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The Garden

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EXHIBIT I

Anything in there?



It must be hiding.

I see it.

Come here, you'll get a good shot.

A straight shot.



(click click click)

Did you get him?



Got him.

Okay, let's go find another.



EXHIBIT V





Look at it. says she

He turned his back to us. says he

How rude. says she

(bang) (bang) (bang) does she

(bang) (bang) (bang) does he

He still won't look at us. says he

your back is a
broad door
to a
closed room.

EXHIBIT VII





*I wish it wasn't pacing.
He's putting on a show for us.
That's not what I want.*

*It won't turn around for me.
It's exercising.
I wish it wasn't pacing.
He's putting on a show for us.
That's not what I want.*

*It won't turn around for me.
It's exercising.
I wish it wasn't pacing.
He's putting on a show for us.
That's not what I want.*

*It won't turn around for me.
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He's putting on a show for us.
That's not what I want.*

*It won't turn around for me.
It's exercising.
I wish it wasn't pacing.
He's putting on a show for us.*

you are a grey storm, swirling. your eye, as the center
of the storm, is still. at the back of the enclosure,
in the only corner partially out of view, you
pace. with each step, the pounds of you
pound into the ground a story
in sound we can never hear.
the weight of your body
is beloved by a
distant land
who needs
your steps
to be
bowls
that hold
water, quenching
thirsty mouths of antelope,
a land who needs your steps to
shape the grasslands that are homes to
wildebeests and larks. but here, your steps
in the dusty ground draw one single shape over
and over again, an infinity sign: that which is endless,
that which is boundless, that which does not exist in nature.

EXHIBIT VI



Is it real? *says he*
I want one. *says she*
See that thing? *says he*
Is it real? *says she*
Is he really alive? *says she*
Yeah, it's real. *says he*
It looks dead. *says he*
It's a real one. *says she*
Let's go find something that's moving. *says he*

your eyes are dewed with moisture
under yellow heat lamps, that pretend to be the sun.
your cast shadow darkens
the blue and white concrete wall, that pretends to be the sky.
your chest swells with breath
on sculpted concrete rocks that pretend to be the land.
you turn your head, as slow as a mountain range moving
while fingers tap on the glass window.
you open your mouth.
your throat is a jeweled cave, alive with
crimsons, pinks, magentas, rubies.
you are the only
part that is *real*.

EXHIBIT II



*... Animals look at space
differently than we do ...
says the curator*

*... Minimum space requirement
... All they need
are four basic necessities:
food, water, shelter, and
the opposite sex...
... We provide that here.
It's not a bad life...
says the curator*

*... The habitats, yes, in a way
are built for us,
to imagine the animals in the wild...
says the curator*

*... We don't call it captivity anymore
but under
human care....
says the curator*

*... The way I say it is, wouldn't you
rather spend a day in a room
full of magazines, phones, food, entertainment?
says the keeper
(I didn't correct him:
not a day,
but a lifetime)*

gull cries sound
from black speakers
mounted on rocks,
covered with dried starfish.

with your every turn,
turn, turn, turn, turning
water brims over the rim
of the glass tank.

you know the sea
to be not only water,
but a wide blue chest
whose deepest depths
you can almost touch.

you know the sea
as pair of cool hands
that tendly shaped your fins
to be the perfect paddles.

now, in the tank
your head breaks
the water's surface.
your nostrils flare
towards the flaming sun.
through the glass, it looks

as if your head
has been severed
from your body.

ARTIST STATEMENT

This selection of paintings, photographs and poetry originate from a series titled *The Garden*. Every weekend, for one and a half years, I visited the zoo near my home to witness the neighboring lives of nonhuman animals, mere miles from me, who remain contained between walls as I move freely. I created images and poetry that both make strange the aesthetics of captivity while also honor a privacy of being that nonhuman animals are denied while perpetually on display for consumption by the human gaze.

As an image-maker who is deeply devoted to the work of challenging human exceptionalism and cultivating reverence and moral sensitivity to nonhuman life, I always account for the ethics with which I depict animals. Each painting or drawing originates from many visits to the same enclosure, where I would stand still for hours and sketch in all weather. I never took photographs of the individual to paint from, for photography is a subtle, but significant way in which zoo animals are captured yet again. Sketching however is inherently fallible and incomplete, therefore felt to be a more honest manifestation of the act of empathetic witnessing. While at the enclosures, I was attentive to the various ways in which the animals limited or denied completely the gaze of human visitors, either with their eyes closed, their back turned, or their endless pacing in a far corner of the enclosure. The animals in the paintings and drawings similarly refuse the viewer's gaze.

The unbalanced compositions and unnatural colors of the paintings and drawings visually communicate the dissonance between the nonhuman animals and the artificial environments of their enclosures. Paired with each image are poems made up of two blocks of text that relate to one another across the divide of the page. The left side is composed of comments by passing visitors and by the curator and keeper I interviewed, while the right side describes the animals as I witnessed them.

The photographs show details of the glass wall of the orangutan enclosure, which is covered with scratches that are made, not from the outside by human visitors, but from the inside by the captive apes. These marks undermine any notion of the animal as object in a display case. To take a tool and make a mark on a surface is, ultimately, the act involved to create a drawing or painting. In art, a mark can be described as having movement and energy, or suggestive of the emotional state of the maker. Given that the root of the word "mark" means "boundary or border," these emphatic scratches and sweeping, gestural lines are

even more haunting, knowing their makers drew them on the border of their world, a border we alone maintain and contain them in. Even within their hyper-surveiled and controlled environment, they were able to find tools with which to gauge the triple-paned, industrial glass walls. There is no way to know the inner lives of these orangutans and their experience of endless captivity. But, somehow, these marks need no translation.

As artifacts of colonialism, now advertised as Noah's Ark in this era of plummeting wildlife populations, zoos use the veneer of entertainment and conservation heroism to sanitize what is otherwise an extremely disturbing reality. Through an isolationist logic of keeping species in separate cages from others and in sculpted habitats arranged like a stage, zoos deprive these creatures of belonging to the web of entangled relations in which they are a vital part. With mouths full of cotton candy, visitors press their palms up to the glass as if it was a TV screen. Curators oversee the "genetic reserve" of captive populations like vulnerable jewels. No one stops to grieve. No one shudders to think: if we have stripped all these beings of belonging, what will be of the Earth's tomorrow?

IMAGE CAPTIONS

Exhibit I

(The Writing on the Wall)

2022

Four digital photographs
in a series of ten

Exhibit VI

2021

32" X 27"

Oil paint and acrylic paint on
translucent fabric

Exhibit II

2021

31 1/2" X 20 1/2"

Oil paint and acrylic paint on
fabric

Exhibit V

2021

16" X 16"

Acrylic paint, pumice, tissue
paper and graphite on canvas

Exhibit VII

2021

32 1/4" X 56 1/4"

Oil paint, acrylic paint, graphite and oil pastel on canvas