

2 April 2021

Bea, I read your letter and – there's so much I want to say and ask, so many ways I want to respond – realizing I'm not sure how to go about it.

So fuck it, I'll start with the weather. Sorta mundane, sorta profound. It's April. Magnolia and cherry blossom trees are blossoming in Prospect Park. Weather's swinging back and forth between winter and spring like it doesn't know what to think. Which is about how I feel.

I spotted my first cherry blossoms a few days ago (in the park) and actually stopped in my tracks, staring at them a minute, sorta dumbstruck. I don't know, guess a part of me didn't quite believe spring would come, or thought it would be altered somehow if it did... Which I suppose it is, in a way.

Judy. Judy sounds like a beautiful being with a beautiful soul. Glad you two found each other in the midst of a crazy time and place. And I get it from your letter, what you share is something good and pure – nothing to do with some desire to own or control anything. (Honestly that read on it is bizarre to me.)

The way you wrote about Judy, your description of him, of his eyes... I kept seeing him, couldn't shake it – I wanted to protect him, too. He strikes me as so vulnerable... and it's not that I feel sorry for him, more that I identify with him. I don't do much drawing these days, but after reading your letter, I found myself sketching a dog I imagined might be Judy, over and over and over (sketching "Judy", in my little room, train rumbling by periodically... different kind of meditation than the hot water lemon you suggested [although I tried that, too]). Anyway, so that's what's going on with the drawing here... no offense to actual Judy intended, I know actual Judy is beautiful and soulful in ways I can't hope to capture here... consider this just, an homage. To Judy, to your love and friendship, to his vulnerability, to all of our vulnerability in this careening catastrophe of a world...

I called my parents a couple weeks ago. I stay in touch with them over email mostly, I find the phone with them challenging, but I was worried about my dad, just had this icy gut feeling about him with everything going on, and knowing how Moody is... I knew if anything had actually happened I'd know, so it was pointless worrying, but I couldn't get it out of my mind, so I called. And my dad picks up, and I ask him how he's doing... and then – I don't want to since I know how he'll respond – but I sort of as casually as I can mention Atlanta and the latest wave of violence and how upsetting it is. And he immediately says it's nothing to be upset about, it's fine, I shouldn't be worried. He's not worried, why should I be worried. Everyone's making a big deal out of nothing, you just have to show you belong and people will treat you like you belong, you can't be afraid, or act afraid, or act like a victim. And he's going off about this and I'm thinking why did I even bring it up, I knew he'd respond like this, act like nothing's wrong, act like there's

no problem – and I get it, if you live in Moody all your life, hardly any other people of color, hardly any other Asian American people, it's a survival strategy, to believe that you're a Moody-ite, that you fit in, that no one sees you as different – but for my dad it's even more forceful. And I can feel myself getting more upset, more heated... this old fury that he's telling me the fire that's burning in front of us – that's burning *us* – isn't a fire, or whatever the fuck metaphor you want to use. But before I can hang up (which I'm moments away from doing), my mom comes on, takes the phone from my dad, and I can tell she's moving away from him, to another room, and she immediately urges me to stop bothering him with it, he doesn't want to talk about it – and I tell her I know, I was already regretting bringing it up, I was just worried. And she says she didn't even know my dad had told me about it, he had told her not to tell my brother earlier – and I'm like, what? And she says that my dad had told her he didn't want the kids to know, because we'd get worried – but it was only one time at Albertsons, it's no big deal, it was middle of the day in the parking lot, plenty of people around, he cut up his knee a little from the fall but nothing broken thank god...can't understand why no one intervened or tried to help him in any way, but at least he was never in real danger – and I just... I realize what she's inadvertently told me. And when I demand to know more and she realizes I *hadn't* known, she doesn't tell me anything more, and she makes an excuse and gets all sunny and says everyone's fine anyway and she has to go they're about to get dinner...

I call my brother (who's up around Seattle now), but you know he and I aren't close, he tells me he didn't know about it either, but even though yeah it's horrible he doesn't seem too concerned, he tells me what can you do, you know we can't get dad to do anything different, just be glad they're vaccinated because that was putting them in a lot more danger than a bunch of Moody whackadoos but...

So I don't know, Bea. I know it's not just my dad, and I know Moody SUCKS and it's not just Moody and it's obviously not just asians but fuck I'm just so angry and over this shit. I feel like I've been angry and exhausted and depleted for so long now, and of course I'm glad there's some public acknowledgement of it (even if there's also at the same time a public dismissal and minimizing of it), and I'm getting contacted by all these arts groups that want to hold forums and safe spaces and panels and I know I'd be pissed if no one were doing anything but at the same time I want to close the door on it and just enjoy my new room in my weird sublet and focus on my work...

And it comes back to this feeling of being poisoned, brainwashed, harmed... and how do we heal and get cleansed, how do we rewire our brains, how do we move on... I think about growing up apologizing for who we were, and muting and dampening who we were... I have this idea for the installation, a sort of (figurative) structure composed of different statements and beliefs – ones that distort us or harm us (whether because we believed them and they're false, or because they're false and other people believed them, or both...), and ones that strengthen us or bring us back to ourselves. I'm thinking of creating some kind of online site where people can submit statements (both kinds) to be integrated into the project. It feels important for it to be about exposing the kinds of distortion and damage we've been subjected to, and that we've engaged in ourselves,

and then undoing it, and healing... and somehow creating something new, or at least create a new experience (even some expression of home or belonging?), from the act of exposing and undoing and affirming underlying truths. I guess I'm thinking, what does that look and feel like, visually and experientially – viscerally --?

In my last zoom class, I was talking about Holzer's work -- that some people make the mistake of thinking she's just a text artist, or that her work functions only on an intellectual level, and don't realize her work engages you visually and viscerally, that her words are visual and have a visceral impact -- that there is energy in the physical experience of them, in physically encountering them. And I started thinking about the energy we generate in the world, and when we enter a space, what an encounter between /among people is or can be energetically... and I started talking extemporaneously about being stuck in bad situations, about how the pandemic has caused our energy to circle, to stall, about how we need to get out, escape, whatever that means to us...

And I realized, as the students watched me speaking (in my still new space), maybe they were concerned for me. But this time, I wasn't worried about it. It was a thought, take it or leave it.

The subtle situation is going all right, given everything. I found myself talking to Jorge the other night – Jorge's the chef who works at some bougie sandwich job in Park Slope – and he was telling me about some guy he's been dating and how weird it's been to date in covid, and how he doesn't know how to read him... and I was giving him my perspective, which came off sounding a lot like advice, and then I realized yeah it is advice, because I'm like 15 years older than this guy, and sure when I was 25 I was living in a completely different reality and there's a whole lot of shit I don't know, but also yeah I'm an older generation than this guy, so it's reasonable for me to offer my perspective... and he was listening, and I think whatever I was saying he found somewhat useful, even if he pointed out that at the same time I probably wasn't the best person to be giving him advice on this subject – and I was like YEAH couldn't agree more – not the best person for a lot of reasons – and we laughed, and had a beer together, and I realized this actually felt okay, and not pathetic... which I might have thought even just a few months ago, if you'd told me I'd be living with a 25-year-old roommate, having a beer with him and giving relationship advice. But I actually felt more than just, this is not pathetic... I felt this sudden wave of warmth wash over me, this deep affection which startled me actually, for a second tears came to my eyes – which writing that sounds weird but I swear this is how I felt. I just had this sudden fierce love for this kid, and I wanted to protect him, I wanted to shield him from all the shit. And I felt good being there, being this kid's... I dunno, not mentor, not mother, not protector... but this kid's... older sister? This kid's auntie? I just suddenly wanted to gather all the young vulnerable beautiful kids together, tell them they're loved, tell them not to throw themselves into bullshit situations... And then I realize I'm being an idiot, Jorge's way smarter than I ever was at 25, he's not going to let himself fall into some bullshit situation. And then Zeyna gets back, and she joins us in a beer, and suddenly we were

just three roommates hanging out. And we talked about Zeyna's mom, and a little about my project, and a little about Nelson, our fourth roommate, who was either working really late these days, or possibly not working at all (he'd been making vague references to possibly leaving his job)... Jorge had seen him on a citibike earlier, and we wondered if Nelson was maybe still biking the streets, imagined him enjoying some velocity in the finally warmer evenings, which sounded pretty great to all of us.

So... I've been putting this off but I guess I just need to say it -- Black Feather Farm continues to sound... intense (ha. hello, understatement). I've been putting off writing this part of the letter because I guess I'm worried about alienating you. Which I realize is crazy (I hope! [ha.]). Okay I don't want to sound judgey, I know I'm not there, and obviously who am I to be judging anyone's situation, I am in no position. (Remind me to tell you another time about what happened when I went back to the old apartment to get the rest of my things... or maybe I'll get to it in this letter.) But maybe it's the clarity of the tiny little kingdom that is my new apartment bedroom... it feels like some of the messages you're receiving at BFF are confusing and contradictory. I'm not sure where Bob gets off telling the multiple women he's sleeping with to not feel possessive (are any of them sleeping with other people, besides him?), and telling you you have possession issues because you and Judy became friends???

Maybe there's something about it that reminds me of the dynamic with Wen... that you're being made to think you're wrong all the time, but the person telling you that doesn't seem to be doing any advanced reflection in that respect.

One thing I know: You're not broken, Bea. That, or we're all broken. Not having a baby and not having a partner doesn't make you broken. And having a baby and/or having a partner sure as fuck doesn't make you whole or healed or whatever.

It's funny thinking about this little sublet I'm in, the ragtag collection of things that came with me... I've been feeling so untethered and free and oddly secure -- in this total lack of security. There's something about the awareness that all the time I thought I was settling down, or settling into myself in a more secure way -- as an artist in my practice, as a partner with Wen, just as an adult -- thought I was creating a solid practice, a solid home, a permanent space -- getting a studio and equipment, getting residencies and fellowships and teaching gigs, getting an accountant, getting a fucking colander and a cast iron skillet... all these markers of some kind of permanence... all of it just me trying to be secure, or feeling things were secure -- but none of it means any of that, of course, of course none of that shit translates into actual permanence, actual security, because ultimately nothing does... of course nothing does, whether it's family or career or home or whatever... All of this is... not quite what we think it is, it doesn't promise anything, and it's already vanishing. It's not actually a thing right? And I find myself sitting on the floor of this little room, leaning against the bed, having this sense of hurtling through space, the way we're all of us now hurtling through space, and knowing we're here for only a short while, and no way to penetrate the mystery of how we flash into being and flash out...

And so oddly, there's a solidity to this shitty, impermanent sublet, where I sit around a kitchen with a few people I've known for only an instant or two, and we talk shit about nothing, and we somehow experience this precious connection to one another. As we hurtle through space and drink beer together and we're not even pretending that this is something that matters, or something that'll last.

Maybe I should go out to Moody. I'm thinking of it. My classes don't end until May but I can teach from anywhere so it's fine to travel (and I'll actually be fully vaccinated end of April, cue balloons and confetti). I want to check in on my parents, even if they're gonna drive me crazy. Maybe I'll track down whoever hurt my dad and beat them up (because that will solve everything). Maybe you'll even be heading back to Moody soon?

OH and speaking of Moody!! (can't believe I didn't say this right away, probably should have led with this) – Bea please do go check on Natural... I don't think there's anything wrong with you going to check in on it (especially given what you've noticed about the bank account), and if Sera isn't telling you anything... Bob should not be guiltin' you into staying, if he cares about you he should encourage you to go back and make sure the business and community you poured your heart and soul and energy into, that you built from nothing into what it is, is doing okay. Trust your instincts to go back to it (and your instincts in general).

Go to Moody, and I'll meet you there, okay? I'm thinking of going next month. or maybe I'll wait until end of May, but I don't want to wait that long. I'll let you know

Actually why don't you give me a call? I love writing letters but you know you can call me any time (I actually tried calling you a few times already, but went right to voicemail). Maybe we can find a way to meet up.

I'd love to see you. Maybe we can work it out.

O.