

DIMENSIONS VARIABLE

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ABSTRACT

This collaborative sequence of short prose or prose poems was written using the paintings of Jānis Avotiņš (as reproduced in a 2005 catalogue) as visual prompts. The writing process used interpretation, ekphrasis and disjunction to construct a non-linear narrative which attempts to create momentary experiences and reflective interiority through characterisation.

KEYWORDS

fiction
ekphrasis
collaboration
narrative
prose poetry



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1. (*Untitled #11*)

Pale fade cream distance. A moment of geometric indecision and isolation. Standalone discretion and turnabout orienteering. No other way to do, no other place to be.

The pale stains of memory seep across the horizon and inflate perspective. I am an adjectival mess, a topographical disgrace.

2. (*Untitled #8*)

White-out. A desert of complications and nothing visible for miles. Nothing assumes importance compared to anything else, distance does not exist. The shadow only turns light cream instead of sun.

Two figures disappear behind a concrete plane, they move from right to left. One leads, one follows. Neither speak. The story is now silent, it moves from right to left. Freeze-frame.

3. (*Untitled #12*)

The dawn sky has turned green from the storm last night. It washed away the litter, the sand on the street and the tourists. One local is out early to buy his fags from the corner shop down the road.

No-one knows why there is a rounded bunker here as part of the sea wall. The only entrance is a rusted door that has been shut for years. The local boys sometimes climb onto the roof but soon get bored.

This town has little going for it at the best of times. When summer is a washout autumn seems to come early, the light fades and the ocean turns dark with seaweed. I might take up smoking and playing dead.

4. (*Untitled #15*)

The cathedral is dark. I am too early for evening mass and too late to be a tourist.

I have placed myself off centre in the right transept, seated on a stone bench by the grave of a martyr and the relics of a saint.

The warm pale stone turns grey, sucks up the light; dusk made physical. Pillars and arches change into shadows, footsteps fade somewhere beyond the altar.

Black stained glass windows. Soft silence. A lack of faith.

5. *(Untitled #10)*

Night leapt upon the hill and didn't leave.

We cooked, washed and dug in darkness until our tongues remembered the taste of day and our skin was translucent and sick.

Slugs smothered vegetables, land-crabs scuttled over monoliths and wolves howled beneath windows.

When news of light came from the neighbouring hill we waited, eyes tilted skywards.

After a while, they turned on me, one after the other, rolling balls of night between their palms.

Collar turned up, hands packed into coat pockets, I left and it followed, throwing one shadowy foot in front of the other, leaning well back into its heels. I didn't turn to see my hilltop uncovered but looked at those ahead ready with their warning beacons and guns.

6. *(Untitled #9)*

My llama is much bigger than me. I am a dot way up on his right eyebrow.

It's no secret that he likes to drink vodka and strangely, his drinking blurs my own vision. This all started after the divorce.

He comes sniffing through the kitchen window every day before lunch. I don't know how he sees them or they him. It's not healthy, I tell him, but he never wants to hear it. The bottle neck fits nicely between his two, curved toes. Once, he lost his balance and I tumbled blinking through the fuzz. I worry that it will happen again.

You may ask me why they don't hide the bottle. They tried that once and didn't see him for three days. We're slumped in the garden swing-seat now, both bringing into focus that photo of her that he still keeps in his wallet.

7. *(Untitled #16)*

I have got used to my cave, it has become my lair. My hangout, my refuge, my home.

Morning arrives as the sun fingers the shadow, starts to warm the sand.

Evening arrives early, sun setting behind the hill my cave is part of. From my place against the rock I watch shadow spread and night descend.

It is a great drama.

8. (*Untitled #3*)

There are elevators inside blades of grass. Lifts, as I have come to call them now that they help me every day. I watch the tiny people rising. They take selfies or lean against the glass in suits. They check that they have their sandwiches and water-bottles for the day, taking care to keep their elbows in. Who knew there'd be a whole, tiny world down there? My favourite rock has not yet become too slippery to sit on. Sketching upwards, as winter comes, allows me to record a little higher every day. Down is mulch and brown and dead-beetle backs. Up is page-white sky and grass tips. I have seen all the way to the floor and understand why the lifts only go upwards. By mid-December, I believe I know where they're going and it's no better, I'm sad to say, it's no better.

9. (*Untitled #14*)

She lures in those who have a preoccupation with size. One couple came from Mexico City. That was the farthest anyone had come. It was to be expected, given the nature of the face, but there's still time. Another couple brought a tape measure and the husband stood at the top of the arch while the wife remained on the flagstones. It wasn't long enough and so they came back with a different one the next day, and the next, but were always disappointed. The French cartographer brought a laser which bounced off her cheekbones, her nose, her brow. A man from York brought a hosepipe and tried to fill the hall with water.

This had to stop.

The white man is paid a lot to sit there. He can text if he likes. Or just stare at the walls. But he mustn't let them see how big she is.

They don't bother, anymore.

10. (*Untitled #6*)

On Monday, there is the loudest noise. We look up to see they have all parked in the sky, blackening it with shadowed underbellies. Street lamps glow then glow less and glow no more. Flowers close but leaves reach hopeful. There is no one to pick their dead fruit. By Wednesday, people emerge from their hiding places, dressed for business or to pick up shopping or children. The espresso man says the coffee hissing from his machine will be the

last, that we should take it to stay awake through the haze of melatonin. We form an orderly queue.

11. *(Untitled #2)*

Mustard chrome with brown leather seats. There are pinch marks in the ceiling from Dom's hat with the antler horns. The ashtray has crusted corners and a two-pound coin for the bridge (the bridge is online payment only, now) and a Murray mint wrapper. Perhaps two.

Dom is at University now. I scooted up through the Norfolk lanes that day, watched the sky shawl up around the shoulders of the day.

Now I am wishing I could do that instead of me, stand outside and look in.

I am telling me not to drive, but I click the handle outwards and slide onto my own lap. Pop Dom's hat on the passenger seat and rumble the gear into first.

12. *(Untitled #7)*

There are times when they do the same thing. He's usually alone, spinning through his universe. But about once every five years the threads come together and the echoes of others pound round him. Then he knows he's on the right track. Sometimes they sit in the same restaurant. Other times they might be on a plane. He believes that all of the hims can't be hims. That people feel trapped in the bodies they've been given. Mistakes, they say, are often made by the entity that decides these things. He imagines one of him in a peplum dress and supposes that he would be happy with that. Another him might be a formula one driver. Another him might be Austrian. Now they are walking together in the same direction. He slows to a stroll and hopes that they can feel him too.

13. *(Untitled #13)*

I am walking away from it all but everywhere else is like here. Swirls and stains, smudges and stagnated sighs. I am despair incarnate, I am the tiny figure walking out of the picture bottom right.

I am lost amongst the vastness of new spaces which all turn out to be old spaces re-imagined as utopias that don't exist. I walk along the edges of mazes that are impossible to reach the middle of; nothing will adequately fill the gaps of memory I have preserved.

My journey is beyond the sphere of personal signification, will span many more forgotten years. I will define my life by flights of fancy and being lost.

14. *(Untitled #1)*

Canals, rivers, lakes and streams, we've done 'em all. Cruised our way along and through the world's waterways, never stopping or slowing, never knowing where we are.

You see us in the background of postcards, tourist snapshots and the daily news. We're blurred and in the background, the boat's wake tired and misaligned from how they used to print.

If you ask us we will deny everything. You dreamed it all, that wasn't us, we're good to go.

15. *(Untitled #5)*

A flag of dark shadow, a meeting of minds. Ideas swapped, coffee shared. There is money to be made, gloomy corners to be frequented, futures to be planned. The network includes many organisations with shared aims: mostly money to be made, land and buildings to be owned.

The day starts well. The sun comes up, the sums add up. The money is transferred. There are no witnesses.

16. *(Untitled #4)*

I see the sea. Or another building. Or the edges of this picture. You don't know which. The painter sees me, on my building. It's not mine but he makes it mine. Angles sit like hats over rotting joists and the balcony lip hides autumn's sludgy debris. Soon I will climb back through my own window. For you, I am a lord. The opened can of beans will not spoil as it waits next to my single-ring camping stove. The floor-mattress does not long for my pressure and my one, worn, book is finally a book rather than a coaster or a door stop. I will stay and let the painter finish.

17. *(Untitled #17)*

This one is the most special, I think. I have tripped through canals, rivers, lakes and streams, I scooted up through the Norfolk lanes. I have seen all the way to the floor and understand why the lifts only go upwards. I am a lord, a flag of dark shadow; the loudest noise made by the entity that decides these things. I tumbled blinking through the fuzz and the story is now silent. A moment of geometric indecision; a rusted door that has been shut for years. I will define my life by flights of fancy and being lost; the farthest anyone had come. I am too early for evening mass and too late to be a tourist. It is a great drama, this gold. The most special.

(1847 words)