

THE

MOBILELIBRARY

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Volume 3 Issue 3

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MISSION

The Mobile Library Magazine provides a multi-digital exhibiting experience for artists and writers to showcase their work during the pandemic closures. Each publication is unique, pairing 6 artists and 6 writers together at different stages in their career to build a collaborative experience.

This year, Volume 3 will explore the theme of memory with Issue 3 that sought work that explores memories, moments, and experiences of being an adult. Themes include family, friendships, and parenthood; advice you would give to your younger self; physical or emotional experiences; or reflecting on generational experiences.

Accompanying this issue are two interviews; one from our podcast "A Guide to Art, Activism, & Culture," and one from our Flat Files: Artist Interviews & Studio Visits.

Cover Image
R. Galvan, Hold Me Harder, Valise, 2023.

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IF YOU'RE A TADPOLE I AM TOO

Poems by Francesca Willow
Artwork by Christopher Williams

It swirls in the back of the mouth, licks your tongue from the inside out,
up the throat and back down again.
Vomits up joy so visceral it's too much to hold inside.
This disgusting love, it makes me sick, it does it does it does.

Swallow it? I don't think I will. Burning nausea-tinted-nostalgia it's
simply too much I
can feel all the way in my toes,
is this what not being alone is? I don't think I like it.

Or actually, I don't like having it to lose, it goes it goes it goes.
So easily if you don't hold on or
if you hold too tight.

Well, I mean, how the fuck are you supposed to know the difference?

Oh, this fragile slug, no wonder they ask
if you'd still love me if I was a worm.

Bury me in the salt, push me down into the marshes.
Find my mud-streaked body, naked warm flesh and stained green fingers
smiling at how undignified it is, the surrender.

It's absolutely gross, vile, this whole thing.

It's me and you, the weird little freaks holding the acidic frogspawn jelly of loving.
Settling it down under a dark leaf, and hoping we turn into something beautiful.

Can't Hear the Snakes, 2023
Ceramic, 14 x 9 x 5.5 in

the same way he took everything
else
whole, alive,
and eyes wide open.

Every last bite and then more-so after.
Morsel of living, stomach swelled-round with joy.

When it sighs I feel six months of stomach ache and saying
I'll process this later.

Looking out to grey expanses and hearing a laugh, an idea,
echoing in the ebb.

Quiet cry as I raise my hand for Pfizer
skipping the queue and remembering a stumbling January
begging for time
we didn't have.



The Dandelions Get Cut Down, 2023
Ceramic, colored pencil, Engobe; 12 x 9 x 6 in

When it empties out I still see him.
My second dose, the day before his thirtieth birthday.
The last vial at the walk-in centre,
given as a shout,
as I'm walking away

Someone volunteers their place,
when the woman in front of me screams our conversation down the line;
this woman lives with a cancer patient,
can it go to her, please?

Pull my dress, bathed in sunflowers,
clean off when the sleeves are too tight.
Stuttering breathless thank yous while the tributes pour in on Facebook,
digital anniversaries for a ghost, a relic.
Pixelated birthdays and whispered I miss yous,

while the ache spreads

from my arm

to my chest. When I smile on a distant

memory resurfaced

I draw a mushroom in the sand and ask an air filled with salt and hollow roots
and a lingering memory of his voice.

Do you feel like, when you prayed, anyone was listening?

WHEN I OPENED MY EYES

it was still dark and
you were there,
outlined in the black-blue velvet but
you were too far away to brush
your fingers down my spine
ridged-brittle twisted ivory and
I saw you smile or
maybe it was just a trick of the
light creaked through
the window above
where we lay in
the not-touching-night
separated by a chasm stretched paper-thin
between us that
we couldn't seem to cross despite
what that might mean.



Haunting from the Winter Tree, 2023
Ceramics, paper, wood, crayon; 4.5 x 3 x 2 ft



Tomorrow's Sweettooth Fire, 2023
Ceramics, panel board, plastic, paper, wood, oil pastel, crayon;
6.5 x 3 x 5.5 ft

PETRICHOR

There is a kind of summer rain
it sizzles,
 storms,
tumbles down brown cobbles turned terracotta
in the red-dirt heat.

Steams,
rising before it reaches the ground.
Ricochets in deep puddles and swirling tendrils
of grey, wet smoke.

There is a warmth here, it wraps itself around me like a curled fist.
And you, an open palm
all green leaves and tender laughter. I stretch my arms in white linens,
 unable to reach the border.

Turn my face to running water and wait for you, foaming
damp gathering at the ankles.
Trace a Louisiana memory with my fingertips, think of you at night while it
thunders at the window.

Simpatico, you say,
my ears fill with rushing tides.
I don't have the words to explain it, I say,
humidity encircling a live-jolting vein.

THEY NEVER TELL YOU WHERE TO FIND THE USER MANUAL

the instruction is: take a scalpel to it.
Slice it straight down the middle, all precise like
you're cleaving two lives clean apart, not two hearts but,
the simpler stuff
without flesh, sinew, guts to make a mess of it.
No blood unspooling on the floor or short,
guttural yelps of the dying grief-fluttered
bird with clagged jet feathers.

the instruction is: clean up the afterglow.
Burnt orange eyelids once the light is gone,
press on your skin to find the dark parts,
writhing in radiant shadows,
never quite taking shape.

the instruction is: don't let them see you cry.
They'll squeeze your cheeks between their palms,
and rub the streaks from your faith,
turn your face to the twilighting clouds,
let the wind carry the water away
to a place where they can't watch.

the instruction is: get your shit together.
Or, keep your shit together, or
look away from the breaking point,
and that means it's actually
not breaking because
that's just how the world works, babe.

the instruction is: none of this actually matters.
You are going to be okay and
if you aren't, well, that's okay too.
Because you will keep on living, you

stubborn beast, your heart
won't give up that easily,
even when it feels like it could rise right
out of yourself
it won't.

The only thing lifting here will be you, one day far from now, full-bodied,
rich and soft,
and full of sweet sweet fermented life that
eventually ripens until you're swelled up with love, yes.

the instruction is: try to believe it.
Even when you don't want to until, some day, you live yourself into it, yes.
Here you are, bloated figure filled heart you,
at the end of a life that you chose
not to leave.

ATTENTION

Text by Daniel Choe
Artwork by Emily Carpintero

Interviewer: It is August 13th, 2005. It was your grandmother you wanted to discuss.

Interviewed: Yes—should I just get right to it?

First, some background.

My parents arrived here from Korea in 1975. When I tell people this nowadays, they ask me whether they came from North or South Korea. That or eating dogs. I don't blame them. It's hard to resist saying the most sensational thing when you've just met someone. I used to cashier in the cafeteria of a health insurance company, and a woman there looked just like Chandra Levy, whose recent disappearance was on television a lot. The lunch special was enchiladas in red sauce, and she inhaled deeply of the food-steam, almost folding into herself, smiling. She ordered the special, and mom spooned a heaping mound into Styrofoam and handed it over the sneeze guard. "Thank you!" she shouted and mouthed slowly, locking eyes with mom, nodding broadly. She glided over to me with her order and then I told her she looked just like Chandra Levy. I'd been thinking about it the whole time she was browsing. She stopped gliding, and her face fell, breaking eye contact permanently. She said she was well aware of the resemblance, and impatiently asked for her change. I really thought she looked like Chandra Levy. This had nothing to do with the thank you.

Mom and dad were married just before leaving Korea. I have some pictures of the wedding ceremony, now yellow and gray. In these pictures, of course they're not smiling. Among the several reasons people offer regarding why some people don't smile in old photos, the one that applies best here is the formality of the event. My parents don't speak much about their lives before America. Looking at these photos you might think they weren't happy there and then because they smile in more recent pictures, that they're happy here, but that's not so clear.

They're not especially unhappy, just averse to reflecting too far into the past. They made the choice to come here and being wistful about the past seems to cast doubt on the decision to immigrate, and regret is a waste of time. I've seen

my mom caught up in some reverie and come out of it with a face that asks, "Hag-yoganeun gil-e eol-eobut-eun saeleul balgyeonhago moduege malhago sip-eo-ssdeon yeol sal gyeoul-eul saeng-gaghamyeo sigan-eul bonaeneun iyuneun mueos-ibnikka?" I inherited that disposition and that same grimace that says, "time wasted!"

The day before Chandra Levy, mom had asked me how to pronounce enchiladas. Among the phonemes that Korean is the L sound from enchilada. You've probably heard about this before—it's commonly noted, commonly imitated. After six attempts, she was still missing the sound, so I told her it was close enough, and I meant it. My mom grew solemn, saying she had something to speak with me about: "Halmeonineun god dol-agasiljido moleunda. ppalli gamyeon ama majimag-eulo geunyeoleul boge doel geos-ibnida. imodo yeohaeng-eul ganikka gat-i gado dwae."²

Grandmother made her way over here after an American GI married my aunt and brought her back to Michigan. My parents an aunt and an uncle clambered over the same path, leaving five living siblings back in Korea. Grandmother was leaving more children behind than the ones she was coming to America to raise. My distant relatives, the ones she left, don't say anything about that. I think a lot about all that was taken from them to have Grandmother here, with me. What must they have thought of my aunt and dad, who took Grandmother, as if America were that much more important.

I remember Ann Arbor most vividly in the snow, likely for the contrast to California, which has been my home for decades. Playing with the neighbors in the townhouses across the way, we once threw a roll of duct tape at a grounded bird, then were harshly scolded by a neighbor. Afterward, my aunt came by with her son, who is now a doctor. Looking down at me, bobbing in a kiddie pool with the first girl I had a crush on, my aunt mocked, "Suyeongbog-eul gajyeowass-eoya haessneunde, keukeukeu."³ Many experiences with my aunt fit this mold. There's a Korean behavior that blurs the line between mocking, teasing, and affection. It's hard to explain. There's also an endemic Korean rush to judge. I know, because I do it too. I've gotten used to my aunt. Still, my doctor cousin said later told me I should never have gone with my aunt, that I was old enough to go alone and save myself the yakking.

Your grandmother.

Grandmother raised me. She raised all the children of her children who had gone to America. Traditionally, Koreans tended to live with the entire extended family as much as possible. It's not so much like that anymore, at least not in the cities. Maybe more intact, extended families are common among many types of



Surveyed Sentimentalities, No. 3, 2015/22
Acrylic on paper and canvas;
28 x 34 in

immigrants who have fewer resources, for practical reasons. I've wondered how much of that type of thing is cultural and how much is practical. My parents, of course, were working at their restaurant, seeing to the practical needs of our family.

Can we jump ahead to the visit?

Yes. There is a market beside the train station in Daejeon. I purchase her favorite snacks: seaweed and rice wraps, rice with beans, fruit. My aunt is chaperoning me. She says that Grandmother likes Choco(late) Pies the most. "Chokopai! Chokopai! Chokopai!"⁴ she yells. Bringing Grandmother all her favorite snacks sets her standard institutional diet in relief. Only on rare occasions is she allowed what she likes.

The trains in Korea are quiet, comfortable. They carry me through improbable idylls. Unnaturally bright green hills on top of hills cut off by sharp ravines, a drop-off every so often, creeks. Disembarking near Anseong, the small town

where the senior home is located, an older woman collapses backwards, onto her rear. I lift her up quickly, careful not to grasp her too tightly. I'm afraid I've invaded her personal space. There is a kind of insularity among native Koreans. There is a pathological awareness of borders. Not only land borders, but the personal borders of bodies, minds, ideas, presences. Americans tend to be less concerned about this. You can see it in the way we move.

The older woman pats at her hair, composing herself. Her clothes say, "I am a tourist in my own country." Elderwear seems often to resemble travel attire. She has the haircut Grandmother and many other Korean grandmothers have: a tight, ovular perm. "O, chinjeolhan cheongnyeon,"⁵ she says. My aunt didn't seem to notice, but mumbles, "O meosjineyo meosjineyo."⁶

The taxi ride is quiet. The landscape de-urbanizes as buildings grow farther apart. Fields are plenty. The sun begins its descent, splashing ochre indiscriminately. On a sign for a farm that sells fancy garlic is a mascot: a little anthropomorphized garlic head with glassy, pleading eyes. The taxi crosses a slab of stone dropped into a small creek as a bridge. I am surprised. Located on the edge of this farming town with small, fragile homes, the senior home is an eyesore of a modern building, with several stories. It is painted the minty or sickly green color one sees in hospitals on television shows from the past. I don't see this green very often now. This place is called Silver Uni Senior Home. Are they suggesting the occupants are uni? That seems distasteful. Maybe I've misunderstood the meaning. I remove my shoes and proceed to the third floor, where the receptionist has directed me. On this floor, the rooms are named after animals: Elephant Room, Monkey Room, Tiger Room. Grandmother is in Elephant Room, where a cartoon elephant set against our queasy green welcomes me. There are six elderly women in this room. I can't identify Grandmother at first. There, in one of the far corners, close to the CRT television that are rare sights these days. She sleeps on her side, facing away from the room and the people in it. Her hair has adopted a slant parallel to the slant of her pillow and seemingly grows in an upward direction. Her head is shaped like an onion. Sitting beside her, I lay my hands upon her back. She turns and looks up at me but says nothing.

My aunt materializes beside me and begins using a script she says has worked before. She sounds bemused or bored. To her it is a performance repeated, sanding her emotion down to a flat surface: "Eomeoni, aideul-eul gieoghasibnikka?"⁷ And after a few seconds, when Grandmother nods, "Eomeoni, janyeoui janyeoleul gieoghasibnikka?"⁸ She nods again. "Migug-eul gieoghasibnikka?"⁹ She seems to have lost interest, but then there is recognition in her eyes. Turning toward me, she says, "Gaman-iss-eo. Dangsingayo nae salang..."¹⁰ Does she believe me my father? I accept her blessings still: "Uiloun salm-eul olae sasibsio."¹¹

Now I give her the food. She makes quick work of the Choco Pies, grinning. A



Hey, Sorry, Are We Still Good?, No. 1, 2016
Acrylic and ink on paper and canvas;
24 x 24 in



Surveyed Sentimentalities, No. 4, 2022
Acrylic, water, modeling paste, and ink on paper and canvas;
24 x 24 in

grandmother on the other side of the room offers, "Eoneu nal bam, naneun isanghan baseulaggeolineun solileul deul-eossgo geugeos-i mueos-inji jeonhyeo mollassseubnida. hanbamjung-e chokopaileul meogdeon geunyeo."¹² I laugh. The fruit is less than ripe. Her whole face squints. Sour face. I laugh. Grandmother says, "I joh-eun eumsig-eul meoggo ulineun hamkke jib-eulo dol-agal su issseubnida."¹³ Of course she does not remember the family home sold long ago, no longer "our house." They tried to keep the house, but modern life. The reverie ends. She keeps trying to feed me the food I brought for her.

She is upright now, and I try to bookend her body with my own. I gently massage her, I hum, and when I laugh, I exaggerate the shaking of my body. I think about how people believe purring can heal and humming can be felt, even heard, by deaf people. She asks, "Neoneun igeos-eul gieoghani?"¹⁴ She shows me her hand. There is a small, black tubular object embedded in her skin. She tells me a story I remember from my youth: "Naega eolyeoss-eul ttae yeonpil-eseo naon nab jogag-i nae son-eulo mikkeuleojyeo deul-eogassda. geugeos-i nae simjang-eulo godjang deul-eoga jug-eulkkabwa dulyeowosseubnida. hajiman anio, yeojeonhi geogie anj-a issseubnida. jeolm-eun-ideul-i geogjeonghaneun geos."¹⁵ She grows still, reconstructing the past.

Lastly, I record a short video of her. She gazes steadily into the lens and seems to stop moving entirely.

[Silence.]

I've watched that video hundreds of times looking for recognition in her eyes. I'm still not sure if it's there. When I stand to leave, she follows me out of the room and down the hall. I wish for the staff to intervene and begin to feel hollow. She shuffles forward, a sobbing, pleading mess. "Wae naleul deligo gaji anhni? eotteohge naleul nachseon salam-ui jib-e dugo gal su issni?"¹⁶ she asks. I repeat, "Halmeoni, manh-i salanghaeyo, halmeoni, manh-i salanghaeyo," as I descend stairs from the opposite side of the hall, the far end. The hollowness vibrates inside my stomach as I flee from the building. My insides have mineralized.

Here is where you can add anything else.

She told me a story once, before she returned to Korea. She'd given me all the money she had saved, about forty dollars, and asked me to sit down. Her story: *A long time ago, there were two brothers. They liked each other. One day, they were walking on a bridge. The younger sibling found two lumps of gold in the water. He gave a lump of gold to his older sibling. They went on a boat. The younger sibling suddenly threw his lump of gold into the*



Surveyed Sentimentalities, No.2, 2015
Acrylic on paper and canvas;
28 x 34 in

water. He said, 'I thought about stealing your gold. The gold has made me greedy.' The older brother was proud of his younger brother. He also threw his gold into the water.

Later, I overhear my aunt on the phone with my mother. Bemused as always, she imitates my crying, but that's just a cultural, Korean thing. There is a kind of imitation here, the use of what are called mimetic words in Korean: "Nummul-i peongpeong nawassda."¹⁷ It's hard to explain.

Thank you. This session is complete.

Yes, of course. But has this time been wasted?

[End Recording].

Endnotes

1 Why am I spending time thinking about the winter I was ten years old, when I found a frozen bird on the way to school and wanted to tell everyone? (학교가는 길에 얼어붙은 새를 발견하고 모두에게 말하고 싶었던 열 살 겨울을 생각하며 시간을 보내는 이유는 무엇입니까?)

2 Grandmother might pass away soon. If you go soon, it will probably be the last time you get to see her. Your aunt is making a trip too, so you could go with her. (할머니는 곧 돌아가실지도 몰라. 빨리 가면 아마 마지막으로 보겠어. 고모도 여행을 가니까 같이 가도 돼.)

3 I should have brought my swimsuit, lol. (수영복을 가져왔어야 했는데, ㅋㅋ.)

4 Choco pies! Choco pies! Choco pies! (초코파이! 초코파이! 초코파이!)

5 Oh, a helpful youngster. (오, 친절한 청년.)

6 Oh, that's nice. (오 멋지네요 멋지네요.)

7 Mother, do you remember your children? (어머니, 아이들을 기억하십니까?)

8 Mother, do you remember your children's children? (어머니, 자녀의 자녀를 기억하십니까?)

9 Do you remember America? (미국을 기억하십니까?)

10 Wait a minute. Is it you my dear... (가만있어. 당신인가요 내 사랑...)

11 Be sure to live a long, righteous life. (의로운 삶을 오래 사십시오.)

12 One night, I heard a strange rustling and I had no idea what it was. It was her eating a Choco Pie in the middle of the night. (어느 날 밤, 나는 이상한 바스락거리는 소리를 들었고 그것이 무엇인지 전혀 몰랐습니다. 한밤중에 초코파이를 먹던 그녀.)

13 After we eat this good food, we can go back to our house together. (이 좋은 음식을 먹고 우리는 함께 집으로 돌아갈 수 있습니다.)

14 Do you remember this? (너는 이것을 기억하니?)

15 When I was young, a splinter of lead from a pencil slid into my hand. I was afraid it would travel straight to my heart and I would die. But no, it sits there still. What things the young worry about. (내가 어렸을 때 연필에서 나온 납 조각이 내 손으로 미끄러져 들어갔다. 그것이 내 심장으로 곧장 들어가 죽을까봐 두려웠습니다. 하지만 아니요, 여전히 거기에 앉아 있습니다. 젊은이들이 걱정하는 것.)

16 Why do you not take me with you? How could you leave me in the house of a stranger? (할머니, 많이 사랑해요 할머니, 많이 사랑해요?)

17 He burst into tears! (눈물이 펄펄 나왔다!)



THE PUERTO RICAN "I", 5 YEARS AFTER THE HURRICANE

A Guide to Art, Activism, & Culture
Podcast Interview with Marcela Guerrero

The Aerogramme Center is pleased to present "A Guide To Art, Activism, & Culture" a podcast that delves into social issues seen in museums and in art collections today. We aim to focus on themes of decolonization, representation, and appropriation within the frameworks of art and activism.

Hosted by Zoë Elena Moldenhauer

About Marcela Guerrero

I spoke with the Whitney Museum of American Art's DeMartini Family Curator, Marcela Guerrero, about their recent exhibition "no existe un mundo poshuracán: Puerto Rican Art in the Wake of Hurricane Maria." Coinciding with the 5th anniversary of Hurricane Maria, the multi-generational exhibition brings together artists from the island and the diaspora to explore the overlapping disasters compounded by Puerto Rico's ongoing colonial conditions.

Marcela Guerrero received her Ph.D. in Art History and Visual Culture from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has worked on notable exhibitions including "Martine Gutierrez: Supremacy"; "Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925-1945"; and Pacha, Llaqta, Wasichay: Indigenous Space, Modern Architecture, New Art" at the Whitney Museum of American Art. From 2014-2017, she worked as a Curatorial Fellow at the Hammer Museum on "Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985" organized by the Getty Foundation's Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA initiative. Marcela is currently the Whitney Museum of American Art's DeMartini Family Curator.

Zoë Elena Moldenhauer:

Welcome Marcela, it is a pleasure speaking with you today! Can you introduce yourself?

Marcela Guerrero:

Yes, my name is Marcela Guerrero. I am the DeMartini Family Curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

ZM:

And today we will be discussing an exhibition you curated “no existe un mundo poshuracán: Puerto Rican Art in the Wake of Hurricane Maria” that recently ended at the Whitney Museum of American Art on April 23rd, 2023. Can you introduce the exhibition and why you wanted to tell this story in the way that you did?

MG:

Yes, though this is an exhibition that opened the year of the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Maria—the hurricane happened on September 20th, 2017.

It was a category 5 hurricane that the minute it touched land, it got downgraded to category 4. Although, in some parts of the island, the winds were felt at a category 5 gale. And it was a moment that everyone knew that it was going to really mark the history of Puerto Rico.

I was in Brooklyn. I had just given birth to my daughter. I was with my mom, who typically lives in Puerto Rico, but she was here helping me. My dad had been here, but he went back. And so, as it happened with many people, we couldn't get in touch with him for a couple of days. That separation that one felt—that the experience of what people were living there, and also this other kind of different trauma felt by the diaspora of not being able to be in touch with their loved ones and family. And knowing that in the recent past, Puerto Rico had announced a massive debt. There were already blackouts. There were already, you know, closing of schools, so many things that became more exacerbated after the hurricane.

But thinking about, why all of these overlapping disasters keep happening? It's kind of this colonial weight expressed in the most perverse of ways. And I knew when the hurricane happened that Puerto Rican artists have always, you know, sought to analyze its colonial condition and imagine ways to think and process this moment. And so, that was kind of the gist of the idea.



Gabriella Torres-Ferrer, *Untitled (Valora tu mentira americana)*, 2028. Hurricane ravaged wooden electric post with statehood propaganda, 116 × 118 × 122 in.

ZM:

The exhibition, as well as the events of Hurricane Maria, are so personal and are present in many people's lived experience. How did you consult with everyday Puerto Ricans in the planning process of this exhibition? And what resources did you draw on to get a sense of what people wanted to know or have presented?

MG:

First and foremost, that the lived experience of a Puerto Rican also included people on the island and in the diaspora. Those were different experiences, but both were very valid.

I was implicated, obviously. Not just as a curator, not in that authorial way, but as someone who has very strong feelings and attachments to Puerto Rico.

Your question made me reflect a lot on this of the conversations that I had with the artists. And it was at that level. Like, you are not only the artist whose work I want to borrow for the show, but you were also someone who experienced this and were also the typical Puerto Rican that I consider them as a visitor level and as a viewer. And so, we had many conversations about the thesis of the show, how it was going to be represented, who else was going to be part of those stories.

In 2019, a group of 10 scholars or thinkers or curators—all happened to be women—and they came for a workshop or a day, day and a

half, two days of conversations closed doors with me. And that included people like Marina Reyes Franco from the Museum of Contemporary Puerto Rico, Natalia Viera Salgado, a young emerging curator very involved in the local scene and emerging artist scene, Susana Torruella Leval, kind of the other end of someone who's been working with Puerto Rican artists for decades.

So, it was 10 people. All with different levels of adjacency to the arts. And many of the ideas ended up in the exhibition in a way. My process of this exhibition was already embedded in my own life, you know, going to Puerto Rico was something that I was doing once or twice a year because I have family there and I have friends and all of that. That kind of rhythm was already part of my life and so it was easy to translate it into the process of the show.

ZM:

The exhibition is celebrated as being one of the first major retrospectives of contemporary Puerto Rican art in a major New York City museum. What makes contemporary Puerto Rican art distinctive, and how did you go about selecting the artist for the exhibition?

MG:

I think it was important to mention it was a groundbreaking exhibition, the one that happened in 1973-74 at the at The Metropolitan Museum and with El Museo del Barrio—and obviously, understanding well that there had been many exhibitions of Puerto Rican art in Puerto Rico and in other museums in the US.

The Met Museum from the 70s covered everything from Taíno art to the present. And it had a very kind of pedagogical element being that El Museo was involved, a former school, so it had gray merits based on those points. For the Whitney, the differentiation would be that it was a very specific small window that we wanted to look at and unpack. By using the hurricane as a lens, we can think of this overlap of climate change, something that will continue to occur, and colonization. That is not unique to Puerto Rico, but it is a condition of Puerto Rico.

But what became very beautiful from comments that I heard from people on how much they could see their own countries reflected. I was glad to get those comments because it's a very specific exhibition, obviously, but it has echoes in many other contexts.

The process for the show happened in ways that might be surprising. I had seen the work of some of the artists like Edra Soto, but I had

never met her. Meaning they weren't necessarily artists or friends, or in my network. The workshop that we did in 2019, that also helped. Really, by doing research and following galleries in Puerto Rico that I go to often and seeing like, 'OK, this person might fit.' It's also art that's different from what you see in Chelsea and blue chip galleries. You don't necessarily know all of the artists and you do research, and you might have an idea or a concept, and so that helps define which kind of artist you're going to visit, or you're going to reach out to do a studio visit.

But those were many, obviously more than the 20 that I invited. It was a very large pool of artists that, as I was refining the idea, I was refining the selection.

ZM:

Museums are about exhibitions, but the hidden part is what goes on behind the scenes of choosing to present an idea for an exhibition—what controversies a museum chooses to embrace and what controversies to avoid. Can you take us through that process at the Whitney that led to this exhibit and the form it took?

MG:

I came back from parental leave, and I think it was within that year, we pitched exhibitions. Which is not typical. Getting an exhibition on the calendar can take many forms. That year, it happened to be this way that the chief curator asked us to pitch a couple of exhibitions. Everyone could pitch up to two ideas. And so, one of the ideas that I pitched, it was a very brief like 5 minutes, very raw, kind of, version of this exhibition. I think it was the next meeting and people could comment on other people's exhibition to get feedback and see which one's kind of came to the surface. And many of my colleagues said, 'This is an exhibition that the Whitney should do. This is something that we really should host here, and Marcela should organize it, blah, blah, blah.'

That was pretty much the way it got green lit. After that, we typically present to upper management committee. And then it got on the calendar. If there was anything, there are certain moments of like, 'OK, so what kind of language are we going to use? And why are we using certain language? Are we using colonial? Yes, we need to use the word colony. That's very important.'

The show was going to be where this exhibition "Josh Klein" is right now. So, on the 5th floor like that size, so a much smaller footprint. Because of the pandemic, a lot of things also got moved and extended and we had to shift a lot of things around. So, that kind of benefited the



Rogelio Báez Vega: *Paraíso Móvil*, 2019. Oil on canvas, 55 × 70 in.
| *Paradox of the New Landscape IV*, 2018, 2022. Oil on canvas, 48 x 96 in.

exhibition in a way. I feel bad saying that, but a) we had more time which helped for the catalog and get a catalog. And also, the chief curator said, 'Oh, OK well, let's try this new thing which we've never done in the past in this building,' which was to do the exhibition on the 6th floor. Because the 6th floor is typically a permanent collection floor.

And so, he gave me the entire 6th floor. And that was like, 'OK great!' So, now I need to rethink the thesis so that it can incorporate more artists, and all of that. So, those behind the scenes things that happened, ended up benefiting the show, actually.

ZM:

You mentioned what kind of language you wanted to use for the exhibition. There were several stages of experience between the art and the explanation, where viewers were given a specific interpretation that wasn't necessarily apparent in the artwork. What parameters did you set in writing the wall labels?

MG:

Usually, the way I write wall labels is information drawn from my studio visits with the artists and inside knowledge of what they think the work is about. Also, if there's anything published about a work and those are ideas that I think might be important too, I put it in my own words—I rewrite them.



Gamaliel Rodríguez, *Collapsed Soul*, 2020-21. Ink and acrylic on canvas, 84 × 112 in.

Yeah, labels are tricky because every museum has its own way of thinking about labels. We don't describe what people are seeing. So, it's more about an interpretation and analysis of the work without overdoing it.

So, I'm thinking of the label for Gamaliel Rodríguez "Collapsed Soul." I've been reflecting a lot of on ships, and so I added a little bit of that interpretation of how it can go back to 1898, and that ship that exploded outside of Cuba and led to what is sometimes referred to as the Spanish-American War. That's not something that Gama was thinking when he did the painting. But I think I added it and I mention the Jones Act (1920) to kind of—how ships have been so important in the imaginary of Puerto Ricans, for so long.

So, we have a whole department that's working—I write them, and then they give me feedback. And then, we show the labels to the artist to make sure that they agree with what is being said, and that it is factually correct and all that. So that's an important process.

I think yeah, the labels had an ideology, if we may call it that. And I think that is also derived from the artists. Someone like Yiyo Tirado [Rivera] who—his position and that of his work are completely against the privatization of beaches.

And there's a—yeah, a very clear point of view. That's definitely true. I think I was either agreeing with that point of view, and also representing that point of view from the artist. So, not putting anything that the artist wouldn't agree with.

ZM:

How do you see art contributing to the plight of Puerto Rico?

MG:

That's a really great question about—I was actually just reading a quote by Colleen Smith—not related to the show at all, but she said, 'I actually believe that art can contribute more—' and I'm paraphrasing her here—'can contribute more than politicians even can because we've tried that and we know where that has led us.' And so, this real belief in that when you go to a museum—this is my thinking now, not Colleen's—when you go to a museum, you go in knowing that you're gonna see works of art. And that you're going to derive a message in something, you're going to learn something from a work of art. If you're coming to the museum, it is because you're ready for that, you know, you're ready to do the exercise of looking hard at an artwork and wanting that artwork to tell you some-

thing that you can't find anywhere else. I also think that when it comes to Puerto Rico, because there is so much heavy history, and law, and like facts that we've also tried that, and should continue to exist in the form of history courses in the way of journalism, but let's try this other method. Let's try to look at art and see what we can learn from that, what we can gain, what new knowledge, what new discourse we can learn from looking at a work of art that you can't find it anywhere else.

If you see Gamaliel's boat, and you don't read the label, you don't have to. But even knowing that you're in the context of an exhibition about Puerto Rico, you're going to feel something. This is not a beautiful rosy story that the painting is telling you. It's quite harsh, right?

So, I think that that it can happen at many levels, to many different people.

ZM:

Right, that there are many forms of activism and art can pick up where the written word can no longer continue. So, the exhibition was extremely successful and received rave reviews. What do you think excited people the most? Was it the fact that Puerto Rican artists were given the recognition in a major institution? Do you think that success will rub off on Puerto Rican based art organizations like El Museo del Barrio or The Clemente that don't have the cachet of the Whitney?

MG:

Yeah, I think people were excited, and surprised, to see a show like this in this museum. That's for sure. We have to say, their surprise says a lot of what people think of the Whitney, and so, we have to be honest about that.

Even people who are in the arts told me, 'Oh, there were so many names of artists that I didn't know.' So, that element of surprise at many levels, from seeing Puerto Rico in a museum like the Whitney to 'who is this artist that I didn't know?' It wasn't lost on people how much considerable real estate was given for this show that every artist, also because of that, they weren't crammed into the wall next to the stairs or next to the bathroom.

Yeah, I don't know if El Museo del Barrio or smaller institutions—they want the reviews and everything, the attention to rub off on them. I don't know if that's how they would characterize it. The Clemente gave one of the artists a residency—or two of the artists. That could have been probably in the plans from before the exhibition, I don't know.

But many created programming that overlapped with the show, so that was really nice to see. Your question made me think about was in



Installation view of *no existe un mundo poshuracán: Puerto Rican Art In The Wake Of Hurricane Maria* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, November 23, 2022-April 23, 2023). From left to right: Sofía Gallisá Muriente, *Celaje (Cloudscape)*, 2020; Candida Alvarez, *Jellow (Yellow)*, 2018; Candida Alvarez, *Here to There*, 2018; Lulu Varona, *Mapa (Map)*, 2020; Lulu Varona, *Ir y venir (Come and Go)*, 2021.

the recent Bronx Museum Gala there were many artists who were part of the auction and Gamaliel—that I've mentioned before—there were, I think 18 bids for his painting. Which I don't think is typical.

There is a tension that is going in many different directions, and I don't know if "rub off" is the right phrase, but will have an impact on other museums. We're all here to learn from each other. I've also been thinking about this recently and how the more of us that are in the field working means that there's a little bit of competition and I say that, for lack of a better word, because it's very collegial, obviously. But it means that it's like, 'Ohh, El Museo is going to do a show about this. Like, ohh man, damn!' We don't want to be redundant.

There are more spaces for artists to show, and we're all really interested in wanting to get to that artist first and things like that. The way I see more about the network of museums and connections and spaces that will show more of the artists that were in the show or other artists that perhaps in the future will have a relationship with the Whitney.

You know, that type of thing.



Danielle De Jesus, *Google the Ponce Massacre*, 2021. Oil and graphite on linen, 60 × 84 in.

ZM:

You mentioned programming, how will the museum maintain the momentum of the exhibition's message in an ethical and meaningful way without fading away over time?

MG:

Yeah, your question made me think of the recent show that we have now that opened and it overlapped with "no existe" by a week of "Jaune Quick-To-See Smith." And how beautiful it was that those two kind of followed each other. And I don't know if, honestly, if those exhibitions would have been possible 10 years ago. For different reasons. But I think that that's a meaningful way of continuing the conversation of saying how there was this exhibition about a very specific colonial context, and then we have an exhibition of a Native American woman artist that is also, in a way, talking about colonization, extractive policies, and laws and uses of the land. And even "Josh Klein", you know, in his own way, dealing with ideas about the climate catastrophe that's going to happen.

Because sometimes I get this question asked and I don't know if it's my fault, maybe I take it too literal—they do ask if there's going to be another exhibition about Puerto Rican art. Sure, there should be more in other institutions and by other curators, and we want to hear other perspectives, but we also need to keep thinking and moving. And that for me is a question of like how meaningful the program can continue to be and not go back to things that might be at odds with these ideas. That I would find really problematic, things that might in a way, I don't know, celebrate the patriotism of America. That would be super weird. That would be the opposite of what, you know, of what a meaningful progress means.

On the other hand, there's also the work that the Department of Education does in creating long-lasting partnerships and that's really the role, right? Connections that extend beyond the exhibition. And so, we have partners like Loaisaida Center, The Casita Maria, we had a partnership for the exhibition with El Centro that we're now thinking, like, in which other ways we can continue that, right.

One way, that I guess I'm excited also to see in the future of the museum of the Whitney is because we're acquiring many works from the exhibition into the collection. Always, the wish and the desire is to have them live and imagine many, many, many contexts in which a painting, a work, a sculpture can be in exhibitions at the Whitney with other works from our collection. But it's when it's next to this other work by a non-Puerto Rican artist, what other conversations that might bring.

Art can be very flexible in that way that it always will retain its original context and ideas, but then it can spark other conversations. So, I'm excited to see that in the future of the of the Whitney.

ZM:

That's exciting to hear that people will encounter the artwork outside of the exhibition's context and have those same experiences. Do you have any final thoughts or announcements you would like to make?

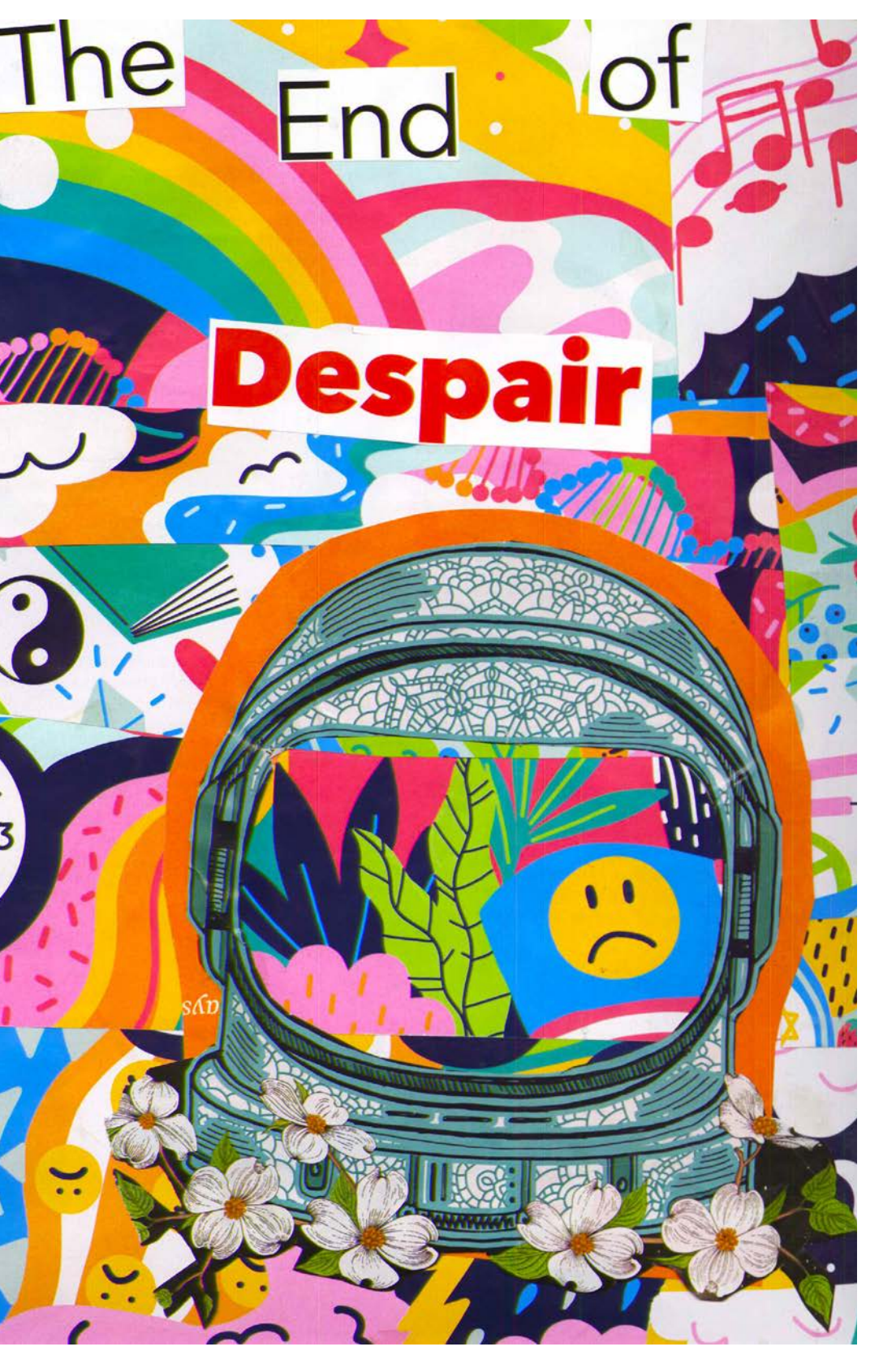
MG:

Thank you for your questions, because I'm reflecting now a lot on the future of the show. Luckily, we created a lot of content that will live on the website. We translated the catalog into Spanish with the intention of teachers from New York and teachers from Puerto Rico, can teach the exhibition and also make use of the catalog in Spanish. That's completely downloadable for free on the website without having, you know, that barrier of the \$40, whatever, coffee table book that these catalogs have.

So, we'll see. Because I just closed the exhibition, I'm at this point of like, 'OK, so, what afterlife will this have?' I'll watch from my little apartment in Brooklyn, how this will develop.

The End of

Despair



MOVIE ON THE FLIGHT

Poems by Joris Soeding
Artwork by Kayleigh DiMaggio

~for Papa

mami, papa, and I fly Detroit Metro to Frankfurt
with a Boston layover on my eleventh birthday
on Pan-Am over the Atlantic we watch Dad
months after witnessing Ray and his father play catch
weeks since the Berlin wall tipped
my brother already there
twenty-five dollars to borrow someone's hammer
for a spray-painted sliver

in Dad mom has a heart attack
son leaves his executive job to help at home
while she recovers
I haven't seen it since
but recall the bonding, ebb and flow
tearing well after pizza and the harbor

in contrast to celebrating Christmas with family
and a new Germany
starting again as we are
with mami gone
stories shared through the loss
finding light with us changed

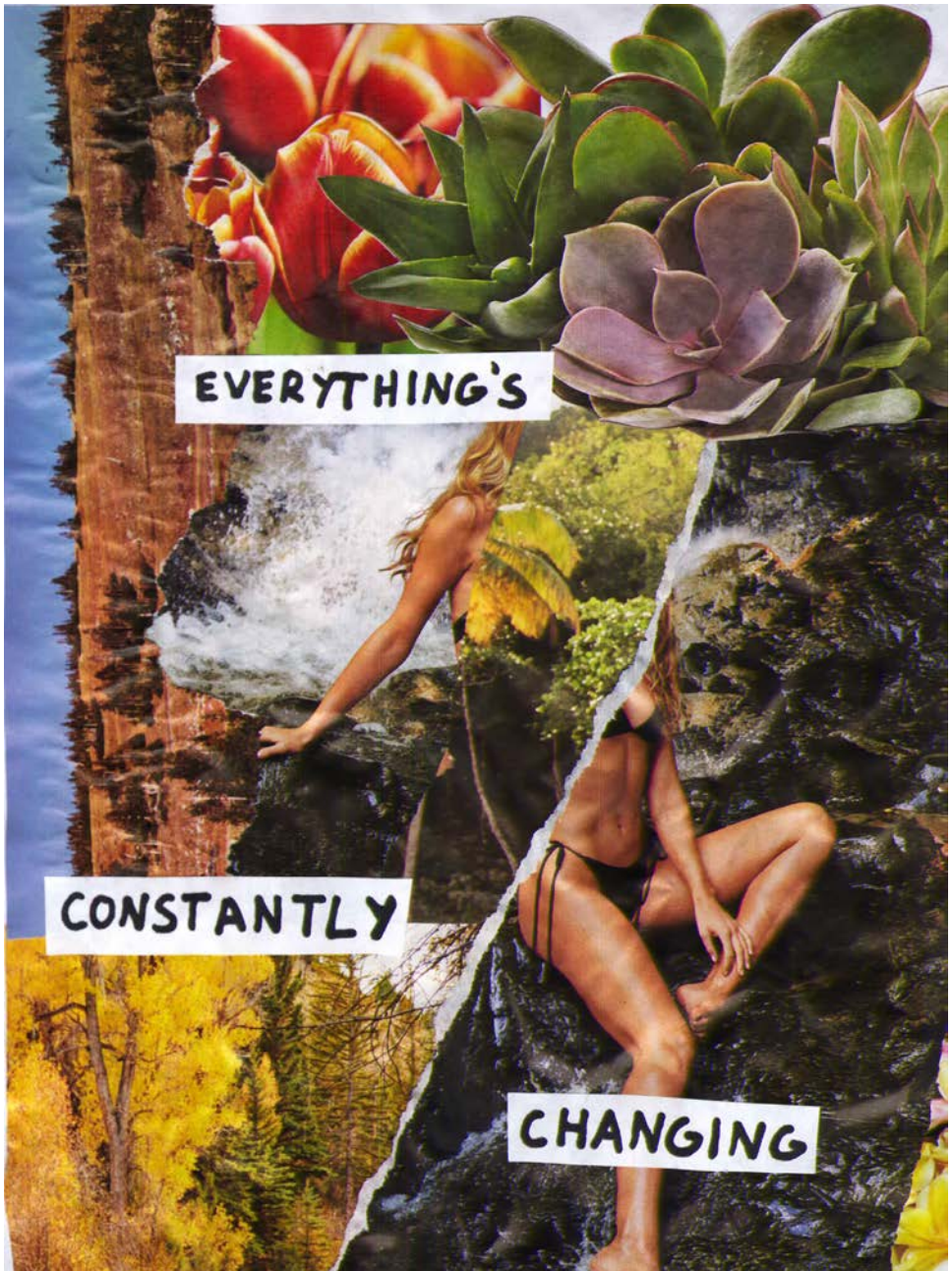
(Pp. 39)
End of Despair, 2021
Magazine clippings, ink; 9 x 12 in

ON THE PASSING OF HARRY BELAFONTE

I return to your stories of Hamburg in the fifties
among the "jazzers"
dancing and music in rebuilding
steered from sirens
barracks and little to eat
yet your smile when you spoke of him
the songs and that charm
I get to reminisce you as a teenager
and tonight
you both playing cards and singing



Ethereal Thoughts, 2022
Magazine clippings, ink; 9 x 12 in



Everything's Constantly Changing, 2022
Magazine clippings, ink; 9 x 12 in

MOTHER, SON, AND THE 'PRINCE OF THIEVES'

~for Mami

a half day from school
uncharacteristically you bring up the movies
not errands, work, or the chiropractor
just us at the Main Art Theatre in Royal Oak
opened a half-century ago
a few months after your birth

minutes into the movie
you hide from the screen
a hand on stone for stealing
it would be the first scene you would share with others
later Robin Hood nude in a waterfall
you clear your throat then smile

time lulled in afternoon
the waning of seventh grade
we would talk of this
how we stole an afternoon together



I'm Losing My Mind, 2020
Magazine clippins, ink; 18 x 12 in

FIRST DISH

the four of us in the kitchen
mimicking mami as she sets
cuts and heats
I ask if I may cook
fumbling the spices
I remove a plate from the cabinet and begin
dashing oregano, cumin, salt, paprika
pepper, thyme, rosemary, a little cinnamon
I decide to finish the recipe with bay leaves
layer each one for substance
make it look like a proper dish
then guess the correct time
for warming in the microwave

DR. NO ON A SCHOOL NIGHT

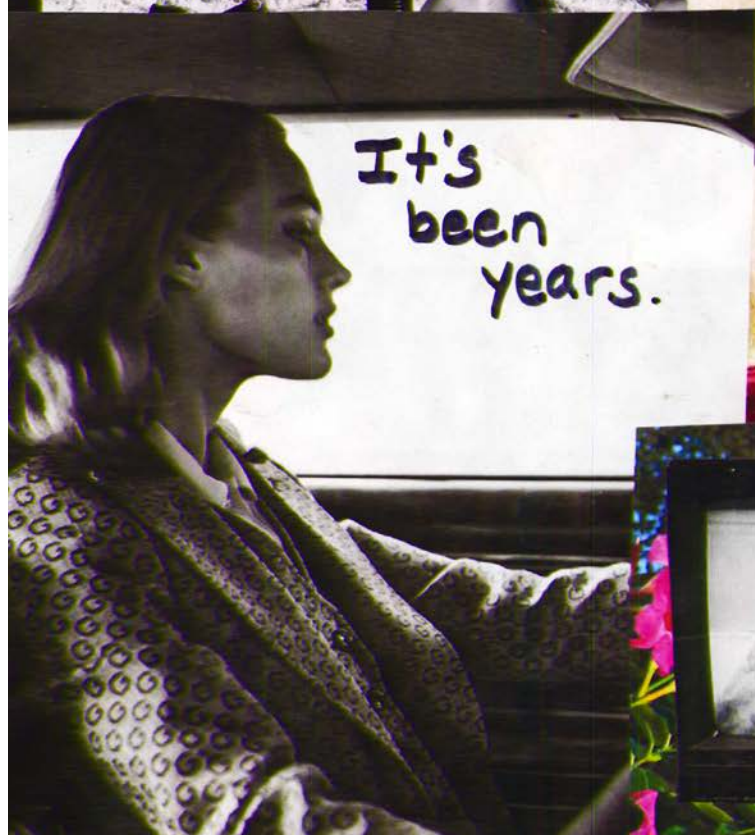
~for Blake and Phil

you're the only kid in seats
while the organ hums up front
a few more walk in
high schoolers and younger
yet mostly couples in their sixties and seventies
several hands raised to the guest speaker
on seeing this at the theatre in '63
hundreds of us by the previews
after who worked on the film and fun facts
peanut butter, chocolate, peppermint, sour gummies
with seashells, a spider, that gray suit
a crease in the pillowcase
talk of dragons on an island
the three of us seeing dogs
chase the three of them

(Pp. 48)

It's Been Years, 2020

Magazine clippings, ink; 9 x 12 in



OF THORN AND BRISTLES

Poems and photographs by Ana M. Fores Tamayo

Poems written in both Spanish and English–

An interpretation, not a translation

(because translation is never poetry)

Those letters you wrote me, I imagined
in their green and yellow envelopes wrapped in ribbon
coated red, stacked full, bursting, filled with scribbles, artwork
of our love, our commiseration,
yet ousted into solitary snows of yesteryear.
They remained an elusive memory
of...

No. I will never stain my recollection
of those ink-bled hands with anything of clouded skies,
of darkened bark, of thorn and bristles.
That was not death nor snow nor winter,
not leaves forlorn with autumn's night,
but love's translucent missives echoing in the whispering winds,
a brightened hope eclipsed in words transcending time.



Birds in Snow
Photography

DE ESPINAS Y PÚAS

Las cartas que me escribías, las que imaginaba
en sus sobres verdes y amarillos, envueltas en cintas
revestidas de rojo, repletas de garabatos: notas
de nuestro amor, de nuestra pena,
aún desterradas a las nieves de antaño.
Permanecieron un recuerdo impreciso
de...

No. Nunca mancharé mis recordatorios
de esas manos-salpicadas de tinta-con cielos cargados,
sombrias costras, espinas y púas.
Eso no fue ni muerte ni nieve ni invierno.
No fueron hojuelas tristes en noche de otoño,
sí no, fueron lúcidas misivas de amor silbando en los susurrantes vientos,
fe iluminada eclipsando palabras que trascienden la eternidad.

MY MAMA'S WASH

I remember staring at my mother doing never-ending chores.
The red and purple sheets, *sábanas* washed so often, hung up to dry,
their colors frightfully faded, *pero no en la memoria*.
The endless diapers my little sisters used: *eran dos de ellas*
so diapers were always washed,
were always hanging,
were always drying in the wind-
hot & languid days, *recuerdo de esos días*.
I was too young to tell back then,
but my mother's back would always hurt-
she would weep secretly into those washed and rewashed sheets.
I did not know it was her tears that made the brown mauve circles
of those bed clothes especially smell of mom...
The purple white stripe linen was my favorite,
it made my bunk feel warm and soft and safe and cozy,
a clean laundry-fresh of wind tucked inside a bed of dreams,
even if ever worn-out, *desgastada*.
Because in those washings I could always whiff the scent of mama,
even when I was too young to know
That I was missing her before her leaving.
I could almost touch her hands, *sus manos*,
feel the red and calloused knuckles
holding down too many clothespins,
so she would not need to lumber back and forth,
back and forth between humbled house and clothes line,
washing rags, cleaning babies, drying sheets,
asking me and sister-help, *no molesten*.
But I forgot all that.
Her hands across those worn-out sheets,
the different hues of color rustling in the soft brown wind,
that smell of her, imbued with fresh-air country wind and balding bedsheets,
will always trace her timeless essence back to me.

MI MAMÁ LAVANDO ROPA

*Written simultaneously in both Spanish and English—
An interpretation, not a translation
(because translation is never poetry)*

Recuerdo a mi madre sudando sus labores de nunca terminar.
Recuerdo las sábanas rojas, moradas, lavadas tantas veces, colgadas a secar,
sus colores desteñidos, pero no en la memoria.
Los perpetuos pañales que usaban mis hermanitas: eran dos de ellas
así que los pañales siempre se lavaban,
siempre se colgaban,
siempre se secaban con el viento endeble—
tiempos calurosos, lánguidos—nostalgia de esos días.
Era demasiado joven para pensarlo en ese entonces
pero a mi madre siempre le dolía su pobre espalda,
siempre lloraba entre esas sábanas lavadas y vueltas a lavar.
Yo no comprendía que sus lágrimas convertían los marrones malva
de esas sábanas al perfume de mi mami ...
La de lino viejo con rayas blancas y violetas era mi favorita.
Mi litera se sentía cálida, suave, segura y acogedora:
ropa limpia—frescura de remolino—enredada en mi cama de ilusiones,
aunque siempre esas sábanas siguieran desgastadas, envejecidas.
Pero con esos enjuagues podía aspirar el aroma de mamá,
incluso cuando era demasiado joven para saber
que la extrañaba antes que se fuera.
Casi podía acariciar sus brazos, sus manos,
sentir los nudillos rojos y callosos
sujetando demasiadas pinzas para colgar la ropa,
para no tener que andar pesadamente de un lado a otro,
ida y vuelta entre casa humilde y tendedero,
lavando trapos, bañando a los bebés, secando sábanas,
rogándonos a mi y a mi hermana, “ayuden, no molesten”.
Pero ya olvidé todos esos días.
Sus manos sobre esas sábanas tan viejas,
los diferentes tonos de color susurrando en el suave viento,
su fragancia, saturando el aire fresco y las sábanas deshilachadas,
siempre me recordarán su esencia eterna, me la devolverán a mí.

CONFLICT

Trapped between two languages
I feel as if I were...
no one.

I understand that language may romance me,
its escalating rhythm,
its ardent nectar.
Words that are understood
but so little known
indeed seduce me,
their musical sounds dance with me,
fly on high,
hide among the sighs,
the slights of hand, the solitary snubs.

But when I speak
still I do not understand
the possessive disorder
of my other tongue,
those words that are so different,
not my own,
words that choke me
through two confounded languages.

The more sober one always excels,
that one knight errant,
the masculine aggressive yin
of that other,
the foreign language that until recently
I thought was mine.

But it is not,
because with sweet lyrics,
passionate, instinctual:
the rhythm of the tongue
is peerless,
and my language
is the mother where
I was born.

CONFLICTO

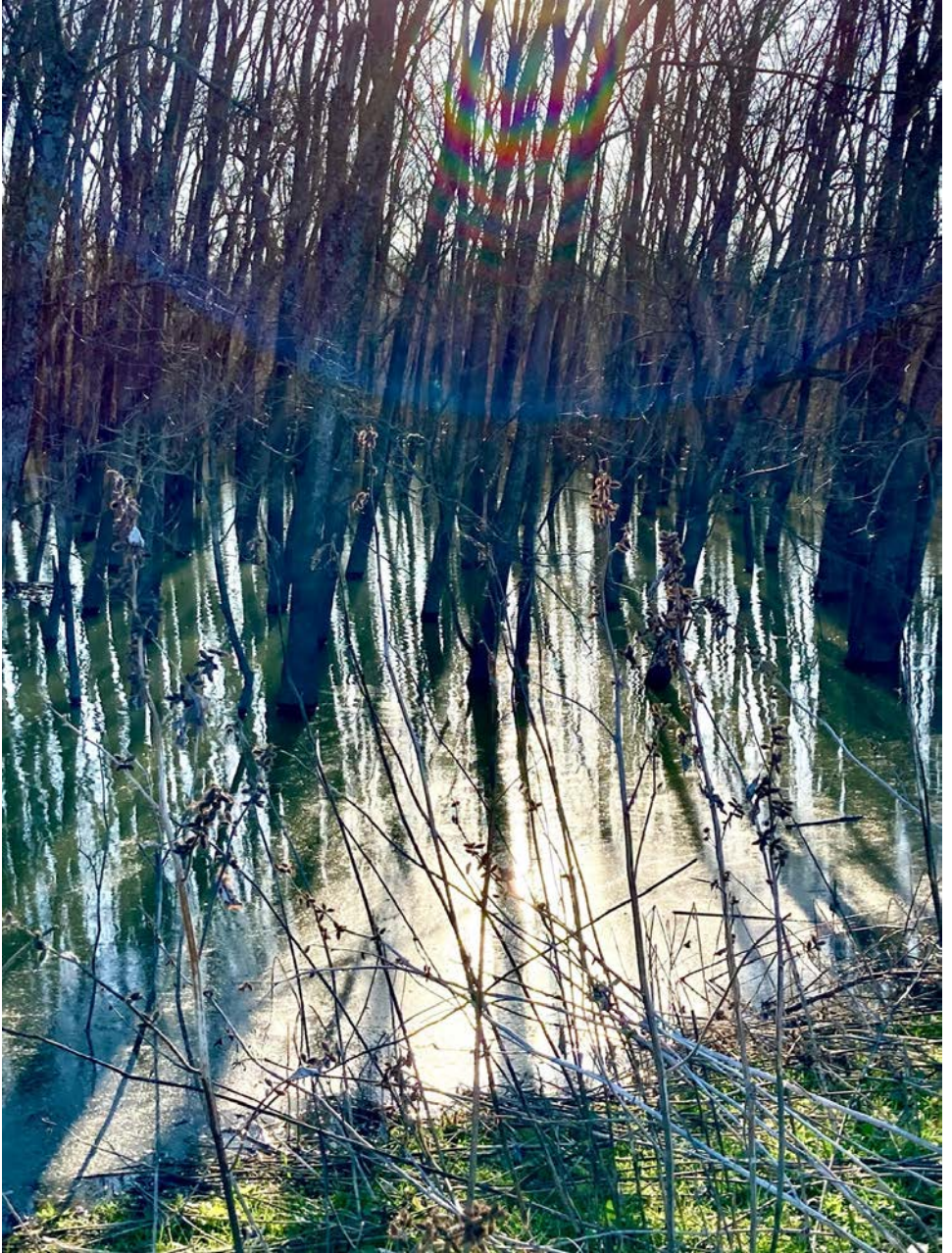
Atrapada entre dos idiomas
me siento...nadie.

Entiendo que me quiera atraer el romance
de la lengua,
su ritmo escalante,
su sabrosura ardiente.
Las palabras entendidas
y tan poco conocidas
también me seducen,
y el sonido musical me baila,
vuela alto,
se esconde entre los suspiros
y desaires solitarios.

Pero cuando hablo aún no entiendo
el desorden posesivo
de mi otra lengua,
esas palabras que son otras,
no las mías,
que me ahorcan
a través de dos idiomas confundidos.

Siempre sobresale el más sobrio,
el más andante,
el son masculino y agresivo
de ese otro,
el idioma ajeno que hasta poco
creía yo que era el mío.

Pero no lo es,
porque con palabras dulces,
apasionadas e instintivas,
el ritmo de la lengua
es único,
y mi idioma
es la madre en donde
yo nací.



Green-eyed Tangle, 2020
Photography

IVIED JUNGLE

Incandescent fires malign
the serpent of my desires
as I sit vacantly staring at the
Brazilian instrument that shimmers
like a sumptuous sculpture,
radiant against the brown-skinned tone of wood,
the pellets of its music hanging
string by string to lyric, soundless of
hubris, hungers amalgamated
to form one tone,
one sound,
one pitch of nightfall.

Yet the horse neighs quietly in its corner
and listens to the wood, cold with expectation.

The silence of the snows deepens
in the winter of her discontent
and she cannot shake the shadows
beloved but abandoned,
bemused yet so bewildered...

Where are we headed?
Why do the wind chimes linger when they sing?
When will the headstone cross its picket-line to revel in
that moment of forbidden time?
What will the rood bear if not the burden
of the ancients, the worries of her history,
the tribulations of a life gone wrong?

The masks upon the wall all stare at her
beyond the ages,
the shadows lurk in silenced dreams to shutter her
misunderstood vexations.
But she gets up, looks over at the wind chimes
purposely peeling their yet not blossomed bells,
and then she shepherds slowly over to her ivy,
to her green-eyed forest,
as she begins to water the jungle of her heart.

HIEDRA ENSELVADA

Alumbrados fuegos calumnian
la serpiente de mis deseos
mientras me hallo vagamente espiando el
instrumento brasilero que brilla
como una suntuosa escultura,
radiante contra el tono de madera con piel marrón,
el perdigón de música colgando
cuerda a cuerda con la letra, sin sonido de
arrogancia, hambrunas amalgamadas
para formar un tono,
un sonido,
Un paso del anochecer.

Sin embargo, el caballo relincha en silencio por su esquina
y escucha al bosque, frío con expectación.

El silencio de las nieves se profundiza
en el invierno de su descontento
y ella no puede sacudir las sombras
amadas pero abandonadas,
perplejas y tan turbadas...

¿A donde vamos?
¿Por qué persisten las campanillas cuando cantan?
¿Cuándo cruzará la tumba su piquete para gozar
ese momento de tiempo clandestino?
¿Qué llevará la cruz si no la carga
de los antiguos, las preocupaciones de su historia,
Las tribulaciones de una vida que salió tan mal?

Las máscaras en la pared la juzgan
más allá de las edades,
las sombras acechan silenciados sueños para cerrarle
las molestias siempre mal pensadas.
Pero ella se levanta, vela los cascabeles
sonando sus timbres aún no florecidos,
y luego pasa lentamente a su hiedra,
a su bosque de ojos verdes,
mientras comienza a regar la jungla de su corazón.

OZYMANDIAS' *COLOSSAL* *WRECK*

(in homage to Percy Bysshe Shelley)

Serpentine trails stretch downward toward the Rio Grande,
jungled twines on the canopy of heavens.
I walk, meander in and out of dreams toward my future faith
but then the passage metamorphoses and you step forth:
geometrical obtrusions getting in the way, I lose my path.
Home is where the heart is, but isn't it
the goddess of my dreams to find the rock that lay with you,
or is it me that makes reality, that makes the science of *escuincles* new?

Paint the world with color bright:
I do myself that honor with archeological discoveries and bony structures
chanced upon the hidden quarries at a vanished cave, lost to the violence of men
battling for absolute power that—like Ozymandias' *colossal wreck*—lectures
destroy, forget: like your love whose fleeting absence
I understand now will always be a transitory trick of light.





BREAKING ORIENTAL TROPES

The Flat Files: Artist Interviews & Studio Visits featuring Ye Xuanlin

The Flat Files is a growing virtual archive of artist conversations highlighting the inequalities of gender, race, and class in the art world. In addition to these conversations, artists are given a platform to share their studio space, where ideas and creativity happen, regardless if it's their bedroom or a professional space.

About Ye Xuanlin

Xuanlin Ye works and lives in Chicago. He received his BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2017), received his MFA from Hoffberger School of Painting at Maryland Institute College of Art (2020), and graduated from the University of Chicago with an MA in Art History (2022). Ye completed his thesis under the guidance of renowned art historian Wu Hung. He is the recipient of the Hoffberger Fellowship and MFA Juried Exhibition in Print by New American Painting featuring one issue #159. He has been exhibited around the world, including Still, life at Art Cake Brooklyn, NY (2021), and has been featured at the Asian Students and Young Artists Art Festival at Hongik Museum of Art in Seoul, Korea (2021). His work was exhibited in art fairs, including Art San Diego(2022) and the art expo Dallas Taxes (2022), and the MDW art fair in Chicago (2022).

Website: www.yexuanlin.com

Instagram: @yexuanlin

Artist Statement

My artistic practice delves into the complex tapestry of intertwined themes and historical legacies, weaving a narrative that explores the intricate connection between Asian American personhood and the rich heritage of Asian art traditions. Drawing inspiration from diasporic objects that reside in Western museums, my paintings serve as a platform to recontextualize, interrogate, and unravel the layers of colonial legacy. Through the physical manipulation of paint, I take the imag-

ery of traditional Asian tropes and question them on the canvas in a humorous or insouciant way.

As a painter, I use my creative process to interrogate and reflect upon the complex nexus of the image's origin, its historical and environmental contexts, and the formulation of artistic visual language. I frequently paint on top of photo-transferred images to manipulate, alter, and comment upon the image's cultural content. This act of painting becomes a reconstruction of the narrative of the painting itself, in addition to the allegories contained within, while serving as a deconstruction of the meaning of photo-transferred images. The painting process raises many questions for me as an artist, such as: How are images culturally conditioned? How does history help form images? What is the tight-linked relationship between my identity as an artist and the subject matter that the audience expects to see?

By subverting established visual tropes, my work challenges prevailing narratives and invites viewers to critically engage with the cultural implications embedded within the imagery. Through humor and playfulness, I seek to dismantle stereotypes and spark dialogue surrounding the multifaceted experiences of Asian-Americans in relation to historical aesthetics and contemporary society. With each brushstroke and choice of materials, I aim to dismantle stereotypes and reclaim agency for Asian-Americans, offering a compelling visual commentary on the entangled intersections of history, aesthetics, and sociocultural dynamics.

Welcome Ye, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Hi, My name is Xuanlin, I am a painter, art historian, and art educator currently residing in Chicago, Illinois. I specialize in exploring images with rich cultural contexts and questioning their meanings through editing and experimentation in my canvas. My work often incorporates traditional Chinese elements and reinterprets them in a contemporary way. By manipulating and transforming these images, I aim to create a sense of tension and invite viewers to reconsider their understanding of cultural symbols.

In your artist statement, you write about many themes of identity from your own diasporic experience to the Western fetishization and whitewashing of Asian identity and history. How are you thinking about these themes in your painting practice?

In a recent conversation with my partner, she pointed out that my painting, in essence, is a form of self-constructing as a method to collage my



Ornament Flowers, 2022
Mixed media; 10 x 8 in



Porcelain Fragments, 2022
Mixed media; 10 x 8 in

experience in a 2-dimensional space. I come from a small town in China called Wenzhou, located in the south of China near the Sea. Geographically it's surrounded by hills and mountains and has no land to farm, so historically the people of Wenzhou have been encouraged to leave, and relocate abroad. Many of my relatives have relocated to other cities or live abroad. So this experience of living outside of Wenzhou becomes a generational experience. The idea of running from the land in which we are born, becomes common knowledge. I think that has something to do with my painting, you know, I came to the US when I was 19, and went through a transformative experience of like receiving this American education, and then having lived here for so long, I guess, I needed a way to really construct my own experiences and identity through my work. So, I wanted to resonate my personal experience with themes such as "western fetishization" and "white washing of Asian bodies." I'm thinking about how those themes are part of the whole experience, and then me as a container. Like incorporating these themes into my paintings is just one aspect of the whole experience.

How are you creating points of entry for the audience to engage in dialogue with your subject matter? Is it through artwork titles or descriptions?

I think the entry point for my work is often the visual itself, although, there is so much personal experience and thoughts behind all the work. I believe the work itself should, at foremost, be visually interesting and create a sense of aurora to invite my viewers to look at my work. Then, if people are interested and they start to look into the painting, they start to see those more complex questions.

I wanted to create a space where the viewer can challenge themselves where their preconceived notions of whatever the imagery means for them. But I think that work should challenge, and if they read more, that 'ah-ha!' movement is also rewarding.

Do you incorporate Western iconography to challenge or create tension in your work?

Yes, incorporating Western iconography in my painting is one of the ways of play in my work. I really enjoy using those iconographies in my work as a way to create a sense of tension or using them purely as a visual device in my painting.

For example, in my painting "Untitled" I photo transferred an image

of a blue horse from the Nelson Arkin Museum of Art's Chinese collection. Then, at the bottom of the painting, I cut out a silhouette of a man riding a horse, running. The image is from the 1878 American photographer, Eadweard Muybridge, who made the first moving image. In a sense, it was also the first GIF.

At the time, I thought there was something very interesting between the dichotomy of one image that marks the technological innovation of mankind, and one image of a horse sitting in a museum in America where it's original purpose was to be entombed in the ground with the hope that someone can ride the horse into the afterlife.

You talk about notions of "orientalism" being woven into American culture. Can you explain what you mean and how you are reclaiming the visual imagery of Asian art?

I think I should explain what "orientalism" as being woven into the American cultural fabric means for me.

From the 1800s, porcelain was a material craved by American consumers due to the difficulties of travel and also China's strict travel policy set by the Qing court. Porcelain became a surface of imagination for the Westerner, and the goods from this land of "otherness" became very rare and highly fetishized. So from the very beginning, China and "Chineseness" were closely linked to an exoticized "Other." And from this mentality and cultural condition many images are made to be used and to be consumed by this culture of "orientalism."

And for me it's very interesting to embrace those notions and ideas and use those imagery in my painting.

For some artists of color, there is an expectation for one's artistic practice to "play up" to their identities, oppression, and histories. How are you navigating the "racial performance" when presenting your work and discussing themes of belonging and place in the art world?

During my early artistic career, I was still in this exploratory mode. I was struggling to find a way of painting that was truly representative of who I am. I made a large painting that is similar to early abstract expressionism with a 'zest of zen'.

I received a lot praise for the painting, however, I was not really pleased with it because I thought it was a painting that reflected on my stereotyped understanding of modernized Asian landscape painting. The praise from my classmates and professors only made me more sus-



Untitled (Gold Leaf and Horse), 2022
Acrylic, photo transferred, gold leaf; 18 x 24 in

picious that my painting represented their mystic Oriental trope rooted in the colonial-era cultural understanding. The painting I had made was influenced by the artists Zhang da Dian and Zhao Wuki, who were both working in the 1950s with a similar goal to modernize the Chinese painting, but I was also influenced by Western abstract expressionist artist.

I look back now, and I really appreciated those moments of my audience responses and my thought process at the time. I think yes, as an artist of color, we feel like our artistic practice should play up to our identities, oppression, and histories. But I feel that through those lenses, I am able to discuss very specific topics within my human condition. I am deeply concerned and curious about the corporal experience of the yellow body in the West. It was not long ago that eight women were brutally murdered in a massage parlor in Atlanta, and even a couple of weeks ago a Chicago man, while traveling in Germany, sexually assaulted and murdered an Asian American woman in a tourist spot. I wonder, 'what does it mean to be viewed as hyper-sexualized, yet at same time, be desexualized?' 'What does it mean when my flesh is turned into an object, and the object of my culture is both appreciated yet tainted with all kinds of ideas?' I try to not bring in too much emotion, but to peek in as an observer, and to use my canvas as a way to take apart small symbols and really question, 'how does this imagery look at both by my peers and the public? And 'how does the imagery function for them, and how does it function within my painting?'

Your practice reminds me of the Filipino artist, Stephanie Syjuco, who creates parodies the imperial museum and looting practices that make up the foundations of Western collections. You also use museum collections in your work, and so what kind of museums do you seek out and what type of collection do you gravitate towards?

I think both of us are very interested in the symbolism of images. I was also watching her interview a couple days ago, I feel artist who are going through this legal process of visa and immigration often have big impacts on their work. The idea of being a legalized body seems so black and white, and as an artist, it's inevitable to question and wonder about the degree of the grey and who I really am in the process.

When I go to museum to visit an Asian art collection, I really enjoy the paintings and ceramics. Sometimes I try to look at stuff if there are interesting patterns and unique motifs that I can incorporate into my own work. I went to the Nelson Arkins Museum of Art a couple of months ago,

and they have this wonderful life sized Guanyin sitting in front of a Buddhist themed mural. Having studied those objects with specialist, Lin Weichen at the University of Chicago, I finally understand the weight of those histories these objects hold. I was wondering, what it means to have a temple taken apart piece-by-piece, cut up block-by-block, and then transported to another side of the world to be installed for display.' Sometime I wonder how the Guanyin feels, to be a God in a land where she supposes to be worshiped, now merely an object of beauty sitting very still in a museum space. Within the museum there's a certain aura of time. What I want to do is bring an object out of the museum, already without context and reappropriate it into my paintings to address the object in a way that tries to give back more context.

The first step is usually sketching, and then finding an object that I want to bring into a painting. Then I do this layer of photo-transfer and that becomes my subject which creates a lot of interesting problems for me. Although the initial sketch my take you somewhere, it might only take you to a certain level of place. Sometimes the painting just doesn't work out and you have to reinterpret the subject again to see how the painting functions. So that's where relationships need to happen between the object as historically significance, but also as an image within my painting.

You also write that museum's Asian collections are diasporic. Can you explain more and what specific motifs or icons you use that speak to that?

Interestingly, when I am searching for imagery, I try to avoid imagery with too much cultural context because it is very difficult to work with too. That the viewer's understanding of the work is limited by that sometimes. I still know where the object is from, but I also want to have this hint of the origin of the object because I think there's a really fine line of ambiguity and level of specificity. I'm using those images as pictorial devices to drive my paintings further.

When I talk to my Asian peers, many of them try to go back their roots in their practice. But going back to their roots is so complicated, because if I do something "zen" it's already so tainted with so much connotation. I have to address a very specific question that's happening in the US, like how those themes are being seen? So in that way, I'm being pushed towards a new frontier in reclaiming imagery in my work.

I imagine that you have two types of viewers: people within your community with similar identities and understanding of your work, and those who are not. Who do



Aubade of Sunken Flower Vase, 2023
Mixed media; 12 x 12 in

imagine your viewer being, and how are you reaching out to those who might not understand the themes of your work?

This is a great question!

I also think there are two type of the viewers, but most of the time I assume they arrive to a similar understanding of my work. Even if they have a different understanding of my work, I think what my job is, as an artist, is to nudge my audience to see the work as they have never fully realized before. I want to have my work speak for me, even to those who are outside of my cultural background. I want my work to challenge their preconceived notions of those images and materials that appear in my paintings. And for those who have a similar background, I also want use my painting to challenge their fixed understanding of their lineage and cultural understanding.

The challenge is that paint exists on a 2-dimensional surface. As a painter, I think that if the painting is visually interesting—it's painterly, it makes sense—but also has that layer of push-and-pull relationship then you've defined the obstacle. Once the painting already functions at the level its supposed to be functioning, then where ever my viewer's level comes from, they're already having a very interesting play with the painting.

Do you have any final thoughts or announcements you would like to share?

I don't, I wish I did!



ONE MORE THING

Text by Lee Eustace
Artwork by R. Galvan

'Ours'—something belonging to two or more persons.

'Is'—a state of being in the here and now.

'A'—some grammatical construct I don't know the name of.

'Fraught'—danger (or the potential for); balanced on a knife-edge.

'Relationship'—the 'ou' give and take; this time shared between one (possible a selfhood thing) or more persons or entities, I suppose.

'The comma'—eliciting a pause; suspenseful; a penchant for the dramatic.

'Really'—backing up or supporting all that I've mentioned thus far; pre-empting the corollary of, 'Are ye sure?'; emphasising what I've already said...

Ours is a fraught relationship, really.

The words cling in my head. Had I heard them on television that evening? Did I believe them? Were they from the book I tried to read last weekend? No time to discern as the door widens and she re-enters.

"I've put the kids down."

"Great. How's Tiff doing with her cough?"

"Getting there. She'll be fit for a good night's sleep. That's if Shane settles and lets his little sister sleep." We look towards one another in a kind of nervousness.

"Yeah," I continue. "We'll see soon enough. I could do with a good night myself... Will we finish this one episode and head up after?"

"Sure. This and maybe the start of another? I've got a later start tomorrow. I've no morning appointments but if you're feeling tired just say the word after this one. Okay?" "Well, yea—"

"Hang on, I can hear his game going on up there. I warned him while I was putting Tiff down..."

"SHANE," I call up. "You better have that turned off this minute or else I'll be up to take it off you. And it won't be returned tomorrow either... I can promise you that." A telling silence follows. Which we take as a concession on his part.

"Him and that stupid game," I begin before I'm interrupted.

"We really should think about using the box room to split them up. It hasn't really been working for us."

I inhale sharply—not necessarily voluntarily—and promptly shift my position

on the seat. Right leg over left this time. My movements say enough and Maria begins to qualify her suggestion: "I know, sweetie. I know. It's hard on you with the business."

I clear my throat in the hope that it will have a similarly altering effect on her speech. It doesn't. "I just wish," she continues. "I wish that we could wave a wand or have one of those television architects in to change things..."

I sense her mind wandering to all the 'possibilities' and 'opportunities' that a renovation of our home might yield. My mind, meanwhile, is fraught with the blow of her having mentioned *that room* again.

That stupid room.

That and that fact that unless an architect were to knock down the wall into the Byrnes next door and have them evicted, then there would be no 'possibilities' and 'opportunities,' not at the cost we could muster anyhow.

I find myself to be far too tired to discuss this flavour of the month again. Not now. And I pinch my eyelids awake—definitely voluntarily—and glance to my right just in time to receive a kiss on my cheek. "I'll just press play on this so we can finish it and get the next one started. Jen is always at me to keep up so we can chat about it over lunch or if the salon is quiet and Lorraine isn't around."

I laugh inwardly and give a delayed chuckle. It doesn't matter, though, as its purpose is lost to the sound of the television. The episode is back playing.

* * *

I wake at six thirty and, after the inevitable shifts and groans that accompany my getting out of bed, I kiss Maria lightly on the forehead. The kiss is a semi-permeable one in the sense that I do it so that Maria feels it in her half-sleep but I do it lightly enough so that it doesn't wake her fully. A vestige of over ten years together, one might say.

In the kitchen, I click down the kettle and begin mentally crossing off parts of my morning routine that can't take place with Shane not in school today and my parents out of the country. Removed from their childminding post.

There's the morning shower—too noisy and that—meaning I will need to find a different stimulus to shake off the morning feeling. The temptation to offset my morning tea for a stronger variant is rejected, as I think better of caffeine loading too early with a full day of minding the kids to follow whatever hours of work I can produce first.

Thankfully, Shane hadn't made me make a point of taking away his game last night: that would have opened me up to an afternoon that I wasn't prepared for. I ponder what I can best use to settle Tiff down later this afternoon? Her latest cartoon favourite isn't proving too popular recently. There's that to be figured out.



Silence Between The Pages, 2023
Digital collage, archival inkjet print; 20 x 30 in



Pink Is For Boy's Suit, 2023
Digital collage, archival inkjet print; 20 x 30 in

And she has that cough. I wonder how it is? I crane around the base of the stairs to see if I can hear any murmurings from the bedroom. Nothing so far. All good on that front until we aren't anymore.

I feel a strain in my neck and then realise that the chance to do my half hour morning workout is lost, too. There just isn't time for it all if Maria needs to leave by lunch. I press the teabag down against the rim of the mug. Harder than I'd like. As if the single rep of spoon clamping would compensate for the missed reps of exercise. I add a swish of milk.

Over my first sip, I decide that I'll leave out the fifteen minutes on the bike and the three minutes of core blasting to focus on the seven minutes of stretching instead. It feels every bit like a Thursday in my evermore creaking body. At least the morning stretching (got to look after that pinched neck) and health shake—not too bad for green stuff actually—had been helping with that of late. Fortunately, I had been prepared enough to make my shake ahead of time. That should help sort out the body enough for a morning's work.

My next concern shifts upstairs; not to the sleeping family above me, but to the foggy feeling in my brain. I lie flat on my stomach on the exercise mat, plant the palms of my hands firmly on the ground and drive my shoulders up to shape myself like a cobra; or at least that's what the experts call it.

No sign of that fog shifting.

I consider what else I'll miss out on this morning with the adjusted schedule. My morning mental routine will be altered. There's the inevitable twenty minutes of podcast listening that usually accompanies my bike exercises. Gone. That's a given.

"Picture Perfect Businessman," which I listen to every Thursday—twenty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the car to collect Tiff and Shane in the afternoon—will have to wait until another listening opportunity presents itself.

Crap!

Today's the episode which has that interview I was waiting for with the copywriting fella that I had wanted to hear from. That's going to delay the proposal I was looking to get around to work on.

I shake my head—not voluntarily—in exasperation and examine the rest of the mental routine that might come under threat. The 30 minutes of Spanish that I do on my Tuesday and Thursday morning break, for sure.

"!Qué pena!" I mutter in as exaggerated a Spanish accent that I can bring myself to imitate at this hour of the morning. Come to think of it, I also missed out on Tuesday's Spanish practice to drop the parents off to the airport. It was the least I could do given all the childminding they've done for us recently. Just one of those weeks, I reason, as I do my utmost to let it all go with an exhale at the end of my stretch.

Not fully awake, but more alert than I had been ten minutes before, I grab my shake from the fridge and creep upstairs towards the box room where my workstation awaits with today's agenda in the world of "Clasping Copyright," my business for the past eighteen months.

Previously, I had been mostly childminding for six months and, before that, I was working as a Features Editor at "Bloomfest Bureau: Monthly Writings to Educate and Entertain." It was a role which, surprisingly, I became rather attached to before my leaving to balance the schedules at home two years ago.

'Surprisingly'—adverb; to do something that is unexpected; for something to perform differently to pre-conceived notions.

It was surprising (my attachment to the role at Bloomfest) given that I had hastily taken the job after Maria decided to extend her maternity leave six months after Tiff was born. It wasn't like I had gone looking for that role.

Or that I even saw myself in an editor role before then...

And now here we are - on adjusted schedules.

'Adjusted'—altered; hinting that a baseline of ideas and rules to which changes were made had existed.

'Schedules'—the pro-normative, pre-conceived, human-made techniques of dicing and slicing time into a desirable (or functionable) means of digesting minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, so on so forth into the decades; a means of co-dependency; a must for family life.

Now put those words together—'adjusted schedules'—and you have the following: Maria back to work (filled with Jen's ideas); me, working in the box room, and Tiff in with Shane now that she's out of our room...

'Busier'—no need for an explanation here—is probably the word I'd use.

* * *

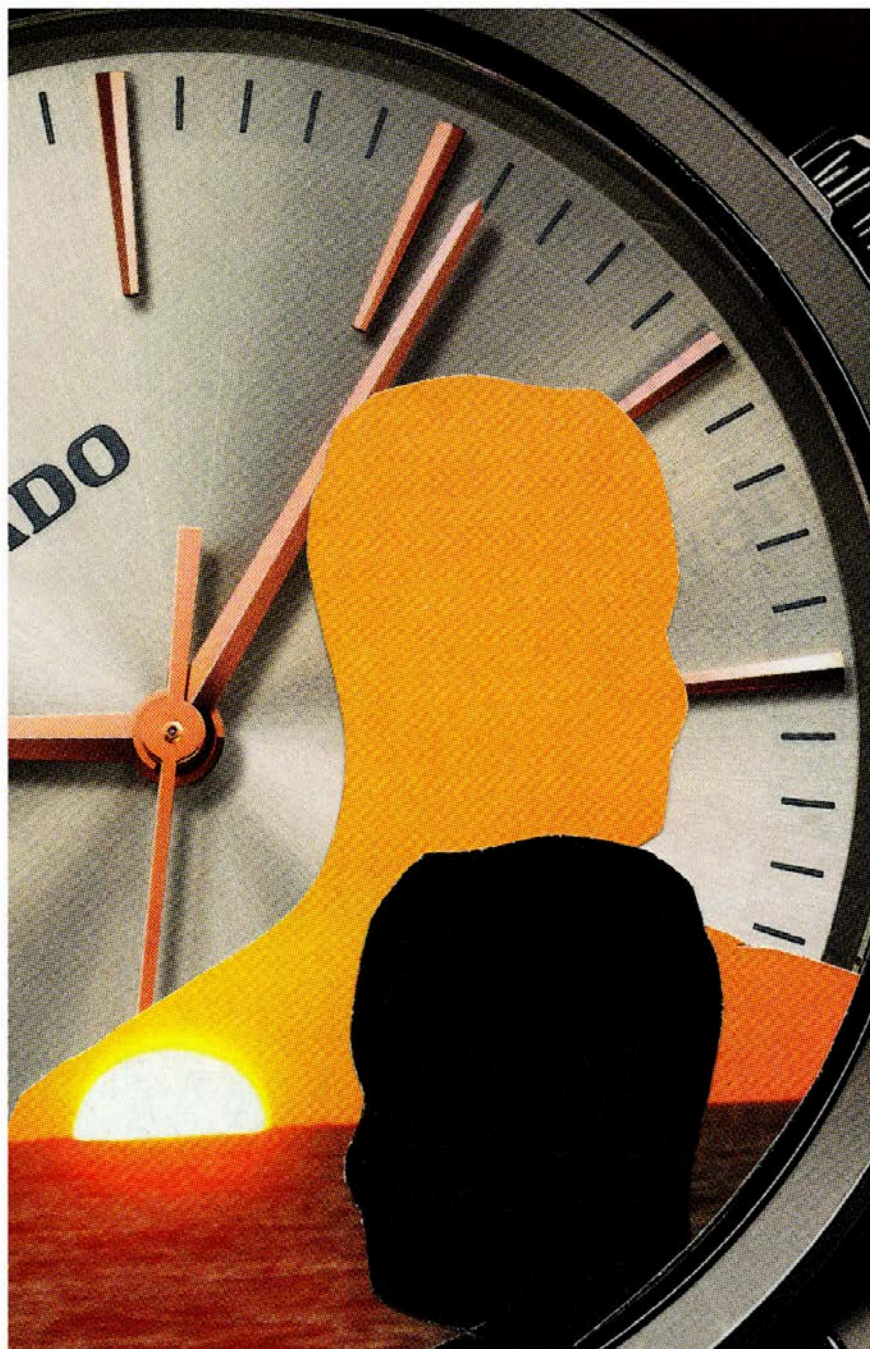
See, back when Shane was little I could freelance and work around Maria's schedule (that word again) in the salon. The two sets of grandparents helped out and it was all one big happy dance around our changing timetables (changing it up here).

The money from Maria's job sustained us and when my writing jobs landed, well, they landed. Back then I always had work. Sure, being stationary with a young child limited my travel—and, sometimes, my earning—potential but I also had the translation projects to branch into.

My college French was helpful but it was apparent that Spanish was the fastest moving market; hence the bi-weekly lessons which I have kept going to this very day. That being said, they have been faltering recently, as are my hopes of returning to that freelance lifestyle.



Hold Me Harder, Valise, 2023
Digital Collage, archival inkjet print; 20 x 30 in



In The Outline Of Time, 2023
Digital collage, archival inkjet print; 20 x 30 in

Or even to that editing one (what was once a compromise) at Bloomfest.

Worse still, lately I haven't been able to shake the displeasure of not having my morning routine that I had become accustomed to from my time at "Bloomfest". While working there, I would arrive to the office at eight (following a brisk twenty-minute cycle to get there) and I had the chance to shower off both the exercise and the crass cobwebs from a night of interrupted sleep that usually preceded. Back then, it was life with a recent toddler-graduate and a baby, after all.

But, five minutes and a bowl of porridge at my desk later, I felt ready to take on the world. Bloomfest style. I had never really known how natural it all felt, right down to the morning break at half ten, which I took for granted.

'Morning break' (in the context of that period in time)—post-mortem football chats, aperitifs of weekend plans, and holiday comparisons.

* * *

Here and now, confirming that the time is, in fact, half ten, I am hurtling down the stairs to scoff down my oats so that I can then make a follow-up call to a business enquiry that I've been working on. This is all before Maria fully hands over the kids to me when she leaves a little before noon.

I can hear Tiff's cough from the top of the stairs. "Not today," I mouth. "Just five minutes of leniency," I ask aloud to no particular person or life form.

'Five minutes of leniency' (again, in this exclusive content)—indistinct voices somewhere in the house; pot crashing onto the tiled floor as soon as my oats are placed in the microwave; Shane's football whizzing past the corner of my eye; his hurtling body quickly following.

"SHAANNEE!" I can't help but yell. "What did we say about no football in the house?"

"Sorry, dad. I didn't mean—" he mumbles.

"Good lad. Now outside to the garden if you're going to kick it again. Nowhere near the flowers that your mother has planted to the side. Understood?"

"Hmm,," I receive as a reply. I see his head shake, suggesting a displeasure I'll have to keep an eye on that for later.

The voices approach the kitchen and the ding of the microwave announces that my oats are ready. It also announces my presence in the kitchen. Maria arrives.

"Tiff's not feeling so well. Make sure to keep a good eye on her. Won't you, babe?"

"Course I will, love. How did you sleep last night?"

"Well enough," she replies. "Missed you in the bed this morning, though. I

was cold!" She leans in to kiss me and follows it up with the words "Good morning."

We both laugh. It's rare enough these days that those get to be the first words we say to each other. This time being no exception. As I try to clear my mouth of my first bite of steaming hot oats, I lean back on the countertop and catch Maria's attention before she swivels out the door: "You can watch Tiff for another hour. Can't you? While I follow up on that call I was telling you about."

"Sure. Just tell me where Shane is before I go in and have her cuddle onto my lap."

"Out the back kicking his ball, don't you know! Only after he tried his best to have a warm-up in the kitchen. As I'm sure you heard."

"I hope he's staying well clear of those flowers I planted. The girls in work said they should be blooming soon. Jen—"

"He's been well warned anyway, love. I'll keep an eye on him out the window. And at least staying away from the flowers might keep him up the other end so I can get a bit of quiet on the phone. If a couple of these pitches go well, we might be able to put that box room to better use after all," I find myself asserting.

Maria looks at me in surprise as if to ask that question that I've been posing the whole time. "I'd love an actual cycle to work again!" I pronounce by way of answering.

'Actual cycle'—a battle against the elements to commute to where it is that I might be working; the implication being that I won't be working in this house of madness; the possibility of returning to fresh air and showers in the morning time; the opposite of a forced twenty-minute stationary job that has to do for now...

My voice trails as I turn and nod discriminately towards my stationary exercise bike in the corner.

"Oh yeah?" she asks. Her interest seems low and she appears to be preoccupied by her own tasks at hand.

I nod and turn to head up the stairs. It isn't until I'm about a third of the way up that I peer down and catch the corner of Maria's eyeline. "One more thing, love. It'd be great if those flowers bloomed. It's nice to see things grow...Isn't it?"

'Grow'—a process of being positively affected by a catalyst of change; a changed state; often used when speaking about flowers, or plans, or relationships, or children.

(Pp. 84)

Timeless Grid At The Beach, 2023

Digital collage, archival inkjet print; 20 x 30 in



PHASES OF THE MOON

Poems by Peter Cashorali

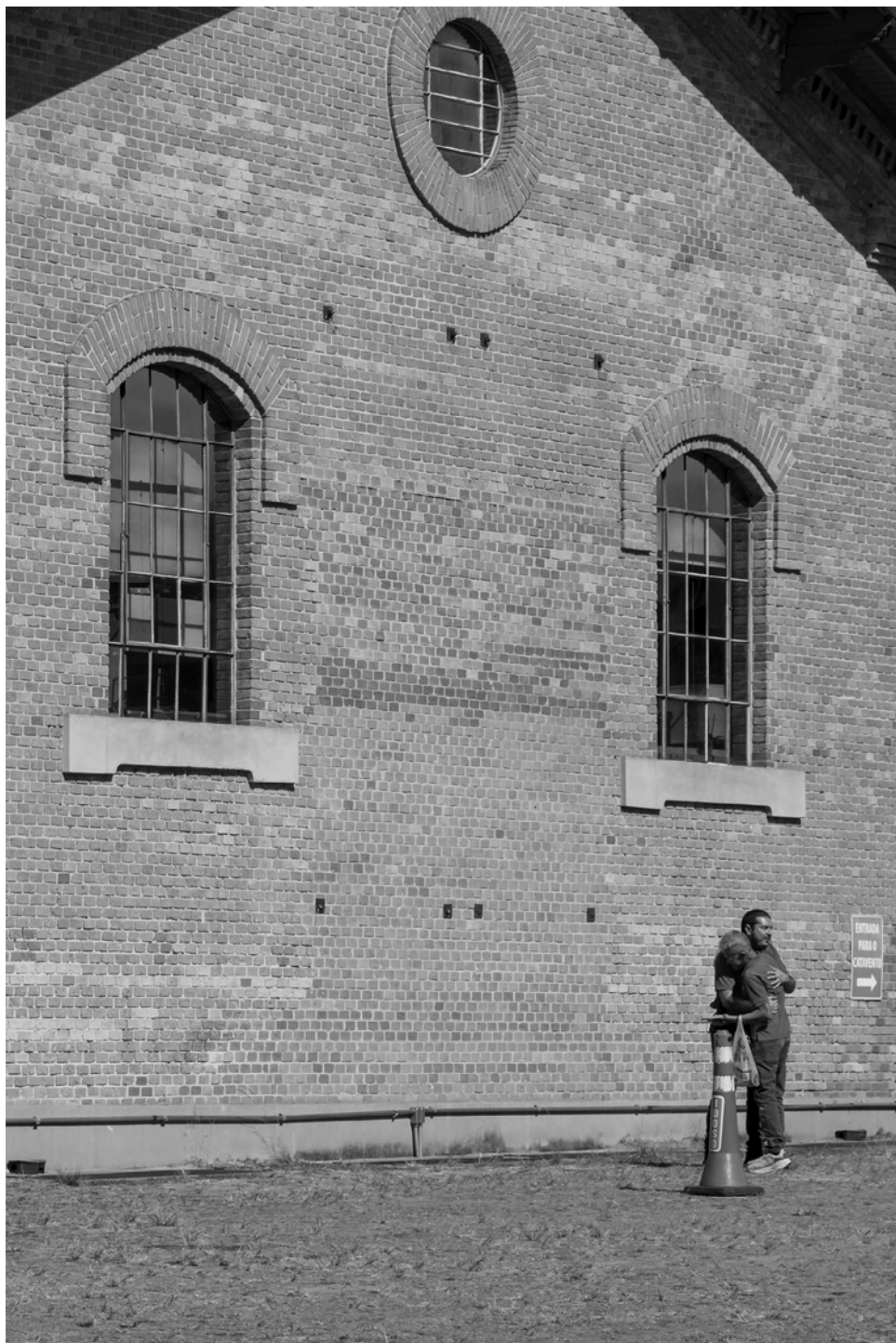
Artwork by Wictor Doarte

Picture me at seventeen,
Dreamy, clueless. Nonetheless
I've got ethical convictions
That haven't yet been put to test
But I'm pretty sure they'll hold.
When I look up at the moon
I see an old man grinning down
At everything, including me,
And judging it as good to eat
Because fit for nothing else.
He's wrong and so we'll have to fight
But so uncertain if I'll win
Or be another meal for him.

Now I'm here in middle age,
Hard at work on everything
Including taking care of who
Common sense says won't get better.
Nights I look up at the moon
I see a man, still semi-young,
Who's looking at the one he loves,
Their full light shining on his face
And though he knows that there's no chance
Goes on loving anyway.

Here I am, an older guy
Jogging down the street before
The sun's come up, to keep my bones
In complement of calcium
And ward away the heart attack.
I look up and the moon's a girl,
Eyes transparent, seeing all,
Lightened with a little humor—
All to the good, because the world's
A heavy place and otherwise
Its own weight would crush it flat.
I have a niece who looks like her
And think the world might do okay.

No surprises what comes next—
Body's going to fall away
Piece by piece and take me with it.
We'll see how much nerve I've got.
But I hope to catch a peek
Of the moon when it's a baby
Getting ready to be born,
Ready to be born down here.



Good to See You, 2023
Digital photography; 84,1 x 59,4 cm

PRINCE KAR-MI

The first time I saw Prince Kar-Mi I was 21, in a café at night, exhibiting my skills with Gauloises for coins and an occasional bill. He stood at the end of the bar, the crowd packed around him. He saw something I didn't, to which he gave all his gaze, drinking it in or giving himself for it to drink. A handsome man, Prince Kar-Mi, and the architecture of his moustache and brows filled me in on what the novels had all been talking about. Just a glimpse that time. Years later I met him again. I was in my 30s as you sometimes wake up in scrub country, miles from roads and the wrong shoes for walking, my biplane crashed and burning. The flames took forever to consume what after all was only balsa and colored silk, and worn out at that. I still loved it though, and perhaps this was why Prince Kar-Mi wouldn't give me the time of day or even a glance, having more serious matters to see to. Since then, plenty of failures, plenty of funerals, plenty of getting the shit beat out of me by what I always tried to avoid but met anyway, and a money-back guarantee that I'm one of so many there's no danger of ever running out. But I see Prince Kar-Mi from time to time and know if nothing else what this is we're looking at.

SKY

I was sitting on a bus bench
By the park at Crescent Heights,
Twenty-two and kind of clueless
But always open-eyed for one
Which is the definition of
Being clueless, don't you think?
Certainty that things make sense
If you only find a key?
This guy came downstairs from a house,
The one with the totem pole
That's still there if you look for it,
Said to me, "My name is Sky.
Like the sky," and pointed to it.
He was like a Crumb cartoon,
Franklin Freak in cowboy hat.
"Me and my friends cleaned this park—
Picked up all the trash and shit.
I need you to help us keep it
Clean the way it looks right now."
I said, "Sure," but couldn't tell
If he was serious or stoned
Or maybe simply spoofing me,
Laughing at me in a language
I heard but didn't understand.
"Like the sky," he said again.

"From now on when you see the sky
You'll think of me. Sky's my name."
Then he went back inside to
What it was that he'd been doing.
Forty years and some later
Here he is like he just happened.
Funny, right? What we're left with
From everything that came our way?
Mostly gone, perhaps you've noticed.
And the mystery of what stays.



Be a Mother, 2020
Digital photography; 84,1 x 59,4 cm



Deep Friendship, 2020
Digital photography; 84,1 x 59,4 cm



I Am Here, 2023
Digital photography; 84,1 x 59,4 cm

MEMORY

Memory's not engraved in stone
Though it assures you that it is
With the certainty of someone
Saying how the market goes
Or how best to raise your kids.
But memory is made of life
And life has no one place to stand,
Not in history or art, not
In your favorite novel when
You were seventeen that meant
So much to you, which you reread
Later on in life and it
Was completely changed, was changing
As you watched, time increasing
Between you once and you just then,
So that at first you seemed to be
That seventeen-year-old's parent,
Wanting to tell them stand up straight,
For God's sake make some other choices,
Then fond grandparent, full of love
That wasn't really needed,
And finally an ancestor,
No longer knowing them first hand
But with an abstract certainty
That things will turn out as they do,
That no matter what transpires
Something will, and whatever,
Everything will be all right.

AT THE FALLS

What was his name, my friend from school,
Back before the fashions changed,
Who had me to his parents' house
After 9 one Friday night,
Cooked us steak and fried potatoes
Brownier than I liked and later
Gave me his copy, Brautigan's
In Watermelon Sugar, with
In his tight and spikey hand
An inscription, "Peter, the words
I wanted wouldn't come. I hope
You know how much you mean." I dreamed
Him often through my twenties.
What was his name? I still knew it
Last time I remembered him.
Like coming to a cataract
Where the river falls away,
Becomes, down there, white noise and mist,
Nothing held back, all at once.
The surprise is what surprises—
When has river been concealed,
Its going always in plain sight
That slides past every house I know
And quickens everything along.
Yes, I've lost something I just had
To where I'll never get it back—
It doesn't mean my home's gone yet
Which in a minute I will prove
By being right back where I live.
But for the minute I look down
And feel the falling water's pull.
Here's where what got lost has gone.

John. That's right—his name was John.

10/9/2019



Home, 2023
Digital photography; 84,1 x 59,4 cm

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