



*Idleness' Owl*

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*with* Terje Øverås



lately, something strange has been going on  
we have seen an owl flying around in the museum  
a grail-shaped alchemist, a bristling copper artichoke  
its ciborium head — a transformation chamber  
comingling birth, death, and rebirth  
she is herald, witness, and factotum

*owl beake*  
anonymous (in 1500–1600)  
Redware, lead glaze, copper oxide,  
scratched, 11 x 8 cm  
Accession number: F 9395 (KN&V)



flapping her wings eagerly in the air  
then hop-hop-hopping on the ground  
then shooting through the ether with feathers on fire

she is a sacred glyph — a vitruvian owl  
a light-mill, a wheel of colours and ideas  
spinning in four dimensions

*Untitled*  
Rob van Koningsbruggen (in 1986–1987)  
Oil on canvas, 93 x 70 cm  
Accession number: 3154 (MK)



eyes wide open, pupils dilating and contracting  
from eternity to infinity, from night sphere to pin prick  
swivel-headed hunter gliding on wings of silence  
  
three-lidded eyes spelling spells that transfix  
noble orbs, brimming with sable tincture, seizing its prey  
with rings of gold descending before the claw

*Painting*  
Rob van Koningsbruggen (in 1986)  
Oil on canvas, 76 x 69 cm  
Accession number: 3127 a-b (MK)



perched on a tower like a fluffy hourglass

waiting for the hour when lightning will topple

the already trembling structure

brick piled on lofty brick, mortar mixed with blood

obscene tongue poking at passing clouds and stars

bound to fall and crack, to shatter language and thought

*The Tower of Babel*  
 Pieter Bruegel (I) (in circa 1568)  
 Oil on panel, 74 x 59 cm  
 Accession number: 2443 (OK)



little owl, yawning friend, the museum is your playground  
and hunting ground. you feed on the fine and the foul  
but do you ever get a little drunk on the blood of saints?

the charming pellets that you regurgitate  
bear witness to a brittle past, and your discreet stools  
cause a subtle ferment in fertile soil

*New Babylon*  
Constant (in 1963)  
Lithography, 40 x 73 cm  
Accession number: MB 1963/46i (PK)



sipping colours like fine wine, nibbling on curious shapes

drinking fluid thoughts, sucking the marrow of cracked concepts

soaking up all the sepulchral nourishment of the past

baroque columns of fat smeared with blood and ink

ligaments built from who knows what esoteric protoplasm

all digested unceremoniously by the eager enzymes of the owly gut

*No Title*

Han Schuil (in 1984)

Oil paint and alkyd on canvas, 195 x 220 cm

Accession number: 3129 (MK)



rooting around in entrails slimy with unpalatable controversy  
gnawing at bones of outdated ideas, even chewing the brim of an old hat  
the owl does not shy away from any dinner invitation

the gastric chaos of the owl's innards is a purgatory  
where taste has been suspended and judgement averted  
being eaten is a grace, being shat out is a forgiveness

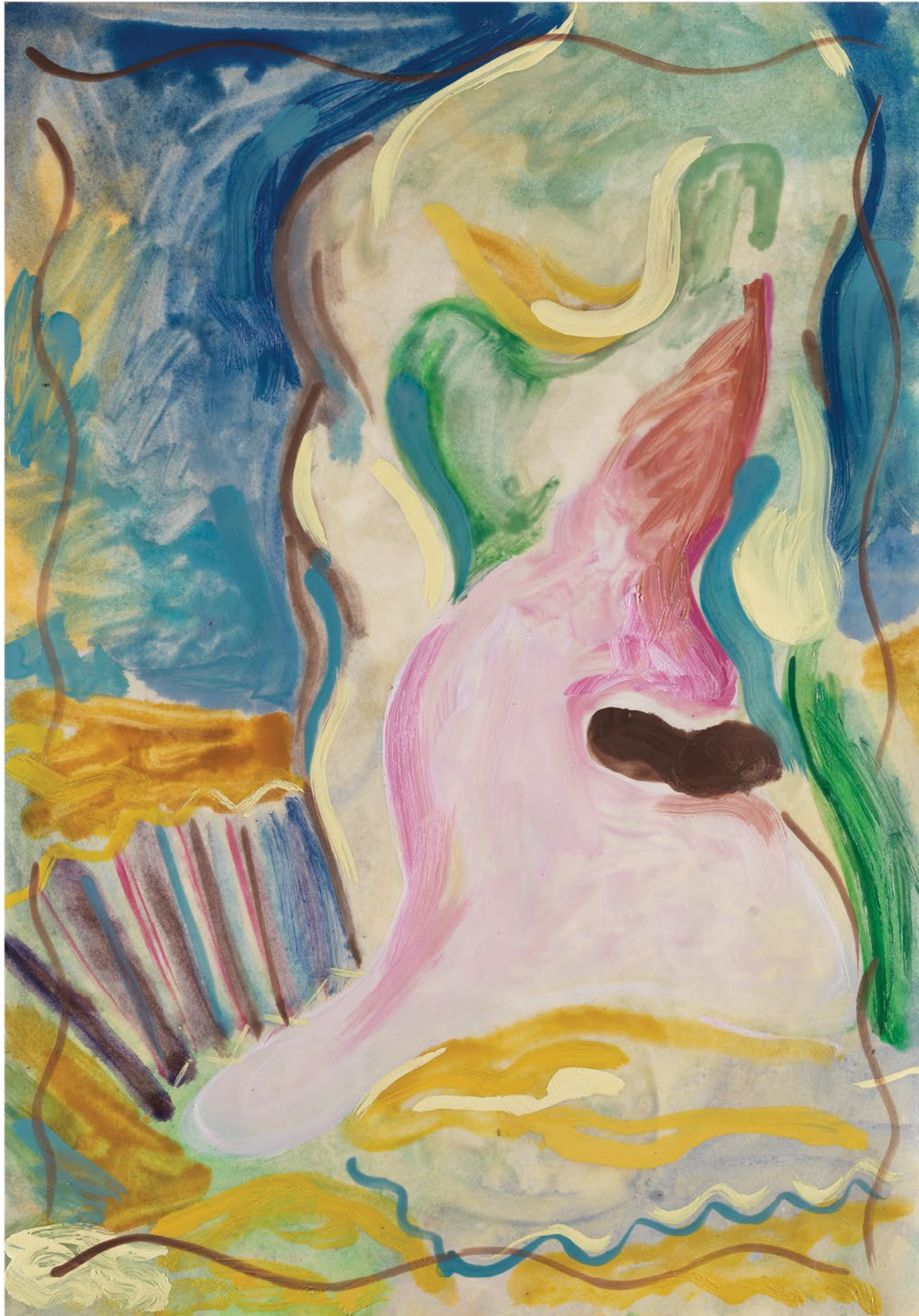
*Illustration for 'The Songs of Maldoror'*  
Salvador Dalí (in 1934)  
Photogravure and drypoint, 16 x 21 cm  
Accession number: BRL 1999-01 10 (PK)



the owl will gladly eat a horse without nostrils  
 who has lost its voice, but whose tail laments quietly  
 while serenading the dinner guest

from this reanimated carcass I could fashion a steed  
 a sixteen-legged horse fit for the apocalypse  
 or to ride out and fight against it

*Plein Air with Noseless Horses*  
 Asper Jorn (in 1959)  
 Oil on canvas, 75 x 65 cm  
 Accession number: 3680 (MK)



nor is the owl a prude — it will gladly peck away at sexual organs  
in flagrante delicto or in post-coital repose  
it will even lap up the light leaking out of the energized enthusiast  
  
regardless of whether you are a musician practicing alone  
or a member of a choir singing together in ecstatic harmony  
the owl will take part in your pleasure

*Afternoon*  
J.H. Moesman (in 1932)  
Oil on canvas with rope frame, 75 x 87 cm  
Accession number: BRL 93-04 (MK)



the owl has an indefatigable hunger that only art will satisfy

a brief sketch for breakfast, a still life for lunch, an abstract sculpture for dinner

a voluptuous, reclining nude as a night snack

the museum is a grand buffét catering to discerning owls of promiscuous taste

and ours is a veritable gourmand, a strigiform glutton

a masticator of masterpieces and a tippler of marginal doodles

*Egoïsme*  
Francis Picabia (in 1947–1950)  
Oil on plywood, 153 x 110 cm  
Accession number: 3400 (MK)



after a hearty meal, a ruminative mood tends to set in

as the art is digested and its ideas are broken down and metabolized

the owl puffs on a pipe and lets out rainbow-coloured farts

an æthanor of entrails where history is transmuted, solve et coagula

the inevitable nigredo, the ablution of albedo, citrinitas —

the expulsion of solar micturition, and rubedo — or bilirubinedo before the final projection

*Painting*  
Kees Smits (in 1983)  
Acrylic on canvas, 180 x 180 cm  
Accession number: 3161 (MK)



while straining over the chamber pot, the owl studies astrological charts  
 will this tiny turd fecundate the green pastures of art  
 or will it merely enrich the patina of an insignificant caryatid?

a benign natal chart might grant the stool a fairy godmother  
 while an unfortunate ascendant might degrade its status to a mere coprolite  
 take heed and plan your bowel movements accordingly

*Again, the Gemini Are in the Orchard*  
 Leonora Carrington (in 1947)  
 Oil on panel, 91 x 60 cm  
 Accession number: 4220 (MK)



the owl peers into the soiled bedpan with a concerned expression  
 looking for the stirrings of minuscule homunculi  
 in that dubious, primordial sludge, retching a little at the pungent bouquet  
  
 (artists are notorious coprophages, they eat their own excretions  
 and those of their peers — they wipe their bungholes with the pages  
 of history books and then lick their fingers clean — you are what you eat)

*On the Origin of Species*  
 Rob Scholte (in 1988)  
 Acrylic paint on canvas, 150 x 150 cm  
 Accession number: 3186 (MK)



a chemical wedding is taking place in the porcelain retort  
and a light shines down on the union like a blessing  
but the light descends with such force that the pot breaks

still, the wedding celebrations carry on like nothing has happened  
the carousing and revelling seems never-ending  
and the light pours down from the skies like wine

*The union of England and Scotland*  
Peter Paul Rubens (in 1630–1633)  
Oil on panel, 92 x 77 cm  
Accession number: 2516 (OK)



the owl keeps amusing herself with the other wedding guests  
 while starving acrobats swing censers like bored choirboys  
 the mouth feels a little dry and the feet a little cold, perhaps

because the light is now mixed with soot from a chimney in the clouds  
 a palace of evil arts — the celebrations are getting out of hand  
 someone breaks a beer barrel, and a drunken priest pulls out a knife

*La muse vénale*  
 René Daniëls (in 1979)  
 Oil on canvas, 150 x 209 cm  
 Accession number: 3025 (MK)



the owl tucks into some vintage Dürer to get some fibre in her diet  
 the people in the picture are also guests at the party, they are also eating  
 maybe it is their wedding too — all weddings happen simultaneously, in eternity

a sound is heard, like a double thunder, a siamese fulguration  
 the owl knows that the tower has finally succumbed to its destiny  
 and that the serpent sleeping at its root has been let loose again

*Adam and Eve*  
 Albrecht Dürer (in 1504)  
 Engraving, 24 x 19 cm  
 Accession number: DN 1274/225 (PK)



adam: *“my darling, why have you come to work dressed like that  
covered with a fig leaf — put it back in the case behind the plinth  
chaste popes and anaemic queens have not been seen in these parts in ages”*

the owl hangs upside down from the branch of a tree and  
ponders the prudent pudendum while swinging like a pendulum  
has this got something to do with the lilies of the field, she wonders

*Still Life of a Home Seamstress*  
Wout van Heusden (in 1936)  
Oil on canvas, 31 x 41 cm  
Accession number: Stad-S 52



eva: *“my darling, you are always thinking about work  
I came here dressed to contemplate — to vegetate, as it were  
by the light of this green candle”*

the owl lets itself fall to the ground with a soft thud  
she thinks the vegetables are up to some mischief  
the roses are about to grow thorns

*Adam and Eve*  
Albrecht Dürer (in 1504)  
Engraving, 24 x 19 cm  
Accession number: DN 1274/225 (PK)



*"I have no time for that,"* says adam, looking at the clock in the museum  
*"the animals will not name themselves, you know, and we have to be  
 fruitful, and multiply"* — he reaches for his pen and pocket calculator

the owl spits out a bit of engraving and looks at it closely  
 it is black and white — yet shimmering lysergically  
 it must have been tampered with, laced with something

*Clock*  
 Peter Behrens (in 1910)  
 Copper, glass, metal, synthetic, 10 x 26 cm  
 Accession number: V 2217 (KN&V)



the owl stops chewing for a moment — this is taking a wrong turn  
 almost like the infamous king midas caper  
 the owl takes a big gulp of cask-strength kandinsky to take the edge off things  
  
 the owl looks nervously around the museum  
 things look the same, but maybe the taste is a bit blander  
 a bit duller, somehow at a remove — something is amiss

*Grosse Studie*  
 Wassily Kandinsky (in 1914)  
 Oil on canvas, 101 x 79 cm  
 Accession number: 2677 (MK)

*Vases Indios. Owl on Branch*  
 Fred Carasso (in 1956)  
 Drawing, 327 x 250 mm  
 Accession number: MB 2020/T 231 (PK)



seeking some sort of affirmation that all is well, she walks into a pastoral tableau  
there she finds revellers sleeping after the wedding feast — a peasant, a soldier, a clerk  
poor man, rich man, thief — no war, just harmony

the owl lies down next to them and tries to rest, but her heart is beating  
a little too fast, and a cold sweat is breaking out, her bowels  
are rumbling and she feels a little ill

*The Land of Cockaigne*  
Pieter van der Heyden (in circa 1570–1572)  
Print, 19 x 27 cm  
Accession number: BdH 12956 (PK)



the owl hums a little tune to calm the nerves: “ooooooo,

*I am just a little owl lying in a field — oooooo, just a little owl*

*minding her own business — oooooo, just a little owl getting some rest”*

the owl listens to the snoring of the companions, but she can find no peace

*“I will have to go to the bathroom again soon,” she thinks, a little annoyed*

*“and I should probably eat a little more, even though I am not even remotely peckish”*

Terra

Crispijn de Passe (I) (in circa 1590–1600)

Engraving on paper, 17 x 29 cm

Accession number: BdH 15964 (PK)



even Hercules allowed himself a little rest now and again

why is there no time to rest for little owls? what is the great hurry?

it is as if we are running out of time all of a sudden, as if someone is eating it

the owl is quiet, trying to hear the covert ingestion

but the snoring of the exhausted revellers is too loud

or maybe the sinister chronophage is too sly and too clever to be caught at it

*Hercules resting from His Labours*  
 Giorgio Ghisi (in 1567)  
 Engraving on paper, 26 x 39 cm  
 Accession number: BdH 12484 (PK)



*“what about my own eating?” the owl ruminates, “is it yay or nay?”*

*have I been overdoing it? should I show some restraint? and what about the shitting?”*

the owl looks around and sees the chamber pot still leaking a stream of dross

*“idleness can be a virtue too,” she thinks, “but every virtue casts a shadow*

*but then again, maybe every sin sparks a light? whatever the case might be*

*today I do not feel like doing anything — I will stay in this field for a while”*

*Ulysses and the Cattle of Helios, the Sun  
God (Odyssey, Book XII)*  
Johannes Stradanus (in circa 1600–1605)  
Pen and brown ink, blue wash, heightened  
with white, framing lines with the pen and  
the brown ink, 18 x 27 cm  
Accession number: MB 332 (PK)



the owl leans back and stretches her legs out among the flowers  
the world starts spinning and the colours bleed into a blur  
and slowly her eyes fall shut and sleep sets in

it pours down from somewhere, filling her head like a cup  
then the cup spills over and sleep fills up the entire world  
a sleep without borders, without shapes - limitless

*Untitled*  
Rob van Koningsbruggen (in 1985)  
Painting, 70 x 70 cm  
Accession number: 3126 (MK)



as she glides through dreams like water through water  
she forgets her language, her memories, her habits, her desires  
if freedom is the opposite of necessity — then idleness is a subtle revolution

*Selfportrait with Landscape*  
Jim Dine (in 1969)  
Lithography 53/75, 97 x 135 cm  
Accession number: MB 1971/50 (MK)

Concept  
Text  
Graphic Design  
Photography  
Paintings

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