

## A Note on Painting Blind

*"I have grown to believe that a really intelligent man makes an indifferent painter, for painting requires a certain blindness — a partial refusal to be aware of all the options."*

Mrs Talmann, in THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT  
Peter Greenaway.

It is not doubted that the artist is prey to a proliferation of choices from the invisible, but is that enough to make him a blind man? The artist makes his first mark — just the point, the touch of the mark; the form, image, the thing is not yet drawn — it is invisible in those seconds. That dab, that touch, the image is not yet visible. The artist sees some bit, some section, but it is not on the paper: -

"What is it to draw?" asks Van Gogh. "How do we do it? It is the act of clearing a path for oneself through an invisible iron wall."

The artist draws from memory — the image in the brain — fleeting, fragmentary — not from nature.

As the artist makes marks he begins to go blind.

"An artist," says Baudelaire, "accustomed to rely on his memory and imagination will find himself at the mercy of a riot of detail clamouring for justice with the fury of the mob in love with equality. The more our artist turns an impartial eye on detail, the greater the state of anarchy."

Memory can be sighted — perception can be blind.

"I write without seeing. I came. I wanted to kiss your hand...This is the first time I have ever written in the dark, not knowing whether I am indeed forming letters. Wherever there will be nothing, read that I love you."

Diderot. Letter to Sophie Volland, June 10th, 1759.

It is as if seeing were forbidden in order to draw. The mark starts from itself by leaving itself. Working blind is not as sightless as it seems — it is not a conjuring trick. The skill of two-dimensional mark-making in order to simulate the three dimensional world is an ancient one.

Walking does it; breathing in and out makes a billion patterned vapours invisible in the air. For most of us seeing is like the way we breathe, we inhale and exhale the visual event; but it goes deep into the lungs.

This skill is valued less and less nowadays, and probably rightly so. There is a sightless quality to any investigation. Inquiry has to makeshift and design its own road; building the road to an uncertain destination. Blindness is inherent in creative activity — so much more is left out than put in — so much refusal to see is involved in seeing.

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The Library at Lower Compton  
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## BLIND TOBIT IMAGES OF A BLIND MAN WALKING

1. CORPSE ON A ROCK
2. TOBIT SLEEPING
3. BLIND TOBIT CRYING
4. BLIND TOBIT SHOUTING AT HIS WIFE
5. BLIND TOBIT WITH A BIRD
6. BLIND TOBIT CRYING WITH A BIRD
7. BLIND TOBIT MASTURBATING IN THE WIND
8. BLIND TOBIT FEELING HIS SON'S EYES
9. BLIND TOBIT LOOKING AT THE SUN
10. BLIND TOBIT LOOKING AT THE SUN
11. BLIND TOBIT AT PRAYER
12. BLIND TOBIT WAITING
13. BLIND TOBIT FALLING
14. BLIND TOBIT RUNNING
15. BLIND TOBIT EMBRACES HIS SON
16. THE ANGEL SMILING AT BLIND TOBIT
17. BLIND TOBIT MEETS THE ANGEL
18. BLIND TOBIT AND ANGEL
19. BLIND TOBIT TOUCHING THE ANGEL'S WING
20. THE ANGEL BOWS
21. TOBIAH PUTS GALL INTO HIS FATHER'S EYES
22. TOBIT SEES A FLOCK OF BIRDS
23. TOBIT GIVES UP HIS SPIRIT
24. Self-portrait blindfolded in private studio (sighted painting).