



Window Space



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Sydney Madia

Hush Now

June 25th - July 25th, 2021

Opening a wound for others to enter. Opening a conversation. Opening oneself to openness.

The decision to continue a relationship, to work at, to endure, to cherish. Sustaining the connection through inner strength and resilience, rather than force or coerce. Severance is an easy decision, black+white, linear, predictable. Naming it is simple. “The way you can go, isn’t the real way. The name you can say, isn’t the real name.”¹ Healing is a non-linear, cyclical process, rewardingly painful, seemingly unending. A scratched scab will form back, time and time again.

Hush Now, a Window Space installation by artist Sydney Madia, evokes a coo of comfort but also of silencing; that dark space that exists between us, unspoken.

Sydney Madia is a practicing illustrator, ceramicist, sculptor and comics-artist based in downtown Toronto.

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¹ Ursula K. LeGuin, *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching: A Book about the Way and the Power of the Way* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 1997), 3

An immense white wool sculpture floats quietly, serenely, surrendering. Just barely above the floor, occupying the bottom half of the window space. It's in the form of a whale, mouth agape, a large pink gash on its side. Distant, pale-yellow eyes. Seen in profile from the window front, it faces towards the entrance of Xpace, greeting those who enter, a somewhat rare full-face confrontation in this time of masks. Set against an intimate black background, the natural white of the wool is striking, soft; the wound jarring, disarming. This abyssal blackness suggests both a suffocating pressure and a womb-like security. In an almost mobile-like suspension, a series of smaller deep-sea wool sculptures form a visual ribbon through the air, guiding the eye, leading down to the wound. Protective, sympathetic, cherubous. The whole tableau suggests a proverbial *elephant in the room*, but one that is being now touched, recognized, named, loved; evoking tenderness.

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In conversation about the work-in-progress Madia explains the intentionality of *Hush Now*: meant as a cathartic meditative exercise and a medium exploration. An opportunity to, through the act of painstaking repetition, cycle through her own tangled thoughts, forming them. Metaphorically emulating the physical process of needle-felting; binding together disarrayed fibres into a whole. Emulating the metaphoric process of holding a relationship together, through endurance, processing and growth.

Subject-wise the mammoth whale sculpture is intended to open access for difficult conversations about + with loved ones. Acknowledging the bruising process of healing a wounded person. "Only the wounded physician heals."² "To give no trust is to get no trust."³ Dispelling shame around a taboo topic to open avenues of communicative healing with love and support.

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² Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Random House, 1963)

³ LeGuin, *Tao Te Ching*, 21

Madia shows me her homemade large-scale felting tool: a paint brush with 5 barbed needles attached by green tape. A remark is made at how similar in configuration + shape to a tattooing needle it is.

In the early stages of the main body of the sculpture, it is a small mound in the living room. Chicken wire wrapped unceremoniously around a pile of couch pillows, a large blanket of white felted wool. The ghost of a felt. The shape of a whale.

She pricks herself with a needle and the barb catches, the needle disconnects from its handle and sticks out like a thorn from her thumb. "*Happens often.*" No blood, lucky, and uncommon. Blood on the wool, although symbolically rich, is unideal. Madia contemplates the colour of the wound to-be.

Needles are pricked into the loose wool, binding the fibres together. It's an intimate act. A small tender violence. It reminds me of tattooing; the obsessive, meditative, repetitive action of stabbing something a hundred times over. Yet, unlike tattooing (which by nature is an act of physical harm/wounding), the needle felt produces a much softer/gentler/more tender final product. As a fibre medium there's a holistic + ambient "healing" quality to the binding of wool. An expansion, a whole-object approach; urging, coaxing, sculpting. Building upon, layer by layer. As opposed to the piercing/mending/binding of disparate fabric objects by needle and thread. Like a tree that is gently guided into a shape as it grows, over years.

A notoriously labour intensive medium, needle felting is not often chosen for large-scale projects. As a needle felted object, the centerpiece of *Hush Now* functions as an exploration of the artistic functionality/boundaries of the medium: To suggest softness amidst hardness. To create a large, observably laborious, physically intensive yet softly evocative piece. A natural shape, a nurturing shape, a nurtured shape. As Madia puts it, "the forms in the felting process must be "suggested" or "nurtured" over time + labour, shaped into itself." The piece itself is corporeal, physical, *in the flesh*, yet the softness of the form + texture denotes an almost ethereal/cloud-like quality. There's a suggestion of both floating (in water

as described by the scene + setting) or flying (in the air, as denoted by the cloud-like-ness, and the physical suspension of elements in the windows air). The intuitive navigation of those undefined, liminal spaces of sea and air, no fixed earthly boundaries, that is not unlike the intuition of the needle felting process and the intuition required to traverse into the emotional space of another.

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Together, Madia and I contemplate the symbology of a whale; isolation, compassion, sensitivity. It's mammalian physicality, the image of a mother and it's calf, a coo, a cry. In the context of *Hush Now* the whale elicits a feeling of vastness, of disconnect; a thing that cannot observe itself or those around it. There's a monstrous quality to it. Not grotesque but daunting and troubling. A problem, unspoken, that has grown bigger and bigger, untenably so. The sea-elephant in the room. How to heal a wound that the wounded struggle to perceive themselves? A colossal undertaking.

The gash, strikingly pink, is an opening. A tearing, a wound. Symbolically, not unlike the "Sacred Wound"⁴. The sacred wound that can be understood as all human suffering; in birth we arrive into this world covered in blood, screaming. "To take the body seriously, is to admit one can suffer. If I weren't a body, how could I suffer?"⁵ But a wound is also an opportunity to heal. It's an abrupt/forced opening that may be followed by a process of mending or an opportunity of salvation. Opening and closing. Opening a conversation.

The black of the background, the suggestion of water and the bottom of the ocean. Water of the womb: returning to water. Blurriness/obfuscation/suffocating yet tenderness/primordial/ cradling. There's an implication of secrecy in the dark, something sinister, beyond words. But

⁴ The "Sacred Wound" is a new-age spirituality concept, hard to find the original source for this reason. Often associated with the metaphoric suffering of Christ it may also be observed in classical mythology. In his lecture collection *Eternal Drama: The Inner Meaning of Greek Mythology (1994)*, noted Jungian analyst Edward F. Edinger points to Prometheus as a great example: for humans to receive fire (the gift of knowledge) the exchange of eternal suffering (consciousness) must be made.

⁵ LeGuin, *Tao Te Ching*, 16

the radical act of naming a thing, seeing a thing, recognizing it; illuminates, takes away fear, and dispels shame.

Above the whale, and leading down towards it, is a trail of small seraphic creatures. Suspended, hanging, like charms, like a nursery mobile. Floating ephemera. Directing the viewer's gaze to the gash, ribbon-like, tether-like, umbilical-like. Many small acts of support. A nautilus, a conch, an urchin. Passing down the family line, echoes of each other, intergenerational trauma. Light pink, iris, plum red. Emotional/rational/irrational reactions vary. Pale-yellow eyes. Identification, recognition. The emotional affectation of a situation, rippling through a family, a community. Working in tandem, being present in their own way, overcoming their own circumstances. Being, together. The decision to remain, to exist, to love.

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As someone who tends to retract + isolate from difficult relationships, contemplating Madia's *Hush Now* pierces me in the heart. The resilience, the decision, the un-decision, the continuation. It inspires; respect, hope, awe.

- Kim Ha