



Art as 'Night': An Art-theological Treatise

Gavin Keeney

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Art as 'Night' proposes a type of ahistorical dark knowledge (atheology and theology, at once) crossing painting since Velázquez, but reaching back to the Renaissance, especially Titian and Caravaggio. As a form of formalism, this 'night' is also closely allied with forms of intellection that come to reside in art as pure visual agency or material knowledge while invoking moral agency, a function of art more or less bracketed in modern art for ethical and/or political agency. Not a theory of meta-painting, Art as 'Night' restores coordinates arguably lost in painting since the separation of natural and moral philosophy in the Baroque era. It is with Velázquez that we see a turning point, an emphasis on the specific resources of painting as a form of speculative intellect, while it is with contemporary works by Gerhard Richter and Anselm Kiefer that we see the return of the same after the collapse of modernism, and after subsequent postmodern maneuvers to make art discursive yet without the austerities of the formal means present in Art as Art. Art as 'Night' argues for a non-discursive form of intellection fully embodied in the work of art and, foremost, painting. A synoptic and intentionally elusive and allusive survey of painting, through the collapse of the art market in late 2007, Art as 'Night' suggests by way of this critique of an elective 'night' crossing painting that the art world is an endlessly deferred version of pleroma (Hegel's Absolute Knowledge), a fully synthetic world given to an exploration and appropriation of the given through classical mimesis and epistemology and its complete incorporation and transfiguration in a theory of knowledge and art as pure speculative agency. In effect, Art as 'Night' is an incarnational theory of art as absolute knowledge.

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