

Art

Wittgenstein's Dream review - Gavin Turk mocks Freud in his own house

★★★★

The Freud Museum, London

Ludwig Wittgenstein was deeply sceptical about the claims of psychoanalysis. Now, Gavin Turk gently ribs its founder with an entertaining takeover of his hallowed home

Jonathan Jones

Thursday 26 November 2015 17.35 GMT



Shares 262 Comments 19

Save for later



All is but a dream ... Gavin Turk's waxwork of Wittgenstein with an egg in the palm of his hand

Sigmund Freud is probably the most famous modern scientist after Einstein. In the shop at the Freud Museum, his iconic status is all too apparent: it is full of Freud finger puppets, soft toys, framed photographs and comic-book retellings of psychoanalytic theory. But is the science this Viennese doctor founded even a real science? Not everyone would agree.

Freud is due for some mild mockery, and [Gavin Turk](#) provides just that in an entertaining intervention inside this hallowed house. In Freud's study, among the ancient Greek and Egyptian curios of the great man's art collection, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein stands holding an egg in the palm of his hand. The egg is a real thing, a simple fact. Is Wittgenstein holding it or dreaming he is holding it? Or is he one of Freud's own dreams? For the dapper-suited figure is a waxwork, frozen in space and time.



[Wittgenstein](#) was Freud's contemporary in Vienna in the 1900s: he came from a rich family that was at the very heart of Viennese culture. [One of his sisters was painted by Klimt](#). But this acutely logical reasoner was suspicious of Freud; he questioned the claims of psychoanalysis to be a science because, he argued, it is not empirical. It is a theoretical apparatus you can apply to dreams, jokes or art - but it cannot really be proven or disproven. Being a Freudian is like being a Marxist: it's not the same as accepting the evidence for such scientific theories as Darwinian evolution or Einsteinian relativity.

So there stands sceptical Wittgenstein, while above Freud's sofa (the real sofa where his patients lay to recount their dreams) rises a silvery plume of smoke. It is one of three haunting large-scale photos of twisting, curling smoke, which are the best things in the exhibition. The smoke, of course, recalls Freud, smoking a cigar. Do we just imagine the forms we seem to see in the smoke? Of course we do. But do they come from deep within, or are they just arbitrary associations?



📍 The Metamorphosis of Narcissus



Eerily, a clockwork automaton is playing chess in the library space nearby. In this video work, Turk himself plays [the Mechanical Turk](#), a famous automaton that amazed the courts of Europe in the 18th century. The surrealists, who worshipped Freud, practised "automatism" to release dream images. Turk has become an actual automaton. It's about the unconscious. It's about the accident of his name.

Ego, Id and Superego, the three components of the Freudian mind, are lit up in neon upstairs. Gavin Turk's Desk is laden with souvenirs of his artistic life, laid out like the antiquities and wonders in Freud's study.

In the hall is a granite monolith (actually a kerbstone stood upright) that you are invited to kiss. Love is what makes Freud a great thinker after all - he recognised the force of desire that drives us.

At once dreamlike and sceptical, this is an affectionate, thoughtful encounter with two minds you could spend a lifetime studying. Wittgenstein or Freud? Logic or intuition? The Mechanical Turk does not need to know. He just keeps playing chess.

● At the [Freud Museum](#), London, until 7 February.