

Strange Allies

for Keegan McHargue

It's not like we get to choose them.

There are a few cases when doctors have said "no"—that is, "No thank you, sir, madam, your reverence, you, creature of great beauty and power, who has deigned to say hello to me. I greet you. I honor you. But ...

(and then make up something really good).

Mostly, though, they choose us, and we say "Okay, how are things?". The best we can do is to perhaps tame them, or their more destructive or embarrassing behaviors.

I was looking for a line to transgress.

Stepped too far and was in flatland, a two-dimensional romance at the kushy end of the rainbow. Something like an elvish contra dance, a bouncing quality, made me think of that poster, the nipple ad that Rudchenko and Mayakovsky did for the *Rezinotrest*. At the darker end of the spectrum and more obviously sinister than your project, but linked by optimism. Art in the service of the Revolution! Reach for the sky and grab a star—five pointed in their case.

(Kandinsky was the first to go—kicked out for being too mystical. The others went on building their new world of freshly lined union halls, freed from tradition, until they were all banished by the cartoon of "socialist realism.") And in the West, through the Bauhaus in an "international" way, stripped of its leftish challenge to propriety, the sky scrapers of New York and the cubes of Silicon Valley.

The friendly persuasion of myth-making was ever the particular province of the arts—naming the powers, revealing their hidden lives, making deals in song and image. Edward Bernays said that the propagandist "must never accept a retainer or assume a position which puts his duty to the groups he represents above his duty to society." Which is kind of like expecting lawyers to always work pro bono. For Bernays, as in the *Republic*, Papa knows best: blue for boys, pink for girls. The hope of the artists was that, unlike money, good poetry would drive out bad, and the deep image ring true. (Both camps may overrate themselves—history was perhaps twisted more deeply when Beau Brummel decided to wear a beaver hat to a party one night).

We follow the panther pads—frivolous foibles through the crib route—our cartoon inheritance, seeking live animation in the ever springful retort, crazier, no doubt, than logic, but saner than the alembic of denial: bubbling, cymbal chime, tambourines if we can find them, ice cream, strawberry popsicles, a chorus line playing croquet with Alice and the Red Queen, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Shem and Shaun, a mushroom walk and an ammonite crawl, thinking with our tails, fire from libidinous ache, birds rising, thought poised at momentary crossroad, an emotive intelligence wandering the howlish streets of hydrogen Manahatta, Sun Ra's pinkly parading elephants. Hiding out in the banal. Moving fast.

And a delicious mess on the floor, like a ritual offering, coffee wrapped in cornhusk at the waterfall, where we bow.

I greet you from the land of fire in the latter days.

Dale Pendell