

DEBUT XVIII: LIVIN' ON A PRAYER

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CURATORS | SANJA PAHOKI & NIKOS PANTAZOPOULOS

'This invisible material'

Whenever things feel like they are at the heights of difficulty I find myself saying 'please god, no!' ... I can feel my stomach in my mouth. When I'm in this state why can't I shake off this idea, word, this invisible material called god? Is this all a repercussion from my childhood? Is this a framework I can't let go of or a framework that makes it all bareable when things get difficult? When I was growing up I had two male role models, one was my neighbor Theo George, he was a Gregorian chanter at the local Orthodox church, the other was my biological father, a card dealer in the local Greek cafe. God was actually never present, but we went to church and spent time together being a community we were filling in the gap of God's absence.

When I was in Form 2, I went from sitting in the front seat to sitting in the back of the classroom. Everything changed in that momentous year for me - I could feel things external to myself. I had cravings I didn't understand. I was always embarrassed and sitting in the back seat where I could hide my shame.

Then, I remembered that I wanted to be a nun, and thought God was going to save me. I spent my school days trying to convert my peers. A priest at World Youth Day told us that masturbation was a mortal sin, so I instantly stopped and tearily went to confess my shame. When I finally orgasmed 5 years later, I stopped believing in God.

Who built a wall around pleasure and made it shameful? I wonder if nuns do masturbate? We all know the shit some priests have gotten up to, now THAT is shameful. It's all a web of lies and fucked up ideals, you might as well masturbate the guilt away.

I wonder how different things would be for people without the presence of toxic shame. A dark, pressurised void, it feels like an invisible force field inside the body. Release, let go, expel. It just takes so much time.

Some kind of jubilant optimism. Some kind of looking up into the sky and looking back down again through the eyes of someone else. It's a shame the earth is round. I have astigmatism and my eyes are shaped conically. Can they take it all in? "All This Sky, That's All Mine" she wrote with some spirit, sixty years ago ... An optimism that never stopped expecting the next miracle. It's a shame I can't fit the world into my mouth all at once.

Could true joy be a true sight? I rushed into the garden once, expecting new blooms; although I found some, there was also decay. I had not expected to find beauty in the latter, but I did. Miracles can be everywhere as they are 'miraculous.' I'm near sure Christ appeared to me in the form of a local duck. I've been more attentive towards these creatures since. I fantasise that I consume a model of the cosmos when I eat a mandarin. I've never thought of taking in all of anything; it feels far too burdensome of a task for me.

I'm pretending to be a bad boy, but I'm not really!

I saw the priest and he called me a sinner.

My mother has a little cross on her bedside table, just in case. I never thought we were particularly religious being brought up in a socialist country and all. When I was younger I used to think the cross was more about a fear of death rather than a belief in god. Now I am not so sure. My grandmother used to have a picture of Tito in her house. After he died and the civil war, the picture of Tito was replaced by a picture of Pope John Paul II.

My mother cooks fettuccine carbonara with cream, bacon, garlic and dijon mustard. That's about as close to Italy and religious taboo as it gets for my family. She gets the recipe from the first Australian Masterchef winner Julie Goodwin's cookbook 'The Heart of the Home.' A true culinary awakening for suburban mums the country over.

In a world that entices us to browse through the lives of others to help us better determine how we feel about ourselves, and to in turn feel the need to be constantly visible, for visibility these days seems to somehow equate to success — do not be afraid to disappear. From it. From us. For a while. And see what comes to you in the silence.

Courtesy the artists, 2022.

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