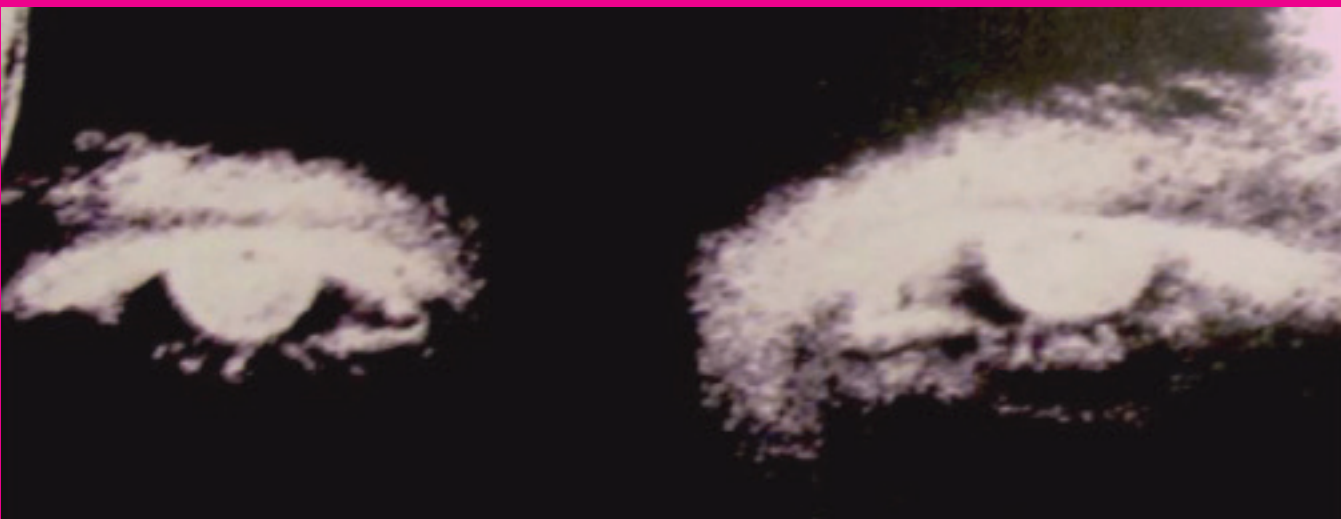


PINK



MOON

Arborea

Gideon Bok

Duncan Hannah

Kurt Knobelsdorf

Sangram Majumdar

Keith Morris

Stephanie Pierce

Stuart Shils

D.M. Stith

Michael Trevithick

Paul Villinski

Chris Wilcha

an exhibition inspired by nick drake's pink moon album

Pink Moon

Pink Moon is an album that one may return to again and again. All of Nick Drake's music is beautiful but there is something about the abstract formal perfection of Pink Moon that places it apart. It is like an abstract sound sculpture, a separate and distinct object in space. You can't really remember or even hear all the words, there are no typical or obvious hooks and yet the whole thing permeates one's being like perfume or moisture.

This show began with the discovery that many of the painters I know listen to and love Drake's music. In the process of making the exhibition I have found more artists around the globe who love Drake's music. With a larger space there easily could have been many more in this exhibition.

I am late to Drake's music and over the last year I've spent a lot of time with Pink Moon. It is a record to mirror life's changes. During this time, I came across Bryter Music, the web site of the Nick Drake estate. I was intrigued by their Place to Be project, suggesting the possibility of exhibitions of contemporary art related to Drake's music. We are extremely grateful to Cally and the Estate of Nick Drake for their cooperation with this project. Their loan of Michael Trevithick's original painting for the Pink Moon album cover allows us to see the original painting for an icon of seventies album art.

The exhibition includes paintings by Gideon Bok, Duncan Hannah, Kurt Knobelsdorf, Sangram Majumdar, Stephanie Pierce and Stuart Shils, photography by Keith Morris, sculpture by Paul Villinski, music by D.M. Stith and Arborea and film by Chris Wilcha. Gideon Bok's perceptually based painting *From the Morning diptych* depicts his studio in Maine with motorcycles, musical instruments, power tools and record player(s.) Multiple copies of the Pink Moon lp (which are probably only one copy recorded as it moves around the floor over time) are strewn across the studio floor. In *The Summer of Love*, Duncan Hannah portrays a dream of an upper class English idyll with a white shirted couple holding hands strolling near a lake by a castle. In Stephanie Pierce's *Take care of the past* a barely visible moon shines through a high window onto a bed in a grey room like a fairy tale cell. Kurt Knobelsdorf's small densely worked paintings allude to moments in Drake's family history. Stuart Shils deep green/blue forest glade *Way to Blue* takes its title from the song on Drake's first album, *Five Leaves Left*. An electric light source reflected in an industrial window becomes a full moon in Sangram Majumdar's *Moonlight*. Black butterflies emerge out of a burnt black hole in Paul Villinski's elegiac sculpture of an electric guitar *Rise*. The exhibition's soundtrack includes an original piece of music, *And We Are Everywhere*, composed by Asthmatic Kitty recording artist D.M. Stith as a tribute to Drake, built on a lyrical phrase from Drake's *From The Morning*. Maine based "psyche folk" duo Arborea, will perform a house concert in the gallery. Emmy award winning documentary filmmaker Chris Wilcha focuses his personal documentary sensibility on a reconsideration of the Pink Moon VW commercial.

If, as has been suggested, all art aspires to the condition of music, with Pink Moon the exhibition, we observe the intrinsic sympathy of music and art, and while doing so, acknowledge the resonance of Drake's brilliant record in contemporary terms. This is the first time I have been able to make an exhibition about a record album. I hope to do more.

- Steven Harvey

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essay by Richard Peabody

April 2- 30, 2011

SHFAP steven harvey fine art projects

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Pink Moon

by Richard Peabody

Nick Drake is, as Winston Churchill said of Russia, “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” No live interviews or concert footage exists. So little is known about him that despite a few biographies and documentaries he remains the shy impossibly tall hunched shoulder guest in the far corner of the room at the party who really only becomes conspicuous by his absence. Drake is often described as awkward, ill at ease, almost impossible to talk to, and was so sensitive and thin-skinned at the dozen gigs he ever played that he barely said a word beyond the actual lyrics. No stage presence, no between song chatter, nada. He would sing three or four songs and retreat to modest applause.

After the commercial failure of Drake’s first two masterful albums he spiraled into depression. Then on two nights in October 1971 during two separate two-hour recording sessions he created the antithesis of his first two lush albums’ exquisite horns, celeste, and orchestration, and delivered a stark discordant unplugged masterpiece. But like its predecessors, Pink Moon would fail to connect with an audience.

More about that in a minute.

* * *

So what is it about Pink Moon that captures the imagination?

The cover painting is surreal and a departure from photographs that adorned the previous records. Drake did not want his face on this album cover. Instead there is a cheesy pink moon with a rat’s tail. Or is it a rope? A fuse? Add a dress shoe. Flower. Shell. Spaceship card. Leaf. Tea cup. A clown mask of sorts. A backdrop of mountains and horizon.

Compared to the previous albums this one sounds like a demo tape. You keep waiting for the other instruments to kick in and they never do. Nick felt like he was getting lost in Joe Boyd’s production. He wanted his third album to be a departure from what had come before.

It takes awhile to fathom Drake’s experimental tunings, his intimate whispery non-vocal style, the fatalist atmosphere he meticulously created. Remember these are the days of James Taylor and Cat Stevens and Joni Mitchell, not to mention prog rock. Accessible artists.

I think Drake thought that solo his honesty, his open heart, his message, would finally find a home. His incredible guitar skill is almost unsurpassed. The nonstandard tunings are still on display. His incredibly busy right hand, his understanding of timbre. And the tunes are catchy. Repetition lending a trance-like feel. While the production is simple the lyrics remain moody and cryptic. Each one tightroping between darkness and light. Drake’s universal reference points remain—Sun, Moon, Rain, Stars.

Though I have heard the theory that Francoise Hardy, the Yeh-Yeh Girl from Paris, had responded to an acetate of Drake’s songs covered by Elton John and Linda Thompson, and wished to meet Drake and record some. Joe Boyd took Drake to visit her in Paris. Her 1971 album If You Listen was apparently recorded at said sessions. No Drake tunes on there but Neil Young and Randy Newman are covered.

Maybe losing his producer and his crush was too much? So many of the songs on this album do seem to be about being chosen, being lonely, being passed over, falling.

Side 1

“Pink Moon” is delicate and lovely with it’s overdubbed piano. (The only dub on the entire album.) Symbolic of death and prophetic of what was to come. “Pink moon going to get you all.” Payback time. Catchy as hell with sinister overtones.

“Place to Be” A broken, lonely, needy outpouring from the heart.

“Road” Standing at the crossroads making choices.

“Place to Be” A broken, lonely, needy outpouring from the heart.

“Road” Standing at the crossroads making choices.

“Which Will” More prayer than song. And more choices. (Covered exquisitely not so long ago by Lucinda Williams.)

“Horn” A sketch. The briefest of instrumentals. But a mood piece as well. A bridge like the instrumentals on Bryter Layter. And works for me the same way that Flash Fiction does.

“Things Behind the Sun” An older song. Social politics? The politics of friends? Joe Boyd wanted this one on Bryter Layter and Drake refused.

Side 2

“Know” Is this a love song or an anti-love song? Four notes repeated over and over. “Know I’m not them.”

“Parasite” A voyeuristic drone that Syd Barrett might have written.

“Free Ride” A Bert Jansch feel to this one.

“Harvest Breed” Flowers get picked. Why won’t you pick mine? Trail of broken hearts.

“From the Morning,” The last song seems to promise hope, a new dawn.

Eleven songs that clock in at barely 28 minutes.

Drake and his guitar just like he wanted. The bare minimum and yet a disk whose bleak delicacy is so overwhelming it would be a test to sit through more.

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* *

Contrary to popular myth—Nick Drake’s albums and performances were given many positive reviews. Radio legend John Peel was an early promoter of his work. So why didn’t these albums sell? Was Drake too gentle, too unassuming? It’s difficult to imagine him opening for bands like Atomic Rooster or Genesis, even an early incarnation of Queen, yet he did. A rowdy crowd craves in your face high drama and Drake’s music is both too intricate and introspective to find much appeal in a concert hall.

The biographers think a lot of the problem was the clash between his Cambridge lifestyle of the mind and the hardscrabble existence of the working class.

I flash on that immortal scene in Animal House when John Belushi smashes the folkie’s guitar to bits.

And yet Drake’s melancholia seems to mesh nicely with Morrissey or Belle and Sebastian. Even Aimee Mann.

Back in the day you could count the people who had heard of Nick Drake or owned his records on an abacus.

All three combined sold just 20,000 copies during his lifetime.

keith morris

Fortunately, WHFS, the first progressive FM station in the DC area had a DJ on staff in the 70's that used Drake's "Bryter Layter" as his theme song.

People obsessed with the myth of the doomed romantic were drawn to Nick Drake the same way they're drawn to say Eva Cassidy or Skip Spence or Sandy Denny or Syd Barrett. (Or in an earlier day to Byron, Shelley, and Keats.) The Cult of Nick has grown and grown.

Island Records didn't know what to do to promote the incredibly gifted Drake who was incapable of touring to support sales.

When the Fruit Tree box set appeared in 1979 it included all three albums plus four bonus tracks from recording sessions in 1974 for a possible 4th album, one being "Black Eyed Dog" which riffs on the black dog of depression. (Churchill, again.) A depression Drake knew too well. Fruit Tree was greeted with indifference and Island deleted it in 1983.

REM's Peter Buck (who began championing Drake's music in the 80's) compares Drake to Robert Johnson, the King of the Delta Blues. Both died young at 26 with only a handful of songs. A shared sense of loss and despair. Which makes total sense though their lives couldn't have been more different. Drake is even rumored to have told a friend that like Johnson, he too, had "a hellhound on his trail."

Nick Drake was born too soon. If only he'd been alive today in the digital indie era. Imagine what he could have accomplished with YouTube and iTunes. Both time and technology are perfect for somebody loathe to perform in front of a live audience. Imagine how well he could function in the era of new meds so different than the ones he'd been prescribed.

Near the end of his life Drake verbalized his despair and directed it at Joe Boyd. The typical artist's "If I'm so great how come I'm not rich and famous" rant. Because Drake had no backup plan for his perceived failure. He'd been born into entitlement and even the safety net of his sister Gabrielle and his parents' upper middle class house in Tanworth-in-Arden wasn't enough to save him. He would die of an overdose of the antidepressant amitriptyline on November 25th 1974.

Yet the Cult of Nick grew. People wrote songs about him. John Martyn wrote "Solid Air" as a heads-up because he was worried about Drake's depression. Robert Smith named The Cure after one of Drake's tunes. So did The Lilac Time. In 1985, The Dream Academy's "Life in a Northern Town" was dedicated to Drake. Robyn Hitchcock's "I Saw Nick Drake" is a more recent tribute.

Finally posthumous fame arrived. It seems bittersweet and random to me that Nick Drake's fame came about via a 1999 VW Cabriolet commercial. The video inhaled Nick's mystical guitar and half-whispered lyrics. A perfect marriage of sound and image. You can still find the ad trapped in amber on YouTube. Thanks to that exposure annual sales leapt from 6,000 to 74,000 in the year the ad hit the airwaves.

The Acid Folk and Wyrd Folk crowds championed folk visionaries like Drake along with Tom Rapp, Vashti Bunyan, and Linda Perhacs, who are all still alive.

By the year 2000, Nick Drake had at last become a viable rock legend. His albums now rank among the best ever recorded. Pink Moon is considered a masterpiece by Entertainment Weekly, Q magazine, Mojo, and many others. And Pink Moon has become by far the top selling Drake album. He even hit the music charts for the first time in 2004.

Music was his method of communicating, his way of making love to the greater world. While a lot of the music of the 70's has become dated or passé due to saturation on commercial radio, Nick Drake's overlooked genius has been caught up in a whirlwind of affection if not adoration.

And it's about time.

* * *

On the back of his tombstone there's a line taken from the last song on the Pink Moon album "From the Morning"—"Now we rise/And we are everywhere."

A fitting epitaph.



Keith Morris Nick Drake, August 1970 London, silver print, 16 x 20 inches, courtesy the estate of Keith Morris

arborea

- Arborea are shanti and buck curran



Coda, 2006, MP3 file, 1:08

Ides of March, 2008, MP3 file, 3:38

Leaves Among the Ruins, 2008, MP3 file, 5:41

Wayfaring Summer, 2008, MP3 file, 2:12

Photo by Shanti Curran

gideon bok



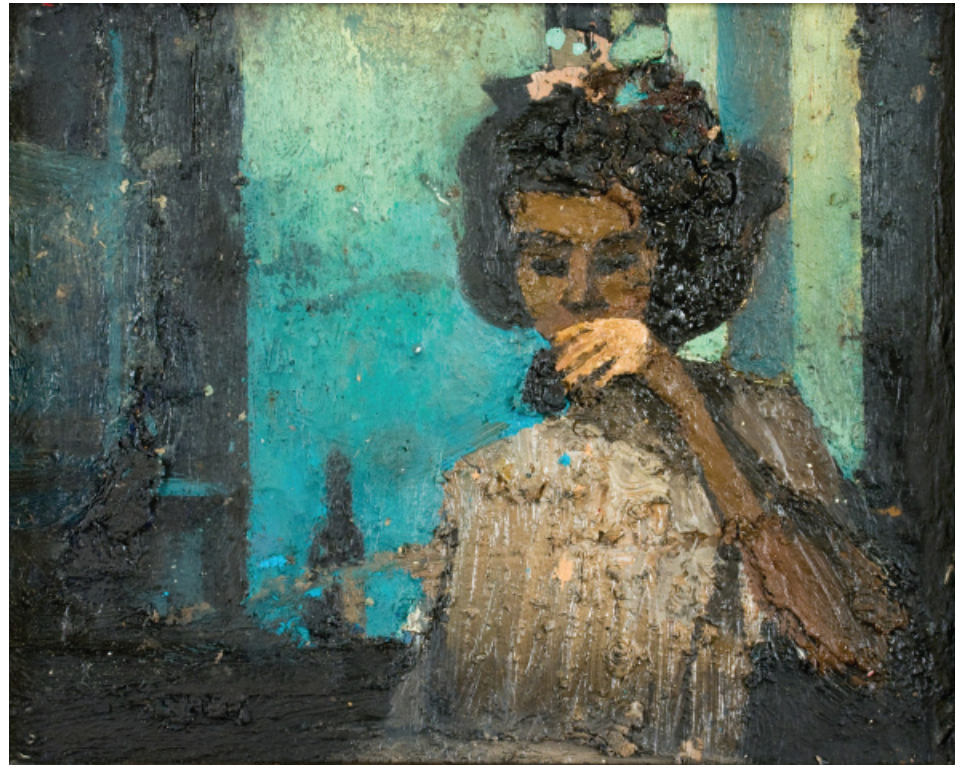
Gideon Bok
From the Morning diptych 2008/11
oil on canvas, 48 x72 in

duncan hannah



duncan hannah, *The Summer of Love*, 2007, oil on canvas, 22 x 28 inches

kurt knobelsdorf



kurt knobelsdorf, *the artists mother*, 2011, oil on paper, 8 x 10 inches



kurt knobelsdorf, *church*, 2011, oil on paper, 8 x 10 inches

sangram majumdar



sangram majumdar *moon-light*, 2010, oil on panel, 11.5 x 11.5 inches

stephanie pierce



above: **stephanie pierce**, *take care of the past*, 2009, Oil on Panel, 12 x 10 inches



right: **stephanie Pierce**, *untitled*, 2009 Transparent paper, collage, 30 3/4 x 21 1/2 inches

stuart shils



stuart shils, *way to blue*, 2011, oil on canvas (2 panels) , 12 x 29 inches

d.m. stith

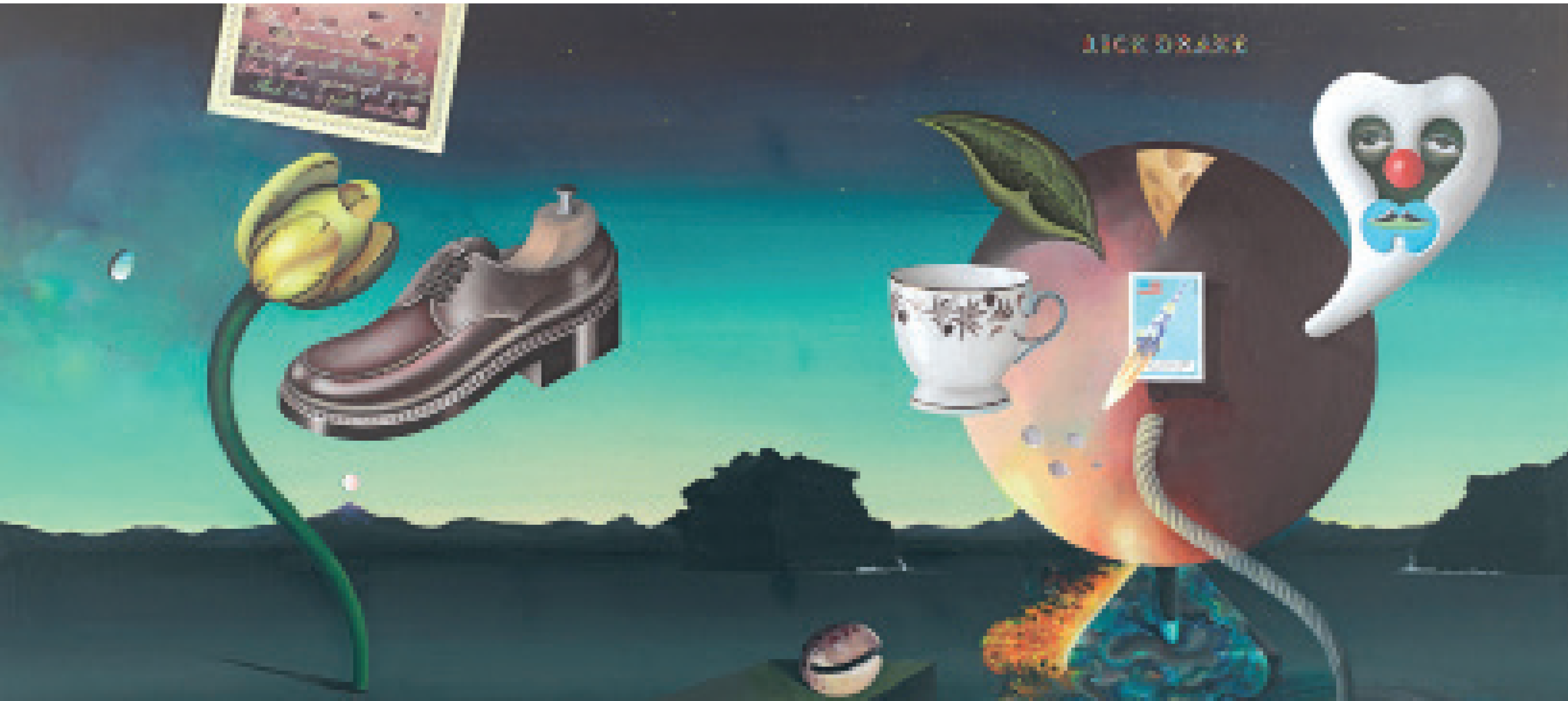
“And We Are Everywhere” uses the elements which make up Nick Drake’s “From The Morning” (the last song on his last album) -- each tone, and a couple of key lines, acoustic guitar and voice -- and reconstructs these elements into a 9 minute meditative cycle. The featured lyrics are also those used as an epitaph on Drake’s grave marker:

And Now We Rise
And We Are Everywhere

dm stith, *and we are everywhere (nick drake tribute)*, 2011, MP3 file, 9:12 min



michael trevithick



michael trevithick, *pink moon*, 1971, gouache on board, 27 x 41 in

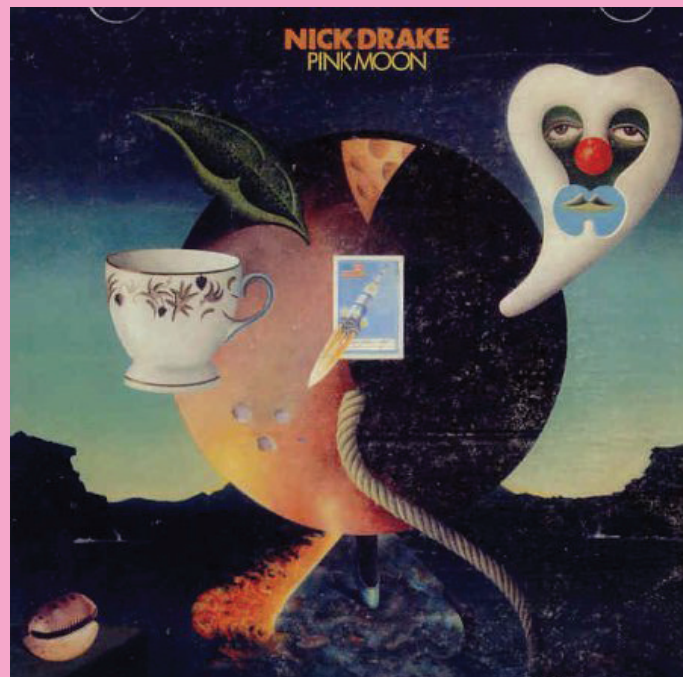
paul villinski



paul villinski, *rise*, 2011, electric guitar, aluminum (found cans), wire and soot, 44 x 15 1/2 x 9 inches

chris wilcha





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