

Janitor, Genitals

Justin Patterson

Afternoon Projects



Sitting in front of the screen I looked up images and stories of that which I can't name. I can't name it, not because I don't know what it's called, but because now I know I shouldn't summon it into existence. But morbid curiosity and perverse interest can be too tempting, even when you know you should stop. Like the amnesia you get after you dip your pointer finger into the hot pooled wax atop a candle, recoiling in sharp then subdued pain, only to do it once again. Hyperfixation and inquisition led to unprompted smoke alarms, unclasped fallen charms, beheaded protection amulets, and hypnogogic hands reaching for my back in the middle of the night. All through which arrived from investigative research into the sleep paralysis entity that pretends to be my boyfriend. Did I become some sort of receiver? Or is this just experiential pareidolia, a human impulse to find meaning in signs?

There's a satisfaction that comes from seeing that which intends to remain unseen. I was first introduced to the action of scrying while playing Magic: The Gathering and encountering a vampire wizard creature card. When I look up the word "scry," all the websites with ads that offer free spiritual awakening courses tell me that it comes from the Old English word "descry" which means to make out dimly or to catch sight of. Scrying necessitates both a medium and a seer—something from which to glean and someone to glean it. It serves as a means of accessing the unconscious and otherworldly realms, employing reflective surfaces like dark mirrors or crystal globes to reveal visions. Early scryers would use the still waters of a moonlit lake, focusing on the shapes of ripples as they echo out to the shore, but now you could also use the screen of your old iPhone 6.

Looking for something and not knowing what you'll find comes at a risk. What if you open your eyes to something you didn't want to see? Is there such a thing as unseeing it? The action of being able to "unsee" is inherently elusive; the verb only exists in the form of negation: "Everytime I look at the clock it reads 3:33, I can't unsee it." No matter what action you try to take, a new awareness is irreversible. It's only through inaction that the unveiled can be shrouded. It's the failure of noticing. So despite the prayers at the door, playing three-hour long YouTube videos of Quran passages, and a month of learning how to correctly pronounce a protection phrase, life carried on. I found a sale on cauliflower, had an eye exam, and malevolence turned to memory. Did it work? What can you do if something is revealed to you that you wish you didn't know? I think the only option is to try to forget.

Written by Asia Jong

*“...Who is your Mother, Who is your father
I guess everything is irrelative
I’m a Janitor, oh my genitals
I’m a janitor, oh my genitals
Oh my genitals, I’m a janitor...”*

- Excerpt from the song Janitor, by Suburban Lawns (released in 1980)

Justin Patterson (b. 1978, Rolling Hills, Alberta) is a Vancouver-based artist whose interdisciplinary approach includes sculpture and installation as well as sonics and image-based mediums. Part of his ongoing practice is a reflection on the overlapping of history and fragmentation of time. His artistic influences include Kurt Schwitters, Agnes Martin, and Mike Kelly, and his farm-youth in the Prairie landscape of Southern Alberta on treaty 7 and 4 territory. Janitor, Genitals will be his third solo exhibition, presenting a selection of work on canvas and linen in pastel, graphite, and watercolor, as well as graphite on ceramic reliefs.

Patterson’s history of collaborative practice spans art, performance and music. In 2003, he co-founded the art collective the Arbour Lake School who have exhibited across Canada, in Paris and Amsterdam, and in 2008 received the Mayor of Calgary’s Award for Artistic Innovation. In his experimental sound and performance practice his collaborations have led to several projects such as the art-punk band Rinse Dream as well as Mo-Dale.

Patterson received a BFA from the University of Calgary in 2005. He has exhibited at Burnaby Art Gallery Offsite, 2019; Monte Clark, Vancouver, 2017; Dynamo Arts, Vancouver, 2017 (solo); Burrard Arts Foundation, Vancouver, 2016; Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, 2015; Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton, 2014; and Pith Gallery, Calgary, 2014 (solo).

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