

THE MUSEUM TOOK  
A FEW MINUTES  
TO COLLECT ITSELF

JOSEPH DEL PESCO

## Colophon

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# Focus for Frampton

In the first lifetime a beautiful heiress is born to a loving but eccentric father with an incalculable fortune who arranges for her every conscious moment to be filmed, starting with her birth. He establishes a trust for his daughter, with the stipulation that she allow the entirety of her life to be documented. The heiress leads a long, varied and passionate life. She travels to the moon where she gives birth to a child. She is awarded a Nobel prize for pioneering science research and is married three times—the third and final time being to the cameraman who follows her everywhere. She so saturates her waking hours with experiences of every kind that she never once pauses to review the films of her own recorded past. Near the end of her life, the heiress writes a will, leaving her entire fortune to the first child to be born following the instant of her own death. The only condition is that they spend the entirety of their life watching the accumulated films of her own.

Following a brief intermission, the second lifetime starts when the heiress is reincarnated as a male child who inherits her fortune. S/he emerges from the womb to the projected film of her previous birth. Because the child must spend every moment as a sedentary spectator, the boy barely learns to walk. Through the accumulated films, the watcher receives a quaintly obsolete education from the heiress' school days, observing with an awkward mix of longing and horror as young men court her during adolescence. With age and waning health, the watcher ceases to speak, except to occasionally shout "FOCUS!" Relying entirely on the films and intravenous medication to survive, the watcher dies quietly in his sleep the night after he's watched the final film.

Rumors about of the bizarre arrangement of the watcher's life spread through academic channels. A film historian, after years of research, reveals that during the second lifetime, the watcher had secretly hired a team of writers to produce a script. The writers had transcribed each word, listed each movement and described each location captured in the films of the heiress in precise detail. The granddaughter of the heiress (the daughter of the child born on the moon) learns of this document and after a series of legal battles gains control of what remains of the heiress' fortune. With it, the granddaughter opens a production studio and

hires a large ensemble of actors to perform each character and dozens of costume fabricators to remake fashions gone out of style. There are no tickets sold to the living theater, only a schedule of performances and locations announced. The anachronistic styles and defunct idioms of two generations ago charm a growing audience. Celebrated as a monumental artwork, it is discussed and written on widely. Following the final performance, all the costumes and sets produced by the granddaughter's various teams are enshrined in a small provincial museum, where they still screen the few surviving films of the original lifetime.

After another short intermission, the story resumes with a third lifetime, which had remained a mystery until a small dog, mostly blind in one eye, arrives at the museum and refuses to leave. The museum director adopts the dog, whose coat is white with black splotches, and names him Focus. After a decade of charming visitors, the director commissions a children's book about Focus, who has become the museum's mascot. In the book Focus is portrayed as the heiress, reincarnated yet again.

The grandchildren of the granddaughter of the heiress read the book and urge their parents, who are board members of the museum, to contribute enough funds to hire an on-site veterinarian.

Eventually Focus dies, of old age and without pain and the granddaughters have him preserved. His body, posed in a humble seated position, is stationed on a small plinth just below the projectionist booth where his little glass eyes stare for eternity at the screen that, every so often, plays film clips of the original lifetime.





# Journey, the Man

It took years to build, but it was finally complete. Every thing in her life, from her very earliest memories, had been saved, stored and could be retrieved by taking a walk through the city. Each post office, alley way and city park; every bus stop, bodega, dumpster and parking lot was a vessel for her collection. Not all the groupings made sense: some were junk drawers, or had strange, mismatched associations. Often this was intentional, the way an embarrassing association aided recall. Timelines were mapped onto city streets, where notable world events were marked alongside personal moments like her first visit to the ocean and every time she'd cried.

Memories of all the plants she had killed were stored on the roof deck of the tallest office tower in her city, all the paintings she had ever seen were displayed in two roller rinks (for expedited viewing), the old bowling alley contained every piece of clothing she had ever owned (spread out across the lanes) and all her childhood toys were stored in a

24-hour parking garage—in case she needed to visit late at night to be comforted by those memories. The main post office held every poem she had ever read. While waiting in line to ship a package she'd recite each stanza, saving a line or two for the clerk. While only publicly accessible spaces were used for mnemonic storage, those that barred entry were occasionally still included in her map. Because most private residences were unexplored territory, she skinned their facades with selections from her personal collection of photographs, enlarged to the scale of billboards. All of her favorite words were stored in their mailboxes.

On Sunday mornings, she gave tours to friends and friends of friends, who walked with her as she described her version of the city. At times, her tours could approach the psychogeographic. She could recall buildings that once stood in parts of the city that had since been demolished or transformed. If she had been inside, even as a small child, she could close her eyes, standing in front, and narrate a tour through spaces that no longer existed. However, if a building had been renovated more than once, the timelines would become entangled, resulting in an invisible mesh that prevented entry.

Once in a while she'd add to or subtract objects from her memory palace. While it's well known that memory is slippery, even fungible and

that for most people to remember is to alter or re-write a memory, her palace had aspired to and retained a crisp fidelity, capturing and holding her past. On rare occasions, things would appear or disappear seemingly on their own and these were of particular fascination.

But the first halting appearance in her palace was of a person she had never met. He first appeared in her peripheral vision and then behind a cafe counter that no longer existed (while touring a previous version of the city) and then finally, he joined a tour. After the tour's conclusion and after her friends had departed, she spoke with him. They sat on a park bench together, surrounded by all the tools her father had taught her how to use and all of the computers, televisions and video cameras she had ever owned. He introduced himself as a representative of her unconscious and guided her to a building she'd never seen. He described it as a museum that held everything she couldn't remember: suppressed dreams, impressions from infancy and even a few secrets she had kept from herself. While it would be dangerous for her to enter, he'd tell her about it sometime, if she liked.

As she continued to give tours in the weeks that followed, she came across the museum and each time it had a different shape. First it appeared as a single-story structure, charcoal black and shaped

like a box with two cylinders attached. A week later the museum resembled a woman in recline, covered in multi-colored patterns. And after a month it had transformed into a monolithic pyramid, made of volcanic stone. The various iterations of the museum haunted her thoughts, but only once did she attempt to enter, without success. The stress of her memorial commitments had brought her to the edge of exhaustion, so she decided to take a long vacation, away from her city and its memories.

On the first stop of her journey, she saw a man with facial features nearly identical to the one from her unconscious. He was standing on a crowded bus, wearing a grey suit and holding a felt hat against his chest. She'd been on the sidewalk about to cross the street. Their eyes met for a moment before the bus pulled away.

Determined to continue her travels, she moved on from the city, but she was unable to shake the memory of the man on the bus, and so she returned. She arrived to find him waiting in baggage claim at the airport holding a sign that said *le temps perdu*. He had been waiting for a long-lost cousin, whose flight had been cancelled, but she smiled at him and he offered her a ride. In the weeks that followed, they ran into each other on a commuter ferry and in line for tickets at the central train station.

Almost a year later, while both were contemplating marriage, they returned to her home to visit her parents. She held his hand as the plane landed. As they stood to deplane, he appeared to be wearing a bowler hat, one she'd never seen before. Upon asking him about it, he raised his eyebrows and pushed his fingers through his hair. She didn't ask again, but it appeared to remain on his head for the duration of their visit.

Having returned to her city of memories, she took him on a tour, walking through her recollections of the past. He was awestruck and dropped to one knee to propose while riding a funicular, surrounded (in her view) by every pet that had ever lived in her family's home. Speechless, she looked around at each of them as they purred, barked or chirped their approval. Later that evening she went for a walk on her own, to search for the museum. It was nowhere to be found.

During their return flight she looked over at her fiancée and the hat he had worn all visit, even while sleeping, had disappeared. It wasn't until their next visit to her city, some months later, that she saw it again. She'd been anxiously awaiting its reappearance, because she'd figured out what it was. Upon arriving, they made one of their usual walks through her city, they stopped to sit on a park bench and she asked him to close his eyes. Standing

in front of him, she carefully removed the hat and looked inside. There she found dozens of black and white photographs. If she picked up a single image, the photo began to animate within its thin white frame. Hearing an unusual noise, like a drawer of clothes being thrown out the window, he opened his eyes to find she had fainted.

After that, the kind of hat he wore changed each day. First it was a bowler hat and then a stovepipe, a deerstalker and a fez. Occasionally she looked over at him and laughed and a puzzled expression appeared on his brow. She tried a few times to remove the hat while he was sleeping, but it wouldn't budge. Finally, she confessed to him, explaining the mysterious appearance of the museum in her city and how it had, since their first visit, taken the form of a hat on his head. He smiled with worried amusement. She asked if he'd sit still while she removed it.

He sat facing her, his hands resting on the sides of her knees while she removed a crisp white cowboy hat from his head. She appeared to him much like a mime, pinching at the air. As she shuffled through the pile of photographs in the hat, she chose one and described to him the moving pictures in the frame as tears blurred her vision. He realized then that he'd never really known anyone until that moment, but that he'd wanted to for as long as he could remember.





# Pianissimo

A large building on a small island at the center of a lake has just one room. The room was conceived and tuned by a team of architects and engineers assembled with the mission of producing the perfect acoustic space for an unaccompanied musical instrument. The resulting museum resembles the shell of a pistachio when seen from the outside. In the middle of the room sits a single grand piano.

Most who visit know that although only one is visible at a time, there are in fact two identical black pianos. One piano sits on an elevator platform, seamlessly integrated into the museum's parquet floor, that each night lowers into the basement. At the bottom, the platform tips a few degrees and the piano rolls off, to be replaced by its sisters. With the exception of a few updated parts, the piano cabinets of both sisters are made of cypress, boxwood, black paint, leather and fir: the same materials as the oldest known piano designed by Bartolomeo Cristofori in Florence, Italy, shortly after the year 1700.

A piano is never perfectly in tune, it's always an attempt, an approximation. After one of the sisters has been played for a few days, she descends and is tuned a day later. There are two men, professional tuners, who tend to the sisters. They arrive by boat just after the museum closes and work into the night.

Weekdays the museum is open from sunrise to sunset and on weekends it's open 24 hours. Whenever the museum is open, the piano is being played. The museum schedules and hosts a succession of musicians who arrive and take a seat. Occasionally during the transition between players, they'll sit together, sharing the keys for a song or two.

After a short boat ride to the island, visitors walk down an elevated walkway through the apple orchard that surrounds the museum (trees that produce a rare fruit with black skin and white flesh). They enter through large glass doors and find a place on the benches that line the perimeter of the room—padded with the same grey felt used on the hammers that sound the strings inside the piano. When the museum is crowded, one can find felt pillows for floor seating stored in hinged compartments beneath the benches. Although no special concerts are announced, some pianists gain a following and many develop long-term relationships with the museum.

There are no social events at the museum, with the exception of Saturday nights at midnight. A bar called The Avalon rises from the floor and is tended by a single barman. The barman mixes drinks produced by local distillers and brewers who harvest the apples from the surrounding orchard. Variations of cider, apple brandy and pommeau are served. Often when The Avalon is open, songs of a faster tempo are played. Singing and the dull thud of shoes tapping can be heard by the tuners, working below.

Every 88 days the museum rests. The doors are unlocked during open hours, but the piano remains covered and silent. While talking is allowed at the museum, it is rarely heard and the 88th day is particularly quiet. Every seven years (one for each octave) some of the most beloved pianists who frequent the museum are invited to sit for an interview. They listen to the questions one at a time and answer by playing short improvisations. Some answers last only a few measures, others entire movements. The piano is like a voice that can erupt in argument or whisper a conciliatory phrase.

In the winter months on the island snow collects in clumps at the water's edge punctuated by black rocks. A white egret lands and prompts the caw of a raven. On the first day of spring the white ferry sounds its horn as it arrives in the rain. A faithful crowd carrying black umbrellas disembark and

walk toward the entrance of the museum. On the apple trees white blossoms appear and the two sisters share the floor of the museum for the first of only two appearances together each year. On this day, duels and duets are played, black and white keys grumble and trill as rivals are challenged and grudges are settled. At the end of the day, the two sisters are blanketed in black fabric and trays of white foods are served. Combinations of eggs, coconuts, chicken cooked in white wine sauce, rice, turnips, feta cheese, cotton salad, peeled apples and white fish are offered to welcome the beginning of the spring season.

In the fall, the day after the last leaf has fallen from the apple trees, a large assortment of black objects including studio headphones, a barber's comb, a top hat, an antique telephone, a patent-leather shoe, a vinyl record, a small tire and a three-hole punch are arranged on the benches that line the museum and players are invited to prepare the pianos, placing the objects on the strings of the two sisters—transforming them into buzzing and thumping percussive instruments.

The rest of the year, the sisters take turns smiling for the public and see each other only in passing. The one cloistered below is visited nightly by the tuners. They solemnly prepare her for the touch of a player—whether a subtle tap on the shoulder

or a stomping down the stairs. Every few days the sister below gets her turn to stand in the center of the brightly lit interior of the museum above. Each player that sits with a sister is a tribute to chorded harmonics and to the idea of a symphony captured in a wooden box. The sister waits silently in the dark of the basement, her vocal chords taut and ready for her turn to sing at the hands of a believer.



# Janitor for the Nation

Each nation lasts about as long as an average exhibition, eight to twelve weeks. The evening the current nation closes, the flag (sewn only weeks ago) is slowly lowered and the anthem sung for the last time. No need for a coup d'état. The administration, who've barely slept in their short run of the nation, are happy to return to their homes. A new president is elected by the following weekend and a new constitution ratified before the full moon. Only those present in the museum during the transition of power may vote and be called citizens. Passports are issued, customs officials replace box-office attendants and gallery guards transform into the national guard.

Each new nation spends much of its brief existence in formation—the inauguration ceremony of the president and the naming of the nation can take five minutes or five days. Electing a parliament and appointing cabinet members can happen in an afternoon, or take weeks. Some decisions are made by presidential decree, like the temperature of the air

conditioning or the nation's open hours. Others are made by sub-committee, like the guard's uniforms or the official cuisine, which is served 24 hours a day in the cafeteria. Some nations commission paintings of their founders while others simply post their photos on social media.

The greatest challenge for each nation is how to schedule the use of space. The group of citizens writing and rehearsing the anthem need practice space while the military wants to run a fire drill. The nation's doctors require a place for their clinic and of course the museum—which has been reduced to a couple of galleries—needs more storage for the nation's growing collection. Negotiations can be fierce and occasionally lead to civil wars, which often involve half the population sleeping in the basement and the other half on the roof, where small sleeping cabins were constructed in the early years.

All those present during each nation understand that their nation will come to a close, that it's a form of theater. The primary audience are also the performers (in their role as citizen or administration), with occasional daytime visitors and immigrants. One may argue that this performance of a nation is no different than the construction of government in any country; the more the performers believe it's real, the more real it becomes. The limits of the performance are tested when a visitor breaks the



law and is held in jail awaiting trial. If the performer makes it to trial (it can take weeks to appoint judges) they may be sentenced to years in prison, but everyone knows that the sentence will be no longer than the run of the exhibition. If the penalty is minor, the janitor will unlock the cell and ferry them out the rear exit, waving them off with a reminder not to return for a couple of months, at least.

Over the years the museum has hosted many visionary leaders who, knowing that their nation won't last, risk experimental formations or ambitious construction projects. One nation, speculating about natural resources, successfully dug a sub-basement. Another established a state with only two laws: mandatory nudity and a ban on making laws. While this was one of the more popular nations, attracting thousands of daytime visitors and a record number of immigration requests, some on the outside argued it was not a nation at all, just a temporary nudist colony. One president refused to delegate decision-making authority, packaging a temporary dictatorship as the production of a *gesamtkunstwerk*. Another choreographed the movements of the entire government administration as a dance. As a result of these experimental nations the Museum of Nations (as it's called beyond its walls) has become the subject of important case studies referenced by political philosophers and international relations specialists worldwide.

The only individual to endure every nation, from the very first, is the janitor. He is the sole exception to the national agenda, serving as the primary caretaker of the outdated electrical system and faulty plumbing. He keeps a small bedroom in the darkest corner of the sub-basement. While he doesn't aspire to power, he's been known to host the standing president at his small kitchen table for midnight conversations. More than anyone, he has witnessed the failures and triumphs of past nations. He'd heard every speech, mopped up blood from conflicts and occasionally served as arbitrator between outgoing and incoming administrations. Because he finds valediction awkward, he often hides in the basement or sneaks out to a movie theater in the last days of each nation. His own departure (and implicitly his retirement) was handled in a similar manner. One day, he was simply gone and with him, a ten-year collection of passports, copies of every inaugural address, recordings of every anthem and the flag of each nation. These he sold to another museum and, with the sum, moved to a small cabin with a view of the Mediterranean Sea. There he lived out his days, making occasional visits to the nearest nudist colony. He never touched a mop again.



# Saint Anthony's Fire

At the top of the right panel of the *Triptych of the Temptation of Saint Anthony*, a painting by Hieronymus Bosch finished in the first year of the 16th century, is a flying fish. Sitting on the prickly spine of the fish is a man with an egg-shaped torso. Behind him sits a middle-aged woman sitting sidesaddle, staring out at the viewer, her translucent white headscarf fluttering in the wind. Held in the right hand of her portly companion is a black rod about the size of a fishing pole. Hanging from the end of the rod at the bottom of a short chain is a fiery cauldron that emits a thin trail of smoke.

A replica painting of the flying fish and the couple riding it, enlarged several times, hangs on a wall inside the largest building in a small town called Requiem, in Texas. A wealthy businessman commissioned the copy during a trip to Lisbon (the original stands in the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga) and in the days before his death he donated the painting and dozens of other details of the *Triptych* to the main hospital, which doubles as the

town's museum. This museum hosts patients and viewers both. Some arrive for a medical appointment and stay for the special exhibition, others come for the museum and receive the advice of a nurse before leaving.

Isolated from its association to the tormented creatures in the bottom half of the *Triptych*, the flying fish is often interpreted by patients and visitors as lightly comical (the casual daydream of a fishmonger) rather than an unnatural force representing mental or spiritual torment. But given the blue-green of the background it remains (to most) unclear if the human couple are breathing underwater or if the fish is floating midair. And while the face of the woman staring out at the viewer was, in the original, suggested with only a few smudges of pigment, the enlarged version has twice the detail, down to the color of her eyes and the pleats in her pink gown. Her face contains a mix of shock and amusement, while her companion's expression of discomfort is no doubt related to his position on the fish's spine.

The hospital of Requiem has the world's largest number of specialists who treat a rare disease that is commonly known as Saint Anthony's Fire. It is communicable through the exchange of bodily fluids in sexual intercourse. The main symptom is a burning sensation in the tips of the fingers, toes

and genitals. Thousands now have the disease and many have traveled to meet with the doctors in Requiem. While there is no cure, those afflicted can lead a normal life with treatment. There is however one side effect of the latest medication: occasional hallucinations. The hallucinations tend to be auditory and often lead to short conversations with inanimate depictions of people or animals. The characters in the enlarged sections of the *Triptych* distributed throughout the hospital/museum are particularly talkative and a few times each day patients in waiting rooms can be heard talking with the deer wearing a red cape, the pig-nosed man with an owl on his head, or the ice skating, hunchbacked bird wearing a funnel.

A writer who lived in Requiem while receiving treatment sustained a series of conversations with Saint Anthony himself, who is represented four times in the hospital (as he is in the *Triptych*). One of the paintings hangs in the basement hallway outside the women's restroom, another on the third floor near the entrance to oncology, one in the darkest corner of the nurse's break room and the final panel in the office of the director. The writer transcribed these encounters, eventually publishing them as a collection. Each conversation with Saint Anthony involves the description of an erotic tryst witnessed in a museum, often late at night. While the writer never traveled to any of the museums

described, the conversations contain accurate details about the sound proofing of certain janitorial closets, the humidity of a sub-basement storeroom and the musky smell of the leather upholstery on a padded gallery bench. *The Book of Temptation*, as it's entitled, has been banned in several countries for precipitating the intentional contraction of the disease by a growing subculture yearning to speak with the subject of a beloved painting.





# The Museum of Smoking

Might it be possible to imagine a future where smoking no longer exists? Where each corner store has sold its last pack. Where the final drag has been exhaled and the orange embers smashed to sooty carbon. The beveled glass ashtray fatefully walked over to the trash bin and dropped in, gone forever. And even though it still appears in the oldest movies—those set in a period where smoking was still prevalent—the world’s cultures have shifted in such a way as to secure its total cessation.

It was in this future that the Museum of Smoking broke ground. It had been planned for decades, in a region where smoking had long since vanished and its global abandonment seemed inevitable. A year later, on the hillside there appeared three floors of glass, with a semi-translucent skeleton of a crystalline metal lattice. When the early morning fog rolls over the foothills in the distance, it can be viewed from the terrace outside, straight through the building. When the sun sprays its orange rays in the final hours of the day, they beam through

the building, ricocheting in all directions, softly illuminating the surrounding landscape with glistening shards of color until fading into the black of night.

On the ground level, the Museum presents the requisite material culture, a survey of cleverly designed packs stacked like bricks to form cylindrical columns. Tens of thousands of designs and never one repeated. In the middle of the room on dozens of glass panels hang various poster campaigns. On one side are posters sponsored by the tobacco industry, extolling questionable science and illustrating lifestyle charms. On the other side are posters from activists, health organizations and concerned mothers from around the world, warning of pernicious chemicals and intractable addictions. The basement level, where the exhibition continues with imagery of cancerous and rotting lungs and suffering babies, is viewable only by adults. By the end of the Era of Smoking, the image-wars between the two sides had become so fierce and the images produced by anti-smoking campaigns had become so grotesque, so precisely horrific, that those who have recently eaten are cautioned against entry. Small bags are available at stations throughout the basement level in case of inner turbulence.

Admission tickets for the Museum are printed on the same imitation cork pattern than was once used to wrap filters. A hypnotism kiosk tells the story

of quitters who needed therapeutic intervention and allows one to experience a short-term trance. And the cinema screens a rotation of scenes from historical films that feature smoking. A few are shown in their entirety including a Museum favorite, *The Last Smoking Flight*, which is both a performance and a document of the final time smoking was allowed on airplanes.

Elsewhere on the main floor and built into sections of all three visible floors of the building, are large vitrines that present, simply, smoke. It was decided in the early planning phase of the Museum that perhaps the most ineluctably aesthetic thing about smoking was watching smoke itself—as it curls and coils, swirls and snakes through the air. And of course, how it moves depends as much on the air currents already in the room as the force and pressure exerted by the smoker. In an effort to memorialize the performative aspect of smoking, they've created over a dozen different conditions into which is released, every few minutes, an average human lung's volume of smoke. While they couldn't resist the parlor trick of blowing smoke rings (a favorite of visiting children), most of the vitrines evoke something much more subtle, even sensual. The delivery apparatus that ejects the smoke is well hidden, with the smoke seeming to materialize in the middle of each compartment, after which invisible thrusts of air shape and direct it as

it tumbles through the vitrine, to disperse moments later. In its early days the Museum experimented with high-tech mannequins, but the lingering societal anxieties about encouraging a now-defunct habit and the resemblance to an uncanny version of a wax museum led to the cancellation of the program before public testing began.

A decade after the Museum opened, a small cadre of retired artists, intellectuals and historians banded together in secret, to form a smoking club. They surreptitiously grew, dried, rolled and smoked their own tobacco—meeting on Sunday evenings at the end of each month in a cabin owned and built collectively in a nearby forest. They owned several acres on all sides of the cabin, ensuring no one would discover their indiscretion. There they shared stories of the best moments of their lives and filled the cabin with the sweetest smelling smoke. A few years after the last member passed away, the Museum of Smoking discovered the cabin and organized a special exhibition, relocating the cabin a hundred yards away from the Museum’s entrance. Once a day they allowed a small group to enter, to smell its wooded interior and view some of the objects collected by the club. On the back wall of the cabin hung a small picture of the club’s members, smiling for the camera and veiled by smoke. One could peer across the small room from behind the stanchion to see the last smokers that would ever be.



# Alphabet City

The 528<sup>th</sup> floor of the mile-high tower is the main entrance and lobby of the museum. The floor houses the administrative offices as well as the first of the 26 galleries called The Rooms, which are distributed one per level on the floors below.

528. The Axaxaxas Room<sup>1</sup>

527. The Baragouin Room<sup>2</sup>

526. The Cirripedia Room<sup>3</sup>

Extending out from the top floor on all sides is an observation deck. Because the building reaches up beyond the layer of clouds that linger in the valley, many visit the museum just to see the sun above the cloud line. A team of undercover therapists hang out on the observation deck to spot potential jumpers. If they yell “CLEAR” it means they’re about to briefly electrify the railing.

525. The Delphi Room<sup>4</sup>

524. The Eunoia Room<sup>5</sup>

523. The Fossilary Room<sup>6</sup>

The dozens of elevators that span the height of the tower travel at 60 miles per hour using electro-magnets to reduce friction and generate power on their descent. One of the lifts is dedicated to museum access. In line for this elevator, a theater director hands out copies of a script with parts for a series of one-minute plays. The number of people in the group ascending determines which play is chosen. The elevator operator assigns parts and activates the lift once the first line has been read.

522. The Gastrophonic Room<sup>7</sup>

521. The Hagiolatry Room<sup>8</sup>

520. The Incarnadine Room<sup>9</sup>

All the guards at the museum, called invigilators, are blind. They wear a museum prescribed uniform of a neutral gray suit and felted fedora to match. The color of their clothes is the color of the walls in the hallways that lead to each of The Rooms. There are small compartments in each hallway that allow the invigilators to nap standing up.

519. The Juvenescent Room<sup>10</sup>

518. The Kalevala Room<sup>11</sup>

517. The Latitudinarian Room<sup>12</sup>

On the top floor, at one end of the long hallway, near the elevator, is an atrium where guards assemble once a day to sing in chorus. In between these gatherings-of-the-guard the invigilators each whistle a tune that helps them locate each other on the different floors of the museum.

516. The Mysteriography Room<sup>13</sup>

515. The Nacarat Room<sup>14</sup>

514. The Objurgation Room<sup>15</sup>

A spiraling staircase that descends 26 floors leads downward from the atrium. When the guards descend or ascend the stairs, they warm up their voices by singing scales. Going up: *Do, Re, Me, Fa, So, La, Ti*. And going down: *Ti, La, So, Fa, Mi, Re, Do*.

513. The Pedioocracy Room<sup>16</sup>

512. The Quodestrian Room<sup>17</sup>



### 511. The Recondite Room<sup>18</sup>

In the museum's restaurant, called Frank's Diner, everything is red-orange: the walls and ceiling, the tables and chairs, the cups and dishes, the cutlery. Dishes such as stress cake, squash pie and genuflect fritters are served with foot-tall piles of fresh greens. A pitcher of purified cloud-water is complimentary at each table.

### 510. The Sacrosentient Room<sup>19</sup>

### 509. The Taliesin Room<sup>20</sup>

### 508. The Ululant Room<sup>21</sup>

An edible forest surrounds the vertical city: green pastures of lettuce, trees bearing fruit and nuts, herbs planted in rows, berry bushes. Those living on or near the ground level tend to the forest, which feeds the thousands living above. During the harvest festival, ingredients for salads are assembled in giant blankets and tossed into the air.

### 507. The Viviparous Room<sup>22</sup>

### 506. The Wherewithal Room<sup>23</sup>

### 505. The Xanthopsia Room<sup>24</sup>

When Edison first invented the phonograph he compiled a list of its possible uses. In that moment he wasn't just thinking about practical applications, he was imagining how his invention might alter prevailing culture. One of these uses was the *Family Record*, capturing the last words of dying persons. The hallway leading to the final room of the museum on floor 503 is wallpapered in vinyl records, each holding the final thoughts, wishes, hopes and requests of a single person. Tracks from these records can be chosen and played inside the room, which is only accessible to invigilators and museum staff during the last weeks of their life.

504. The Yonderly Room<sup>25</sup>

503. The Zzz Room<sup>26</sup>

## Alphabet City Notes

1. A collection of books, stored inside of books, stored inside of books, many of which are seemingly incoherent, unreadable or otherwise encoded beyond legibility. They must be read as metaphors and allegories, or yet-to-be-decoded messages of the cryptographic variety.
2. Daily, a group of six to twelve people gather in this Room, each speaking a different language. There they endeavor to communicate, to understand each other beyond language.
3. An array of household objects are submerged for decade long periods off the coastlines of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Once retrieved, those covered in barnacles are presented here, in an otherwise fully functional kitchen environment. Seafood stews and chowders served daily during lunch hours. No reservation required.

4. Three woman, world renown for their predictive abilities are on-call (both in person and via 1-800 number) to answer your questions about the near or distant future: that is, if you can convince them to stop binge watching television shows long enough to talk with you. No reservation required, but be prepared to watch a few episodes of the programme du jour.
5. An award-winning book of lipograms by Christian Bök.
6. An artist moved to rural Pennsylvania and bought a gas station (with an apartment in back) on a hundred acres of land. Standing at the edge of a pull-off, just down the road from the station, is a scale model of brontosaurus made of fiberglass and rebar and painted red. A door in the tail opens onto stairs and leads up to a stomach cavity that has a bubble dome skylight on top and a wooden floor.

Each day the artist took a walk through the vast forest that surrounded his home and collected the bones of birds, the evolutionary descendants of dinosaurs. He'd clean, bleach and assemble them into scale model skeletons of prehistoric beasts, referencing precise measurements published by the American Museum of Natural History. He positioned each

miniature dinosaur on shelves he'd built in the belly of the brontosaurus. He had planned to name it the Jurassic Museum of Contemporary Art but had a heart attack and died before revealing its existence to family or friends. The brontosaurus and its collection are on view here. On the outside of the brontosaurus is an aviary, where all of the birds that flit about are scared as hell of the dinosaur.

7. The foods eaten in this room contain a precise combination of acids, bacteria and gasses that produce a symphony of sound in the gut. The acoustics of each person's gut are different. Contact microphones are attached to the belly and amplified for a live audience. Side effects may include dizziness, gum disease and Xanthopsia.
8. Saints, Heroes, Minor Gods, Übermensch and other helpful but otherwise unsavory characters come here to hang out with each other (because normal people find them creepy) and argue. No devotees admitted.
9. A Room of a pinkish-red color in which every surface is padded, soft and fuzzy. A nice place to rest and digest after visiting Frank's diner. No reservation needed, unless staying overnight. Also known as the Womb Room.

10. This Room contains a small cabin discovered frozen inside an Arctic glacier. If you step inside, it's makes you 472 days younger. No one really knows how or why, but it works.
11. In this room, a Finnish elder will tell you the entirety of a legend he recalls from the 19th century. Reservation required. Get ready to drink more aquavit than you planned for.
12. Not agnostic, not atheist, just casual—even lax—about religion? Then this Room and the altar inside are for you. Most people hang out just a few minutes; prayer is discouraged. This Room also serves as the chapel for the health clinic on floor 517.
13. Two people, both named  $\Lambda$  hang out in this room. If you touch both of them simultaneously, your consciousness downloads into theirs. You can then have a conversation with yourself. The effect wears off in about an hour.
14. The break-room for employees of Frank's Diner.
15. An alternative to the standard confessional booth: you tell the pastor what you've done wrong and they roast you mercilessly.

16. The headquarters of a government of, by and for children. Not recommended for adults and not to be confused with day-care.
17. An elephant with a variety of 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century oil paintings attached on all sides waddles lazily around this Room, eating peanuts
18. Some of the world's oldest secrets are held in books stored in this Room. Good luck gaining access though, reservations are 7 years out.
19. A collection of sacred objects with low-level sentience, assembled by non-human animals are presented in this Room. An ad hoc, volunteer staff of human caretakers attend to its hourly intake of nutrients and clear its excrement. The current caretakers need only present the collection to guests, to initiate their departure. The guests, who after seconds of seeing the collection are teeming with feelings of desire and reverence, kindly ask the soon-to-be-previous caretakers for their permission to stay with the collection. The sitting caretakers smile, accept and immediately take their leave. In the days following, the amorous feelings fade, replaced by a mundane acceptance of the duties of maintenance. Care instructions for the collection are posted near the entrance, accompanied by the consequences for early departure.

20. Only via those coming out, baffled by their inability to describe a single detail about where they have been or what they have done, was this Room identified. Inside, a *School of Not Knowing* was established. Or at least the desks, chairs whiteboard and teacher's desk were delivered. No schedule of classes has been published and no inauguration or graduation has been announced. Students emerge with blank pages in folders, carrying pens that have run out of ink.
21. This Room has an entrance door that is also the exit door. One can see the room prior to entering but upon entering they find themselves exiting.
22. An infinitely large and swirling pile of baby ducks, chicks, kittens, puppies etc. Those who've lost all hope can reserve time on the La-Z-Boy™ chair in the middle of the room.
23. A lens that bends space-time allowing you to look into the night's sky and view it in the past or distant future. This Room is cantilevered off the side of the tower and comes to a point, like the prow of a ship. The time-space controller is a classic nautical steering wheel. Open from dusk to dawn, no reservation required.
24. A room for those who suffer tinting of vision related to four-color-process printing (CMYK),



including Cyanopsia (a side effect of Viagra), Magentopsia and Xanthopsia (yellow) and also those who are losing their sight (black). Museum Invigilators (once fully blind) are often hired from this support group that meets Tuesdays and Thursdays to view and discuss paintings made by artists who, or so art historians theorize, suffered from tinted vision.

25. The place British teenagers go when they fuck-off.

26. At the end of the hallway of records, is a door. The interior is hexagonal with crimson stained wood on all surfaces. The lighting is controlled by sensors, diffusers and apertures that adjust throughout the day, allowing a steady and soothing amount of natural light into the room. Medical monitoring equipment is built into the walls and their LED readouts can be viewed through a translucent wooden veneer. In the middle of the room is a surface called the Ergo-Lethe that conforms to the shape of the body allowing comfort in any position. The surrounding floor is covered with burnished tiles that mark each step taken in the room with a halo of color that slowly dissipates. Above the door is a sign that reads “My solitude is cheered by elegant hope,” the final line of the *Library of Babel*, by J.L.B.

Prior to Completion of Occupancy, most inhabitants of The Zzz Room request cremation and that their ashes be mixed with precipitant and released (from the observation deck) into the clouds, allowing them to rain into the valley below. On the day after Completion, the museum invigilators, as they carry out their daily duties, all hum a slow rendition of the tune once whistled by the invigilator or staff-member while alive, as a funeral dirge. A day is then chosen by the museum's director to scatter ashes into the clouds. The museum is closed early and all the invigilators and staff descend to ground level, to walk through the forest below. There they bury small objects of remembrance and look up, waiting to feel rain drops on their cheeks.



# Seldom Come

And the As Ever People sent formal requests to museums around the world with the weight of international law. They asked for things stored in the darkest corners of collections; things that had been borrowed and never returned, things that had been stolen. And their requests were granted. Not all at once, of course, but slowly—one and two at a time—their history was sent back to them. Some homecomings required the work of lawyers, others just an exchange of letters. Signatures on lines. Both sides knew, by reckonings ancient and recent, that it was time. And so these museums sent, in crates and cardboard boxes, carefully wrapped in foam and bubble-wrap, all that had once belonged to the As Ever People. And the objects were received and unpacked and photographed. These things that had specific uses, or were parts of stories that spanned generations, were researched and written about. Some of the uses and stories were remembered; others had been forgotten.

One group called a meeting to discuss what to do with the growing collection of objects. And after some disagreement they settled on a plan to build a museum of their own. It was designed and built in the way of the As Ever People. And a staff was hired to organize and care for the collection that accumulated each day as crates of different lengths and widths arrived. By then, countless books had been written about making museums and they had all been read and understood by the As Ever People. And so—inside glass vitrines, or composed on the shelves of display cases, or positioned behind stanchions, all carefully illuminated by track lighting—were the objects and artifacts that had been returned. The day it opened, the As Ever People visited the museum. And for the first time they witnessed all that had been recollected and all that had been lost.

It was called an inauguration and a celebration, so they smiled at each other and at the satisfaction of reclamation. The traces of lives past had been received in good condition, respectfully displayed and gratefully welcomed. But during the evening's event a story was told. And the story reminded them of the lives of the objects and of the dead who had once held them, or had worn them on their bodies. And afterwards they went home, alone or with their families. In their kitchens they set elbows on the table and put their faces in their hands, or sat

silently by the window looking out into the dark, or went straight to bed without a word. The museum had reminded them of the scar that ran across their backs—the part that hands and fingers couldn't reach. It had started to itch.

And so, in the weeks that followed, mothers and daughters, fathers and sons and sometimes whole families sent requests to the museum to loan objects for their personal use. And schools and community groups requested loans for historical research and for use of the objects during gatherings. Some wrote formal petitions with the help of lawyers and others just signed their names at the bottom of hand written letters. The museum staff sat together and reviewed each page and read each word. They understood that the objects on view had been returned not just to the museum but to the As Ever People. And so, all the requests were granted.

And as these things circulated among the As Ever People, some remembered parts of the old stories. Other things found their way into kitchens or meetings and were used to stir the soup or were passed hand-to-hand, they were worn under t-shirts or wrapped around newborn babies. One of the curators who cared for objects in the museum decided to collect the stories that were shared from mouth to ear. She wrote them down and placed the

pages inside the empty boxes that had been used to ship the objects.

And soon the museum was almost empty. On the walls were hooks and hanging hardware, in the rooms were vacant shelves and vitrines where objects once stood. And the Come From Away people who didn't expect to find an empty museum, those passing by who saw the sign on the road, came less and less. But when the few As Ever People came, the curator who had collected the stories gave them tours through the empty museum, recounting detailed descriptions of the objects that had once lived together there. She read them the old stories that had been remembered and told them of the new lives and uses of the objects. And hearing the stories was like a salve for the itch and many more came to visit the curator.

In the last weeks of the museum, which had been unofficially renamed Seldom, all the crates and boxes that once contained the objects were piled up in the center of the museum. They had been kept in storage, but it had become clear that each object had found a new and permanent home. And the administration, who had no desire to care for an empty museum, found other jobs. But the curator who had collected the stories stayed, sitting in an old arm chair next to a wood-burning stove and

listened to the wind. And one by one, the rest of the As Ever People came and sat with her and listened.

And the wind outside caused the boards to creak and the building to sway. To fuel the fire she broke up the wooden crates and tore apart the boxes and fed them to the flames. She gathered up the pages of stories she had collected into a pile and on the day that the wood of the last crate burned in the stove, she collected her things. She held open the doors and let in the wind. She watched as the pages in the pile blew off the table and onto the floor of the empty museum. And then she locked the door and walked home. Left inside were a few embers and a scatter of stories that might one day be collected into a book. But the stories were already known and would never be forgotten by the As Ever People.



*When the right stories are found or written, the stories that reveal the tear in time where matter and myth become frayed and entangled, might we not awaken the gods that sleep in museums? And when they arise, will they remain obedient guests or wander back into our lives?*





# Tycho

During periods of war, museums with collections of national treasures have historically been evacuated. Trains packed with crates fled cities headed for mines or caves at remote locations, away from battlefields where they might be raided or destroyed. In the months of escalation that led to the declaration of the Third World War, the off-world solution of the moon was presented as an alternative, as most of earth's natural and man-made cavities were known, mapped and routinely imaged via satellite. At the time, the moon was already host to a dozen extra-national outposts and a few small colonies, most of which were related to mining and tourism. The largest of the colonies occupied the floor of the lunar impact crater Tycho, named after the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe. A few days after the fifth Earth nation entered WWII, the facility at Tycho had become the largest trans-national storehouse of artworks in the solar system.

Originally built as a birthing center for mothers-to-be, who (if they could afford the trip) left earth

for the low gravity environment at Tycho station for their final month of pregnancy. As a result, Tycho was the most comfortable habitation on the moon. After the expansion for art-storage, only a small section of the colony was retained for the birthing program. In this section only mothers-to-be, doctors, nurses, midwives and newborn babies were allowed outside of visiting hours.

Between the birthing and storage facilities, above-ground tunnels connected habitation domes to a docking bay that served as a reception point for shuttles to and from earth, receiving pregnant mothers and crated artworks both. Prior to receiving guests at the in-patient birthing center, the bay had been equipped with an operating facility and a trained surgical staff, in case of emergencies. As space travel became routine and the occurrence of emergencies dropped to near zero, the ultrasound and radiographic equipment were retrofitted to enable scans of artworks and artifacts—condition reports filed after transport for insurance purposes.

As is often the case throughout history, many technological advances were made during the war. By the second year of WWII the surgical equipment at Tycho was replaced with *infra-scanners*, which enabled a deep material and chemical analysis, accounting for every substance used in the construction of an object. It could also live monitor a

mother and baby's internal systems during surgery. While the bay didn't yet have a nanoprinter, the software model generated by the scanner could serve as instructions for producing a near-exact replica of whatever had been scanned—a surrogate object that was indistinguishable from the original.

One 20<sup>th</sup> C theorist had suggested that the unique existence of a work of art was inextricably bound to its period in history, the moment in which it was made, but also the time-span it remained on view, in storage or in circulation. That history, he wrote, is recognizable through the non-physical forces of economic and cultural value, various kinds of written interpretation and even images of it taken and distributed. The history of an object is also formed, informed and reformed by physical forces and conditions including heat, pressure, humidity, the oxidizing of materials, poor handling and other accidents that might lead to dents, scratches, water damage, acts of conservation et cetera. An artwork carries within its material a memory of its period of existence and the result of these forces acting on an object over time is what makes it unique. Once the printing of art objects began, all that distinguished one from another was this physical memory: the age of the chemicals used in its construction and the dents and scratches of its life as a particular object.

One of the first objects to be printed on the moon was ironically one that was already there and had been since 1971. It was a pocket-sized sculpture entitled *Fallen Astronaut*, by a Belgian artist named Paul van Hoeydonck. At only three and half inches, it was a tiny monument to those who had died in space. Because it more closely resembled an pregnant woman than an astronaut was the reason it had become known as the Lunar Venus and was chosen as the official mascot of the birthing program at Tycho.

As one of the few craters visible from earth (a result of the lines radiating out from its impact zone), Tycho became known as the Belly Button of the moon and the shuttle that delivered art and pregnant women The Umbilical Cord. During wartime, millions on Earth continued to look up at the moon as they had for thousands of years, but what they saw had changed. The shape of the moon began to resemble a pregnant bulge and they imagined that protected, deep inside were the artworks they had known before the war and would hopefully live to see again.

Three years into WWII, the storage company on Tycho began turning a profit. In celebration, they sent the first surrogates to earth. Replicas of *Fallen Astronaut* made of crushed moon-rock

were delivered to the administration heads of every major museum that stored artworks in their facility. The arrival of the gift provoked two questions: Hadn't museums around the world, for hundreds of years, presented plaster casts of marble or bronze sculptures from antiquity? Why should printed replications, surrogates made of marble or bronze, be any different? A few of the museums with the largest endowments began to commission the printing of surrogates at Tycho, which were crated and sent to earth. Soon, dozens and then hundreds of artworks were replicated and installed for public display in the world's encyclopedic museums. Their appearance, after years of empty halls, was heralded as an act of resilience in a time an aesthetic and emotional deficiency suffered during a state of global conflict.

Just after the end of the war, the new global government restricted the production of surrogates on earth. However, because of newly inflated insurance premiums it was cheaper to print and ship surrogates from the moon, rather than return-ship originals of exponentially greater value. As a result, the world's major museums continued printing and filling their galleries with the digital offspring of objects held in secure storage at Tycho. While debate about the ethics of producing surrogates continued on earth, everything from 15<sup>th</sup> century oil paintings to 21<sup>st</sup> century sculptures could

suddenly be sent across vast distances digitally. The gray market for infra-scans grew and illegitimate surrogates were printed and sold. A few years after the end of the war, all the world's major collecting institutions were largely populated by high-resolution fakes.

A decade after the war, a small but beloved city that had been bombed to ashes, as it had been in the first and second world wars, was again rebuilt. It was decided that all the buildings in the city would be reconstructed according to historical record—photographs, maps and architectural plans—to resemble as closely as possible an array of pre-WWI, WWII and WWIII architecture. At the center of the city was a building named the Museum of Doubt. It presented only first-generation surrogates that were made on the moon during the war. The centerpiece of the collection was one of the first replicas of the Lunar Venus, made of crushed moon-rock. The museum also initiated a residency program on the moon. Applications were open to pregnant artists, who travelled to Tycho to produce new artworks that were then scanned and printed.

One of the pregnant artists sent to the moon for a residency was a distant relative of an astronaut named Charles M. Duke. Borrowing a mining vehicle, she travelled to the Descartes landing site explored by the Apollo 16 mission in 1972. There she found a

snapshot that her great-great-grandfather had left inside a plastic sleeve—a family portrait with his wife and their two sons. Returning to Tycho, she had the photograph infra-scanned and printed a stack of surrogates that she sent through the umbilical post to friends. On the back of each photograph she hand-wrote the announcement of the birth of her baby girl on April 20<sup>th</sup>: the same day that Charlie had landed on the moon. She wouldn't know until days before her death, but she had given birth to the person who would put an end to all war on earth. Her name was Fin.





# End Notes

## **Focus for Frampton**

A shorter version of this text was printed in the magazine SFAQ in 2014. It was written as a parallel text to Kerry Tribe's *Critical Mass* (2010), a performed version of an experimental film made by Hollis Frampton in 1971. The first section paraphrases a text by Frampton, *A Pentagram for Conjuring the Narrative* (1972). Frampton tells the story of a friend's recurring nightmare of multiple lifetimes which serves as an allegory about the complexities of representation.

## **Journey, the Man**

Written on Fogo Island, during a residency at Fogo Island Arts (FIA) in May of 2017. The story references *Galerie Légitime* (1962) by Robert Filliou (he wore a hat around Paris and presented its contents to strangers) and three artist museums: Claus Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum*, Diego Rivera's Anahuacalli and Niki de Saint Phalle's *Hon: A Cathedral*. Dedicated to my wife Helena, the one who remembers.

## **Pianissimo**

An early draft was written in Tel Aviv during a residency at ArtPort in December 2015, but the second half was written (and rewritten) on Fogo Island, during the residency at FIA. The final version arrived while listening to the solo piano of sister Emahoy Tsegue Maryam Guebrou. A near-final draft was read to a small group at the Fogo Island Inn, May 23, 2017, in a room with a single grand piano. It also references a published project *Michael Snow Questions & Answers* and borrows from the list of various white-colored foods mentioned by Erik Satie's in his *Memoirs of an Amnesiac*.

Avalon, the name of the colony settled by Lord Baltimore in Newfoundland before migrating southward to Maryland, refers to “the isle of fruit or apple trees” in Arthurian legend.

## **Saint Anthony's Fire**

This story was written in Lisbon, Portugal and published in issue #15 of White Fungus magazine in Taiwan. It's built on a mention of a book by Antonio Tabucchi called *Requiem: A Hallucination* (1991) that I found in Raúl Ruiz's *Poetics of Cinema*, thanks to Jeff Lambert.

## **Janitor for the Nation**

This was originally published online, as part of Art21 magazine's *Movement* issue, edited by Chen Tamir.

It was written in Tel Aviv the day after witnessing the performance *National Collection*, by the artist group Public Movement, at the Tel Aviv Art Museum. During the performance, I wrote down the line, “imagine that this museum is a nation and inside this nation is a museum.” Thanks to Dana Yahalomi for her encouragement. I had the good fortune to read this story to a room at the KVS in Brussels, and a year later at Signal in Malmö.

### **Museum of Smoking**

One of first stories written in this series, it was drafted (looking out on the Chesapeake Bay in the Fall of 2015) at the invitation of Ola El Khalidi and published in her 2017 book *She would roll petite cigarettes, petite like her*. Some sections were added more recently, including the mention of *The Last Smoking Flight*, a video by the artist Gabriel Lester.

### **Seldom Come**

The first version of this story was written in Mexico City, while staying at the home of friends Julia and Victor. They had just been in New Mexico working on a project and visited an empty museum. Julia’s description of it led to this. *Seldom Come By* and *Come From Away* are terms borrowed from Fogo Island. Thanks to Rometti Costales.

## **Alphabet City**

This story is a kaleidoscope of many different sources, salvaged ideas, memories and art references. There's more than one nod to *The Library of Babel* by Jorge Luis Borges (1944). The mile-tall building refers to *The Illinois* by Frank Lloyd Wright. The elephant wearing paintings references a drawing by the Russian cartoonist, Yuri Albert. The *Jurassic Museum of Contemporary Art* refers to a drawing by Mark Dion of a dinosaur. Zzz refers to *The Dying Room*, a project by the German artist Gregor Schneider. Tossing salad in a blanket is a reference to *Make a Salad* (1962) by Alison Knowles. The lens that bends space-time appeared in a dream of my Dad, Thomas. The School of Not Knowing refers to a project by A Constructed World.

## **Tycho**

There were more variations of this story than I can count. The final version was completed on Fogo Island, with edits in Paris. The Museum of Doubt references *Lugar a Dudas* (place of doubt) in Cali, Colombia, which occasionally produces replicas of contemporary artworks that would otherwise be unavailable in the region. The *Fallen Astronaut* sculpture was carried and left on the moon by David Scott, a crew member of Apollo 15, in 1971... the same year that Hollis Frampton made *Critical Mass* (see *Focus for Frampton*).

# Thanks

I'm indebted to so many friends, many thanks to HYKdP and my family and to friends Renny Pritikin and Suzanne Stein for their endless encouragement. Thanks to Justin Limoges for his insights and story-order suggestions. Thanks to Christian Nagler and Jim & Leah for reading and listening. Many thanks to ArtPort and especially Vardit Gross and Renana, but also Toony & Yoni and Elad, Michal, David, Naama and Tamir. Thanks to Dana Levy for her enthusiasm. Thanks to everyone at Fogo Island Arts, but especially Alexandra McIntosh, for her warm hospitality, and to Nicolaus and Zita for the time to write. Big thanks to Art Metropole and Danielle St Amour for her edits and care in publishing. Thanks to Michael and Jessica in Toronto for their friendship and support. And finally, thanks to KADIST Paris. I made final edits on all of these stories late at night in the apartment on Rue des Trois-Frères.

# Epilogue

These stories are the result of a year of travel, from Mexico City to St Louis, from San Juan to Tel Aviv, Paris to Lisbon and finally Fogo Island to Toronto where they became a book. The places, people and things herein are to be found in the rhythm and rhyme of these cities. But, they are first the result of an attempt to find a new way of writing that thinks beyond the summary, the review and the catalogue essay—the kind of art writing typical to my day job as a curator. Bill Berkson’s notion of the Parallel Text, which proposes that writing aims to find an equivalent vitality in the orbit of an artwork, has provided a line of thought that continues to lead me in the right direction, ever closer to my own voice.





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49° 37' N, 54° 12'

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