

‘time, fear, presence’ by Wen-Juenn Lee

Most often, I want to remember something false. I want to interiorise a moment—sunset, true love, the cleanness of a line—but the moment is already gone. Presence never makes its way through straining, but through eyes half-closed. We can only look at the unseeable through reflections and mirrors. This is how the Greeks killed monsters; this is how we look at the sun.

Joon says, fear makes you present. Sometimes, I think I am most present when I am afraid.

I am afraid of disintegration, injury, insult. I am afraid that Rachel Cusk called her years of insomnia waking to spectral light. They are somehow the same thing: injury, and the largeness of time. People make time disappear by falling in love. The lover is atopic, which is to say, a-temporal, without-place; in a valley of their own.

In the painting, *The Agony of Eros* peeks out, a wound in a bag, among the detritus of time. An empty wrapper, headphones, tissues. A split in the bag, like the slit of an eye, or an opening of a knife. I am reminded of Courbet’s *L’Origine du monde* in which a split in a body contains the origin of the world. It is funny to think that for a while, Jacques Lacan owned this painting. As well as women, Courbet painted caves and water. They all have dark patches—hair, caves—as their centres; sources, in which there is bleed, then light, blooming from outside.

What this has to do with timelessness is beyond me. But it is there, I think, inside Joon’s bag. Actors and celebrities unpack their bags in front of a camera, and people say, what a surprise, they carry snacks, phones, just like us. The clutter of your life somehow redeems you.

The performance artist Tehching Hsieh used his body in *Time Clock Piece* to show the passage of time. There is a severity to his shaven head, his grey uniform, as if to say, in consuming time, we are always working, walking around with time’s debris hanging off of us. Time, like work, can be an alienation, an overlooking, or a surrender.

The post-it-note is never permanent, nor is the condensation or the doodles I draw on my shower walls. I think about the ephemera that is now collected in archives; how at the time, people didn’t know they were living through something monumental. My brother wrote in his diary, ‘Wen-Juenn smiled at me.’ He was ten, I was less than a year old. On the same day, he met a former Prime Minister, who would go on to become Prime Minister again, vowing to see out corruption, reform, upheaval. My brother wrote, ‘I saw myself on TV.’ So often, the days unravel unplanned. You cancel dinner, your sister smiles at you, there is an accident, a thunderstorm, a house collapses.

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What I like about this present is never ending. I continue to evade it, but it will continue to follow me, dogged. I leave something out which someone else picks up. Joon told me of a house she lived in with a burn mark on the carpet. She met someone who had been at a house party decades earlier, where they fell asleep in someone's bedroom with a cigarette in their hand. They made that burn.

At its most dramatic, each moment is a choice. At its most ordinary, we already live it. Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow. I am not willing presence into being, but it comes, and I enter it.