

Homebound Conjurations in the Work of Tricia Wright

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Tricia Wright paints patterns whose designs, placed strategically in places and spaces in her canvases, help her recall her memories in the south of England where she was raised. These patterns are the artist's equivalent to Marcel Proust's sighting of the little *madeleine*—a mental doorway into the past and its contents. For Wright, certain patterns instigate emotional currents that cascade into deep emotional pools. Through remembrance and distancing these interior decorative motifs act as ideational and sensorial triggers of the past, of growing up the youngest of three children of Anglo-Irish parents, in Rickmansworth, in the south of England. In her notes Wright has written about how ambivalent her relationship is to her past and to the issue of what constitutes the perception and the lived experience of being uneasily at home in Great Britain, Ireland and in the United States. She recalls her housebound memories as a child (her family did not own a car) and being transfixed by the wall patterns and linoleum patterns at home and in her grandmother's house in Ireland.

The textile and wall covering designs from the turn of the century, from the twenties, sixties and seventies that the artist uses in her paintings to draw her closer to her complex feelings make it clear that her attention to the representation of patterns includes an art of description as well as one of ascription. The artist assigns some quality or character to each pattern as she works out the pictorial territory that each of her paintings takes her, allowing her to map out a journey of discovery (or of unraveling) for herself. The ambivalent condition that the artist keeps alive through a pervasive ambiguity consists in the tension that exists between the astringent clarity of her compositions and line work, which seems to proffer an aura of remove from her subject matter, which is countered by a sensation of moody introspection as well. This strange fluctuation of sensations not only gives her work vitality, it also charges her artwork with a touch of the sinister.

This foreboding aspect, for example, pervades *EKG* (2009) with its visceral internal rhythms, *Long Ago, Far Away* (2008) with its stultifying, proliferating forest of floret patterns that threaten to blot out the sky, *Home—Outside Looking*

In and Home—Inside Looking Out (2008) with their suggestion of remorseless ennui, evacuation and contamination, and *Passing Through* (2009) with its perspectival inference to space and time passage along with intonations of stasis, rupture, aloneness and perpetual wandering.

If these works are about the artist's relationship to "home" and to the "homely" (*heimlich* in German means "belonging to the house, familiar, intimate") it is also about Wright's relation to homelessness (that is, un-rootedness) and to the un-homely as well. This routing of the familiar and the territorializing of the unprecedented, the unknown, and the traumatic is played out in tautly choreographed visual sequences in Wright's most complex work *Storyboard 02.23.62* (2009). In 1919 Sigmund Freud, in his essay *The Uncanny*, refers to the condition of the familiar appearing unfamiliar. It is a feeling, he suggests, that is often symptomized through repetition compulsion, a disguised reenactment of a repressed trauma (*trauma* is Greek for "wound"). He refers to the uncanny as the "unhomely", a condition of *unheimlich*, which, while it recalls a place that the unconscious recognizes as familiar in one sense, is seen and felt as inscrutably eerie and uncommon in another sense. "*Uncanny*", Freud writes (citing Schelling), "*is what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open.*"

By the time the viewer's eye will have scanned the length and breadth of Tricia Wright's *Storyboard 02.23.62* several facets of intentionality will have become clear. The artist is intent in taking the audience through a sequence of charged events that change markedly from left to right and that by creating simple alterations in color, motifs and patterning she can produce complex implications in regards to narratological development.

Secondly it becomes evident that the storyline can be "read" or interpreted in broad strokes by looking at the elements as a whole and individually so as to deduce their interrelationships in the story. This systematization finds fruit in Wright's aesthetic approach that prioritizes clarity and simplicity. This straightforwardness allows her work to divulge its contents (and by contents I mean the suggested material that is being addressed in the work, that is a range of sensations and complex feelings) in two ways: by telling the story and by showing the story.

By “telling” I refer to the painting’s capacity to direct the interpretation of its own meaning by a type of extended visual rebus. Thus the arc of development from youth to decay and transcendence starts off to the left by a surge of earth out of which emerges a thatch of youthful flowers. These plants grow to the point of fragility and they bend downwards with their weight as three of their petals fly off, strewn to the ground. This action in turn leads the eye to consider the section consisting of interlaced hands festooned with an ornamental pattern and with repeated images of cherries, indicating freshness and sexuality; this sequence is followed by a billowing “surf” of earth over which a black cloud surges, creating turbulence below. In the final movement at the lower right biomorphic land curves and suggestions of fissured rock formations or dismantled architecture seem to be awash in the currents of waves or waters as the sky above dissipates into wispy designs (air currents?) that appear miasmic, hallucinating, ephemeral.

What Tricia Wright “shows”, through the pellucid clarity of her overall design and her nuanced color schemas in her recent acrylic paintings, is her involvement with time and her perception of her past. That is, the past not considered equivalent to personal history per se but as the object of the history of a life lived. Similarly, memory is viewed not as history itself but one of its objects and an elemental level of its development.