

# The Upside Down Legacy of Farrell Brickhouse

Robert C. Morgan

There are times when a title occurs that appears exactly right, but cannot be explained in legitimate terms. The words simply come through the act of seeing. I will return to this quandary in a moment. But, in the meantime, I should say the paintings of Farrell Brickhouse are capable of inciting language beyond rationale cognition, beyond the kind of language that dives into sensory depths filtered through the unconscious. Here we may discover the excretion of memory conflated or held back by the prophecy of last events **1.**(eschatology) emancipated by an eternal prologue to a new beginning. All of this is contingent on desire, the displacement of the pleasure principle into painting, a kind of eschato-scatological event. I am thinking of the orchestrated feline humanoids in *Club Europa* (2014), the poignant kiss in *Home Life* (2014), and the suckling cumulus clouds in *Under Nirvana* (2008). No matter how light or dexterous the artist's touch, the lainyered **2.** fecal density in these paintings underpins the process.

The sensual pigments used by Brickhouse have a delicate, yet molded effect. Still they remain inexorable and **3.** expulsive, if not unpredictable amid the art world atmosphere of coy trends and vapid rhetoric. Thus, Brickhouse's *tableaux* are difficult to clarify in today's digital environment – an environment mindlessly fraught with virtual cleanliness overwrought with vacuum cleaners and tidy porno. Even as his works appear inscrutable at their initial unveiling, they remain difficult to explain to the wolverine Wall Street cum Oedipal establishment. Given this current displacement of art in favor of investment, how does one make a convincing argument that these paintings are the real deal, in fact, some of the most significant and revolutionary paintings being made today?

Despite this perplexing conundrum, Jung's *anima* holds a vital presence in the paintings of Farrell Brickhouse. It has an important place in our current social reality.

The matriarchal *anima* resides deeply within the artist's creative source-point, beyond any facile or normative recognition. Somewhere in this Jungian stratum, there is a source of encounter as articulated in *The Undiscovered Self*. Here Jung speaks of recognition in terms of what is latent within the human mind, what is perpetually on the verge of self-discovery. This would include the reservoir of images stored in the unconscious, waiting to become paintings. In the case of Brickhouse, I have rarely found a painting I did not believe was real, or a painting that did not immediately come alive at the moment of seeing, that did not break open a hitherto lost conduit of some isolated self-recognition. While not all artists are shamans, I believe Jung trusted shamans, not because they looked different or dressed different from the rest of us, but because they were close to the unconscious. Indeed, the paintings of Farrell Brickhouse suggest a proximity to what lies dormant beneath consciousness, a quality I sensed upon my first encounter with his work.

I am in a quandary as I wander through the paintings that Brickhouse has selected and mounted for this show. I would claim the bare bent legs in *Ashore II* (2011) as a kind of minor masterpiece, as is the scruffy ideal oblation given to *Youth* (2007). Then there are the ineffable moments captured in paintings, such as the fantastic *Encore for Three* (2014) or the metaphoric *Petey Walks on Water* (2007). These ineluctable canvases are divided between the representation of solemn dismay and a clamorous happening in which comedy and tragedy seem to collide. In essence, they represent the absurd. They are suspended just below the Platonic ether as it evaporates into a murky solemnity or quixotic disaster. The results are never clear or coherent. Rather they appear blasphemous on the edge of some potential turmoil, nevertheless humorous and bawdy in their reclusive erotic demeanor. With a cunning sovereignty aching at his sleeves, this coarsely elegant painter brings us back to humanity. Brickhouse holds a penchant close to that of Giacometti or, for that matter, Marlene Dumas. As an ensemble they share the wreckage encountered by those humans lost in themselves – proud, sacrilegious selfies, coded in branding, sutured with tattoos. I do not pretend to understand the inner-self of this painter, but I sense these paintings go beyond their shelf life. They go deep into void of one's soul, capable of unlocking the doors of conceit once slammed shut in ages past.

And what about the “upside down” legacy I attribute to Farrell Brickhouse? A number of years ago upon seeing *Le Musee Art Brut* in Lausanne, I considered the possibility that truth in art – if such a truth exists – comes from an oblique angle. Since then, I have never believed in works of art that insist on their veracity through aggressive confrontation. For those who have encountered posters, leaflets, or constant videos on a repetitive basis in societies where oppression of human rights is their reality (even as they are unaware), such imagery is aggressive propaganda that does not permit thinking or feeling. It merely destabilizes the unconscious by separating it from the conscious mind. In contrast, I look for other ways to see art, regardless of what medium is used to represent it. I look at the paintings of Farrell Brickhouse because they offer a necessary and subtle counter-transmission in the most positive sense. In this case, painters who appear upside down in a society that perpetually mediates or disguises itself in order to appear right side up offers an important alternative to the fearful status quo. There is something more in art than the fashionable present or the dull thud of a hapless reality made only to assault the senses. Those who encounter the paintings of Farrell Brickhouse – not for what they mean, but for what they are – may find solace and fulfillment. They are works of art that manage to do everything works of art are expected to do, they offer solace and fulfillment but will never change the face of reality that lurks behind them.

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*Robert C. Morgan was given the first Arcale award for international art criticism by the Municipality of Salamanca (Spain) in 1999, and was later inducted into the European Academy of Sciences and Arts in 2011. His criticism is focused on artists who produce work that opens new thresholds of understanding the human condition in the twenty-first century. In addition to his writings, Morgan has worked as a conceptual painter since 1970, and has shown frequently in Europe and the United States.*

*Notes:*

**1. eschatology-** "last and "study" (-λογία),  
**Detritus as Art**

One might argue in favor of a transcendent aspect to many of these works; yet at the same time a Freudian analysis of the human need to accumulate detritus in one form or another might lead in the direction of a scatological interpretation. The opposition between the two—transcendence and scatology—is interesting, yet does nothing to devalue the importance of the works in this show. According to St. John of Patmos, presumably the author of the Book of Revelation, the last book in the New Testament, there is a prophecy of the coming of last events, or what theologians refer to as eschatology. If one were to combine Freud and St. John in the context of Accumulation, one might discover an important new synthesis in art, not altogether irrelevant to our time. For the moment, let's call it eschato-scatology, or more precisely: Shit matters!

**2. Fecal-Alfred Jarry Ubo-Merde – see text below**

[http://books.google.com/books?id=CU2WD5xBSTMC&pg=PA194&lp g=PA194&dq=eschato-scatological&source=bl&ots=upohvbV8Rx&sig =IO1K9lt6l1Bwfid6go2G1\\_rTPPM&hl=en&sa=X&ei=oaJDVO3qOeffs ASOkYKwAw&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=eschato-scatolog ical&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=CU2WD5xBSTMC&pg=PA194&lp g=PA194&dq=eschato-scatological&source=bl&ots=upohvbV8Rx&sig =IO1K9lt6l1Bwfid6go2G1_rTPPM&hl=en&sa=X&ei=oaJDVO3qOeffs ASOkYKwAw&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=eschato-scatolog ical&f=false)

**3,expulsive- Patheos (blog)-Oct 8, 2014**

... existence require a supernatural work of God that Baptist

theologian A. H. Strong described as “the **expulsive** power of a new affection.

Ineffable- too great or extreme to be expressed or described in words.

Ineluctable- unable to be resisted or avoided; inescapable.

**2. fecal- Merde avant- garde**

Given Barrault's appeal to the theater of Alfred Jarry, not to mention his reliance on the irreverence of Rabelais's own work, the critical alternative he offered to proactive guerilla theater was far from a mere reactionary reassertion of bourgeois pieties. Skillfully blurring the scatological with the eschatological and touting the tradition of what Yeats in a fit of disgust with Jarry's *Ubu Roi* had called the emergence of the "Savage God," Barrault laid claim to the earliest, offensive manifestations of avant-garde performance when appealing to Jarry's theater—Jarry the infamous offender of bourgeois culture who arguably fathered the avant-garde when his Ubu delivered the opening line "Merde!"<sup>64</sup> As Christopher Innes has noted, the uproar at *Ubu Roi*'s premier "was so violent" that the play continued only with the accompaniment of "catcalls and vociferous arguments between rioting factions in the audience."<sup>65</sup> While such pandemoniac displays certainly recalled the forums conducted during the occupation of the Odéon, Barrault's staging returned in kind the scatological performances that the occupiers of the Odéon them-

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selves had advocated and indeed pursued. To Beck's "Shit on everything rather than the sterile power clean machine," to Lebel's "It's time for mass shit-ins," but above all to those who had transformed his theater company's wardrobes into a "soup . . . filled with excrement," Barrault offered a Rabelaisian salute, a crude flaunting of the grotesque body and its fluids.<sup>66</sup> Turning his back to the audience and the activists, Barrault staged Rabelais's "The Arse-Wiper":