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Making a Scene

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Making a Scene

Over the past year, I have worked to produce what I think of as a visual work of translation. I have spent the last few years intermittently making work from childhood images or videos. I am lucky to have a sizable archive of visual information depicting me and those around me during my childhood at my disposal. Simultaneous to this long-term project dedicated to depicting scenes of my childhood, I have become enamored with teaching small children. In my quest to become a preschool teacher or work with kids in some capacity, I have had the delight of witnessing the constant creativity and storytelling active in the individual and collective worlds of childhood. I am fascinated by the inner lives of children, in their laughter, their games, and what they understand and make of the world— this is one of the reasons for the project. This is also one of the central thematic components important to the genesis and context of this project; the other is memory, in particular the transference that occurs when translating from an image to a painting and the vital role memory or lack of available memory plays in this process. A few of the paintings are of children alone, a few are of adults and children. They all include some iteration of myself, my character, in childhood. The project explores the strangeness and familiarity of the scenes depicted in the images, as well as the unknowable-ness of childhood and its powerful yet posthumously intangible quality. Looking upon old photos without context, I cannot say whether some of the people I see in them who I don't remember were truly unknown to me or whether I've just forgotten them— to me, it would seem, this makes them all strangers, albeit friendly ones.

All the pieces take place in the same window of time— between 1998 and 2005. I was, for most of that time, an only child. The world revolved between me, my parents, my endlessly long list of babysitters and these friendly strangers— I did not like school and I did not get along very well with other children— I preferred my parents’ friends and some of my teachers. I would dote on them in an attempt to escape social interaction with other children. While there are two paintings of me and a childhood friend, they do not represent a particularly salient connection between the figures. There is not much more happening outwardly in the paintings of me and grown-ups, but more is implied. An imaginary life certainly existed with my childhood friends, the very few that there were, but I was much more fascinated with that of adults and desperately wanted to understand and live in it. While “stranger” and “guest” are not synonyms, “visitor” provides a link between the two. This is how I think of the family friends, the distant god-parents, etc. However, it is not those I truly don’t remember that I depicted here— these people are family, childhood friends, and *family friends*— I either still know them, or have memories of them, of some kind. The context I am providing here for all the unknown or semi-unknown figures in the images of my childhood archive are the context I needed to start thinking about my childhood critically and provide some kind of depth of field or background for these works. Four out of seven pieces are set in the same apartment I lived in from age 2 (2000) to age 7 (2005.) This is where we had the most guests and when we were most often guests in the homes of others— other Jewish writers et al. The three others are set in an old New York restaurant, likely since closed, a pumpkin patch somewhere visited for a rare rural outing, and a family member’s house on Halloween. I did not consider these details very much at all when selecting these images to render. I chose them under a pretense of visual intrigue— of course the stories

(meaning thematic scenes) behind them meant just as much. I do think life may be similar, but the reverse; I catch myself finding and being taken in by scenes everywhere, and I am definitely more interested in the expression a person's face than the plot of a movie. As a child, in the very apartment just described, especially before my sister was born, I was busily "making 'set-ups'" as I called them or perhaps more clearly, I was 'building scenes' with toys— I could do this for hours. Thus, it has always been about the scene— meaning, milieu, tableau and performance.