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Klára Sedlo

A Tale of Lovecraftian Lacquer

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“Something was creeping and creeping and waiting to be seen and felt and heard.” – H.P. Lovecraft

H.P. Lovecraft and Klára Sedlo – cut from the same cloth, or in this case, canvas. They stitch with the same needle, write with the same pen, dip their brush into the same ink. What resides in their craft is extraordinary, absurd, obscure, and as big as any new moon sky, pitch black; truly numinous and notorious.

Sedlo deliberately includes “a sense of something occult in my art, but that is where it starts and ends. The only thing I take from the occult is the atmosphere, which I transform into my own occult science. I have plenty of paintings depicting invocations of that demonic dog – these invocations are, of course, totally fictional, but based on old grimoires. So I would say I am like a writer that creates bizarre horror stories, that are fictional but convincing because they share the same atmosphere as the real occult that was studied by the author.” If Lovecraft could be a painting, he would be a Sedlo, no questions asked. And very little need for invocation, for he would instinctively be drawn to Sedlo’s brand of magic.

If Chelsea Wolfe and Björk collaborated, unrolled, unravelled, and unveiled music on canvas, it would look like Klára Sedlo’s work. Just twisted and dark enough. Just sweet and sticky enough. “Candy and toys are symbolic in my paintings – they point out our time and our behaviour. And that is why I like to put them in uncute relationships, attribute human emotions or weird hobbies to them (like cute plush toys reading Lovecraft books), or put them in mysterious situations. The result is that my paintings are cute and upsetting at the same time and the viewer, caught up in the cuteness, has to look as well at the other, “darker” line of the painting. Here the cuteness does not cover, but leads into the true, deep inner world.”

It’s the juxtaposition of light and dark that hypnotises the viewer, not just in terms of contrast, but content, too. The darkness, however, wins in Sedlo’s world. Unlike most stories where the light wins, in Sedlo’s work



darkness looms. It lurks like a creature in the corner, casting its shape upon the walls of an antechamber, foreboding and forbidden. She follows in the footsteps of Lovecraft who states, "The process of delving into the black abyss is to me the keenest form of fascination." While Sedlo dwells with the darkness, she is well aware of how the light plays against its counterpart which "is definitely connected with my fascination for Baroque painting and the fact that that kind of light adds something deeply dramatic to the final artwork." A colour theory advocate, Sedlo knows her way around a palette. She isn't the least bit frightened to explore psychological realms with her viewers.

The darkness offers two meanings. "On the one hand, it is the symbolic expression of our deep inner thoughts or subconscious mind that we are maybe scared of. And on the other hand, it brings a mysterious atmosphere, which I really like. There are a lot of things you can see in the dark, it creates awesome space for the viewer's imagination."

Sedlo is a raconteur. Witness the conjuring of Buggy the Evil, an inconspicuous French terrier who boldly takes magic into her own paws, paws that are fantastically painted by Sedlo's ingenious hands. The story unfolds, as does any delicious piece of fiction. According to Sedlo, "The dog was a different story, more connected to my tendency to create legends. From the first time I saw this dog, I knew it would be a perfect demon in my paintings. So I created a whole series depicting a cult of worshipping this little dog (her name is Buggy) or the dog levitating in rooms, walking into houses, etc. It made Buggy quite famous in my circle of friends, followers, and collectors. They keep asking if I will bring her to openings and want to meet the little demon. So I keep creating the myth."

Lovecraftian lovers swoon over Sedlo's ability to blend fact and fiction into a warped, whimsical narrative. From "The Other Gods" Lovecraft beckons us to observe, "The moon is dark, and the gods dance in the night; there is terror in the sky, for upon the moon hath sunk an eclipse foretold in no books of men or of earth's gods." A keen observer of the world around her, Sedlo looks to the sky for inspiration. "During the day, I like to 'save' all the interesting visual impulses I see around me in my mind. It can be a piece of sky in combination with a dark green tree. I do not sketch these impulses, I just focus on them and save them in my head."

Imagine Sedlo on her studio floor, decked out in full supernatural, Dadaist regalia, with a pair of horns and a smudge of black lipstick. She hums whilst juxtaposing objects; the collision of cotton-candy-coloured marshmallows and black candle drippings. Might the shadows of Jungian philosophy be present here, too? Whatever the case may be, Sedlo's dedication to self-expression speaks loudly. As she asserts, her art is a "kind of psycho-analysis of vision and of its impression on someone else." Her approach focuses on interpretation and collocation. "I know symbols

(which could be a piece of sky, interior, etc.) creates feelings, so I think deeply about what I put together and how it will work when viewed, all associations, and how can I support its main impression." The aim to rearrange life is ever-present in Sedlo's pieces, a psychological thrill and insight into her mind's eye.

When asked about what drives Sedlo to her art, she says, "It is inner need. I like to say painting is a life necessity for me, like eating or sleeping. I cannot go too long without it." The artist eats and sleeps her art, she becomes spellbound by the very spells that bind her to the canvas. Painting has been her destiny, one that she has not shied away from. "I have painted for as long as I can remember — as a child it was my favourite activity — and since that time I have not stopped. Once, when I around five, I made a lot of drawings and stuck them to walls and furniture all around my grandparents' flat. Then I told them that was my exhibition. They had to go around, look at the paintings, and pretend they were in a gallery. So this is probably the first memory of wanting to become a painter."

Again, Lovecraft's own words reflect back. "There are not many persons who know what wonders are opened to them in the stories and visions of their youth; for when as children we listen and dream, we think but half-formed thoughts, and when as men we try to remember, we are dulled and prosaic with the poison of life." (Lovecraft, "Celephaïs")

Waxing poetic on today's version of happiness, Sedlo's conclusions surface in her paintings like the foam of a wave, rising and falling into a dark, dark ocean. "A nice glittering unicorn T-shirt does not make you happier. You can also see that products around us in the last ten years are getting cuter and shinier. I think the more glittering and useless things you create, the more intense dark you need to cover or emptiness you need to fill. It is a logical consequence and essence of our time."

*I have seen the dark universe yawning
Where the black planets roll without aim,
Where they roll in their horror unheeded,
Without knowledge, or lustre, or name.
H.P. Lovecraft, "Nemesis"*

