

**Black**

**White**

**Blue**

*Come with me into the void!*

*You who like me, dream*

*Of that wonderful void*

*That absolute love...*

*-Yves Klein*

## **Black**

My mother told me that when she had my oldest brother, her first child, no one showed her how to get him to latch on to the nipple. Her breasts were filling up and so painful from the milk. She said the only person to help her was a black nurse. She came in one night, in the middle of the night, and showed my mother how to pinch the nipple between her fingers so the baby could latch on. She was grateful as my brother began to drink and the pressure released.

Maya Angelou in *Writers Dreaming*, says:

*There's a phrase in West Africa called, "deep talk." When a person is informed about a situation, an older person will often use a parable, an axiom, and then add to the end of the axiom, "Take that as deep talk." Meaning that you will never find the answer. You can continue to go down deeper and deeper. Dreams may be deep talk.*

At the beginning of this year I had a dream of two huge yellow and orange anacondas twisted in a knot mating while eating each other in a dirty river. My friend Mazen, from Bagdad, says that in his mother's culture the snake or anaconda is an enemy...*but it's enemy of your group, two of them talking after you or trifling, that they were fighting each other is good because their poison is between them and you safe watching. To dream you are near to the river is fortune, but the river you talked about was muddy so it's not good, it's like those fight will make you feel sad or there is something making you feel unhappy.*

His advice to me was...*believe you are safe and you will be safe, sometime we think only about material, that's why we do not know the real happiness.*

At the time I was just grateful for some understanding, but when I thought more, my eyes opened as I realized Mazen comes from a different land than I do. We only met this past year, yet his people dream the same dreams as I. Not just that, but what business do I have dreaming of anacondas? They are not in my daily life, I wasn't watching a nature documentary before bed, and I can't remember the last time I saw a river, let alone a muddy one. But to have placed myself on the bank of a river in a foreign land that felt like home and to watch these two creatures in their natural habitat, it's as if I was connected to someone else's memories.

## **White**

Carl Jung calls it the *collective unconscious*, in that we are all connected in our dreams. I think we can interpret this a couple of ways. I sort of imagine us letting go of our sense of place when we dream and allowing ourselves to travel anywhere, often bumping into others' unconsciousness's. Jung studied the dreams of people from all over the world and found that there were common symbols among strangers: teeth falling out, falling, flying, paralyzation, snakes. What does it mean to be connected in this way? No matter that you've never met that boy in China, but you are dreaming in the same images, the same symbols. Does it mean all across time we have the same fears, the same desires? That their forms may take different shape, but their roots are the same. When we all go off

into the blackness of our sleep, do we become connected? Jung says, the collective unconscious is infinite.

Why is it called daydreaming? Is it because the day is meant for reason? So when we let our minds wander into their natural habitats, it's like we're sleeping? Only in our sleep when we're not able to stop it, are we allowed to dream? I can hear the negatives attached to the word. Or the luxurious nature of the title like it's a privilege to have the time to do it. Or it's something the teacher wakes you out of followed by scolding. But I call it *thinking*, and for me the best times for it are in the daytime. In the morning after you've stepped out of that sleepy haze and gradually slip into the afternoon. This morning I put on Billie Holiday to accompany my mind into the wild. She was singing sad about poplar trees. My thoughts glided on her words following their movement up and down.

*Southern trees bear strange fruit,*

*Blood on the leaves and blood at the root*

*Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze*

*Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees*

She sang me into my memories. There was a road in Wilmington, North Carolina that we took to the Intracoastal Waterway. The most beautiful road lined with low-hanging tree limbs and a white fence keeping in horses and protecting a large, pruned estate. This road soon bent sharply to the left and the view opened up to the waterway with its many boats and colorful restaurants lining the opposite side of the water. I remember the time this view changed for me. I was looking at the trees that lined the road and the ones that filled the yard inside the

white fence, magnolias maybe, and I noticed how low their branches were and I thought, *I bet they hung slaves from those limbs*, and then I looked at the view and thought, *I wonder if they could see the water from where they hung*. I hated myself for thinking it and I hated myself for not thinking it sooner. Wilmington is an old town; history is everywhere, old battleships and ghost tours, but not this history. The trees and low-hanging branches are our only reminders, our only connection to this past. Our past.

## **Black**

What happens when we lose our connection? What happens when we stop thinking about how my thoughts relate to others' thoughts in the present and even into the past and the future? When we stop noticing the person passing by us on the street and how our lives connected for that second? Or when we don't notice the rose bush growing up through the white picket fence next door to the 7/11 and how important a juxtaposition that is?

## **White**

When I drove out West to California with my dad I anticipated us having life-changing conversations. I imagined he'd tell me stories he'd never told and he would pass on advice that would illuminate this next life I was embarking on. But we didn't do any of that. We drove and looked and listened to favorite albums and sang to the ones we knew. It was simple. Just the closeness was enough. I remember asking, as we drove through Oklahoma and saw the absolute flatness and thought "tornado alley," *why would people live here if it's*

*known for such deadly tornados? And my father responded, because lots of people don't have the means to just pack up and leave and start over. Or because their families are there or because they don't think outside of their home there, that is their home, where they live and the nature comes along with it.*

## **Black**

What happens when we don't consider the lives of others, the way of life of people across the country, across the globe, *or* rather what happens when we begin to consider the Other. This question was the beginning of many questions I began asking as I worked my way into this new landscape. Nothing was the same as where I'd come from. The food was different, the speak, the plants, the streets, the way of life. It was all different. Different and illuminating.

## **Blue**

Blue is a blue whale, the largest mammal that has ever lived. It could have never lived on land because no legs could support such weight, only in water could something so large exist. A blue whale only eats krill. Tiny crustaceans. But krill hold enough nutrients to feed the world's largest organism. Blue whales.

Blue is the ocean. It makes up most of our planet. And it is mostly unknown to us. Too deep and dark and cold to know. Home to the unknown and the unknowns that dwell there. It is deadly and the ultimate destination all at once. It wipes out populations and pulls flocks of populations to it. Blue gives life, and death.

Blue is the sky. The heavens. In California it's always blue, clear blue sky. California is known for the clear blue sky. In Seattle, it's gray. Blue sky is happiness, is destiny, is a dreamscape. The clear blue sky implies forever. Not a cloud in the sky; no barriers, all is open and before you. The blue sky is where the angels live, where heaven lies with its pearly gates. In Spanish, *cielo* means sky, but it also means heaven.

Blue is cold. It is the temperature of ice, freezing. Your body turns blue when you're cold, when you're dead, when you're frozen. Blue is lifeless, when your warmth has left you, when your red blood is no longer pumping through your heart.

Blue is sad. *The blues*. It's melancholy. The ultimate sadness. From loss. When your heart is pumping heavy loads of blood and you can feel it beat its broken beats. You wish you were lifeless, but you exist and you feel and it hurts and you're blue. Your eyes cry from the pain created by the blue.

Blue is empty. An empty hollow. Empty from losing what was once there. To feel the hollow space that was once full. The absence. The crying out of all the empty air that fills your hollow cage of bones.

## **Black**

When I was a child my family took trips to the beach every summer, the North Carolina coast, the best beaches in the United States. My mother is a strong swimmer. The waves often dug up sandbars, patches of packed sand farther out

into the ocean. They dared you to swim to them, like a little island in the middle of the sea. I'd climb on my mother's back and wrap my chubby arms around her neck tight and she'd take off for the island swimming what seemed like a great distance over deep deep sea. I looked back to watch us get farther and farther from the shore, the people too teeny to distinguish. And I'd look out around us, only water and us. I asked her *what if a shark gets us*. She took her time, thinking, and then said *well, if it gets us, it gets us*. And then she asked me if I wanted to turn back. I took my time, thinking, and I looked out and around again and then back to the shore and then answered, *no*. When we reached the sandbar, I unlatched myself from my mother and splashed around the shallow island that had popped up out of nowhere, out of the unknown. We stood there and waved back to all those back on the shore. Then I climbed back onto my mother's back, wrapped my chubby arms around her neck, and we shoved off, across the deep deep sea to our family back on dry land.

## **White**

Yesterday, *Democracy Now!* posted an interview with a man who was wrongly convicted of a murder and spent 30 years on death row. He was just released. The interview pointed out how we never really moved forward after slavery; we never dealt with the injustices inherent in that long period of time. And so its injustices are still in our bones as a society, in the choices we make, the decisions. We are wrongly prosecuting black and brown people to fill quotas or to put periods on murder cases; we want to find someone to blame, anyone, and

from our history of knowledge, black and brown people are usually the guilty ones, the less humane. Our prisons are filling up with the innocent or we are shooting them dead in the streets.

A refugee from Iraq told me how lucky we are in this country. That in other countries, like his own, parents are being killed in front of their children...*[In America] all have their rights...we can work...we can live...a lot of countries they don't have the right to work because of their race or religion.*

How do we choose one over the other? How do we compare injustices? Look at how the globalization of knowledge has changed what we see. We have no excuses now, cannot cry ignorance. But now our hearts, our souls must encompass *global* injustices. We must cry out for our neighbor next door and our neighbors across the seas. How are we to hold all of this, bear it all? Do our wills, and souls, and hearts, grow and expand as our knowledge does? Do we have to grow them as we grow our knowledge? Or do we shut down and turn off and tune out just so we can get through the day?

## **Blue**

The first three months of living in California was mostly spent on my own. I called home to North Carolina a lot. And I walked a lot. It took me thirty minutes to walk to school, but the path was beautiful. I looked forward to it. I looked forward to noticing new differences. There was one house I always passed and smelled espresso, so each day I tried to figure out why, which plant was emitting espresso. I looked forward to the new things I could find on the same path. I was

getting to know my surroundings. Getting to know a place. Passing by the same high, dark wooden fence, I began to wonder what was behind it, looking between cracks as I walked. One day the gate was open and I saw what was behind the ominous wooden fence, a simple manicured yard as pretentious as the fence that hid it. Getting to know a place and its secrets.

## **Black**

I didn't know it at the time, but I took these experiences with me into my work. Perhaps they were always there; perhaps it's just how I am, always curious about my place. I like to put forms together. See how they match up. Back in North Carolina I always liked to put friends together. I was the middleman. Friends in various groups, and I was the tie that connected them all. The shaman, the conduit.

## **White**

I've come to realize as I approach this degree that titles me a Master of Fine Art, a master in the pictorial, which means expressed in pictures, illustrated, I've come to realize that painting is not special. *Painting* is not the thing I am mastering; it is like the word says, I am mastering illustrating an expression. Painting, through paint, mark making, tangibly forming, through these processes is only one aspect of the mastering. Reading, writing, imagining, thinking, interpreting, remembering, exploring, loving, hating, doubting, failing, listening, crying, laughing, assuming, predicting, not knowing, shitting, longing, missing, wanting, having, letting go, losing, sitting, standing, laying, walking, seeing,

dreaming, being...to exist! is what I am mastering. Noticing all these through the pursuit of proving the ideas within the illustrations, I have come into existence. I have pulled out my inside and smeared it on to this fabric that has a lineage as old as the canon of painting. I stretched the fabric across my wall like one would have stretched a buffalo skin to dry.

## **Blue**

This blue has been a part of me for a long time. A bright blue. I think it just connects me. It feels a part of everything. Yves Klein saw it and made a version he could own. He thought it universal. He covered a globe with it. He painted naked women with it and imprinted them onto paper. He jumped off a roof into it. This blue, it is the void. It is teardrops and blue jeans and blue collar and the color of freedom and the color of dreams and the skin of goddesses and a symbol of life and limitlessness and distance and the air we breathe and temperature and it is the deepest part of the soul.

## **Black**

[feminine, passive, negative, unconscious, dreams, water, intuitive, shadow]

This black, this black is new. I don't know where it comes from. I can guess. I can guess that it is a dark side. A dark, but not exactly evil. It wants to cover and expand and exist, but it is vast and does not end, which can be scary or frightening. This is where it can feel a little evil, mystically evil. Like how the unknown feels evil, like how under the bed feels evil or inside the closet or how evil things seem to always occur at night, in darkness. A naïve evil. But *this* black

is made of blue and brown. So it is not fully dark, it has color, it is made of color.  
A darkness made of color. Blue and brown, the sea and the land.

## **White**

[masculine, bright, positive, conscious, rational, the sun, active]

And then there is the white, the light. Sometimes it is a manufactured white, a background, the material making itself known, keeping itself known so as not to mistake it for something else, something more. And then sometimes it's a cover. A sheet put over what was there before. A white sheet that only allows the strongest of colors to peek through, afterthoughts linger on its surface. Then, then there is the white that exists as white, mixed with some tan, some light earth, and some blue, some light sky. It hesitantly glides across the mystical black expanse like Jesus' first attempt at walking on water. Hesitant, fearful but confident with God on his side, he takes his first steps slowly, testing the surface, his eyes playing tricks? No. He has been elevated. The white here, on the dark expanse does not know what it's doing or where it's going, but it moves. It moves for the first time on the scratchy rough, raw fabric. It takes long strides across the plane and it huddles up inside itself and it tumbles lightly back and forth. All without knowing. Just moving, in one way or another.

## **Black.**

To be alone.

To quietly... quiet. It's always quiet when alone. To quietly pace, and then lay and wait for the water to boil. To quietly cut the tops off strawberries standing at the sink and feeling like this scene has occurred before. To be enveloped in thoughts and feel as if it has all occurred before. To remember a dream remembered. To be living the dream, acting out the memory. To not speak. To feel the power, the loudness, of your own, one voice. The only one. To be able to think, travel far into thought desires, to not have to come back .

To notice the crumbs under your feet. To use the top of your left foot to wipe away the crumbs attached to the bottom of your right. And then use your right foot to sweep away the crumbs from the top of your left foot. To listen closely to the neighbors' conversations as you spoon yogurt over berries. To hear another person's heavy breathing as he walks up the stairs, lungs blowing out and sucking in. To feel actively and luxuriously dirty, noticing the packed dishes in the sink from last night's meal. The sexiness of the remnants of living, the sex of the filth. The intimacy of the solitude. The relationship with the mind and the space to let it run wild into neverneverland and the anxiety and sadness of calling it back.

What happens when we lose this sense of place? These secret far off places. Or when we can't get there anymore? There's no time or it's too hard or our minds just won't go there because we have too much to think about, too much reality. What happens when we stop exploring or when the movements become routine?

## **White**

When I was a child we spent all our free time outside, *in the woods*. Woods connected all the neighbors' houses and that's what we used to travel to each other. Our lives were these woods, the in-between. And all the adventure happened during the in-between. All the exploring. We'd follow creeks until we couldn't anymore. Walk until we stumbled upon an idea. Walk until we found a prop for some make believe. Or we'd just go and sit on the bank of the creek and dangle our legs. I remember it feeling like we couldn't be seen, like no one knew this existed except we who traveled it daily. It was secret. And every evening at dinnertime we'd hear the far-reaching whistle of my mother calling us back, out of the wild.