

Tombstone Tor Warren-Guerette

In brainstorming for our group exhibition, we were asked to consider what issues were most pressing to us personally, and I began with two: gun violence in schools, and war, in the world. Specifically I thought to Palestine, and I would miss one of these classes to be in a college-organized protest against Israel's genocide, and specifically I thought to the Palestinian students who are already in my classroom, and the black students who thought it'd be funny to tell me during a drill "if there's a shooter, they'll shoot me". Maybe that isn't how the interaction went but that is how it felt. And in these two problems I wanted to know what it was that I can do. I grapple with white guilt quite a bit. I grapple with guilt even more. A question formed from these considerations: How can I be good? At teaching? At protecting people? At helping? At art? At a time like this? No, just in general, I'd like to be good, and I think I think about being good all the time. I think we all do a little bit but I think I really obsess about it, I really pull it apart and beat myself up about it.

So in this piece I am doing a bit of visual research. I ask the question and I answer. I draw what comes to mind. Either they will be in separate pieces of this yellowish paper posted up with the ink, or I'll draw them up on the wall, a la Cara Walker's piece at the Poetry Foundation, which I'm aware she crossed the picketline to present when the Foundation chose not to publish a Palestinian poet to maintain relations with... who? The amorphous, ambiguous state of Israel that permeates the United States society? Well whatever. I write here, I draw here, and whether it is comprehensible or not matters less than the making of the work in my opinion. Maybe I'll read it out so people can see the questions and the poetry there – my handwriting is not nearly as legible as Ms. Walker's – but I'd also like to point out Ms. Bechdel's hand in my work as well, from the referenced pose. I needed to get back to art, and to do that I had to overcome this/these question/s. So ink and brush it was. Paper and words and everything else.

I've found that nowadays it's a lot more difficult for me to sit down and just draw. Probably because this question(s) is clogging up my art. But I draw a lot from reference these days, and it's nice, but I miss being able to draw amorphously. It's why I chose to supplement with words, as the words fuel the drawings fuel the words fuel the drawings, and so on. I feel I owe it to words a little bit since they got me my job at the Chicago Poetry Center. I did not feel worthy of the place even though it was only slightly glorified babysitting without any actual protections to me or my coworkers, who I never saw unless we carpooled together. So much lonely work. And still trying to figure out how to be good in spite or light of it all.

