

in and out

Two Junes ago, sleep deprived, I was walking my newborn around my suburb. Everything had changed; my body went from vessel to coin-purse, recreational to ogre, calm to lippy. A bitchy Battered Sav on legs. Propelled by nerves and feeling alone, my new M.O., anything and everything inspired rage, tears, or, maniacal laughter. Still walking, and on my third loop of the block, I noticed a ridiculous bumper-sticker: *Remember to breathe*. Rude! Breathing doesn't usually require any thinking, it's involuntary. I was vexed by these three Papyrus-fonted words. Was I to add this to the list of meditations that had been hurled at me by emotional strangers? Stay Calm, Be Present, Remember to Breathe?! All these things made me feel stuck in my body and offended the way I would normally metabolise the outside world through my mind, my best friend. It reminded me that my processing was more cyclical; moving between calamity, carbonation, and charisma in rapid fire, versus being encouraged by meditative tropes. For me, the space where my mind and body met, they biffed. It made me think that maybe order and disorder are plain facts of life for everyone; that regardless of whether or not we feel calm, present, are breathing, or are living in newly-renovated-bodies, our minds and habits are constantly in flux. It's like we forget we know the change seasons bring.

I always silently low-five the air when I see Zara somewhere I am. We have the best chats. Topics we address wobble between the real and unreal, feelings and thoughts, and almost always end in *why*. I like the questions Zara asks and I think that's why I'm drawn to her practice as a painter. In a world where *how* you live in your mind and body is economised by meritocracy: If you are 'well', you are good; if you are 'unwell' it's because of something bad you've done, which negates the entire life you've spent raising your mind to roam freely in its flesh. Zara kinda flips all this sideways and celebrates not the *how* but the *why* we live in our bodies: a groovy, but unanswerable question. Like our bodies are moving, as is our mind, it's a performance, a performance for nobody, what are we doing? Zara is cosy with life's cycles; with its layers moving in and out of focus. She understands failure as a mode of success; that exaggeration and force can be fatal, good-fatal, and that fatality is bad-fatal only to the mediocre. This harmonising of self with self is Herculean. Her paintings remind me that although breathing is involuntary, it's enjoyable to remember it. The inhale I take, exhales from her with a power so well authored and travelled that it makes me shy. But *why*?

What is in us must out, Hans Selye once said. Selye changed the way people understood stress and its toll on the mind and body, which is cool. Sometimes I think the word ‘stress’ is lacking from how we talk about paintings—we’re all too busy trying to calm each other down. For me, that’s not the artist’s job. I want to feel their raucous insides—the dark chewy bits that go to war with every breathing day. Why did that yellow just assault that blue?! I don’t know, but I agree. It’s thrilling to see someone’s humanity play out in paint, its storytelling at its essence. Good paintings like Zara’s link us as emotional creatures; they’re uncertain in their certainty, they’re waxing and waning, and make us ask weird questions like *where do the stars go?* to complete strangers. Her red’s are ambitious and her lines are naughty— is there anything more beautiful than someone being able to paint themselves in such detail? What is in her must out; the elusive knowledge of her body needs to be heeded; the margin between self and world straddled. She is compelled and propelled by a force that is a stranger to mine, but just like cool air relieves a warm one, Zara’s paintings stress to me that living is involuntarily shared.

Two Junes ago, walking back into my house, where there was once space, there was now a small Zara painting. I silently low-fived the air. Every day since, this painting has seen me burn dinners, sigh at thunder and dare I say, forget to breathe. It has reminded me that maybe I do need to live with daily meditations; one for every layer of life lived. That June will soon be July when it’s still February, and so on. Like pink slapping teal to hug orange, everything in everyone is everywhere in entropy, always. That’s why.

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