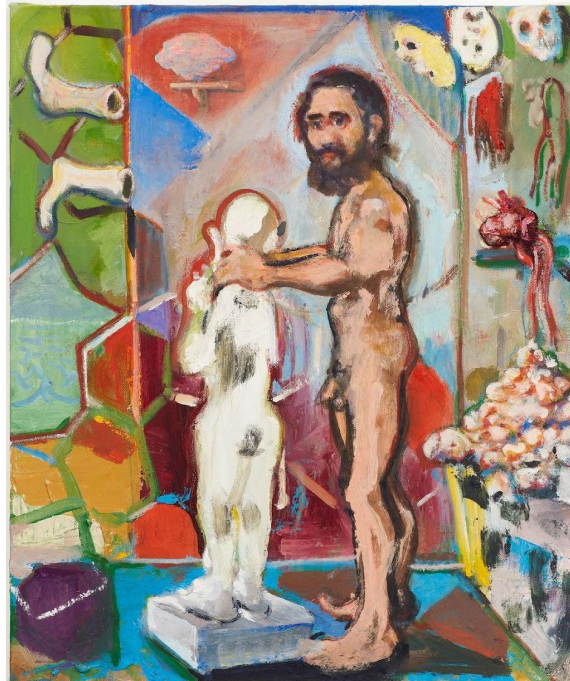


Galo Sanchez



Verne Dawson, *Prometheus in the Studio*, 2019. Oil on linen, 24 1/4 x 20 1/8 inches (61.5 x 51 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich/Vienna.

In one of Verne Dawson's most recent works, *Prometheus in the Studio*, he's able to create an eerie and unwelcoming atmosphere, one that directs the viewer's eyes right on the naked man. Dawson uses this tone to direct his message on the Greek story of Prometheus and use it as a connection to human progress. The story goes that Prometheus was the one who molded humans and gave them life changing discoveries like fire and technology, and was therefore considered by many to be a symbol for scientific advancements. Dawson gives this knowledge a negative connotation by implementing this feeling of isolation, a pattern that seems to be present in all his work. Here, it's used to make the viewer feel like the world he made is beyond human understanding. Through this, Dawson makes light of problems with human advancements, and how a society could benefit from not knowing.

Many factors contribute to this feeling of isolation, looking at *Prometheus in the Studio*, Dawson uses divine attributes that makes his work feel above the viewer. He first displays his

work in an upright canvas, allowing his main subject, Prometheus, to feel like an important figure. He makes his setting a mosaic-like background, which tends to have a close relationship with places of worship like churches. Adding onto this divinity is the naked man himself, which is reminiscent of Christ. Along with this theme of divinity, Dawson uses this pattern of placing the viewer in unfamiliar scenarios to expand *Prometheus in the Studio*. Recurring subjects in Dawson's work include mythical creatures set in fantasy-like settings, like in *Korrigan on the Run in Brittany*, in a lot of his pieces he allows his skies to take up a majority of the canvas creating huge worlds that'll never be fully explored, which can be seen in *Manhattan*.¹ The viewer doesn't know why this elf is running away or why this piece that looks nothing like Manhattan is titled "*Manhattan*," Dawson purposely uses these characters and scenarios to make the viewer feel like this world is bigger than them, through this he directs everyone's attention to the beauty and craftsmanship that's right in front of them.

All these elements are used to teach the idea of being content with not being able to answer every question humans face, and to acknowledge the consequences that could unfold as a result of further advancements. He uses the eeriness of Prometheus looking straight at the viewer and the depiction of divine beings to show that this is beyond human understanding, and discourages further context by making the viewer feel isolated in his work. Many writers also share the same sentiment of whether or not Prometheus was right by giving humans fire, thinking that by "giving humans fire also meant giving humans a moral choice: to use the tool for good or for evil."²

¹ Hutchinson, John, and Verne Dawson. *Verne Dawson*. Lund Humphries, 2019.

² Watson, David de Caires. "What Greek Myth Teaches Us about the Morality of Nuclear Technology." *Medium*, 13 Aug. 2021, medium.com/generation-atomic/what-greek-myth-teaches-us-about-how-we-use-nuclear-technology-38557c776a9#:~:text=When%20Prometheus%20stole%20fire%20from,for%20good%20or%20for%20evil.

Instead of just leaving Prometheus as a symbol for innovation, Dawson decides to fully realize the ending of the greek myth in "*Prometheus bound*," here he conveys opposition against innovation by putting Prometheus in a negative light, which shows a brutal depiction of him being eaten by eagles. At this point in his story, Prometheus has reached his punishment for disobeying Zeus, Dawson doesn't display Prometheus as a hero for giving humans fire, instead he makes the viewer feel deformed with Prometheus' death stare, like the viewer shouldn't want to understand how he got to this point of punishment.

Originally the viewer can't really understand the point Dawson was trying to get across, it's only after actually diving into the artist and researching do they realize his ability to connect all of his art together and create a recurring theme of feeling alone in this new setting. He's able to use this pattern to build on his other work, using this to not only set a tone but to spread his thoughts on modern day problems.

Verne's piece inspires the idea that knowledge is a powerful thing that may not always lead to positive outcomes meaning humans shouldn't always persist in trying to understand life's questions, or they might never be able to appreciate the wonders that the world already offers.



Atomic Bomb, 2007



Korrigan on the run in Brittany, 2007



Manhattan, 1998

Bibliography:

Watson, David de Caires. "What Greek Myth Teaches Us about the Morality of Nuclear Technology." *Medium*, 13 Aug. 2021,

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Prometheus bound, Korrigan on the Run in Brittany, atomic bomb. Hutchinson, John, and Verne Dawson. *Verne Dawson*. Lund Humphries, 2019.

<https://www.lundhumphries.com/products/verne-dawson>

Verne Dawson, exhibition pamphlet, Hill Art Foundation, New York, July, 21, 2023.