

The union of Abstract and Surrealist forms would not be complete without Toyen. The dissolution of prescribed boundaries that come about in the life of an unshackled mind is the *prima materia* upon which the artist broke ground.

Born Marie Čermínová, September 21, 1902. The place, Prague. The person, beyond pronoun and marked path. Poet-as-painter emerges from the periphery of her androgyny to face down latent realities of the 20th century as a celebrated member of the Czech avant-garde and internationally recognized Surrealist before falling into oblivion to die virtually unknown.

The name Toyen, born of revolt in 1923. A possible truncation of the French masculine *citoyen*, meaning citizen, inherently uprising, tethered as it was to the French Revolution. In her *ArtForum* profile on the artist, Lucy Ives surfaces Whitney Chadwick who posits Toyen as a pun on *to já jen*, Czech for “to think oneself.”

To think oneself Toyen did. Purveyor of exquisite netherworlds and nightwoods. Cartographer of the black sun. Voyager beyond the horizon of elsewhere to active revolution. Her paintings, drawings and collage-work were often charged to no end with eroticism. It was a lifelong fascination, every means of showing up for nested potentialities of the erotic dimension and more importantly, what those currents go on to reveal.

Inside the paradox of Toyen's intensely private nature is the admission to friends she took her own virginity. This freedom, to birth yourself, to fuck yourself, transcendent as you liberate systems of grammar and dead weight, bucking feminine endings, freed from the imperial imagination to radically re-imagine human and artistic equality, by means of emergent new forms, and night. Endless depictions of irreducible, inner night, its wonderment, in recurring motifs, of ocean, beast, specter, fish, egg, eye, cunt, veil, phantom of a woman's body, tidal, like the horrors of history, like the dangers of hiding a Jewish friend in her apartment during long years of German occupation, and after, when there is distance from all-encompassing devastation—Toyen's insurrection—her revolution sees into the enigma of the image which is the enigma of being, a new world, a new body of forms, indefinable and most audacious of all, sees into the enigma of love itself.

“That which inevitably changes mankind and the world,” writes Annie Le Brun in *Toyen: The Dreaming Rebel*, “also suddenly makes visible, through the strange conditions of happenstance, how pathways determine shapes. But also, how the shapes that matter to us are perhaps born of the confluence of currents that carry us.” The enigma of the image carried Toyen, in Breton's word's, to the impregnable core of night, where the enigma, compounded, donned its infinite, other face, which she shaped, on canvas after canvas, into being reclaimed.

Toyen's desire to know desire, lured as she was to the most hidden recesses of the imagination with unwavering devotion,

impassioned even in depictions of vanquished meaning, carried with it an implicit burden—what Le Brun calls savage lucidity.

I wonder how Toyen carried this lucidity in the final arc of her solitary life, after Breton died and the Surrealists disbanded. She was given Breton's Paris apartment by his family where she would live out the rest of her days. Making and morphing, fed by her loyalty in friendship, fed by the images, I yearn to imagine her free.