The Potato is the Body is the Potato

“What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/out of this stony rubbish?”

-T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*

Roots link us to our pasts, to new growth, and dead ends. We’ve been severed from our instinctual connection to the natural world. Do we really even remember how to nurture a relationship with nature?

The Potato - A humble creature hiding many complexities, and who is a better contestant, I think, for the role of death flower. Who knows death better than the potato? The potato who has ended and caused famines. The potato who is so prone to disease and demise, who feeds the multitudes with its tubers, but could kill you with a taste of its greenery.

Green is a symbol of prosperity and growth, but not necessarily for the potato. Green in a potato reveals that solanine is developing, a consequence of light exposure. A potato cannot live in the light, although it tries. Like Icarus, too close to the sun and the potato falls. To live, a potato must be buried.

The potato, for me, has been a symbol of the vicious cycle of grief. I have continued growing potatoes above ground until they are taken by the development of solanine and begin to rot, then I replace them and start again knowing ultimately, I will get the same result. On a personal level this cycle mimics the grief I have endured with those in my family I have lost to heroin. I cared for them the best way I knew how, but in the end their exposure was too much. Through caring for these potatoes, I readdress past guilts of enabling and abandoning.

I have been photographing these cycles, and creating video work to express these feelings.

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Preservation Through Isolation

It is said that April is the cruelest month. I hope this is true. Now that the world is on hold, I have decided to put the potatoes on hold as well. The current situation of quarantine is what is on my mind, and so that is what I am making work on now. Using this extended time at home away from studios of comfort, I am challenging myself to explore different avenues of making that are new to me. I am continuing to make video work, something I have been interested in for a long time, but have found daunting. I am trying my hand at bookmaking. Documenting the moment feels important, and using a book to do so feels relevant. Books hold stories, thoughts, memories, all things I want to be able to look back on once we get out on the other side of this. Lastly, I am exploring lumen prints. Being in an apartment, with two windows, and no yard I find myself craving the light. Making work with light seems precious to this moment. All of these methods of making hold the ability to document, to preserve.

Salt has been a connecting thread in my recent work, yet another preservative. It is used to maintain a thing in its original state, but salt doesn’t work forever. There is still an expiration date.

The moon has also been showing up a lot in my work. Inspired by Italo Calvino’s *The Distance of the Moon*, a story that describes a time when people would sail out to sea and climb ladders to the moon. Over the course of the story the moon is pushed farther and farther away by the tides of her own creation, and it describes the different reactions of the people who are going to lose the moon. This story resonates with me greatly during this time of loss and panic.

Repetition has been the most prevalent aspect of my work. Whether it’s photos, ceramic forms, drawings, paintings, etc. the grid and repetition are a component. Repetition provides power and an overwhelming sensation. The grid is a space of created harmony. Forcing harmony on topics of something as grievous and unpredictable as loss is forcing a chaotic entity into place. The individual piece becomes one in a hundred, part of the whole. A vain attempt to restore regularity.

I fear the changes we will face as we work through this pandemic. I selfishly resent being confined to 500sqft with two windows that face nothing but other windows. Windows now feel like barriers, like jail cells. I’m beginning to understand what the Betta fish feels like in that cup. I have what I need to survive, but what kind of life is it?

Many people have been mourning the loss of a connection to others and to nature at this time. I too am feeling this, and thus my work is investigating that longing. I hope if nothing else, this pandemic can help us reconnect with the natural world.