

Dear Maja,

I remember when we first met, the way we bonded over the bizarre parallels in our upbringings. Despite coming into the world on opposite sides (you, in Nelson, and me, in Toronto), we share so many of the same experiences and internalized values. Growing up in two settler-colonial, limbs of an empire that stretched itself from your corner of the planet all the way to mine, as schoolchildren we'd learned a manicured truth. We each remember taking field trips to pioneer villages where we were taught a version of history absent of violence. We learned handicrafts in our day programs, where lessons emphasized the technical aspects but minimized where they came from.

It's funny, before we met I was never confident in my memories of growing up. Apart from a few major family events, nothing stuck out. It's as though the older you get, the more stubborn the subconscious becomes, whittling away at the past to form a discernable shape, regardless of whether or not the shape is accurate. I suspect this is a symptom of the world we live in, where the past is constantly glorified as a 'simpler time,' being flattened, condensed, and summarized into something much smaller than what it actually was or felt like. It doesn't help that my perception of time and attention span have been irreversibly altered thanks to how much time I've spent behind screens (embarrassing).

What I mean is that memory can be hard to locate, and when we do find it, it's almost impossible to understand how it's being distorted by the present. I think this is why I was so taken by the grass paintings the first time I saw them. Monochromatic scenes depicting the texture of a patch of grass recently subjected to an encounter. Impressed upon by lovers, or a struggle, the grass is a witness to an event that is familiar, but also inaccessible. Placeless, and in the paramount of its growth, the grass in these paintings clings to a feeling rather than a date. Like the amygdala, they're unbothered by logic or specifics. Inscribed in your grasses are charged moments, documented by microscopic brushstrokes, which, fittingly, are made by gestures you compare to handwriting.

The ambiguity I sense from the grass paintings is akin to how I feel when trying to access parts of my past. It's an embodied nostalgia built up of dread and intense longing, but also of idealism. For me, your recent work addresses this dissonance, this unruly knot of reality and fantasy that we call memory. When I think of the grass works, what surfaces is always slightly different. My responses are filtered through the sediment of today: what I ate for breakfast (eggs), how I slept (poorly), the way the grass looks here and now (a pale, Wintery yellow). In any case, I suppose the point is that anything surfaces at all, the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. Or, the fin of the orca. Like a flashback or reflex, it's a smaller fragment attesting to something beautiful, wild, but never completely available.

I didn't grow up around orcas like you did, but I think I understand why they come up in your work. There is something tragic, as well as ironic, about a killer whale being endangered: to think that one day the entire species could become a distant memory. Echoing the waves, the simple, somewhat alien, shape of a dorsal fin evokes so many visceral reactions in people. There's a curiosity to see what it's attached to, but also a fear of finding out and being consumed. Cutting through water like a blade, the fin somehow casts the ocean's vastness into scale. Disembodied by the water level, the fin takes on a different meaning, emphasizing what can't be seen. The detached form carries a symbolic threat, reminiscent of other alleged predators, like its cousins the shark fin, the cat claw, and, remarkably, the rose thorn.

I remember the first time I visited your studio, you showed me one of your rose thorns. It was tiny, and impossibly sharp. The gradient from the base to the tip suggested it had just been trimmed from a stem, freshly removed from its context. While I hadn't seen a rose thorn up close in years, the detail was uncanny, I felt the baseline tingle of a subtle threat. The act of trimming carries a kind of banal violence. For florists and gardeners, I imagine it's a daily practice. All for the sake of a full vase on the counter or a corny romantic gesture (the domination of plants and animals is an eerie second nature). Your severed thorns and stems never fail to remind me of that. That is, of the casual violence that happens in the background of our daily lives.

Growing up, my grandmother had a rose bush in her backyard that bloomed every spring. Again, there are seldom discrete moments I recall from childhood, but the smell of blooming roses delivers me to a certain state of being. Of feeling small and safe, with crisp air in my lungs. I don't return to an isolated moment, but an accumulation of them. Like a bouquet, or waves lapping into the shoreline, there's a potency in volume that overpowers a singular event. I think there's something about your practice that operates in a similar way. In your work I sense a tendency towards an accumulation of thought, repetitive gesture, recognition. A form of *déjà vu* that works somatically. Have you ever had that kind of *déjà vu*? It's a simple fact that no moment can happen twice, though sometimes we don't want to believe it.

You described your latest table work as born from a compulsion to retain certain experiences through the preservation of their parts. It's a casual dinner scene, encased by a black reflective layer. A relic of togetherness, with all the fixtures of a perfect date: a great meal and drinks spread out on a surface that looks like it could go on forever. It's a perfectly orchestrated account of a fleeting moment, but too good to be true. Like other distant memories, some details have vanished, while others spring up. There's no place for scraps or imperfections, leaving behind a streamlined account of things. What was once improvisational is now refinished, rewritten, cut down, perfected. There's something impressive, and violent, about how we buff out certain details, becoming the authors of our own remembrance.

It's been a pleasure to watch these new works come together, hope to see you again soon.

Always,
Danica

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Danica Pinteric (b. 1994) is a curator, writer, and editor based in Tkaronto/Toronto, Canada working from an ethos of care, collaboration, and sustainability. Her writing has recently been featured by DRAC (Drummondville, QC), Stedelijk Studies (Amsterdam, NL), BAD WATER (Knoxville, TN), Nanaimo Ceramic Arts (Nanaimo, BC), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, NL) and Laurel Projects (Amsterdam, NL). She holds an MA in Curating Arts & Cultures from the University of Amsterdam, and a BA in Communications & Cultural Studies from Concordia University. She is the founding director of Joys, an independent platform for contemporary art based in Toronto.