

August 22, 2021

Bea,

All the time we'd been writing, or at least since you went to Black Feather, I didn't realize until now but I think I had this growing sense of, don't push too hard. It was so good to be connecting with you again, to have this one precious thread in the wreck and ruin of the last year, and I wanted to hold onto it. But you got pulled into this other orbit. And I think a part of me was trying harder and harder to not make a wrong move, to not say the wrong thing, or I'd lose you somehow.

And now I wonder if I've lost you anyway. Maybe treading carefully, tempering words was pointless. Or maybe there were never any words that could have reached you. Or maybe the words I chose were crap.

And now I have this feeling about all the words that have passed between us... where did they go, what did they do? did they do anything? are they living somewhere, effecting something? did they just fall down a well, or dissipate into the ether. Sometimes the whole thing feels like a dream. and I'm still in it, or in and out of it.

I've been working in the space, the art space, working on this piece it feels I've been working on forever now, or inside of this piece maybe is more accurate. Practically been living here actually. A few projects that had been scheduled in the venue before me wound up getting canceled because I think of concern over delta variant, so they offered me the space to use as a studio up until the installation/opening. Which feels almost too generous, like there's something obscene about any one artist benefitting from a fucked situation. Still, I've basically moved in, I have 24/7 access and I love being here. (I think I love it? Or it's fully absorbing anyway.)

I've started coming in and staying all night, feeling the walls breathing around me. I play music, twigs' magdalene album has been on repeat lately...you know she had these fucked up fibroids and these fucked up relationships, and there's this exquisite fragility and exquisite power to her. But I keep thinking of the fibroids, this was a few years back but I remember her describing how she had been ignoring abdominal (and other kinds of) pain for so long, and working hard through the pain until she noticed this massive lump and thought she had stomach cancer... and when she finally went to the doctor they found six fibroids the size of two apples, three kiwis, a couple strawberries... how they finally removed them in this laparoscopic surgery like strings of sausage through her belly button, she said... I just remember that image, and imagining these skeins of muscle and tissue being drawn out of your body, parts of you that grew out of control and are removed, so your body can be whole, or try and approach wholeness again somehow... so somehow when I'm listening to her music, I'm thinking about her body in pain, and her working and working through it. I'm thinking of this and I'm drawing. I draw mindlessly or without conscious thought. sometimes I draw a face, eyes, mouth, this expression that's part smiling, part uncertain, something else...and it looks so familiar

and I keep following the contours and grooves of the face and curve of the mouth and eyebrows, the laughlines, until I realize I'm looking at you. Like I could conjure you into that space.

I know you're not going to write back to me. and so I'm like fuck it why would I hold anything back.

But I still do. I still do hold things back, I think.
I don't want to, but I do.

I've been doing a lotta self portraits, too, drawings of our faces overlaid on one another. I found an old photo of us when I was back in moody this last time – one of us sitting on the steps outside your house.

I was looking at this photo remembering how we used to drop off rolls of film at developing places, how it would take a few days, how excited we'd be waiting to get them back and see how they came out... and then when we finally got them and pulled them out of the envelope and looked through the stack-- usually there'd be a lot of crap, a nondescript hill in the distance, an overexposed quadrant of someone's face, some out of focus arm suggesting the motion that couldn't be captured...:

but then there'd be one good one. like this one of us on the steps. you're holding a cup full of what looks like purple grapes and looking at me with this dazzling smile, the way you were always so dazzling, like the sun was shining out of your face. you're making some kind of joke, you're mid laughing, and I can't remember what you were laughing about, what we were laughing about. because I'm laughing too, but my laughter is sorta half, like a light that's only at dim. and I'm pulling away a little, like I'm bracing for a grape to be thrown at me. and you're wearing shorts which I forgot was a thing we ever did, it's not like moody got hot (not like now, when it's scary hot, all the time). But it was a hot day that day I think, one of those rare hot days and you had pulled out a pair of shorts but I was sitting there wearing jeans like usual, oversized hoodie like usual, I never stopped hiding, especially when the sun was out. It looks like I'm trying to soak in your warmth, soak in your light. I'm even sorta in the shadow on the stoop. and looking at the photo as an adult I see this dazzling girl and this sorta shy girl. but I also remember the feeling of looking at this photo when I got the photos back from the developer, and the blend of pleasure and pain at seeing it -- the pleasure of seeing my friend, seeing this person who somehow, miraculously, let me into her life, and loving her so fiercely, and also the pain of sensing the distance between us. I don't think I was conscious of it in that way, but that was the feeling.

And I felt a lot of sorrow somehow, now, looking at the photo, feeling for both of us, where both of us are. and us being on the precipice of forty which doesn't mean anything and also means everything and wondering when the fuck will we ever feel like we belong, anywhere, when do we ever figure this shit out. and my brain goes to everything I've read, everything I've encountered, all the narratives about how we figure

shit out, people looking back on the mess they made of their lives from the safety of some pristine marie kondo figured-it-out fantasy of whatever adulthood is supposed to look like. and I have no fucking clue. and I look back even on this last year of us writing each other and how a part of me actually thought deep down really thought really believed that coming home to you to each other was going to be some kind of key. like it wouldn't just bring us together, it would somehow solve whatever broken thing was going on in us, whatever broken thing was going on in the world. and then a part of me knows, the way some part of us knows, the wisdom that resides somewhere in us even if a lot of the time it goes mute or awol, for long stretches of time, the wisdom part knows and understands that being broken is the state of things, it's not a problem, it's how we're built, we're built to break and shatter and long for a wholeness that is always elusive. and that sort of breakingness and the yearning for our pieces is our wholeness.

which sounds like an elaborate pile of bullshit. and some asshole part of me points out that that argument could be used as justification for not doing anything, for not even trying to take action to address problems because problems are the nature of things. and anyway being broken is an illusion, we're all one, we're all whole and connected, blah blah blah. but it is very hard to feel that way, that being broken is an illusion, that we are all one and whole and connected, it is very hard to believe that, things being the way they are.

anyway. so this photo, I drew this over and over and over... these two girls. and wanting to have that moment back somehow. and feeling it so far away

I'm grieving for that moment in the parking lot, that moment on the stoop.

I feel like I'm living with ghosts in this space.

Judy wasn't just a dog.
I felt that needed to be said.

and I'm thinking about your second moderna shot, how you sounded unsure of getting it, like you were leaning away from it. and the danger that puts you in.

you say the farm is helping you to heal. what does healing look like. how do you know when you get there. who determines what it means to be sick, and to be healed

I wish to be healed. I wish you to be healed. I wish for us all to be healed

I love that seeing faces fills you with instinctual joy
I love that you see a universe in a face
you're right
we're a lot to take in all at once

reading your letters, you're this star or comet receding from me... thought we were coming together but you were always on your own path, in your own orbit.
or we're all in some greater system, all looping and arcing around the same universe, belonging together even if, even if

I do remember when you were told your braids were against the high school dress code
I remember when you were sent home

that photo
the one of us on the steps
you in shorts, a buttoned down flannel
you have braids in your hair
you're home because you were sent home
I'm there because I went home with you too
I'm remembering
I wrote on the bathroom wall (RE)DRESS THE CODE FUCKERS
and left
you threw grapes at me
you smiled brilliantly
I drew my hoodie up around my face

it hurts to think of you there
believing you're sick in ways I know you're not
but you say you have that cozy feeling of being part of a community
is it wrong of me to want you to not have that

you're living a big life
right?
I want that for you
in my mind that's what you've always been doing

I want you to live your big life
to push yourself beyond where you think you can go
that sounds beautiful
when you say it like that
but

you write in your p.s., "I'll never forget what's happened this year. probably I will spend the rest of my life trying to repair the damage."

I'm wondering about that
sitting with that
and how we could ever go about doing that
repairing the damage.

I'm looking at this photo of us
I'm there, in that moment.
There's no photo of us in the parking lot that night
when I think of us then
feels like we were in possession of some kind of wisdom
some kind of understanding
some kind of code I can't quite crack.

I wonder what we're doing
what we're thinking
the questions we're asking and
what we're dreaming about