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Some thoughts on the art of Sylvia Naimark

In the artistic practice of Sylvia Naimark, I have come to find a singular and immediately recognisable style. While revealing a sensitivity to the historic traditions of art and poetry, her oeuvre is characterised by an individual and ceaseless scrutiny of painting itself.

Born in Malmö and working in Stockholm, she studied at various schools, including the Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm and the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem. Naimark's works have been featured in Swedish and international exhibitions, the most recent of which include the solo shows *Dog Secret* at the Nancy Margolis Gallery in New York (2018) and *What Remains* at Galleri Ping Pong in Malmö (2017).

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The paintings in the series *What Remains* show personal belongings and ornaments as separate objects removed from their context, from being close to a human body.

What remains of a past existence when there is no material evidence? In a retroactive gesture representing the experienced loss, Naimark's art seems to traverse the winding paths of memory towards a wasteland of aporia. In memories of the past, the unseen emerges, we see what we never saw.¹ Similarly, the objects in *What Remains* appear to me as symbols of a creative process. The imagery contains an unfulfilled potential of presence; a flickering intimacy quivers and expires. In a dialectic now, the objects insist on their own history, on a solitary reappearance in the now.

I am returned to a wondrous painterly world through Naimark, a world submerged in reflections and mirrorings. In several of the paintings, concrete figures move evocatively towards and away from the image. Like tracks in varying degrees of dissolution, these bodies appear from the darkness of which they are also a part. The temporally and spatially transcendent settings that recur in Naimark's works are teeming with murky waters, animals and humans that have conjoined or exchanged bodies with one another. In Greek tragedy,² the term *nyktipoloi* is used to denote "night roamers". These hidden characters on the perimeters of death and the city could, in a broader sense, be seen as personifications of darkness, creatures that are impossible to reach, shifting shape yet simultaneously present in every movement.

Like the works in *What Remains* suggest possible stories, I am reminded of narratives that defy being read, that open towards the ineffable. This awakens a kind of trust in my own

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, 1064.

² See Aischylos *Psychagōgoi* fr. 273a9, Euripides *Ion* 717.

relationship to the world. Being near, feeling but not seeing, accepting uncertainty. For experiences of loss are not necessarily bad. On the contrary, as the Renaissance poet Petrarch writes in one of his many poems about the nature of loss: “nothing is lost, and greater certainty would be worse”.³

In an artist statement, Sylvia Naimark describes painting as her way of thinking: “In my work, I look for a language with which to relate to and understand the world, not for truths. The physical dimension encompasses the materiality of colour and the human gesture. There are no answers – you go silent and visualise uncertainty.”⁴

In this painted topography, we approach what cannot be touched but only perceived by waiting patiently. Our thoughts linger in the transformation through painting of time and seeing.

³ Francesco Petrarca, *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* 125.75–76, “nulla se <n perde / et piú certezza averne föra il peggio”.

⁴ https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59d7d44746c3c41be2e09da5/t/5a70cb6b71c10baf104a500f/1517341547862/SN_Statement.pdf