

Inspirational 53

An abstract painting featuring thick, textured brushstrokes. The color palette includes warm tones like yellow, pink, and orange, contrasted with cooler tones like blue and dark brown. The composition is dynamic, with a large, bright yellow and pink area in the upper center, a dark blue and black shape on the left, and a dark brown, textured shape at the bottom.

CAR ACT AIR

suneet madan

timo ahjotuli

tyynelä gallery

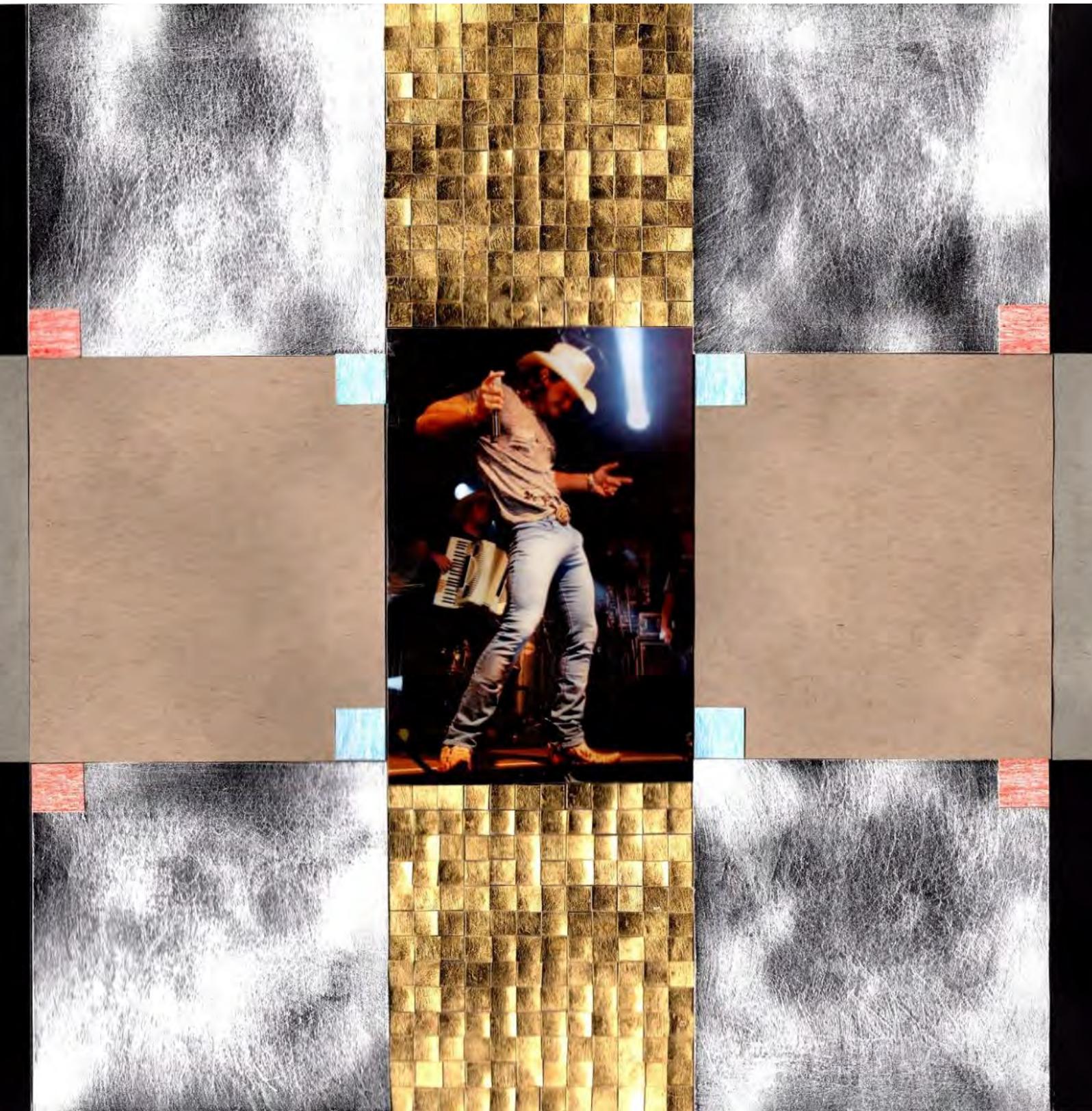
john devlin

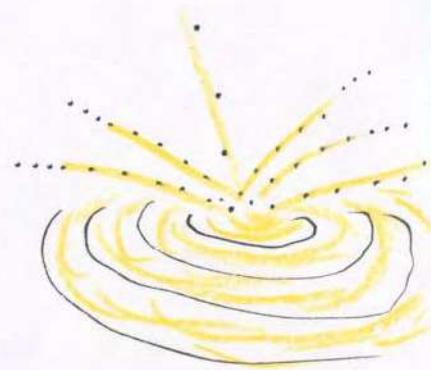
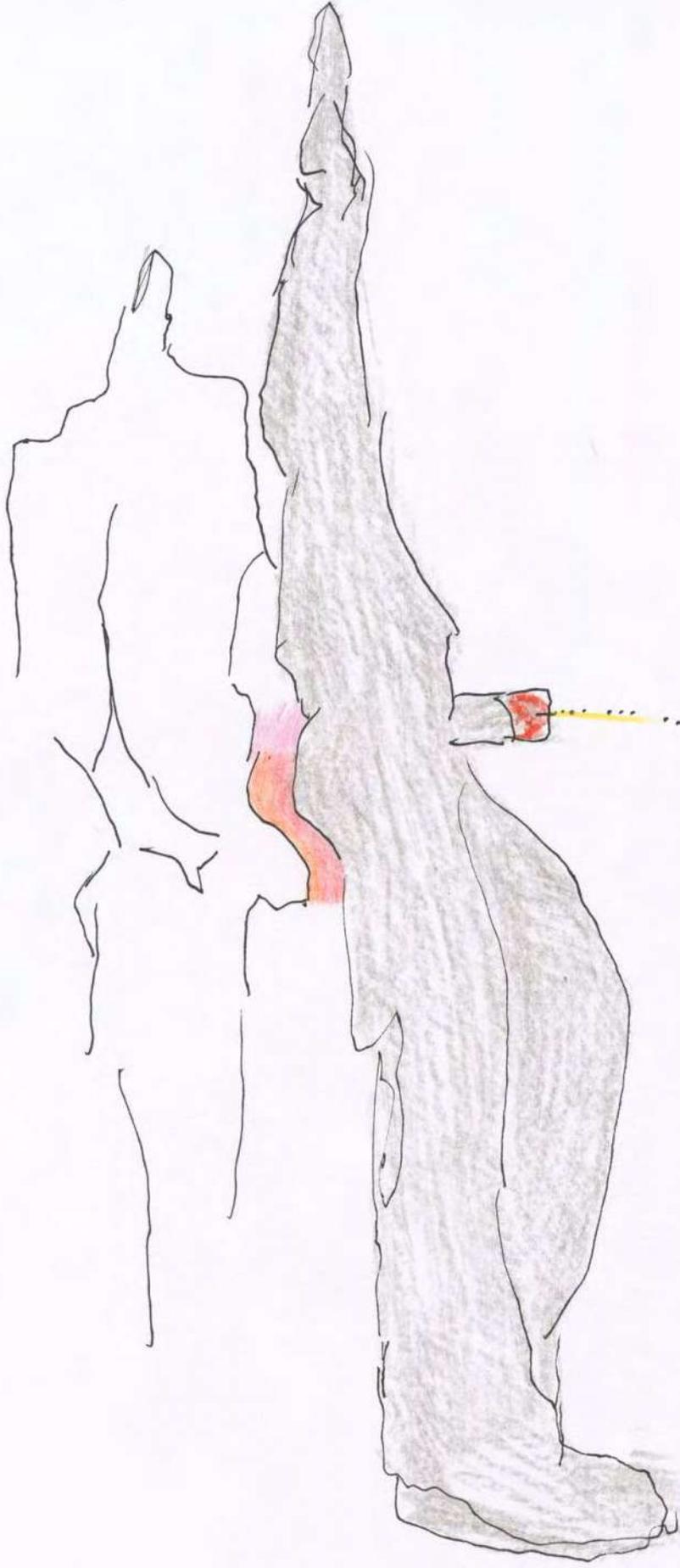
nidhi shekhawat

melissa emerson



**john
devlin:
interview**





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john devlin: interview

Immaculate Conceptions: Hypersexuality and Creativity in John Devlin's Drawings

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This is the first time a sequence of John Devlin's erotic images has been shown as such.

Devlin's visual work has been shown internationally, though it has been primarily his *Nova Cantabrigiensis* or visionary 'New Cambridge' work that has received attention, along with his non-erotic collages and miscellaneous objects such as his Bible, and that largely in Art Brut circles.

Recently however, Devlin's poetry has begun to receive some much deserved attention, from myself and others, and with it the depth & scope of his oeuvre has been coming to light.

We've needed a study of Devlin's erotic art, if not of eroticism in his art generally.

DIALOGUE:

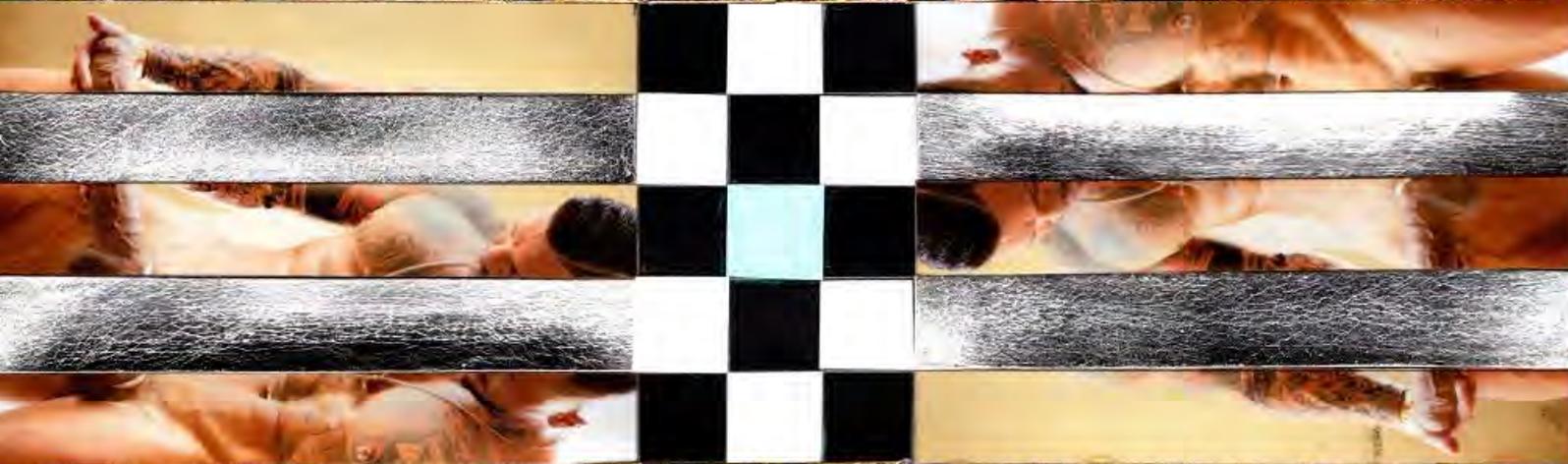
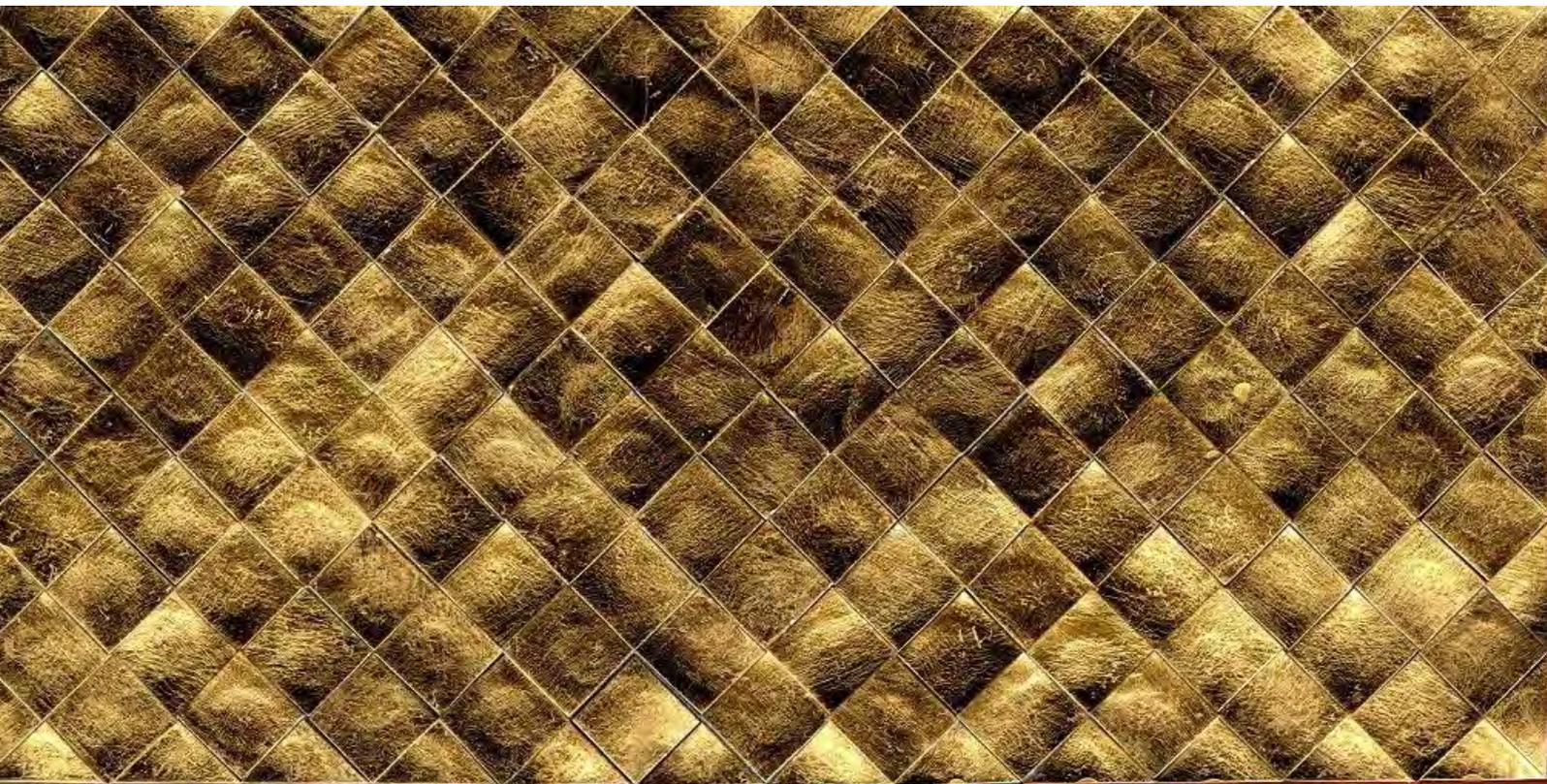
TP: *John, here's a theory that came to me as I've been considering your work anew for this interview.*

Your sexuality & hypersexuality represent a spectrum that rules over the heart of your universe. In your Nova Cantabrigiensis, sexuality undergoes a subversion and propels in subterranean fashion the vision of a complex world; your erotic collage on the other hand covers itself in sex, wears pudenda openly. Yet throughout your oeuvre your work never loses its fascination with pattern and a mystical love of algorithm. The difference between the subversion or the surfacing of sexuality is merely which side of that grid you're on.

The compulsion of sexuality from interior to exterior, and vice versa, seems to be your major occupational hazard. While your work exhibits an extraordinary formal control, I get the impression that your Nova Cantabrigiensis nearly destroyed you. With that in mind I sometimes see your erotic images as emblems of an uncontrollable dynamism. That dynamism remembers itself and seems even to present its creator in its invention, as if the machine runs on without you.

JD: In my work there have been motifs that appear quite early, to be elaborated and developed much later. For instance, the motif of gold which appears as early as 1983 in some stories, to emerge full-blown as actual gold leaf collages after 2017.





john devlin: interview

Another motif is that of the body. The first drawing in this sequence dates from 1988. I have returned to the [male] body every once in a while after 1988, emerging with greater force as time goes on.

You're right that *Nova Cantabrigiensis* nearly destroyed me. Or I destroyed it. I mined that vein (and myself) to exhaustion from 1984 to '89. As I lost interest in a built city as a Utopia, I instead saw the body as the sought-after utopian topography, rather than anything made of bricks and mortar. But this obsession led to excess every time, and then revulsion, as I found spiritual refuge from the senses in algorithms. And so the cycle repeated.

I'm glad you brought up the subject of hypersexuality. It is the psychology, the daily lived reality of sexuality (and in recent years hypersexuality) for me that it is never an end in itself, but always a means. If it were an end it would be as sterile as lust. But very often it leads to ideas for writing or drawings.

It is my experience that intense genital activity results in creation. Even if that activity is lowly masturbation, and even if what is conceived is only an ephemeral drawing or a poem, it results in the conception of a living thing. That's how I proceed in invention from work to work, idea to idea, algorithm to algorithm. It's how I evolve.

Even when the work has no apparent outward erotic content, it began with erotic intensity.

TP: *Would you connect sexual arousal and prayer?*

JD: Sure. As early as 1979 I began to experience sexual arousal during prayer. Also occasionally while reading the Psalms. St John of the Cross experienced this, too, and wrote about it.

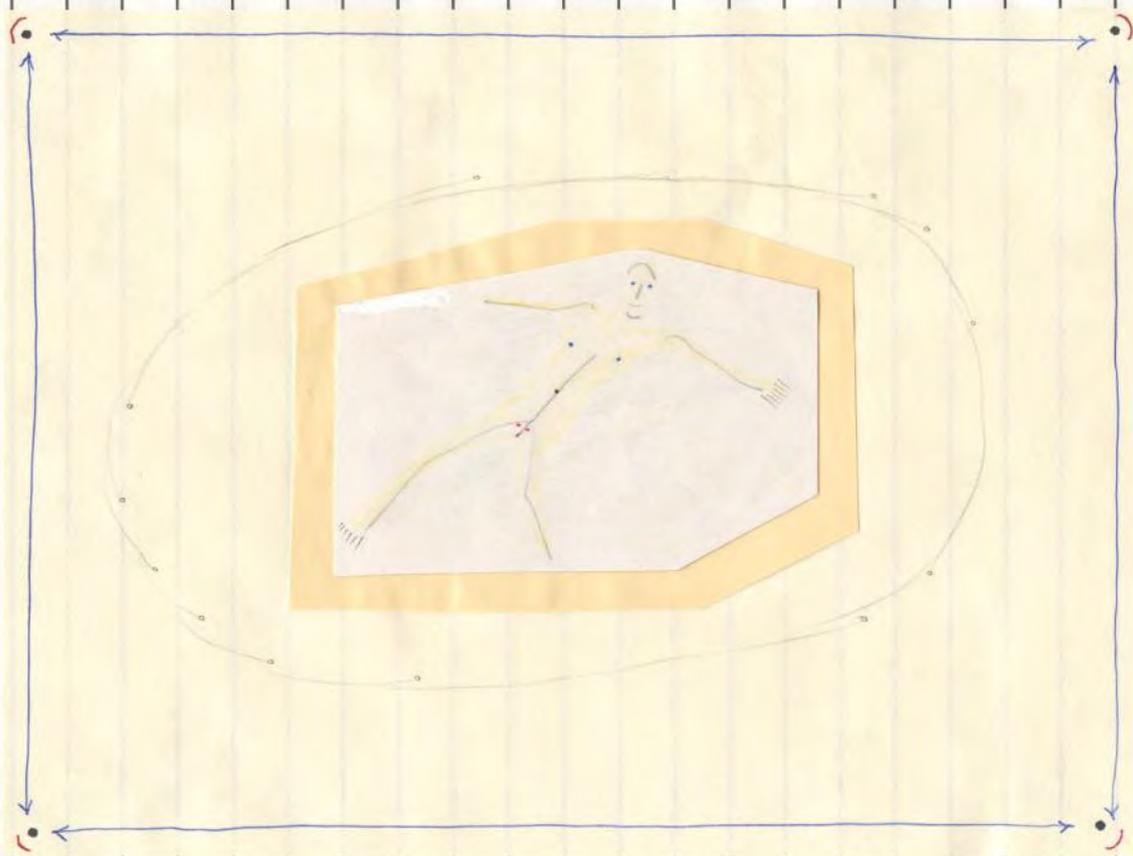
I was to learn slowly that engagement with the divine was engagement on all levels: mind, intellect, will, soul, gonads... everything.

This was surprising at first, and puzzling.

In time I experienced Rudolf Otto's *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Something he reserved for the numinous in God but which I attached to the numinous in the sight of an adult human penis.

Jung intuited something similar in his famous childhood dream he had when he was three or four, of a giant phallus on a throne in an underground chamber. It was a dream, as he put it, that "*was to preoccupy me all my life.*"

- nude -

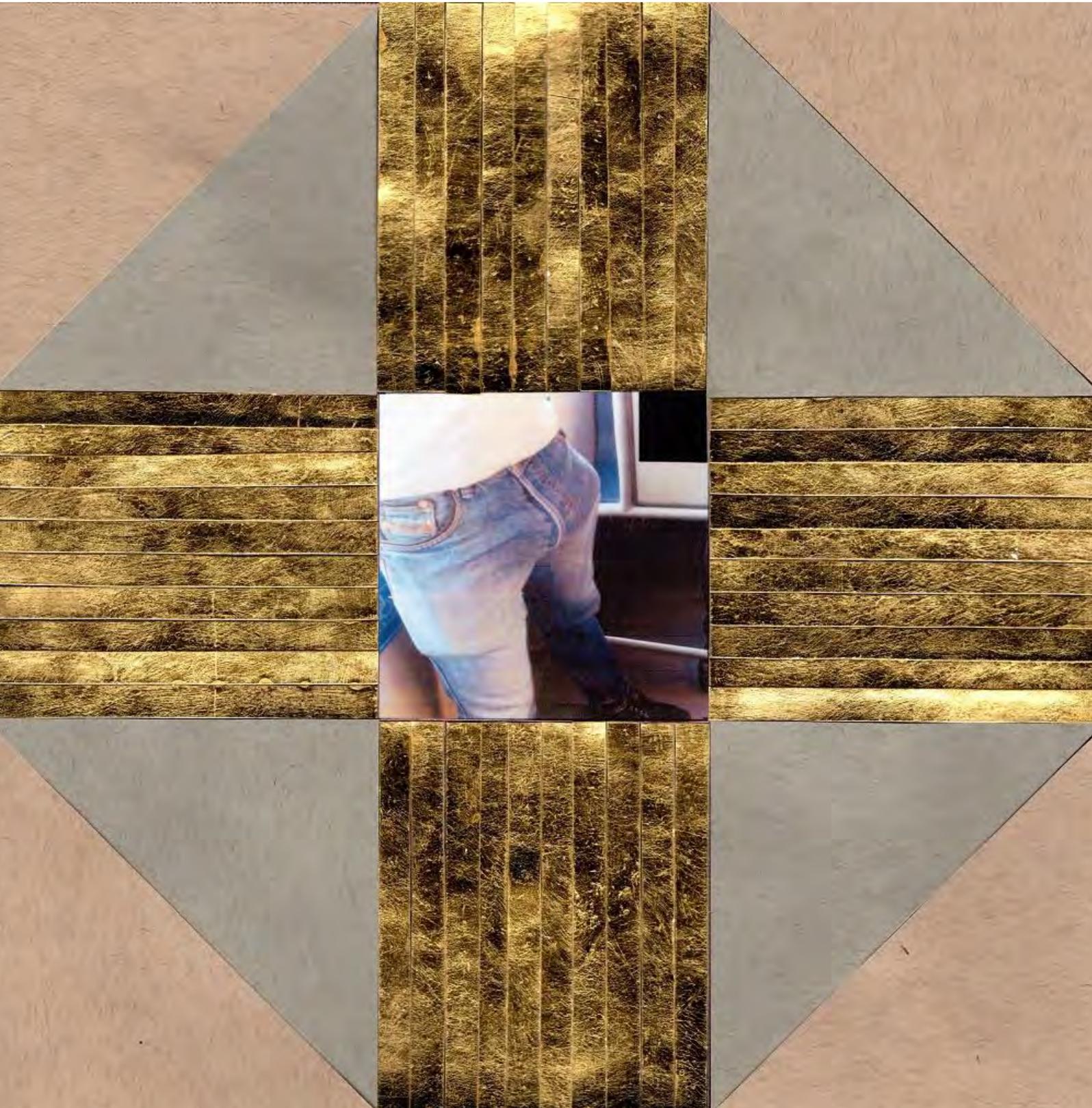


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March, 1988

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1988



john devlin: interview

The crotch for me is God's tabernacle, his dwelling place. And the fly is the little door of this tabernacle from which he emerges to be seen and adored.

It was as simple as that. God was not in some far away land or heaven, but dwelled among humans, close at hand.

TP: *Sexuality and the divine, as you've described it, reminds me of those terrible and complex gnostic gods, like Abraxas, or Typhonian creatures and Titans; or most basically the Hurrian myth of Ullikummi, that rock which doesn't stop growing and so threatens the established order of the universe. Those particular myths have always excited me by suggesting that the very borders of existence are stochastically weird in their behavior, and that those borders harbor figures of sexual creativity next to which your average Olympian god looks laughably conservative. Of course, those same Olympians can perform the roles of their unhinged antagonists in a different context: mythologers would commonly suggest that's the movement from one cycle or pantheon to the next.*

What I just called weird I might also have called queer. We once spoke somewhat casually about the queerness of a Messianic Christ. Would you elaborate on queerness in your religion? Do you think queerness has a revolutionary role in religion— or more broadly— consciousness?

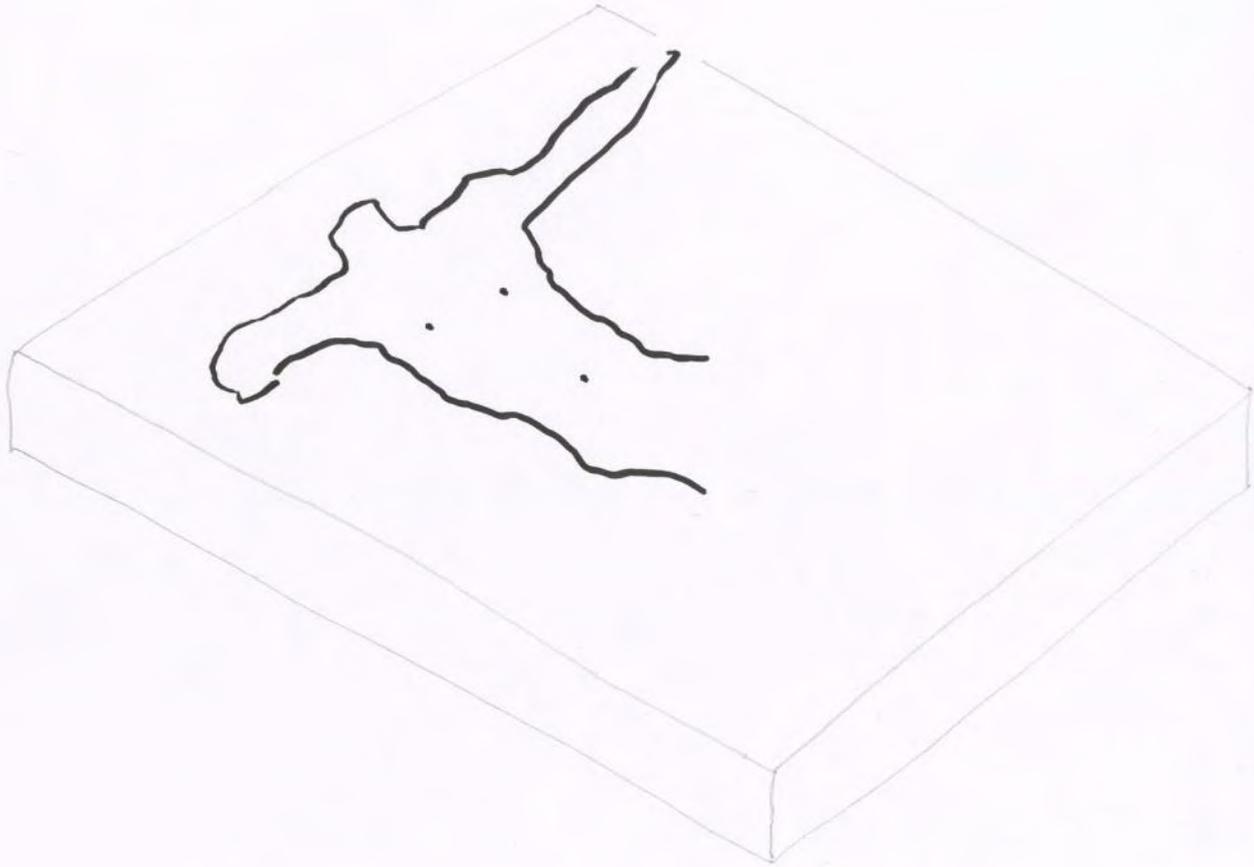
JD: Sure. I think the queerness was always there, especially in Catholicism which is a bit more earthy and visceral than Protestantism. When you read the Bible with eyes opened by Freud, you see no end of double entendres, and thinly veiled eroticism. It's the great code that binds it all together.

Jesus taught his followers to eat his body and drink his blood. That is a very hard teaching, and got him into trouble.

There's no end of weirdness in the Old Testament, too. Like a Jahweh who commands circumcision of the penis. Why exactly did he demand this? Images are my vocation, not biblical exegesis, so I won't touch that.

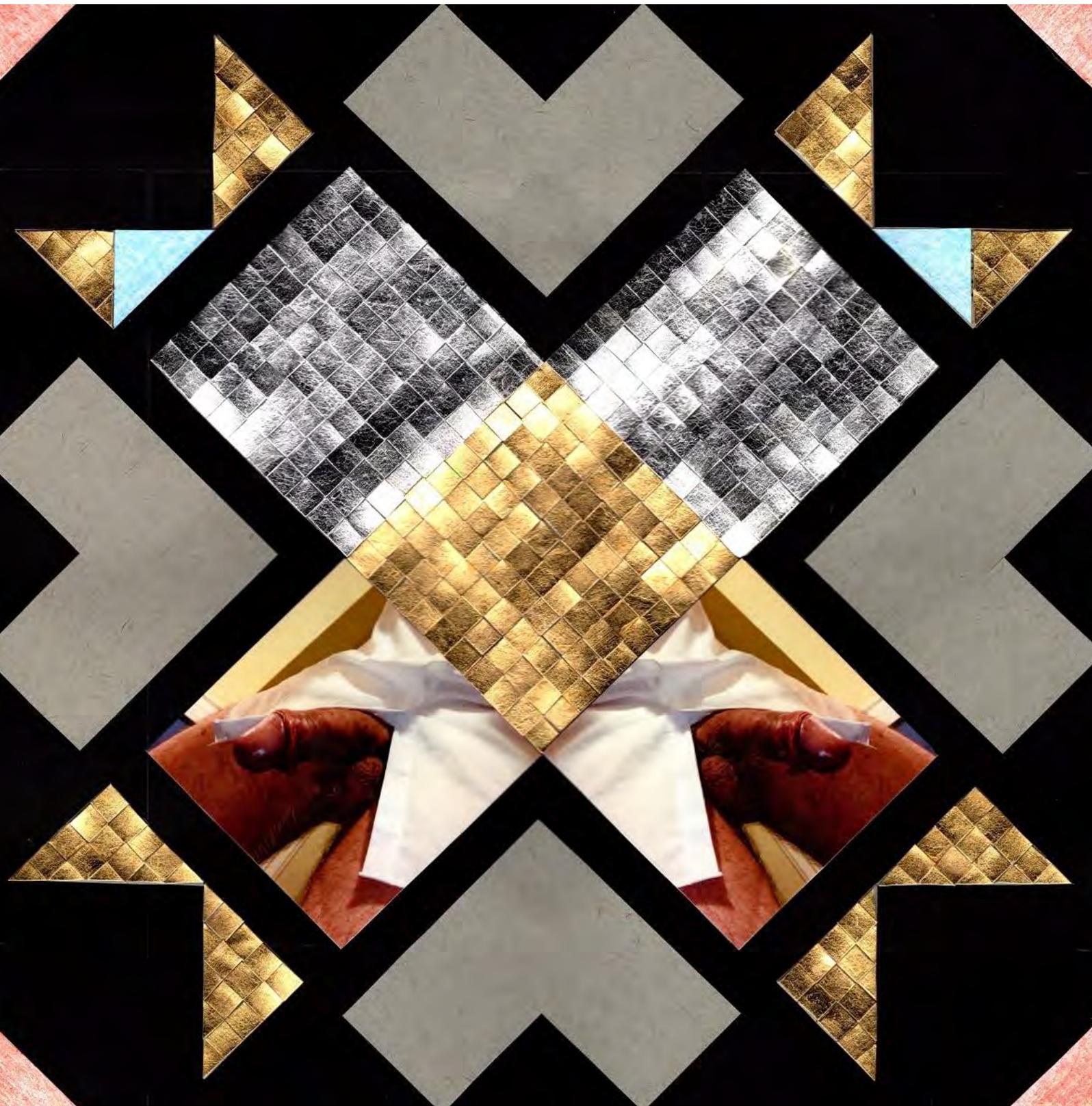
Catholic mysticism took a turn to the steamy erotic with John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. But I maintain they were only making more manifest what was already there from the beginning.

So, to answer your question, there's nothing revolutionary at all about my queer spin on religion. I'm thoroughly orthodox. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila are following a tradition that goes back to King David's ultrahorniness, The Song of Songs.



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29 January, 2015



john devlin: interview

However, queerness may have a revolutionary role in secular consciousness, to help us see how certain ancient, wild poems (like the Bible) were queer to the core. There's a move I suspect towards hypersexuality in society these days. But Jahweh from the start was hyperphallic, I think. So it's time secular consciousness caught up, and that we were less uptight, and became as liberal, liberated and earthy as folks such as David, Jesus, Teresa of Avila. It's time to rescue religion from the puritans, who somehow at some time hijacked it, and made it the weak, meek and creepy thing it is today.

Tamiz Panitz is the author of several poetry books, including Toad's Sanctuary (Ornithopter Press: 2021), and The House of the Devil (Lunar Chanelier Collective: 2020). He is a founding editor of the online journal Blazing Stadium. Tamas Panitz is also a painter, whose paintings and stray poems can be found on Instagram: @tamaspanitz

Artwork:

Page 63: Hello! Damn! (gold and silver leaf on paper, inkjet print, 27.94cm x 27.94cm), 2020

Page 64: Untitled (mixed media on paper, 27.94cm x 21.6cm), 2017

Page 66: Body Electric (digital file, dimensions N/A), 2016

Page 67: Bird in a gilded cage (gold and silver leaf on paper, inkjet print, 27.94cm x 21.6cm), 2018

Page 69: Untitled (mixed media on paper, 21.6cm x 27.94cm), 1988

Page 70: Untitled (gold and silver leaf on paper, inkjet print, 21.6cm x 21.6cm), 2019

Page 72: Man on a mattress (India ink, graphite on paper, 21.6cm x 27.94cm), 2015

Page 73: Untitled (gold and silver leaf on paper, inkjet print, 27.94cm x 27.94cm), 2019