



Lost and Found - Notes by Marie Tomanova

I have done nothing all summer but wait for myself to be myself again.
--Georgia O'Keeffe

I am painting again. I am painting myself again as a means of expressing my identity, or parts of my identities that have come together or have come apart. These paintings will be shown for the first time at my September 2024 exhibition at C24 Gallery in combination with a series of instant photographs that I took of myself each day of 2022, a body of photography work titled *Three Empty Weeks in July* because while I set out to create work each day, ultimately I failed—for three weeks in July I did not take photographs. But for me that process told me a lot about myself and I found strength and inspiration in the idea of that which is not there. So I photographed each month of these instant photos on the reverse of a painting I had painted between 2005 and 2010, linking, however imperfectly and indirectly, my past painting practice to my current photography. Subconsciously this may be a meditation of the concept of failure, but perhaps more importantly, it is about the significance of what is not seen, about ourselves, others, the world, those empty spaces that resonate so profoundly because of their unintelligibility, because of their capacity to hold great dreams or fears, great truths or fictions.

I am exhilarated and I am terrified. This new exhibition, combining new painting and photography, is in many ways complex, but at the same time it is very simple—it is about self-portraiture, self-conception; it is about who I am, a self that can be hard for me to see or to understand. And really, it is about all of us who struggle to find who we really are, what we really could be.

There is a story I have told many times before about how I studied painting at university in the Czech Republic and got my MFA in painting. But that process, to me, was ultimately traumatic. I remember getting the letter that I was accepted into art school, and I remember being so excited, dreaming; my goal to be an artist was closer. And yet upon going to art school I was repeatedly told by the all-male faculty that I would amount to nothing; that girls couldn't paint, couldn't really be artists. We were compared to the capable young men around us—they received praise, we were at best sexualized and scorned. And so I graduated defeated, beaten-down, demoralized--an experience I have heard from many other young women who have painted under the same conditions, who have shared the same deeply ingrained misogynistic treatment. So broken, I came to the United States; I was lost, and I found photography, but I never quite let go of my desire to paint—I drew everyday and journaled—but to paint was something that still stood beyond me with the years of brutal, derisive critique. But I think that photography has made me stronger. I am painting again. I am painting myself again.

In March 2024, knowing I would have this show, and that I would be showing new paintings for the first time in over a decade, I wrote something in my journal, and it may be the most honest way of expressing myself. It forms some sort of artist statement related to the paintings in the exhibition.

March 25, 2024

I am painting

Something I never thought I would do again. But here I am, sitting in my kitchen of my 1 BR apartment and painting in an improvised studio. Listening to David Bowie's *Space Oddity*—I almost feel like crying. So many emotions. So many memories keep re-surfacing. I have vivid memories of my studio in Mikulov, in the lower part of the house (which doesn't exist anymore). I had a beautiful view from the studio windows onto my mom's flower garden and the sunset. I used to paint there, listening to music, feeling heartbroken about many of my back then relationships and whichever one was the current disaster. I wasn't lucky with men back then. And I longed to love and be loved more than ever. I wanted that deep connection and all of my paintings were a reflection of that. A reflection of a confused self. I felt so terribly and painfully lost. All these memories and feelings are coming out and I am trying to process them from a totally different point-of-view. I am a different person now. I no longer have those feelings.

I no longer have any relationship drama to work through in my paintings. And yet, all of these old feelings...It is strange to feel them again...

Some of them still resonate. I wonder—did I really change at all? Am I still scared and confused? I want to paint. Yet I have to constantly remind myself that I can. I can do whatever I want. Paint however I feel. Give myself inner creative freedom. Allow myself to create without fear.

--Marie Tomanova