

# PAUL HAZELTON

## GHOSTS IN THE MAKING AN INTERVENTION IN THE WUNDERKABINETT

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The Hendrick's Commission

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THE VIKTOR WYND MUSEUM OF CURIOSITIES,  
FINE ART & NATURAL HISTORY

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OF THE DUSTY SIDE OF LIFE

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# PAUL HAZELTON

## Dust in the Corner of My Eye by Michael Petry

When you enter an art space that is not the clean white void of modernism (along with all its cultural baggage) but go into a space that seems more real, or of the everyday (be it in someone's house or a large Victorian museum of Empire), contemporary art objects can seem out of place. Many artists have used this moment of disruption as a starting point for the artistic interaction of their work with historic objects. Others completely disregard the site and install work in whatever space is available, or adaptable, and their work stands alone, and away from this non-white context. Both strategies are possible and can succeed (or fail) but a third possibility is that an artist makes work specifically for the setting within their already existing oeuvre. This is what Paul Hazelton has done for his show *Ghosts in the Making* at the Viktor Wynd Museum of Curiosities. The museum aims to 'present an incoherent vision of the world displayed through wonder enclosed within a tiny space' and it 'focuses on the pre-enlightenment origins of the museum as Wunderkabinett'.

Hazelton's new works look like they might very well be old, found objects of wonder from around the world. Rich collectors in the 17th century bought shells from the Pacific as well as glass work, paintings and scientific objects. Hazelton has also used such items along with human hair, pigment and of course, his signature dust. The hair and dust has solidified into tiny figures that float in larger dust globes or inside glass domes and instruments. These figures are ghostly, some



referring to Japanese Rokurokubi spirits who in that classical tradition, have extremely elongated necks or wander about with their heads in their hands. The artist Hokusai is credited with bringing them to Western attention and they have even morphed into contemporary Manga cartoons (and Reed Richards in Marvel's Fantastic Four). In his The Ebb and Flow Egg, Hazelton has created a sort of dry terrarium where we see some of these ghostly bodies float next to jellyfish and other mysterious sea creatures as if they had drowned in a dusty sea. The egg shaped glass that contains the scene also sees Hazelton's first use of colour in his dust works. Bright pinks and purples shunt up to watery blues, and transparent white dust balls jar the eye. Hazelton has mixed in colour pigments as well as coloured lint with the household dust that he has previously carefully collected. The waterless tank sits inside a cabinet next to a large egg from the museum's collection, and his other works are equally incorporated into the site.

A tiny figure rests on a circular mirror and its image is doubled, making it even more ghostly. It is corporally there, as is its reflection, but it is hardly there at all. It is dust and the reflection of dust. The figure is seen through a half dome of hair that also sits atop the mirror. The doubling reflection perfectly seals the figure in a real and invisible sphere. As in the terrarium, the tiny ghosts are captured, contained and yet look like they could easily turn to smoke and float out into our space to haunt us. In fact in Gold Dust we see a figure passing through a solid book of the same title, which is obscured as it too is wrapped in an ectoplasm of hair and dust. It is hard not to want to blow! I imagine that Marcel Duchamp also had an overwhelming desire to blow the dust off of his Large Glass even before Man Ray could turn it into an image of haunting beauty (Breeding Dust, 1920). After the photo was taken Duchamp wiped most of the dust away but did incorporate some of it into the work itself (the surface dust had gathered over a year). He glued some of it onto the cone section and there it remains, a reminder of the passing of time, of life and of death.

Hazelton's work that instantly reminded me of Quentin Crisp is called Mothers Ruin and features a dust and hair covered Hendricks Gin teapot. Crisp famously said "There is no need to do any housework at all. After the first four years the dirt doesn't get any worse." Here it looks as if eons of dust have swirled around such a house to form not only dust balls containing Rokurokubi, but a tower of dirt. It belongs if not in the home of Crisp then surely of Miss Havisham, left to decay in her spiteful desire





to revenge herself against all men. Could this have been her wedding tea? Certainly she had many ghosts to slay, but did not overcome them. There is a strong narrative to Hazelton's works that encourages us to add to it our own experience of dust, whether art historical (I keep remembering the extremely dusty NEW vitrines at the opening of the Ashmolean museum's new addition in 2009) or from the body of fiction we might have read (His Dark Materials, Philip Pullman). Yet all the time I keep thinking I need to look at the work out of the corner of my eye, because then, the spirits will move, thinking I have turned away. They seem to have frozen under my gaze and if only I could catch a glimpse of them at play I know I would have an entrance into their magic realm.

Hazelton has made seeming doors into another world, and unlike Elsie Wright and Frances Griffith's photographs of the Cottingley Fairies (1917), which were of course double exposed plates, he has made sculptures that do seem to touch on the supernatural. We now know that the historic photos were fake (though at the time many believed them to be real) and that Hazelton's sculptures are also fictive, but somehow we want to believe his more, perhaps because they are in three dimensions. The general public is well aware what trickery Photoshop and other forms of re-touching can create and are generally aware of the fictive nature of all photography. But even ethereal sculptures makes, holds and carves space, we see Hazelton's objects with our own eyes and try to dupe ourselves! That of course is why we go to CGI movies, to see the impossible; men and women flying, or stretching their rubbery necks around villains, or we see humans flayed alive, or walking through walls, or even books. We want to believe.

In Blood, Sweat and Tears: ghosts in the making Hazelton incorporates what is known as a 'Maxim's Pipe of Peace', a form of scientific glasswear designed by Sir Hiram Maxim in 1909. His inhaler was used for patients with bronchitis. They boiled water and his Dirigo medicine to form a vapour that soothed the throat. Maxim, however, was better known for inventing the machine gun. Here, the pipe sits atop a glass funnel where a female ghost is in the process of forming, taking shape before our eyes. Hazelton has made a 'distillation apparatus or ghost making machine' and we want it to work. How I longed to lift the funnel from its mirror base and release her into the world, my world because like in all good ghost stories, the central character (and as with all viewers, we place ourselves in that position) always opens the door they know they should not, or turn on the light in the dark room,



or un-stopper the bottle of the evil genie, or watch the cursed video tape, or answer the telephone call only to be dismembered. If our fictional filmic friends are really lucky, and miss gruesome fates, and live to tell the tale, they become what so many want to be; witnesses to another realm, and that too is what art offers, another realm.

Michael Petry is a multimedia artist, director of MOCA, London , co-founder of the Museum of Installation. He is the author and co-author of many books. Titles include: Nature Morte: Contemporary artists reinvoke the Still-Life tradition (2013), The Art of Not Making: The New Artist/Artisan Relationship (2012), Installation Art (1994)

## BIOGRAPHY

Paul Hazelton was born in 1962 on the Isle of Thanet. His signature material is household dust and he describes his dust creations as immaculate conceptions: concepts involving the control of dirt and the subversion of cleanliness. Sometimes incorporating other materials or objects such as human hair, cobwebs, light bulbs, books, or mirrors, Hazelton attempts the impossible: to reverse, or delay, the inevitable and ultimate decay of all things. Through the continual breakdown and fusion of ideas and materials, impossibly fragile worlds are revealed and held in suspension. Works often have associations with time, transformation, value, mortality, spirituality, and the mundane, or everyday nature of existence.

Hazelton has exhibited widely and in many different kinds of spaces including domestic settings, abandoned buildings, churches and museums. Shows include: Swept Away: Dust, Ashes, and Dirt in Contemporary Art and Design, Museum of Arts and Design, New York (2010); Metamorphosis: The Transformation of Being, All Visual Arts (AVA) The Crypt, One Marylebone Road, London (2012); Wonderful: Humbolt, Krokodil & Polke, Die Olbricht Collection, ME Collectors Room, Berlin (2013); Building Bridges, Fundación Rozenblum, BSM Art Building, Boulogne, Argentina (2013); Waste Agency, Platform 7, ex HMV shop, City, Leadenhall, London (2015); Inaugural Group Show, Herrick Gallery, 93 Piccadilly, London (2015); INVITED, 9 Hillgate Street, Notting Hill, London. Fair & Co in collaboration with Seth Stein Architects curated by Flora Fairbairn of Fair & Co and Philly Adams of The Saatchi Gallery (2015); Wolves, Magic and Spinning Wheels: The Anatomy

of Fairy Tales, Maslow Galleries, Everhart Museum of Natural History, Science and Art, Pennsylvania (2016); Nature Morte: Contemporary Artists Reinforce the Still Life, curated by Michael Petry (touring) Ha gamele prestegard, Stavanger, Norway (2015) Konsthallen at Bohuslan Museum, Sweden (2016) Guildhall Art Gallery, London (2017-18)







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