Love is a Rose

In what was once the working-class living room of my grandparent's house, a brutal brown sewage pipe cut across the wall from the toilet up above. At age sixteen my Aunt Fulya painted it into the thick trunk of an enormous cherry tree, pink flowers cancerously blooming along the walls and around the corner. Still, there was no denying shit literally moving through the room. But denial was never the intention. And acceptance certainly wasn't an option either. Embellishment is not a willing cooperation with material conditions, but a provisional forgiveness of them.

At the beginning of one of his better ballads, Neil Young croons the warning "Love is a rose / but you better not pick it / it only grows when it's on the vine / a handful of thorns and you'll know you've missed it / you lose your love when you say the word 'mine'..." Beyond being just a proto-polyamory anthem, it's also some wise words about plucking things out of the context of breathing. Gorgeous chiaroscuro still lifes pack our planet; a lobster (still red) sits next to a fresh cut flower (still vibrant), its claws poised (still alive) on a Turkish carpet erroneously placed atop a Dutch table. Souvenirs from tall ships, death mask renditions of Western flex, they are arranged with a trite gravity sparing them from the realm of the living. No shade here; pleasure principles are generous in allowing twisted plots to remain beloved. But we can all collectively shudder at someone special wanting these things, and someone special getting to paint them. Power imbalances famously allow no room for error.

Leaving the museum or the living room behind, imagine a sleight of hand, caused by any number of things. Perhaps a wet painting slips off the wall, say, and smears across a brand-new pair of trousers. The trousers provide a false sense of neutrality for moving through a very unneutral world, like a fictional anyone else. The painting never had a false sense of neutrality to begin with; the trousers are ruined, the painting is not. To make work while believing there is no such thing as a mistake is an ontology incorporating not just encounter and chance, but disaster as well. The cigarette holes repeatedly burnt into the polyester pajamas of the aforementioned grandfather always blossomed into floral embroideries by the hands of the women around him, a garden in the ashes. A detached and resigned narrator within me persists: *That happened to me, so that became this,* she shrugs. *I saw this there, so this became that.* Or simply: *Whoops.* Will she ever get a grip? No matter how I ply my endocrine system, she is waterproof, or at least resistant, and as undeflatable as a buoy on the salty sea.

And so to gather the strength needed to absorb misfortune, she bobs down the street for fuel. My favorite döner stand is my favorite not for the quality of its kebab, but for the details behind the counter. Like in any home, even the most disheveled, there is a customized logic to it, be it a strict mindfulness or chaotic suspension of the following: a place for everything, and everything in its place. The two older men inside this kiosk run a tight ship and the kitchen is organized with the severity of a workshop. But like in every Werkstatt I've ever worked in, there is a space carved out for decoration, or to be more precise, personalization. Next to the window hangs a generic promotional calendar, suspended next to a well-oiled vintage clock, adorned with a

bouquet of ceramic garlic bulbs. At the base of each bulb is a single watchful glass eye. Something about this sparks joy. Unlike most contemporary examples of customization, it isn't merely a symptom of the plague of individuation and the marketability of infinite choice, of fidget spinners or insta ads or investment accounts curated just for you. A Bowerbird painstakingly collects little bits of blue plastic to get laid, and we all have our eyes out for the things that feel so right - or very wrong - to us, the things we can take home to decorate our dance floors in the dirt pit. Mimicry is one of the most breathtaking features of biology. And so we gather napkins, or stamps, or stickers, or thimbles, we crush butterflies between books, we nurture aquariums, or begonias, or baseball cards, or little things that look like other little things… Whatever it may be, every good collection requires an audience, or at least nerdy comrades, to verify its existence. Accumulating and sharing what we are specifically attentive to as subjects is a pointing-to, a relating, a key to survival. Like so many other things, it's a matter of endurance. Deciding how much to cull from a reference and how much to leave behind requires a carefully poised sensitivity towards refinement or tastelessness (pick your poison), but the artist knows the open secret best: her collection will survive only if she is aware of its limits and inadequacies at creating a convincing picture. She must keep an eye on that.

Optimistically, a single eye signifies safety and protection. On a bad day it suggests another thing entirely - a panopticon, a cyclops, a vague malicious intent. The English titling for a *nazar boncuk*, or "evil" eye talisman, is a misnomer but not completely unfounded. It implies something to be protected from. Envy circulates as a wandering vapour, gathering heat until it combusts like oil rags in the middle of the night. A pair of eyes becomes a different kind of threat in the form of a body, be it an attentive lover, a detached observer, or both. Manga irises glitter with little white specks of foreshadowing. An endless procession of cowboy tears catches the light with their rhinestones. During my most recent flop era - in true Gen X style - I got lost in the candle series of Richter: there's no end to what a bit of white light in a painting can do.

As I write for Sóley, my apartment is overrun with overwintering ladybugs, who make a break inside everytime I crack the windows open in a stubborn attempt to deny fall. At this point, I could call it a collection. In her application for a Guggenheim fellowship in 1976, Ree Morton famously wrote: "My career probably began at the age of 3, when I took up watching ant hills and protecting ladybugs. This caused a long interruption in my artistic progress, because my family read it as an interest in science and directed me to nursing." Misrecognition strikes again. I, however, in being deemed host by an adorable invasive species, feel entirely recognized. They pepper my ceiling beautifully.