

JLXTAPOZ

Art & Culture

A Spiritual Cindy Bernhard in "The Darker the Night, the Brighter the Stars"

ANDREW RAFACZ, Chicago

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The Dark Night of the Soul, 2024 Oil on canvas 72 x 120 in.

Maybe I'm stretching or maybe I'm right on point, but this is the perfect timing for a [Cindy Bernhard](#) show. Feeling as we are on the precipice of what is both a seismic shift and yet the gut feeling that for 8 years now we have been on an anxiety-riddled precipice, Bernhard has gathered this sort of feeling and created sublime, personal paintings. The title of her show, [The Darker the Night, the Brighter the Stars](#), a reference from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, captures Bernhard's juxtaposition of mysticism and spirituality.

In the context of *Crime and Punishment*, this line captures a theme where suffering and hardship can lead to greater clarity, redemption, or understanding. The novel's exploration of morality, guilt, and the possibility of redemption amidst dire circumstances, we ain't really traveling far from the world we find ourselves in now. At the center of Bernhard's exhibition is *The Dark Night of the Soul*, "a six by ten-foot painting set in an imagined version of the artist's studio, titled after the 16th century poem of the same name by St. John of the Cross," who himself was a Spanish mystic, poet, and Roman Catholic saint, who emphasized the importance of surrender and detachment from worldly desires in order to achieve spiritual enlightenment, thus having a profound influence on Christian mysticism and spirituality.

There are a lot of elements at play in Cindy's work but mainly we are looking at growth, something greater amongst the surface level. She balances her largest works to date with some of her smallest. It's a journey, and we are here for it. —*Evan Pricco*