



MAPA

Marseille - Arles - Paris - Auvers-sur-Oise

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*And then went down to the ship,
Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and
We set up mast and sail on that swart ship,*

Ezra Pound
from *Canto 1*

I came across *Ba'al the Warrior* (Baal Guerrier) at Tate Modern once several years ago. And at once something struck me about it. Something Magical. The bold shapes, the gestures, the elemental colours, the bird-like glyphic rendering of the marginal god. Like a sigil to another realm.

Ba'al was a Levantine Fertility/Storm Deity, and main rival of Yahweh who in time, as the wall text explained, came to exemplify the worship of false gods within the Western Judeo-Christian tradition. An outsider figure and adversary to hegemony...in Ba'al I recognised the Crow of Social Marginalia that I use as some sort of a leitmotif in my own work.

Another once, I found myself in Jerusalem during Passover/Easter, while staying at my friend Elisheva's. Having been banned from her kitchen for multiple Kosher violations, I used to spend many dusks on her balcony, contemplating that conflicted land while she prepared dinner. Across the street was a tree, a Fir I think, birdlike. It reminded me of Ba'al who was once worshipped here. I imagine the depreciated god on the run from the followers of Yahweh, the mainstream, hiding in the trees, shapeshifting, only perceptible perhaps to those who he wanted to see.

Ba'al Guerrier was painted in 1953 by Jean-Michel Atlan, a French Artist of Algerian Jewish descent. The Tate wall text stated "As a Jew and a member of the Resistance, Atlan had been arrested in the Second World War. Feigning madness, he was committed to a psychiatric hospital from which he emerged when Paris was liberated." Upon reading this I was intrigued! How, considering that the disabled were the first targets of Nazism under the T4 program, could a Jewish Resistance fighter escape by acting insane? And yet, he had managed to turn the world upside down and, like Ba'al the Warrior, survived.

In 2004 I had a show at the Bethlem Gallery at Bethlem Mental Hospital entitled *Unbearable Truths* which was inspired by Antonin Artaud's 1947 text *Van Gogh, le suicidé de la société*, (Van Gogh: the man suicided by society). One section of the exhibition was called 'Rorschach Tests' and consisted of pareidolic photographs made by puddles of dog piss, the other, entitled 'Threatening Skies' displayed a grid of photographs of Crows.

A bit of research found that Artaud was interned in Sainte-Anne Psychiatric Hospital in Paris— the French equivalent of London's Bethlem— from 1937 to 1938. One of his doctors there was Jacques Lacan, who infamously claimed “[he] is obsessed, he will live for eighty years without writing a single sentence, he is obsessed.” Artaud died aged 52 and is now widely recognized as one of the major figures of twentieth-century theatre. An exponent of the European avant-garde, he used gesture to liberate the subconscious from social conformity, with a predilection for surreal and transgressive themes. In *Van Gogh, le suicidé de la société* Artaud accuses society of driving Van Gogh to suicide to “prevent [him from] spouting unbearable truths”. Coincidentally, after Atlan's arrest in 1942, he too was sent to Sainte-Anne for two years, missing Artaud by just four.

A plan began to take shape in my mind and slowly these disparate tributaries of thought began to confluence into some sort of body: Ba'al, Atlan-Artaud-Van Gogh, Outsider, Madness, Gesture. A journey! I began then to map out an itinerary in order to follow these ideas and so in September 2017 me and my partner and navigator Samanta disembarked in France for a ten day Odyssey.

We started in Marseille where Artaud was born (and Rimbaud departed from poetry) and then travelled to Arles where Van Gogh attempted his Artists community only to end up in nearby Saint-Paul Asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. From Paris, where the protagonists all converge, we finally reached Auvers-sur-Oise, where Van Gogh suicided and was buried.

*Then, delivered from my straining boatmen,
From the trivial racket of trivial crews and from
The freights of Flemish grain and English cotton,
I made my own course down the passive rivers.*

from *Le Bateau ivre* (*The Drunken Boat*)

by Arthur Rimbaud

Translated by Samuel Beckett

Prologue





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Marseille

























