

THE COMING LIGHT, THE PERSISTENT DARKNESS
A CREATIVE PROJECT
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I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

John 14:6

When faced with a dominant religion that claims to be the one and only way to connect with god, where are people of the multitude of faiths in the world supposed to find common ground and live in harmony with the rest of mankind? The zeitgeist would lead us to believe that any two religions are diametrically opposed, or if any two share a few small details or morals there is still a distinct geographic divide between eastern and western religions and that these groups of ideologies are fundamentally different. There is an oriental way of thinking and there is a Judeo-Christian way of thinking and never the twain shall meet. (Stendhal 7)

Assumptions like this breed ostracism and xenophobia that neither respects nor loves thy neighbor. This is a contradiction to the viewpoint expressed in this creative project. Every mythology expresses truth. They are all true in their own sense. This body of artwork was created as a testament to the search for truth, which transcends any one religion or mythology—as Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers put forth in their conversation *The Power of Myth*:

CAMPBELL: The best things can't be told because they transcend thought. The second best are misunderstood, because those are the thoughts that are supposed to refer to that which can't be thought about. The third best are what we talk about. And myth is that field of reference to what is absolutely transcendent.

MOYERS: What can't be known or named except in our feeble attempt to clothe it in language. (49)

In this creative project I mix and match symbolism from religious mythologies through known human history to illustrate the common language and wisdom of our ancestors.

II. METHODS AND MATERIALS

I began by determining which characters, stories, and events could best visually demonstrate the shared themes of the world's mythologies. I thoroughly studied the myths and sought out their previous artistic depictions. I then picked out their best visual elements to create a dynamic composition. Next there was a stage of pre-visualization where through sketching and rough digital compositing I determined which elements would best be handled with photography and which would be best to collage.

Once those decisions were made, location, models and props were gathered for photography sessions. Most of these were photographed separately and later composited together for the final image. This is so the final image could have a higher resolution than the digital camera is capable of creating on its own. This also allows for more freedom with spatial elements and warping of the image for surreal elements where desired. When photographing elements separately, it necessary is to maintain a consistent angle, lens length, and focal length to make the perspective of the final image appear realistic.

A Nikon D200 digital single lens reflex camera was used throughout the photography for this project. Variations of 650-1000 watt open faced Arri lights and household lamps were used for lighting. A two-car garage served as a studio for the photography session.

All other images that were not personally photographed but were found images and stock photographs acquired through public domain Internet archives.

Once the source images were acquired, they were brought into Adobe Photoshop® and composited together to create the final image. This required various techniques to blend all of the separate source images together. Cutting, cropping, layering, blending modes and filters were all used to make one cohesive and aesthetically pleasing image.

III. DISCUSSION OF THEMES AND SYMBOLISM

And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

Genesis 1:3

Light is important in this body of work not only because it is a necessity for photography as a medium but also for symbolic purposes. As light physically paints an image on the film plane or image sensor in a camera, I paint with light conceptually and use it for its emblematic implications of enlightenment, life, and goodness.

As light illuminates the world physically, it symbolically illuminates knowledge in one's intellect. Light, in that sense, is representative of spiritual insight and darkness is, therefore, symbolic of ignorance. This is apparent in the word "enlightenment," or in expressions like: "in light of," "shed some light on the subject," or "seeing something in a new light."

The symbolism of light is not exclusive to an intellectual light or the quest for enlightenment in a Buddhist sense. It is not only something that is attained, but it is also emblematic of supernatural presence or what Kabalistic, Gnostic and other western mystical traditions would refer to as a divine spark that dwells within all creation—the presence of that which is referred to as god.

The idea of light as a conceptual element led me to treat the light source not only as a tool but also as a character in itself. Sometimes this meant including the light within the composition. Other times it meant having either the light source interacting with a figure or vice versa, and occasionally it was all of the above.

Men fear death as children fear to go in the dark; and as that natural fear in children is increased with tales, so is the other.

Sir Francis Bacon, *Of Death*

Death is change. When I use symbols of death they are not necessarily addressing the end of life, but rather the end of one thing and the beginning of another. This could be the ushering in of the New Year or the evolution of a person's identity over a period of time. Metaphorically, one's old self can die as their new self is born. This is akin to a fairly recent term "Born-Again Christian," referring to one's conversion to Christianity from a secular life or another religion. The origin of the term being from the New Testament, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3).

Though my focus is on symbolic death, literal bodily death is encompassed in this symbolism. Literal death is one of the great mysteries of the human condition and it would be disingenuous to exclude it. This noted, it is not the object of this project to define the fate of one's soul after death. Instead, it is one of my hopes that the viewer will

take one moment to reflect on his or her own impermanence—as well as the fleeting nature of all things in this world.

*Our Father who art in Heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven.*

Matthew 6:9-10

The balance of opposites is woven into our everyday lives. The day alternates with the night and the individual finds identity within society. This relationship is also referred to as *Macrocosm and Microcosm*, from the Greek *macro-* and *mirco-* meaning “large” and “small” respectively and *kósmos* meaning “order” or “world.” Scientific observations, such as Pythagoris’ the golden ratio, echo this in the concrete world, where the same patterns are found on the subatomic level as we do on the galactic level.

Another expression for this relationship is “as above, so below” which is derived from *The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus*: “that which is below is like that which is above that which is above is like that which is below to do the miracles of one only thing” (3). This concept is used in many Hermetic and occult traditions to demonstrate the Macrocosm and Mircocosm relationship on all, physical, mental, and spiritual levels. However, the specific language is more akin to astronomy and often described as Heaven and Earth rather than above and below.

Though thematically this body of work addresses Macrocosm and Microcosm in

both the abstract and concrete worlds, the astronomical tone of *as above, so below*, is wholeheartedly embraced in the imagery. This is expressed visually with depictions of celestial bodies such as, the Sun, the Moon, planets, stars, and planet-like shapes. In some instances, this is as straightforward as the juxtaposition of human figures with these celestial bodies. This is done with the intent to bring all the subjects to a grand stage.

“The Christian religion is a parody on the worship of the Sun, in which they put a man whom they call Christ, in the place of the Sun, and pay him the same adoration which was originally paid to the Sun.”

Thomas Paine, *Origin of Freemasonry*

This body of work is inspired by my personal discovery of Astrotheology. This area of study looks at the possibility of the connection between religions—that astrological phenomena are metaphorically explained by religious mythologies. “Perhaps Astrotheology would be a useful instrument as a common denominator of religion. For elements of it and traces of it are to be found throughout the world. In some way or some reason, though the origins are obscure, these concepts unfolded together with man’s religious and philosophical ideas and became almost universal” (Hall).

Astrotheology recognizes the fact that Ancient man anthropomorphized the many elements of nature that ruled their lives. For example, the Sun’s daily and yearly journey through the sky became a story of the Sun god. Its annual path through twelve star constellations in the sky and these are the twelve characters of the zodiac. Though names

and terminology differ from culture to culture common themes are found in their mythology (Hall).

The sun is often symbolized by Light, Death and Resurrection. Its light illuminates the Earth during the day and wards off darkness. Death and Resurrection is symbolized in the Sun's yearly journey and the changing of the seasons. The four seasons are result of Earth's rotational axis and revolution causing the Sun to heat the Earth unevenly. As the year approaches winter the Sun's daily arc through the sky moves farther south until the Winter Solstice and then it begins to move farther north until the Summer Solstice and then repeats the cycle. Therefore, each year the Sun appears to die in the winter and resurrect in the spring. As the Sun returns, vegetation flourishes, and by its grace animals and man can eat, survive, flourish, and multiply. The Sun's behavior shapes human life by creating something as basic to us as the day. It also creates ways of life, such as, the vocation of the farmer. The pattern of the Sun is a pattern of the Earth—as above, so below.

The death and resurrection of the Sun myth, when applied to the bible, leads to the interpretation that Jesus Christ is Christianity's Sun God. (Hall) This revelation while controversial is edifying for me. Growing up in small-town Indiana I've been exposed to my fair share of Christian teaching and then some, but it never resonated with me because it had always been presented to me in a dead and stale manner. The Church was *the* place of god and then there was every other place. It felt disconnected from the concrete world and had no practicality to me. But now in my mid twenties, after studying any religion I could get my hands on, part of Christianity made sense. All of a sudden, the Bible had a profound connection and respect for the world around us—a practical application. It

never logically made sense to me why Christ's death and resurrection had to happen to save mankind.

The themes of Light, Death and Resurrection are represented in this body of work by symbolic characters and objects. The sun, light sources, and mythological solar deities symbolize intelligence and the cycles of life. The characters are depicted at pivotal moments in their myths where they are on the brink of death or transcendence. Human figures are juxtaposed with celestial objects to set personal inner conflicts of identity and death in a galactic context—that they are not insignificant in the grand scheme of the universe.

IV. DESCRIPTION OF THE ARTWORKS



Nous

Pronounced \ 'nūs\, from the Greek for mind or intellect—the divine reason regarded in Neoplatonism as the first emanation of God, this piece is a self portrait that draws its imagery from *The Light Parable* of *The Holy Qur'an*:

"God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp: The lamp enclosed in glass: The glass as it were a brilliant star: Lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous,

though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! God doth guide whom He will to His light: God doth set forth parables for men: and God doth know all things.”

Qur'an 24:35

It is a depiction of the intellectual quest for enlightenment with the figure representing a singular human consciousness, and the light and lantern the knowledge he seeks.

The surreal elements of this piece are to suggest that this pursuit for enlightenment is an internal as well as external journey. The figure is blindfolded hindering his ability to perceive the light with all of his senses—just as a mortal man lacks the capacity to perceive the entire nature of the universe or what one might refer to as “god.” He is dressed in black and white to attribute constructs like good and evil to mankind as opposed to nature. His three sets of arms and their positioning are representative of the three states of mind that are important to a spiritual pursuit. The bottom pose is that of an anchor and symbolic of the down-to-earth objectivity needed for direct observation. The center pose is one of interaction and self-awareness. In intellectual and spiritual matters, it is important to recognize the self as part of the surrounding world. Finally, the top pose is the lofty dreaming part—the hope that something greater is out there.

The light was given artificial elements to make it seem supernatural. Multiple lens fares were artificially created and composited to use them as planet-like orbs and bring an astronomical tone to the piece. They seem to appear as perfectly aligned planets as if this is a significant moment that has a divine hand in it. These orbs and rings are also

purposefully reminiscent of chakras, the points of physical and spiritual energy throughout the human body according to yoga philosophy (“Chakra” Def.), intended to emphasize the internal element of enlightenment.

With the exception of the lens flares, all parts of this piece were personally photographed. The three poses were captured in three different exposures with the exact same backdrop and camera set up. The lantern was also captured in a separate exposure and its light was simulated when the model was photographed. The three poses, lantern, and artificial lens flares were then composited together creating the final image.



Osiris Rising

Osiris is the Egyptian god of vegetation whose myth of death and resurrection is inspired by the annual flooding of the Nile River, which weighed heavily on the ancient

Egyptian livelihood. His brother, Set, murdered him and cut his body into fourteen pieces. Isis, his wife and Egypt's mother goddess, reassembled his body and performed a magic ritual resurrecting Osiris. This ritual is the first rite of embalmment, symbolic of immortality in the afterlife. Over time, disillusioned with his brother, Osiris resigned from life and became the ruler of the underworld (Cotterell 256, 307)

In this piece Osiris is shown in a funerary scene that combines the symbolism of the Egyptian myth with contemporary funerary elements. The green tint to his skin represents both decay and vegetation. The texture of the background forms a faint coffin shape around his body. He is dressed in formal contemporary garb common for burial and is barefoot in accordance with an old British custom. The floral arrangements are sprigs of acacia. Acacia, being an evergreen, and retaining its leaves all year, represents immortality.

The remaining symbolic elements are further connections to Osiris. The vein on the figure's right cheek is a tracing of the Nile River. The orientation of the compass with the East at his feet assures that when the resurrected Osiris rises to his feet he is facing his newborn son, the Sky/Sun god Horus, who "holds an ankh, or sign of life, before his father's face" at his resurrection. (Campbell, Hero xv)

This piece was constructed with found images and photography. The model was photographed and multiple exposures were taken and pasted together to compensate for the special distortion of the lens. His upper body, hands, and feet are from separate exposures. The background was created by applying filters to an extremely grainy photograph to brighten and shape the grain as a hatched texture. This texture was then warped to faintly draw the viewer's eye into the casket shape. Scans of old paper were

used in Adobe Photoshop® selections of lines and lettering on decaying paper were created and filled to create the shape and borders. This was then assembled to form the white compass and border. Finally illustrations of acacia sprigs were collaged and filtered to finish the composition.



Thy Rod & Thy Staff, They Comfort Me and Though I Walk Through The Valley of The Shadow of Death

Displayed as a diptych these two pieces depict the ancient Egyptian gods Horus, god of the sky and sun, and Set, god of the desert, darkness and chaos. In their myth, Set claims the throne of Egypt after murdering his brother, Osiris, was also father to Horus. Once Horus grew to a rightful age, he challenged his uncle Set for his father's throne.

(Cotterell 285). They battled brutally to a stalemate and in the struggle Set lost a testicle making the desert infertile. Horus' left eye was gouged out by Set (Campbell, Image 29). Horus' eyes representing the sun and the moon, the moon's light became weaker and cast half the day in darkness (Pettazzoni 63).

Set, the right image, is represented by a skull of a springbok beginning to emerge from the darkness. The morbidity of a horned, fleshless skull combined with the sparse lighting create an ominous image meant to embody darkness and evil. The springbok skull was chosen for its shape and horns, which looks similar to a goat but is exotic enough to be unfamiliar to a North American audience. This is intended to draw an allusion to iconic satanic imagery.

Horus, the left image, is represented by a youthful and physically fit man. His eyes outlined by iconic Egyptian makeup, his right decorated with the Wedjat (Silverman 228) and his pupils show the sun and the moon respectively. Further symbolizing the sun, he is holding the iconic crook and flail. The crook is similar to the curved shepherd's staff and the flail is an agricultural tool—emblematic of the ability to rule, guide, and provide for the people. (Bard 495)

The titles are what connect these images to contemporary Judeo-Christian religion. They are excerpts from *23rd Psalm* of the Old Testament:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Psalm 23

This psalm is the foundation for this piece. As it is used as a prayer for courage to face the dangers of the world, elements are pulled from it to illustrate the darkness and the light and have the viewer face them both side by side. The skull emerging from the dark, symbolizes the “shadow of death.” The crook and flail, more commonly associated with pharaohs than the god Horus, allude to the psalm’s imagery of a shepherd protecting his flock of sheep and a king ruling with an iron rod. “Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” (Psalm 23) “And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron.” (Revelations 12:5)

Both images are photographs that were layered and blended with Adobe Photoshop’s® Water Paper filter to give them a subtle fiber-like texture of a thick, aged paper.



The Hanged Man

The Hanged Man tarot card is an image of contemplation and meditation, in which the character lets go of worldly attachments, all known, wanted, or cared about (Solandia). His inverted suspension is symbolic of a change of perception because, upside down, he literally sees the world from a different perspective. (Kenner 123) The context of the Hanged Man serves as a common denominator to compare Christ and Buddha as figures of myths of transcendence.

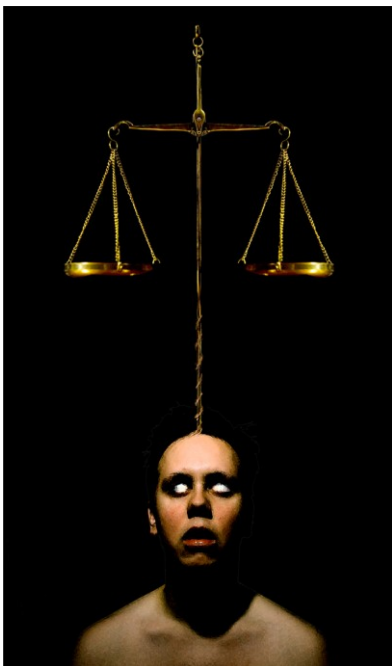
Buddha is shown as the trunk and roots of the Bodhi Tree—the tree in the middle of the universe where he came to enlightenment; also known as Axis Mundi, or the Immovable Spot—the spot not moved by fear or desire. (Campbell, Mythos) Here the lord of the world tested him by taking three forms: Kama (lust), Mara (death), and Dharma (social duty). After these appeals to desire, fear and duty, Buddha touched his fingertip to the ground. This pose is known as Bhumisparsha or “earth-touching.” With it Buddha called the Mother Universe to testify and she said, “This is my beloved son who

through enumerable lifetimes has so given of himself that there is no one here.” And thus Buddha achieved illumination. (Campbell, Mythos)

Just as Buddha transcended the temporal world under the Bodhi Tree, so did Christ at his crucifixion. Through meditation Buddha transcends bodily form and through death, Christ does the same. Both, in some manner, recognized their divine nature, much like the Hanged Man’s orientation to the world is changed.

In this image Christ is crucified on a living tree to represent growth and Buddha is shown as its trunk and roots to symbolize being in touch with the Earth. The tree also connects them to both the Earth and the Heavens as it sprouts from the ground but reaches up into the sky. The Hanged Man tarot card hangs from the tree as an ornament. The noose is an allusion to the similarly pronounced Greek word Nous, meaning intellect, and the title of a separate piece included in this body of work. Thus, the mind is what is hung on the tree. The noose being empty signifies that there is room for one more.

This image is collaged from found images. The figure of Christ is from the 1689 painting *Crucified Christ between Saint John and Mary*. Various images, statues, and 3-D models of a meditating Buddha under the Bodhi Tree were cut and pasted together to create a bark textured earth-touching Buddha. Various photographs of trees, landscapes, and sunsets were composited together to create the background. Artistic filters were applied to all these elements to blend them together as one cohesive image.



Golgotha – The Skull Place

The dual meanings of the word temple, “side of the head” or “place of worship,” are not differentiated in the context of this piece. It is a representation of the mind’s role as a holy throne of consciousness where we perceive and judge all information which is taken in through the nervous system.

From the Aramaic *gulgutha* meaning “place of the skull”, Golgotha is the name of the place where Jesus Christ was crucified:

“When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.”

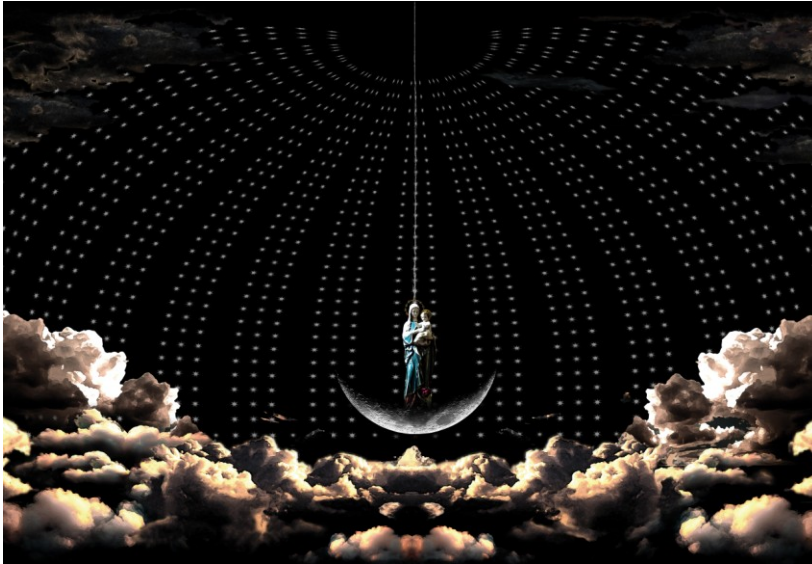
Luke 23:33

Continuing with the Hanged Man interpretation of the crucifixion being a moment of transcendence, Golgotha becomes the place of transcendence and is not a physical place but a psychological state of the mind.

The imagery, though macabre, symbolizes transcendence of the physical world

just as the imagery contained within the Christian myth of transcendence is gruesome. The figure's white, pupil-less eyes signify the skull, or temple, being filled with light and, therefore, the presence of the divine, of which the figure stands in awe. The scales sprouting from his head represent the balance of opposites in one's consciousness, one's dark side and one's light side. The composition loosely forms a shape similar to most depictions of Christ's crucifixion. The figure's head being the mound and the scales the cross.

The figure and scales were photographed separately and then composited together. The pupils were removed by cloning the whites of the eyes and pasting them over the black. Small selections of the forehead were copied and warped to create the illusion of flesh wrapping around the stem of the scales. A paint texture filter was applied aesthetically blending the metallic and flesh textures.



Born of a Virgin

This piece is derived from *Stage set for Mozart's Magic Flute* by Karl Friedrich Schinkel—production art for an 1815 production of the Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*. The original is stage design art for the scene *The Arrival of the Queen of the Night*. This scene is recontextualized with the Queen of the Night character being replaced by the Virgin Mary carrying an infant Jesus. The starry setting places Mary in an Astrotheological context and alludes to her place as the constellation Virgo, the Virgin, in a Christian sky. (Hall)

Schinkel's piece was chosen because it could easily be altered into a birth metaphor by shapes similar to a female reproductive system. The starry dome is the womb. The white line of light running from the figures to the top of the dome, which was a crease from the original work being folded, is the umbilical cord. Toward the center the clouds were cut and mirrored to create a symmetrical form similar to a woman's vagina. Thus, as the clouds represent the threshold between the Earth and the Heavens, the mother's vagina is the threshold of birth into life.

This piece was created entirely by altering found images and stock photography. A grid of stars was created and warped to form the dome. Various images of clouds were cut, pasted, color balanced, warped, and filtered to create the singular base of the clouds. The darker parts of the clouds were used at the top to balance and frame the image. The crescent moon, Mary and Jesus were collaged from public domain images.



Taurus at the Base of Mount Sinai

When Moses returned from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, he found his people paying adoration to the idol of a golden bull, or calf. He saw them dancing and singing around the idol. This great sin angered him and he smashed the tablets on the ground, and he burned the calf in the fire. (Exodus 32)

The adoration of the golden bull might be interpreted as the adoration of wealth, but in an Astrotheological context it is the adoration of Taurus—more specifically the Age of Taurus. At one time the sun rose in the constellation of Taurus on the Vernal Equinox, the first day of spring. Due to a phenomenon known as the Precession of the Equinoxes, this changes to another constellation over time. The Earth does not rotate on a perfect axis. It wobbles and its orientation slowly and continuously changes. Every 25,765 years, otherwise known as an eon or age, the sun moves backward through the Zodiac into a new constellation. Thus bringing the Age of Taurus, then the Age of Aries, and then the Age of Pisces, etc. (Hall) Modern star maps have the equinox entering the Age of Aquarius in about 600 years. (Precession)

The timing of the prominence of certain religions and their myths show adoration for the symbol of the zodiacal animal of the age and a change in concept of religion. (Hall) For example, Hindu's have the holy cow (Taurus). Jews blow a shofar made of a ram's horn (Aries) in services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and the myths of Jason and the Golden Fleece and Abraham sacrificing a lamb instead of his son, Issac, etc. Then, the Christians have their Pisces fish symbolism (Joseph):

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

Matthew 4:19

When Moses arrived at the foot of the mountain, he saw his people worshipping the symbol of the old age, Taurus the Bull. Destroying the idol and leading the people to a new way of worship is symbolic of the changing from the Age of the Bull to the Age of

the Ram. (Joseph) This is the beginning of ram/lamb imagery, as in, the Paschal Lamb, the shofar and the Scapegoat of Israel. (Hall) Moses himself is depicted at times with the horns on his head, such as with Michaelangelo's marble of him as part of the tomb of Pope Julius II.

The scene of the Israelites dancing around the golden bull is recreated in this image by combining a modern rave or dance club atmosphere in a mountainous valley. A small brass bull prop was photographed at a low angle and the color and luminosity adjusted to give it a golden look. The crowd was created by collaging various pictures of audiences at rock 'n' roll performances and dance settings. Adobe Photoshop's® Lighting Effects filter was used to simulate the dramatic lighting of a dance club which also helped unify the many layers of people from separate photographs. The mountain edges and sky were taken from found images and composited together to create the background. Further allusions to the bull were included outside of the actual bull form. One being the hand gesture of the University of Texas Longhorns known as "Hook 'em Horns" where only the index and pinky fingers are extended (Nicar). Another is the crescent moon and small star, outside of the crescent, obliquely forming a bull's head.

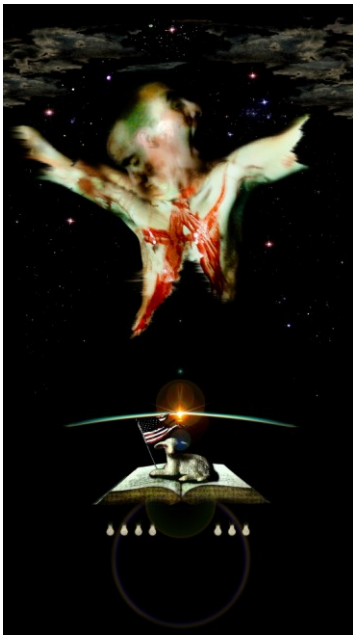


Samson – The Sun Man in Winter

Hebrew for “the sun man,” Samson is a Herculean figure described in the Old Testament’s Book of Judges, chapters 13 to 16. He performs great feats of strength, such as defeating a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass. (Judges 15:15) His lover Delilah eventually betrays him. His golden hair is cut from his head thus, causing his strength to vanish (Judges 15:19). The Philistines then burn out his eyes, shackle him, and make sport of him (Judges 15:21-27). His hair eventually grows back, and with it his strength. When he is placed between the supporting pillars of the Philistines’ temple he pulls down the building killing himself and 3,000 Philistine men and women. (Judges 22-31)

Samson’s story, as his names implies, is a metaphor for the Sun. His hair is symbolic of sunrays, which are cut off in the winter as the Sun’s power weakens. It then grows back in the spring and his strength returns. The blinding is symbolic of the darkness of winter. (Hall)

In this image, Samson is portrayed beaten and weakened state before he pulls down the pillars of the temple representing the Sun in winter. This particular model was chosen for his slim, yet muscular, build to show both the character's absence and rejuvenation of strength. The model and columns were photographed separately and composited with stock photographs of a starry sky.



The Scapegoat

The scapegoat was a goat that was released into the wilderness as part of the ceremonies of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 16) Also known as the Paschal Lamb, it carried away the sins of the people and because of this was sent away to die (Frazer 569). National sin and identity is the focus of the symbolism in the context of this image.

In the upper half of the image is a disembodied figure that has been subjected to a horrific sacrifice. His dual expressions show both pain and willingness to face sacrifice much like Christ, whose role in the Bible is very similar to that of the scapegoat:

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

John 1:29

The letter “A” painted in blood on his chest is an allusion to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. A novel in which Hawthorne’s main character is forced to wear a scarlet letter on the breast of her clothing—an uppercased “A”—as public humiliation for her crime and sin of adultery. However, in the context of this image, it is not necessarily an emblem of sin but a badge of both “America” and “Apocalypse.” Apocalypse brings to mind images of devastation and mass destruction resulting in the end to the world. However, the origin of the word is from the Greek *apokalyptein*—to uncover, reveal (“Apocalypse” Def.). In that sense it means a changing of the world by a revealing—a revelation—and not its destruction.

The symbols of the Paschal Lamb and the Apocalyptic Lamb are combined. The lamb, seen with a flag supported by its foreleg, is an emblem of St. John the Baptist and symbolic of resurrection (Forty 112). Lying on an open book with seven lamps makes it the Apocalyptic Lamb, which was “used as a symbol of the teachings of Christ defeating the evils of ignorance and darkness” (Forty 109). Behind is a new day’s rising sun. The flares and light streaks were duplicated and mirrored to create an abstraction of female

genitalia symbolizing birth. The sun and horizon give the image visual depth and reinforces the symbolism of resurrection and light defeating darkness.

This image is a combination of photography and collage. The figure and book were photographed. Multiple exposures of the model were composited together to make the one figure. However, one long exposure where the model moved his head and changed expression was used for the dual head. His limbs were digitally erased and distorted. The lamb, flag, sunrise/horizon, stars and clouds were cut and pasted from found images and composited together with the photographed materials to create the final image.



Janus

Janus is the mythological Greek god of thresholds, gates, doors, passageways, beginnings and endings. He is generally depicted as having two faces back-to-back representing the past, present and future. This associates him with the sun as it opens and closes the day (Guerber 205). He also began the New Year, hence the word January (Arundell 218).

This piece is a father and son self-portrait. My father is the model for the left face of Janus representing the elder who has seen the past. In turn, I am the model for the right face of Janus representing the younger who is eager to witness the future. In the middle is a coffin passing through a hallway that marks the changing of generation to another. The flag draped coffin is not a symbol of the end of the United States of America, but a symbol of an evolving country. Once this symbolism was developed, this image became a personal reply to the iconic art used in President Barack Obama's 2008 campaign, such

as *Hope* by Shepard Fairey, which had alternate versions using the words “change” or “progress” in place of “hope”. (Gralish)

In the Bond family, the American ideal is held in high esteem. It being a country founded on the hopes of overthrowing the rule of kings and the continuing pursuit of the equality of all sons and daughters of the human family. In this context this image is a take on Christianity’s concept of the Holy Trinity. This is a family portrait with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The final image is combination of photography and digital collage. The hallway, doorway, and coffin are cut and pasted from found images. The two faces were photographed separately. Finally, all these elements were composited together, and color and luminosity were balanced accordingly.

V. INFLUENCES

“Worlds above, worlds below, there is no one in the world like me”

-Infant Buddha at his birth (Campbell, Mythos)

In my early life, living in small town Indiana, I was exposed to modern Christianity and I never felt any spiritual resonance with how it was being practiced in that culture. By high school I had ventured out to gain some understanding of other religions and spiritualities. I soon discovered the work of Joseph Campbell. To this day he remains my anchor when I research world and comparative religion. His work is always good for finding a relevant quote:

The biographies of saviors are symbolic of the meaning of the savior’s teaching. It’s not like Carl Sandberg’s Life of Lincoln where you get documentation of the actual details of the life. It has nothing to do with what happened in life. It has to do with the implication of the life.”

(Campbell, Mythos)

I was first exposed to Astrotheology through the documentary films *Zeitgeist The Movie* and *The Pharmacratic Inquisition*. The contents of these films directed me to the vast amount of lectures and works by authors Manly Palmer Hall and Jordan Maxwell. I

was inspired by a point that Maxwell stresses: the word “occult” does not mean evil or bad. It simply means, “not revealed” or “hidden from view” (Maxwell). Most immediately dismiss the occult as something inherently evil—the devil’s work. However, there may be some value, or even truth in things like alchemy, astrology and pagan tales.

Visually this body of work was influenced by surrealism in general, contemporary filmmakers, and iconic works from ancient cultures. I often found myself looking to Cecil B. DeMille’s biblical epics where deciding how to treat iconic images. Especially when he covered the same subject (i.e. *Samson*, and *The Golden Bull*). The music of the band Tool, and their collaboration with visionary painter Alex Grey, have long been an influence. More so with this body of work because they tend to focus on transcendence, the human soul, and politics. In fact, I first heard the words “as above, so below” in Tool’s song *Lateralus*. Stanley Kubrick tends to be an unconscious influence in my preference for right angles and parallels in my compositions, but his use of planetary and astrological forms in *2001: A Space Odyssey* is very obvious in my work.

VI. CONCLUSION

This creative project was a challenge to my ability to explore symbolism. It was a return from my focus the moving picture to the singular still image, which had its pros and cons. While the still image is more cost effective, it constricts the complex subjects I chose to address to a single image with no sound and no movement. What I would be able to communicate audibly through dialogue or sound must now be communicated through juxtaposition, composition, and expression in the one frozen moment. On the positive side the still image allows for a wider range of surrealistic imagery on the micro-budget of a student.

Also, more dynamic aspect ratios are possible when working with photographs or print images. Whereas with film and video, the image is restrained to a landscape format of 16:9 or 4:3 ratio. If a portrait format is desired, drastic measures have to be taken to photograph and display the moving image appropriately. Most available equipment is engineered for the display of the landscape format. Some resolution has to be sacrificed due to the fix amount of pixels available (so many up and so many across). Many pixels would go to waste when displaying the tall portrait in the wide format.

Motion picture is a medium that I hope to use to express my spirituality and fascination with the subject of Astrotheology. Creating this body of work has exercised

my storytelling skills by forcing me to summarize my points briefly in a single image, thereby, taking a minimalist approach with my subjects. It has also familiarized me with numerous stories and archetypes that I can apply to scripts and characters that I will work with in the future. I have a pallet of hero stories that I can draw from to mold a hero character of my own.

Overall, I am satisfied with this project because I have proven to myself that I am capable of creating a poetic image with complex roots yet compelling enough to being simply experienced. All my technical and creative skill have been challenged and expanded. I am a better artist for doing this work.

VII. EXHIBITION STATEMENT

The Coming Light, The Persistent Darkness

The work seen here is a mixture of digital photography and digital collage. It uses imagery from various cultures' mythologies and religions from ancient to contemporary eras. These pieces are composed to show the common ties of the world's religions and also astrological themes not commonly associated with these mythologies.

Ancient man was many things but stupid was not one of them. With the emergence of modern science and the relentless march of technological advancement we grow further away from our ancestors' perspective of the world. Their myths and religions often become silly little fairy tales rife with superstition and collect dust on a library shelf to be read only by academics and a select other few.

Ironically the application of modern science to our ancestor's stories shows an amazing awareness and connection with the mechanics of nature and what that meant for life on earth. Resurrection myths become stories about the Sun and its death in winter and rebirth in spring. Stars and constellations become characters in a movie about the cyclical struggle of human life through the year. Sunlight becomes the savior from the deadly predator-filled night and the struggle between light and dark is a daily occurrence rather than a battle between Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader. The search for light is the search for enlightenment.

Many modern advancements are for the better and there are many shameful and ugly things about our past, but to not examine and learn from both the wisdom and the follies of our ancestors and pass it off as archaic and irrelevant would be foolish indeed.

Andy Bond

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