



Wassily Kandinsky,  
*Upward* (1929)

## INHALE EXILE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CATALOGUE

There are flex points in history. Moments at which humankind pivots, a squall of change that historians clamour to identify as a new age, the end of one chapter and the beginning of Something New.

Consider, please, this scene: a slip of a girl, barely eighteen, weighed down by corsets and bustles and all manner of tight, high-buttoned shoes. She moves down a busy Victorian London street at noon in the shade of a delicate parasol, which she rests on her left shoulder. The heavy cloy of manure rides neck and neck for her attention amongst the shouting of labourers heaving crates of rum fresh from the Colonial Caribbean, the excited babble of pedestrians comparing received newspaper wisdom on all the latest in West End play-acting, the heavy peals of St Paul's reminding all of death and the promised reward.

This girl, while remarkable for her pulchritudinous countenance, her graceful manner and generous proportions, would pass for simply another shadow in time, a slightly blurred collection of features on a cheap tintype preserved by future relatives simply for its age; another forgotten human who once did breathe those same oxygen molecules you yourself now enjoy; yes, another anonymous, shuffling member of Ensor's masked parade but for one thing:

In her right hand smoulders a cigarette.

Let's call her Mary, and our Mary is very important to us because she is the flex point.

Mary is well-versed in the traditions of prim Victoriana, but throws herself under the thunderous hooves of the King's Horses in order to force suffrage. Mary is destined for a career as a mother, but placidly watches as her husband is extinguished at the Somme and carries on as if nothing much had occurred. Mary enjoys touring the Royal International Horticultural Exhibition each year, but welcomes the absurd and angry energy coming from a German artistic milieu that screams its disturbed cries in the dark. In short, Mary embodies all that has come before and all that will come after, and the correct key to unlock an understanding of her, of us, is held within that white paper tube slowly accumulating ash between delicate fingers that tremble on the cusp of womanhood.

The history of smoking itself is almost inconsequential—the particulars are well-known and there are a dozen tomes one could use to familiarise oneself with that tale in a jolly afternoon. It is in the depictions of smoking in which we find the embodiment of Change, the jostle and jounce of human actions collected together through a pall of smoke and reproduced again and again for our edification and entertainment, and this is what we must concern ourselves with, and that which this project so expertly displays: as smoking falls out of favour on a global scale we must remember what has come before and, holding this singular subject up to the light of reasoned inquiry, give it Life so that others who come after us will understand our real, eternal quest: for Death.

A putrid stench. A man recoiled in comic, drunken horror, his fingers pinched violently to his nose as he falls backwards, away from the putative odour that offends him so. A seated



Jan Miense Molenaer, *Smell* – Part of the series "The Five Senses" (1637)

lickspittle, too besotted to move, is in fact incapable of anything but laughter. In focus, a smiling, defiant mother (our Mary) locks eyes with the viewer as she delicately raises her squirming tot's skirts with one hand and, with the serene surety of practice borne of a thousand similar movements before, wipes the faecal-stained bottom of said tot with the other. Yet the comment by Northman painter Jan Miense Molenaer (1609/1610-1668) cannot be truly mistaken: also in "focus" (as delimited by the high contrast and colouration) is the disgusted man's pipe and smoking paraphernalia - which is the real target of this pedantic daubing. We start then with a negative reaction to smoking, an unveiling of its hypocrisy (and an approach to paradox): that literal human faeces would repulse you so, while at the same time you flush your lungs full of deadly smoke, your tongue slowly turning brown and your clothes filling with acrid, nostril-assailing fumes. Smoking is now revealed at once to be a physical and moral act, in its very defiance of same, and when we add to this mixture the paradoxically pleasurable/painful/vital-for-the-continuance-of-the-species act of Sex, we can see how quickly this becomes a quagmire of opposing Wahrheitwünsches.

The priapic, overtly-sexualised nature of a smoking device is, of course, part of its transgressive appeal—but when placed in the mouth of a provocative prostitute (our Mary) or a president's mistress (our Mary) who lolls by the side of a pool, her jungle red nails trailing aimlessly in the chlorine-filled water, the cigarette becomes more than the phallus: the carefully placed Dunhill Slim so delicately balanced between lips ballooned by collagen able only to pout with Brechtian exaggeration reverses again and becomes a skeletal finger pointing

straight down her absurdly Mannerist neck and into her Dieter Rams-designed curvilinear body now on the trembling edge of exploding with gabbling cancerclusters, ravenous, murderous. The human act of smoking is primal—it mimics the human dependence on air but heightens it, concentrates the smoker on this natural act and raises it to orgasmic levels that in turn spark chemical changes that will, over time, kill the very animal that put the entire reaction into motion—and this primal, essential function is the fuel for the engine of humanity's existence: the propagation of DNA, as our host bodies continue to reproduce and move towards some unknowable goal that was set in motion when, once upon a time before history began, a gloop of amino acids were struck by lightning, starting up this whole mess in the first place. That lightning: the spark of flame that blooms forth from a well-struck sulphur-tipped match. That lightning: the brilliant flash of creative inspiration which, in this post-Lamarckian world, we disallow any divine origin but yet has no traceable source. That lightning: the tendrils of emotion that grip us with tender iron shackles as we consummate our love. That lightning: the result of that love as unstoppable sperm finds imperious egg which, in their fusion, produces Life. That artists throughout the ages have attempted to reproduce (and as men have dominated the power structures scaffolding the creation of art and its discourse for its complete existence, that verb has been chosen very deliberately) this explosively metaphorical source contained in the "simple" act of smoking is powerfully demonstrated here, and that men are primarily depicted as smokers—and that it was provocative in the 19th and early 20th centuries to show women smoking, as code for their fallen virtue—is yet another example of the paradox in which we find our

complicity revealed: as (male) artists wish to steal and tame the reproductive (and infinitely creative) powers of (female) reproduction, so do (male) men attempt to subvert those selfsame reproductive powers by glorifying a phallic tool that, in its cruelly reductive form of simulated penisweapon, brings pleasure as it brings death.

One feels a dunce for repeating these trite observations, and a thousand apologies are rendered unto you for this painfully reductive description: it is as if a century of sexually-charged smoking dreams had not swelled the pocketbooks and egos of psychologists and their parasitical ilk, as if these dumb archetypes had not been reduced to hoary intellectual rubble through overuse and overfamiliarity long ago and we are not simply prancing naked among their smoking ruins, naive nymphs play-acting in the flensed fleshsuits of the outsized intellectual behemoths that preceded us. Yet these savaged and timeworn concepts are here brought together and raised to a greater plane in their intermingling, a singular ability that, perhaps embodied by the Cronenbergian bodyhorror invoked by the occult powers of artistic collaboration taken too far—the clue is in the name: Knowles Eddy Knowles, where does one begin and the other end?—when used for direct and piercing analysis reveals something previously hidden and unseen, uncanny and new.

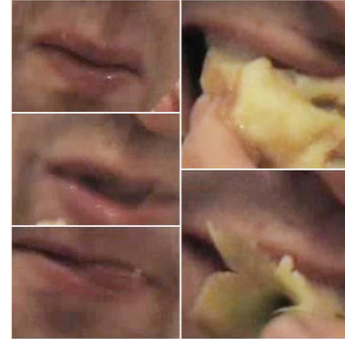
In these details from two scenes in the single channel video *SDR+ VITSOE Room* (2007), a deliberately crude rendition of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Why Does Herr R. Run Amok* (1970), we see with unprecedented clarity the celebrated Knowles Eddy Knowles (our Marys) approach the act of smoking—an erotic

ritual in closeup, sharply contrasted to the angry apple-eater: the “cool” (read “death-defiant”) act of inhaling smoke is opposed to the “healthy” (read “death-submissive”) act of inhaling fruit, the former driving the latter to an incoherent murderous rage—and we begin to understand that, while they have long explored this almost ur-Freudian duality like so many others before them, their analysis exists at another, higher level: that of living with the paradox of the flex point.

As globalisation becomes seemingly inevitable and the entrenchment of internet-as-public-utility-cum-total-surveillance-tool establishes an invisible but powerful boundary between those who play upon and those who cower from the international stage, smoking as a meta-narrative for the death/sex/creative drive increasingly becomes a target for those who wish to further quash the human agency of their “subjects”; though it would be foolish to bemoan the efforts of well-intentioned health organisations, they are at once trying to save lives while simultaneously acting as stooges for the expansion of neocapitalist control.

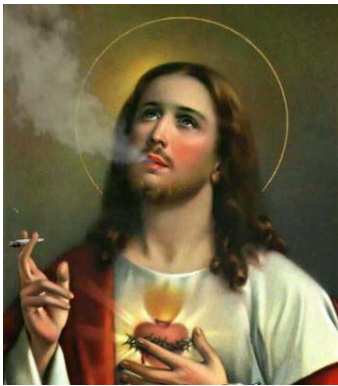
Living with paradox is the territory of all decent artists, and this exemplary collection you have in your hands (or device of choice, if you happen to prefer digital means) is the ultimate guide to live within—and without—this paradox.

Knowles Eddy Knowles have, through the efforts of the last decade, studied the intricacies of these intertwining stories and assembled them, not for a particular position or polemic, but rather to examine the concept of the peaceable manifestation of the flex point. That's our Mary, remember? The living embodiment of several



Knowles Eddy Knowles, *SDR + VITSOE Room* (2007) (above and upper right)

paradoxes co-existing, as we co-exist within various degrees of successes and failures, riding the cheap plastic boogieboard of impossibly complex systems we no longer understand (if we ever did!) that bear us inevitably downward along the water slide of History.



Artist Unknown, Smoking Jesus  
Internet Meme (c. early 21st century)

It is by examining these representations of smoking to be found in all the “Rembrandts, El Grecos, Toulouse-Lautrecos” that this project seeks to remind us that these flex points—our multiple Marys, as they, if this has not been made sufficient clear, exist all around us, at all times and in various guises—are ways in which humankind reflects back upon itself the power, dreams, desires and frailty embodied by the absurdity of living as we do, and that 90-degree revolutionary change is often subcutaneous, a boiling river under the scrim of civility. Immerse yourself in this cloud of artistic smoke as it billows from the distended lips of History, and see if you might have more in common with Mary than you had previously imagined. Remember too that it was Mary who grieved, but Jesus who wept. As he likely smoked a tab behind the shed when she wasn’t looking. ■

Doctor Roger Quallen is a tenured professor at Augsburg College in Minnesota, USA. He teaches film, philosophy, and social studies, and is a keen aficionado of the arts. His forthcoming book on the cinema of director Johan Riding is to be published by Morel Books in 2016. Doctor Quallen is an ex-smoker.

## IMAGE RESOURCES

### SMOKING AS METAPHOR

Jan Lievens's *Fire and Childhood* (c1623-25)—the embers being used to light the stout faggot, Jusepe de Ribera's *Clubfooted Boy* (1642)—the stick, Diego Velázquez's *The Surrender of Breda* (1634-35) - the smoke, Georges de La Tour's *The Penitent Magdalene* (c.1640)—the flame, the woman, the momento mori, Antoine Watteau's *Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera* (1717)—the cupids ascending playfully on a column of smoke, Joseph-Marie Vien's *The Cupid Seller* (1763)—the brazier/censer slowly smoking while cupids (children) are offered to a disinterested woman (mother), Joseph Wright's *Vesuvius from Posillipo* (c.1776-80)—the obvious strike of the volcano/match and the clouds/ smoke, anything by JMW Turner, Adolph Menzel's *The Iron Rolling Mill*, or *Modern Cyclops I* (1872-75)—the flames and labours of industrialised production, Lucien Levy-Dhurmer's *Silence* (1895)—the woman's fingers to her face both referencing smoking and sexuality in their gesture, Phillip King's *Slant* (1966)—the figures as stubbed-out fags.

### SMOKING AS SMOKING

Adriaen Brouwer's *Tavern Scene* (c.1635), Pietro Longhi's *Exhibition of a Rhinoceros at Venice* (1751), Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's *In a Cafe*, or *Absinthe* (1875-76), in the background of Edouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882), Georges Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884-86), Pierre Bonnard's *Intimacy*

(1891), Georges Braque's *Bottle, Newspaper, Pipe and Glass* (1913), Fernandes Léger's *The Mechanic* (1920), Wassily Kandinsky's *Upward* (1929), anything by Philip Guston, Marcel Broodthaer's *Pipe Alphabet* (1968-71), Paula Rego's *The Artist in her Studio* (1993).

## END NOTES

Knowles Eddy Knowles Inhale Exile Catalogue Introduction 29/02/2016 Doctor Roger Quallen.

Exhibition details:

Knowles Eddy Knowles

Inhale Exile pt 1 (The Break)

May 21 – July 21, 2016

L'Escalier

2272 Panet, Montréal, Québec

“The Break” includes works and documents by: Sean Lynch, Leisure (Susannah Wesley, Meredith Carruthers), Michael Fernandes, Gareth James, Roger Quallen, Alessandro Rolandi, Lawrence Weiner\*, Philip Guston\*, Richard Prince\*, Lee Lozano\*, Claire Fontaine\*, Hans Haacke\*, David Hammons\*. Screenings include videos by Nina Koennemann, Lee Kit, Erik Blinderman, Steve Carr, Tamara Henderson, Knowles Eddy Knowles, Daniel Olson, Michael Fernandes, James Benning, Gerard Courant, Chantal Akerman, and others.

Leaning against the brick archway, a light greeting followed literally by a lighter. The face emerging from its bow in the inaugural white paper smoke, which has such a neutral connotation (or maybe neutralizing, like burning records and documents), opens itself to the distraction of the road and its minutiae, heightened anodinely by the erotic tension of standing quietly next to someone else.

"What did you think of that?", a footstep on the broken ice, and parried back comes the mild wince and see-sawing hand of a figure prone to pleasantries in gesticulation. Legible, the real thing. He or she then draws a little closer. "Sucks to be struck out here. I'll bet you remember the days of the communal pack, on the table, within arm's reach. Actually, that's interesting, that word, pack..."

Another gently telling gesture. First smoke of the day? Needs massaging? Why smoke electronic cigarettes? E-cigarette benefits

- Cost less than 1/3 the cost of regular cigarettes
- You can smoke in non-smoking places
  - Starbucks, casinos, bars, offices, planes, trains & automobiles!
- Electronic cigarettes (E-cigs) are a **PROFITABLE AND ALTERNATIVE TO** traditional cigarettes.
- E-cigs simulate the smoking of traditional cigarettes in every way. It looks, feels and tastes like a cigarette.
- E-cigarettes are not banned under any no-smoking laws of Canada
- Electronic cigarettes produce no second hand smoke
- No more smell of tobacco smoke in your clothes and hair with e-cigarettes
- Electronic cigarettes contain no tar, chemical additives or carcinogens seen in regular tobacco products
- No nicotine stained teeth and hands
- Forget about cigarette burns, lighters and dirty ashtrays
- Are you tired of:
  - Going outside every time you want to have a cigarette
  - Getting the nasty looks and comments
  - Your clothes always smelling of smoke
  - People telling you to "just quit"
  - Running to the corner store every time you run out
  - Paying the ridiculous price of buying cigarettes
  - Stains on your fingers and teeth

241

"But actually, here we are outside, and then we may have never even met inside. Even though there are ways around that. Like how they do it in airports, right? Like little glass pavilions? I once saw one of those built for just one person. Brings to mind another case, during the last days of indoor smoking, where a coffee shop pioneered a large glass wall to enclose the smokers. Nevertheless bagels and donuts still tasted like musty tobacco. Come to think of it, I think it was an artist who thought that one up. And now, only a generation later, placed in the middle of a busy art fair, the smoking pavilion seems neutralized tenfold. Only an artist, right?"

Hardly a budge.

242



We heard an anecdote... (My other ashtray is a Donald Judd) sculpture and performance by Knowles Eddy Knowles for the exhibition "Portrait of Self-Exile" at Vitamina Creative Space's The Shop, 2009.  
© Knowles Eddy Knowles [Photographer: He Cong]

"It's kind of funny..." partnered with a very natural pause. "I have a friend, an artist friend, who keeps pointing out all these art works that have cigarettes in them. She seems to be obsessed with it. Oh, listen to me, just blabbing away, and forgot to introduce myself. My name is Knowles Eddy Knowles. What do you do?"

With a surprising voice, a brassy hoarfrost soulful gong. "I am a curator." Finally, a foothold.

"Like an art curator? Ha, that's really something. Gee, my friend would be tickled pink if I told her I ran her idea by you. Would you mind?"

A look toward the door, and finding the route blocked by the interior, fingers another cigarette. You have approximately five minutes.

"Well, if I remember correctly, her idea goes like this: The exhibition is organized around the shape of a body. We begin with the fingers. They reach out and touch the outside world, they point at you; they indicate you, but they themselves are marked—they aren't divine phalanges. Nevertheless you comply, and—like a secret handshake knotting with your feet—you walk into the exhibition under the tenting arch between index and middle fingers.

"After a solid left turn in the gallery, you transition to the hair and lips section. The arrangement in the gallery is modeled on dialoguing whispers, so as to resemble the chitchat between co-workers during a lunch break. This is where ideas are initiated, the impromptu brainstorm where they are smuggled into the intellect, wising you up through peer pressure.

"Proceeding these initiations are works themed on the mouth, tongue, and teeth—frontality, directness, rationality, articulateness, presentability, design and activist propaganda... do you read me?" Knowles Eddy Knowles draws closer, straining for saliva, abandoning hopes of fresh breath.

"Once you're getting really inside, that's when you actually meet the outside: the skin, this cover, this weathered thing, this dead crawling organ that is the source of most beauty but is really disgusting if you think about it. This part is like the mirror, where your self-image is melted in with the liquids of ideal perfection that you either alloy with or are rejected from. Adbusters, Richard Prince, Bernadette Corporation, 'Fresh Accents' the art video. It's an exhilarating moment, and kind of goes against our expectations, doesn't it?"



Interactive display at the China Science and Technology Museum, 2012  
© Knowles Eddy Knowles [Photographer: Michael Eddy]

"Then in the next section you arrive to a concentration akin to a node in the network of veins and blood circulation, and you notice aspects that have been with you the whole way, just undercover, gradually being manipulated through previous galleries; your blood pressure, pulse rate, and the temperature of your hands and feet will all return to normal by this point." Noticing some vague uneasiness in the curator, "figuratively speaking, of course.

"The lungs are really ground zero. Lung like a Parisian salon, the organizing principles are nonetheless openness, throbbiness, transformation. The breath is a grounding rhythm, it supplies to the other faculties their legitimacy, their functionality, but what it takes in is in fact quite ambiguous. Graphic representations; surrealism; automatic associations; where the dematerialized is re-materialized; this is actually the region of the lung.

"Some may attribute this to the brain, which is next door, but the brain is more honed to the perceptual triggers and intertwined psychological judgments, and it is of course much more about the potentiality inherent in the tension between doing and not doing. There you find reluctant painters, bathetic schneisse sculptures, and clever and sad

Scene: Mare Street, Hackney, Late afternoon, early fall. Not long before the Frieze Art Fair.

things like that, alongside kind of non-things, strobe lights, tinsel, Gutai renakes, Fluxus games and stuff."

*Unravelling or planning a trip? Be Seen! Go Green!*

*Going on a trip? Whether taking a train across Canada or flying to your favourite destination, you no longer have to worry about the long trips with patches or the white knuckling cold turkey approach.*



Paradise-AO in Shibuya, 2009  
© Knowles Eddy Knowles [Photographer: Michael Eddy]

"Lastly, you come to the heart, which is by the exit: the heart, last thing to give up, is the space of sheer brute repetition, but also murmuring, jumping, surprises, and passions. Expressionism, structural films, and Op-art. There is also a door next to the exit that leads you back on an alternative route through the exhibition, like some kind of new lease on life.

"Now, I know this sounds, on the surface of it, kind of like the Museum of Modern Art, reconfigured. Not true. Keep in mind that every work in this project has some reference to tobacco in—"

A break in the curatorial membrane, shocking elation, and with effort-less ease, Knowles Eddy Knowles' construction is bypassed for some shadow figure emerging from behind. With a "Hey Claus, how are you,

245

nice to see you" coupled with one of those double-cheek kisses, the entrance has become the exit.

Knowles Eddy Knowles grabs the curator's elbow, says, "I hope you die of emphysema."

THE END

Alternate ending #1

"What did you say?" Claus also pauses, his mandibles frozen, smooch-extended.

"I said, that sounds fascinating. Does your friend have a name?"

"Yes, she does. Do you have a card I could give to her?"

The curator and Claus exchange wry glances, then a card is withdrawn from a pocketbook, and the gates of Eden stand ajar.

Alternate ending #2

"You people make me sick. It's always the same cabalistic incest. But you know what I know? It's all done out of fear. Your little associations, your self-aggrandizing panel discussions and self-presentations: you feel they protect you from total oblivion. And so your delectation in compromise! The fact that you willingly consort with the enemy! How you won't take a stand unless to highlight yourself! Your vapid mantras to the lowest common denominator! And this conceals the reality that you're the most well-supported class, keeping your class interests A.K.A. your network sustained by a monopoly on speech and knowledge. You know, I used to feel sorry for you, how you're forced to play a character that you never really identify with, or only insofar as the will to power is written into this role. But you choose this! It's your own subjugation you're choosing! And in doing so, you force others into endless struggle. When will your generation face up to its crimes!"

Claus and the curator grab their mops and turn back into the space, coughing.

246