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SUSAN BEE

with Phong H. Bui

Although I was first aware of the essential *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* in the early 1990s, a biannual publication focusing on issues of feminism and painting from various dissenting perspectives (edited by Susan Bee and Mira Schor, published between 1986 and 1996 in print, and online from 2001 to 2016), it was only later that I met the painter Susan Bee through the late Nancy Spero, who was both Susan's and my friend and mentor, at the opening reception of Nancy's powerful exhibit *The War Series 1966–1970* at Galerie Lelong in 2003. Admittedly, I didn't get to know Susan and her work until 2007, especially after having read Geoffrey Cruickshank-Hagenbuckle's essay on Susan published in the May 2007 issue of the *Rail*. I still remember Geoffrey's haiku description, "Susan Bee's paintings are a savage mix of Expressionism and Pop schadenfreude populated by cut-and-paste pictures." Subsequently, on the occasion of her eighth one-person exhibit at A.I.R. Gallery, *Pow! New Paintings* (March 16–April 16, 2017), I finally was able to have a lengthy conversation with Susan in front of a live audience at the gallery (Saturday, March 25, 2017). The following is its edited version along with an additional conversation from my recent visit to Susan's Brooklyn studio before her upcoming exhibit *Anywhere Out of the World: New Paintings, 2017–2020* (postponed because of the coronavirus crisis) at A.I.R. Gallery.

PHONG H. BUI (RAIL): I'd like to begin with your painting, which is hung on the wall at the *Rail* HQ, titled *The Quarrel*, painted in 1983, oil on linen. It's a square and small format, measured 12 × 12 inches, depicting a man and a woman in profile, boxing with each other, right in the middle of the visual field. One reference could be Charles and Susan. [Laughter] Or not! Perhaps two fictional characters? We don't exactly know. All I know is I see it every day, and it's always given me such pleasure, yet at the same time I always am perplexed by it. Above all, the energy generated from the painting is intense, partly because while

the figures are painted confidently, flat and thin, the background is thickly and urgently painted with an overall mosaic pattern of bold lines and irregular black shapes. It's a tremendous contradiction that lies between anxiety and gaiety. Perhaps it's both sophistication and innocence, which reminds me of what our friend Bill Jensen said once about Robert Ryman: "He's the most sophisticated and the most innocent painter I know working today." I should also add that in addition to being committed to your work, you, like your friend and painter Mira Schor, together co-founded and co-edited the essential *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* magazine, which lasted from—

SUSAN BEE: It was published for 10 years as a printed journal: 1986–1996, then online till 2016. We also did *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism*, published by Duke University Press in 2000, and then in December 2016 after Trump won, we did our final online issue, #7. We just thought "Ok, we've had our say and we're passing the baton to you guys, the *Brooklyn Rail*."

RAIL: Whaaat! [Laughter] Thank you so much. Before I start I would like to bring up different insightful observations that were written by Raphael Rubinstein, David Shapiro, Johanna Drucker, among others. Raphael thought, for example, that your work lies in between the familiar and the strange, which manifests in the use of material and images. David Shapiro referred to your sense of humor in how you seem to be carelessly or anachronistically playful with your repertoire of images, and how to compose them and whatnot. You thrive in the idea of painting the space between the figures and the objects. Johanna Drucker said that you command a sense of anarchy and resistance, which is revealed in how you freely work in various techniques and materials: painting, collage, works on paper, artist's books, and so on. Let's start with *The Quarrel* in reference to the decade of the '80s.

BEE: *The Quarrel* is a good example of when I returned to figurative painting. Otherwise, while I was in graduate school at Hunter College from 1975–1977, where I got an MA, I was making a lot of photograms and altered photos, and I was also an abstract painter. I was working on big stain paintings in reference to Helen Frankenthaler and also more minimal geometric works. Then various things happened—including my mother, Miriam Laufer, died in 1980 and she was a figurative painter involved with the Abstract Expressionists. I felt I needed to get back to figuration in order to be near her, and really to explore figures in symbolic landscapes that had been in my mind for quite a while. So those images and those patterns just came to me relatively naturally and rather urgently. I'd just realized how I was drawn to a pastiche of different styles: so there's a Pollock section in the middle between a couple kissing each other in *The Kiss* (2014), with stripes on either side and above them, at the door or window, is painted various sorts of decorative motifs. The painting, *Buster's Sleeve* (2015), for example, which is from a series, where I was working off of very small black-and-white film stills of the '20s and '50s, and really wanting to make it all about the color, and the painting, and the people interacting as different patterns. Because I think of people as having different patterns that accompany them, strange as that may sound; you can see it played out here. That's why in the painting *The Quarrel* with the woman boxing with the man is somewhat similar to the one called *Pow!* (2014).

RAIL: Which in this instance, the woman knocked out the man with energetic and radiant stripes generating outward from the center.

BEE: I'm interested in the idea of the relationship between the figures, so that the figures are also like paintings. It's like the paintings are the figures fighting each other. Styles are therefore fighting

Portrait of Susan Bee, pencil on paper by Phong H. Bui.

each other. It's a pastiche, and in that way it's also like a collage.

RAIL: Would, having experimented and made photograms and altered photos inspired in part by Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray, as well as making stained and minimal, geometric abstract and collaged paintings, perhaps had an impact on how you think of your figurative works in those terms?

BEE: Yes. There is a certain level of abstraction in all my figurative work. Since, I bring the intensity of color and closeness with expressionism that I brought to my early abstract paintings and my altered photos to my current paintings. In addition, I was always interested in layering the imagery and emphasizing the paint texture and that was in my early canvases and altered photos as well. I was also involved with the feminist art movement. I went to a lot of events and shows at A.I.R. as a graduate student, and I was very inspired by artists like Judith Bernstein, Ana Mendieta, Mary Beth Edelson. They were doing a lot of figuration that was very inspiring.

RAIL: What about Nancy Spero?

BEE: Nancy was a mentor of mine, and I was really taken with what she was doing. When I met her, very few were paying attention to what she was doing in 1976–77. But it was very exciting for me to see what she did with collaging the figures and texts. I was inspired by how she put the figures back in at a time when conceptual art and minimalism were the prevailing trends. This was also a time where there was a lot of fighting between women, which there still is, about different issues regarding feminism. I think that's why at the time I did a lot of women boxers—I was looking for women fighters, a theme that was hard to pin down, pre-Internet. I went to the picture library at the New York Public Library to look for images. I borrowed images and some of them I'm still using. I found it really interesting because women were fighting with each other, especially in these feminist spaces, which wasn't being talked about. I've made paintings of women fighting each other, and on some occasions I've painted women fighting men.

RAIL: On the subject of two elements opposing one another: I remember once visiting Nancy Spero's studio when she was preparing a show in Spain in 2002. I was asking Nancy how the floating texts relate to the cut-out figures, and vice versa. She more or less said the texts are like fragments of the body, so the text and the figures should be treated in equal terms. I am interested in your case, how do you mediate the contrast between what is considered flat and what is considered to be textural, for example in the painting *Flesh and the Devil* (2015)? While the flesh of the couple's faces and the woman's arms are painted resolutely flat, which is a quiet area that you can rest your eye on, but overall it's incredibly active in texture and patterns of all kinds and high-key colors, which I notice wasn't as strongly prominent in the early paintings but intensified in your recent paintings. Where do you think that came from, that simultaneous view of the two?

BEE: I actually don't know where it comes from but I do have a sense that those faces are the resting place in this overly patterned composition—I

know it's too much—and the odd thing is that I studied with minimalists, and it had the opposite effect. I painted with just two colors for two years, and after I finished I was like an explosion, I'd been held back for so long.

RAIL: Who were the teachers there?

BEE: One was Robert Morris, who interviewed me and took me into the program and Rosalind Krauss, who was my thesis advisor. But the faculty really couldn't stand the fact that there were so many colors in my work. I remember the first time when I brought my paintings in and they started to hide behind their hands and said, "You have a lot of colors in these paintings." [Laughter] So I tried to diminish what they were saying but it didn't work. [Laughter] I'm really bad at following instructions.

RAIL: Ok, maybe that's the rebellious part in you.

BEE: Yes, I'm afraid that the rebellion was that I ended up going for broke and I see these as paintings within paintings as in *The Touch* (2014). Both images are based on a still from Robert Bresson's film *Pickpocket*, which is a black-and-white film from 1959. I really love this film. I have done four paintings based on stills from the prison scene in this movie. His girlfriend goes to visit the pickpocket in jail, so there's always this grid of bars. I was taught at Hunter to "always have a grid." I followed the instructions, and I got the grid. But I love the idea that paintings can have paintings inside of them. So, often I see these areas as being a separate painting or a painting that's fighting with the different layers.

RAIL: In the early '80s you were making similar paintings with these contrasts like *Cupid Complains to Venus* (1982).

BEE: This was based on a Lucas Cranach the Elder with the same title (1525–27) at the National Gallery in London. It was also included in the survey show *Doomed to Win: Paintings from the Early 1980s* that I had at A.I.R. Gallery, which was curated by Kat Griefen of Accola Griefen Gallery in 2014.

RAIL: Yes, it was the same painting that made me realize your exploration of pastiche is neither appropriation nor copy. Perhaps it's close to music sampling in that it takes a portion of one sound recording and reuses it as an instrument or element of a new recording. I mean your version is super intense and weird, especially with three flat silhouetted figures in blue on top of three letters "T", "O", "Y" against a very active and textural background. Does "T", "O", "Y" mean toy?

BEE: Yes, I know that painting's very complicated. I remember showing it to a dealer back then and I remember his reaction. He said, "But you can't do more than two things in a painting." [Laughter] He said, "You have three things here." [Laughter]

RAIL: Was it an accusation of greed?

BEE: I think that I tend to have to do more than three things in a painting, and that gets me into trouble. And as for the three letters "T", "O", "Y", when I painted them, they were all abstract shapes to me and I didn't even notice they spelled "toy" until later, I have to admit. I really like taking themes from earlier paintings, and I love Cranach, and it is

titled *Cupid Complains to Venus* because Cupid is holding a little beehive and the bees are coming out, and I had just started using the last name, Bee, so it was a self-reference. So there were six things going on in the painting. [Laughter] It had a reference to me, I sometimes have private references in the paintings that people don't know about.

RAIL: So one would say that your sense of storytelling, narrative doesn't have to be read?

BEE: Yes, even though I have a need to make a narrative, and I don't tell the viewer looking at the painting what the narrative is. In fact, I don't expect any viewer to see this image as Bresson would have seen it in *Pickpocket*. Or in *Raisin in the Sun* (2014), which is based on a film still from *Raisin in the Sun* (1961) with Ruby Dee and Sidney Poitier. I was interested in the poem, so the secret reference is to Langston Hughes' poem, "Harlem," where there is the line, "Does a raisin explode." I'm referencing the film, and also painting styles from the period. I'm creating complex layerings. Whether anybody else sees it but me, whether you read it that way, it's not necessarily so important. Besides, it would require too much literary explanation.

RAIL: Did you have any kind of rapport with Neo-Expressionist painting in the '80s, take David Salle, for instance, who had made use of collage and especially film imagery and montage, and so on?

BEE: I'm sure we were at times looking at the same images from film or even art history. Mira [Schor], however, wrote an essay in *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* #1 critiquing David Salle's imagery, partly because she had gone to school with Salle at CalArts. What was strange in the '80s was that the most successful women artists were mostly working on photography, like Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, and Louise Lawler, so one of the reasons we started the magazine was to talk about women painters. Women painters were being dismissed in that period because what we were supposed to be doing was a different kind of work, and that wasn't the work that either of us were doing. Many of our friends did figurative work that came out of the context of feminism or from abstract or figurative expressionism. It was an alternate universe to what was going on because we couldn't afford to paint those giant paintings [laughs] that were being shown at Mary Boone. And she wasn't showing us. It was a time when women painters were supposed to be doing more conceptual work in reference to *October* magazine, and that wasn't the work that my circle of friends were doing. So our works weren't getting shown. It was really impossible to get them shown in any commercial galleries, which was one of the reasons we started the magazine, so we could talk about different levels and a broader context of painting, although I feel my work still involves appropriation, but it's always charged with emotions. I never took any images from any sources casually. An image has to have some kind of meaning for me. That's why we called our magazine *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*. In other words, we were appropriating for very different reasons. I appropriate because I love something, like I love Edvard Munch, say his painting *Two Human Beings (The Lonely Ones)* (1896) so much that I had painted two versions of it, *Dark Matter* (2017) and *Non Finito* (2016). The

same with Matisse's *Seated Woman, Back Turned to the Open Window* (1922), the idea of bringing the sunshine of Nice to Brooklyn was great so I painted my own version in *Color Storm* (2016).

RAIL: Those landscape samplings are what Raphael referred to as "pastoral psychedelia." It's like taking LSD and walking through a landscape. No one would look at these paintings and the first thing they would recognize is a reference to art history, and that you're a trained painter. I like David Shapiro's description of them as wildly eclectic.

BEE: [Laughs] That's fair.

RAIL: Johanna Drucker said the sense of freedom you undertake is usually your immediate feeling about a specific subject, whenever that subject may be. It's as though there's no filter, which brings me to my next question: Do you relate to the work of outsider artists?

BEE: Yes, I relate to almost all of them. [Laughs] I always go to the Outsider Art Fair and look closely at the full range of painting categorized in that way. We were just talking about how much we both love Horace Pippin. And I just love the fact that the outsider artists are not really outside. I think they're really inside, and I think I can identify with their inside feeling. Also, the flatness in my paintings relate more to folk art than to modern art. It's something that really appeals to me, because I like the direct approach. I think Pippin is very sophisticated in his understanding of painting. It's just that it's a very different approach from an academic approach. There was a show *World War I and American Art* at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia (November 2016–April 2017), and there were a lot of trained painters like John Singer Sargent, but Pippin's work stands out because he just gets to the emotions right away. He just gets there so directly.

RAIL: With such economy.

BEE: Yes, with such economy. They're really small paintings. He was on the battlefield as a soldier, and he has a way of nailing the experience for me. I feel a really strong relationship to the folk artists and I never felt it was something I shouldn't look at, though I didn't study it in art history courses at Barnard and Hunter, because it wasn't taught. But I looked anyway. I also really love quilts, and the patterning and the idea of assembling pieces the way quiltmakers do. I like to think of the same process with my paintings.

RAIL: What about how you conceive image in space?

BEE: To answer your question I have to go back to age ten, when I played a lot with paper dolls. I would cut images out of magazines and I would make little collages. I was quite obsessive. In some of the early paintings that I showed in the '90s there were paper dolls in the paintings and other collage elements. My three books with Johanna Drucker: *A Girl's Life* (Granary Books, 2002), *Fabulas Feminae* (Litmus Press, 2015), and our upcoming book, *Off-World Fairy Tales* (forthcoming, Litmus Press, 2020) are all based on my collages. The collages remain more prominent in many of my artist's books. In some ways, these paintings are like collages. The flatness gives the sense of the collage or of cut-outs. I love to cut



Susan Bee, *Anywhere Out of the World*, 2019. Oil on linen, 30 x 24 inches. Courtesy the artist.

things out. Plus I was a graphic designer and I did paste-ups for a living.

RAIL: For how long?

BEE: At least 20 years, from the '70s to the '80s. I should mention that my parents were graphic designers, artists, and book designers, and they were always cutting and pasting, so it was what you did at our house. You could say it's in the blood.

RAIL: Another attribute of your work is the sense of humour which, according to Freud, is very different from the sense of comedy and jokes because the sense of humour requires a serious reevaluation of reality that is not being withdrawn, or passive. I would say it's rather intense and maybe subversive.

BEE: I like to take an image and subvert it. That's why in my upcoming A.I.R. show, *Anywhere Out of the World*, I take several paintings by male painters that I admire including Chagall and Ensor and twist their subjects around for my own ends. In *Oculus Mundi* (2019), I substitute my own image as a woman artist painting for *Self Portrait* by Chagall from 1914 and in the painting, *Demonology* (2018) I insert my own self-portrait into a composition

based on a print by Ensor. Thereby, altering the meaning of the image but in a light-hearted and admiring way.

RAIL: How would you describe your relationship to poetry, in fact you're married to the poet Charles Bernstein?

BEE: Charles and I met in high school. I was a painter but he wasn't a poet then. Both my parents come from Europe and they were very involved in literature. I grew up reading a lot of poetry and loved poetry, so when I fell into this relationship with Charles who turned into a poet, then came all the poet friends. I would go to readings with Charles and then I started to work on *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* magazine as a designer from '78 to '81, edited by Charles and Bruce Andrews, 13 issues in all. I also started designing for Roof Books and I worked with all these poets on book design. I designed a lot of poetry books and did a lot of covers. It became an all-encompassing thing and I loved it. Poetry has no money attached to it, so that's why I was working so hard in other design jobs during this whole time to support all these things we were doing. But it was a great thing to be involved in the '70s with so many things going on:



Susan Bee, *Oculus Mundi*, 2019. Oil, enamel, sand on linen, 24 x 30 inches. Courtesy the artist.

A.I.R., and feminist stuff, and poetry, and performance, and the downtown music and film scene. All these great things that were happening. So we were very involved with all of that. Then I started to do a lot of books with poets, partly because the poets always liked my work, which was not the way it was in the commercial art world, where they couldn't make out what I was doing. But the poets always supported me, and they bought my work and they would come to my shows and I have to thank the poets. [Laughs] They were not the mainstream poets. They were the experimental poets and they supported the fact that I was doing things that were outside of what was conventional.

RAIL: You all were kindred spirits.

BEE: Yes. They also had humor as much as they had angst, they had no money. [Laughs] It was a very nice community of people when we all shared the same struggle.

RAIL: What about your interest in film Noir or B movies? When did it begin, at least how it appears in your painting?

BEE: Take for example, the painting which I regard as my post-Trump painting, called *Afraid to Talk* (2016).

RAIL: A couple, and the man is holding a gun in his right hand!

BEE: Yes. There's always a man with a gun. And sometimes there's a woman with a gun. I love the women in these films. They're always as strong and dangerous as the men. But no, I never saw these films growing up. It was only in the last decade that I began watching films like: *His Kind of Woman* (1951), *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946), *Criss Cross* (1949), *Detour* (1945), *Gun Crazy* (1950), and others. I just thought these women were fantastic. They were always insane and violent, but I just liked them. I wanted to be part of that, so the only way to be part of it was to paint it. And I did a lot of those. I eventually started a series in 2009. In the show I had in 2013 at Accola Griefen Gallery, there were 16 paintings that were based on Noirs.

RAIL: In reference to those two paintings, *Color Storm* (2016) and *Distant Shores* (2016), based on Matisse's Nice paintings, where he escaped to between the two wars from 1917 to 1929, and again from 1939 until his death in 1954. These paintings of marvelous interiors looking out into the Mediterranean coast were of momentary act of painting and the fleeting atmosphere of time

and which they were painted. You didn't stay with Matisse too long I take it!

BEE: I've always loved Munch, Matisse, Marsden Hartley, more recently I have been reexamining Chagall, Ensor, and others. I always felt like I wanted to enter into somebody else's mind and see what they were thinking. I've been interested in the German Romantic painters, especially Caspar David Friedrich. I did a number of paintings based on several of his paintings, for example, *Moonrise Over Sea* (2011), *The Chalk Cliffs* (2012), *Window Frame* (2016), and I'm still very interested in the idea of the *Rückenfigur*, or figures facing the sea or landscape before them and they're seen from behind. I'm also interested in the idea of windows in paintings—what does it mean to look out through the window in a painting. I also did many paintings with car windows especially in the noir series. One car window painting is on the cover of Charles's book *Recalculating* (published by University of Chicago Press in 2013), so that was another theme that interested me. I get taken by themes, which most painters do. Even when you're an abstract painter you get taken by the color red, or a particular shape, and so on. Recurring motifs would occur even on a subconscious level.

RAIL: Take the painting *Dark Matter* (2017), for example, the figure might refer to the Munch painting *Two Human Beings (The Lonely Ones)*, which we mentioned earlier, instead of the empty, anxious, and haunting space, sea and sky, they're looking at you activated in space with your version of the wailing wall sort of speak, with maximal applications of various painterly gestures, mark makings, textures, and densities filling the entire space.

BEE: The strange thing was that I had initially painted the whole painting with the rocks that appeared in the Munch painting. There was a definite horizon so you can see it as a seascape but I hated it in the post-Trump period. I started to take them all out and then I wasn't sure how much I was going to take out, so the black lines turned into these energetic strips of removal. I left the rocks, so that you can still see them, and I left the figures because I had a thought to cover over the figures but then I couldn't do it. This process took place over a series of weeks. I kept arguing with the space of the painting. I wanted the figures to be looking into the future and they didn't know what the future was going to be. I was trying to figure out what the figures were thinking about—what they could be facing.

RAIL: How often does this last-minute change of mind occur?

BEE: It happens often. I paint with oil so it takes a while to dry. I'd therefore leave one part to work on another, so images will appear and disappear. These are process-oriented paintings. I begin with a basic outline and from there it's all whatever the painting takes me to places and tells me what to do with some designs of negotiation at times, other times not. In *Dreamers* (2014), I unusually added all this imagery that is not in the film still. It's a man and a woman lying in bed, it's very plain and simple. Yet I felt like I wanted to surround them with images of a flower, a weeping eye, an arrow pointing in from the left—I wanted to show these two people who had these different patterns in their life because it's true in *Raisin in the Sun*, in both the play and the movie that the two lead figures have different goals and they're fighting a lot. But at one point they were lying down together and I really wanted to focus on that image.

RAIL: So it would be fair to say that the automatic appropriation of the imagery as either a formal framework or a potential narrative is only a pretext, a jumping-off point really, because the rest is just dealing with the space in-between.

BEE: Right, it's totally an excuse. It almost could be a bunch of triangles—except that I always feel there's emotion behind them too. I painted triangles and abstractions for a couple of years. They were different from one another yet they had a relation to each other also. At some point I asked myself, "Why am I painting triangles?" Then I realized they came from my early photograms, so the triangles and other abstractions or patterns are there to either intensify or lessen the emotion.

RAIL: That makes sense. Also, I noticed in the last four or five years the reference to your past and your family history became very visible.



Susan Bee, *Under Water*, 2019. Oil, enamel, sand, and collage on linen, 28 x 48 inches. Courtesy the artist.

BEE: Yes, especially after having visited Germany and Poland in 2015. And I had never been to Poland. My mother was born in Łódź. I have a very complicated history with my parents, and I had gone through a lot of trauma of different types as I wrote in the piece "Threadsuns" for the *Rail* when Charles Schultz was the guest critic in May 2015. It just became important for me to paint images that were relevant to my own history. When I went to visit Ahava, the Jewish children's home where my mother grew up in Berlin, I took a photo there: "Artist daughter takes photo in front of grim Berlin landmark." I ended up doing a painting based on the photo *Ahava, Berlin* (2012).

I do occasionally paint self-referential portraits, but this is similar to how I reference art history as a form of self-portrait. Painting my history and my family including Charles, and my children, Felix and Emma, is also a feature of my many-sided self-portraits. When I went back to Europe, I started to think about where my parents came from, because I view myself as American. But my parents were Jewish immigrants and arrived in the US in 1947, so I have been looking at their milieu and trying to address my own history, but I don't like to do it head-on. More like sideways.

RAIL: How would you describe the change that occurred in this new body of work made over the last three years in preparation for this new exhibit?

BEE: I turned from making paintings with couples to paintings that rework or transform earlier paintings. To come back to it, *Anywhere Out of the World*, which is also the name of my show, is a good example.

RAIL: In *Anywhere Out of the World*, you are a painter holding a brush and her upper head is in the cloud.

BEE: Half of her head is thinking about escaping from this world, and the other is here, very present in the world. This is very much the way I feel in this world changed by coronavirus. I should say that I've been getting into a more dream-like space partly as a way to counter our current political and environmental climate.

RAIL: Perhaps your fantastical portrayals of the biblical and mythological are because of this time of need and urgency.

BEE: Yes, like the painting *Jacob's Ladder* (2019). While Jacob is sleeping under the tree, the angels are climbing up to a ladder that is actually going up and off the canvas. And the painting *Under Water* (2019) can be seen as my ecological and biblical painting all in one.

RAIL: I also notice there are paintings of animals, and creatures that I haven't seen before.

BEE: That was partially inspired by my trip to India and Sri Lanka (2018–2019), where I saw a lot of wild animals, including peacocks. This experience led to my interest in mythological creatures, and especially medieval iconography in illuminated manuscripts and romanticism—how the idea of women got portrayed as monsters. I've also been looking at William Blake's illustrations of the bible, among other things, especially how clearly the vision of his images came to him ...

RAIL: And were painted in the same way. This painting, *Demonology* (2018), seems to be painted so directly and clearly, which I'd say it's the most graphically legible and flat among your paintings I've seen for a while.

BEE: This is true. It's loosely based on James Ensor's print, *Self-Portrait with Demons*, (1898). I painted myself in his place. I remember clearly the feeling I had painting the demons. I realized they were friendly. I could relate to them. The demons are not as fierce and disturbing in my painting, at least compared to how they are usually portrayed. This doesn't mean demons aren't capable of evil: they are an imagination of evil doings. We've experienced catastrophic events throughout history, just as we're experiencing now with climate change, our politics, and the pandemic. What I explore in my paintings is how we coexist with evil. We never escape it. The devils are our companions. Our fate is beyond our control.

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