

The edge of the land

Dear Louise

I am writing this from inside a flower, just like Tulippa, who was carried aloft on a supple stem, in the search for a new home. And just like Tulippa, your work gives me a sense of direction when I feel lost. When Tove Janssen created Tulippa, the girl in the flower, she knew a thing or two about flowers. She knew what flowers are for, their enticing multiplicity, their enunciation of beauty, their vivid fragility sending us back to the first ever flower we saw, to the simplicity of looking, and liking, and liking to look. And at first, we did not have to remember to stop and look because we lived moment to moment. But now we need your whorls of petals to ring out the shape of summer. I think you stopped summer with your *Double Flower*. Can we say one flower is smiling and its double is smiling back?

Dear Louise

There is not enough darkness to call this night anymore. The sun stays up so I hide under the covers, there really is nowhere else to go. Midsummer is a catastrophe. Unstoppable shudders of blossom crowd the sky. When the season turns I will sleep again.

Dear Louise

I have not travelled in seven years. I watch the ferry go to the islands, searching the ends of the peninsula, but I cannot leave. I remember the last time we met. You stepped out to stop the car, I wound down the window, you passed me a gift through the gap – thank you.

Dear Louise

What kind of map is a bough of magnolia? What do you find if you follow the berries? I am starting to think of these gifts, the flowers, the berries, the blossoms as a kind of map. Not a map that will help me find home but a map I could turn to if I were lost. I mean love or grief. When we are lost we turn to nature to find direction – I do this, I go towards the edge of land to know where I am. This is what *World Map (Clay)* means to me, the rolls and balls, thumbbed and pressed, these remnants of your palm covering the territory *are* the territory. The ledge on which we stand has no name, and of course the world of touch is not a world we can really claim to map, although that is where we do our living.

I found a poem, well, Adam Phillips found it for me, I am rolling down the car window to put it into your hand. He writes, 'We might say being lost makes people unusually inventive in the use of objects' is this what you meant when we talked about illness as a gift for the imagination? In this poem by the Czech poet and immunologist Miroslav Holub titled, *Brief Reflection on Maps*, the Nobel Prize winning physiologist Albert Szent-Gyorgi tells a story about a lieutenant which goes like this:

From a small Hungarian unit in the Alps a young lieutenant
Sent out a scouting party into the icy wastes.
At once
It began to snow, it snowed for two days and the party
Did not return. The lieutenant was in distress: he
had sent
His men to their deaths.

On the third day, however, the scouting party
was back.
Where had they been? How had they managed to find their way?
Yes, the man explained, we certainly thought we were
Lost and awaited our end. When suddenly one of our lot
Found a map in his pocket. We felt reassured.
We made a bivouac, waited for the snow to stop, and
then with the map
Found the right direction.
And here we are.
The lieutenant asked to see that remarkable map in
order to
Study it.
It wasn't a map of the Alps
But the Pyreneese.

Goodbye.

Dear Louise
And often the question of how, or where, an artwork might come to rest
is answered by time itself. The artist just comes to the end, something like
walking to the end of a jetty.

Dear Louise
I have been thinking of your open books, their beautiful geometry. How
an ellipse loves a circle, and a triangle vaults. Their squint humour, their
graphic and meticulous flight from page to page. They are theatres for my
imagination, you call them bodies or rooms.

And I think your *Magnolia Tree* is composed from trunks from the winter
and blossoms from the summer, and so your work of painting from one to
the other takes us from winter to summer, makes the seasons touch each
other, whether they like it or not.

What is a berry? Not just enticement but actual food. And *Gem Set* where
two hands are marrying in a florid muttering. You said you were trying to
paint two hands into the rings, pour the bodies into them. Phillips writes,
'We need a person to long for, an object of longing, because it orientates
the excess, the complexity of our hearts and minds.' It is this extraordinary
complexity that your hands reach out for.

Here is a poem by Adrienne Rich written for the women's climbing team who climbed to Lenin Peak led by Elvira Shatayev in 1974. Here she is writing her *Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev*, as Elvira Shatayev,

In the diary as the wind began to tear
at the tents over us I wrote:
*We know now we have always been in danger
down in our separateness
and now up here together but till now
we had not touched our strength*

I have been thinking about what you said about *Climbing Round My Room* by Lucy Gunning, how my pen travels around each curve of each letter and how hard it is to find your own pulse.

Dear Louise

Does your *Double Flower Performance* double this flower's strength? Or does it fall in love with its double? Or is it doubling again and again, its soft geometry opening out to the horizon, to the sky, into the air, to trapping the wind, your hands hardly able to keep it and your hands of course made it. You said *Double Flower* could be like a sail or a flag. I see a floating theatre. The scene is summer. The stage hand says so. She walks a new backdrop across, changing the scene from a pastoral vista into an expressionistic second act.

And then again, it could be a tent, a flag, a kite taken by the wind. A curtain drawn against the world too, a lens to show us microscopic pollen, to let us see another way – so many things we will not stop for. You stopped the season.

Sarah