

Dreams

ETERNAL THEMES IN ART
FROM GIOTTO TO KUSAMA

Dreams

Markus Eisen

PRESTEL

MUNICH · LONDON · NEW YORK

Introduction **8**

Anonymous New Kingdom Carver, <i>Dream Stele of Thutmose IV</i>	14
Anonymous Attic Sculptor, <i>Votive Relief from the Sanctuary of Amphiaraus at Oropos</i>	16
Anonymous Shunga Stone Carver, <i>The Dream of Maya</i>	18
Giotto di Bondone, <i>Joachim's Dream</i>	20
Anonymous Sephardic Illuminator, <i>Jacob's Dream</i>	22
Fra Angelico, <i>The Dream of Innocent III</i>	24
Rogier van der Weyden, <i>The Dream of Pope Sergius</i>	28
Piero della Francesca, <i>The Dream of Constantine</i>	30
Tang Yin, <i>The Thatched Hut of Dreaming of an Immortal</i>	32
Raphael, <i>Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams</i>	34
Albrecht Dürer, <i>Dream Vision</i>	36
Michelangelo Buonarroti, <i>Il Sogno (The Dream)</i>	38
Giovanni Battista Naldini, <i>Allegory of Dreams</i>	40
Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, <i>Joseph's Dream</i>	42
Jacob Jordaens, <i>Night Vision</i>	44
Jean-Honoré Fragonard, <i>The Warrior's Dream of Love</i>	46
Henry Fuseli, <i>The Nightmare</i>	48
Francisco de Goya, <i>The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters</i>	52
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, <i>The Dream of Ossian</i>	54
Katsushika Hokusai, <i>The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife</i>	56
Caspar David Friedrich, <i>The Dreamer (Ruins of the Oybin Monastery)</i>	58
Moritz von Schwind, <i>The Prisoner's Dream</i>	60
Thomas Cole, <i>The Architect's Dream</i>	62
Odilon Redon, <i>Dans le rêve (In the Dream)</i>	66
Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, <i>The Dream</i>	68
Ferdinand Hodler, <i>The Night</i>	70
Edvard Munch, <i>A Summer Night's Dream: The Voice</i>	72
Edward Burne-Jones, <i>Lancelot at the Chapel of the Holy Grail</i>	74
Henri Rousseau, <i>The Dream</i>	76
Franz Marc, <i>Dream</i>	78
Giorgio de Chirico, <i>The Double Dream of Spring</i>	80
Paul Klee, <i>Dream City</i>	82

Max Ernst, <i>Two Children Are Threatened by a Nightingale</i>	84
Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Little Dream in Red</i>	86
Joan Miró, <i>The Birth of the World</i>	88
René Magritte, <i>La Clef des songes (The Key to Dreams)</i>	90
Pablo Picasso, <i>Le Rêve (The Dream)</i>	92
Henri Matisse, <i>The Dream</i>	94
Marc Chagall, <i>The Dream</i>	96
Frida Kahlo, <i>The Dream (The Bed)</i>	98
Max Beckmann, <i>Dream of Monte Carlo</i>	100
Salvador Dalí, <i>Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second before Awakening</i>	102
Diego Rivera, <i>Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park</i>	104
Grete Stern, <i>Dream of Imprisonment</i>	108
Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, <i>Warlugulong</i>	110
Marina Abramović, <i>Dream Bedroom (I), from Dream House</i>	112
El Anatsui, <i>Recycled Dreams (Uniting the World with a Stitch)</i>	114
Damien Hirst, <i>The Dream</i>	116
Banksy, <i>Follow Your Dreams, Cancelled</i>	118
Yayoi Kusama, <i>Infinity Mirrored Room – Brilliance of the Souls</i>	120
Sources of Quotations	125
Image Credits	127





Dreams are inescapable. They arrive unbidden, seemingly asserting themselves night after night for each and every one of us, even if, upon waking, we often find ourselves unable to recall them. The most fantastical scenarios, the most extraordinary chains of events, often take on a life of their own. Set against the immediate, tangible reality of what is seen and experienced in dreams, the imaginative play and fantasies of the waking mind appear almost drab, weak, even superficial. Dreams have a compelling presence, an overwhelming intensity and are full of tangled situations and baffling phenomena. They elude rational understanding and resist scientific analysis; as soon as our investigations move beyond purely medical and physiological observation and attempt to grasp the actual content of dreams, we quickly encounter insurmountable obstacles. The dream as such remains subjective, confined to each individual, in some ways resembling religious or artistic experience. In this sense, the world of dreams forms a realm set apart from the world of the ordinary, only partially subject to the laws and norms of everyday reality, unfolding instead in a seemingly untameable, uninhibited space.

Across all periods and cultures, people have grappled with dreams, which in turn have played a significant role throughout history. Dreams permeate religious texts, literature and fine art, shaping superstitious beliefs from the earliest times up to the present day. What has changed over the centuries, however, are the opinions on the nature and origin of dreams. In the distant past, dreams were often understood as visions sent from outside ourselves, received by the dreamer from a real, if variously imagined, source. In more recent times, dreams were perceived as emerging from the depths of our own minds, with dream imagery interpreted as a manifestation of our deepest desires. Some dreams have even been seen as a gateway to other, supernatural or divine worlds; while in others, the emphasis shifts inwards, with dreams understood as offering access to the unconscious and to our innermost secrets. Both share the conviction that at least some dreams carry genuine significance and can supply us with vital insights into our own lives – provided we are able to interpret them. This holds true for both the dream readers of antiquity and the psychoanalysts of modernity.

It is hardly surprising that artists have repeatedly engaged with the strangely unfamiliar yet at the same time uncannily familiar world of dreams, incorporating them into their works, whether because a patron wished to have a significant dream experience preserved, or because a dream itself provided the artist with a creative impetus. In the visual arts, thousands of works take up dreams in strikingly diverse ways. Among them are pieces by some of the most outstanding artists from disparate epochs, many of which have had a lasting influence and retain enduring aesthetic significance. It goes without saying that dream art can never escape the cultural, religious and social circumstances of the historical environment in which it was created. Such works reflect the most diverse conceptions of dreams: at times these are directly visible

and legible in the way an image is composed; at other times, specific facets of dream experience become accessible through the circumstances of an image's production and reception. The present selection thus offers both a journey through the history of art and an exploration of the history of dreams.

We begin with two examples from the remote past, both involving the direct intervention of a divine being in human life. According to legend, a god struck a bargain with Thutmose IV in a dream: if he were to free the Sphinx from its sandy grave, the prince would become Pharaoh. Shortly after the year 1400 BC, he had a stele erected to commemorate this event; it still stands, three and a half millennia later, at the very place where the dream occurred – between the front legs of the Sphinx itself (p. 15). This monument to an event that once held world-historical importance is followed by an image that records the experience of a single individual while at the same time reflecting the religious practices of the day. A Greek votive relief from the fourth century BC depicts a man being healed by the god Amphiaraus, which occurred in a dream (p. 17). The person who had been cured commissioned the work himself and had it set up in the temple grounds in gratitude. In both instances, part of the work's aura derives from the circumstance that it was ordered by an individual who, by their own account, encountered a god while in a dream state. The two objects, then, are immediately bound up with an awe-inspiring and deeply moving religious experience.

*... And they say that life is a dream: not so;
not dream alone. Dream is a fragment of life.
A tangled fragment in which face
and being clasp and intertwine [...]*

RAINER MARIA RILKE, '... AND THEY
SAY THAT LIFE IS A DREAM' (1906)

The works that follow engage with sacred texts and depict celebrated religious scenes once familiar to all, some marking turning points in their respective sacred narratives. Dozens of dream episodes appear in the Old and New Testaments, five of them in the Christmas story alone (p. 43), while dreams also play a role in Buddhism (p. 19). In Jewish, Christian and Islamic households, every child knows stories such as that of Jacob's Ladder, on which angels ascended and descended between heaven and earth (p. 23), or Joseph's interpretations of dreams in Egypt (p. 35). There are nevertheless many lesser-known dreams, particularly those associated with the legends of saints, including the dreams of Pope Innocent III (p. 24) and Pope Sergius I (p. 29), or the dream of Emperor Constantine the Great (p. 31). In the Middle Ages and the early modern period, such

images of dreams emphasized the power and agency of God and were repeatedly commissioned from the leading artists of their time, including Giotto, Fra Angelico, Rogier van der Weyden, Piero della Francesca, Raphael and Rembrandt (pp. 21, 24, 29, 31, 35 and 43).

Around 1500, with the flourishing of the Renaissance in Europe, we encounter works that offer a fundamentally different approach to the world of dreams. Subjective experiences, personal interpretations of dream images and even dreams personally experienced by the artist now shift into the foreground, as seen in Dürer's apocalyptic vision (p. 37), but also Michelangelo's famous dream drawing (p. 39) and, strikingly, at roughly the same moment, Tang Yin's depiction of Wang Dongyuan's dream (p. 33). With this shift, the range of themes gradually expands, as a wide variety of dream subjects now furnish material for artists, including desires and longings of an amorous nature (pp. 45 and 47), at times intensified into the explicitly sexual, as in Japanese shunga imagery (p. 57), or giving rise to terrifying and abyssal nightmare visions.

Two such depictions of nightmares, created just before 1800 by Henry Fuseli (p. 48) and Francisco de Goya (p. 53), mark the transition from the early modern period to Romanticism, or even Modernism. With his aquatint *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, Goya created one of the most striking and widely discussed images of this epochal shift, giving form both to the dangers of Reason abandoned and to the menace of Reason elevated to unchallenged authority. With Romanticism, the historical past itself – albeit transfigured now by the imagination – enters the world of dream images. Like virtually no other artist, Caspar David Friedrich succeeded in visualizing a nostalgic, dreamlike yearning for what has been irrevocably lost – a past beyond recovery (p. 59) – while Thomas Cole presents a grand vision of idealized architecture, drawing on historical models (p. 62).

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, an increasing number of works take up the grotesque and often absurd imagery of dreams – a powerful current whose influence reaches well into the twentieth century. A key figure in this regard is Odilon Redon, whose enigmatic dream apparitions (p. 67) were frequently and explicitly cited by later generations of artists. His shadowy drawings and prints of floating, disembodied eyes and heads testify to humanity's hidden depths and to unconscious realms, as they may be revealed in dream's elusive visions. An extended sequence of works by a range of artists is devoted to experimentation with such bizarre and hallucinatory forms and motifs, culminating in the great masters of Surrealism, among them Giorgio de Chirico (p. 81), Max Ernst (p. 85), Joan Miró (p. 89), René Magritte (p. 91) and Salvador Dalí (p. 103). Although their approaches differ widely, these works are united by their engagement with the irrational, creative dimension of dreams and their effort to give form to the unconscious – a path that gained considerable momentum through the concurrent establishment of psychoanalysis under Sigmund Freud.

There are also striking individual works that articulate highly personal relationships to dreams, not aligned with any particular artistic tendency but compelling in their own right, including images by Ferdinand Hodler (pp. 70/71), Edvard Munch (p. 73), Henri Rousseau (p. 77), Franz Marc (p. 79), Paul Klee (p. 83), Wassily Kandinsky (p. 87), Pablo Picasso (p. 93), Henri Matisse (p. 95), Marc Chagall (p. 97), Frida Kahlo (p. 99) and Max Beckmann (p. 101). After 1945 and the Second World War, works increasingly emerge that use dream motifs to critically engage with aspects of contemporary life or recent history – whether related to a specific nation (pp. 104/105), patriarchal systems in general (p. 109) or to colonialism (p. 115), commodity capitalism (p. 117) or false promises of freedom (p. 119). An entirely new level of radicalism is evident in works that transform the viewer into an active participant, drawing them directly into the world of dreams (p. 120), even allowing them to become the dreamers themselves (p. 113). A genuinely exceptional role is played by so-called 'Dreamtime', a central element of a living religious practice that continues to the present day, and one powerfully visualized by Australia's Indigenous artists (p. 111).

Taken as a whole, this focused selection of key, exemplary artworks offers a distinctive and compelling view of the many facets of dreaming as they unfold across the centuries and into the present. These works open a path into a world of dreams found nowhere else.



