

tak e

re.occurrence

(leo mara)

was my last installation put together and shared in Lille before leaving. A last idea inspired by her memory. A subfolder of select recollections which played over. Recollections of my oldest cousin stealing action figures when we were both fourteen. Mischievously abducting posed sword fighters, super soldiers, boxers, a caped vampire, orcs and the most memorable, a prominent breasted telekinetic. She stole these characters when we were left alone in the Taylors' second bedroom decorated with collectables. The Taylors looked after us for hours sometimes when my aunt and uncle, her parents, were arguing about worsening insufficiencies. My cousin behaved unbothered by the not-well-covered conflict. She fixated on the PVC figures and who to sneak into bag or pocket when the Taylors spent unintermittent time in the kitchen, cooking us dinner. After shepherd's pie, breaded fish, sauce over pasta, we returned next door. My aunt let us in, always suggesting we swap to pjs before she then took herself back to sunken sofa and the coffee table where she sewed, repairing clothes in silence. Uncle wasn't home. He was 'just getting some air' aunt would say.

My cousin put each new figure in the backseat of a replica car, a cab ride into the first night of their new lives. Taxied as we tucked in, top and tail, and fell to dreams of castles.

She'd never returned any of the action figures to the Taylors.

But what was now hers, she looked after. One ending, another beginning.

This last installation cost me roughly three-and-a-half thousand euros in materials, custom lighting and cameras, eight-hundred hours in precise labour, and how ever much else in situational debt for becoming a further unbalanced person. A person outrightly failing to respond to calls, reply to messages, invites to lunch, to dinner, to coffee, and other virtual check ins as well with friends, family or previous clients. I ruined general attuned patterns. Water consumption, regular sleep, eating fresh vegetables. I'd not exercised enough to counter the agonising soreness of working constantly hunched. I really fucked myself up for this dedication.

'take' was a one-to-one-hundred scale model. This meant you could grip the width of most structures in a single adult palm. The cars, trees, foliage, phone boxes and rubbish bins all fit separately between pinched fingers.

It took place in January of Two-Thousand-and-Ten.

The setting's unclear. Or rather, it's undetectable and undisclosed. I understand the setting. I'd first based it upon specific, curious, though inconspicuous section of another alive city not too far from Lille, however, even with this clue you'd likely never match the section. 'take' provided not an accurate depiction, because it's an else-influenced reinterpretation. A concoction. Ingredient A dated memory of aforementioned urban section, and ingredient B an unconnected dream dreamed three years backwards in time. A widescale reaction written, produced and played out by my unconscious mind.

In this January of Two-Thousand-and-Ten, across the several streets, crowds of people were distracted from whatever had their attentions moments before. They got out of cars, got up from desks. They stood out on balconies, headed out automatic doors and fire exits and up to roofs for a clearer view of whatever was happening up above.

'take' stayed on display in the German-built Kunstalternative building for one month. I'm indebted for this length of gallery residency since most works approved for KAB are granted a fortnight, maximum, and the substantial duration meant there was much greater opportunity for 'take' to be experienced as was intended. As something interactive.

It was placed on a white, three-by-two-foot pillar in Lieber hall, at the north end of the room between two other sculptures. Adele Meyer's 'Two Wolves' and 'The Model of Light' which was the work of another artist whose name I've misplaced.

From day one through to day twenty-seven of 'take's time on display, I sat at a desk in a temporarily repurposed utility closet inside KAB and spied. Miniature cameras set within and disguised inside 'take's Coli Ouest office building and Fleur Street's Upper Apartments fed live feeds to my laptop. My perspective for most hours of these days was away from natural light and deceptively shrunken to match that of my miniatures. I joined them for the impending existential disturbance.

Not much happened the first Monday through to Friday. The weather under the unchanging brightly lit heavens was not yet physically inflicting. It was harmless men with white hair, interchangeable quiffs and swept fringes, sometimes short ponytails. Dense, dark framed glasses, laptop bags and hands dunked up to knuckles in light denim pockets. They only bobbed in Lieber hall. Floated between painting, photograph and sculpture in a circuit of poor ballet. Clockwise once, clockwise another, and pirouette, and bob. An index rubbed the jaw, a photo taken on his around the collar DLR. Exclude 'take's sun, the nearest overhead spotlight, only to glance over the scene for forty-five seconds and move onto Two Wolves, a work of admittedly more immediate lure.

College trips and international tours offered 'take' longer than a minute. Sixteen-year-olds collared with yellow lanyards, attired to align with one conforming subculture or another, approached as musketeers. It was often three girls, and if not, then two girls and one boy who was much scrawnier. Despite the limitation of several fixed-point cameras, I saw that they first pointed at characters gathered on the roof of Coli Ouest then moved onto renters and introverts and pets peeking out windows from inside the further back apartments. Careful not to touch, they poked fingers ever closer, pointing out to each other the figures who were on or by the roads and outlining pavements.

International tours brought more reactive visitors. Orange lanyards were not to be mistaken with yellow. Spanish women came arm-in-arm with an identically intrigued or impressed sister, mother, or aunt. They pointed less than children. Instead, their hands moved to cover the smallest of gasps. Shock was reasonably expressive when they saw certain intricate details. Fallen leaves, litter, a sign about supermarket, a newspaper on the corner. They took tens of portrait photos on their wallet-cased phones never mind the dozen 'pas de photo' reminders inside and out of the five galleries inside Kunstalternatieve.

Most of these people looked me right in the eyes without knowing they'd done so. I hoped they'd read the wall text and understood the invitation. I self-provoked a reassurance for cynicism and somewhere in that expectation, hoped to feel something else as well. Take. I dare you.

Saturday, the first two hours Lieber hall was open to the public, I glided into a stare every so often. I fixated on no certain detail and dreamed while partially conscious. I'm sure I'd heard the clicks and my cousin's utterances as she repositioned apposable limbs, designing mundane scenes with her rehomed action figures. I saw her husband slam shut the boot of their car. As he brought it down with one arm, I sat up straight. Awake, I focused again on the live footage.

Because there was time to sit and do nothing but watch and write down observations, my entire tired self-wavered. Post the spattering of dreams, I thought back through more recent memories. I thought of what it might've felt like to feel overtly emotional. To process less through dedicated creation.

Assisted with sweetened caffeine, I downsized again. I watched, and by accident speculated further backstory, expanding on my miniature's I-established existences. The histories of every mini figure holding in dread, restraining terrified cries, and thoughts to call their loved ones while there was still time as the sky filled with backpacked and plastic bag carrying, quiet, spring-dressed giants. Two-centimetres-tall Jules Eduoard, Petites Nouvelle's replacement weather reporter for much adored Beau Shoe who'd finally resigned to take that leap and travel Canada, had not forecast little more than a light, afternoon shower.

The young girl, whose dress was infuriating to cut correctly, purposely fell behind her mother's marching. Her mother could be harsh voiced, and this scared her even then. She knelt on one knee outside the supermarket, petting a muddy-brown Portuguese Water Dog on the head. Its tail kept upright and midwag. She wasn't facing the disturbance. Instead, her head was turned, attention toward an older stranger. Rose, who faced the sky while half resting on her walking stick, believing she'd pass before she'd ever witness anything like this.

It's when I drew my focus to Rose, that the disturbance turned.

Enroute to collect his only son from the airport, Walter had stepped out of his sedan as the junction's lights turned from red to amber. He eyed figures spilling out of the hotel Court Séjour and joining a near crowd when he was suddenly taken.

The glue dotted on the soles of his derby shoes unstuck and stretched thin like clear syrup as he went up into the atmosphere between clamped fingers. A boy gripped Walter in his fist. A hand kept clenched when he soon exited my limited frame of surveillance, plodding towards 'The Model of Light'.

Walter's absence would be suffered. His son would land soon, transfer to Terminal One where he'd agreed over short message to meet his father at pickups. He'd wait with brown case, fresh flowers for his father and an extremely overpriced single nougat bar. He'd first expect his father again confused pickups with the separately designated area for drop-offs before he realised, he wasn't coming at all. He'd comment weeks later, on the incomprehensible event which took his father. Struggle to get his handwritten statement out without the wobble besting his composure.

The boy who thieved Walter hadn't left Lieber hall right away. With the one hand confining Walter hidden inside his pullover hoodie pocket, he used the other to pick at an eyelash and divvied his pupils between street photography and a likely in-her-twenties woman wearing a sleeveless, curve-keeping dress.

On Sunday, two were stolen off the roof of the Coli Ouest building. The fifth-floor sales manager would turn around from propping open the fire door with an extinguisher, expelling 'what the fuck?' as he saw two of his closest employees, the happy sales lead Colette and more introverted Alain were gone. He'd fear they stepped off. Fallen to their ends, encouraged potentially by the behemoths in the changed sky.

Colette was taken before Alain. Snatched by a late millennial in circular sunglasses and all cream attire that first read the wall text. A youngish man of fast and fragile confidence. He snuck Colette to a conspirator. A younger woman in tights, short skirt and bloated coat. She held Colette with distaste and reluctance in her expression like she felt they were wrong for taking the defenceless sales leader. The artist who to now twenty-six was desperate to be creative, but only ever saw her hard work reward her a few more meaningless sales.

The youngish man turned back to 'take'. He wanted another. One for himself. His date could never be granted anything he couldn't have equal to or a more costly version of. He picked Alain up by his white shirted chest.

Not long after, a woman wielding a plain notepad and pen stopped and made notes on 'take'. I watched the kidnapping couple chatter some distance behind her. They gestured and glanced back in 'take's direction. As he feigned scratching an itch on the bridge of his nose, the millennial who stole Colette and Alain hid them behind a collection of reconfigured nineties technology nearer to the exit. They escaped Lieber Hall right after. Colette and Alain were to start a new life together. One free of their past anxieties, removed from their original world.

'The Model of Light' was removed on my eleventh day of observation, collected by its artist. The artist whose name I should've but never remembered at the right time to make a note of.

By the eleventh day, 'take's starting population of forty-one, a character for every year I've been alive, had been reduced to thirty-two. The guiltiest were tourists. English, like me. Here for a week or just its end. Averagely bellied men who yawned, stretched tiring legs and thought to boastfully demonstrate an unflattering dominance by taking what outrightly did not belong to them. I'm not sure they'd read the wall text first. I expect I read their thoughts, how many art galleries were they going to dragged around on what was initially planned to be seven days on a sunbed in Portugal?

It wasn't only husbands. Women so far abducted an as-close-as-possible-to-equal portion of miniatures. Una had held the handlebars of her bike, riding close to the curb. She'd stopped for the moment worrying whether she'd ever get her driving license and looked up. She was taken by a woman dressed in similar overalls. I've entertained the idea she saw herself in Una, too.

Only Walter and Una were taken by single culprits. The rest were victims of co-committers. Clever romantic partners or friends daring each other after reading the wall text. Never sons with their mothers. Nor the dads who carried their children on the benches forged from their trying forearms.

'take' outlasted every other piece on display in Lieber but one. Even when only eleven figures were left on the few streets. When no curator or staff member had once reacted to the disappearing population.

Sasha was nabbed from beside the opened driver's side door of her minivan. Stolen from her children who were strapped in in car seats and playing with a tablet between them. She was taken from her kids and balanced between the teeth of the fiercer of Two Wolves' two wolves. This happened late. Sometime between nine and ten pm as KAB prepared to close for the evening. Before it was too late, another visitor moved Sasha back to 'take'. They left her at the junction, and she was to be the only miniature to have returned. An actuality that would be something Sasha often discussed during her resulting government funded therapy sessions. Sessions otherwise used to reflect on disconnection with others. Years later, she would publish a biography recounting her experience.

KAB let me know a week ahead of what was agreed to be 'take's last day on display in Lieber hall. They'd kindly agreed to store what remained for twenty-four hours before I'd break from packing up my belongings and taking the train across the city to collect it.

Guided through to where it was stored, I saw right away another three miniatures had been lifted. The fifth-floor sales manager was gone from the roof. And Tim and Anna, retirees, arm-in-arm left subtle footprints of glue on a greener patch of grass. Broadcasts would've soon warned anyone in that area to stay inside. It would've been worthwhile advice. Those who were inside the onlooking offices and rentals survived the taking. They still watched the streets cleared of civilians. Hatchbacks and other company cars and delivery trucks abandoned. Parked bicycles, opened shopfronts, knocked over plants, glue spots.

For Ashley, who was on the third floor, there was a silver lining. When the one-month apocalypse ended and the skies cleared, she'd never felt more grateful for her delicate existence. She'd never wanted to feel so trapped inside again, even knowing what it might protect her from.

Benjamin Taylor and Ella admitted only to one another that they were in fact entirely unaware of the catastrophe outside Benjamin's ground floor part-buy. Ella was visiting. She came to sit with Benjamin not long after a funeral, to reminisce and reflect on old memories of Ella's cousin. Memories of stealing. Benjamin chuckled with wet eyes and shared for the first time with Ella, he knew what her cousin was up to and always felt what she took was going to mean more to her. If it helped her through the hard times even a little.

Ashley, Benjamin and Ellas' lives all changed soon after the taking. I deconstructed the windows of the apartment building, picked the three of them out the living spaces and put them into a pocket. I took apart the rest, disconnected the cameras and lifted each structure of the urban dressed base. I moved Ashley, Benjamin and Ella to hidden spots close to some of my favourite sights in Lille.

Jen was the last figure. She was the only one to leave Lille. I put her inside a replica car and ensured her taxied journey to London. After her world had fallen apart, there was a life still needing her. New life. A new father whose beautiful wife tragically died during the child's birth who would ask for her help to care for the baby. She would care. She'd rock him in a room with old action figures. She'd whisper, 'one end is another beginning'.

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