



Deanna Musgrave, *Transcendence*, 2019-2022.
Installation on a 609.6 x 1097.28 cm wall, Acrylic on masonite.
Beaverbrook Art Gallery. Photo: Drew Gilbert

Deanna Musgrave's *Transcendence*

BY KARA AU

I first saw Deanna Musgrave's paintings in 2019. Her exhibition, *Channel: Conversations with Emma Kunz*, was on display at the AX: The Arts and Culture Centre of Sussex, New Brunswick. I was in Sussex alone for the first time since the dramatic end of a significant relationship in my life. It was an unplanned pitstop and in that moment I felt a mysterious force pulling me back—encountering Musgrave's show in Sussex marked the beginning of something. A transition.

To Musgrave, *Channel* was a pivotal moment in her career—it was the first time she publicly acknowledged herself as an artist-healer with a spiritual practice. It was not an easy decision for her, as she had concerns about not being taken seriously, being labelled as crazy, and having her artwork and experience invalidated. However, she cites Swedish artist and mystic Hilma

af Klint as someone who gave her the courage to reveal herself. By using methods like energy work, hypnotherapy, astrology, and intuitive guidance, Musgrave acts as a facilitator in helping her clients work through their struggles to find inner healing. To Musgrave, spirituality is not something tied to religion; taking from transpersonal psychology, she believes that humanity is more than its material experience, and that everyone's spiritual journey is unique.

For our first meeting, Musgrave graciously invites me into her home. I'm there to talk about her new work, *Transcendence*, but we spend much of our time connecting in other ways (I end up receiving a cutting of her African milk tree as we navigate our first exchange.). I'm not exerting control or forcing direction during our conversation, but allowing us to



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Deanna Musgrave, *Warrior*. Acrylic on masonite, 119.38 cm tondo.

reveal ourselves organically. After some time, I apologize and tell her we'll get to the art; she observes that we've been talking about it the whole time.

I don't get to see *Transcendence* until our second meeting. There, I learn that its beginning was not at the moment the paint touched the canvas, but in 2004, when Musgrave had the strong intuition that everything was going to change in 2020. When January of that year arrived, she suffered a concussion from a car accident, forcing her to isolate for several months. That March, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a global pandemic.

Mirroring the world's current state, Musgrave depicts an apocalypse in *Transcendence*. Although an apocalypse is often illustrated as the horrific end of the world, Musgrave takes from the original Greek understanding, roughly translating as "an unveiling of truth once unknown." She describes it as an uncomfortable process, but one that might be necessary for transformation.

A massive undertaking, the painting is composed of over 50 hexagonal masonite canvasses. They are installed on a 20'x30' wall in the Elizabeth Currie Gallery at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery from July 18 to October 24, 2022. Nearby is the Salvador Dalí painting, *Santiago El Grande*, the inspiration for Musgrave's work. The energies in the paintings, however, are different.

Santiago El Grande is a vertical painting—a man, holding a giant crucifix, is on a bridled white steed ascending above a nuclear explosion, the details sharp and striking. In *Transcendence*, a naked woman sits atop a white, unbridled horse, their edges blending and diffusing into the blue canvas, moving left and upward toward a nebular collection of large, atom-shaped lights

and clouds. While the painting sits horizontal, Musgrave's composition gives it a sense of lift, opposite to Dalí's explicit skyward movement.

Behind the woman and horse are a series of other characters moving together toward the light. The woman's arms are held wide, with her palms turned upward, welcoming all to take the journey with her. Rejecting the binary of heaven and hell in the *Last Judgement*, Musgrave's depiction of the apocalypse is one of healing, and of giving everyone the opportunity to transform and nurture together without the need for control. The characters in the painting are based on real people who have given Musgrave their blessing to be placed in the work, as an act of self-healing. The horse, called Big Buddy in real life, lives up to his name as a guiding force working with the humans on their journey. *Transcendence* feels like a proposition: that collective healing may be found by looking and feeling beyond the limits of the material world. Musgrave's apocalypse acts as a stepping stone for individuals to discover what lies beyond themselves.

To amplify the nurturing space of her painting, Musgrave put out a call at the beginning of 2020 for people to donate objects of importance that she could implement into her work; this would also allow people to move into the new year unencumbered by the weight of their objects' significance. Using an intuitive watermarking process, she lays the objects on the canvas and pours water and pigment over them, releasing their energies while leaving a coloured embedding in the space it once took. The liquid has freedom to move where it wants to go, Musgrave's belief being that water has consciousness. By immersing the painting in the lived experience of others, perhaps we can find a part of ourselves within the imparted objects. Every single hexagonal canvas holds the energy of something dear, unified through the shared fundamental need for water.

Transcendence is a visual reminder of hope and healing in a difficult time, one that is sorely needed as we move toward some unknown future shaped by our wounded, but still loving, hearts. ■

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