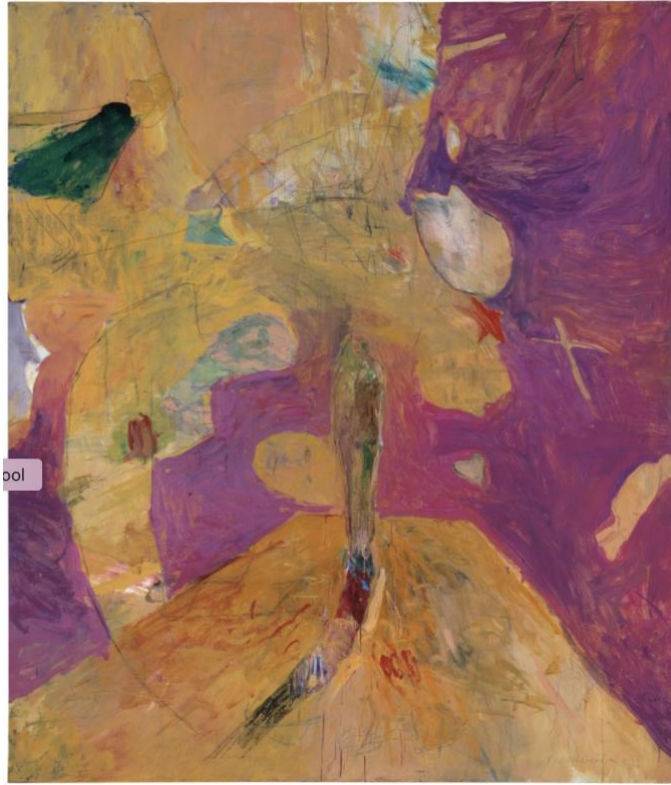


Nathan Oliveira, *Nude in Environment I*, 1962

To see this painting is to think of the Strangeness of a dream, perhaps even a kind of vertiginous nightmare.



Introduction to themes and the visual; what we are seeing –

- 1) Dreams and History
- 2) The Figure, The Nude;
- 3) Religiosity

A) Some kind of prophetic, epiphonic experience – maybe even portentous in the palpability of that early 1960s historical moment

B) There is an uncanny-ness, a kind of metallic-misted mirage of a landscape, a subsuming feeling

C) Legible Figures and faces emerge, as do illegible yet recognizable symbols; things merge
Notice the presences of recognizable symbols: an emerging cross, a retreating heart, a red star – American *or* Communist-like – who are we to say or know, a Dorothy-like young girl in a green dress cyclonically spinning in this *Wizard of Oz*-like yellow hued tornado beginning and ending, where, we don't know

So,

A) What are we seeing, and how are we *guided* to be seeing?

B) Why is this person painting like this?

1) An interior space, maybe a bedroom with all materiality evacuated – there is no bed, no windows, no stationary objects

2) Two main colors envelop the space of the canvas

- 3) Some strange kind of almost ambulatory vertical figure occupies the center of the picture frame
 - 4) A vertiginous muted yellow dream-like cloud seems to bracket the figure
- The quixotic nature of dreams, fantasy – a push towards defamiliarizing one's own interior world; the stasis of things

How is this the case? Was there a history or tradition of this kind of depiction?

History of interiors (Van Gogh 'Bedroom in Arles,' 1889; Matisse's 'The Red Room,' 1908; Max Ernst, 'The Master Bedroom It's Worth Spending a Night There' 1920)

Each of these paintings addresses the vividness of colors, palpability, strangeness of interior space, the interior world of the artist; Oliveira would have surely been familiar

Thinking of these formative figures

I then think of

- a) dream worlds
- b) birth of psychoanalysis and Freudian interpretations of the world
- c) the expressive nature of one's own immediate experiencing of the world, effusive feeling and an emotiveness vividly on display in 'Nude in Environment I' from 1962
- d) THUS, The triangulated **worldscape** of Surrealism meets abstraction, meets personal expressions of *Being* in the World

A bedroom in disarray, floorboards, dream clouds and an purple starry night scratched into existence with Van Gogh-like brushwork

This is the, "scene;" great. The environment, the context within the painting, of the painting – a kind of frame within a frame.

But the title, the 'Nude in Environment I?' What is this? Where is this? Who is this?

In the late 1950s – a turn toward abstracted figuration was not altogether an isolated painterly gesture

He had been painting these types of ethereal glassy effervescent figures emerging from different kind of landscapes starting in the 1950s

Her dream, her smoky figure and world of dream shown with no demarcated beginning or end

Her sensuous multi-colored body softly floating along the floor

A reflection seems to also emerges in the floorboards – the scar, or wound the canvas.

Look at the sinuous shape of her body and its reflected slice in the ground; sickle-like in the repeated cut in the floor boards – the foreground of the painting

The soft fractures of her own mirrored identity slash the ground with a thick red, darkened pinks and black claws

Again then her reflected self seems to resonate off these purple walls and bleed into a vastly expansive thought-bubble of sorts

Notice the two matching curved and thick painterly lines

Where did this fascination come from? The figure, the women? – De Kooning and the history of art more broadly

Oliveira had a conversation with Willem de Kooning in the mid 1950s about painting.

De Kooning relayed something about his own process and Muse,

'I was once at a party he said, and was introduced to a beautiful woman...enamored and talking together I then turned momentarily away, when I turned around, she had disappeared.' De Kooning wanted to keep *this* in mind when painting – something ineffable, delicately sublime, the beauty of the ephemeral

For Oliveira, I think, he wanted to also see this woman, to feel her, to know that *Muse* – this kind of mirage of a person or maybe even beautifully disappearing Idea, an Idea in repose and subtle; an otherness or mirroring of his own self

This woman – *de Kooning-esque* (abstract, expressive and surreal) – emerges at the center of the Oliveira's *'Nude in Environment I'* painting

I think there is a kind of Religiosity – the sacred, the divine, the prophetic – which greets the everyday, the mundane, the banal in this magnetizing work

So we now can see this Virgin Mary type woman in the center of his canvas here

We are Lost in Oliveira's dream world, *or*, maybe we offered a painting whose interior logical want us to dream, to imagine with it; to feel a kind of sublime softness, a kind of alchemic magic in a disappearing lone figure

The woman's body, like the many disparate disappearing heads in the cloud storm above, seems to dissolve – the apparition of her body floating above

Maybe then it is not a question of meaning or legibility in the painting; or even demarcating spaces and figures – an emptied out room or a nearly unrecognizable featureless body

Rather instead, the stakes are something more sacred

We are offered to see a divine apparition, a holy figure almost resurrected Jesus-like with no necessary materiality

And so it is open-ended questions of absence and presence, and invitations into faith and seeing that make sense of this complicated painting

Eakins Cross Clinic

First appearance

Army Medical

Also Wilsey and Bontecou photographs and ghostly building

The picture is haunted by the wounds of war—a collective memory of male bodies damaged and maimed by carnage: a uniquely American understanding of anatomical bodies and medical excavation; religious redemption through violence; and a conflation of moral sacrifice and masculine endurance in battle.