At the Bend in the Bright River

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Abstract

*At the Bend in the Bright River* is a collection of portraits that celebrate the beauty and stillness of quiet moments of intimacy between me and members of my queer family. Heavily influenced by film, literature, and queer temporality theories, the portraits explore the passage of time in intimate relationships by combining elements of photographic and drawn information. By combining elements of drawing and photography within a body of lithographic prints I aim to complicate, prolong, and elaborate on the act of reproducing the likeness of another person. The portraits of *At the Bend in the Bright River* are bolstered by a series of smaller contextual images that bridge and complicate the relationship between each of the sitters.
**Distance**

My work is a love letter to the people who make me feel grounded. I had a very transitory upbringing, so it is necessary and important for me to actively acknowledge and honour my closest and most intimate relationships. I grew up across four continents and constantly felt like I was leaving people behind, so many relationships got lost to time and distance. Queerness was always an additionally alienating factor while growing up but, in adulthood, it has become a means for connection and community. It is not uncommon for queer people to experience a certain feeling of being alien and a need to establish smaller and more insular communities as a means of survival. Being among other queer people is really the only time I do not feel foreign. There is a mutual experience of otherness that creates a stronger and more resilient bond that I feel the need to celebrate.

In my work I consider the relationships between queer time, the present moment, the promise of the future and my family through portraiture. I am interested in queerness as a feeling, rather than queerness as an act. I am interested in the bounds of queerness as it pertains to the way we move through the world and operate as human beings and how it can be used to construct togetherness. By creating portraits of the people who matter the most to me and who have existed with me through various versions of myself, I am declaring the importance of togetherness and requesting a future in which we can continue to share each other. Our construction of time in the domestic sphere differs from the ways in which we exist in the greater world; it is my aim to capture the quiet sense of self and place in domestic environments. The feeling of sharing a morning at home provides a palpable, ineffable, and inimitable togetherness.

In “Having a Coke with You” Frank O’Hara tells his lover that the great art of the world lacks the ineffable spark that is the joy of the two of them spending time together. In discussing what artists have not been able to capture, O’Hara says that “it seems they were all cheated of some marvellous experience / which is not going to go wasted on me which is why I’m telling you about it.” Within a mere moment O’Hara, inspired by the simple pleasure of watching someone enjoy a beverage, envisions all the pleasures of travel, leisure and art and comes to the conclusion that the most important action he could take is to verbalise the joy of this very instant. For me, the need to articulate the pleasure of watching a lover in the most banal of moments hold incredible power and weight. In the introduction of Cruising Utopia: the Then and There of Queer Futurity José Esteban Muñoz discusses O’Hara’s poem in order to elaborate on queer futurity. Muñoz points to the depiction of a moment of the present as a moment of the present that is already squarely in the past but with a potentiality that lies in its ability to promise a future. By acknowledging the present, we have already committed it to being a moment of the past, but it is the act of acknowledgement that points to our shared existence in the future. In ruminating on the act of sharing a coke with another person and all of the thoughts that may flick through the narrator’s mind over the course of sharing said beverage, O’Hara is constructing a present that celebrates and foregrounds a knowledge and romance of the past while simultaneously pointing toward a future that will inevitably come to fruition.

Scholars of queer temporality have theorised that members of the queer community experience time and space in a nonlinear manner. Several aspects in the formation of a queer identity create a fractured experience of the progression of time. As such, many queer folk have a complicated relationship to ideas of futurity, longevity, domesticity and family.
dynamics are often very complicated for us, and so our peers, the people who happen into our lives, can ground us more than blood relations ever can. Queer temporality often foregrounds presentness and the importance of the here and now in the queer experience of the passage of time. As such, I find the work of scholars like Muñoz to be incredibly important. His advocacy of futurity and its importance as a remedy to some of the nihilism and individualism that pervades modes in which the present moment supersedes other ideas of longevity is necessary in envisioning possibility. I find optimism over queer relationality and its ability to envision actions in the present in service of a future to be deeply reassuring.

At the Bend in the Bright River has been heavily influenced by Chantal Akerman’s Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles. Jeanne Dielman methodically exercises restraint as it immortises the quotidian and the mundane. For three hours the viewer sits, mostly in silence, watching a woman complete her daily routine for three consecutive days. I have been asking myself why I am so attracted to a film that uses pacing slow enough to punish the viewer. I think Akerman created magic by rewarding a viewer who is able to sit through three days in the life of this woman. We are rewarded by being able to recognise the faults in Jeanne Dielman’s routine. I am in awe of a film that can so deeply unsettle the audience by simply having the protagonist leave a room without turning off the light switch or overcooking potatoes.

When I began At the Bend in the Bright River I wanted to pay homage to Jeanne Dielman and create work that encourages the viewers of my portraits to engage in the kind of time and methodical act of looking that Akerman employed in the film. Film is a useful tool for examining the ways in which we already look at and consume the likenesses of others. Unlike other mediums of representation, film has the ability to control pace and movement in a way that makes it particularly adept at choreographing consumption. I reconstructed and photographed several scenes from the film using my family members. This act of reproducing and translating originates from my desire to bring the film and its themes closer to my reality and equate the viewing experience with my lived experience of my nearest and dearest. My hope in positioning my people in the context of this film was to allow their idiosyncrasies and the minutiae of their movements to be the star of the portraits, much like the idiosyncrasies and minutiae of Delphine Seyrig’s performance as Jeanne became the star of Jeanne Dielman. I then used those photographs as references for drawings and prints. The process of translation from film to photograph, photograph to drawing, and drawing to print, allows me to create a new and deeper sense of intimacy with my subjects. Spending hour after hour staring at their faces, bodies, clothes, and every detail of their physical beings allows me to get to know them better, pore by pore, hair by hair. While the ‘present moment’ that I am rendering has long since passed, I am able to continue experiencing it by using such a lengthy, extensive and deliberate process. Roland Barthes describes the photograph as having the power to certify the presence of what has been and existed by recording its likeness on celluloid. The photograph is not a memory: it is a declaration of the present, and a present without future no less. By combining the original photograph with my drawn reproductions, I use my hand as an act of clarification. My act of reinterpretation amplifies the likeness of photomechanical recording and attests to the rendering of presence, existence and insistence.

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Stillness

There is nothing more beautiful than sharing a moment of quiet with another person. Allowing stillness and comfort to supersede conversation indicates an inimitable quality of intimacy. I celebrate the quiet moments that we share, when we are able to just exist together while considering the importance of the here and the now in intimate, queer relationships. I contemplate the ways in which time can be savoured and preserved in service of a collective future. Utopia exists in the banal, it exists in the minutiæ of a room filled with silence and space for existence.

*Tina with Coffee* was the first piece I created for *At the Bend in the Bright River*. In the print, Tina is sitting next to a window that has a mug on the windowsill and she is touching the jade bracelet she has around her wrist. Tina’s jewellery is incredibly important to her, it is a reflection of so many aspects of her identity, heritage and family. Sitting with Tina you cannot help but notice her adjusting her earrings or shifting the large piece of jade on her wrist if it has migrated too far down her forearm. Touching these objects is a way for her to consistently ground herself. In setting up the images for *Tina with Coffee*, I chose to use an analogue medium format camera to take the photos as it requires the photographer to slow down and be more contemplative and selective. Film photography mirrors the delayed gratification of printmaking. The thrill of rediscovering the photographs I have taken after going through the process of developing feels similar to the exhilaration of peeling that first proof off of the stone in lithography. Once I had developed the photos I chose an image to commit to stone in the form of a drawing. Initially I planned for the print to be a single-layer black and white print on a delicate paper. I wanted my highly rendered and labour-intensive style of drawing to convey the care and love I feel for Tina. By situating Tina within a fully defined and rendered space I was attempting to convey the stillness and intimacy of the early morning. After the first round of proofing, though, I recognised that the stillness I was interested in capturing was reading more as stasis than stillness. It felt as if I were memorialising Tina rather than committing her presence to the pictorial plane.

After reading Hito Steyerl’s *In Defence of the Poor Image*, I was interested in exploring the idea of an image corrupted by time, reformatting, and reshaping. For Steyerl imperfect resolution and the deterioration of the fidelity of the original image can act as a point of access to the work. I wanted to corrupt the stasis of my original drawing by implying motion and the passage of time. By layering my drawing of Tina with a photographic reproduction of a different image from the same roll of film I explore the look and feeling of sitting with another person. The small shifts between the colour and black images indicate the relatively short period of time in which Tina and I were able to exist together, rather than a singular moment. The union of drawing, photography and analogue means of reproduction are used to elaborate on the voracity of the photomechanical image. I was most excited by the interaction between drawing and photo in Tina’s hands. For me, the shifts between the two information systems speaks to the way in which the real Tina moves and shifts her hands in order to adjust her jewellery. Looking at her hands in *Tina with Coffee* gives me a glimpse of the real Tina, sitting in front of me, fidgeting with her hands.

*Tina with Coffee* represents two moments in time overlaid over one another to create the transient bridge between those moments. In thinking about the transitional moment between each shot I decided to explore what continuous motion could offer the picture plane. If *Tina with Coffee* expounds upon a moment of quietness and intimacy that was captured in two separate instances of 1/60th of a second, what would two and a half minutes worth of images feel like? In response I decided to use a short clip I had shot on my grandfather’s

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super8 camera. In this clip I again was emulating the quiet quotidian intimacy of Jeanne Dielman by speaking more specifically to the scenes of the titular character working and eating in the kitchen. Watching Jeanne prepare her meals is meditative and deeply satisfying and so I wanted to bring that home to my figures. The resulting piece, Connor with an Orange, is built upon this short video. I wanted this piece to present a more languid visual approach to the passage of time, so I overlaid roughly one hundred stills from the film to create the equivalent of a long exposure. This long exposure is printed along with a drawing of a single still from the film. The relationship between drawing and photography in this piece becomes more of an act of definition and clarification. Because the photographic element of the piece is so soft and hazy the body and personality of the figure almost become lost. My act of rendering through drawing then becomes an act of recording presence and insistence. Working from such a small negative means that I only have so much detail from which I can draw. Connor’s movements are preserved but the negative is simply too small to capture the exactitude of the moment that a much larger negative could. The Super8 negative has forced my hand away from my typical style of realism and into something softer.

Austen with Her Life in Boxes in the Centre of Her New Living Room serves as something of a counterpoint to the other portraits in the series. In spite of what I have previously said about time, I found myself attracted to this simple image of Austen, caught in a moment. Each of the other portraits feature a conscientiousness and awareness of the camera that produces a stiffness. While I love the more formal postures of Tina and Connor in their respective portraits, there was an ease in this moment of Austen being caught off guard. There is something about Austen meeting the gaze of the camera over her scrolling through her phone and holding her vape that feels honest, unpretentious and self-possessed. I chose to render this portrait in the same way as the previous ones: a cyan, magenta, and yellow layer of photographic imagery underneath a drawn key layer printed in black, but this time all based on one source image. The only shifts in the drawn and photographic imagery are discrepancies between the photo and my draughting abilities. I wanted to see if the viewer would investigate Austen with Her Life in Boxes in the Centre of Her New Living Room in search of the kinds of shifts and discrepancies present in the other portraits. My hope would be that the viewer would dive into the likeness of Austen in search of motion and instead find the fallibility of my skills as a draughtsman.

For this series of images, I wanted the materiality to underscore the ephemeral and delicacy of the qualities of time and intimacy I am representing. As such, each of the images is printed on either 10 or 15 gsm Sekishu which I am leaving unglazed. Leaving the work unglazed allows it to breathe and move with viewers as they traverse the space. The slightest amount of movement sends my figures dancing. As the paper moves and responds to its environment it gives the figures more of a presence in the reality of the present moment. The portraits are constantly changing, moving and recording the stresses of their environments due to the sheer delicacy of the substrate on which they exist. Another element of this paper that I knew I wanted to exploit was its transparency. I am interested in a paper that allows the viewer to focus on and through the portraits I am creating. For me this ever changing focal plane, further accentuated by hanging the pieces a few inches off the wall, allows for a deeper level of intimacy between subject and viewer. The process of making is subsumed by the physical presence and experience of the resulting object. In planning my images, I chose to print the drawn layer and the photographic layers on opposite sides of the paper. I wanted the final layer of black ink from my drawing to come through the photo from the back of the paper and truly by integrated into the construction of a single image. As viewed from the front the image becomes more harmonious but the piece still exists as a double sided print. The printing process becomes a little bit queer, it is subverted to create an image that is viewable from both sides at once, each side revealing its own intricacies.
As I approach the construction of my drawings, I find inspiration in the work of many artists working within two dimensional modes of representation. I love looking at portraits and genre paintings from the Dutch Golden Age and am particularly drawn to the delicacy and intimacy of many Vermeer paintings. I find myself most drawn to his paintings of women next to the window of his studio. There is such a serenity and breathlessness to the scenes that, married with his incredible technique and sumptuous use of ultramarine, leave me in awe. Vermeer was a master of quietness and stillness. Another artist I deeply admire, Mary Cassatt, made prints that capture a similar sense of quiet domestic intimacy. The tenderness with which she renders human touch is breathtaking. The way in which Cassatt marries the most delicate and perfect drypoint lines with graphic planes of aquatinted colour is sublime. The relationship between the immediacy of the drypoint and the delayed methodical process of aquatint speaks to the act of elaborating on an instant that resonates deeply.

In more contemporary terms I find myself aligned with many painters and photographers from marginalised communities who work with figuration. People like Toyin Ojih Odutolla, Nicole Eisenman, Ka-Man Tse, and Jess T. Dugan are all hugely influential in my work. I think a lot of my work is in line with these artists in that it celebrates a quieter and more introspective form of intimacy. They each present an act of celebration of the subject and their place in this world that can be deeply startling and moving. The quiet self assuredness of Dugan’s portraiture or the eclecticism and humour of Eisenman’s figures are impossibly seductive. Where I see myself differing from most of the aforementioned artists is my devotion to realism. I am honestly not entirely sure why, but I find myself preoccupied with fidelity to the likeness of the subject. To me there is a different kind of act of devotion that comes from highly rendered realism rather than more expressive ways of capturing the figure. I find that denser and more rendered images and figures lend themselves to a feeling of stillness. By articulating space and time so fully I am giving the eye the opportunity to absorb the totality of the image in an instant while simultaneously providing the kind of surplus of information that allows for a deliberately slow and methodical act of looking. I am interested in the way that my subjects choose to present themselves to the world and recording them with as much fidelity to their actual likeness as possible feels like a testament to the version of themselves that they have created. I feel like I am bearing witness to the self that they have constructed.

Repetition

In addition to film, literature has been one of the greatest influences on my work. I appreciate both genres for presenting the human experience and its nuances and intricacies through narrative forms. Modernist authors like Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, Malcolm Lowry and Ernest Hemingway have been particularly influential. These authors play with narrative structure and the passage of time in unique and engaging ways. One of the most powerful and affecting pieces of writing I have ever read, and still cannot stop thinking about, is Woolf’s To the Lighthouse. In particular, her use of punctuation in the second book has really stuck with me. The emotional weight with which she was able to imbue a bracket and a full stop is nothing short of awe inspiring. Book two, aptly titled ‘Time Passes’, is the shortest of the books but chronicles the longest period of time. Woolf describes the effects of the passage of ten uninhabited years on a house and the surrounding garden. Through meandering passages devoted to the growing grass, it is only through short, bracketed sentences that the reader finds out that several characters have died. Woolf has the ability to emotionally devastate through the use of the quietest subtleties.

While working on the portraits of Tina and Connor I found myself asking how these two people are connected to each other. I am devoted to celebrating and representing my community but it is not a traditional community; each member is really only connected to each other through me. How do you construct and represent a community that does not exist in one place or time? I started thinking about the emotional labour of maintenance and the role of distance in each of these relationships. My entire life has involved the commitment of travel in order to see loved ones. Whether it is family across the world in Australia, or friends in a city that is only an hour’s drive away, travel is inevitable. In addition to the main portrait images, I decided to print contextual images, mostly sourced from films I have made or rolls of film I have shot, to ground the portraits in the ephemera of long lasting and long-distance relationships. Paired with surrounding images which explore related locations and objects, the portraits in this body of work have taken on a somewhat melancholy tone that underscores the beauty and ephemerality of time spent together. Whether it is a pair of earrings, a sunset, or a front porch, each image provides a context that may be recognisable to some and may be superfluous to others.

I often ask myself, why do I explore portraiture through printmaking and the multiple? For a long time, I would have responded by pointing to the somewhat more democratic nature of prints. I enjoy that prints often require more people in the making and are typically made in a space that is buzzing with other people and their projects. I also love that prints are able to exist in more than one place at any given time. As with any medium of multiples, prints are able to be disseminated and enjoyed in a very different way than unique objects. The act of printing and creating multiples allows for time to be recorded and reconstructed in a way that mirrors the quality of queer time that I am investigating. My figures were rendered over the course of a moment in time and yet they are able to exist in multiple locations and times at once simply by virtue of being printed. I think it is powerful to explore representation and queer relationships in a medium that allows more people to participate in the appreciation of the work. Printing has always been the primary means of sharing information and so can be used as a political tool. Queer communities historically relied on underground publications to share information and foster community. While my prints occupy a very different space as fine art objects, I think they still participate in a rich history of print as a means of communication.

Although these aspects of the nature of prints are relevant, I have realised that the primary reason I use print is because it allows me to engage in a kind of play and discovery that is unlike other mediums. By having a stable matrix from which I print, the possibilities truly do become endless. Exploring simple strategies like colour, layering, and repetition is incredibly easy in printmaking. The physicality of the final print is paramount to me, and printmaking allows me to explore all of the nuances of display and materiality. The thing that initially attracted me to lithography specifically was its incredibly close relationship to simple drawing. More than any other print technique, lithography most closely imitates the feeling of using a pencil to draw on paper. That said, it did not take long for me to appreciate limestone as one of the sexiest drawing surfaces. The thing that has maintained my obsession with lithography, however, is its mutability. Lithography can look like anything I want it to be. Using litho allows me to explore all of the facets of drawing, painting, photography, and digital languages in which I am interested.

I find that the process of creating an edition of lithographs affords me a new and deeper sense of intimacy with my subjects. Lithography can be an intensely physical and labour-intensive process, especially when working larger. By using such a laborious, and often time-consuming, process I feel as if the making of the work allows me to express a degree of care for my subjects. The act of rendering, recording and printing in the way I do is a means of expressing my devotion to the people I choose to represent.
Intimacy

Fragment I

In May 2019 I was preparing to leave Boston. After five years it was time to move. I wouldn’t be going very far initially, Connor and I were just moving down to the Cape for the summer. His parents had a house in Sandwich so we decided to spend a few months living there and save some money on rent. At the end of August we would be moving to Albuquerque so this first leg of the move felt pretty easy. I don’t remember feeling sad about leaving Boston, not because I don’t love the city itself, but moving an hour away felt sort of inconsequential. Especially considering the next leg of the journey would require days of driving. Also, I hated the apartment I was living in at the time. At one point Connor described it as a tuberculosis garrison. I think he meant it in a romantic sort of La Bohème way but it was an industrial building in Charlestown between a highway and a rail line. It was affordable, which says a lot about Boston considering it cost almost a grand a month, but it certainly didn’t make me feel like Carrie Bradshaw. I moved into that apartment because it had a lot of private space. It was billed as a live/work space and it did feel sort of romantic to live in a space with a freight elevator.

Before that space, I was living in a cute little apartment in the North End with these two girls I had met through Craigslist. They seemed nice enough but the living situation deteriorated pretty quickly. One of them was an emotional wreck who would literally kick and scream through tears because the boy she liked didn’t reciprocate enough. I think they’re still together and living in Austin now? The other girl seemed more even keeled but eventually accused me of having HIV and insufficiently warning her about the risk of exposure from sharing a kitchen and bathroom. I was dumbfounded that not only did she think anyone else’s status was any concern of hers but also that she seriously thought that sharing a bathroom could put her at risk. She was the kind of person who said she loved gay people until they actually started to be gay in front of her.

I was pretty thrilled to no longer share a space with them but sad to leave that apartment. The building was all the way at the end of Hanover street by the coast guard and our apartment was at the back of the building so we actually had a pretty large patio overlooking the Charter Street Park. I used to sit on that patio, chain-smoking, watching people pass through the park for hours on end in summer. That patio was magic but the room I rented in the apartment had two doors that opened inward and was too narrow to accommodate a full size bed. And I paid more in rent for that apartment than in my tuberculosis garrison across the Charles.

Tina offered to help me pack in preparation for the move to the cape. I think she was planning to arrive at the apartment some time after sunset so it was pretty clear that no actual packing would occur. At the time she was living in Brighton so it meant a lot that she was willing to hike all the way up to Charlestown to have a few beers over moving boxes. It probably took her over an hour to get there on public transport. When she got to my apartment I don’t think we even pretended she would be doing any packing and immediately opened a couple of beers instead. All I had was a four pack of blueberry fruited sours which didn’t last very long. I was surprised she enjoyed the beer, at least she said she did, because they were the kind of sour that made you feel like your mouth was caving in on itself.
We kind of just sat there and talked for a couple of hours, her on my bed and me on
the chair I had nicked from the shared kitchen down the hall. My mobile was sitting on a
half-empty box playing Kate Bush while we talked. I was in the process of re/discovering
Kate Bush and wanted Tina to listen to her. Looking back, that may have been torture for her
considering it was a few hours worth of Kate Bush’s more inaccessible work.

When I was in high school the vinyl resurgence was getting into full swing so my
parents bought me one of those Crosley suitcase record players and my mum gave me the
odds and ends of her record collection. It was maybe ten or fifteen records, mostly LPs but
also a few 45s, that she inexplicably still had in her possession. These were all records that
she had bought in the 70s or 80s in Brisbane and somehow they had made it all the way to
Connecticut for me to play. She said that she had allowed her brother to go through her
collection and take whatever he wanted in the 90s (or whenever she stopped listening to
records). Suffice to say it was a strange collection of records that remained. It was mostly cast
recordings of musicals I’d never heard of or Cat Stevens, of whom I can’t say I’m a fan.
Really the only records of hers I listened to were Tapestry by Carole King and Wuthering
Heights by Kate Bush. I was aware of Kate Bush before I inherited the record but had never
heard her music. The first time the needle hit that 45 I didn’t know what the fuck I was
listening to. Considering the rest of the music in my mum’s collection this was a total
surprise. Those ethereal opening piano notes and Kate Bush’s falsetto singing style on the
song really took me aback. It didn’t help that this little record had been in and out of storage
units and bounced around shipping containers for about three decades so the lyrical content of
the song was more or less unintelligible. Something about that song was enchanting and I
would listen to it all the time.

Early on in my relationship with Connor I recommended he read Wuthering Heights. I
couldn’t tell you why I recommended that book in particular but he read it, bless. It shouldn’t
have come as a shock that he really hated the novel. The only other book he read on my
recommendation was The Sun Also Rises. Well, actually he listened to The Sun Also Rises.
Connor is dyslexic so after his experience with the vernacular writing of Wuthering Heights,
an audio version of The Sun Also Rises seemed like a good idea. In hindsight that was a
terrible idea—Hemingway’s short, clipped cadence really doesn’t translate well to audio. To
his credit he finished both novels but he hasn’t listened to any of my recommendations since.
One day Connor texted me a link to a clip from the music video for Wuthering Heights. I
think he expected me to say “wow, what a weird song” but instead it was the catalyst for a
years long journey through the back catalogue of Kate Bush.

Tina was the first person I subjected to hours of listening to Kate Bush but certainly
wasn’t the last. While I was living in New Mexico a friend, Maggie, and I would get drunk
and recreate the choreography from the music videos for Wuthering Heights and Babooska.
I’m sure there are horrible videos floating around somewhere of these performances.

I don’t remember what Tina and I talked about while we were packing. At some point
in the night we realised two things, we were hungry and we’d run out of beer. We opened a
food delivery app and started trying to decide what to order. Tina admitted she’d never had
Indian before so, naturally, that’s what we ordered. A couple of curries and some naan or
something from a relatively local restaurant. In the meantime we had to walk into Somerville
to find the nearest bottle shop to solve the alcohol problem. After some careful deliberation
we just ended up getting more of those blueberry sours. Tina and I have a history of horrible decision making while drinking, so beer seemed like the safest option. By the time we walked back to my apartment the delivery driver was arriving. We started hoeing into the curries and I was pretty immediately taken aback. They tasted like cream cheese? I felt bad that this was Tina’s first experience with Indian and it was not great. She was super nice about it and said how much she enjoyed it but she didn’t end up eating very much.

We had graduated a year before this night so I think we were both at a strange point in our lives. She was working in the gift shop at the MFA and I was assisting at a local print shop. We were both floating and just starting to figure out where we wanted to go next. I don’t know if either of us have found what we were looking for in that moment but we’ve made forward movement.

I was pretty thrilled to be leaving Boston. I’d spent five years there and that’s about the longest I’ve ever lived in any one city so I had the itch to leave. I really didn’t think I’d be the kind of girl to find a man and move away but that’s just how it worked out. It was bittersweet leaving Tina, we had really clung to each other in order to survive our last year at MassArt.

Tina transferred into the printmaking department a few weeks after the semester had started. She was initially in illustration but quickly realised that that wasn’t the spot for her. Because she transferred into the program late she wasn’t able to get into all of the core print classes that the rest of the print majors were taking. I think for that reason, and how quiet both of us are, I was really only peripherally aware of her. The first time I really remember seeing her was in one of the first critiques we had in our intro to etching class. She presented this line etching of a segment of an orange. I remember feeling somewhat jealous of that little etching, it was so full of life and juice. She had managed to make each little juice vesicle just sort of shine.

It was through another friend in the print department, Sarah, that Tina and I were finally really introduced. We had separate circles and didn’t initially spend too much time together but stayed friendly and connected while in the print shop. It was the summer after our junior year that we became closer. I had just moved into that apartment on Hanover Street and she had been dragged, kicking and screaming, to Houston. Tina is from Lawrence but her parents were venturing into a nail salon business with other family members in Houston. As the eldest child, Tina was asked to serve as the interpreter for some of the documents her parents would have to read and respond to in the formation of the new business. It was a very taxing role to be given as a 20 year old without any knowledge of legal or business jargon.

I think we were both lonely and looking for someone to talk to. My relationship with Sarah had just collapsed and I was living in a city that most of my friends had left for the summer. I had just turned 21 and I found myself without many people to celebrate with. I would call people to just chat with and it seemed like everyone was busy with the lives they had returned to back home. Tina ended up being the person who would listen. I ended up being the person who would listen to Tina. We already had each other but we only really found each other once we were 2000 miles apart and in need of someone to listen.

In Houston, Tina was really struggling with who she was and how she wanted to present herself. I think that, as she was coming into herself, she was struggling to reconcile who she was becoming and the version of herself that she reverted to in the presence of her
family. Being surrounded by family, and only family, 2000 miles away from the rest of her life, she was searching for a way to express herself. The expectations of the American daughter born of Vietnamese parents were pretty heavy. Tina wasn’t well equipped to manage those expectations while she was in Houston. I got to listen. I got to listen to her complain, laugh, and figure out how to navigate family. I go to listen to her contemplate shaving her head. I go to listen to the exciting aftermath of shaving her head. It’s hard to believe how long her hair is today when I think back to how liberating that shaved head was for her. When she got back to Boston and the academic year began we just maintained the level of intimacy we had developed over the phone. We were each others’ person during that final year of undergrad.

I think that night she helped me pack ended fairly inconsequentially. After we finished the second four pack of beer we called it a night. It was pretty late and Tina definitely wasn’t sober enough to take public transport so she splurged on an Uber. We already had plans for her to come visit me and Connor on the Cape and make the pilgrimage to Ptown so there weren’t any tearful goodbyes. No hankies were flown out of Uber windows, it was just a ‘see you in a few weeks’.

Fragment 2

When Connor and I arrived in Amarillo we had been driving and playing tourist for six days already. We were so done with travelling and so ready to sit in one place for longer than a night. It didn’t help that when we travel we have this habit of forgetting to eat. Eating just seems to get in the way so we would often find ourselves in the last town before a 100 mile stretch of nothing trying to come up with something nutritious to eat. More often than not Connor would be driving and I’d be sitting in the passenger seat becoming more and more irate at every closed restaurant I would google. Also, being a vegetarian in the heartland just compounded all of our issues. By the time we got checked into our motel in Amarillo we had been driving, walking around, and sightseeing for the better part of twelve hours, on an empty stomach. In the end we decided to just go to Walmart and get groceries, we just wanted to get some real ingredients we could see.

For the majority of our journey we weren’t staying in cities in an attempt to save some money on accommodations. We were travelling with a dog, Daphne, and pet friendly accommodations within cities was too much for us. So, we would end up in these tiny little towns in the middle of nowhere. The hotel we stayed in in Elk City was one of the few buildings you could see in any direction other than the livestock auction building. When I took Daphne out that night to pee she and I were surprised to see hundreds of frogs just everywhere. They were absolutely covering the carpark in all directions. Daphne was thrilled, she ran after the little frogs trying to sniff them only for them to jump away right out from under her nose. I, however, thought I was witnessing the start of one of the plagues of Egypt or something. It was only after Daphne had driven away most of the frogs from our immediate vicinity that I noticed the sounds of the livestock. The night sky was filled with the noise of hundreds of screaming cows. I felt like Clarice Starling. Suffice to say finding food in that town was a particular challenge.

Being in a city large enough to have a Walmart was an opportunity we couldn’t afford to miss. We couldn’t leave Daphne in the motel by herself so she came with us to the
Walmart. We were desperately hungry so we decided to both go in in search of something to eat and left Daphne in the car. Because the dog was in the car we decided to split up and just buy our own food and head back to the car as soon as each of us was ready. I can’t remember what I bought for myself. It was probably something very simple. Whenever Connor wants to make fun of my eating habits he usually points to my time in undergrad when I would just carry around a can of chickpeas with me for lunch.

Whatever I bought, I was ready first so I walked back to the car. We originally thought I would take longer to decide so Connor kept the keys. As the car was locked, I just stood there looking at Daphne through the window waiting for him. He took a surprisingly long time but eventually I saw him heading towards the car. He was carrying a whole watermelon.

I’ve never seen someone eat as much watermelon, or as many grapes, in one sitting as Connor. During this road trip from Sandwich to Albuquerque we stopped at his parents’ house in Connecticut and his sister’s house in Virginia. Both had grapes and watermelon ready for Connor’s arrival.

When I asked Connor if he wanted to move across the country with me we’d only been together for a year, so I was a little surprised when he agreed. I was glad, but surprised. He’d only ever lived in New England so I think he was ready for an opportunity to do something else. Plus, he worked from home at the time and Albuquerque seemed like as good a place as any in which to work remotely.

We left Boston with little fanfare, partially because he was going through roommate drama surrounding his departure, but leaving Sandwich was a lot harder for him. We had spent the summer living in his childhood holiday home in Sandwich. Holiday home belies the very working-class nature of the house in Sandwich but, because it's in Cape Cod, it was the house they went to during school holidays growing up. After they stopped going to the house as a family unit he would spend a lot of time there with his friends and even spent a year living there before I ever knew him. Also, he adopted Daphne while we were living there. When the day came to embark on our journey I was surprised to see Connor begin to tear up as we pulled out of the driveway. I’ve never been attached to a home like that so I didn’t know what to say to him.

We decided to get ice cream on the way out to cheer him up. We also got a small sugar free vanilla ice cream for Daphne. That was the beginning of her love affair with ice cream. While we were living in Albuquerque I went away for a fortnight with a friend. When I returned I found out that Connor—and another friend, Alyssa—had been going to the Dairy Queen drive through with her and ordering her a puppy cone. Now, any time you mention ice cream in front of Daphne, or take her through a drive through, she promptly begins crying and crying, verging on screaming her head off.

I was perplexed when I saw Connor carrying that watermelon. The motel we were staying in didn’t have a kitchen and we didn’t pack any knives or cutting boards or anything in the car with us. I really didn’t know what he was going to do with that thing. Not to mention it was late summer in Texas so it was absolutely ginormous. When he got close enough to the car he just said “I picked the smallest one.”

Daphne had been pacing the back seat waiting for someone to let her out or join her in the car. She certainly didn’t expect for a watermelon to suddenly take up half of the back with
her. She just sat on the other side staring at the watermelon, starting a bit every time it began to rock with the motion of the car. Connor just got in the car and said “I don’t wanna hear it” and explained that a week of driving and very little fruit had grown to be too much for him. He needed a watermelon. When I asked why he didn’t buy some pre-prepared watermelon he was aghast at the suggestion.

“Do you know how much they charge for that?”

When we got back to the motel I couldn’t wait to see how he would get into this thing. Daphne was bouncing around the room feeding off of our delirious and overexcited energy. Luckily the motel had one of those bathrooms in which the sink is separated from the toilet and shower by a door so Connor didn’t have to worry quite as much about sanitation. He placed the watermelon on the long bench and pulled out his pocket knife. Whether he had a plan or not, I have no idea, but he swiftly started hacking at the rind with the tiny pocket knife. After a solid fifteen minutes alternating between sawing at the watermelon and trying to pry it apart with his hands, the thing gave and split into two pieces. He looked so pleased with himself once he was holding one of the halves, jagged edges and all. After wiping the rind he carried the first half of it to the bed, sat down and started watching the tv. He was completely content to sit there with a disposable plastic spoon eating the watermelon like a bowl of cereal.

Connor managed to eat most of that watermelon in one sitting. I’ve seen him eat a lot of watermelon but never like this. It’s a different experience to watch someone eat a watermelon that’s been nicely prepared into little cubes or wedges than it is to watch a man hollow out a twenty pound fruit with a plastic spoon. The next morning Connor decided it would look weird for housekeeping to find two hemispheres of watermelon rind in the little bathroom rubbish bin. We had to find somewhere else to dispose of it. He did his best to clean the copious amounts of sticky watermelon juice from the bathroom bench and we were out the door by seven.

Connor said we should leave the watermelon somewhere readily accessible so that when we saw a public rubbish bin we could quickly dispose of it. Again Daphne found herself sharing the back seats with a foreign object. The motel we stayed in was on the western edge of town and we were heading west towards Albuquerque, via Cadillac Ranch, so there weren’t very many public bins we could use. We decided to return to the Walmart from the night before because Connor remembered there was a large dumpster we could use. He pulled into a parking spot that was as close to the dumpster as possible and asked me to dispose of the rind. I refused, he had to dispose of his prom baby of a watermelon on his own.

The last leg of our journey was only four hours long but it felt much longer. Reality was starting to set in that we would be arriving in the city that would be our home for the next year and we still had no idea what to expect. It didn't help that I hit a pothole that was deep enough to break our air-conditioning as we were driving into the sweltering late summer sun of New Mexico. After a few hours going 80 miles an hour in a completely straight line with a panting dog in the back seats we finally neared Albuquerque. Passing through the Sandias we felt this nervous and excited energy as we drew closer and closer to catching our first glimpses of Albuquerque. Coming around the last bend it was like the air left the car as we saw the landscape open up into flat nothingness and suburban sprawl. The highway fed us
into old route 66 and so our first impression of the city became the tired remnants of a bygone era.

Albuquerque has its charm but we got off on the wrong foot. We hadn’t been able to find an apartment to rent before starting the journey to Albuquerque so we weren’t sure where to go first. We just needed somewhere to pull over so we could find an airbnb for the first week or so while we searched for somewhere to live. A quick google search told us to stop in Old Town so that’s what we did. We didn’t realise that Old Town was a tacky little tourist trap but we found a restaurant with a patio where we could sit with Daphne. For the first time Connor and I looked across the table at each other and had absolutely nothing to say. We just sat there looking around at all of the ristras and tchotchkes for sale in total silence.

We left Albuquerque after the eighth month of the pandemic. Nothing much was happening for us in the Southwest so I thought it would be best to come back to the north east where we both had more community. Plus, moving back to Sandwich would mean we wouldn’t have to pay rent while we twiddled our thumbs waiting for whatever would come next. Returning to the Cape was much harder than either of us had anticipated. It was October, all the tourists had gone and all of the foliage was falling and dying. After the wide open spaces and impossibly clear blue skies of New Mexico, Sandwich felt small and dark.

The following year, when I decided to move to Providence, I just assumed Connor would come with me again. I thought he would enjoy the opportunity to return to an urban environment but he chose to stay in Sandwich. It was only an hour away so we’d still see each other often and it would be a lot cheaper for me to just find a room to rent rather than an apartment for the two of us and the dog. I thought that moving to the state next door would make joining me an easy decision, but instead the proximity allowed him to justify remaining. He had a different appreciation of our time in Albuquerque than I did. I was always happy to come home to him after a long day at work, whereas he felt like he was always left waiting for a day in which I wouldn’t be too busy or too tired.

I found a cheap room to rent in an apartment with two roommates. To say I wasn’t thrilled to have roommates again is a massive understatement. I thought I was past having roommates other than Connor and Daphne but here I was moving into a grubby college apartment. The apartment itself is actually pretty large and nice but you didn’t have to look hard to see that three twenty year olds had been living there and clearly none of them owned a vacuum.

Connor rented a Uhaul and dropped me off in Providence in the beginning of September. The forecast had been threatening rain but luckily it was a beautiful sunny day. We unloaded the Uhaul and then Connor helped me arrange what little furniture I had. He lingered for a while but eventually got back in the Uhaul and left for Sandwich. In those first quiet moments after he left I wasn’t sure what to do with myself. I sat on my bed, which was still covered in a mattress bag and made horrible plasticky crinkling noises under my weight, and stared at my hands. I could feel myself getting emotional so I quickly stared up at the ceiling and started doing my best to swallow the tears. I love sitting down and having a good cry while watching Terms of Endearment but shedding tears over my own circumstances felt overly indulgent or something.
Fragment 3

Austen’s identity was stolen on a day I went to take photos of her. She had agreed to sit for me on a day in early February and I was to come to her new apartment in East Boston. She had just moved in with her boyfriend so she warned me that her life was a pile of boxes in the middle of someone else’s living room. Each of the last few times I’d seen Austen she was living in a different apartment, with a different person, in a different part of the city. When I met her she was living with then girlfriend, Sarah, and another guy whose name I can’t remember in a dark little apartment deep in Allston. Shortly thereafter she moved into a studio with Sarah on Kelton Street on the border of Allston and Brookline. There was about a year in which Austen, Sarah and I spent every weekend in that apartment on Kelton Street. I met Austen through Sarah, but, when their relationship dissolved, Austen won custody of me. Well, she didn’t really ask for custody but she got it.

We weren’t instant friends, I started spending more and more time with her girlfriend and so it was just inevitable that we would spend time together as well. I don’t think we would ever have become friends if it weren’t for Sarah, we aren’t very similar people. I guess we’re similar in that we’re both quite introverted and reserved people but that’s about where the obvious similarities end.

For quite a while after we met we would only ever interact with each other in the presence of Sarah. More often than not it was sort of awkward when the two of us were left alone together. Sarah is such a self assured and gregarious person that it shouldn’t be surprising that two quiet and staid people, like myself and Austen, would be attracted to spending time with her. She and Austen were friends in high school, they went to a private girls school in Massachusetts, but started dating the year after they graduated. I think they separated for university and realised how much they missed each other and began dating. After some school transferring and city moving, they ended up at different universities in Boston together.

During the time that Sarah, Austen and I were spending a lot of time together I started experimenting with acid. The first time I tried it was at the suggestion of my roommate. I was feeling some type of way about going to a concert alone and she gave me half a tab to make the evening interesting in a very different way. Looking back I feel like giving acid to someone for the first time when they were going off to the House of Blues on a busy summer night, alone, was a terrible idea. But, I had an incredible time. I wasn’t tripping so hard I could see a kaleidoscope of colours or anything, but everything just felt electric.

Thereafter I started doing acid more and more and brought it back to Austen and Sarah. Sarah had serious concerns about how she would respond to acid with her mental health struggles and chose not to partake. And so, Austen became my tripping partner. We were dumb twenty year olds and indulged way too frequently, probably at least once a week for eight or so months, but it really gave us a lot of time together to bond. I seriously think that the amount of LSD I consumed has negatively impacted my cognitive abilities but I honestly don’t regret it for a second. Sarah would usually join us while we were tripping, high on something else, but I think we quickly realised the nights we enjoyed the most were when it was just the two of us.
I can’t remember why but there was a weekend in February that Sarah would be going home to Haverhill so, obviously, Austen and I planned on getting high. It’s such a cliché, but we bought tickets to a laser show at the planetarium at the Museum of Science. It wasn’t Laser Floyd—we were going to see The Beyoncé Experience—but still, we were tripping and looking at lasers. Surprisingly we were able to show up at a science museum, already pretty deep into tripping, buy tickets, and sit in a family friendly planetarium and just enjoy the show. I think of that show very fondly, the people at the Museum of Science really knew their audience well.

After the show we got on the green line at the Science Park stop heading towards Austen’s apartment in Brookline. The thing about acid is that it kind of hits in waves and stages. I was fine and dandy talking to the guy at the science museum while I was buying the tickets but for some reason sitting in the silence and bright light of a public train car made me want to crawl out of my own skin. We must have been around Kenmore when we got off the train and started to walk home instead. It was February so it was absolutely freezing out, and we were absolutely underdressed, but we couldn’t really feel the cold. We just merrily walked the rest of the way, hand in hand.

After stopping to stock up on cigarettes we finally made it back to the apartment. I can’t remember what we did specifically that night, but it was probably some variation on the usual—sipping Sailor Jerry’s from the bottle, listening to music (often while watching Planet Earth on mute), and just talking and giggling away. We were lounging in the one room of that apartment and both of us wanted a cigarette but didn’t want to go outside. It was cold, yes, but on another night—previously or in the future, I’m not sure, it really all blends together—we literally sat and chain-smoked in the middle of the road during a blizzard wearing little more than a t-shirt and jeans. And yet, on this night, we decided we could feel the cold. One of us suggested that we just turn on the exhaust fan in the bathroom and smoke in there.

It was probably me who suggested that idea because I used to do the same thing during winter with the first guy I ever dated. When we dated I was 18 and he was a good deal older than me. He was a trust fund kid and a total fuck up but he had his own apartment in Fenway and an expensive little coke habit that I found incredibly alluring. I used to feel so glamorous sitting on the bathmat of his tiny bathroom drinking cheap white wine or bud light, doing key bumps and smoking American Spirits into the early hours of the morning. At 18 I thought it was cool to fashion myself in the vein of someone like Gloria Wandrous. It was only later that I found out that he repeatedly ignored complaints that the exhaust from his bathroom moved through the apartment of his neighbour with emphysema before actually being exhausted.

Austen kept saying that Sarah would kill her for smoking inside but you could tell that it gave her a small sense of joy to disobey her. After very little debate Austen and I decided to bring all of her bedding into the bathroom so we could make the bathtub as comfortable as possible. We were making a cocoon in which we could spend the rest of the night. After a few cigarettes Austen decided to switch to a blunt. I was taking photos of her lighting the blunt when I stood to get a better angle. As I was coming down into a squat, my elbow swung back and turned the tap on. Bitterly cold water came flooding out and immediately created a
pool in the heavy comforter we had lining the bottom of the tub. I was drenched and our little cocoon was ruined but Austen just kept smoking her blunt and laughing at me.

When I arrived at Austen’s new apartment to take her photo she answered the door and after a hug and the usual hellos and everything she said her Instagram had been hacked and she was locked out of her account. A couple of people had just texted her to warn her that someone had posted on her stories asking for money. Whoever hacked her account changed her password and recovery information so she had absolutely no idea what to do in order to get her account back. Naturally she was pretty agitated. I felt really bad but, seeing as neither of us knew what to do about her account, she told me to start setting up to take the photos. I wasn’t sure what I wanted from these pictures so I brought a bunch of different camera formats to play with. While I was setting up and metering light Austen was just staring at her phone trying to figure out how to get her account back.

Suddenly, she got a call from a blocked number. Surprisingly, she answered the call. There were a few beats of silence before someone on the other end of the line started to speak. I was watching her face slowly scrunch up and become increasingly confused as she was talking to this person. She could see the confusion on my face so she put the call on speaker before continuing. The man on the line was a police officer in Austin asking Austen how many properties she owned and what kind of mail she had been receiving at these properties. When she informed him that she doesn’t own any property he claimed that drugs had been shipped from Mexico to an address in Austin that was registered in her name. Austen was obviously incredibly dubious of this whole call, especially considering the number was blocked, and asked the man to prove that he was who he says he was. After giving his badge number and some other identifying information he told her to google the phone number for Austin police’s drug department or something and he would call back on a line that would display the number she had googled. And he did.

Austen was still dubious but more willing to listen once she could see the phone number displayed on the call. The man continued telling Austen about the drug packages and mortgages that had been taken out in her name. He said that her identity had been stolen and they had a file number ready for her. He recommended she freeze all of her accounts and move her money somewhere safer than her own bank accounts. He asked her how much she had at the time and she lied and just said about a thousand dollars. He said he would call her back later once they had more information from her.

We were dumbfounded. After she hung up we just stared at each other for a while in silence. Then she got to work. She called her dad first and then her boyfriend. Her dad immediately started organising to talk to some government agency and find out more for her. Her boyfriend was at work but said he would try and get home as soon as possible. She told him to expect a Venmo transaction as she emptied all of her accounts. She quickly went to work freezing her bank card. It was amazing how level headed she was able to remain considering some man had just told her drugs had been shipped to a home in Texas that she apparently owned. Was this at all linked to her hacked Instagram?

All the while I was just sitting across from her not knowing what to do. There was absolutely nothing I could do to help her so I just sat and watched her call different people and take drag after drag of her vape. She had quit smoking cigarettes a few years prior but was still using the vape that she had used to ween off the cigarettes. I also used a vape to try
and quit smoking a while ago. I found vaping even harder to quit so I had to switch back to regular cigarettes before I could quit nicotine all together. Sitting there watching her nervously fidget with the vape I noticed a habit that I used to share in which she would pull the cartridge out of the vape, flip it, put it back in, and double tap it to check the charge.

I don’t know exactly when Austen stopped smoking cigarettes. Her break up with Sarah was particularly tumultuous and it had a ripple effect on us. Though we tried to continue spending time together, we both got boyfriends and just drifted. Once we lost our routine and our habits as a threesome with Sarah it was easy to drift apart. About a year passed in which we didn’t see each other. She had moved in with the new boyfriend, Will, and I just wasn’t a part of her new relationship. I actually hung out with Will a few times while I lived in that apartment in the North End but didn’t see Austen for some reason. I think we were both hurt enough in the breakup with Sarah that we couldn’t spend time with each other without being reminded of that pain.

That coming May I would be leaving Boston for New Mexico. I wasn’t sure what my life plan would look like after New Mexico so I knew I had to make up for lost time and see Austen before leaving. One day after work at the MFA I headed down Huntington toward her new apartment on the hill. It was just us, her boyfriend was at work and their other roommate was elsewhere, and we got to know each other again. After an awkward start we got back into the swing of things pretty quickly. It was then that I saw she had switched to vaping. I think I was in one of my attempts to quit nicotine entirely because I ended up bumming off of her the entire time I was there.

While Austen was calling her father, boyfriend, bank and others I was just sitting there watching the sun move across the apartment. I kept track of how many hours were passing by tracking the sun as it moved from the couch, to the floor, to the coffee table, to the other end of the couch. I felt terrible thinking about how much light I was losing while she was dealing with the repercussions of identity theft. She kept looking over at me and apologising that this was interrupting the photo session. We laughed that we used to just be able to show up in front of each other and commit to a twelve hour acid trip with no warning. Now, however, we had to spend weeks organising a simple photoshoot. I don’t know what made her think of it, or why we hadn’t thought of it to begin with, but she decided to call Austin city police to verify what she had been told. They immediately, without missing a beat, told her it was a scam.

I felt bad about the whole day and suggested we reschedule the photos but she insisted we continue with the original plan. After the identity theft was ruled a scam she was still pretty distracted by the Instagram hacking. At a few different intervals, mostly while I was reloading cameras, she called Instagram? I don’t know who she called but she called Instagram. There was this whole protracted conversation in which she had to wait and give information, eventually having to do a full facial scan and set up two factor verification or something. But, after a few hours she finally had her account back in her hands. After a painfully long morning of panicking and calling countless people, she could finally lean back and take a breath.
Looking

Creating a portrait is an act of care and devotion. It is my way of verbalising all of the possibilities of my affection for the sitter. Queer time demands the possibility of the future by acknowledging and celebrating the present moment. In the portraits I have created for *At the Bend in the Bright River*, I am declaring the quiet and intimate joy of spending time with members of my queer family. In committing the likeness of the people I care about the most to lithographic stones I am ensuring that I will have a future with that person, even if just their likeness, by incorporating them in a practice that stretches the simplicity of the present moment into an unknowable and inevitable future.

The title, *At the Bend in the Bright River*, was borrowed from the essay “John Wayne: a Love Song” from Joan Didion’s *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. Didion’s essay is a tender reflection on reconciling the idea of a human being with their actual existence. She considers the significance of meeting the man, John Wayne, who has always been there, who has always signified something more than a movie star, who has signified manhood itself and all of the promise of California and the American West. In a winding paragraph she reflects on what it means for her to realise that John Wayne, rather than her idea of *John Wayne*, was lying sick in a hospital bed rather than standing in the pastures by the bend in a river of her childhood mind’s eye. I was particularly taken by the sobriety of her reflections on the differences between looking at and seeing another human being. For her, the entirety of the idea of John Wayne can exist simultaneously with the reality of the man that she has met later in life. Perhaps there can be multiple iterations of one person and multiple ways of experiencing them. Her act of looking at John Wayne made me consider the ways in which I look at Tina, Connor, and Austen. With time and distance my idea of each of these people begins to diverge from the reality of their countenances. It is through the act of creating a portrait that I am reconciling my interpretation of a loved one with their likeness in an attempt to bridge those two existences.

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