

**3AM**

**wonder,  
paranoia  
and the  
restless night**



3AM

wonder,  
paranoia  
and the  
restless night



Published on the occasion of the exhibition *3am: wonder, paranoia and the restless night*, curated for the Bluecoat by Angela Kingston, with additional research by Bryan Biggs and Sara-Jayne Parsons.

Exhibition dates:

28 September – 24 November 2013

The Bluecoat, School Lane, Liverpool L1 3BX

13 December 2013 – 2 March 2014

Chapter, Market Road, Cardiff CF5 1QE

April – June 2014

Newlyn Art Gallery & The Exchange, Princes Street, Penzance, Cornwall TR18 2NL

20 September – December 2014

Ferens Art Gallery, Queen Victoria Square, Kingston Upon Hull HU1 3RA



Hull  
City Council

CHAPTER



Published 2013 by

Liverpool University Press,

4 Cambridge Street,

Liverpool,

L69 7ZU



and

The Bluecoat,

School Lane,

Liverpool,

L1 3BX

**the Bluecoat.**

ISBN 978-1-84631-957-0

© 2013 Liverpool University Press and the Bluecoat

While copyright in the volume as a whole is vested in Liverpool University Press and the Bluecoat, copyright in individual chapters and of images belongs to their respective authors and artists, and no chapter or image may be reproduced wholly or in part without the express permission in writing of both author/artist and publisher.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Cover image: Dornith Doherty, *Dry Creek* (detail), 2012. Archival pigment photograph, 76.2 × 101.6 cm. Courtesy the artist, Holly Johnson Gallery, and McMurtrey Gallery.

Designed by Carnegie Book Production

## CONTENTS

FOREWORD BRYAN BIGGS	02:07
CURATING THE EXHIBITION ANGELA KINGSTON	02:11
THE ARTWORKS	02:22
THE ARTISTS	03:06
EXPOSING THE NIGHT SARA-JAYNE PARSONS	03:09
TRAVELS WITH A DONKEY IN THE CÉVENNES ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON	03:15
THE POWERS OF INSOMNIA ELISABETH BRONFEN	03:18
HOPE FADES FOR THE HOSTAGES AILSA COX	03:20
WHY DO WE SLEEP? LEON KREITZMAN	03:25
THE WILD PLACES ROBERT MACFARLANE	03:29
DEAR MARIELLA MARIELLA FROSTRUP	03:35
I WAKE AND FEEL THE FELL OF DARK, NOT DAY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS	03:38
3AM PLAYLIST BRYAN BIGGS	03:40
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	03:43



Henry Fuseli (Füssli, Johann Heinrich)  
(1741–1825),  
*The Nightmare*, 1781  
Oil on canvas  
Detroit Institute of Arts, USA,  
Founders Society purchase with Mr  
and Mrs Bert L. Smokler and Mr and  
Mrs Lawrence A. Fleischman funds,  
The Bridgeman Art Library

## CURATING THE EXHIBITION

*3am: wonder, paranoia and the restless night*

Angela Kingston

The exhibition *3am: wonder, paranoia and the restless night* focuses on works by artists who push into night's farthest reaches, who grapple with a darker and more distant nocturnal reality. Their drawings, paintings, photographs, sculptures, films and videos are about states of mind that are folded into darkness, with many angles, shapes and textures in the folds.

I've come across writers who have, likewise, conjectured the far night as something extraordinary. For the philosopher Maurice Blanchot it is a paradox that he expresses in riddles, here in terms of life and death: '*In the night one can die; we reach oblivion. But this other night is the death no one dies, the forgetfulness which gets forgotten. In the heart of oblivion it is memory without rest*'.<sup>1</sup> For him, night's far reaches are '*an alterity located outside and beyond the succession of day and night that structures our everyday reality*'.<sup>2</sup>

Breathtaking though Blanchot's writing is, it does not require a philosopher to describe this other kind of night. Researching the exhibition, a short phrase kept recurring, found in day-to-day conversation, on radio and TV, in newspapers, and in the writings of novelists, poets and songwriters. We refer, everywhere, to 3 a.m. – and by this hour we tend to mean, in shorthand, at some level however subtle, something quite strange and yet specific.

'The mudslide suddenly came at 3 a.m. It was so unfair, coming at that time, when people are at their most defenceless' (a Brazilian interviewed



on the World Service, January 2011); the scandal of the unpaid London Olympics stewards who were turfed off their bus at 3 a.m. and told to shelter under a bridge, reported widely in the media, July 2012; '3 a.m. is the best time for skipping, when squatters raid supermarket bins' (Richard Madeley on *This Morning*, ITV, 6 December 2012); '3 a.m. is a known time for suicides' (talking with a social worker); 'I was wide awake at 3 a.m.' (friends/colleagues/self). In each case, the simple mention of 3 a.m. tips us further towards sympathy, or outrage, or dread.

It's also true that 3 a.m. exists as a mundane reality. We cross through its timeline once every twenty four hours, usually in deep slumber: 'As we sleep we whistle through the darkness, dreaming on the surface of an immense spinning top'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed our biology entreats us to sleep at this hour. The focus of this exhibition, on the other hand, is wakefulness and restlessness. At its outer limits it touches on semi-sleep and somnambulism. But there is no 'ordinary' sleep or dreaming. It's about a distinct reality as touched upon by artists.

In this essay, I suggest what we might learn about this 'other night' through a discussion of artworks by the twenty two artists selected for the *3am* exhibition, each of whom immediately identified with the theme. I also refer to writings, fictional and factual, that probe this hour of the night. But it is a psychic site and remains in many ways unknowable.

As much of the art attests, the night is significantly a time that belongs to the young. In **Anthony Goicolea's** video, *Sleepers*, a camera is trained on a lamp-lit cul-de-sac, into which figures in colourful sleeping bags roll and wriggle, before disappearing just as inexplicably. In another video, *Code*, set in a wood, torch-beams pierce the darkness, casting excitedly around, and suggesting an exuberant, shared adventure. The artworks conjure with the uncommon excitement of the sleepless sleepovers and camps of late childhood and early adolescence, in which new ways of being can be tried out, unsupervised.

In **Michael Palm** and **Willi Dorner's** video *Body Trail*, young people run in packs through city streets at night. Intermittently, we see them

attaching themselves at angles to lampposts with gravity-defying poise, or piled up, one on top of the other, in phone boxes and at street corners, sometimes like corpses, at other times in elegant heaps. They have taken ownership of the city: running silent, mocking danger, sharing menace.

Sociologist Murray Melbin writes, 'The stillness of late hours appeals especially to young people, who come to feel that they possess the streets ... [Teenagers] will keep late hours away with friends to avoid dominating or questioning parents. They try to dodge disputes and being nagged ...'<sup>4</sup> To feel their imprint on the world, albeit within the anonymity of the crowd, the young go out of phase. To avoid the strictures of the daylight hours, they are drawn into the night. They have much to do, at every level; they must experiment, have their freedoms.

**Tom Wood's** photographs of nightlife in 1980s New Brighton, across the river from Liverpool, depict young people in a club, in the final stretches of their night out. The women are mostly dressed to the nines, with their hair extravagantly preened. But the night has been long, and the poise of both the men and the women is starting to slip: eyelids are heavy, and faces are vacant and trance-like. It is a primal moment, time to clinch the deal, to see who you can get off with. Some are sidelined while others are deep in embrace.

**Sophy Rickett's** series of photographs, *Pissing Women*, depicts young women urinating in dark city streets – while standing up. This gesture signals release from prohibition, heady freedom: they are pissing on patriarchy. This artwork has its fun, too, with tut-tuttings in the media about young women clubbers' behaviour, the scandal that they can behave as badly as men. But as a strange inflection on this, the women in the photographs appear perfectly sober, and wear smart, uncrumpled clothes.

When tiredness encroaches, when the imagination flags, drugs come to the rescue. The 3 a.m. moment, that particular state of mind, is caught and held to wonder, and stretched and magnified. **Fred**



**Tomaselli's** *Portrait of Jim* is a night sky in which stars have been named after over-the-counter drugs and illegal stimulants taken by his subject, Jim. Caffeine, Novocaine, LSD – here's a personality, a cosmos, conjectured in terms of chemical input, headaches and highs. The stars are luminous, space is infinite, every comfort and emotion possible.

On the other hand, there are those who work at night, unseen among the revellers and part of the industry that sustains the whole delusion. In **Paul Rooney's** sound work *Lights Go On*, a nightclub cloakroom attendant expresses the tedium of dealing with clubbers' stuck zips, lost property, queue-jumping, and emotional demands. Her words have been set to music, a catchy but deadpan, sung liturgy. The artwork builds towards the moment, at 3 a.m. – 'the very end of the night' – when the music stops and the lights go on, and crushing ordinariness re-establishes itself.

Equally, the night is for loners. **Hirsch Perlman** spent many nights in secret, up on the roof of his apartment building in Los Angeles, railing against the world and its warmongers during the war with Iraq, and building makeshift rockets and other gizmos as a gesture of defiance. He then took photographs of the rooftop that feature him with his inventions, quite alone and unseen.

Two paintings by **Anj Smith** are of night wildernesses in which humans and other creatures have taken refuge. In *Nachträglichkeit*, a bat, a badger and other animals are safely hibernating together, suspended within a gossamer-thin fabric that is tethered to the sky. In *Post-Pastoral Secrets*, a weathered wayfarer's marker hung with talismans points to repeated journeys, on foot, into the darkness; the need for escape has become a state of being.

Here is Melbin again, this time on the night as refuge, somewhere we can 'colonise', the day being now so overcrowded: '... conquest of the darkness opens a new zone capable of meeting people's needs for escape and opportunity ... Persons who are disparaged or oppressed

retreat to its tolerant atmosphere ... Night's hush and solitude attract people looking for a haven from stress'.<sup>5</sup>

But look again and 3 a.m. contains its very opposite. It's a world in extremis, with pressures untold. **Dorothy Cross's** diptych of photographs, *Searchlight*, depicts a helicopter search for someone lost in the ocean. Quite utterly lost, in the infinite darkness, in the vast waters of the sea. Heedless, or suicidal, or abjectly unlucky, quite possibly already dead: who can say if he or she can be brought back to the day? Hope consists of a beam of light, trained on the sea by another human being, only just perceptible in the darkness.

In the night's far reaches, we witness the extremities of humanity: utter helplessness and the untold tenderness of a person intent on rescue. Something of this commingling of need and generosity, borne of the very dead of night, is found in an incident described by F. A. Worsley in *Shackleton's Boat Journey*. Having not slept for days, the author has been steering a tiny, leaking boat, with only an awning for cover, in a relentless Antarctic storm:

Between 3 and 4 A.M. [the first officer] found that I was cramped by wet and cold. I had been steering in a constrained position, sitting on the stores, for twenty hours. As he seized the tiller, I said, 'Let me know when you close the land.' As Macklin and McLeod put me under the dripping folds of the tent, I asked them to straighten me out and rub my thighs and groins. While they did this – straightening me out like opening a jackknife – I fell fast asleep in their hands. After they had vigorously massaged my stomach and legs they lay, one on each side, under the tent to keep some of the breaking seas off me.<sup>6</sup>

**Jordan Baseman's** video *A Nasty Piece of Stuff* introduces still other extremes of human behaviour, as a man tells the story of how once, working into the small hours, he went out into the streets of London for some air, and was raped. The horror continues with the discovery that



he has contracted gonorrhoea, and with the scorn of the medic who treats him. As a visual counterpoint to the incredulous, and remarkably steady, tones of the narrator, are rapid, staccato sequences of the night – the camera swaying wildly, the screen streaked with neon. These visuals – the sense of them breaking down – serve on the one hand to express the distress that the man remains numb to, and on the other, the violence of the perpetrator.

The writings of Charles Dickens are strongly associated with the night, particularly its far depths: ‘that time which ... may be truly called the dead of night, when the streets are silent and deserted, when even sound appears to slumber and profligacy and riot have staggered home to dream.’ In *Oliver Twist* the action pivots around an attempted house-burglary at a time approaching 3 a.m. Under the cover of darkness Fagin’s criminal gang is in its element, while poor Oliver, forced to take part, is ‘well nigh mad with grief and terror’.<sup>7</sup> We hear also of the panic of the servants of the house, but to comic effect this time. Here, again, different facets of humanity converge around a single event in the dead of night.

If the night can make us feel all-powerful, then sometimes this has negative consequences (as with Fagin’s gang). As reported by the *Daily Mail*, night nurse Anne Grigg-Booth ‘believed she was in control of the rules after dark’, allegedly administering lethal doses of painkilling drugs to up to twenty patients. The article continues: ‘at night on the quiet wards, the matron – “utterly convinced of her own clinical prowess” – believed she carried ultimate authority’.<sup>8</sup>

Something of this megalomania infuses **Nathan Mabry’s** sculpture *Eat Your Heart Out*, of a clean-cut boy with a hideous, grimacing, monster riding on his shoulders. Rendered in blackened metal, this impossible pairing is a shadow, a dark apparition, a child who has turned his worst fears to his advantage, a monster made more monstrous. Each dons one of a pair of boxing gloves and boxing boots, and they are ready for anything.

**Danny Treacy** seeks out the occupants of the urban night via the soiled clothes he finds in side streets, alleys and graveyards, and by lock-up

garages. To him, these places are ‘fertile grounds, where the human animal reveals itself.’ Against all instinct, he dresses up in those clothes and creates life-size self-portrait photographs that confront us with nightmarish personas: a man-pig in malevolent velveteen; a hospital reject survivalist; a night-worker automaton. In each photograph in this series, titled *Them*, he becomes the bogeyman, a shape-shifting embodiment of dread.

Drawings by **Marc Hulson** conjure with what the dark corners of our own homes conceal. It’s much as William Herbert, seventeenth-century writer of religious tracts, put it: ‘The night is more quiet, then the day; and yet we feare in it what we doe not regard by day. A Mouse running, a Board cracking, a dog howling, an Owle scritchng put us often in a cold sweat’.<sup>9</sup> Hulson sets the scene with *dramatis personae* that could be taken for a family. But he also brings to the stage a clawed monster in human clothing, a grotesque, reptilian eye, and another eye that weeps and dissolves. And there is a drawing of a staircase – that oftentimes most frightening of places, with inexplicable shadows and creakings. I am reminded of other nocturnal invasions of domestic spaces, as envisaged by eighteenth century artists: Fuseli’s *The Nightmare*, a demonic figure squatting on a deeply slumbering woman, and Goya’s *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, a sleeping man mobbed by owls, bats and cats (pages 02:10 and 02:06).

In contrast to these perceptions of a 3 a.m. ‘dread zone’, there are artworks that engage with how the distant night is also wholesale cessation, quietness and *inactivity*, the lifting of the pressures of the day. As the globe turns and darkness falls, the nocturnal hours bring respite and repose, as night cleanses day.

**Bettina von Zwehl** wrested people from their beds in the middle of the night, at the deepest point of sleep. She made them face her camera, individually, to have their portraits taken. Mentally, her subjects seem entirely elsewhere; physically, they appear barely able to hold themselves. The fact that they wear white against a white background renders them almost ethereal: night inundates them, flushing out the day’s dirt and debris.



I was surprised when a whole section of the exhibition turned out to be bright and white. But then I heard about a French phrase *nuit blanche*, or 'white night', meaning a night without sleep. Its origins are in the middle ages, when knights prayed all night, dressed in white, purifying themselves before battle.

**Tonico Lemos Auad's** sculpture *Sleepwalkers* is comprised of curiously shaped white lace orbs hanging from the ceiling, lit internally. They are part 1960s lampshade, part fleeting-glimpse-of-nightie, part floating dream-bubble (the nocturnal equivalent of a thought-bubble). The delicate humour of this artwork connects with the weightlessness that night can bring. The day is purged and all is whiteness.

**Ed Pien's** *Spectral Drawings* are drawn with white ink on black paper. The surfaces teem with half-human figures that grin or grimace or stare. Floating in the darkness, many have coagulated into groups. Some seem to perform ritualistic gestures; they appear to be flailing, waving, turning. The white marks are in many places broken and smudged, the figures sometimes barely there. Pien's phantom-creatures seem to rise and fall, advance and recede – 'without weight, without bones, without body'.<sup>10</sup>

In **Rachel Kneebone's** white porcelain sculptures, there are tangles of limbs and bodies that dissolve into one another, and individuals with pod-like upper bodies. Noticeably, there are no heads: all is lost to sensation. In *Study in self-sufficiency II*, the foot of a supine feminine figure on a funerary pedestal arcs with sexual urgency. Both sexual and deathly, Kneebone's sculptures are redolent of Blanchot's vision of the 'other night' as a 'death no one dies': they are distant night's most alien workings.<sup>11</sup>

As we travel still further into the night, thoughts expand outwards. On a clear night, there's the sensation of a lurch upwards, too: there's no roof on the world; stars thousands of light years away are visible.

**Sandra Cinto** compulsively creates drawings of the night sky. Often working in white ink, chalk, or pencil, she covers entire walls with images

of individual stars, whole galaxies, and also strangely floating boulders. She frequently draws rope ladders, suspended precariously from who-knows-where, suggesting a desire to travel further still. Sometimes the drawings are loosely layered over each other, hinting at universe after unknown universe. Pencil-probe in hand, the artist reaches out beyond all limits, ever further into the night – at one with her drawing, mere matter in the cosmos.

The night is also nature's own time: for hunting, feeding, mating and the care of young. Most creatures in the wild are primarily active at night.<sup>12</sup> With our poor night vision and limited sense of smell, humans are mere interlopers. Curious as to what her dogs were barking at during the night, **Dornith Doherty** placed motion-activated cameras around her suburban Texan home. She'd glimpsed coyotes by day, but was surprised by how many prowl at night, a time she describes as 'teeming with secret life', when deer, armadillos, possums, raccoons and bobcats were also observed. Revealingly, the creatures are barely captured by the camera: their fleeting forms sleek across the picture plane, their eyes blur with movement and light.

**Lucy Reynolds** filmed a lake in a London park at night. She opened her camera shutter for three seconds per frame of celluloid, allowing enough time for an image to imprint itself. As a consequence, the camera reveals far more than was visible to the eye, while everything also appears speeded up, creating a hyperreal landscape of uncanny twitchings and rustlings and flows. Water birds skitter feverishly across the lake's surface and bushes shudder as if made of flesh. It is as travel writer Robert Macfarlane has described: night utterly changes the senses, producing a new awareness of the very substance of a landscape, and creating a strange fusion of past and present.<sup>13</sup>

In *Nightwatch*, a video by **Francis Alÿs**, a fox is let loose in the National Portrait Gallery in London at night, and filmed by CCTV cameras as it roams from room to room. The fox ambles past rows of masterpieces in the richly decorated rooms, eventually finding an ornate table on which to curl up. The video contrasts two extremes: nature embodied



in the fox; culture epitomised by the museum. It raises the question of what a museum *is* when there are no humans to populate it and give it meaning. Night and nature are seen to re-define terms, rendering a museum of high culture into a kind of wilderness.

On and on and through and through. At 3 a.m., there's doubt that the day will ever come: time is looped, or repeats, or eats its own tail. The mind falters and slides, and ideas come that would not otherwise. It is for this reason that the far night state *belongs* to artists. Art needs the strangeness of 3 a.m. and its utter loneliness, too, to force the hand, to reach the 'why not?' state. The exhibition *3am: wonder, paranoia and the restless night* drips with insomnia. It needs to keep different hours. It is an adolescent running free, a man alone and afraid, a woman gazing at the cosmos, an unexpected coupling, an emboldened fox.

#### NOTES

- 1 Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, first published in 1955; University of Nebraska, 1989, trans. Ann Smock, p. 164.
- 2 Elizabeth Bronfen on Blanchot, in 'The Powers of Insomnia', in *Louise Bourgeois: The Insomnia Drawings*, ed. Peter Fischer, DAROS, Zurich, 2000, p. 37.
- 3 Christopher Dewdney, *Acquainted with the night*, Bloomsbury, London, 2004, p. 33.
- 4 Murray Melbin, *Night as Frontier: colonizing the world after dark*, The Free Press/Macmillan, New York, 1987, pp. 59–60.
- 5 *ibid.*, pp. 36–7.
- 6 F. A. Worsley, *Shackleton's Boat Journey*, about the ill-fated expedition to the Antarctic in 1914–16, first published in 1940; Pimlico, London, 1999, p. 81.
- 7 Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, first published in 1838; Wordsworth, Herefordshire, 1992, pp. 433 and 198.
- 8 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1285128/Did-nurse-Anne-Grigg-Booth-kill-20-Matron-drugged-patients-ruled-wards.html>, 9 June 2012, accessed 20 December 2012.
- 9 William Herbert, *Herbert's Devotions: or, a Companion for a Christian. Containing Meditations & Prayers, fitted for all Conditions, Persons, Times and Places. Either for the Church, Closet, Shop, Chamber, or Bed. Being reasonable and Usefull for these sad unsettled Times*, 1657, London, p. 231, *Early English Books Online*, <<http://www.jshistoricbooks.ac.uk/Search/?bibnumber=Wing%20H1542&spage=1>> accessed 27 February 2013. Original spellings and capitalisations have been retained.
- 10 From Franz Kafka's diary entry for 6 June 1912, in which he describes walking the streets of Prague at night. *The Diaries of Franz Kafka*, ed. Max Brod, trans Joseph Kresh (1910–1913 only) Penguin, 1975, p. 204.

- 11 3 a.m. is widely considered to be the most likely time to die. Interestingly, this is more imagined than real. See <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2012/11/you-are-most-likely-to-die-at-11-am/265427/>, accessed 29 January 2013.
- 12 This was the assertion of *The Dark: Nature's Night-time World*, a BBC Two series screened in summer 2012.
- 13 *The Wild Places*, Granta, London, 2008, p. 193.

Angela Kingston is a freelance curator and writer



# 3am wonder, paranoia and the restless night

Does 3 a.m. represent the current *zeitgeist*? At this dread hour, there's doubt that the day will ever come, a sense of reaching the nadir, of being in a dark place. It's the shadow side of our daylight existence, lawless and demonic. But 3 a.m. is also a time for refuge and release, for dreams and adventure, creativity and imagination.

This book accompanies an exhibition of the same name, curated by Angela Kingston, and features over 20 contemporary artists who step into the night to create artworks that reflect this strange, numinous hour, between the last traces of day and the first glimmer of morning. *3am: wonder, paranoia and the restless night* drips with insomnia. It is an adolescent running free, a man alone and afraid, a woman gazing at the cosmos, an unexpected coupling, an emboldened fox.

Edited by Bryan Biggs, the book also combines images with texts by writers, from Robert Louis Stevenson to Robert Macfarlane, who have conjectured the far night as something extraordinary, and includes essays by Angela Kingston and Sara-Jayne Parsons, and a new short story by Ailsa Cox. Contemporary artists featured: Francis Alÿs, Tonico Lemos Auad, Jordan Baseman, Sandra Cinto, Dorothy Cross, Dornith Doherty, Anthony Goicolea, Marc Hulson, Rachel Kneebone, Nathan Mabry, Michael Palm and Willi Dorner, Hirsch Perlman, Ed Pien, Lucy Reynolds, Sophy Rickett, Paul Rooney, Anj Smith, Fred Tomaselli, Danny Treacy, Bettina von Zwehl and Tom Wood.



LIVERPOOL  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

[www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk](http://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk)

**the Bluecoat.**

ISBN 978-1-84631-957-0



9 781846 319570 >