

Lottie Consalvo

in silence

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Text by Sarah Mosca

Imagine gazing upon the sea from a windy cliff your unstable footing pivoting on steadiness and fragility because you are wearing the wrong shoes. In pursuit of the quiet you tighten your grip on the handrail.

Annette von Droste Hülshoff was born in 1797, a German poetess (lingering somewhere between romanticism and realism), a composer, a daughter of old Catholic aristocracy. Sickness a frequent visitor, ill of body and mind and an itching eye for awkward attachments. She spent most her adult life a recluse, convalescing at her sister's home near Lake Constance surrounded by the moors of Meersburg. Here she wrote most of her literary prose, her wild muse.

I think of Annette von Droste Hülshoff in this way, wandering along the moors kicking the soil with a handicapped lustre, summoning the life force in the quiet. Her thoughts swimming with composed lyrical ballads of the moors, the loyalty of her pets, the stillness of the lake, her discontent, and the horrifying and baffling moods of the human condition. Witnessing a place in all its loneliness. The mirror her faithful friend.

In 1819, Droste Hülshoff attempted to spend an entire year writing about one topic, spirituality. Against a background of existential disturbances and in connection with a failed love affair, these notes became a personal confession in which her uncertainties about faith were raised. An enchanting form of spiritual lyricism, her relentless observations resulting in what she referred to as a neglect of knowledge to retain faith. This attempt soon abandoned proving only to deem her unabated questioning having the appearance of doubt. This cycle *A Spiritual Year*, was published posthumously.

She died in the afternoon of May 24th, 1848 in Meersburg, alone by the lake.

Recently I was listening to philosopher Simon Critchley discussing how life can not be well lived unless you are considerate of death. He recalls, 'You must always have death in your mouth'. What does it mean to have death in your mouth? If we do not fear death does it make us reckless and lacking of empathy?

We must all attempt to have death in our mouths.

These are thoughts that could kill us, they stun the spirit, rob any happiness. With a thousandfold murder, the redder on their hands. I gently turn my gaze.
(*Instinct*, poem, von Droste Hülshoff)

What of the stillness of mind and its mean counterpart, idleness. The car's engine is not completely off, just humming. The threat of the fuel gurgling out.

We endeavour to find a perfect balance between collapse and stillness. A freeze frame. A lingering glimpse. Terror in the sublime. The delicate bending between desire and reason. Like a tight-rope, stretched taught yet bowing in the centre when you attempt to cross it. The potential of falling. A precarious mission with us its willing participants, perpetual idealists in the pursuit of happiness.

Bird in Space, 1923 by Constantin Brancusi, the reduced form gently bends, emulating an action of a bird in a state of flight, its slender physic on the brink of plummeting. Its slight impregnation, a counter balance between stillness and collapse.

Lottie Consalvo's painting *a distant silence*, 2017, echoes this same gesture; impregnated bends, repeated - mirrored. Tender tones concealed by determined clumsy marks mimicking the lyrical action of a bird in inverted flight. The ducking and weaving of a psychological transition, the battle of memory and imagination in pursuit of the quiet.

Similarly, *in silence*, 2017, this repeated precarious insertion cuts-through a heavy black canvas, splitting the stillness, interrupting the calmness of the void. Intuitive severing gestures, a dynamic push-and-pull action revealing or concealing depending on a mood. Consalvo's unapologetic manner commanding our attention.

Consalvo's reductive palette again echoes Brancusi's sculpture, no nauseating colours, no horror, just earthly tones of burden and perhaps sorrow. Her graceful brush strokes sweeping back and fourth like a pendulum. The bold minimal intersections fragmented like a daydream. Almost as if she was going to tell you something but then changed her mind.

A bellowing silence.

Just before noon on the 8th of January, 2015, I arrived in a small town outside of Paris. The day before there had been a terrorist attack in the centre of Paris, twelve people were shot dead inside the offices of the French satirical weekly newspaper, *Charlie Hebdo*. I was walking into town looking for lunch, then suddenly, over a loud speaker a woman's voice, "Une minute de silence", bells chimed three times, then everything simply stopped. The people walking, the cars in the street, the clanking of cutlery and coffee cups at a nearby cafe, everything simply stopped - there was nothing.

The longest of minutes, it was a deafening silence, a suffocating stillness. As if the silence itself carried the heavy burden of grief.

The titles of Consalvo's paintings imply a nod to existential interference, akin to Droste Hülshoff's durational poetry *A Spiritual Year*. A persistent enquiry regarding quietness, intuition and spirit. A particular favourite *totemic emptiness*, the totem being an empty vessel or a bird who took flight but got stuck and can not retract its wings.

In Consalvo's painting *leaving paradise*, 2017, she poses a question. Two monumental forms similar yet set apart, like doors, suggesting entry or exit. Again they are mirrored, as if she painted one door, folded the canvas in half so it left a vague impression. Now there is a choice, two doors. Standing idly in front of an existential quandary. I kick the dust beneath my feet with indecision.

Restlessness, *she is dancing away from you now*.

Consalvo's pas de deux with the fall-outs of life's malleability is familiar territory. Once she undertook a year long performance titled *Compartmentalise*, where she lived only with essential items packing up the trimmings of her life she then deemed unnecessary hoping it would give her mind more room. More recently she spent another year living out her desires in an attempt to find ultimate happiness.

I imagine Consalvo tread softly on the fulcrum of feeding desire and self destruction.

What if you stayed in the same house for twenty years. Are you content or fearful of the packing and the inevitable unpacking. Does it determine you humble or misled. How do we balance idleness and care? Can staying still be suffocating.

We often curve towards self destruction. Solitude the hunting ground for an unravelling. At what point does the mechanism of care set in. I like moving. It is like hitting the reset button. When you get bored, refresh. Laying down roots we might stabilise our minds although the uprooting is more compulsive. Each of Consalvo's paintings idle somewhere between fragility and sturdiness, an enticing conundrum. Repetition and flow, together and apart. Her persistent questioning seducing us to hold in our hands a set of wire-cutters letting them hover near the tight-rope.