

Remote Icons by Benji Heinke

I make paintings based on digital collages, exploring the interaction between the physical and the digital in the 21st century. The work samples imagery ranging from photography and pattern designs to art history and pop culture. The combination of these reference points results in otherworldly scenes, informed by everyday living in the digital age.

A vague idea of an everyday scene often forms the initial basis of the work. As it is developed, narratives form which become disrupted through collage and subsequent abstraction. My work includes people and imagery from my personal life as well as figures from fashion photography and stock images. The paintings are the result of a fusion of original and appropriated imagery, creating a distorted mash up of personal truth and internet-sourced material. This implicitly relates to the seemingly blurred line between fact and fiction in today's internet saturated world. Digitally generated imagery such as heavily contrasting RGB pop colours, warped elements, overlays and strong gradients are existent in the initial collages. Through the use of digital and internet aesthetics, my work points to the postdigital. This examines the human relationships with technology through direct and indirect means, in both the physical and digital worlds.

As well as being a visual artist, I am also a musician. This has a discernible influence on my practice as a painter. Preliminary digital collages act as 'demos' before being executed in paint. The translation of clean-cut digital to oil paint is not a direct one. The end result is always painterly by contrast, augmenting the conversion from digital to physical. The process of collaging makes direct reference to techniques utilised in songwriting such as sampling and the use of rhythmic patterns.

The 2008 album 'Intimacy' by Bloc Party has proved influential. The album was conceived based on a relationship break-up of lyricist Kele Okereke's. Throughout the album, the lyrics loosely discuss his personal life whilst referring to the Bible, Greco-Roman mythology and his own Nigerian Igbo heritage. I am interested in the way Okereke enhanced personal narratives with wider cultural elements and how this could be applied to my visual work. The use of patterning in my work refers to the decorative, as seen in Christian religious art, particularly that of the late Gothic/early Renaissance period. I am interested in alluding to Biblical themes and symbolism within my work, in addition to that of Greco-Roman mythology and Saxon-Lusatian folklore (stemming from my German heritage). I apply these influences, not through a linear illustrative mould, but through capturing an implicit essence of a particular narrative to create an unearthly atmosphere. With the inclusion of various art historical references, I aim to dissect, reposition and re-evaluate existing works into relevant new contexts.

I am interested in the idea of truth and lies and the inherent relationship to storytelling and power structures. This ties in with the spread of misinformation on the internet and the increasing difficulty in differentiating fact from fiction in this so-called 'post-truth' era. Having personally experienced psychosis, where I was unable to distinguish reality from unreality, I am fascinated by the psychological. I am particularly interested in the way that people can become

brainwashed through fake news and how delusions can take hold of someone with often disastrous consequences. Conspiracy theories, largely tied to far-right politics have developed over time, generally centred on certain groups. For example, antisemitic narratives, which have existed for centuries, as well as those directed at secretive societies such as the Freemasons.

In extra-Biblical lore, there is a rumour detailing a black and white chequerboard pattern on the floor of the Biblically documented Solomon's Temple. This reflected a dualistic cosmology of good and evil, a 'yin and yang' of sorts. One cannot exist or be comprehended without the other, creating a balance through the combination of the two opposing forces, in both the universe and also specifically within human life. This theory about the chequerboard floor in the temple is predominantly of Masonic origin and as such, features prominently in Masonic lodges to this day. No one knows the exact origin of this pattern, which has been noted in objects from ancient Egypt and floors of Roman villas. It has continued through the ages and is seen everywhere from Neoclassical palaces to more modest Victorian homes and 1950s American diners. This is of course in addition to chessboards and the motor racing chequered flag. Esoteric symbolism has found its way over time into pop culture. Musician Mac DeMarco wrote and released a song called 'Chamber of Reflection' on his 2014 album 'Salad Days'. The song alludes to the Scottish and French Rites of Freemasonry's initiation tradition of the same name. In the Masonic process, the person who is being initiated must meditate on their life so far and reflect on how it will change with the Masons. In the chamber, many esoteric symbols are present such as a skull, cockerel and a scythe, amongst others. DeMarco compared this experience to being in his home studio over a period of time. Musically the song makes prominent reference to Shigeo Sekito's 1975 track 'The Word II' through interpolation. This is a process where a musician recreates the melody of a sample, rather than directly collaging it, often to circumvent elements of copyright law. This would be the same as drawing from art history and painting the sample by hand rather than literally collaging it into the final work.

The song 'Chamber of Reflection' bears an amount of similarity to the Vaporwave genre of the 2010s. Vaporwave is/was an online musical movement which often sampled and slowed down existing songs, particularly from the 1980s, exploring ideas of cultural memory. These ideas also became part of a visual aesthetic movement, which often sampled imagery relating to consumer capitalism and technoculture. This ranged from 1990s computing, classical statues and architecture, hyper-saturated psychedelic colours, Japanese typefaces, pop cultural and esoteric symbols such as the chequerboard floor (which could also be a reference to the grey and white transparency chequerboard in digital image making). Initially ambiguous and therefore relatively innocuous, the musical/visual movement was then appropriated by groups such as the alt-right to spread political memes. It also spawned disturbing microgenres such as Fashwave (a portmanteau of fascism and Vaporwave/Synthwave) influencing politics amongst certain internet active Millennials and Gen-Z youth.

I am interested in dualistic, binary ideas such as utopia/dystopia, heaven/hell, truth/lies and good/evil. These ideas link back to both the spiritual and mythological as well as the technological and political. Speculative futures, in addition to reflections on the present and past are explored in the paintings, in order to try and find some kind of truth amongst the chaos of the 21st century.

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List of Works



Remote Vision, 2020 [Oil and charcoal on canvas, 100 x 70 cm]



Blue Icon, 2020 [Oil and charcoal on canvas, 100 x 70 cm]



The House Plant Shop (Eden), 2019-20 [Oil and charcoal on canvas, 243.5 x 192 cm]



In the Temple, 2020 [Oil and charcoal on canvas, 170 x 280 cm]



Distant Hour, 2021 [Oil and charcoal on canvas, 170 x 280 cm]