

Psychic Prayers and False Promises: Mira Dancy's Future Woman and the Nude as Transformational Object

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Describing the art world of the 1860s - the decade that gave us Manet's *Olympia* (1865) - art historian T.J. Clark writes: "Critics agreed that the nude as a genre was in a precarious and confused state." [i] In the 150 years since *Olympia*, this confusion has not resolved itself, but only deepened, as painters have continued to reimagine the form for multifarious ends. Describing the art world of the 2010s, one might observe that a lot of women are painting women. While this essay won't attempt to analyze this trend at large, it does take as its focus one of the most compelling painters pushing this genre in a new direction: Brooklyn-based artist Mira Dancy.

Three new mural-sized paintings form the heart of "Future Woman." These works, all made in 2016, feature a reclining nude in a landscape and mark the first time Dancy has painted that specific motif at such a large scale. The 5.5- by 10-foot works (*Red Garden // Pink Repose*, *Red Garden // Red Repose*, and *Red Garden // Repossessed*) are stilled and indelicately painted. The bodies of the women are angular and sharp; their hands have long, sinister fingers. Each woman is tucked into a mountainscape with a feverishly multi-patterned, textile-like ground below and behind. In this pictorial plane, foreground and background intermingle and bodies loom large over the landscape. Each painting encompasses every color of the rainbow, an art school no-no that evinces Dancy's experimentation with the unrefined, the unsanctioned.

By painting the nude not as a portrait or as a static subject, Dancy acknowledges the female form's uncomfortable history in art while refusing to simplify, allegorize, or appropriate it.

Although the trope of the reclining nude in landscape can be traced back to Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (1510), it is most useful to compare Dancy's work with an artist active 300 years later: Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot.[ii] Primarily known as a landscape painter, Corot also painted several recumbent nudes in the landscape beginning in 1837.[iii] In *Bacchante by the Sea* (1865), one can see that beyond the obvious compositional



乔尔乔内,《沉睡的维纳斯》
Giorgio, *Sleeping Venus*, 1510



杜乔,《园中祈祷》
Duccio, *Agony In The Garden*, 1311

similarity to Dancy's paintings, both artists are employing a certain disjointedness in their treatment of scale - but to very different ends. [iv]

Corot's woman feels as big as the landscape. In proportion to the tree next to her or the castle turret behind, she appears supernatural in her giantess proportion. Dancy's women, too, seem to be the size of mountains. In *Red Garden // Red Repose*, the figure is slightly off, too big. Dancy explains the woman's size as an interruption on top of something otherwise abiding or logical. Her scale - her inherent wrongness - destroys the illusion of the picture plane and the world in which she is situated.

In 1865, when Corot painted *Bacchante by the Sea*, the female nude was under scrutiny by artists and the Academy alike. Corot had to make his unclothed woman palatable by giving her a mythological pretext. The woman pictured is the Bacchante, a votary of Bacchus in Greek and Roman mythology. Including this priestess in a quasi-pastoral landscape, replete with Lorrain-esque turrets, associates the female figure with a timeless and noble beauty as well as Arcadian ideals of the rustic and pastoral. Her perennial beauty is meant to personify the perennial beauty of nature itself - an age-old Western allegorical blending of nature and woman that extends here to the female body metaphorically becoming landscape.

One hundred and fifty years later, Dancy is turning this tradition of body as landscape on its head. Here, allegory is left behind in favor of a more porous relationship between form and background. In *Red Garden // Pink Repose*, a bended knee is interchangeable with a mountain. In certain patches, it feels like her leg is transparent, flickering like a hologram, with the landscape visible through it. A blotch of mint green on her torso seems to be reflecting the pattern in her hair. Other strips of pattern at the left intermingle with the sky. Here, body as landscape is about acknowledging the ways in which subjecthood is informed by its material environment. In psychoanalysis scholar Adrienne Harris's 1998 essay "*Psychic Envelopes and Sonorous Baths*," she describes French

psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu's work on body ego. He positioned "the skin as a complex, socially reverberating register of psychic structure and interaction." [v] Rather than the allegorical implication of female-body-as-landscape, Dancy represents the way we both inform and are informed by our environment.

Both painters also toy with the representation of time in their picture planes. For Corot, the specific referents of mythology and the pastoral were timeless, and they represented the highest ideal for the female body. Dancy paints her women nude and often in abstracted spaces because it doesn't associate them with a specific time, a specific mythology, or a specific ideal; she is unburdening the image from the fixity of time. In this theoretical space, bodies are language - they are signs that can have a multivalence of meanings. By positioning them as Future Women, Dancy upsets a representational time-space continuum.

This strange sense of time is further elucidated when looking at Dancy's work through the lens of British psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas's 1987 theory of "the transformational object." Bollas proposes that in helping to "integrate the infant's being," "the mother is experienced as a process of transformation, and this feature of early existence lives on in certain forms of object-seeking in adult life, when the object is sought for its function as a signifier of transformation." [vi] Bollas argues that adults continually seek out objects that promise to transform us, as our first caretakers did. These "objects" could be people, religion, ideologies, experiences - not to mention that "the advertising world makes its living on the trace of this object." [vii]

Bollas also applies this theory of the transformational object to aesthetic experiences. "It is usually on the occasion of the aesthetic moment... that an individual feels a deep subjective rapport with an object (a painting, a poem, an aria or symphony, or a natural landscape) and experiences an uncanny fusion with the object, an event that re-creates an ego state that prevailed during early psychic life." [viii] We seek out these aesthetic moments and experiences because they seem to promise to change us, to transform us.

Throughout her practice, Dancy emphasizes the nude's psychic positioning as a transformational object, whether it is used to sell perfume or a mythological fantasy. She often draws inspiration from the accoutrement of a certain lowbrow urban milieu - neon signs for psychic services, salon advertisements, and other street symbols that beckon women into feminine spaces, real and metaphoric. Yet in their sharp-elbowed fashion, her women dangle the assurance of transformation at the same time that they reveal themselves as false promises.

To this end, Dancy often scrawls words, some of her own invention, alongside her female forms: "bodytonic," "herfume," "pawn," "psychic." She douses her figures in glitter, remakes them in neon. She also co-opts Modernist styles, from Cubism's fragmented

planes to Kirchner's angular forms, but uses them for her own means - she makes Picasso trashy. Most exhibitions of Dancy's work have paired paintings with other media, a way of bringing her figures into our space and preventing us from dismissing them as passive objects on canvas. In "Future Woman," Dancy's multimedia practice is represented in the form of *3 Petals Open*, a tripartite 6.5- by 9-foot neon mounted on mirror; dangling 5.5- by 10-foot plexiglass pieces including *Hanging Repose*; and a neon in the shape of a woman's head whose hair twists into the words "remake me." It's as if the viewer's desires are imprinted on her body, confronting us with our own lust for transformation.

In the landscape paintings, perhaps more than in some of her other work, Dancy makes the women thorny, churlish, imposing. They don't seduce easily. In *Red Garden // Pink Repose*, the nude's limbs are too long; the way she spreads open her own leg feels like a threat. All three figures have outsized hands, twisted and witchy, with pointed tips. Their bodies are made of jagged edges. The sharp angle of the elbow in *Red Garden // Repossessed* is mirrored in the angular triangle shape of her hair. Here, too, signs of advertising, dollar signs and abbreviated body parts hover around her. In all of this, Dancy is disquieting the desires we invest in body-as-object, disrupting easy consumption, and liberating her women from being static objects, fixed for our transformation.

Bollas proposes that the search for the transformational object is rooted in the past but is always forward-looking. "Although it seems to be grounded in the future tense, in finding something in the future to transform the present, it is an object-seeking that recurrently enacts a pre-verbal ego memory." [ix] Thus, desire is trapped between the past and the future. As Bollas writes: "Even ruminative planning about the future is often a kind of psychic prayer for the arrival of the transformational object: a secular second coming of an object relation experienced in the earliest period of life." [x]

Rather than let her women be trapped in this psychic loop, Dancy positions them as Future Women; she paints in the future tense. Hers is not an optimistic, progressive interest in the future, but a way of unburdening the image-of-woman from being a fixed subject. Her women move freely through time. Dancy conceives of the three figures in these paintings as existing in parallel versions of the same dimension, where their three picture planes exist back-to-back, just on the other side of the mountains. *Red Garden // Red Repose* has her back turned to us as if she is enacting the same pose as *Red Garden // Pink Repose*, but we are seeing it from the other side.

A touchstone for Dancy for more than a decade has been Duccio's *Agony in the Garden*, one of the back panels of the *Maestà* Altarpiece (1308-1311) and a partial inspiration for the trees in *Red Garden // Pink Repose*. The piece contains two moments of time in the same picture plane - to the bottom left, Jesus warns Peter, James, and John not to be

tempted and in the upper right, he prays and sees an angel. The work collapses time in order to better illustrate a narrative. Dancy, too, thinks of her women cinematically, like actresses cast again and again in Rainer Werner Fassbinder films. They move between paintings, as if part of one overarching story, an endless structure.

If, as Bollas contends, the self "lies somewhere in the future tense" awaiting the arrival of the transformational object, then Dancy's women already exist there. Their painted plane is the future, making them forever out of reach, just outside our grasp, never actually transforming us in the present. The viewer waits on the Future Woman to transform them, but she won't. What Dancy gives us is the frustration of not being able to use a woman's body, not being able to own it, not being able to allegorize it. Dancy places these women out of our reach, but they are looking right at us – daring us to try and grasp them.

[i] T.J. Clark, "Olympia's Choice," in *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the art of Manet and his followers*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 122.

[ii] Lilian H. Zirpolo, *Historical Dictionary of Renaissance Art*. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 226.

[iii] Gary Tinterow, Michael Pantazzi, Vincent Pomarède, *Corot*. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), 164.

[iv] *Bacchante by the Sea* (29.100.19). (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-) <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110000396>

[v] Adrienne Harris, "Psychic Envelopes and Sonorous Baths: Sitting the Body in Relational Theory and Clinical Practice," in *Relational Perspectives on the Body*, ed. Lewis Aron and Frances Sommer Anderson (Hillsdale, N.J.: Analytic Press, 1998), 55.

[vi] Christopher Bollas, "The Transformational Object" in *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 14.

[vii] *Ibid*, 14, 16.

[viii] *Ibid*, 16.

[ix] *Ibid*, 16.

[x] *Ibid*, 17.



闪回的身体 *Flashback Bod*
布面丙烯 Acrylic on canvas
183 x 168 cm
2016



红色花园 // 粉色安息 Red Garden // Pink Repose

布面丙烯 Acrylic on canvas

168 x 305 cm

2016



红色花园 // 红色安息 *Red Garden // Red Repose*

布面丙烯 Acrylic on canvas

168 x 305 cm

2016



红色花园 // 再度占有 *Red Garden // Repossessed*
布面丙烯 Acrylic on canvas
168 x 305 cm
2016

精神祷告与虚假承诺：米拉·丹西的“未来女性” 和作为转换对象的裸体画像

阿什顿·库珀

提到十九世纪六十年代的艺术圈——马奈的《奥林匹亚》（1865年）出现的年代——艺术史学家T.J. 克拉克如此写道：“评论家们一致认为，裸体画这种形式不定且混乱。”[i]从“奥林匹亚”起始至今的150年间，这种混乱不仅没有自行消解，反而更加复杂，因为画家为了达到多样化的目的一直在不断地重新构思。而谈到二十一世纪一零年代的艺术圈，你会发现越来越多的女性在描绘女性。虽然本文并未尝试全面分析这种趋势，但的确聚焦于一位令人瞩目的画家，她正在推动此类样式往新的方向发展：常驻布鲁克林的艺术家米拉·丹西。

三幅壁画规模的新作构成了“未来女性”的核心。这些2016年创作的作品描绘了风景画中斜倚的裸体，这也是丹西首次以如此大的尺幅来创作这个特定主题。这些作品（《红色花园 // 粉色安息》《红色花园 // 红色安息》和《红色花园 // 再度占有》）长5.5英尺、宽10英尺，画面风格僵硬而粗野。画中女性身体瘦削，棱角分明，手指修长、嶙峋。每位女性都与身下、身后那色彩丰盈、如织物般的山色背景完美融合。在这个生动的画面中，前景和背景相互交叠，人体赫然耸立于风景之上。每一幅画都包含着彩虹的全部颜色，这一艺术学院的禁忌显示了丹西对于未加修饰、未经认可的事物的尝试。

丹西创作裸体却不视其为肖像或者静物，她承认女性形态在艺术史上的出现令人不适，因而也拒绝去简化、比喻或挪用这种形态。

尽管以风景中斜倚的裸女为创作主体可以追溯到乔尔乔纳的《沉睡的维纳斯》（1510年），但将丹西的作品与另一位活跃于300年后的艺术家让·巴蒂斯·卡米耶·柯罗[ii]的作品相比会更有意义。作为风景画家被大众熟知的柯罗，从1837年开始也在其风景中描绘一些斜倚的裸女。[iii]其1865年的作品《躺在海边的酗酒女人》除了与丹西的作品在构图上具有明显的相似之处，两位艺术家在比例的处理上都有一定脱节——然而结果却全然不同。[iv]

柯罗笔下的女人看似和风景一般大；与画中人物近旁的树和背后的城堡角楼相比，巨大的比例使她看上去不可思议。丹西笔下的女人也是一样，与山同高。在《红色花园 // 红色安息》中，这个人物因为实在太而稍稍超出画面。丹西解释说这个女人的尺寸是对于某些原本恒久不变或合乎逻辑的事物的干扰。她的比例——她固有的错误——摧毁了对这个画面、对她所处那个世界的幻想。

当1865年柯罗创作《躺在海边的酗酒女人》的时候，女性裸体还需经过艺术家和学院派审查。柯罗为



Mira Dancy, *Repossession Bacchante*, 2016
Digital collage with Corot's *Bacchante by the Sea*
米拉·丹西，数码拼贴，基于柯罗《躺在海边的酗酒女人》

了使他的裸女形象受到认可，不得不赋予她一个关于神话的托辞。画中的女人是酒神女祭司，她在希腊和罗马的神话中是酒神巴克斯的一位信徒。柯罗在一片类似田园风光的景色中画上这位女祭司，点缀着洛兰式的角楼，把女性角色和一种永恒高尚的美，以及田园牧歌式的理想联系在一起。她的永恒之美意味着赋予永恒的自然之美以人性——古老的西方寓言式的自然与女性相结合，在此延伸为女性的身体，隐喻成风景。

150年后，丹西颠覆了这个把人体比作风景的传统；寓言为形式与背景的进一步相融作出让步。在作品《红色花园 // 粉色安息》中，弯曲的膝盖和山脉相通。某些笔触中，她的腿仿佛是透明的，像全息图一样闪烁，可以透过它看见背后的风景。她身上的一块薄荷绿似乎在反射头发里的图案，左侧条纹图案与天空融合在一起。在这里，作为风景的人体，其主体性通过它所在的物质环境被呈现出来。精神分析学者阿德里安娜·哈里斯在1998年的论文《精神的信封和浮华的浴场》中，描述了法国精神分析学家迪迪埃·安齐厄对身体的自我意识的研究。他把皮肤定位成“一个可以反映心理结构与互动影响的复式社交反馈器”[v]。丹西在此呈现了我们从自身所在的环境中获得及提取信息的方式，而不再是对于女性身体即风景的寓言式隐喻。

两位画家都在自己的画作里玩弄了时间的再现方式。对柯罗来说，神话的特指和田园景色是永恒的，它们代表了对女性身体的最高理想。丹西则把裸女置于抽象的空间内，这样就无关于特定的时间、神话或理想；她将图像从固有的时间内释放出来。在这个理论空间里，身体就是语言——也是标志，可以被赋予各种语义。通过定义其为“未来女性”，丹西颠覆了具象派惯常的时空连续。

透过英国精神分析学家克里斯托弗·博拉斯1987年提出的“转换对象”理论来欣赏丹西的作品，这种怪异的时间感就变得更为显著。博拉斯提出，为了“使婴儿的存在更为完整”，“母亲经历了转变的过程；这种早期生命的特征在成人生活中仍然以一种客体寻求的方式存在，成年人通常会去寻求这种具备转变信号功能的客体对象。”[vi]博拉斯认为成人会不断地寻找可以改变自身的特定对象，就像第一个照顾我们的人那样。这里的“对象”可以是人、信仰、意识形态、经历——更不用说“广告世界也因这一‘对象’赖以生存。”[vii]

博拉斯也将这种“转变对象”理论应用于美学体验中。“通常在审美时刻……个体会感到与对象（绘画，诗歌，咏叹调或交响乐，自然景观）之间深入主观的密切关系，并体验到与之神秘的相融，使人再度被

唤起早期精神生活中普遍存在的自我状态。” [viii] 我们追寻这些美的时刻和经历，因为他们似乎能改变我们，转化我们。

丹西在其实践中强调了裸体作为一种转变对象在心理上的定位，不论它是用于贩售香水或是对神话的幻想。她常常从城市中某个低俗环境内的装饰物里获得灵感——灵媒咨询的霓虹灯招牌、沙龙广告，以及其他街头那些真实或隐喻的容易吸引女性进入的空间标识。而她的女性咄咄逼人，动摇了这种转变的确定性，同时她们自身也成为一种虚假承诺。

由此，丹西经常在她所创作的女性形象旁随意添加一些单词，有些是她原创出来的，比如：“身体汤力 (bodytonic)”，“她的气味 (herfume)”，“人质 (pawn)”，“灵媒 (psychic)”。她用霓虹灯再现了这些形象，置于光环之中。她也借鉴现代艺术的风格，从立体主义的碎片式画面到基希纳棱角分明的形态，但通过自己的方式去使用它们——她使毕加索显得没有价值。丹西此前展览中的大部分绘画都配有其他的媒介，不仅使她的人物融入到我们所在的空间，同时也以防我们将她们简单理解为画布上无意义的被动对象。在“未来女性”中，丹西的多媒体实践是由一系列作品共同来呈现的：一组三块 6.5x9 英尺的霓虹灯镜面装置作品《盛开的三片花瓣》，5.5x10 英尺的有机玻璃绘画作品《悬挂安息》，以及一件具有女性头部形状的霓虹灯装置，其头发卷成了词语“重塑自我 (remake me)”。观众的欲望仿佛被印在她的身体上，使我们直面自身对于转变的渴望。

或许和丹西的其他作品相比，在她风景画中的女性显得更为痛苦、无礼，令人印象深刻。她们并不轻易诱惑。在《红色花园 // 粉色安息》中，裸女的四肢过长，她张腿的方式像是一种威胁。这系列作品中的三个形象都有特大号的手，扭曲且怪异，手指很纤细；她们身体的边缘都参差不齐。在《红色花园 // 再度占有》中，肘部尖锐的角度对应着菱角分明的头发。同样在这幅画里，环绕着她的是广告标识、美元标识和简化的身体部位。在这些作品中，“被物化的身体”投射出我们的欲望，丹西正是以此使我们不安，瓦解我们对于女性身体的简单消费，并使她的女性从静物中得到解放，为我们的转变奠定基础。

博拉斯提出，转变对象的研究虽然植根于过去，却也有远见。“尽管它似乎以将来为基础，去寻找未来之物以改变当下，但客体寻求早就存在于掌握语言之前的记忆之中。” [ix] 因此，欲望被困在过去和未来之间。就像博拉斯所述：“甚至对未来的深谋远虑也是一种对于转变对象到来的精神祈祷；祈求生命初始所经历的对象关系能够再次长久地到来。” [x]

与其让她的女性形象被困于精神领域内，丹西就把她们定义为“未来女性”；她的创作是将来时。这并非出于对未来的乐观或进取之心，而是一种将“女性形象”从静物中释放出来的方式。她的女人在时间里自由穿梭。丹西把这些画作中的三位女性构想为存在于同一维度的平行版本，她们所处的图像平面背靠背，在山的另一端。《红色花园 // 红色安息》内的女性背朝我们，就好像她在《红色花园 // 粉色安息》内摆出同样的姿态，只是我们正从另一边看她。

杜乔的《园中祈祷》在十多年来一直是丹西的试金石，它是祭坛《圣母像》(1308-1311年)的一块背板：在《红色花园 // 粉色安息》中，部分对于树的灵感也源于此。这件作品在一个画面上同时包含了两个时间——左下角，耶稣警告彼得·詹姆斯和约翰不要受到诱惑，而在右上角，耶稣祈祷并见到了一位天使。作品为了更好地叙事，打破了时间的概念。丹西也从电影的角度思考她的女性，就像赖纳·维尔纳·法

斯宾德电影中反复出演的女演员一样，她们在画间移动，犹如一个宏大故事里的一部分，好似一种无止境的建构。

如果正如博拉斯所主张的，我们“存在于未来某处”的自身正在等待着转变对象的到来，那么丹西的女性形象已经在那里存在了。她们所在的画面即是未来，永远遥不可及，超出我们控制，永远不能真正改变当下的我们。观者期待着“未来女性”能改变他们，但她并不会。丹西所传达的是女性的身体不能被使用、不能被拥有、也不能被神化的挫败。她把女性置于我们无法触碰的位置，但是她们在看着我们——挑衅我们去抓住他们。

i T.J. 克拉克，《奥林匹亚的选择》，刊于《现代生活绘画：马奈及其追随者艺术中的巴黎》，普林斯顿大学出版社出版，新泽西州普林斯顿市，1999年，第122页。

ii 莉莲·H·泽波洛，《文艺复兴艺术的史学辞典》，罗曼和利特尔菲尔德出版社出版，马里兰州兰哈姆，2016年，第226页。

iii 盖里·丁特罗，迈克尔·潘塔齐，文森特·波马雷德，《柯罗》，大都会艺术博物馆出版，纽约，1996年，第164页。

iv 《躺在海边的酗酒女人 (29.100.19)》，纽约大都会博物馆，2000-，检索于

<http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110000396>

v 阿德里安娜·哈里斯，《精神的信封和浮华的浴场：将身体置于关系论和临床实验中》，刊于《人体的关系视角》，刘易斯·亚伦和弗朗西丝·索默·安德森编辑，安娜兰蒂克出版社出版，新泽西州希尔代尔，1998年，第55页。

vi 克里斯托弗·博拉斯，《转换对象》，刊于《物体阴影：未知的心理分析》，哥伦比亚大学出版社出版，纽约，1987年，第14页。

vii 同上，第14、16页。

viii 同上，第16页。

ix 同上，第16页。

x 同上，第17页。



柯罗，《躺在海边的酗酒女人》

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Bacchante by the Sea*, 1865