

## THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

after the sculpture hats of Gertraud Platschek

1

'You can leave your hat on  
You can leave your hat on'

'You give me reason to live'  
– Randy Newman, 'You Can Leave Your Hat On'

We are all us  
people like us in her head  
on her head

Made the world into a hat  
and the hats into a world  
on top of the world

Beams & girders  
in one ear & out the other

Made an annunciation hat  
ready for things to come

Made a resurrection hat  
a small shrine to self

Dead not dead  
(back from the dead)

Sackcloth and ~~ashes~~  
No,  
sacking and charms  
pinned on to the past

Balanced doubt on her head  
and held her head up high

Built a tower of Babel to the sky  
balanced on her head

Redefined the Renaissance  
balanced on her head

•

Four hats  
pinned to the wall;  
four in the dressing up box:  
photoshop opportunity

Windows on all sides  
cantilever construction

•

colander  
pomander  
coffee grinder  
strainer  
netting

Crumpled box  
and stuffed socks

the suns that tin cans make  
when you shine a light

the shapes that cardboard  
crumples into

the grid of cartons  
the grimace of dust

winged silhouette  
chance encounters

Collaged the weight of the world  
onto herself

•

It flows  
it stutters  
it is all angles  
it is taped & tied together

is drawn  
and sewn  
and taped  
and tied  
and encountered

and imagined

is put on Instagram

It is a living sculpture  
a liberated sculpture

is taken from the wall  
and worn  
and paraded  
and danced under  
and arranged

It is imagined  
then put back in its box

It is pinned up  
is lined up in a row  
is collected & selected  
discarded once worn

•

The architect of millinery  
builds as though  
you could wear it to town  
or inhabit the catwalk

She folds  
and scrunches  
and staples  
with sacking  
and fabric  
and string

Cardboard beaks  
plastics & stockings  
speak of utopia:

a fool's hat  
laid carefully in the corner  
eyeholes patched and ragged

sticks & sawdust  
tied to buildings  
nobody could live in.

•

The section of trunk  
is a population map  
of a dense city

Split wood  
shows the major routes  
of entry and exit

escape  
and revelation

•

She cannot see  
what she is wearing

It is far and away  
the best thing  
she has ever done

is a form of knowledge  
we cannot understand

is intuitive fashion  
that follows the line  
of discontent

and should be back in school

•

The badly patched tarmac  
has sunk under the weight  
of its own conviction

Double pay overtime  
having spent all day  
talking to each other

•

The blue sky  
has surprised the morning  
after a night  
in the dark

Away with plans & diagrams  
let us build  
each other's dreams  
and hide our eyes

We built this city  
out of birdsong

the call of ducks leaving  
and returning

the grunt  
of the first lorry arriving  
at the metal works  
down by the creek

the faint grumble  
of cars on the bypass

Leaves uncurl  
in the sun

the patio table rotated

makes a new room  
to work in outside

•

I put my writing hat on  
and sit out in the garden

thought I'd done  
with all this nonsense

but now I must interact  
again with the same story:

an androgynous angel  
is stunned and frightened  
as he enters the room

Nothing changes

An angel and  
a surprised Madonna

Nothing changes

a puppet show  
a flaking painting  
a comic strip  
an installation  
a flickering tv screen  
a primary school play

Nothing changes

•

Dead not dead  
breath removed

(As though angels were a thing)

She could not see  
what she was wearing

(As though these hats were real)

Kept these things  
in her heart

(As though memories could last)

•

Sometimes kneeling  
sometimes standing  
sometimes airborne

Together in a room  
but separate  
Worlds apart

The sacred  
has touched the world

the card & fabric  
embrace her head

Questions not answers

Fantastic uniforms  
and costumes

encounters with  
the impossible

Perhaps you believe?

We are awash  
with experience

- 

Do women have to be naked  
to get into ~~The Met~~ heaven?

Dating & mating protocols  
may have changed

Gabriel can't  
just barge in  
like that

looking radiant  
with his  
halo aslant

- 

Painting is a mirror  
and sculpture is a wall  
we walk around

Hats are windows  
with the shutters drawn

implied hats float unseen  
above paintings  
with no headwear in

They are the unsaid words  
revisionist interpretations  
ready to wear

do it yourself theology  
amateur architecture  
with inconsistent details

I haven't got a thing to wear  
and I am wearing it now

The artist almost always  
ignores the metaphor  
in the word 'overshadow'

but hats overshadow us all  
disrupting the iconography  
of self & the sacred

the sacred self  
encountering the other  
as it invites itself into your room

The annunciation is a hinge  
the hat is a window

the angel is a visitor  
the hat is here to stay  
dramatizing the head

a prop with multiple layers  
of signification  
and sacred overtones

a new iconography  
of the perfect woman  
as imperfect woman

the foundation of a city  
built by herself

The viewer will have  
to be taught to read  
the language of hats  
and architecture

to decipher  
the folds of association  
the meaning of wit  
and headtop theatre

the normalized retreat  
of women from  
the public sphere



into private architecture

•

Narrative time  
in spatial terms  
is frozen in this image

Looking is  
an act of attention:

sight lines  
in a sequestered space

viewer & artist  
separated

the rules of  
domestic architecture  
contravened

An intimate  
whispered approach  
to self

the sketch & model  
the model modelled  
on the model

a person with her head  
in the ~~clouds~~ architecture  
of her imagination

ignoring the architecture  
of the annunciation  
I presume to mis-read

turn upside-down  
and relocate  
in the city of self

•

Cropped & modified  
the narrative plane

and placed it on her head

Picked up  
her discarded socks

and placed them on her head

A human armature  
passive & wide-eyed

to support what she placed  
on her own head

•

Built a city of self  
and made herself  
a building to inhabit

Built a city of self  
and ~~made herself~~ became  
a building to inhabit

a sculptural context  
to mirror the internal

a box of self  
balanced on her head

a collage of the imaginary  
imposed on herself

a constructed set  
for the angel to inhabit

and not bother her

•

Convince us what we're looking at:  
a constructed set as reality  
as long as we believe  
in what the camera shows

The scale of the hat  
offers a false perspective:  
the architect & actor  
remains emphatically close

a wide angle lens  
is not required  
nor is building consent  
or any contractor

Very little space exists  
between the building  
and the head

the absent angel  
is suspended between  
God & woman

banished from what  
is central, autonomous  
and unique

individual even

•

Post post post post  
modernist architecture

built from discarded  
card & paper & string & socks  
(did I mention the socks?)  
& felt & cans & careful collage

She is the star  
of her own show

a silent angel  
excluded  
from her own story

a stage set  
for a queen  
who needs no courtiers

A poet  
would understand  
the lack of words

We are all us  
all them, *other*

People like us

besuited  
bedevilled  
behatted

2

'An angel is nothing but the personified meaning of the questions we ask'  
– Raoul Schrott, *The Sex of the Angels, the Saints in Their Heaven*

There is no path to purpose  
but I ask that you hear me out  
and allow me to explain.

Refresh your memory by  
experiencing the angel  
at a certain point in time,

make a new hat and put it on:  
millinery seems especially  
relevant here, meaningful

to us all. Mary often crosses  
her arms over her chest,  
I often cross the road.

See what I am doing? It is  
poignant and your life has been  
utterly changed if you want

it to have been. We dwell  
in different worlds but  
the hat is sacred and we must

ask ourselves the big question:  
Where are the angels and why  
do they not wear hats?

Divine inspiration cannot be  
constrained by felt or cloth, cardboard  
or wire; photoshop comes in handy.

Divine intervention is unlikely,  
but you never know, do you?

Perhaps you are on sacred ground,

perhaps you are filled with wonder  
and feel that you are inspired?  
Good luck with that! I will not offer

epiphanies or inspiration, tea and  
biscuits is about my limit. Angelic  
encounters can be wearying, so

sit down and take the weight  
off your head, put your hat aside,  
let us enjoy this visitation.

•

Any encounter with the sacred  
takes time to make sense of,  
ideas gradually gather a life  
of their own and ideas need  
nurturing before we share  
them with each other. Regard  
these events as a nice surprise,  
not just for the privileged few.  
Convince yourself that there  
are angels everywhere and  
you will start to see them,  
meet them, especially when  
you are not looking or are asleep.

Was it actually an angel?  
Does it matter? It was a dream,  
an encounter, abandon sense  
for the impossible, a new way  
of seeing. What are we about?  
How has your life been changed?  
Make a hat and remember to shape  
your belief into a collection of hats  
and photographs as you re-acquaint  
yourself with sorrow and grief,  
hat moulds, sellotape and string.  
Capitulation to an omnipotent lord  
seems to be the norm, so swat away

the dove and make room for robes  
and wings, demand equality of  
thought and theology, more room

on the canvas; physical beauty, piety  
and purity can never be enough.  
We need to see differently, see  
our way to avoid the angelic bird  
of prey and take back control  
of our lives. The figure in my mirror  
is attentive, but she cannot reflect  
enough, prefers to walk away  
from this annunciation and live  
as the reflection of another self.

•

Painting is an illusion, angels  
do not float above our selves  
nor deliver surprise messages  
or sperm in the sleepy corridor  
of dreams, cleverly set in  
the convent of ruined self  
between the angel and the book.

•

*What is the annunciation?*

A shadow of death  
and the end of liberation.

*What is the annunciation?*

An abandoned future  
and the curse of unwanted children.

*What is the annunciation?*

Spatial and temporal complexities  
tied up with purple thread.

*What is the annunciation?*

An anachronism within  
popular theology and culture.

*What is the annunciation?*

An act of religious meditation  
and public ritual.

*What is the annunciation?*

A depiction of space  
dramatizing difference.

*What is the annunciation?*

Narrative time outside time,  
temporal order frustrated.

*What is the annunciation?*

A manual for public worship  
around multiple texts as text.

*What is the annunciation?*

Detached and desocialized females  
deserving a feminist response.

*What is the annunciation?*

Visionary experience or knowledge,  
religious ecstasy imposed.

*What is the annunciation?*

Mary leans in to hear then backs away.

•

A line of separation between two:  
the whisperer pulls back.

Tumbling figure inverted  
cuts and fills visual space.

Salute and touch the earth  
below the suspended message.

Gesture triggers memory;  
angel dominates the space,

assumes another meaning.

•

The modern art space may be thought of as the lens through which we represent the scale of the room, floor and window a contemporary parallel to the past, a strata of visual deception akin to false perspective.

Elevate the horizon and confine Mary to a narrow strip of floor, her gaze drawn deeply into the space of composition. She is preparing herself for dialogue with the angel, who descends from a higher viewpoint, subverting rational space.

Even if hung in an exhibition, neither angel nor God exist and will not be able to visit. The photograph is startling to behold, forcing us to engage with the symbolic purity of its narrative content, although nothing sacred is visible.

Digital precision and flatness have come down to earth where sorrow dwelleth, migrating image into the fibres of the paper without leaving a trace. It is a subtle disavowal of religious association, suspended between God and man.

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Let us focus on headwear, what the best dressed woman is wearing. In the foreground, standing in a blue dress with a red shawl, there is a young woman on the cusp of an important moment in her life, yet she has no hat.

To the left, the angel is kneeling on a white cloud. One hand is raised, whilst the other is holding three lilies. Pink fabric billows from Mary's shoulders as she turns away. Neither are wearing a hat.

The light of the crescent moon defines the silhouettes of the forms in the composition. Colour carries symbolic significance but no-one is wearing a hat.

Mary's simple clothes emphasize her humanity, and she is wearing blue, a colour that symbolises divine love. Her cloak mirrors the wings of the angel, but she is missing a hat.

When the angel Gabriel appears to Mary she reacts with surprise and takes time to listen and question the words of his message. If only she was wearing a hat.

The viewer's attention is drawn outside the confining psychological space constructed by walls to the facial expressions of the women as outward manifestations of their inner hatless selves.

Neither merely naive nor decorative, *The Annunciation* presents an original, complex and powerful image of Mary as an autonomous subject whose hat is conspicuous by its absence.

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If the gospel account tells us something about the Annunciation, it says nothing



about how the Incarnation happened.

This is the God eye cannot see.

A deeper level of meaning only emerges in the spaces between intense listening and long pondering in human hearts.

This is the God eye cannot see.

The Annunciation extends out in time, a very successful communal enterprise because of the normality of the image.

This is the God eye cannot see.

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What would Mary do? On current evidence not a lot, she tends toward meek and mild, head hung low as she hides in her sanctum and ponders things in her heart, unshocked by the angel bursting in like that or by what he's said. She asks one fairly logical question and once answered accepts what's going on.

What would Mary do? She'd rummage in the recycle box and find some cardboard, to crumple, tie rags around the shape, string it to her head, post it on Instagram. 'You won't believe who visited today,' she writes. 'I was so shocked, I made a hat.' In fact she's made a few, masking how she feels.

What would Mary do? I'm going to give that some more thought. She's greatly troubled and perhaps the hat is not what it appears to be. Perhaps it is a mediation on the act of creation, angelic violation, or a critique of social change? Maybe it is *#metoo* re-aestheticised for a new era, a sublimation of human impulse and ambition.

What would Mary do? Well what would anyone do? Use all her architectural skills and training to subvert the iconography, reinvent the halo as a torn edge of fabric or card, write her own

apocrypha, subvert the idea of religious signs.  
She will not be a threshold for holy desire,  
will wear her hat into future space and time.

•

More of a therapy session  
than an annunciation.  
Perhaps an *un*annunciation,  
perhaps more of a discussion  
about the idea of pregnancy  
and starting her own cult.  
The angel seems to be quoting  
from the text he holds,  
Mary has put aside her  
coffee-table picture book  
and is concentrating on  
keeping a straight back.

The canvasses behind the pair  
are as blank as the future  
appears to be if Mary doesn't  
agree to this ridiculous idea.  
Gabriel intends to build  
the virgin's house to plan  
but given the opportunity  
Mary will not be involved,  
has other hats she'd like to wear.  
Is there an understudy  
she wonders, someone else  
who could be chosen by God?

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