

SANGUINE HUSK

at Rumpelstiltskin

“Chances are you would’ve never found your first apartment. Never discovered your favorite punk band, spouted your first post-structuralist literary jargon, bought that unfortunate futon sofa, discovered Sam Shepard or charted the perfidies of elected officials. Never made your own hummus or known exactly what the performance artist Karen Finley did with yams that caused such an uproar over at the National Endowment for the Arts. Without it, you would’ve never discovered phone sex services or honed your antipathy to authority and gentrification.

“One measure of contrarian vitality is the certitude with which diehards of any era can say exactly when its quality went downhill. For devotees, the golden age is always the one just past. So the story, again, is the same: we’re all standing on shaky ground, and the trucks are rumbling in the distance. The myth insists on progress: bigger and better and more all the time.

“This kind of distortion, this state of inarticulate contempt for the present and fear of the future, is essentially nostalgia. It’s typically in concert with a yearning for order, constancy, safety, and community – qualities that were last enjoyed in childhood and are retroactively imagined as gracing the whole of the time before one’s birth. I have long imagined death’s approach as the swell of a wave – a towering wall of blue.

“The myth’s nostalgia, however, is not founded on regret for vanished coziness and civility, but for vanished grit and uncertainty. To accept the present – to *not* indulge in this nostalgia – is to be complicit. To be one of them. To confront that you are in fact an inte-

gral part of the death you grieve. A city that we all helped replace with another city. Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat.

“The other group that likes the way it’s going is the army of amateur landlords – the buy-to-let brigade. I’m sure some of them are perfectly nice, but most of the ones I’ve met sound like the bastard offspring of Ayn Rand, secure in the conceit that having been the right age to buy a house for peanuts in 1996 makes them investing geniuses. There came only a shuddering blankness and an ineffable loneliness; and I saw at last a fearful truth, which no one had ever dared to breathe before – the unwhisperable secret of secrets.

“Actually it was dead from birth. But I couldn’t have noticed until the corpse began to smell. Its sprawling body imperfectly embalmed and infested with animate things that have nothing to do with it as it was in life. The old is no more; I’m here but I’m gone. The form changes faster, alas! than a mortal’s heart.

“No. This obsessive replication of death-imagery, death-proclamation, and its commodification is itself the poison. It’s just as destructive as censorship, media-brainwashing, and the physical destruction itself. It sets up negative feedback loops.

“We naïvely thought that the downward spiral would simply proceed, that the city would be drained of its wealth and cleansed of its wealthy, and that we could move into their vacated penthouses when tumbling rents and our minimally increased wages finally agreed to shake hands. This myth thrived on squalor. It was a component of our masochism, and our masochism, with an admixture of bourgeois guilt, was what had drawn us all here in the first place.

“The dead are, of course, a notoriously perverse and unmanageable lot. When the grand and definitive death is endlessly proclaimed and reproduced the villagers certainly do not run to help as they had before. Founded on forward motion, the myth is loathe to acknowledge its dead, it merely causes them to walk, endlessly unsatisfied and unburied, to invade the precincts of supposed progress, to lay chill hands on the heedless present, which does not know how to identify the forces that tug at its rationality.

“Indeed stones do crumble and decay; faiths grow old and are forgotten. But there is no death. Only a change of worlds.” ■

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Featuring a sculpture by Tim Simonds, a painting by Tanja Nis-Hansen, a suite of videos by Sam Tierney, and a sculpture by Oba.