

*75 Oriole Rd*

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*75 Oriole Rd*

October 24 - November 28, 2020

Niloufar Salimi



\* Insert is Tataki-Zomé of leaves from the wild apple trees at 75 Oriole Road, hammered into Sumi paper. Toronto, Summer-Autumn 2020.

Tataki-Zomé (たたき染め) is a traditional Japanese method of transferring botanical dyes from leaves and flowers onto a surface. It is a form of natural printing in which a plant is hammered directly onto paper or fabric.

MATERIALS is a collection of references

Between window and looking

One window for seeing  
One window for hearing  
One window reaching into the heart of the earth

~Forough Farrokhzad from *Let us believe in the beginning of the cold season* (1974). Translated by Niloufar Salimi

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But it can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It.... Relation is reciprocity.

~Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (1923)

...

Niloufar Salimi sits at her third floor apartment window – in the previous century, sometime before the First World War, this sunroom was a balcony – and she draws the branches of the old, wild apple trees. The two closest to her bedroom are a little sickly, they didn't flower this year and perhaps they won't last the new decade. For the time being, they are inextricably located within the day's flux.

If, as Martin Buber has understood it, relation is reciprocity, Salimi's daily drawing practice is a reciprocity of shelter. She offers the branches the shelter-in-time of many honest and delicately faithful watercolour paintings. The trees house her patient craving for whatever visible truth and beauty, ugliness or strangeness she might discover in them. Her paintings of branches and their leaves are faithful to the ephemerality both of her subject and of her medium. Less than immortality, she offers empathy, sensitivity, and a delicacy of line which is a gift like the touch certain pianists are born with. Within the technical encounter of drawing, hers is an ability to converse, to question, and to become.

John Berger noted in 1960:

It is a platitude in the teaching of drawing that the heart of the matter lies in the specific process of looking. A line, an area of tone, is not really important because it records what you have seen, but because of what it will lead you on to see. Following up its logic in order to check its accuracy, you find confirmation or denial in the object itself. Each confirmation or denial brings you closer



to the object, until finally you are, as it were, inside it: the contours you have drawn no longer marking the edge of what you have seen, but the edge of what you have become.

With these drawings, Salimi is an argument against the God-who-sees-everything. To be human is to trace the structure of the local with the device of your senses, with the matter of your own body. Is this the last day above the earth for one of the pale yellow leaves that takes up the light into its thin, drying membrane? Salimi watches, translates a curl, a bending towards air as if floating or flying, an elegant thrownness, or an ineluctable drooping. She assumes the identity of each leaf within the negotiated collectivity of a tense, clustered branch as it reaches for the light or begins to fall slowly, imperceptibly, away from existence towards the other side of cyclical time. She discovers beauty and melancholy in this.

It seems to me unexpected that these small, old trees – and in a city forcefully constructing condos and monster homes, the once common three-story apartment buildings themselves – survive at the beginning of the 21st century. They are small nerve centres, nexus of life and struggle.

Salimi began drawing the apple branches after watching John Berger draw a rose during an interview with NPR host Michael Silverblatt. Apropos of Berger's thoughts on painting in his 1995 essay, "Steps Towards a Small Theory of the Visible (for Yves)":

Painting is, first, an affirmation of the visible which surrounds us and which continually appears and disappears. Without the disappearing, there would perhaps be no impulse to paint, for then the visible itself would possess the surety (the permanence) which painting strives to find. More directly than any other art, painting is an affirmation of the existent, of the physical world into which mankind has been thrown.

Things are disappearing. This year especially, the year of the arrival of the pandemic COVID-19, it seems as if so much is disappearing. Locked down and quarantined, careful even to leave the house, we are thrown into a virtual world. Our brains, remodeled by our smart devices for the specifications of minimum concentration, lack attention to what physically surrounds us, to the *where* of the place we were once-upon-a-time thrown.

Perhaps it is not a surprise that the daily drawing practice that produced this exhibition was occasioned by the loss of Salimi's collective studio to COVID-19 safety measures. *75 Oriole Rd* is an urgent retrieval of concentrated attention and seeing, of encounter with physical appearances. All of this was clearly under threat before the time of the pandemic, and now it might be said that there are two pandemics, one called COVID-19, and another the erasure of real-time and space. This second pandemic – which includes the soaring profits of Apple and Google – seems less like the precarity of Marx and Marshall Berman's modernity: "All that is solid turns into air," and more like those ubiquitous tinted car windows that effect



the disappearance from public view of driver and passenger. A dimming in plain view. Something of the ethos of the American 'gated community.'

This lends an especial poignancy to John Keats' notion of "negative capability," of the poet who looks so faithfully and openly that they *become* the flower of which they write. "A poet is the most unpoetical thing of anything in existence; because he has no identity – he is continually... filling some other Body – The Sun, the Moon, and Sea..." wrote Keats in an October 27, 1818 letter to his friend and patron, Richard Woodhouse. We must all learn from this egoless capacity to inhabit the visible, to worshipfully attend to what is outside our window and in the streets around us.

About a month ago, sitting at her desk in the sunroom at Oriole Road, the memory of a story published in 1907 (around the time Salimi's future apartment building was rising in what was then north of the city), returned to her. It was one of the *Tales of O. Henry* which she read in Farsi translation as a child in her home in Shiraz a couple of years after the Iran-Iraq war.

A young Greenwich Village heroine, "Johnsy," familiar for Joanna, has been "stalked" by the scourge of this New York City artist's colony: deadly November pneumonia. Lying in her bed she has become obsessed with the falling leaves of an ivy vine, "gnarled and decayed at the roots," that she watches through her window. She is convinced that when the last leaf falls, she "must go too." Old Behrman, the painter living downstairs, goes out in the damp cold on the night the last leaf falls, and he paints, out of rightness and duty, another leaf on the brick wall. His "master-piece" fools Johnsy into recovering but this act is also his downfall. He succumbs to pneumonia two nights later. Behrman and Johnsy are poets both; they have staked their lives on the empathetic, imaginative act.

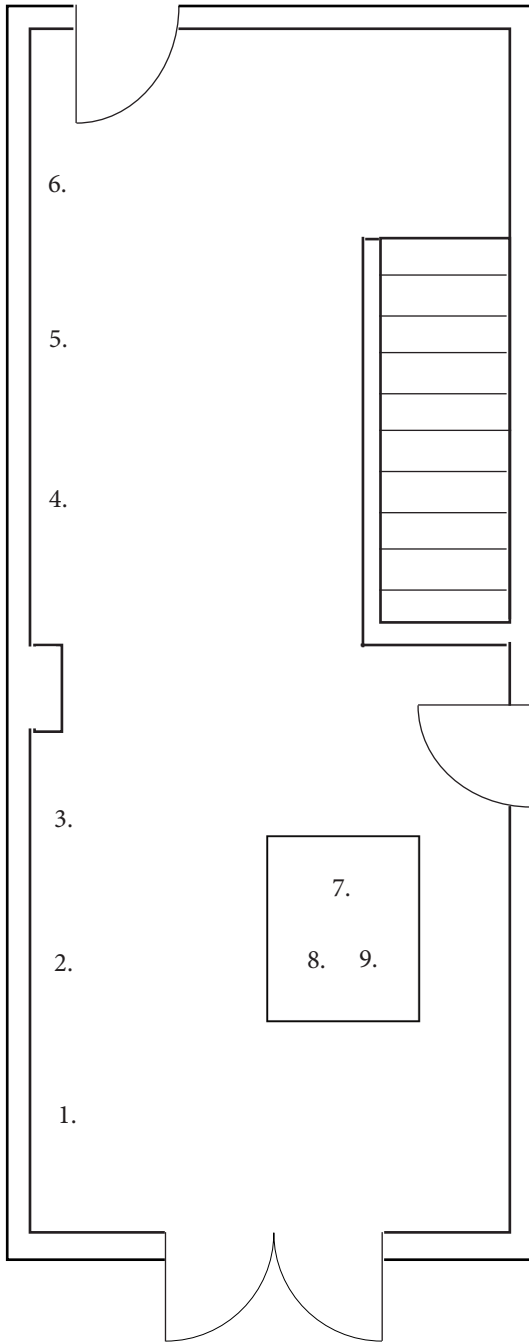
In our new season of illness and death, Salimi has found that she is both Behrman and Johnsy. Drawing what is immediately visible, she survives and keeps herself open to possibility, and yet she practices this daily discipline, offers her pianist's touch and her sense of rightness, for the sake of others.

And especially for you, dear exhibition viewer. If you are truly to live, you must recover your capacity to see.

~E.C. Woodley, Toronto  
10.21.2020



## GALLERY MAP



1. 75 Oriole Rd, September 1, 2020  
watercolour on paper  
16" x 20"

2. 75 Oriole Rd, September 7, 2020  
watercolour on paper  
16" x 20"

3. 75 Oriole Rd, October 19, 2020  
watercolour on paper  
16" x 20"

4. 75 Oriole Rd, August 16, 2020  
watercolour on paper  
16" x 20"

5. 75 Oriole Rd, August 29, 2020  
watercolour on paper  
16" x 20"

6. 75 Oriole Rd, September 18, 2020  
watercolour on paper  
16" x 20"

7. 75 Oriole Rd, August 1, 2020  
watercolour on paper  
9" x 12"

8. 75 Oriole Rd, July 25 (7pm), 2020  
watercolour on paper  
5.5" x 8.5"

9. 75 Oriole Rd, July 25 (3-4pm), 2020  
watercolour on paper  
5.5" x 8.5"

**Support** is a project space based in London, Ontario. It is organized by Liza Eurich, Tegan Moore, and Ruth Skinner.

supportsupport.ca  
260b Clarence Street

**Support** *v.* hold up, carry, prop up, keep up, reinforce; give assistance to, give comfort to, care for, suggest the truth of, advocate, to keep going: *n.* a thing bearing the weight of another thing; material assistance, maintenance, upkeep, sustenance.