

ROCK COMMISSION

by Eileen Myles

I blow up balloon Jess Perlitz “made” and discover faded rock face on it. It’s a grey balloon. I think if I can’t blow this I up I probably have the virus. Blowing is easy. Tying the knot is not.

I recollect rock Jess Perlitz sent me in New York. I stood there holding it in my kitchen one night. Yet I doubt my own recollection so I text poet assistant Will to pick up rock & describe it for me. (The rock is in New York and I am in Texas.) He does so and sends photograph(s). I think about how more poets should have secondary (in terms of any one task being a primary responsibility) poet to relay sensations to them remotely for fabrication purposes in this case to fulfill an essay commission on the work of Jess Perlitz who uses rocks in their practice.

Why rocks I wonder.

Reading an essay by JP on their own work two things occur to me. One is that the pleasure & the quality of their writing makes me wonder my purpose here. I think I generally supply the text to accompany the body of art. I am a companion to the work. Here JP has already demonstrated their capacity to companion themselves (in writing) similar to the project of theirs in which they wandered Portland & outlying districts costumed as a rock carrying *another* rock (on wheels) alongside them—and so it occurs to me for all their talk about work they admire (including their own) being conceptually “unfinished” JP’s work is *completed* by this fact of a companion. Perhaps (I stroke my chin) I am being *invited* to re-open the procedure & by stating another, placing *my* text next to theirs a rock next to their rock similarly to how Will my poet assistant holds the gifted rock remotely in their hand, a network of rocks is getting reinstated, or established. A continuum exists in which I reprise the phenomenon of *non infinito*. And so they need me after all.

The second thought is pure rock in the sense in which the moon (in their work) gets invoked, and meteors are invoked (10–15 arrive unbeknownst to us every day I learned in JP’s essay) and the rock we stand on is by implication invoked too. JP herself is *already* being a satellite of all rocks landed & fallen, native and migratory. She establishes a grammar of stones and sculptures as an articulation of mineral bodies made & found. They are almost like the baby dolls of humans and of the planet earth.

I’ve not been asked to only talk about JP’s rocks here & her writing on them but all her work. I met JP about a year ago at the Academy of American Arts & Letters where both of us had received an award.

Unexpectedly since then many people on the planet earth are sick. My life is changed and so is hers like an invisible enemy is driving much of the world away from each other and into their homes where we are quietly waiting for it to pass like a war or a storm. And even a civil war since a portion of the world—even as people are dying—persists in insisting the virus that is doing it is a hoax.

People think for instance that it’s still okay to gather in churches. Inviting a miracle, the greatest kind of work.

The piece of Jess’s work I like the most is burned beast. The world had not seemed destined to turn this way. There’s a stain on the wall near the creature like a cloud or an exit or the creature’s dream. A gateway to the abyss from which he came. His head is turned slightly listening to a distant song.

I stood in my kitchen earlier this year & turned the key on the grey stone I was holding that JP had sent me. I was listening carefully as the stone played Amazing Grace. Now I look into the jeering complacency on the face of the creature. I think it resembles me.



Bones, 2019
Plaster
2½ x 2 x 6 ft
Photo: Mario Gallucci