

Will Benedict

*A Tomb with a View*

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One of the best things about painting is what it tells us about how we see ourselves versus “what’s actually there.” It unpacks our specific desires. It really pins them down. So for instance sometimes I want to make pictures which my cat can walk on and sometimes I want to make pictures that a cat can’t walk on. It’s all very context specific.

The thing about irony is how painful it is. Working class Americans voting for Trump against their own self interest and far right Israeli government policy are so painful it’s even difficult to call it ironic for fear of sounding flippant. Humans are the only living beings that breathe incorrectly; our consciousness gives us the capacity to do and be wrong.

The American philosopher John Rawls developed a thought experiment known as “The Veil of Ignorance,” behind which we must imagine the society we would want to live in without knowing what role we would occupy in that society’s hierarchy. This experiment makes clear that, behind this veil, rational and self-interested people would never design a society like that of the slave states of the American South nor the carceral system designed to replace it.

Still, thought experiments may not translate well to the real world. Einstein’s epoch-altering account of what it would be like to travel on a beam of light, and how it would affect the hands on one’s watch, is profound for what it reveals about the nature of time. Yet it isn’t much of a guide to setting the timer on the coffeemaker in the kitchen so that the pot will fill in time for breakfast. Actual politics is much more like setting the timer on the coffeemaker than like riding on a beam of light. Breakfast is part of the cosmos, but studying the cosmos won’t cook breakfast.

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There are no posters in the actual exhibition. And the title is confusing. It’s obviously a play off of E.M. Forster’s *A Room with a View*. But the title of this exhibition exists only in the realm of the impossible or extremely violent. And while I would prefer not to think about those realms they are always there. Which is scary. I’m not a fan of horror films until I see them and realize that for the most part they aren’t that scary. It seems I’m just afraid of the idea of being scared. Forster has another book called *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and spoiler alert it’s about the death of a baby which is very sad and lends the otherwise trivial banter and banal though witty observations a serious punch in the face.

We live in a world where stupidity and brilliance are bedfellows and sometimes it’s hard to tell the difference, sometimes because of drunkenness, at other times intentionally but mostly because of illiteracy. The prison film genre is another form that I find hard to stomach. Seeing that much injustice piled upon the idea of justice is so infuriating that it begins to tap on the door of a realm beyond understanding, beyond what the brain can absorb. If I think about it too long I would get a panic attack. When I was 15 I attended a High School for the Arts in Los Angeles where there was a student named Rigoberto Jimenez who had been in a very popular movie

called *American Me* which was loosely based on actual events and persons. In the movie there is a prison rape scene that so infuriated the real members of the gang the film was based on, the leaders of the gang retaliated by killing the consultants who had advised director Edward James Olmos on the film's authenticity.

I was born in 1978 and during that era a rash of films were made with names like *Nazi Love Camp 27*, *The Last Orgy of the Third Reich*, *She Devils of the SS* (inspired by *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS*), *Lager 5 L'Inferno delle Donne*, *Le Deportate della Sezione Speciale SS* and *The Black Gestapo* (a melange of Nazi sexploitation and blaxploitation) just to name a few. Many of these films were Italian and most of them were made between 1976 and 1978. But the larger point is that this was such a tremendously popular and widely accepted form of entertainment that it launched the career of Tinto Brass with his *Salon Kitty* and almost ended the career of Luchino Visconti who's *The Damned* was a colossal flop. *The Night Porter* by Liliana Cavani is the only movie that I'm aware of directed by a woman dealing with the subject of a woman exploited, raped and killed by Nazis. It's a serious film and very scary. And so I walk gingerly into the 21st century. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* comes from a line in Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism*: "For fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

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But to get back to my original point about painting, I usually have a pretty specific idea of what I want to make but I can never really be sure how close, or far, the original idea will get from where we end up. Sometimes the further the better and sometimes I just want exactly what I want. Some works in this show are extremely precise visions that were executed as faithfully to the original idea as possible and other works are like cats painting with their shit. Cats don't paint with their shit. In fact cats are really concerned that their shits be reintegrated into the natural world. They don't want that shit to build up and take over reality. Which would seem to make cats a lot smarter than people. But they aren't. Will the lies never end?

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Will Benedict (b. 1978, Los Angeles, USA) currently lives and works in Paris. Benedict's work has been featured in solo exhibitions at Balice Hertling (Paris, 2025); Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art (Copenhagen, 2024); Centre d'Art Contemporain (Geneva, 2022); Fondazione Giuliani (Rome, 2017); Artspace (Auckland, 2015); and Bergen Kunsthall (Bergen, 2014); Halle für Kunst (Lüneberg, 2013), among others. He has also participated in group exhibitions at venues including Fondazione MAST (Bologna, 2024); What Pipeline (Detroit, 2023); Balice Hertling (Paris, 2022); Biennial of the Moving Image (Geneva, 2021); Belgrade Biennial (Belgrade, 2021); Art Sonje Center (Seoul, 2019); MMK (Frankfurt, 2018); the 9th Berlin Biennial (Berlin, 2016); 18th Fondation Pernod Ricard Prize (Paris, 2016); the 31st Biennial of Graphic Arts (Ljubljana, 2015). Benedict has also collaborated with Wolf Eyes on numerous music videos and performances, including *Pandemonium* (curated by Pierre-Alexandre Mateos and Charles Teyssou), held at Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection (Paris, 2023).