

What goes around
comes around:
Glen Pudvine's
Singulus the White
and the Penance
of Saint Glen

A text by Matt Carey-Williams

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A human being is a part of the whole, called by us "Universe", a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts, and his feelings as something separate from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of consciousness.

Albert Einstein, letter to Robert S. Marcus, February 1950

The Fucking End

Read the last line of the essay if you want to short-circuit all the bullshit.

Pudvine's *Slugulus the White and the Penance of Saint Glen* is an exhibition of twelve paintings, executed between 2019 and 2021 which operate individually but also as a sequence, albeit one that orders a powerful ataxia of time and space and which gymnastically flips and flops around Herculean conflicts of self. These labours are set in amphitheatres both ancient and modern and chime with antagonistic arabesques of light and life versus shade and death, pitting mind against body and ties Pudvine's viewer up in libidinal and Gordian knots of desire.

As a group they follow on from his painting, *Dawn* (2019). That work juxtaposes the artist's nude self-portrait (with the exception of him sporting a pair of dirty white socks on his feet and a gold chain around his neck) with a cartoonish dinosaur figure. Pressed to the front of the picture plane, dominating space like Byzantine saints, they are set in an ethereal, primordial landscape that looks like Mars and reeks of Hades and – as the title suggests – positions both protagonists at the beginning of something. Or, maybe, the end of something. Time? Life? Even death has a beginning. Indeed, the dinosaur is a recurring motif in Pudvine's work which he employs to signify death. Here it drools with salacious delight as it uses a bicycle pump to augment the artist's penis to improbably grandiose proportions. Covering this pump's meter face is a map of the world, so that pressure is not atmospherically calibrated, but geographically. Place, not space, provides a different kind of pressure. It's as if the existential exigencies of being in the world are that which is forced into the artist's mouth via a tube, filling his cheeks not with air, but fear. Yet it is that same thanatotic inflation that now causes his vastly vascular penis to throb so viscerally. Looking not unlike a breaching whale, Pudvine's penis now literally takes on a life of its own. A life blown up by death.

The new dawn we witness, therefore, is not that etched across the fiery, sunrising sky, but that of Pudvine's new, Brobdingnagian cock, awakened in heady, tumescent animation, hungry for experience, and which, itself, becomes a stage for the theatrical contest between Eros and Thanatos, already signified by these two characters, however, now, further intimated in the tiny green bird fucking a mouse with porn-star alacrity as the centre around them fails to hold.



Dawn, then, begins our journey at the end. The end of life; of time; of identity; of meaning. That end is perfumed with a skittish, splenetic savoir-faire that sees Pudvine inspect and dissect the agony of selfhood through the irony of manhood, seen in physical, sexual flux. This libidinal mutability – genital and congenital – colours the many shades of Significance that emerge from that thrust and which, now, become the foundation upon which the *Slugulus* suite of paintings start to make shape and sense.

Pudvine's dozen paintings unravel a narrative that, ironically, focuses on an entanglement. One of self with both itself and numerous others. Of enmeshed iconographies of identity, masculinity, sexuality and fertility, all latticed in and upon one another, revealing new textures of thought in the process. Of circles of life with dances of death. Of space and place with moment and memory. That entanglement – an ever-mushrooming ouroboros from the artist's own trousers – is registered over these twelve canvases as a battle between a man and his penis, but it speaks of those epic battles, drawn from the annals of myth and history, between id and ego; between hero and demon; between being and becoming. Binaries that are whipped into a batter of cardinal drives by the artist in halcyon arenas that appear faux-naïf, but which are anything but false or naïve. Their amalgamation – their struggle – casts shadows of doubt over those pillars of truth and enlightenment we use to support our crumbling selves and which, in turn, makes us stop and confront the abjection that constantly bubbles under our psyche. A fear and loathing we choose to ignore but which, here, now chooses to subsume us.

Part One: The End Of The Beginning

I: The Twelfth Painting

Meet Saint Glen. A young, hirsute, bearded man with big eyes and a big dick. A really, really big dick. He's athletic, but not annoyingly so. His iconographic symbols are his smelly white socks, his gold chain and the Fitbit he wears on his left wrist. Signifiers of his physicality, perhaps? Yet emblems that hover in those epistemological cracks found between slabs of the heteronormative, homoerotic and the fluidity of masculinity that make up the patio and ever shifting patina of manhood. He stands, arms open in delighted declaration, to present his companion, Slugulus the White.

Slugulus the White is the name of Saint Glen's dick which, already, in this first chapter, is enormous. The look on Saint Glen's face is a hybrid of shock, glee and sheer terror. Perhaps this is the moment that Slugulus revealed himself to Saint Glen. *You? Yes, me. 12* is thus an affirmation of self; a celebration of that which you know of yourself and that which you don't. Yet. Of that which you see and that which you feel. Ground and underground. A fantastically laddish 'wey-hey' surely accompanies this grand unveiling, born from the fact that Pudvine's penis was named by his friends at school. He and his close circle of friends all had names for their dicks: Dr. Weird, Mr. Gherkin and Coco Pops, to name but a few members of that club. 'Slugulus' because Pudvine's limacine penis is rather corpulent, so he tells me; 'the White' because he and his friends were all fans of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* films. Unlike Gandalf, Slugulus needs no giant, magic staff. He is that giant, magic staff, conducting Pudvine's narrative from the beginning to the end and back to the beginning again. *Ad infinitum. Ad absurdum.*

Whilst there are numerous homoerotic beats to this soundtrack, there is also a juvenile, schoolboy goofiness that informs the registration and identification of Pudvine's Saint Glen. It is that particular thrust – silly lad shit, so to speak, of boys being boys and showing their willies to each other – that opens up many a door of perception and experimentation and which, without really thinking about it at the time, empowers an openness and agency to explore oneself further. Identity is here not fixed to statutes or statues of masculinity



or virility even if the artist employs a vocabulary that directs your attention towards those tropes. It is this push-pull between the signs and signifiers of identity – some heavenly, others mundane - and how that constant effervescence of existence feeds into Pudvine's self-interrogation, empowering him to tackle the big, existential questions of life.

II: The Eleventh Painting

The homoerotic undertones of *You? Yes, me. 12* are continued in *I'm me. II*. With his eyes wide shut in ecstatic reverie, Saint Glen stands in a desert-like landscape, barren save for a Quiver Tree and a candle of tapirs, comforted by Slugulus the White who has curled around his shoulders like a warm, familiar scarf. Pudvine's landscape is inspired by the first part of Stanley Kubrick's 1968 masterpiece, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, called 'The Dawn of Man'. The scene has a tribe of hominids driven away from its water hole by a rival tribe. Influenced by an alien monolith which has arrived as they awaken the following morning, they discover how to use bone as a weapon and, after their first hunt, they return to the water hole, now weaponised, to drive their rivals away. The notion of 'bones' as 'weapons' is here not lost on the artist.

Much as Kubrick delineates the moment of transition from innocence to experience; from hunted to hunter; from hominid to human in 'The Dawn of Man', so too does Pudvine begin to unveil the journey of Saint Glen's penance. Again, it is the penis that choreographs our understanding of Saint Glen's transition from lively and loving to, finally, deathly and defiled. Whilst Slugulus' form suggests comforting affection for Saint Glen, the stretched, taut skin, pulling at his testicles, offer portents of the pain to come. And cum. The tapirs in the background are those Kubrick used as a food source for the apes, however, Pudvine is also aware that male tapirs have evolved as such that their genitalia are so large as to be cumbersome. They are known to accidentally step on their own penises. Their penises are actually prehensile, like an elephant's trunk, and allows them to grip and keep hold of a female tapir whilst mating to insure successful insemination. So it is that Saint Glen's own prehensile penis, Slugulus the White, becomes the tool that grips and controls himself. It also becomes the weapon which, eventually, will destroy him. The id that will consume the ego.



III: The Tenth Painting

The libidinal exchange between self and other is the fulcrum of the politics of desire yet, here, the protagonist as self is also the antagonist as other, with Slugulus now energetically wrapped around Saint Glen's throat. You can feel the air begin to burn inside Saint Glen's lungs. A plume of victorious ejaculate flies off into the sky like celebratory cannon fire. The struggle begins, reminding us all to be careful what we wish for. Fulfilled or otherwise.

It's a struggle we are all experiencing right now. A struggle to live, work, imagine. To get the measure of things. Pudvine executed this suite of twelve paintings mainly during the Coronavirus pandemic and its various lockdowns. As an artist he has struggled and juggled with ideas, thoughts, visions for this body of work much in the same way he – like all of us – has struggled to come to terms with life's newest twists and turns and its vortex of frustrations, alleviated, maybe, by the odd ejaculation now and again. As Saint Glen is about to find out, and which Pudvine makes manifest throughout his paintings, experience is just one big, sticky tornado, where self is confronted by thousands of others, constantly reshaping sense and sensibility, discernment and desire. The ultimate fight, however – for meaning and for life and the desire for both - remains with the one other that is not another and that is the contest with yourself. Pudvine's paintings are, if nothing else, confessions of a self at odds with themselves. As we all are, in the beginning and at the end of the day.



IV: The Ninth Painting

Light has drawn in over Pudvine's Kubrickian landscape; its darkness obfuscating the terrain which, in turn, makes the illuminated struggle between Saint Glen and Slugulus the White all the more vivid. Compositionally, Pudvine has created a figural unit that looks like a collapsed swastika, evoking the *serpentina* of the great marble Roman sculpture, *Laocoön and His Sons*, excavated in 1506, now in the collection of the Vatican and which changed the history of sculpture almost overnight.

Binaries abound here. Day and night. Light and dark. Life and death. Good and evil. Eros and Thanatos. The lubricant that greases the wheels of these antagonisms is time. Time changes as day turns to night. It monitors the blanket of darkness slowly covering this eerie topography which, likewise, catalogues the great struggle between, and blurring of, protagonist and antagonist. A struggle that ends with both *mort* and *petite mort*: Saint Glen's asphyxiation juxtaposed with Slugulus' ejaculation. Saint Glen's features signal a final breath, yet also seem to capture a sense of rapture. Likewise, Slugulus' sperm does not shoot out in a victorious flourish, as before. Rather, here, it seems to bleed slowly onto the ground, as if the life that Slugulus strangulates out of Saint Glen also depletes its own.

Time, then, begins and ends at the same time. *Here at the end of all things. 9* is a painting that marks those binary moments, or, rather, chronicles the coalescence of those moments as one time gets stuck in another. As death washes over life; as darkness envelops the light; as id unseats ego. Time, like Slugulus, twists and turns around us. Constricting, then releasing; suffocating, then feeding experience. Far from being linear, time bounces about like a ricocheting bullet. Pudvine has consciously chosen to make twelve paintings for this body of work because of the rule of twelfths. A mathematical approximation that assists with the estimation of change. Like tides. Like the length of the day. Like time. Think how we calibrate our lives by the hours of the day or the months of the year. Think how we articulate paradigms of fluctuation or transformation. Always through time. These twelve paintings set up a linear, temporal architecture. Within that amphitheatre, however, time stresses and distresses the antagonist and protagonist in moments that never seem to begin nor end, but just flicker, endlessly, like white noise.



Part Two: The Beginning Of The End

V: The Eighth Painting

As another dawn begins to stretch across the Kubrickian desert, a defeated Saint Glen lies prostrate on the ground. He the Sonny Liston to Slugulus' Muhammad Ali. Rising from and above Saint Glen, Slugulus assumes the position a cobra would when about to attack its prey. Slugulus peers down on a concussed and conquered Saint Glen; the little trickle of ejaculate dribbling out of its meatus now a drool of deadly anticipation, filling the already adumbral stage with more shadows of pending, inexorable doom. This caliginous mood beats like a hungover heart in the Caravaggesque theatricality of Pudvine's lighting. Again, the battle is lit with a fluorescence of flesh, dazzling against the grey-emerald landscape. Pudvine offering his viewer some of the dizzying brio that only Baroque tenebrosity provides.

The stage is therefore set for, at least, the beginning of the end of Saint Glen's penance. This is essentially the penultimate act of Pudvine's narrative, played out over this and the next five paintings, where Slugulus slowly consumes Saint Glen in an arc and act of, I guess, autocannibalism that reverts the dynamics of self-fellatio. A protracted devourment that both separates and unifies protagonist and antagonist; that melds yin with yang; that reverts time and inverts meaning; that breeds an estrangement with all things and ends with a dubiety of all systems: spatial, temporal, relative. The circle is complete before we have even begun to contemplate the circle. Like a cubist conundrum, Pudvine's painting proposes a simultaneity of experience and a multi-dimensionality of memories. Unlike a cubist painting that synchronicity stares us plainly in the face. A life eaten by death that is born from that very life. The one inextricably linked to the other.



VI: The Seventh Painting

The shape evinced by Saint Glen's decapitation – his head consumed by his other head, so to speak – brings to mind the symbolic thrust of the ouroboros: the snake that ate its own tail. This ancient symbol is associated with a tranche of meanings that orbit around cycles of life, death and rebirth and its description goes back to Ancient Egypt. The first known appearance of this motif is in the Enigmatic Book of the Netherworld depicted on the second gilded shrine of Tutankhamun some 3,800 years ago. In some cultures, the ouroboros is also a fertility symbol, with the snake's tail read as a phallic symbol and its mouth as a yonic symbol. Hence Saint Glen now becomes the site for the unification of the feminine with the masculine. A site where his glans penis now becomes his own head, thus removing his genitals from its usual location, leaving his crotch looking female. Slugulus, therefore, kills and fucks and transitions himself all at the same time. Identity, again, presented as a collapse of pillars that prop up usual codes of Signification. You don't find yourself in the Temple anymore. You find yourself in the rubble.



VII: The Sixth Painting

As the sun begins to rise over the desert and the tapirs begin to look for food, Slugulus begins the slow consumption of Saint Glen, now reduced to just his legs, a hand and his white-socked feet.

Jean-Luc Godard famously said that 'every edit is a lie'. He insisted on his films unveiling not just a filmic narrative but also the mechanics of that very film's making. A little like a painter leaving the drips to sit on their canvas. In that spirit, Pudvine here also continues not just the course of Saint Glen's wretched demise, but also the discourse; the physiology; the psychology of it as an action. This determined, unabashed self-consumption is difficult to watch, yet Pudvine insists upon it. Every detailed aspect of it. Nothing can be edited otherwise everything becomes a lie. Which, ironically, is, of course, exactly what we're being presented with here. Another ouroboros – this time not a serpent, but the truth.



VIII: The Fifth Painting

With the sky now peach and purple, Slugulus appears like a whale out of water, his self-consumption nearly complete. Its torn tail indicates that it has removed itself from Saint Glen's body. All that is left of Saint Glen is a single white sock which, now, is transformed into a dribble of Slugulus' cum. The rest of him is barely silhouetted in Slugulus' shaft. From death comes life.

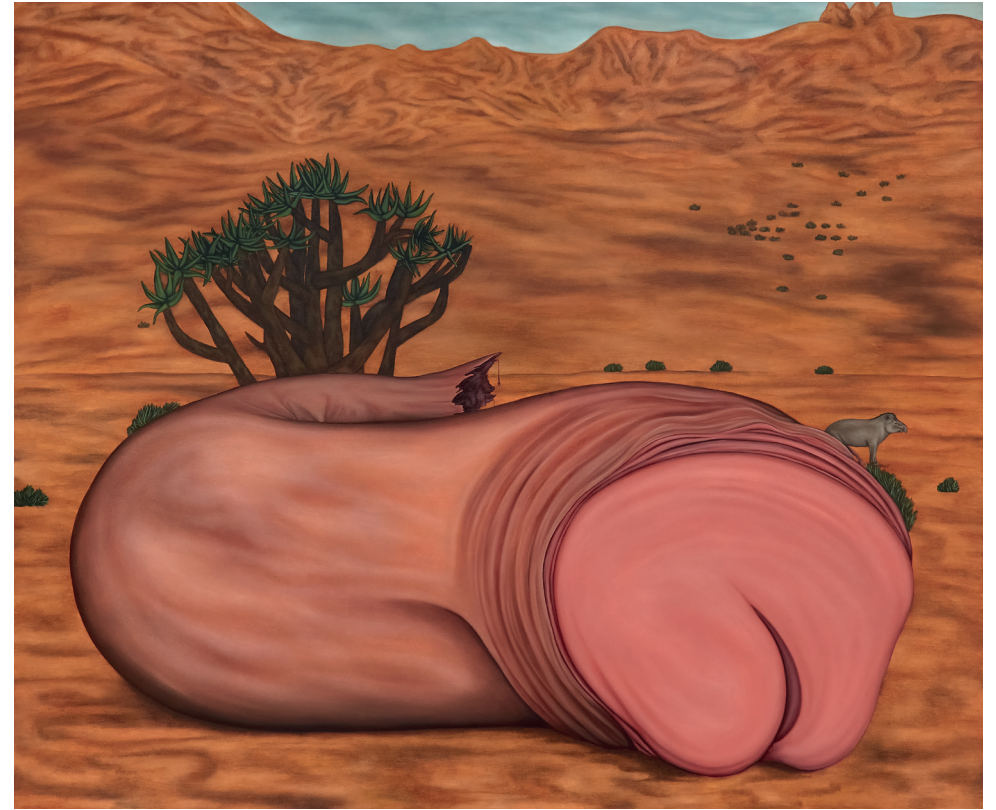
The trajectory of time is clearly and cleverly fucked here. It is not just that the usual linearity of life ending in death is reversed. There is also the oblique concurrence of life and death occurring at the same time. The rupture of self from itself, indicated in Slugulus' tail, is further echoed in the temporal discombobulation alluded to by Slugulus' digestion of self. I'm reminded of Denis Villeneuve's brilliant *Arrival* (2016) where cunning linguist Amy Adams learns to communicate with recently arrived aliens via their language of inky, circular logograms. These heptapods understand time differently, seeing it not as a linear flow from one experience to a later one, but as a circle that orbits around itself, in on itself, circumnavigating a myriad of moments that ferment memories made and are yet to be made; those remembered and those forgotten.

Birth, like the dawn, suggests the beginning of something. But death, like dusk, can also be the start of something. We spend our lives trying to calibrate our lives through the language of sequence. One stepping-stone at a time gets us to cross the "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay ..." (as James Joyce opened his novel, *Finnegans Wake* [1939]). However, how we really arrive at our "commodious vicus" of meaning in life is not by ploughing through it but by embracing its endless curlicues of possibility that constantly colour the kaleidoscope of our lives. A journey that is "... a way a lone a last a loved a long [that] ... riverrun ..." (the final [abridged] sentence of *Finnegans Wake* which continues seamlessly into the novel's first sentence, as noted above). The beginning is the end. The end is the beginning.



IX: The Fourth Painting

The sun now begins to bake down on a spent Slugulus, now bloated with death. Perhaps this is the ultimate signifier of masturbation? The protagonist not hoisted by their own petard but fucked by it.



X: The Third Painting

As morning turns to afternoon, this afternoon makes room for mourning. Slugulus has visibly waned; shrivelled up like a flaccid penis on a cold, January morning. The outline of Saint Glen's skull is clearly visible to the left of Slugulus. Now, for the first time in this cycle, both Saint Glen and Slugulus appear to be on the same trajectory. Both headed for death. One that will, however, germinate new life.



XI: The Second Painting

The sky turns pink as afternoon drifts into early evening. Beside a barren tree, and in a now desolate landscape bereft of flora or fauna, Saint Glen's skeleton lies on the dusty ground. Silence fills this Bowie-like void. The only life one can detect out of all this death and decay is the tiny sprouting plant that has emerged from the ground, fertilised by Slugulus' sperm.



Part Three: No Beginning, No End

XII: The First Painting

The final painting in the cycle is its first one and, moreover, brings us back full circle to Pudvine's *Dawn*. As night (which one, I do not know; maybe before, maybe after) begins to unfold in an ensanguined sky, another Godzilla-like monster contemplates the skull of Saint Glen. The tiny sprouting plant born from Slugulus' sperm is now fully formed. Life has bloomed once more, even as this scaly, green Hamlet of a dinosaur contemplates the *vanitas*-inspired foreordination of death (and life) generated by Saint Glen's Yorick of a skull.

The circle is now, finally, complete. Yet it was begun and completed many sunsets ago, and on many occasions since and before this final and first vignette. Life is death and death is life, after all. Ashes to ashes, and all that jazz and jazz. Both are organic algorithms that deny the verticality of experience and bankrupt the symmetry of time and sequence. Life is not (an) order. It is a frisson of flashes, an embroidery of observation, introspection and sophistication. It whirls and swirls and twirls around so much you just don't know whether you're cumming or going.

The dinosaur motif haunts Pudvine's body of work because, ultimately, death haunts it. Pudvine's consistent focus on self-presentation operates as a joyous assertion of existence; a testimony of artistry, spirit and elan. The fact Pudvine's self-portraits are invariably depicted in states of quite majestic tumescence means that he is doing as much as he can to stave off the magnetism of death with images and indices of the utmost life and vitality. After all, what's more vital or virile in an image of a man than an erect penis?



Curious, then, that in the final analysis, the index of that virility proposes the very same signifier that becomes the agent of its own death. Pudvine's Saint Glen – clearly his own self-portrait – is eaten alive by his own penis. Life becomes death yet lives to read its own eulogy as death. By extension, then, Pudvine's generative self-portraits similarly live on – at the beginning and the end - as that dinosaur which roams his strange and primeval landscapes. Self finally forged in the flames of alterity; short-circuiting time; absorbing condensations and evaporations of identity; swimming in the flux of life and the crux of death.

If this essay has taught you anything, it's this: you are what you eat and you attract what you fear. Now, go back to the fucking end again, and start reading the second paragraph, which begins with Glen

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