motifs. In one, a procession of curiously melancholy ghosts float along a crooked road. In another, a tall phantom drinking coffee reaches its amorphous limbs toward telephone poles. Later that month, during a visit to the Boston Public

Library, I encountered a painting near the Puvis de Chavannes Gallery. On a large canvas, two angelic beings—one joyful, one mournful—gazed at a nineteenth-century telegraph wire. (1893) This image echoed my own motifs. That same month, rereading “Nadja,” I revisited Breton’s proverb. These alignments led to the creation of *Whom I Haunt...*, a work exploring the transmission of memory and communication.

In this piece, I slathered layers of acrylic over an old oil painting, rejecting traditional reverence for canvas permanence. Hauntings are not forever...they’re liminal, fragile. Over time, the ghost formed, powerlines and skyscapes morphed, and surreal elements emerged. The work responded to my unconscious rather than any fixed concept. I trusted intuition as the final and continual editor.

Golf Ball Apocalypse, a smaller canvas, derived from a vision invoked during a state of night-time delirium. Conjured by memories of golf course maintenance, a pink figure—formerly blue—emerged in the intermediary between wakefulness and dormancy. The figure mowed the fairways at night, smoking a cigar and sporting PPE ear muffs adorned with a single cut daisy. This melancholic groundskeeper, burdened by monotonous mowing, became a symbol of spiritual stagnation and ecological loss. Around him, birds flee. The painting captures the tension between labor and wildness...the absurdity of human control over nature.

Another mixed-media work, *Are You Free After Midnight*, critiques the rigidity of time and institutional power. A welded steel spiderweb houses a plywood “cell” where pill bugs are trapped, referencing psychiatric incarceration. A Ginsberg quote from “Howl” (1956) reverberates: “...who threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot for Eternity outside of Time...” (p. 15). Oil-painted, an additional billowing window, and a visible moon suggest a potential escape, either metaphorically or intentionally.

Lastly, *The Wind, The Weight* embodies a personal memory. On a cold night after working downtown, I spotted a plastic bag tangled in a tree. Its stillness against the winter sky brought unexpected peace to my routine trek—a journey usually hindered by feminine fears. Reconstructing that moment, I painted the bag on glass and threaded braided plastic through holes cut on a waterjet. The fragility of the glass, suspended by the very plastic it depicts, echoes key contradictions: humanity and nature, contamination and comfort, burden and buoyancy.

Conclusion

‘Encrypted Reverie’ is a dream logic built from tenderness and terror. My work honors the unconscious not as chaos but as communication...a coded language where symbols whisper truths too temperamental for clarity. Through the influence of artists like Hilma af Klint and

Remedios Varo, and with the guidance of surrealist texts and spiritualist inquiries, I have cultivated a practice of intuitive deciphering.

The unconscious is not a black void but a densely populated terrain. In my visual practice, each line is a lyric, each artwork a séance, each composition a haunting. In a world demanding productivity and legibility, my work insists on mystical reverence. It becomes an encrypted refuge of sensation and yearning. My art prioritizes intrinsic and felt experiences, abandoning rigid interpretation.

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