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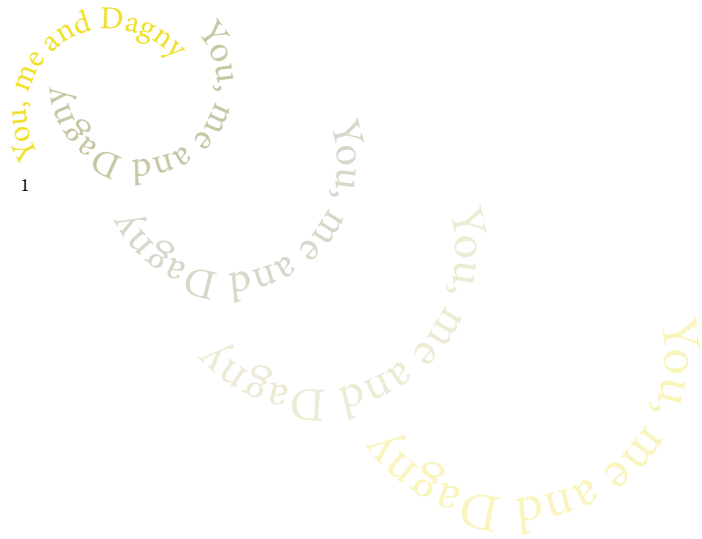
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MFA Critical Reflection 2022

Trondheim Academy of Fine Art

Faculty of Architecture and Design
University of Science and Technology



This first scene is grey with brown, green and blue. The soft soil under the soles of your shoes supports you, graciously, as you look towards the horizon, you see fog in the valley.

We are up on a mountain and if you listen, there's the sound of rolling stones on stone and a *thump* when it hits the heather. Look at the hilltops, the summits of our very home, the likes of which will never be built again.

We are seized by the luminescence from the lights which points us in the direction of a castle.² Take your stick and walk this way...

Hello, and welcome to my castle. Would you be so kind as to leave your jacket, phone, thoughts, favourite meme, reminiscences, worries, plans for what you're making for dinner or any other disturbances, *here*, before we continue to the Throne Room. Do it now! Quickly, quickly, I have something to show you! Before we move on to more important matters, I want to show you the ceiling.

How's the temperature?

We want you to feel comfortable, just toss your jacket on the floor, I don't mind. The castle is kept on an even temperature the whole year round, we decided for 21 degrees Celsius, a moderate temperature. Anyway, the Throne Room is right this way, up the staircase, here through the large doors.

Would you like to be the one to open them?

Look up!

This winter we painted the ceiling, every vault and girder gold, what do you think? When the sun hits the window, *there*, and *there*, it's an incredible sight. If you turn around, *look* there, *stand* there! When rays of light go through that window it's remarkable! It's not the right time yet, but if you wait for the perfect moment, the ceiling will shine on you and be gracious to you! Hehe. Do we have the time? I don't have a watch, but you might? Oh! Forget about it! Time is just a feeling anyway!

Let me see. You wished to see a painting? It's located in a room, which is also one of my absolute favourites. If you enjoyed Throne Room this next room I'm about to show will blow your mind! It's indescribable! Beyond words! I haven't altered the room one bit! The plan is... actually, I don't have a plan with it, it is just perfect the way it is!

Follow me.

Hey, you are now standing in front of a window I gave the name Iris...³ Ouch! Look at all that dust! How dirty it looks! You really need to look the other way, I'm almost embarrassed by this. In this castle we have a North-, East-, West- and South- wing. Here's the corridor leading to the South wing. The gallery is in the South wing and in the completely opposite direction is the Clock Room⁴. That might sound a little strange, as there's no mechanical clocks in this castle. In the North wing we have the sun, wind, clouds, moon, tides, stars and planets. You name it! I visit it very rarely, sometimes she visits the moon whilst brushing her teeth, because of all the busy brushing the moon loses control and it falls down, almost. It is unsettling...the lack of power can feel unsettling.

I am surprised that you wished a visit today. Is today Earth Hour? Is that what today is called? It makes me wonder. You'll understand what I mean when we get there...hold on.

This is the door to the South wing.

Here is the gallery—or *galleries*. The gallery makes up many galleries, we have; a Hall of Mirrors, Hall of Daylight, Hall of Chandeliers, a Military Gallery, Dream Gallery, Stoic Gallery, Love Gallery, the Profile Picture Gallery of Everyone I have ever Been Secretly in Love With, the Gallery You Did Not Know Existed and the Gallery You Wish Never Existed... The painting you are here to see is situated in another gallery I didn't mention yet. Further on. We are fortunate as we do not have to go through all the other galleries, as they are behind doors on each side of this corridor. This is the last corridor, I promise!

The painting we are about to observe was painted in 1954.⁵ What's so special about this painting is of course that you have come all this way to have a look!

Come on in.

Don't be afraid of falling through the darkness. Your feet are touching the ground even if you can't see it. We are standing on grass, if it helps you to hear this, I cannot see my own legs either, does it feel thrilling? Do you want me to hold your hand? Hold my hand, or else we might lose each other in this room. In this gallery, you cannot move whichever direction you want, we can only go closer... We can also just stand here if you want to see the whole picture.



What we are looking at is a dark street with a two-storey house with attic, and a bright blue sky with cumulus clouds. In simpler terms, we're looking at night and day. The idea behind this painting is a conflict, a paradox.

Should we get closer?

The artwork is inspired by poetry and the title was chosen by the poet I believe was called Paul Nougé. The title can help us to better understand what it is that we are seeing. Before we get to the title, let's look a little closer.

In front of the house is a streetlamp, illuminating the lower central part of the scene. Light shines through just two of the windows on the second floor, which tells us that the people living there, are either going to bed or waking up.

I've walked this street many times and photographed both the streetlamp and the windows. I hid behind that tree once, you see there! Can you see me?

Look at the iridescent parts of the roof, where some of the blue colour of the sky is mixing with the night's darkness...he painted this version in oil. It's hard to imagine a sky like that, when it's dark over here, where we are standing, it's been thought through, everything has.

This painting represents the duality of light. René Magritte juxtaposes the natural and the artificial light and as Empires exists in relation to a ruler, this makes it the *Empire of Light*.⁶ That's the title.⁷

You've walked a long way to get here and it is time that I introduce myself. I am a visual storyteller, creator of realms illuminated by flashes and perfectly metered light, which later become fixed forever.⁸ The stories written in light are inspired by the poetry of René Magritte's imagery and an interest in his power to illuminate ideas. I choose to photograph because of its built-in lateral nature that might lead me to multiple solutions and approaches and because the message it sends is in the conversation between you, me and Dagny. When I photograph myself, I am in a conversation with my photographed self. The photographs are what I've seen and felt, but they are also what you feel when you look at them.

Susan Sontag described the medium of photography, as a speech delivered by several people. I work both with single images and in series, where concept and content determine how the work is presented in an exhibition room. Often an overexposed light serves the purpose of a leitmotif, expressed in music I would prefer it to sound rich, dissonant, just like the inside of a sleepless person's mind. In my family a disturbance of sleep has been passed down for generations, and I have come to terms with the fact that my project is an observation of circadian rhythms and the disruption of circadian rhythms.

*The work's embodied message is that
rhythms control life on Earth.*

My search for *the Empire of Light* began by documenting light sources in daylight. It was not photo documentation, but a subjective observation of artificial light and daylight in my surroundings. When I exhibited these 'daylights', the most common reaction was, "have you considered showing them in a light box?" and, "it would look cool if the lights in these were illuminated". I acted on a whim and made a daylight box. My reasoning at the time was that using artificial light is a cheap trick and I didn't like that idea. Without the electric light, the photographs will have to be displayed in a window to come to life, backlit by daylight. In daylight the photograph is alive, at dusk it dies. It's a rhythmic work, the work's embodied message is that rhythms control life on Earth.

Hello, and welcome back. I know why you are here (because she told me)..
The dungeon, East wing, one flight of stairs down. It looks like a technical
museum, but in reality it's a bedroom with a plank, toilet, sink and
peephole through the wall. Her first title was conceived on the bed there.

Too tired to sleep

...Heavens to Dagny!

Did I have anything to do with this?

Follow me!

Off to
something completely
different. I need to
talk with the Three
Witches. In
this place it is easy
completely... The light is eating of my rib cage! Do you see what is
happening here? The photographs are hanging somewhere over there. In the middle of the room. Do you see any?
Me neither.

too loose yourself

This self-portrait we are looking
for has a staged narrative
where I am supposed
to shoot the light.⁹
Don't look at me.
I am hanging there.
Sacrificed and cool-
looking, the way she
wants it. We had an
elderly couple visiting
which were blown away
by this. To observe a weight-
less figure, a girl with guns,
took them by surprise.
I am amazed by their
reaction. They looked at
it as if it were words
screaming at them. I
guess not all of us have
lived with a great
illusion in their bedroom.
Look. There I am.
Do I pose or act, or act
as if posing or pose as if
acting? Do I pose for
the camera or am I posed
by it? Or is it even
more complicated?¹⁰
Honestly, I do not
have the time
to find the
answers to these
questions. But
maybe you do?
You do not
say.



With Marshall McLuhan's theory in mind, that media is an extension of ourselves, your latest gallery visit on the previous page was the allegory of how the camera is an extension of my body and who I am.¹¹ My generation views screens as a reality, a reality that we can control and perfect. I started with this when I was about yay high, got up one Sunday morning and borrowed my sister's computer. I knew I had about an hour before she would wake up from a state of dreaming and start to complain about the noise from the machine. She hissed and spat and I would run like a scared cat back to my alley. My first computer was my sister's old one, it was a beige PC battle station with a CRT monitor, floppy disk and CD-ROM. The baddest shiz nit from the mid-90s. My favourite floppy was a cat programmed to walk in four beats across the screen, and sometimes it sat on the trash bin. To have lived, to remember, a moving, trompe-loeil in cat form! After that, a world of editing software and image flora opened for me. The next step was LCD screens, there was a time I had two, and with that, the LEDs served as a portal to this shining Kingdom. I moved to study at the Academy of Light where I graduated with a bachelor of honours, I fell in love, stole a bike, and fell ill.

You are standing at the bottom of a staircase leading to a castle. Listen. You are welcome to stay if you want, but there is one last piece of information I feel required to provide before I leave; we have an excellent electric switchboard which is operated by The Three Witches.¹² Because of The Three Witches we can reassure that it will never become dark nor night. Isn't great! If you want to go into sleep mode,¹³ I can recommend another visit to the Hall of Daylight or the Darkroom which has red light bulbs. This red light has longer wavelengths and feels comfortable as the eyes does not have to adjust as much as to the white light we have everywhere else. One more thing. I would steer clear of the North wing if I were you. A robot has gone mad and is making a lot of mess. She told me that it has something to do with medieval clocks. I haven't the faintest idea of what we need them for.

"Allegory of War" by Rubens is a commentary on the Thirty Years' War in Europe.¹⁴ The central symbols in this painting are carefully selected and taken from a pictorial language that originates from the Roman Empire. The god of war, with a shield, sword, breastplate and helmet is held back by the peace fighter Venus. His red cloak emphasizes his Roman identity, under his feet is a book and a drawing that represent how art and text are destroyed and forgotten in the chaos and violence of war. The door to Janus' temple stands open, another symbol of war. The personification of anger holds the torch high. No one can be measured by his anger. The lye is crushed and lies on the ground. Harmony is art. Arrows, olive branches, sticks and all the other Roman symbols are there to tell the story. In the same language as Rubens I resort to allegories, although the symbols are hidden behind each individual's ability to look and ask questions. My symbols tell stories I do not even know myself, because unlike the old masters, I create art outside of the program, and am filled with questions and doubt.¹⁵ What I do know is that the white room gives an impatient feeling of what is going to happen next.

Hello, and welcome to my castle. We are standing in the gallery—or *galleries*.
The gallery makes up many galleries.

What do you say to a Black Square or Red Square? I, Myself, will have
a White on White. My food philosophy is to eat all colours. It's not like
it should come off as a surprise, my pants are white, anorak and singlet
too. This is inspired by a poem giving significance to how we choose to
communicate with each other by Lavinia Greenlaw...I know this poem by
heart.¹⁶

The poem consists of three stanzas of the same length, the first stanza
carries on in a normal pace-or, let me rephrase that, normal is such a clumsy
word. In the opening stanza, her message travels slowly, it winds its way
through time and the course of technological development. We see riders,
semaphores, telegraphs... the third stanza is 'faster, smaller and harder', an
image of how we communicate with each other today.

The ending is somewhat emotional. 'Nets tighten across the sky and the
sea bed' makes one think about Rolf Jacobsen's "Landscape with Steam
Shovels", where the steam shovels become the symbol of man's impact on
vegetation and ecosystems.¹⁷ I also register images of flames, 'when London
made contact with New York, there were such fireworks'. Hurray! Hurray!
And again, 'City Hall caught fire. It could have burned to the ground'.
The finish is heavy and flat; the images of flames and the density of that
last stanza gives me the feeling that the poet actually wants the City Hall to
burn down. Ha! Ha! Ha! It is both bitter and so good!

Ashes to ashes, light to light!

Now that we are entering another gallery the luminist Jeff Wall is an important reference to
a more conceptual art form, where the central idea is in the presentation of the photographs
and how they are received.¹⁸ I will not guide you any further as I want my photographs to
be experienced, rather than explained. Let us try just that, in the Hall of Daylight on the
following page.

She felt forced to create a gallery with daylight seeing that daylight is the Earth's vital source of life.

Imagine that.

In the Hall of Daylight there is no artificial illumination, which means that this gallery connects us directly to the natural world.

On the other side of this wall is another gallery that has no roof. The gallery without a roof has two sources of light interfering with each other; the daylight and the artificial light of The Three Witches.¹⁹

In *this* gallery an endless array of rich nuances can be evoked in almost natural surroundings. On my last visit two days ago, the room made me go mad. It felt like walking straight into the sun. This violent experience stands in stark contrast to what I am experiencing here and now. Today it seems that we have a flock of lambs or freshly cut sheep's wool over a blue sky...a pretty peaceful image, if you ask me. The room is very nice, but when the light particles slowly disappear, it dies. The Three Witches have asked for permission to access the Hall of Daylight but I suspect it will take a while before they are even granted a visit. The existing light carries a complex beauty that the Witches are not allowed to control.

Let us walk through that door...

Where are we?

Wait a minute... Through that door is the Garden... And that door will lead us back to another corridor with many other doors... I believe we are standing in the Hallway of Time! That's funny. Have you heard about The Master Clock?

The Master Clock is not the face of an old church clock, the world clock in Berlin nor the medieval astronomical clock in Prague. The circadian rhythm comes from the Latin circa, 'around, about', and dies, meaning 'a day'. The earth's rotation is not constant, which means that some days are longer or shorter than others. In other words, 'the day' has been baptized in the name—not names, just as we have been commanded. Because without a name or designation, you remain anonymous. What is anonymous is enigmatic and incomprehensible. When we in fact speak about 'a day' it's a watch that requires a maker.

I am that watchmaker!

The most unlikely event I can remember happened on solstice, before I was born. On this particular day I wake up from the sound of a buzzing fly. It crashes into my window again and again and eventually falls on its back. After numerous six-legged spread eagles and splits it performs a somersault and gets buzzy again. But only to repeat its self-imposed distress with droopier wings. Is it a sign that my day will be completely wasted? Am I dreaming?

Admittedly, I am awake. The fly too. My eyes search for a clock, the clock is standing next to the computer, and to my horror it is long past noon. I have never in my life slept until three o'clock.

On winged sandals I leap out of bed to check if the clock is running. Alas... This is bad! I feel the urge to escape the room immediately. My bedroom is on the second floor and I run down the stairs and out onto the patio, screaming, "MOM!"

This wakes my mom from nature's solarium and in an abrupt motion, she sits up, clutching the arms of her chair. I walk her way, I am thunder, cracks and sparks strike the grass precisely where my feet just have been.

The neighbours are passing the ketchup around the table. Their eyes fixed on what must look like the personification of an exclamation mark slowly changing into a question mark. Mom is smiling and squinting her eyes for protection from the lightning bolts coming out from under my feet, I am shooting straight to the ground as I am screaming about the day being wasted, gone, and fall to the ground flooding the whole garden with my tears. It is strange, it is strange to be awake at this hour.

I love you mom.

Sincerely,

Dagny Hay

Footnotes / references

- 1 The structure of my thesis is a written conversation between the reader, myself and the photographed alter ego. The polylogue discussed by Susan Sontag in *On Photography*, 1973, page 136.
- 2 Theodor Kittelsen's portrayal of the Ash Lad looking at the glimmering castle Soria Moria in the distance, is a symbol for progression and hopes, and is where I would like my story to begin.
- 3 Iris is the tissue that helps to control the size of the pupil to let light in. This is a reference to a design I made the first semester depicting sunflowers, smartphones and guns in a symmetric pattern that's reminiscent of the opening in the eye. The three subjects serve as symbols for my media-saturated life.
- 4 "A clock" is "any clock", except when it ticks.
- 5 Magritte, R. (1954). *Empire of Light* [Painting], The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Peggy Guggenheim Collection.
<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/2594>
- 6 René Magritte painted a series of paintings throughout his career, exploring the theme in 17 oil paintings and 10 gouaches. My interest in *the Empire of Light* comes from its inherent wondrous experience of it.
- 7 The title of my master's project is a direct reference to Magritte's series of paintings.
- 8 Sontag wrote, "Life is not about significant details, illuminated a flash, fixed forever. Photographs are.", Sontag S., *On Photography*, 1973, page 64. Sontag was great at discussing the proliferation of the medium, while I want to shed light on our artificial lit lives and proliferation of screens.
- 9 This is the first portrait I shot of Dagny Hay (May, 2020), *Scenes From Your Favourite Epic Movie (featuring the conspiracy pants)* [photograph].
- 10 Cindy Sherman is a pioneer in self-portraiture. Sherman's oeuvre is a great spiritual mirror for all of us when it comes to image culture and the obsessive-compulsive desire to take your own selfie. Looking at her work I don't believe she has ever shown her true face. There is a perfect explanation of Sherman's work in the book *Photography and Cinema*, "Does Sherman pose or act, or act as if posing or pose as if acting? Does she pose for the camera or is she posed by it? Or is it even more complicated?" Campagny, D. *Photography and Cinema*, 2008, page 136.
- 11 McLuhan M., *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1964.
- 12 I am using the symbol of darkness and chaos as an analogy for light pollution. 'The Three Witches' or 'Three Weird Sisters' are characters that feed the protagonist Macbeth with prophecies, which drives him into a tyrannical desire for power.
- 13 Touching base with something I read in Jonathan Crary's book *24/7 Late Capitalism and the End of Sleep*, 2013, page 13.
- 14 Rubens' *Consequences of War* (to be admired in Firenze at Palazzo Pitti).
- 15 Vilém Flusser wrote that doubt is closely connected to another term called freedom.
- 16 *A World Where News Travelled Slowly*, Lavinia Greenlaw, 1997.
- 17 *Landskap med gravemaskiner (Landscape With Steam Shovels)*, Rolf Jacobsen, 1954.
- 18 I am an admirer of his staged work with backlit colour transparencies.
- 19 *Second Meeting* by James Turrell, 1989, is a small house in Los Angeles that I've only visited in my mind.