

INNOCENCE ABROAD



Dominic
Palarchio

These days, these days have happened. Ferried by the abundant sun, so knowingly, directionless, put upon by elsewhere.

First to choke: a bird. Yet some hours off.

Barefoot on the brittle back of a warming roof, a focused man took a trusting stance, as if under welcome downpour. After waiting for the final piece of a long and faltering correspondence, his hope that the creased papyri now in hand might offer clarity—might resolve the failed effort to redirect a love drifting toward some shared injustice—was nearly gone. His hands, of course, were filthy. Stains are stains; that he did not paint this day did little than maroon the preexisting pigments to the deeper crevices. Something almost silver, a near-black, an ochre, a tired cinnabar lodged beneath nailbeds. Blue, too, clings. And a neutral binder, yellowed, toughening at the most rubbed region of his palm, wishing to replace the bits of hand it hugged to.

“Mortar.” He said.

He unfolded the topmost travel-smudged leaflet, a protective thinner sheet, as one might touch an urn; cursed, stolen, then reforgot. Then, too, the main papyrus. The bigness of a ripening pride slowly attaching to the sender’s scrawl as he read:

And why is it that some forms of knowledge you let warble bad-manneredly, trailing behind your hard-nosed disgust, in defiance of all potential use? Always implying that to even touch such topics guarantees one’s irredeemability. And then—more backward still—is you holding, in near-tattered adjunction, the irascible guilt of what you do not know. Giving those few in your fragile orbit the sense that you’re always recovering from the startle of an unprompted call to arms.

And how many entrances does a wolf’s lair have? As many as you make. No, this was not meant for him. It had the tenor of something eavesdropped, missing introduction and signature, apparent haste aside. The letter looked more an edit, a scrap of ledger torn then enlarged. Imagination, pursuant in only multiplying its own yield, could’ve counseled the man to entertain the trueness of his correct recipience, but the eddying heat, there on the villa halfway through its planned (behind schedule) renovation, there on the corner of an almost busy insula, there in the year A.D. 79 in the city called Pompeii, had a way of taking him to a place not near enough to call lucid.

The day’s recent hum—inaudible, indistinct, pitched in hidden properties—the hum of all days.

A conclusion enough.

Nocturne ocularis—
Heat hum of piston,
fleshforge turning—
Abattoir, abattoir—
All else: appanage,
epiphenomenon.



And how could it have been meant for him? His last penned dispatch had been something of an accomplishment—others had confirmed as much—having passed it around a coterie of lazy, untrustworthy, tanned, and bawdy bureaucrats who spent the twilight of their days in cynical commentary, swatting flies, drinking whatever was at hand. Even so: an accomplishment. A response alone was a miracle of no small order. For the train of confessions, the attempted egress, the failure of admiration to serve as stopgap, the memories, the flame, the gore that passion yields when given voice—all of it yearned, still yearning, down a sentimental journey of enhancement and revision, like an unconfirmable dream, all laid flat. Flat across hundreds of parchments, dangerously kept, stacked, ordered in reverse chronology, covered in small and peevish Latin—vulgar Latin. One in indigo ink. The other—literal ox blood.

That too—this one was in blackish text. Sure enough, blackish text. Hold it sideways, crumple the thing, renounce your beliefs—blackish it stays. “Old world,” that oxblood.

So it was a mistake.

The man upon the roof—hot, vexed—resolved once more: an anomaly! That want of red, that absent hue—casually reaped from castrated bovines set about to pull plows (and pull they should) til their strength failed (and fail it should)—was the evidence.

And then too, consider the silly, uncharacteristic way it began with “And”—and backwards still: the slant, the italics—fancy. All too fancy, haste notwithstanding.

His lover was no fancy boy, no boy at all—boyish, yes—but no boy at all.

The assassination of John F. Kennedy was still far off—the soft tissue of brain matter (cushion for the pushin’, so to say), bits of scalp, O, America not yet founded. Utagawa Toyoharu, too, was still unborn—he who would one day teach Kunisada, Kuniyoshi, Yoshitoshi, and through them, give to this earth not serenity, not peace, but visions: actors mid-scream, demons draped in silk, courtesans posing in flex and flourish. Aged 27, as the whetted flake of cocaine ate from within his narrow veins, achatter, ablaze,

a lucent wyrm of glassy fission, Georg Trakl would die. That, too, hadn’t happened yet.

And what’s the French Revolution without the guillotine? And who’s Mussolini without Gabrielle D’Annunzio? And what’s a keyboard without a mouse? And what’s a mouse without a trap?

The phrase “work of art” would not be abbreviated to simply “work” or “a work” for quite some time. Unconfirmable.

And what’s a Pulitzer without a prize? A lion without its gold? A gold without its finch?

A “J”, an “F”, without a “K”? A “U”, an “S”, without an “A”?

And what’s a joke without another? What’s a joke, plain and simple?

And let us paint a dog’s leg pink. And let us goad it into prancing about—sprezzatura—clink our glasses, demand its meaning to a set menu, a negotiable price (always up), an aperitif, an hors d’oeuvre, an aperitif, an hors d’oeuvre. And let us tie a horse to a wall, call it a painting. And let us tie a few more—call it a painting. Well, it is, isn’t it? Unconfirmable. And let us seal a fish in a glass vitrine filled with plastic garbage. Let it breathe. Watch it breathe. Who doesn’t mind a little off-gas? Genesis, 2018, live freshwater ecosystem, fish, modeled landscape, glass aquarium, steel base, custom LED panel, Aquarium: 47 × 66 × 20 inches, LED panel: 47 × 20 × 2 inches. Steel yourself. Steal yourself.



Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?

The sanguine! The choleric! The melancholic! The phlegmatic!

Where's the community in that?

The sanguine! The choleric! The melancholic! The phlegmatic!

Where's the universe if not right here?

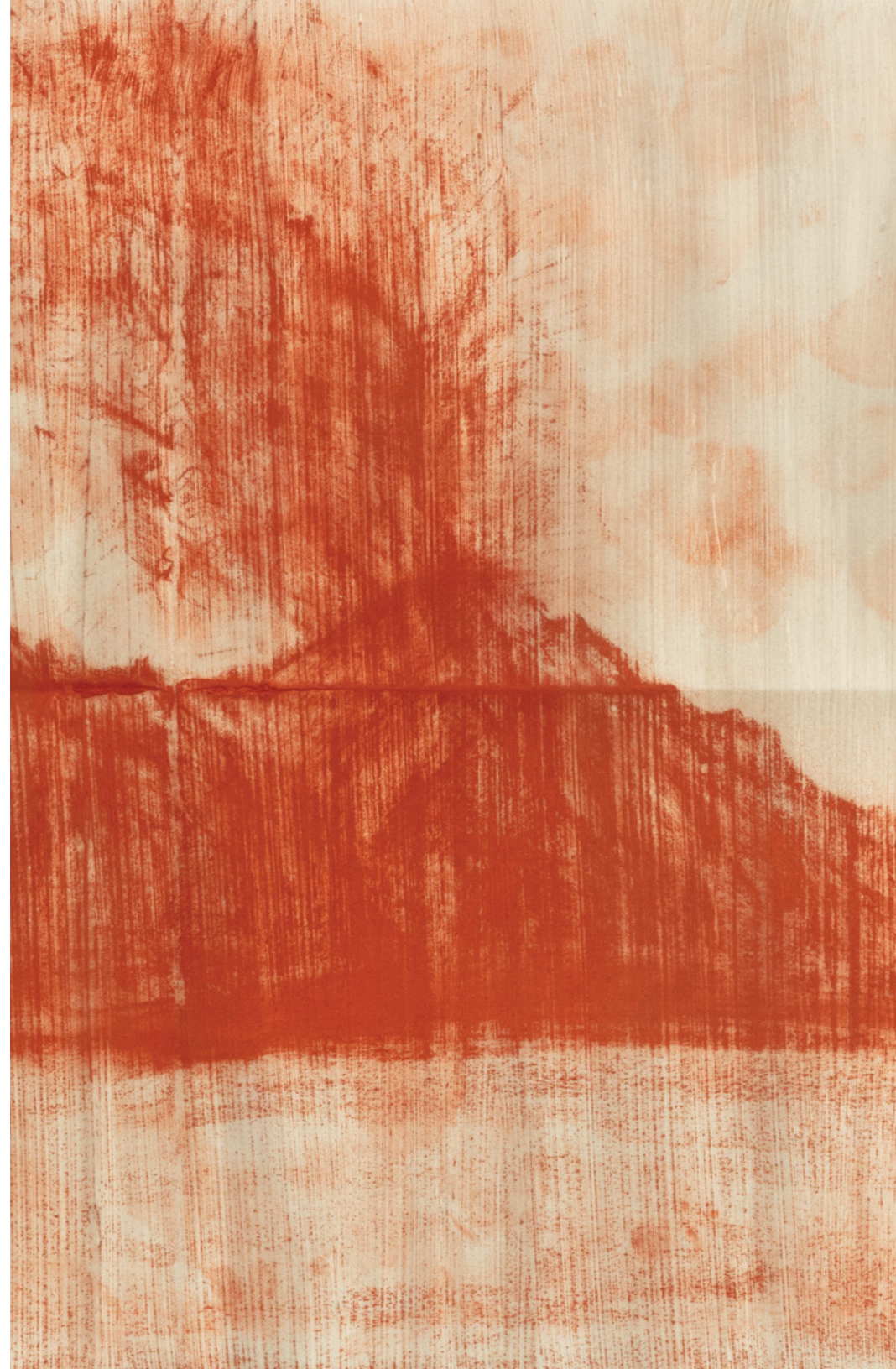
She—flankward,
breath-tied,
linen-tucked—
Ledge-music,
pumice-toned,
near-silent.

Here: A.D. 79, atop a roof. Here once more.

Flipping the letter, the backside held nothing but ink's soft bleed. Blank enough to hurt. A conclusion enough. In conclusion: the authenticity of its inclusion within the corpus of an astonishingly original epistolary exchange—one lamenting the disintegration of two people, a disintegration perhaps furthered by the project itself—was in such doubt that its necessary rejection now verged on certain.

Crushed they had been—every encounter had begun to feel like cleaning a terrible dungeon, gloveless and without tool. And yet, their plan: to write through disaster, to free-wheel the thing, to speak in human terms, to broach every topic, to err, even to risk inventing a few. To ride this rickety thing—robust, yes, but rickety still—toward some new height, toward a vast and impossible garret in the sky. To steer it. To scream for its oblivion. But to heckle, to hester, to launch forward with concentrated animus, trusting that at the very moment of impact—towards the stuttering unforgivable—a great, two-handed swerve would take place.

And they would be possessed no more.
And all would begin anew.





And if the indigo and oxblood were both him (which it was), if the whole noiseless project was penned by that one man alone (which is true), would he have noticed? Surely not (he couldn't).

It was the problem of his soft tissue—the brain (cushion for the pushin')—the worst of mollusks, a glistening curd holed up in its own indecorous meat. It was the problem of his soft tissue—the brain (cushion for the pushin')—the worst of mollusks, a glistening curd holed up in its own indecorous meat.

The most egregious signs were clear: a cadence too familiar, that matching humor—at once burdensome and poorly repressed—a metaphor too often reused, the choice of paper, the unusually thin outer sheet, the font—exact.

But what then to make of this latest black-inked installment, there, gripped by those anemic, chroma-stiff hands? Was that, too, him? Another's problem. No one's problem.

He would toss it.

Walking to the middle edge of the roof, where the compluvium started its slope, he peered down.

Vesuvius, A.D. LXXIX

Scoria flung skyward,
red tongues lapping.
Ink blackened, noon
as ink— Ash-column, cypress
of smoke, falls
inward—
(sculpture that eats)



Exhibition List



Innocence Abroad, 2024
Sanguine and pumice on paper in artist's frame
Paper: 19 × 26 inches (48.3 × 66 cm)
Frame: 28.375 × 35.375 inches (72.1 × 89.9 cm)



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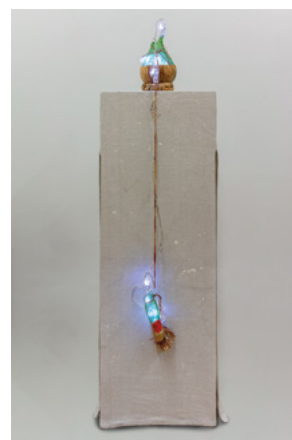
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North Channel, 2024
Pastel and pumice on paper in artist's frame
Paper: 19 × 26 inches (48.3 × 66 cm)
Frame: 28.375 × 35.375 inches (72.1 × 89.9 cm)



Winter's Press, 2024
Wine bottle, string lights, drop cloth, pedestal
50 × 14 × 10 inches (127 × 35.5 × 25.4 cm)



Untitled, 2023
Trunk, fluorescent tube sleeves,
petroleum jelly, incandescent bulbs
47.5 × 30 × 15 inches (120 × 76 × 38 cm)



Advanced Age Assemblage, 2024
Dolly, crate, Murano glass, fabric,
petroleum jelly, incandescent bulbs
26.5 × 20 × 14 inches (67.3 × 50.8 × 35.5 cm)



Mitre, 2024
Toolbox, drawer liner, rag, flourescent tube
sleeves, petroleum jelly, incandescent bulb
25.5 × 11 × 6.5 inches (64.7 × 28 × 16.5 cm)



Untitled, 2024
Tool box, liquor bottle, petroleum jelly,
incandescent bulb
17 × 11.5 × 5 inches (43.2 × 29.2 × 12.7 cm)



Johnny Appleseed, 2025
Folders, fabric, Murano glass, petroleum jelly,
incandescent bulb
25.75 × 23 × 10.5 inches (65.4 × 58.4 × 26.7 cm)



Less Leaden, 2025
Glass drainline, box, petroleum jelly,
incandescent bulb
13.5 × 8.5 × 5.5 inches (34.3 × 21.6 × 14 cm)



So Desirable Product, 2025
Murano glass, tool case, oak, petroleum jelly,
incandescent bulb
18.5 × 9.375 × 8.75 inches (46.7 × 23.8 × 22.2 cm)

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