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<div align="center">Known/Unknown Figure</div>

A motif that has appeared frequently in my work is a single figure seen from behind in a landscape. After recognizing the mood, spatial perspective, and human connection this motif creates in the paintings of two artists I admire, Caspar David Friedrich and Giorgio de Chirico, I began to incorporate the concept into my own artwork. Despite my strong draw to paintings of this configuration, it has been difficult for me to understand and explain why I use it in my paintings or how it is relevant in my art. In order to hopefully gain further insight into this, I researched more into the presence, use, and meaning of a single figure from behind in a landscape in art history.

The compositional device of having a person seen from behind, usually in the foreground of the image overlooking a landscape, has been a motif throughout art history. This device, which is termed rückenfigur, is typically used as a way to allow the viewer to enter into the space and vicariously experience the scene and emotion of that figure. As noted by Koerner (2012), Rückenfigur achieves a paradoxical effect - while the figure invites the viewer into the scene, their back turned away from the viewer suggests a mood of isolation or melancholy. The use of this motif is closely associated with the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, who was the first to pioneer the rückenfigur as his subject matter and give it a central and key

role in his compositions. An example of this is in his work, "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog" (image 1).

To help illustrate the use of the rückenfigur, I will examine two works: one by Caspar David Friedrich, "Monk by the Sea" (image 2) and the other by Giorgio de Chirico "The Enigma of the Oracle" (image 3). Both share in the expressive weight of melancholy, though the rückenfigur plays a different role in its relationship to the viewer in each.

In "Monk by the Sea," the scale and openness of the image consumes the viewer. After observing, the viewer notices a tiny figure in the foreground, giving perspective to the image. This isolated faceless being observing the sea, looking out over the edge to the vastness of the world in a palette of cool tones, has a meditative and transcending feel. As Berdan (2016) writes, "(Friedrich) wanted to reach beyond just visually representing a scene or person, he wanted his works to turn the viewer inwards and feel a connection that transcended the physical world." She goes on to identify how the layers within the painting, when compared with the figure, give the viewer the experience of "an unlimited experience of space." In "Monk By The Sea," we are invited to view and contemplate this space and breath it in. We are alone, isolated and transcended, asking, "what does it all mean?"

In contrast, Giorgio de Chirico's, "The Enigma of the Oracle" is more conflicting. We have the rückenfigur looking down and out into a valley, which takes up a very small portion of the image on the left. The rest of the scene is an empty room that is natural in detail but is essentially an unknown and invented place. As

Berdan (2016) describes, the viewer is left with a feeling of uncertainty and otherworldliness that is hard to define. Here lies the conflict, for as the viewer you are invited in only to realize you are not wanted and you are just a voyeur upon the scene. Like the figures, the viewer is "alienated in landscapes of "existential solitude"(Berdan, 2016)." De Chirico builds upon Friedrich's rückenfigur giving us a "landscape rendered alien through emptiness and loss (Eburne, 2016)." The room is a void in which the rückenfigur is withdrawn from the scene. With "The Enigma of the Oracle" we are a spectator that asks, "What does it mean?" But ultimately knowing, there is no meaning.

The rückenfigur of "Monk by the Sea" and "The Enigma of the Oracle" ask the viewer to live and acknowledge their melancholy. While one invites us in the other separates us from the world. The rückenfigur continues to be used in a variety of forms of artwork, often evoking the similar feeling of sadness, voyeurism, and isolation. I find that those themes are often present in my artwork. I feel the need to make work like this because it allows me to hide in plan sight how I feel. The artwork gives existence to the feelings somewhere outside of me. The un-named rückenfigur is always me. My images invite you in, but allow you only to get so close before you are turned away.

Image 1. Caspar David Friedrich, "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog", oil on canvas, 37.3"x 29.4", 1819

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wanderer_above_the_Sea_of_Fog#/media/File:Caspar_David_Friedrich_-_Wanderer_above_the_sea_of_fog.jpg

Image 2. Caspar David Friedrich, "Monk by the Sea", oil on canvas, 43"x 67.5", 1808-1810

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Monk_by_the_Sea#/media/File:Caspar_David_Friedrich_-_Der_Mönch_am_Meer_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg
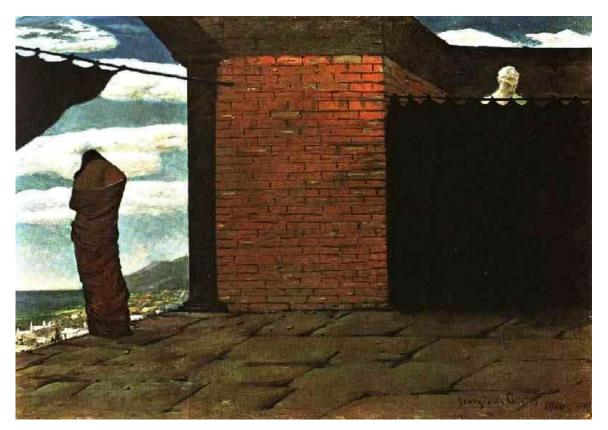
Image 3. Giorgio de Chirico, "The Enigma of the Oracle", oil on cardboard, 16.5"x 24", 1910

http://allpainters.org/wp-content/themes/paint/paintings/full/the-enigma-of-the-oracle-1910.jpg

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