

T I M E T O
F E E A R
CONTEMPORARY ART

Luca Indraccolo

SJ Fuerst

Lydia Cecil

Lizet Dingemans

Svetlana Semenova

An art exhibition
supported by Raw Umber Studios
Curated by SJ Fuerst

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Katie B. Kohn M.A.;
Harvard University

At the heart of Bram Stoker’s deliciously unnerving “The Judge’s House,” lies—not a ghost—but a painting.

The tale is a “ghost story,” to be sure—one so classically rendered as to today appear almost cliché. (Are those *eyes* darting to and fro from the shadows of that dusty old portrait? Is that *chit-chit-chittering* the chatter of rats within the walls?)

But it was no spectre that pulled me spine-straight upwards in bed that first night, reading into the small and dangerous hours. And it was not the rats either. It was the *painting*.

There are a good number of extraordinary paintings in fiction, not all of them bound to horror though many to ghosts, some of them oddly still living. From the double life of Dorian Gray to Du Maurier’s many Mrs. de Winters, portraits, in particular have a tendency to tug at the thread at their subjects. To regard a portrait (worse, to be *in* one) is to find oneself ever so subtly at risk of being *unravelling*. Even in the best of cases, as one Miss Elizabeth Bennet before the “handsome” likeness of the master of Pemberley, there lies a certain danger. Something stirs. With little more than a look, one finds oneself *affected*.

All art wants to be seen, wants to be believed. And so, we check our cynicism at the door, suspending our disbelief.

In Stoker’s case, a studious young graduate student has rented a disused country house as a kind of retreat. The place has a few quirks—odd portraits, rats in the walls—including one of the previous owner: “Evil, crafty, vindictive,” “cadaverous,” “malignant,” “strong and merciless”: the portrait of the old Judge paints no pretty picture. But as we soon find, the only thing worse than the “baleful eyes” looking out from the painting is what the young man finds next:

“From where he stood, Malcolmson saw right opposite to him the third picture on the wall from the right of the fireplace. He rubbed his eyes in surprise, and then a great fear began to come upon him.

In the centre of the picture was a great irregular patch of brown canvas, as fresh as when it was stretched on the frame. The background was as before, with chair and

chimney-corner and rope, but the figure of the Judge had disappeared. Malcolmson, almost in a chill of horror, turned slowly round...”

Here, that cynicism we once set aside so easily suddenly comes back to haunt us, tugging at that tenuous thread of belief until you, too, may find yourself turning round, searching deep corners in the night’s darkest hours, afraid of what you might find there.

Because if the cadaverous Judge is no longer still there in the painting, safely bound by the laws distinguishing fiction from fact...

In a panic, one reverts to that old saying, repeated over and over like a talisman or beads in a rosary: *it’s only a story, it’s only a story, it’s only...*

It’s only a painting.

Except, by the end of the tale, it is not only a painting that hangs on the Judge’s walls. With just a glance, a door has been opened. Within us, something has stirred. We sit up in bed—spine straight—turn to the shadows, and *look*.

You look into a glass and for a moment mistake the figure for your own reflection. But this is no mirror, the glass is a window; on the other side lies a stranger—looking back.

Before us, a figure holds us in a view we cannot quite return. In Luca Indraco’s work, hyper-realist elements weft through expressionist ones, recalling cinematic moments that have not quite stilled. One waits for the image to be set back in motion, as if the cell has stuck on the reel. And yet, it is not the image that is stilled here but the viewer. The subjects themselves remain suspended, as if in a state of deep ephemera, a private world beyond narrative, disturbing our sense of the real.

Figures continue to confront the viewer in the works of SJ Fuerst, where the image seems to defy its own entrapment. Echoing the spirit photography of William Hope, forms evanesce away from themselves, resisting capture, either in furious motion or flight towards the spirit realm. Layers of glass enhance the effect, evoking the spectral reflections of the Daguerrotype as well as the galvanic shocks of the

phantasmagoria. A girl looks back at us from the veil of her own reflection. Do you dare say her name? *Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary...*

The unease of the cinematic uncanny persists in the work of Lydia Cecil. Like Fuerst, Cecil's work recasts figures from popular narrative against dream-like compositions. Here, a flight of *Crows* suggests the protocinematic experiments of Etienne-Jules Marey or Eadweard Muybridge but also the silver screen horror of Alfred Hitchcock or George Franju. In *Empty*, a white silk dress lists with hushed surrealism. Neither here nor there yet luminous in her repose: here lies the perfect gothic bride. Decadence, disembodied.

Elsewhere, Lizet Dingemans cuts another figure. No bride here, but a child's plaything, double mortified in her stillness and displayed at an angle which can only suggest the fate of the fallen girl: the mortician's slab, the surgeon's gallery, the floor of a playroom long since forgotten. Dingemans inverts the impressionist's passion for vital ephemera, for *life* in all its movement and colour, forgoing bustling cafes and rain slicked streets for muted remains: a scrapped *vanitas*. Even a pair of milky skulls appear silenced, as if someone has muzzled them mid-*memento mori*: "*remember you shall...?*" After all the centuries serving the old masters, one wonders what else these old bones might have to say.

After so many *un-still* life's, an abyssal *trompe l'oeil*: with *Fragments of the Void*, Svetlana Semenova points us to a place of all horror. A place Maxim Gorky once called "The Kingdom of Shadows" (1896).

"Grey rays of the sun across the grey sky, grey eyes in the grey faces, and the leaves of the trees are ashen grey. *It is no life but its shadow*," he wrote. "It is not motion but its soundless spectre..."¹

From out of light, "*life itself!*" the newspapers had promised. But here, in the pale glow the Lumiere's *cinematograph*, Gorky found not wonder but horror:

"Last night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows. If you only knew how strange it is to be there."

In the final throes of a long, gothic century, the moving image was still startling and new. Perhaps it is only in our restless era—where images move algorithmically, where the eyes in the picture follow us by design—that rule over this Kingdom should fall back to the strange, spectral, not-quite-still realm of the painting. What other worlds will we find here, I wonder, now that it is our *Time to Fear*?

You look into a picture and for a moment mistake the image for the world you thought you knew. But this is no picture; it is a veil. A reminder of what lies behind every wall. A question you cannot answer. A hole not even fear can fill.

Welcome to the Kingdom of Shadows. *If you only knew how strange it is to be here.*

1 'I.M. Pacatus' (Maxim Gorky), *Nizhegorodski listok*, 4 July 1896, translated (by Leda Swan) and reproduced in Jay Leyda, Kino: *A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960), pp. 407-409.

PAINTINGS BY LUCA INDRACCOLO

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SMF•83•50•32•90•28
Oil on canvas 90 x 140 cm
£6000





SMF•52•1•16•67•69
Oil on canvas 90 x 140 cm
 £6000

SMF•9•41•63•49•77
Oil on canvas 110 x 140 cm
£7500



SMF•26•10•55•9•3
Oil on canvas 75 x 90 cm
£3600

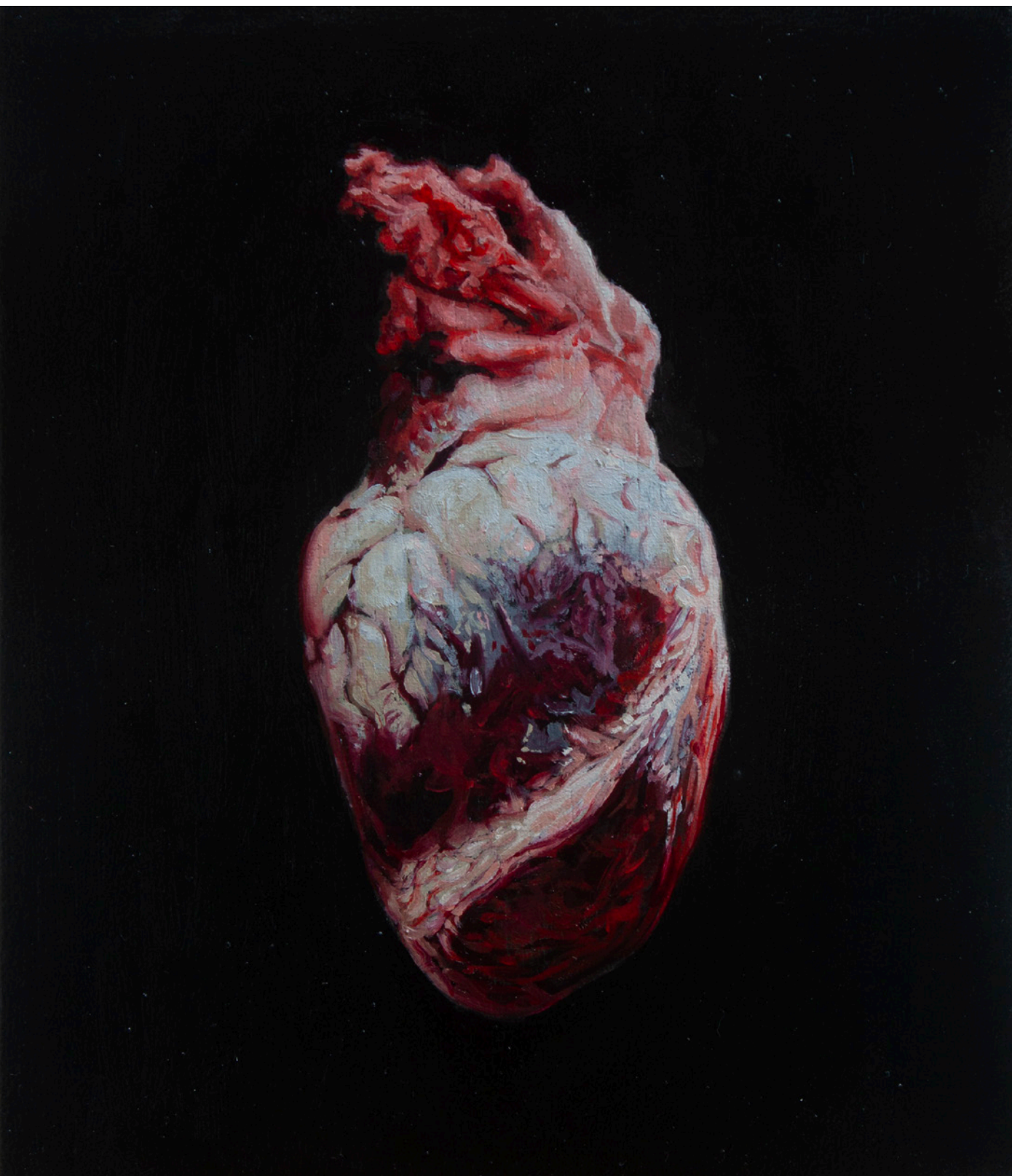




SMF•7•5•90•14•23
Oil on canvas 56 x 65 cm
£2900

SMF•9•26•7•60•4
Oil on canvas 50 x 50 cm
£2500





SMF•71•55•67•5•70
Oil on wood panel 20 x 17.3 cm
£550

PAINTINGS BY SJ FUERST

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Vera's Ghosts
Oil on panel 32 x 47 cm
£2000



Invisible Forces
Oil on canvas 50 x 78 cm
£3000



The Abyss
Oil on canvas 33 x 95 cm
£2500



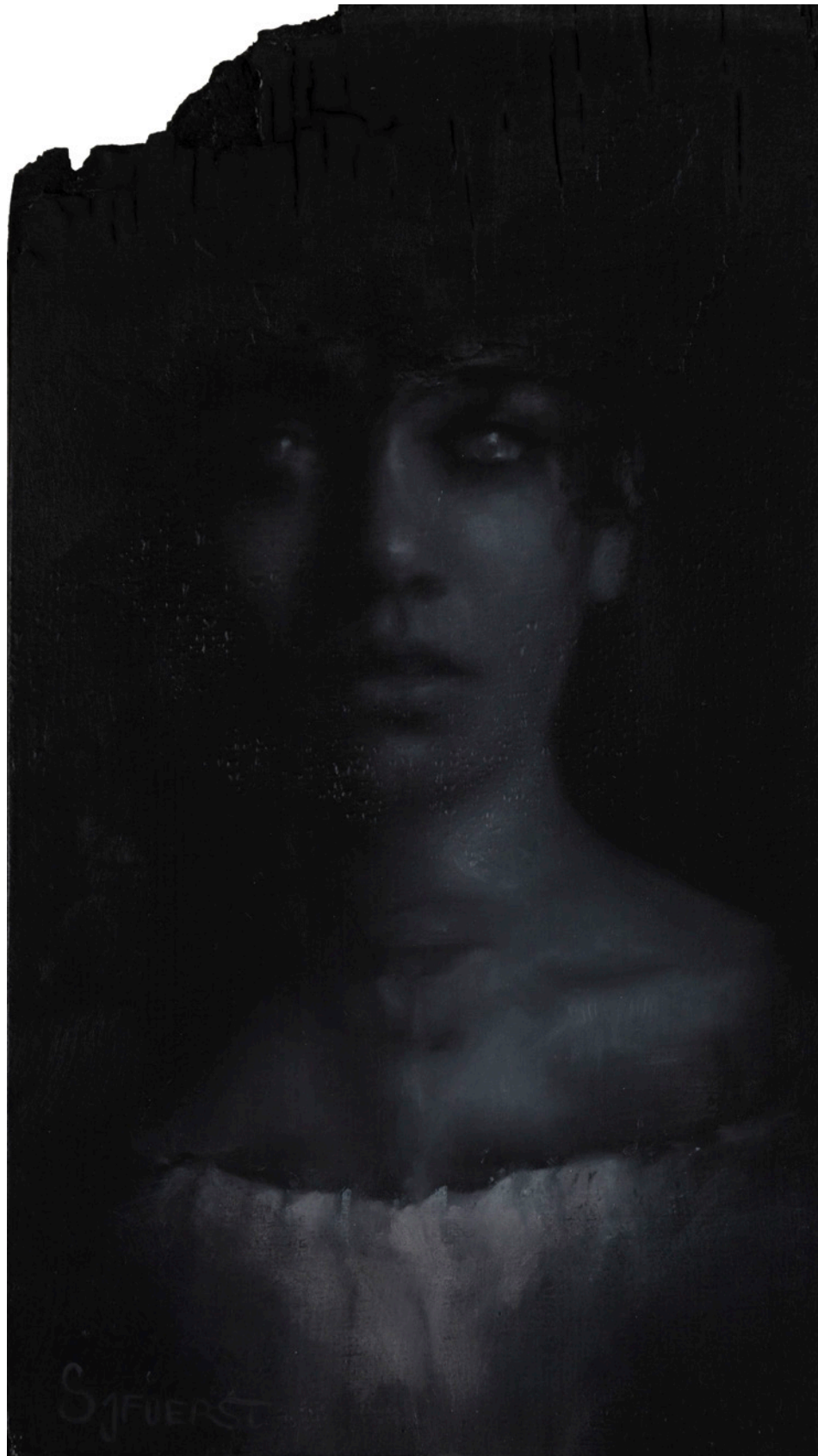


Odette
Oil on canvas 50 x 100 cm
£2500

Dark Water
Oil on canvas 75 x 125 cm
£7500



Esmeralda
Oil paint on burned panel 27 x 15 cm
£900



The Anxious Thinker
Oil paint on mirror 37.5 x 43 cm
£1800





Hello
Oil on canvas 85 x 125 cm
£7500

Shattered Psyche
Charcoal and oil paint on toned paper 28 x 35.5 cm (framed size)
£500





Objects in Mirror
Oil paint on mirror over interactive video installation 51 x 73 cm (framed size)
£3000

Trixie in the Basement
Oil paint canvas board 30 x 40.5 cm
£400



PAINTINGS BY LYDIA CECIL

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Empty
Oil on canvas 40 x 30 cm
£1000





Crows
Oil on canvas 51 x 30 cm
£1000

The Birds
Oil on canvas 120 x 90 cm
£2500



Mrs de Winter
Oil on canvas 120 x 90 cm
£2500



Elegance
Oil on Canvas 30 x 35 cm
£1000





Of Judith
Oil on Canvas 40 x 30 cm
£900

Under Glass
Charcoal and chalk on toned grey paper 50 x 100 cm
£1500



PAINTINGS BY LIZET DINGEMANS

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Ornitophobia
Oil on board 40 X 33 cm
£800



Pediophobia
Oil on panel 40 x 25 cm
£750



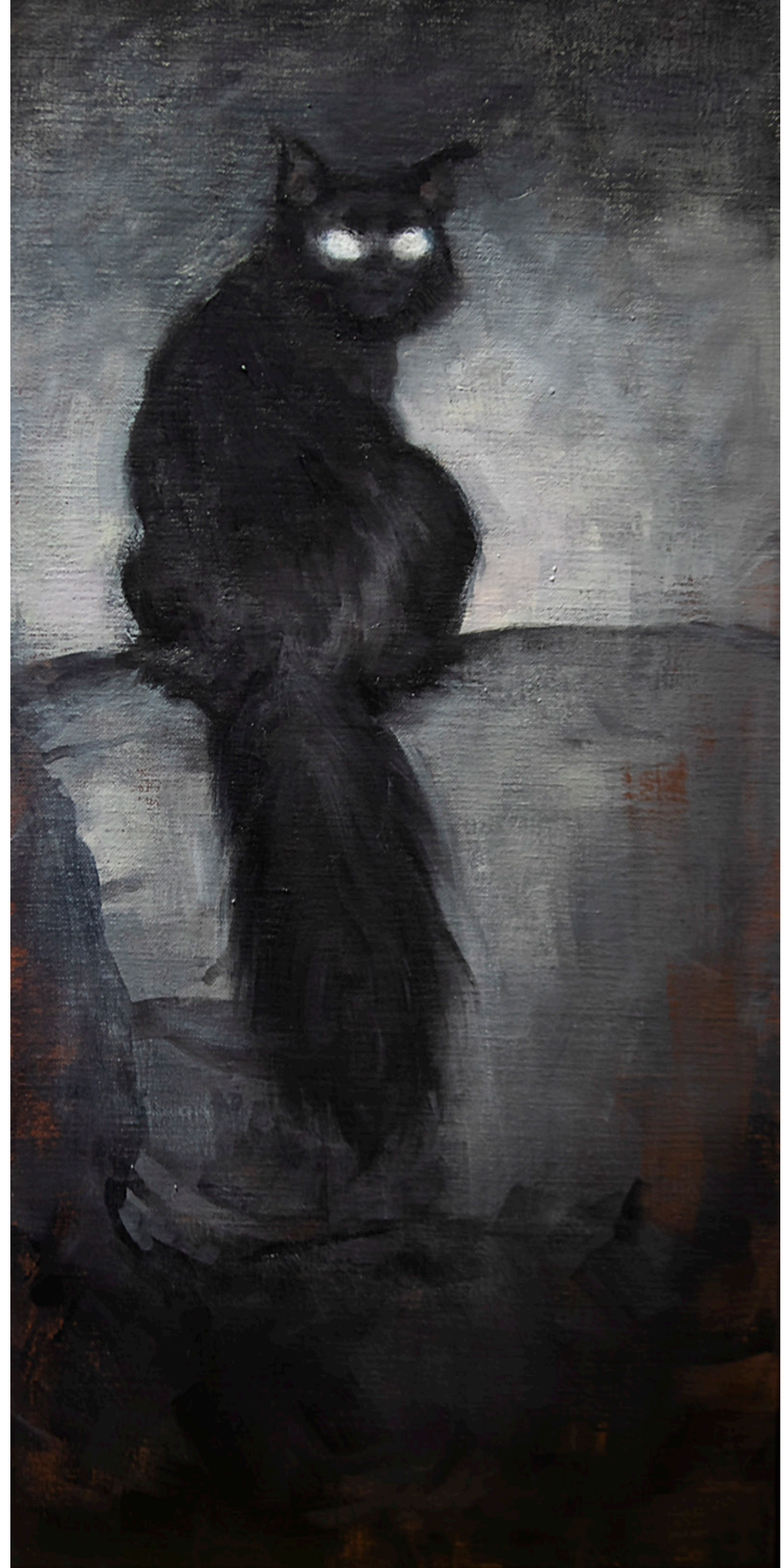
Thanatophobia
Oil on panel 55 x 30 cm
£900





Phasmobophobia
Oil on board 43 X 33 cm
£700

Ailurophobia
Oil on canvas 54 X 29 cm
£900





Arachnophobia
Oil on canvas 50 X 30 cm
£900



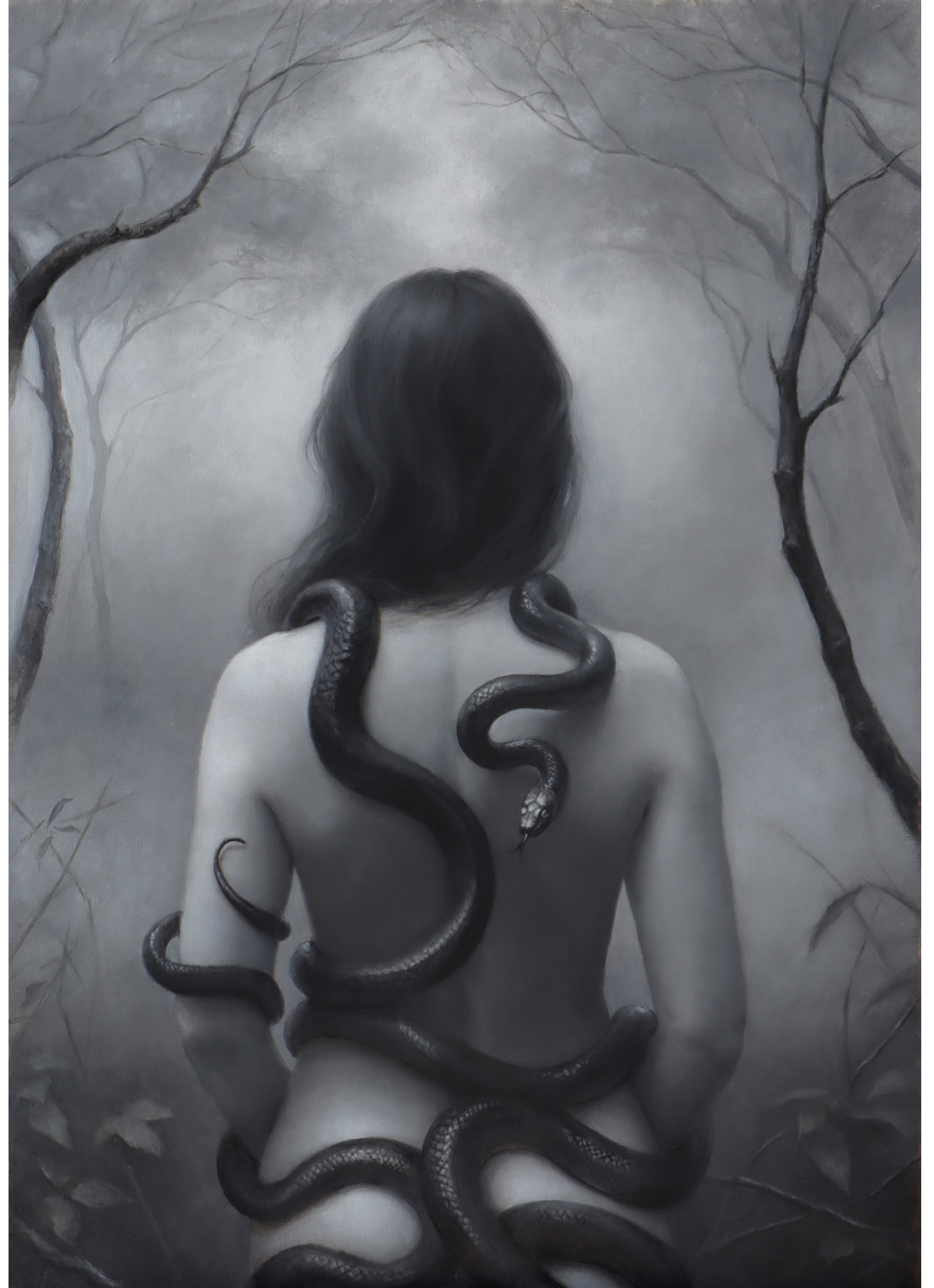
Damaged
Oil on panel 44 X 40 cm (framed size)
£800

PAINTINGS BY SVETLANA SEMENOVA

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The Slithering Veil
Oil on panel 60 x 42 cm
£2500





Wings of the Unseen
Oil on aluminium composite panel 57 x 120 cm
£3,850

Fragments of the Void
Oil on panel 36 x 27 cm
£1500



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