

An Original Vision

The artist was true to his desires. He pursued them with a singleness of mind. He painted landscapes. Despite spending years in his studio, surrounded by completed pictures, he had not yet completed his masterpiece. He did not expect to ever paint it. He doubted he could ever find it. Often, riddled with insomnia, he'd pace his studio at night shaking from all the coffee he drank, a lit cigarette filled the room with its aroma, a brown, weighty substance—one night the artist decided to paint that. It failed. The smoke drifted away, and he was left again with nothing, riddled by insomnia into the early morning, approaching the sunrise, shaking.

He investigated his dreams. Wrote them down. Didn't eat. Spent all day reading, worrying, trying to both forget and remember his dreams. A dual-will, partially coated with desire, partially suppressed by the haziness of willed forgetfulness, strangled his desires, creating a choke-point, in an attempt to let one pure desire reach the surface of his consciousness. The latent desires, all his fears of failure, all his misguided work at self-destruction, all his perversions of good faith, rested beneath himself. It was like sticky mud that both swallowed him and spit him up. Once and a while a pure thought would escape. The remainder of the time, he sat there, in his oaken chair by the window, staring out the window at the inertia of cars, letting his mind be swept away in the tiny story of civilization, seen from his window, while he sat and stewed.

He'd construct a world, one thought at a time, slowly re-imagining his dreams. Each thought, pushed upwards, congealed with others, mixed with desires, hazy, somewhat unseen, believable, like a sincere delusion, or a piece of fiction—a biography of his unconscious.

He did not believe in inspiration. That for, he was simply inspired. He lived in a constant state of slipping away, of treading the unknown in desperate leaps, while focusing a blade-like will upon a houseplant, slipping away, slipping towards, falling headlong to stand up, a constant state of astonishment at nothing. His miracle was being alive, and he explored that in all its ramifications, yet, he only painted landscapes. He did not even live in the country. He lived in the city.

Once and a while something new would emerge, a pure, driven thought, brought upon by the necessity of his vigorous lifestyle, he would chase it, the way a bear would chase a man, or a bee that chases honey, or a man, a woman. He'd chase it till he'd thought what he'd found what he'd always been looking for, the original vision, the original intention of a life forgotten at birth, and the outer world became like the static that expounds from a radio and on a dull summer day--chasing the original vision, the way the ocean deep chases the soul of a man to the grave.

He had no wife or children. He was thirty-six. He was tall, gaunt, and morbid looking. His only exercise was walking to the store to buy supplies. His diet consisted of bologna sandwiches, sardines packed in a can with mustard, and canned tuna. He ate the tuna without mayonnaise. He only drank water and coffee. His muscles were not hardened by the rigors of a physically demanding job, but by his singleness of will. At times he mused that he willed himself into existence. He had no friends.

His health began to decline, but his work had just begun. His salvation, to him, depended on it. This constrained effort, this battle of cosmic significance between his flesh and spirit, also took a toll on his mind. He began to hear things that were not there. But yet he was coming closer to his original vision, and continued onward. Most days, he'd simply lay in bed, heavily depressed by the vast demands of his life, demands which he placed on himself, which offered no hope of rest, which consisted of constant worry, and an anxiety that was as fierce as a firestorm. He whirled around in his bed, tossed to and fro, barely able to hold on, and then suddenly—calm, the eye of the storm, the reprieve of nature, and then an eruption, the beginnings of his original vision. A pure, undefiled desire, driven into one point, one canvas, an entire life, shed into a single moment, written in wet paint.

By now his work had begun. He had his vision, he only had to see it through. He stayed up for a marathon 18 hours painting a landscape that didn't exist anywhere in reality. It was an original piece, his masterpiece, and he knew it, and his pride swelled, and without being seen, swelled him up to gigantic proportions, so much so that his consciousness could barely fit in his room. His canvas, tiny before him, could barely be seen, and the

whole of his life existed on that canvas.

His body began to digest itself. He was withering away, yet his spirit soared unto unseen heights. He painted with what was left of his body. The conscious mind that was aware of the world around him ceased to exist. He existed in an internal reality, his only connection to life being a paintbrush, his world, a canvas.

Gradually, all thought succumbed to one thought. He had purged all else that did not fit with his new worldview. He himself was beginning to fade away. He was struggling to maintain himself as a substance, a physical being, and a soul, and yet he was winning the battle for his original vision, and pursued onwards, headlong, into this unknown area of space and time that few have dared to tread.

But he could not climb as high as he liked with what strength he had left. He faced a wall, an infinite wall that consisted of his past life, his past lives, and his future life. At a rather vociferous moment, possibly the yelling of the neighbors that could be heard beyond the thin walls, he ceased to exist in time, passing into the true unknown. At that point he was now a pure thought, a pure desire. His body, what remained of it, was merely a blemish, a wrinkle in the air, an errant brushstroke, and it was made of all his unconscious desires, which he painted. Each color a sort of link to his past life.

He struggled now to exist, he had no concept of identity, yet his painting was nearly completed, he had nearly scaled that impenetrable wall of solitude and abasement, poverty within himself. He was like a saintly desert dweller, herding goats, and eating the manna of the gods. But his peace would soon be interrupted by the violence of the apocalypse--he struggled with what was left of his pure, original, masterpiece. The battle lasted twelve hours, he nearly lost his soul he felt, and then in a grand cathartic moment, he finally released all his tensions onto the canvas. The painting was complete. He sighed, and what was left of his will, was released into the air of his studio, floated around ecstatically, and rested on the floor.

The next day, there was a knock at the door. It was his art dealer. The art dealer considered the artist a friend. The artist had not considered the art

dealer a friend, but only an object, a cog in his designs, that completed the cycle of his artistry. The art dealer knocked, but to no avail, and, turning the knob, and finding the door open, he stepped inside.

There was no one there. The artist was gone. But what stood before him was the greatest work of art he had ever seen, and would ever see. He felt he were tempting God by looking at that canvas. But sure enough, he looked, it was too hard to resist.

And then he saw the artist, painted onto the canvas. The brush was laying on the floor. It was still wet. The painting was sold for two hundred dollars. But the artist would never see the money, in fact, the artist would never be seen again.

The painting was bought by a rich old lady. She bought it because she had the money, and had a vague interest in it. After several years, it kind of grew on her, once and a while she admitted to herself it looked nice. Yet she never understood why the figure in the foreground of the painting looked so lifelike.