

# Folk horror

Wossit all about?

What can it bring to art  
practice?

What's its value to  
contemporary culture?



# What's animism?

a myth for living by  
willing suspension of disbelief  
there + Not there

- 'Animism is the belief in the presence of spirits in every aspect of the physical world, animate or inanimate, including weather phenomenon, such as wind, thunder and lightning' E. Firestone, 2017:1)

Bevy  
Kandinsky  
Pollack  
ERNST

o Anthropomorphic - ascribing human emotions to things + nature.  
Rather than acknowledging the  
**RADICAL OTHER** of Nature





# What's folk horror?

Folk Horror recognised genre; Adam Scovell identifies three key films from 70s:

- *Blood on Satan's Claw*, *The Wicker Man*, *Witchfinder General*. But many in this vein
- *League of Gentlemen* (Horror fans); *Black Spot* (2017); *Midsomer* (2019); *A Field in England* (2013), *Enys Men* (2022) FH around before the triad, cross-genre presence across platforms.

### **Pessimistic outlook**

humans = deluded, barbaric & bent on mastery

Visual articulation of the theme: No sightlines  
visual blocking; no sightlines – lack of human agency, curtailing gaze/mastery

Critical of androcentrism, Anthropocene, and human dominance

Presence of Ritual, Sacrifice and the Ancient & Myth/legend

Antipastoral/romanticised rendition on the rural/nature

### **Animism & Pessimism**

Through pessimistic frame human magic is false (demonstrative of human attempts to have even more agency over the natural world).

In more recently in FH animistic forces (nature) are in play as BIG OTHER speaking to Anthropocene concerns (Black Spot).

FH therefore has both in play– those with demonstrable animism and those who show it as human folly.



# Characteristics



**What does Visual  
Pessimism look  
like in folk  
horror?**





Trees in landscape. Cold grey. Trees as dark barrier, cutting (out) the sky; tracing wyrd's tendrils





Muted palette, cold colours, the soil that swallows us all.  
Branches – bony fingers breaking up the pastoral unity in *Blood  
on Satan's Claw*.





*Macbeth*

All of these cases recall the army of trees in Macbeth, acting as a visual **challenge to the sovereignty of human agency** over nature

Trees. Boundaries, Visual, psychological Barriers





Arboreal myth-making - Black Spot  
The Dark Forest – no sightlines.



'The black house' from *The Secret World* – betwixt town/country; inside/outside; night/day, entropy/haunted boundary space – places of imagination, ordinary and supernatural transgressions...





*Mr and Mrs Andrews* Thomas Gainsborough (1748)

“...landscape makes an ideological claim that human intention both frames and leaves its traces on the land, and ‘nature’ fills in all the spaces between. This specific conception of landscape flows from the conventions of Renaissance perspective in a landscape painting or photograph, the elements of the land converge towards the viewer’s position in a pleasing way, and in doing so implies the singularity of that static viewpoint as an ideal abstract position of power” Oscar Moralde ‘Haptic Landscapes’ <http://mediafieldsjournal.org/haptic-landscapes/>

FH as anti-pastoral, anti-vitruvian



# Courbet's 'animism'

Blocked sightlines

No 'framing' – existential encounter rather  
framed 'view'

Pastoral becomes 'wild' untamed, primal

*Fantastic Landscape with Anthropomorphic Rocks* 1864. 87 x  
93cm







*Source chthonic/origin place/resist  
gaze*

Primordial  
Secret  
Black fathoms

Material of the earth – no smooth  
polished surfaces; far from  
metaphysical – a very earthly  
spirituality

Not about dominion or pastoral pretty  
scenes (contra patronage) – instead  
'sublime' (Romantic?) in the sense of  
making the human world small and  
insignificant; equivalent of Lovecraft's  
cosmic horror

*The Source of the Loue* 1864. Oil on canvas, 99.7 x 142.2 cm





The Unfathomable, chaotic...anti-human

*The Wave* c1871-73 Oil on canvas

# Wyeth's folk horror: Stranger Things

folk horror lies mainly in  
the implied storytelling  
rather than in turbulence of  
material application



Implied natural forces linked to death



















Implied  
natural  
forces linked  
to death

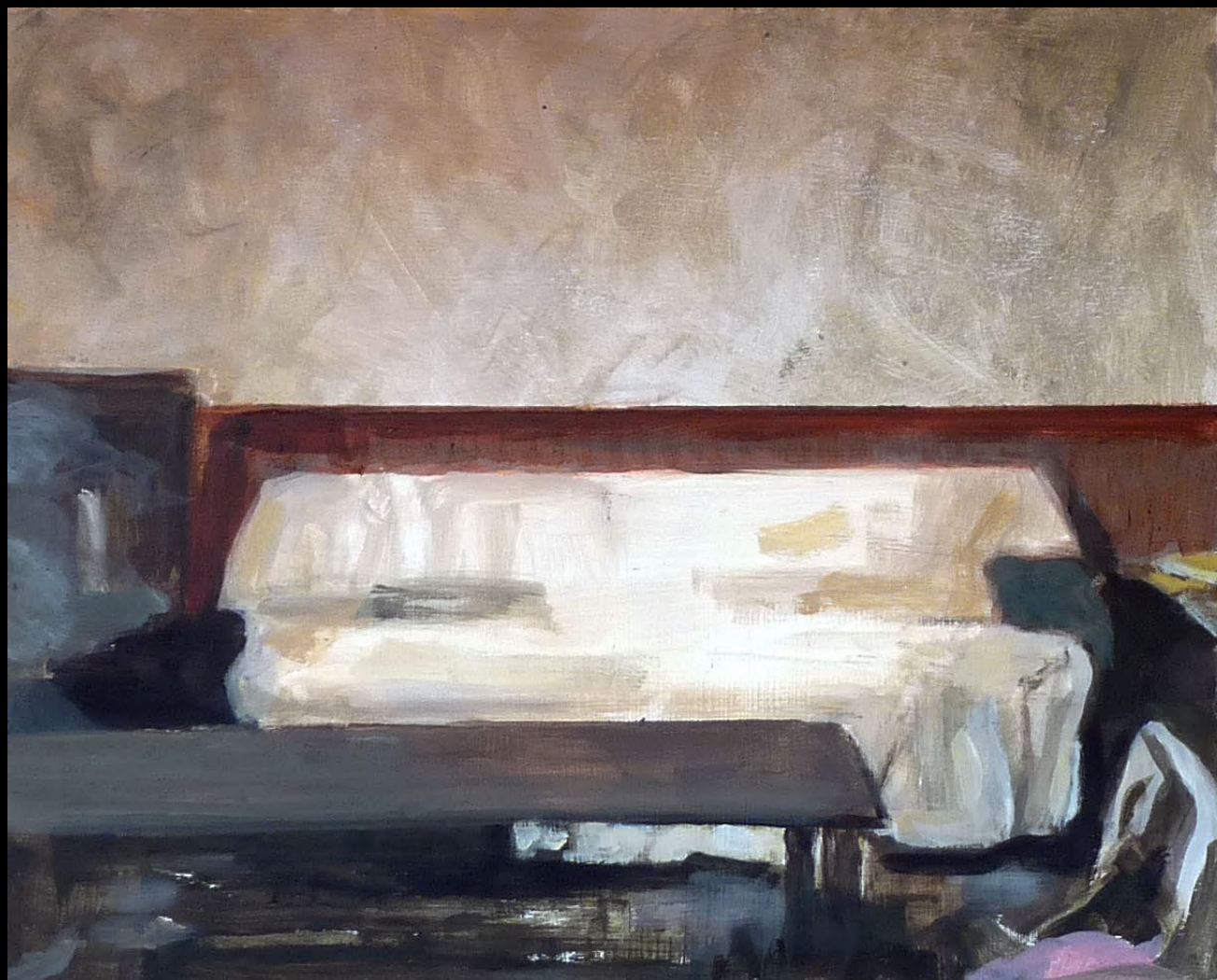
# Link to my practice

- Investigating ways of expressing visually figurative and landscape – without dominance – put humans into and in their place.
- Critical commentary on Anthropocene through the frame of FH and animism
- Existential inquiry – who or what are humans and why are they so jumped up? Why have we lost our connection to the wild.
- New tools new modes of expression – frame of FH to explore that through AR.
- Research-practice question: What does a pessimistic use of digital augmentation look like?



























# **FH, AR and animism**

<https://bridge.artivive.com/>



# Dolls house hauntings (FH AR)





















Strangeness  
of  
Existence



Aim to create a visual 'poem' rather than linear narrative  
Focused on 'energies' and word-image puns  
Combo of 3D particle based animations & 'real' footage

- <https://tanyakartblog.com/2022/10/04/3s1-ar-haptic-work/>
- <https://bridge.artivive.com/>

# Discussion pointers

- Why does folk horror speak to culture now?
- Is pessimistic animism an escape or symptom of an age of incoherence & materials? Does it have value?
- Is there a way to connect painting and digital augmentation that isn't gimmicky?
- What could a pessimistic use of digital augmentation look like?
- Why do artists need to be in the digital game?



In the contemporary milieu, the idea of being negative is either regarded as a destructive mentality or else defeatist fatalism. But, at least in passing shades, negative emotions can hold great power. There resides in negativity the seed of critical thought and a beneficial duty to engage with one's internal feelings. The work of negation, indeed the very act, is a process which remains productive in a sense – a deconstruction rather than a wholly violent act of destruction.... The negative capability of the art of negativity reveals a mutual demand for plasticity, open-mindedness, and freedom from totalizing rules and answers.

'The Art of Negativity: On Rejecting Positive Thinking'  
Enis Yucekoralp.

[https://przekroj.pl/en/society/the-art-of-negativity-enis-yucekoralp?utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_medium=post&fbclid=IwAR1400IkK0KI\\_wEiKrD\\_Mc0HyF6423XGRTieQRftu9trEjaSHvW7uolYs5U](https://przekroj.pl/en/society/the-art-of-negativity-enis-yucekoralp?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=post&fbclid=IwAR1400IkK0KI_wEiKrD_Mc0HyF6423XGRTieQRftu9trEjaSHvW7uolYs5U)