

Written Support Material

— Josephine Mead

The material below is indicative of the type of writing, using water as metaphor, that will be presented in the publication, 'I Sea See' and through the online platform. I will use excerpts of the below texts, poems already written, and new poetic texts created throughout the residency programs. For further examples of my writing, please refer to my website: <http://www.josephinemead.com/writing>

WORKING THROUGH SURREALIST SCORE

by Josephine Mead

In 2019 I made my way across oceans—bound for the countryside of Arraiolos, Portugal—to produce photographs. Staying in an XVIII century manor house to undertake the CórteX Frontal Residency program. For the majority of my stay there, I was alone—thinking through story, place, possibility and time. In a dry landscape, overseen by the brazen sun that drew lines aside my eyes, I was thinking through modes of water—before and after, quiet yearnings and ancestral ties. Cinematic tropes seemed like the appropriate mode of expression for this surreal new reality. Water is defined as ‘a colourless, transparent, odourless liquid that forms the seas, lakes, rivers, and rain and is the basis of the fluids of living organisms.’ I slightly disagree with this statement. It may be transparent, but it is full of colour in myriad ways. I wouldn’t call it odourless, as it cascades with sensorial possibility. It is diaphanous and welcoming and dangerous and becoming and everything and nothing. Even while alone within the arid summer, I was swept up in fluvial possibility. My company lay within thoughts of the ocean. Opportunity was found through the power of settling—as a young, yet ageing woman, **I was seeking out ways to be alone.** There is great difference between the words “alone” and “lonely.” There is strength to be found with the focus that comes from acts of deep listening and solitary silence—this allows one to fall into their own tides, rhythms and values. I was sinking into my abysses and soaring through sky and possibility. Water is with us and in us and around us. We exist within the oceans of those who swam before us, buoyed by their potential and power. My gestures of making were attempts to define myself within the salty waters of my own becoming. I was listening intently to the sounds of the waves. Women are fluvial, fluid, flowing, fluctuating, feeling, fostering, falling, fissuring, flickering, flourishing, flooding and fascinating beings. I was and am flowering and floundering simultaneously—there is magic to be found within both of these states—I am both solid and empty, unwavering in gait.

Water surrounded me at this time, but was also barely present. I was in an arid landscape in the high-summer. Dry heat warming my bones and bearing down on the white-washed houses of Arraiolos, carrying years of memory in their stones. Despite the dryness, I was swept up in oceanic thought, perhaps because I had just spent several weeks allowing the sea to soothe me in Istanbul. In the mornings, near the castle overlooking the town, glistening beads of dew caught onto lace spider webs. I took photographs of the sun-rays kissing them. I spent the middle of each day sitting in the main square—**alone**—drinking coffee and listening to the sounds of the water from the strange fountain that had been erected in its centre. It covered the old dyeing vats that were a formative factor in the history of Arraiolos’ rug making trade. How odd that water can be used to cover such an important point of time. The pillory column at the other end of the square remains in vision—acts of pain are often more visually prevalent than acts of making within our collective historical thinking. Nevertheless, the water of the fountain soothed me and acted as my main point of company during those long days. I spent a few hours swimming in a pool with the woman who founded the





residency program, Mercedes, and her two small children. Peacocks were roaming the surrounding grounds and I kept wondering what my future would hold as I watched them from the water.

The act of aqueous floating left me weightless and the fear started to slowly seep out of me. Was I bound for gestational possibility? I was here and I was making and I was accomplishing it **by myself**. There were not many other moments of liquid to be found in the hot Portuguese countryside, but the bulk of my body consists of water. I was bringing oceans to the landscape. I am fluvial and I was settling and opening and fluctuating and sinking and floating simultaneously in the sun. We are held in water in our gestational origins. I am still carried gestationally by my mother—still buoyed within her waters. The gestated body never leaves the one that brings it to life. We are forever floating, anchored. The water of the feminine body is ‘a challenge to phallogocentrism’ (Neimanis, 3). I was finding strength and solace within the tributaries of my mind. Women’s bodies are fluid in their gravitational pull. Our menstrual cycles have a draw between the ocean tides and the cycle of the moon. We are liquid and we are leaking. Even when weeping, we are in full bloom. We can be built upon the choral voices of a thousand souls before us. Lift me up to the pulpit and cast me over with brazen confidence. I am in modes of diaphanous singing, serenading the women that came before me. As Virginia Woolf reminds us, ‘there are tides [with]in the body.’

This series of photographs are a departure from my past work. I began to turn my face towards the camera. I created still-life images with local flowers, which were just as much self-portraits. Modes of theatrically, making and heartbreak had pushed me to this point and I was ready to face the world and enter into new modes of experience and exchange (albeit tentatively). Was I attempting to cast myself in the place of muse/siren—at once subject and photographer—in an act towards attaining self-confidence? Within this volume Rachel Ashenden remarks, ‘If the siren is not listened to, she will perish’ (see page 40). These photographs capture times of making and acts of preparation, readying me for future sonorous offerings—I **am collecting words and preparing to be heard**. I am building myself into memories of my own making, to be shared. We are often not afforded the opportunity to truly be alone—to have the time and space to sink in and not turn away, to really settle—especially as women. There are moments of pain within this solitary state, but it is an opportunity that can bind, build, beatify and buoy us. I came out of the residency with (almost) resolute edges and tender eyes. These images capture at once a loneliness and an awakening to the strength of being with/by/in myself. They stand as visual reference to the women who have rallied and pushed and sung their own songs and stories—remaining unique, embracing loneliness, moving towards the edges. Standing in front of the shutter and moving through cinematic score, I trudged through frameworks of theatricality, pulling myself to shore. Solace can always be found within acts of making. The siren is deemed an intoxicating, seductive woman—pulling yearning beings from the ocean. The word also describes an acoustic instrument that produces musical tones, often to signal danger. I am happy to exist within this potentially volatile place of peril and pleasure. In a statement of self conviction and strength, Laura Carthew pronounced, ‘I make stock from salt.’ I too am making stock from my own salt—building myself through the brine of lamentation. I am not afraid to try—mixing tears and sea water to bring myself to



life. I am creating an archive of new sounds. They can be muffled or made louder under the depths of the water. It all depends on how deep I dive. Jen McSweeney notes that, ‘depth is thus a relational phenomenon that becomes visible whenever a body is put into contact with a world’ (147). We can constantly be re-made and revitalized. To do this, we need to welcome new surroundings.

My mouth is cautious, recalibrating the space around new syllables, making sounds. But articulation comes in rapid motion and I am building my vocabulary quickly under water—I am listening and **I am learning**. Lacking translation, I may slip from foundation, meeting oceanic floor. Preparation is key. I am building monuments before me. Continuing to stand up again. The worn marble tiles in the manor house looked and felt like waves. The floor, cold. When I laid down on it I had the feeling of being encased in the ocean—the initial submerge that catches your breath—a touching, just me and the waves. **It is brave to be alone**. I re-drew myself through camera shutter. Walls of water cast us towards the running of different clocks. Time can move in more harmonious distance when you truly listen to yourself. We are not always in time with one another. I am deciphering and disturbing and coming up with new temporalities to suit my feelings and accommodate my desires and wishes. This is an oceanic experience of time—big and expansive and mysterious. I can carve the space I need and fill it with possibility. How can I drift, dissolve, float, swim, wade and wander forever? I am both young and ageing—my body is changing. I am learning how to remain afloat, anchored and adrift—all at once. The key is to forever follow curiosity—I learnt this from my mother. I am deciphering what I need to hold onto. Carl Safina muses, ‘we are, in a sense, soft vessels of seawater. Seventy percent of our bodies is water, the same percentage that covers Earth’s surface. We are wrapped around an ocean within. You can test this simply enough: **Taste your tears**’ (Safina, 435). I am sea, mist, flower, air and wave—both ocean and earth, from initial breath to grave.



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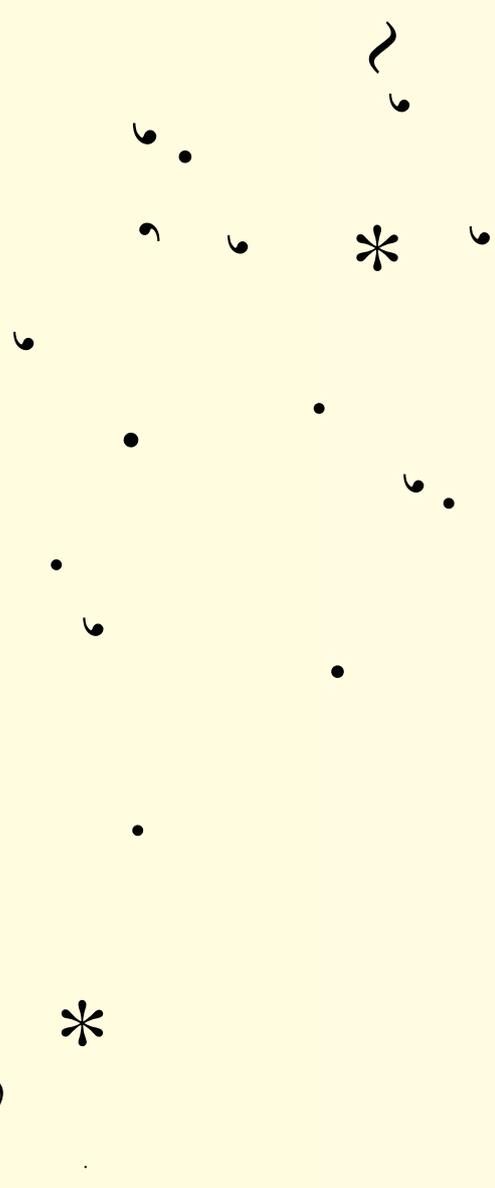
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You are the weather. ^[1] Liquid forming. Your expressions change. You have the face of a chameleon. I can never predict you. *You are the weather.* You cast me as amorphous. Like glass, but also wind, breaking and changing form, again and again, in multitudes. From solid, to cloud, to liquid, and back again. I had been burned inside a hundred volcanoes and my molten lava formed anew on the ash floor— I am always making. I extracted salt from plant in an effort to be fired and formed. We were rolled on a slab in order to imprint the delicate threads into our bodies. A merchant ship, laid with nirtum, was moored. The merchants stumped up their cooking pots on the beach with used lumps of nitrum from the ship, which fused and mixed with the sand. There flowed streams of a new translucent liquid—I was the small pebbles under clumps of nitrum—I was born again as *glass*. I am prone to breaking. I was fashioned for fragile planes and melting landscapes. In Greek times I was marked as *halophile*, ‘salt-loving’. *Silica* is often the primary constituent of sand. It can be used to strengthen hair and nails in the human body. We are always in modes of transformation and becoming. When I recover the image, do I lose the memory? We are looking towards the same horizon, even though you are facing away from me.^[2] Lightning forms across my chest in bursts when I am anxious, furthering the production of the image. My skin turns to crystal in its wake. You melted me into butter. I was fashioned to withstand cooking at a high temperature. Images are durable, to an extent. The window panes are slipping and we are dancing inside the studio. Slide me into wax dripped down your waist-side. Pin me to the floor or wall. Let your plaster mark my corners. Wait for my birthing cry to call. We are already a *sage* in the womb. I am a greyish-green leaf and a wellspring of knowledge simultaneously. A *sage* (σοφός) in classical philosophy, is someone who has attained wisdom. The term has also been used interchangeably with a ‘good person’. There is so much goodness to be found within your image. I hold your landscapes in a photograph and my body remains imprinted on your skyline. The light hits the ground and all feels possible. I leak deeply into wax. Butterfly wings are cast as debris. Leaf marks surrender birthright. I am forged and founded sight. Scrunch me under palm like warm butter then let me melt into sky. *You are the weather.* Look up to the light of the falling sun together. Welcome the moon into our living room. The blue of longing ^[3] that hangs between us through mis-steps, mistakes and time-wasted. There is a horizon of becoming colour between our bodies and the shades are shifting eternal. Obsidian, a volcanic form of glass, has often been fashioned as cutting tool. You cannot cut the shifting light of dawn or dusk with a knife. Light bounces from prism too quickly. Ancient glass is fashioned as optical device, but does not have the ability to still motion. Photography is such a slippery tool. The *alkali* of Syrian and Egyptian glass was *soda-ash*, which can be extracted from the ashes of many plants, notably halophile seashore plants like *saltwort*. I came in the form of beads at first. They say that beads were the first forms formed. After glass I will enter into a new medium, I will become the base that dissolves in water, as *alkali*. I am forever at risk of disappearance. *Halophiles* can be found in water bodies with salt concentration more than five times greater than that of the ocean. I cried you a sea of saline to stitch your boat to mine. I gnawed upon the edges of your image. You will find me in many places throughout our lifetime together. *You are the weather. You are the weather. We are the weather. I am the weather.*

[1] Horn, Romi, *You are the Weather*, 1994-95, 64 C-prints and 36 gelatin-silver prints, dimensions variable.

[2] Kelly, Phoebe, *Dusk on Minjerrbah (Stradbroke)*, 2019, 35mm colour photograph.

[3] Solnit, Rebecca, “The Blue of Distance”. *A Field Guide for Getting Lost*, Canongate, 2005.



. . . We are all fragile. So very fragile.
Even the very strongest of us. Fragile
like wounds in the sky. Colliding and
circling and sometimes exploding on
top of each other or against each other,
on account of the fragility. I lean back
and rest on the moon. Language draws
us closer and abruptly marks us apart.
We have survived loneliness before. I
am in constant sea motion, currently
not held by any body of water. I can't
promise that things won't unravel. But
I do know that we are different now to
how we went in. . .



To conclude with ellipses

...

To love you

...

To begin.

...

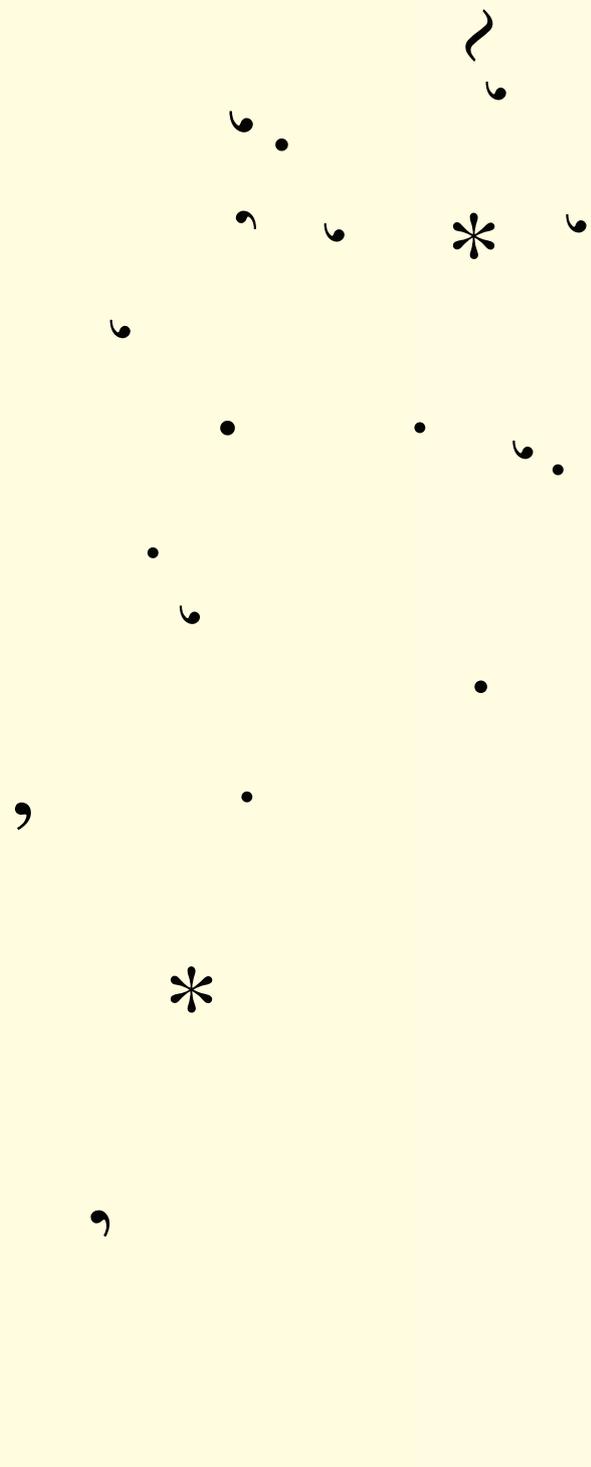
This text was written for . . . *to conclude with ellipses* . . .
— a solo exhibition by Josephine Mead at Seventh Gallery
(215 Church St, Richmond 3121), 5th - 28th August 2021.

The work for this exhibition was created across Boon Wurrung,
Wurundjeri woi-wurrung, Gunggandji and Yirrganydji Country.
Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

<http://www.josephinemead.com>

We are bound in language. *Ready to punctuate in perpetuity.* We are cast as immortal, time immemorial. We are transcribing stories into longevity. We had been brandishing the skyline through one hundred desolate nights, until we found each other. Searching for jonquils when it wasn't yet spring; searching for light. We were welcomed into overflow and laden down, two bodies in and out of time, singing new songs and drawing new symbols. We became sign and syntax, overloaded. We forgot how to use grammar and our sentences fell apart. We are worried and fusion and fissure and fighting and candescence and overlapping welcoming waves, like tsunamis, without a place to go. But we do have a place to go; *to return to each other's arms at night.* We are stars exploding and falling into each other with plight. Remind me of what *safety* means. We are the very origins of language, coalescing. We are words rubbing against each other. We are the texture of the sentence. Never heard words coat the roof of our mouths, ready to be spoken. We are friction with and without resolve, and that is a good place to be. We are endings and becomings and beginnings and a world of stories, waiting to be told. Keep things interesting for me and I will attempt to write within the lines for you. We both know I will go off track continuously. We are a thousand sprinkling stars, searching for new galaxies. We are a million stories on old library shelves. We will forever be learning from one another. We both have to realise that we are no longer alone. Cast me in punctuation and laden me with your letters. Use grammar in a different form. Utilize punctuation to separate and satiate and silence me. Then ask me to speak fast, without reservation. Demand that I fill the room with my thoughts in magnitude. We will keep coming up against each other. Different minds allow for pages of miscommunication. Let's find brilliance within the misfortune. Let's redefine disagreement through fashioning new phrases. Let's keep your eyes full of laughter. We need to still each others speech and then cascade each other in sound. Remember, there is beauty to be found within a well-timed pause. Let everything in and learn when to draw lines in the sand. *You are more afraid then I could have ever imagined.* How many odes to you will I write? Marking you player and plaintiff in the pale blue light. Melting you into crimson shores and serenading sonnets in the wake of your thighs. I am still uncertain about so many things, but the future feels full of fluvial possibility. To draw my own becomings, one chrysanthemum at a time. I will keep awaking, to the dew of you. *You look happier than before,* my dear friend said. *Tell me that again; I need the external reminder,* I requested. It's often easier to see happiness in hindsight. We use language to wrap up memories in sheets of gold. We forget that life is sticky. *You look happier than before.* The marigolds pass salty moons around the fireside and we strip the bed sheets at night. I am living in the moment of my past dreams. A reminder to see the brilliance before me. Waters on other planets have different constituencies of salt. I rub coarse salt across my body to get rid of dry skin. There is something comforting in the notion that part of me dies, but I am still living and forging forward. *To know that anything can be fixed.* We are constantly realising where we go wrong. I am the tidal push and pull of the moon and you are an avalanche in full bloom. To learn how to harmoniously *meet sea—with—sky.* I will blanket you in undertones of pearlescent light as grey clouds come in and out of sight. I will blanket you in effigy and bring you abruptly back to life. *We will unravel through and through—still—I will blanket you.* We are flawed and fault-lined and this is where beauty resides. The language we are building consists of *a coming back together, in parts, slowly.* Nothing else will matter as long as we listen to one another. Let's follow the wind, together.

Good morning, my sweet-heart . . .



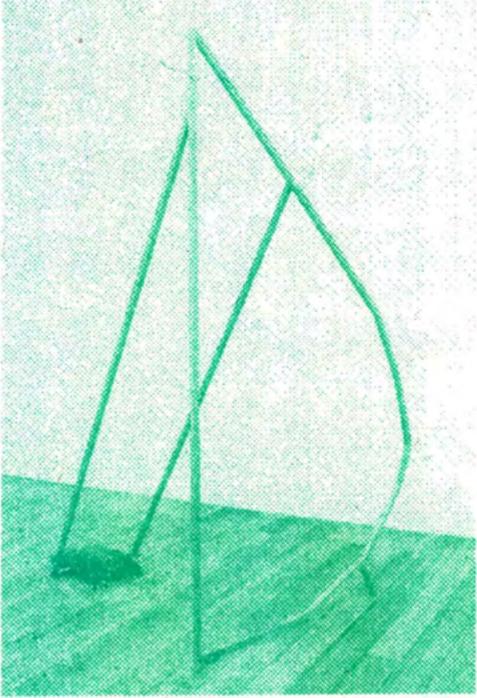
The theatre of Bosra was beautifully preserved because it was filled with earth for so many years.¹ Cold soil, pushed into my indentations. Is it worth being preserved if there is no room for your lungs to expand? At what point does the integrity of the building start to fail? The stage was once again silent. *Theatre came to Rome rather late.*² I am pushing myself out from the wings, missing the first beat. At-once dancing and hiding in the pockets of black between the spotlights. The audience has not been present for years. Would I rather be worn down and tired, soaked in experience? Or beautiful and empty, from being too full? We sat solemnly together—myself and myself. Two parts. Seats were sized according to status and value. We are all valuable, even with flaws—I must remind myself of this. I'll use language to reclaim things and to carve out room for meeting others. Awakening to the sound of a collective exhale, I am stage-subject and I am sitter. A conversation is a circle that can be opened or closed. *It's strange how fear can come and gulf you – in waves – before a show.*³

I am archiving myself, under rubble and hay, bound in books of past civilizations, swept up in ancient effigies. I am laid bare on slabs of cold stone and warmed by funeral pyres—I am history. I am breathing for the first time and scaling sacred mountain passes. I am coming into myself. Standing in front of ancient Roman gravestones in Istanbul, I was reminded that love and loss are timeless experiences, crossing divides. We made love in Florence while I cried. The doctor wasn't sure what to do next. To hide the truth forsakes the reasons behind art-making. To what extent should you still figure in my poetry? I am writing my own body and coming up with silence. [The myth of Aktaion and Phoinike] *attributes writing to the female figure.*⁴ Do my words come from the tears of women, past? I am standing deep within my silence and their pain is bound within the marrow of my bones. The artists provide remedy and respite and I sink into their prose.

Photography is an emotional resource. I build sculptural assemblages to capture light hitting spectrum. Their meanings unfold later. I am pushing myself as hard as I can, moving fast, lacking the proper equipment, turning stills into cinematic motion. Anchoring my body within an endless series of *tableau vivants*. Recording images and words. *You must find your form.*⁵ The sculptures are anchored as printed image on paper. I am self-anchoring and throwing myself under waves simultaneously. I am moving out towards the ether, blanketing myself in as much knowledge as possible. I am seeking constructivist corners and am coming up with curves. The lights dim; my body begins to settle.

I am building an archive from listening—an audible library with words already forgotten. One day I will be entombed within the books that I am writing. I'll be packed away in photographic plan drawers, able to exhale heavy in my bones, rolled up and resting on my photographs. Tears cocoon my body and create a shelter. The spotlights turn on and burn my eyes. They are warmer than the fluorescent lights above me. I am a tired ship with deflated sails. I felt uncomfortable and couldn't work out why. I realised that I felt happy and hadn't felt that way in a long time. Moving on without time for reflection. To be full and bursting. I am circling and I am ready. You spoke to me from the belly of the stage. Your voice, soft. The ancient acoustics carried your words up to my ears, as if you were beside me. The trouble only started when you stopped talking. Our narrative was lost within the belly of the theatre. We will be swept over by time, losing hard surface, turned into sand. Applauding hands sought stillness. There is no hope for new conversation. I want to take a photograph of a leg breaking backwards.

Write a sentence and then deconstruct it in as many ways as possible. I am spotlight, subject and cyclorama. I am fixed and in motion; light hitting spectrum. I am every word and every letter. The sentences fall from my hands. *Critical writing, with its citations, quotations, allusiveness, and intertextual resonance is a field of grief and longing.*⁶ I am writing you in hopes that you will leave me. I am pushing letters through my body, in hopes that it will settle. I am reading as much as I can, in an effort to go further. I am needing to repeat pages. I am falling through sentences and being marked by poetic prose. *You seem to have this attachment to the relationship.* I was swallowed whole, clinging on. *The attachment* was consuming my thoughts less and less. It was starting to leave me, but never travelling far. I was full of words of sadness, never spoken. Carving through letters and wading through tributaries of tears. *In this context, I did not know how to read.*⁷



Peonies as delicate as crepe paper. I saw them dried in the Turkish desert and sewed them into a frame. (Now I can't look at them without thinking of you). When soft substance suddenly crumble to dust. The flowers are fragile in the same way that my body is fragile. A soft petal, accidentally dried by the sun, turned to powder. Will I ever move out of the space of this image? In the ether of the repository, the whole world existed. The conversation remained closed. Silence by way of punctuation. Speech can be controlled through grammar. I am broken thoughts but I am breathing. The pictures were designed to *hold the wall.*⁸ Pushing visible; the mechanics of making, provisional. Was the idea of holding up the cloth bore from the subject's directive? I am photographer and I am dramaturge. Applaud my phrases, without opinion. I couldn't have melted into the project this much if you still needed me. I swim past archipelagos of words and my waist is warmed with liquid phrases.

Greek balustrades, archways and mottled light. Did I fall into the stage play or was I merely swept up, heavy velvet, curtain? I seek to find ease through unsettling myself—a contradiction. Is everything that we ever write just an ode to our future selves? I don't want *the attachment* to keep coming up, so I'll carve out space for reading. The most interesting work comes from a heart that is broken. I am language—full of failure and mispronunciation, lost in translation. I like the way that my hand moves up and down and across the page, in curves; leaving stream of ink. I slow down your name when I flourish your letters. I give time to acts of talking. I can inscribe you into symbolic rhythm. Gertrude Stein left out punctuation because she didn't want to control your breathing. I like the way I can fill your lungs with the inclusion of a single comma. I am present and open to discourse, missing sentences, moving from one still image to the next and attempting to remain there. I am the Conversation.

— Josephine Mead, 2018

¹ Frank Sear, Lecture: *Ancient Theatres*, Potter Museum of Art (Melbourne, February 24, 2018).

² Ibid.

³ Olga Bennett, *Written correspondence* (July 21, 2018).

⁴ Quinn Latimer, *Like a Woman: Essays, Readings, Poems* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 209.

⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁶ Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (New York: Routledge 1993), 150.

⁷ Jen Hofer, *Sin Puertas Visibles: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Mexican Women* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003) 2.

⁸ Wikipedia contributors, "Tableau vivant," Wikipedia, accessed July 16, 2018, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tableau_vivant#cite_note-fried08-5.