



BURIED, ALIVE

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“...the Death Instinct manifests itself in two different ways, depending on whether, under the action of Eros, it is turned outward (sadism) or whether part of it remains as a residue libidinally “bound” within the organism (masochism).”¹

1 Deleuze, Gilles and Sacher-Masoch. *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*. Zone Books, 1989. p. 109



Live Burial Study 1
Ink on paper
11" x 14"
2019

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In August of 2019, I was on a bus headed upstate from New York City to attend a live burial. I was depleted. I had worked the closing shift at my bar the night before and was experiencing pain in seemingly every part of my body. My yet-to-be-diagnosed autoimmune diseases were destroying me. The anti-anxiety medication I was on was giving me unrelenting depression and tachycardia. I hadn't yet received all of the details on how to reach my destination, and when we passed Kingston, I realized there was no cell service. I had the bus let me off at a gas station in Phoenixia and I made a call.

Mistress Blunt showed up in the passenger seat of a shiny new car driven by another domme I didn't yet know. I got in and arranged myself between bags spilling over with corsets, whips, gloves, shoes, bandages, scissors, flowers, rope, twine, needles, scalpels, and rubbing alcohol, all of which I knew were about to be used.

When we got to the house, my friend Katie was trimming flowers, the sub was preparing a charcuterie board, and the domme I didn't yet know sat on the couch with her sunglasses on, daintily scrolling through her phone with her red pointy nails, stopping only to reapply her red lipstick.

Mistress Blunt and Mistress X shoved the aforementioned bags of BDSM accoutrement into the sub's arms to be carried out to the field where the aforementioned live burial would take place. I grabbed my drawing stuff and followed.

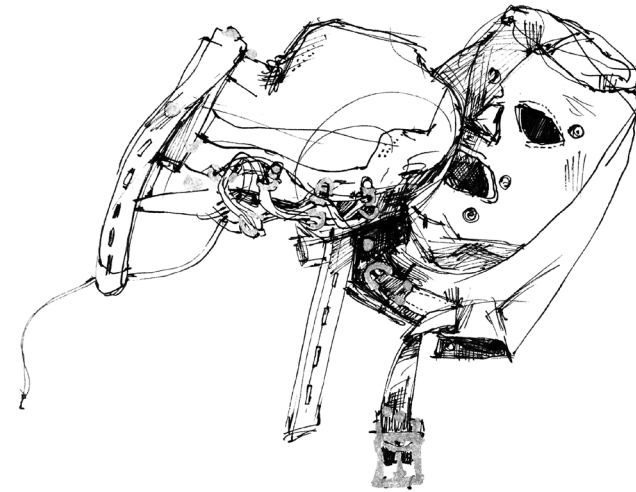


Live Burial Study 2
Ink on paper
11" x 14"
2019

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Just as almost every other artist knows from a tender age that art is an essential facet of their being, I have always been interested in sadomasochism—the relationship between pain, gratification, and power. It was seeing the movie, *“The Secretary”* (starring Maggie Gyllenhaal & James Spader) in high school that first illustrated a romantic D/s dynamic for me. I had been peripherally introduced to the trappings of BDSM through the Punk scene’s appropriation of kink and fetish culture (dog collars, leather, vinyl, latex, bondage pants...). And porn, of course. And studying ballet as a girl viscerally exemplified beauty through suffering. But it was *“The Secretary”* that connected the dots for me. Like Lee’s, my family was dysfunctional. Like her, I coped by developing maladaptive behaviors. Hers was cutting, mine was an eating disorder. But once I saw her happy ending, I too wanted to be appreciated for my ability to endure. I wanted to belong; somewhere to someone. I wanted to be possessed, contained, restrained from my self-destruction, kept safe. I wanted love to save me from myself. Not just once but again and again.

I am an artist and a masochist. My masochism is the kind described by French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze; I don’t derive pleasure from pain, but rather, I can only experience satisfaction after first enduring some form of suffering. This exchange is not separate from any other in my daily life. It is deeply ingrained in my way of thinking and being, and therefore a characteristic of my very self, including my artistic process.



Untitled
Ink on paper
11" x 14"
2018

Service is a well-known “love language,” commonly understood as performing tasks to please another—doing a significant other’s laundry or dishes, for some vanilla examples. Service often plays a large role in BDSM/ kink relationships as well, and may include the aforementioned domestic chores, but the difference is a well-defined, mutually-agreed-upon power dynamic.

For me, drawing and painting are acts of devotion to my subjects. They are also acts of service to the history of Drawing and Painting; efforts to subvert, pervert, and provoke the questioning of the Canon of Drawing and Painting as well as our human architecture of shame, control and power. Through submission to my process, I seek to enter my subjects into the lineage of great muses: Madame X, Dancers of the Moulin Rouge, Christ, Aphrodite, etc. I am devoted to them and work/suffer to glorify them.



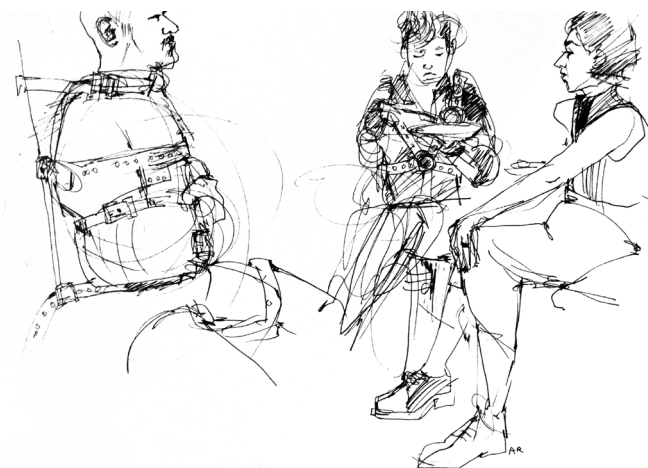
Blunt and KD Diamond at Tableaux
Ink on paper
11" x 14"
2019

“People shy away from pain,” my friend, Mistress Blunt—lifestyle femdom, professional dominatrix, friend, and muse—told me. But, she notes, “it’s often at the painful moments in our life that we’re able to move through to something new. In a traditional evolutionary sense, pain is meant to tell us that something is wrong or something is happening to the body that might need to change and I think being able to take control over some of those feelings and turn that information into something that helps us psychologically move through different aspects of our life is something that is very undervalued.”²

Francis Bacon believed that “all art should be about sensation.” When I paint from source material in my studio, I am left to a given scene in total isolation and therefore have free rein to move between sadist and masochist at will. In a dominant mode, subjects are thrown onto the canvas as disembodied parts, meat of form and color. It is more *felt* than constructed—an unsympathetic, exacting, brutal frenzy. But as paintings develop, sadism gives way to masochism; I wait and work, begging the subject for form and life. Once I’ve conjured my subject, I regain the power as the painting nears its end and becomes merely an object of my making. At this point, I feel what’s often referred to in BDSM as “topspace,” a dizzy elation and amnesia about the process. I also experience a strong sense of exhibitionism and inflated ego.

2 Mistress Blunt. Personal Interview. 15 April 2021.

When I draw from life, the process is completely informed by the subject. There, I act as a medium for life and energy. A drawn line is searching, eager for guidance, excited to be shown form and directed how to develop. While drawing, I seek to be completely consumed by my subject, to inhabit them. I have no goal or end-point, only the oblivion and transcendence of “subspace”—the elation wrought by having endured.



At the Party
Ink on paper
11" x 14"
2019

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The relationship between myself and the subject can be either dominant or submissive, depending on the dynamic at play. If I am drawing two people engaging in a sex act who are focused in on each other, I feel completely invisible and submissive to the power of their act. But if those two people acknowledge me, focus on my gaze and attention, I feel dominant—an undeniable, and hopefully enjoyable, part of their experience. The very idea that I am having two relationships at once (one with my drawing materials and one with my subjects) enraptures me; I am documenting an important moment for my subjects while drawing provides me with a sense of worth and validation.



In Troy's Dungeon After the Dyke March
Ink on paper
11" x 14"
2021

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But as a masochist, I also often reflect on my paintings as ridiculous and absurd, and myself as a clown. If this happens too close to the completion of a work, I can experience “topdrop”, an after-effect that may be experienced by a dominant after a scene. This effect is usually characterized by a feeling of guilt or depression”³ In my case, I also experience a distinct sense of worthlessness. Painting feels absurd, like a tragic comedy. “It’s embarrassing,” Artist Bunny Rogers says of creating her work. “It’s humiliating for me at times, it’s a compulsion...it’s a struggle to accept this embarrassing compulsion that puts your defects front and center and at the same time having to be the representative of those defects...”⁴

3 www.kinkly.com/definition/6304/topdrop

4 Bunny Rogers. *My Favourite Elliott Smith Song*. Episode 10.13 September 2020.



Bunny Rogers at KGB Bar
Ink on paper
4" x 6"
2015

Rogers, like myself, carries the burden of feeling like her own artwork has the power to debase and destroy her, yet she can't stop. It is certainly a masochistic sentiment, exhibitionistic: sharing her shame fuels her masochistic response, which, in turn fuels the compulsion to share, and on, and on.

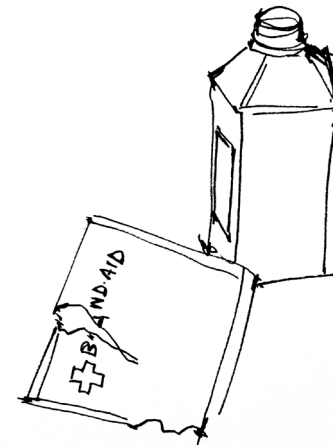
By contrast, Artist Monica Majoli has described her series of watercolor and gouache paintings of rubbermen (figures encased in fetish rubberwear) as surrogates for herself⁵. My initial read on this work was that they were formed of a submissive gesture: the distinct lack of the artist's ego, the subdued tones, the works overall ethereal qualities. I imagine Majoli quietly wrapping herself up with her gouache and elegantly floating herself to sub-space through various washes. However, ultimately, the subjects are not her, they are other anonymous figures that Majoli used for herself, her own pleasure. Her work, in the end, feels sadistic (in the strict, non-pejorative definition of the term), devoid of self-submission.

The pain I felt growing up was non-consensual, as is the pain I feel now from my autoimmune diseases and the consequences I experience from my many years of a less-than-comfortable lifestyle. However, by learning to embrace pain, to willingly engage in a D/s (Dominant/submissive) dynamic (whether in my romantic, artistic life or otherwise) I feel empowered. Mistress Blunt elaborates,

5 Campbell, Andy. *Bound Together: Leather, Sex, Archives, and Contemporary Art*. Manchester University Press, 2020.

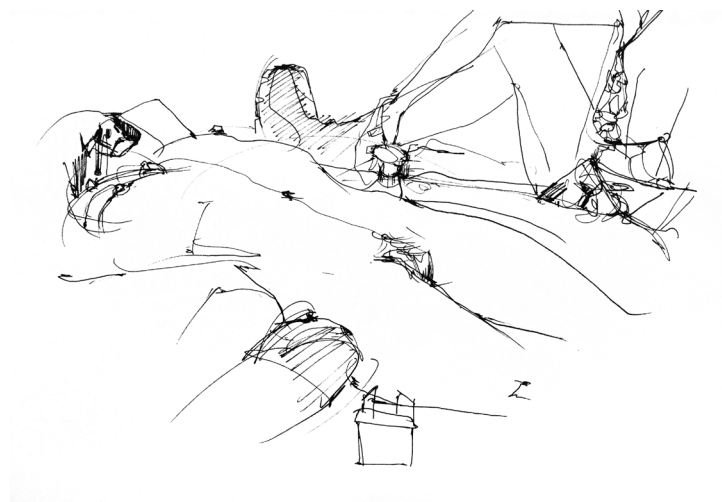
"What pain does is it gives us information about our experience. And when we're choosing to intentionally interact with pain, it gives us space to control the outcome to some extent. Which, if you have experiences with chronic pain, or mental health issues, or experiences of pain that you have no control over, it can be really healing."⁶

6 Mistress Blunt. Personal Interview. 15 April 2021.



Aftercare
Ink on paper
4" x 6"
2019

I realize now as I write this, that I may be currently more interested in healing than I am with pain—more interested in the end of “The Secretary” than the beginning. Since pain was my primary focus from childhood into my 30s, it was familiar, a constant, eventually just noise. But now that I have engaged with it as part of a dynamic, I can be intentional about where and when I choose to submit and why. It is up to me to delineate good pain from bad, and what is constructive from destructive. In the end of “The Secretary,” Lee has proven herself and her reward for choosing pain is what’s known in BDSM as aftercare, which occurs after a scene. It often includes various pampering techniques in an effort to provide comfort. These two concepts, consent and aftercare, escaped me when I was young and helpless, but now that I have some power over when my pain subsides and I experience time without it, I am able to reflect and assess. I am able to negotiate with others as well as with myself: between my brain, my body, my pen, my brush. I am able to embrace the whole of myself, to give myself to my work and my subjects, but remain mindful of my own personal needs and desires, apart from my work.



Live Burial Study 3
Ink on paper
11" x 14"
2019

Masoch (who lends the propensity for pain his name) felt that “it is essentially the work of art and the contract that makes possible the transition from a lower nature to the great Nature, which is sentimental and self-conscious”⁷

The live burial upstate⁸ in 2019 was where I last encountered my own boundaries, and in so doing, learned something valuable about myself and my work. I learned that bloodplay is not my thing, while impact and bondage are exhilarating. It was there, at the edge of my sensibilities, that I was able to go the deepest psychologically. In drawing every piercing needle and every burn, I remembered the feelings that drove me to do that to myself. But with every wrap of the bandage, I was reminded that wounds can heal. My work may lead me to frustrating, dark places, but I know now that I can always take back control; stem the bleeding, mend what’s torn. When the sub was laid into the ground, I remembered that we all have the ability to lay old, tired narratives and versions of ourselves to rest, to be unearthed when and if we choose. I remembered that my body is the one thing I will ever truly own, that all past and future work will exist as a function of my power over it. Later, when the sub was exhumed and cleaned off, I remembered that ends are often also beginnings. And then we all drank champagne.

7 Deleuze, Gilles and Sacher-Masoch. *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*. Zone Books, 1989. p. 76

8 All parties referred to in the live burial scene have given consent for their mention and title.



Live Burial Study 4
Ink on paper
11" x 14"
2019