

Text by Alissa Bennett

I guess I've learned to acknowledge that I'm a relatively avoidant person. I don't think it's symptomatic of age or time or anything like that—there's no cornerstone event or trauma that I can refer back to, no particular experience writ large across my life that explains or justifies my inability to look back; I just think I've always been like this. I avoid familiarity in all kinds of different ways; I go through long stretches of time where I cannot listen to music, where I avoid passing places that I've known too long or too well, where I will leave the room if the conversation seems that it might soon touch a string I cannot bear to hear the tone of. As I write this from my office now, I can glance over and see a group of boxes that have remained unopened since I moved in three years ago, boxes that were sealed up tight for years before that, boxes that I will probably never open ever again. I guess I mention them here because it seems like a dumb but also totally accurate metaphor for what I believe is true of all of us; sometimes we don't look inside of things because we know exactly what they contain.

The word nostalgia was originally a medical diagnosis that indicated an illness for the past, and I guess that's probably what I have. I always think that my version of it feels radioactive, too totalizing to contend with, too painful to ever touch, but maybe everybody else's feels like that too. I remember the last time I walked past what used to be Steven Parrino's studio in Greenpoint and didn't intentionally turn away, a day when I didn't walk an extra block or two to circumvent it, when I looked at it with my eyes and my memory on purpose to measure what I might feel—I won't elaborate here except to say that I never did it again. I guess a lot of different people have lived there since 2005, and maybe what scares me most is not the idea of finding him there, but rather of finding nothing of him at all.

For the past twenty years, I have had a memory that there was a full moon the night Steven died, but I looked it up just now and learned that that this part of my recollection is false. Maybe I had the thought because his accident coincided so

closely with tsunami in Phuket; maybe I had the thought because there *should* have been a full moon, because it might have explained how the world can go so haywire without a moment of warning. What I can say for sure is that he and I talked about violence and the planet and death that night, that we drove through Williamsburg on his motorcycle in the cold, fast and reckless, the sky dark and the stars shining. I asked him if the things that were happening scared him, and he told me no. He said that nature always culls itself, and there's nothing we can do to stop it.

I don't remember whose idea it was to go to his studio on New Year's Eve, but we did. He showed me a video he was working of the Universal Studios logo circling infinitely through some antique cinematic void, the words vanishing to reverse as they slipped across the back of a globe before showing themselves again and again until forever. It's nice to see it now, to encounter the ghost that both confirms and denies Steven's contention that the world doesn't stop when we leave it. It makes me think about what's in the boxes here in this room with me, how one way to keep things safe is to simply shut them away for good.

A few years ago when I was cleaning out a drawer, I found a piece of paper that Steven had given me, maybe at a time when I was sad or a time when he wanted to encourage me to actually do something other than dread what was coming or mourn what was gone. The title of an Emily Dickinson poem was scrawled above a short note, his handwriting imprecise but the sentiment certain. "Alissa," it says, "the light of life is in your eyes." I guess the light of life is in all of our eyes for now, that it spins around and around and around until the very moment when it simply stops. Maybe in that void Steven thought about so much, we all get the chance to come back for a minute. Maybe we all get to circle around again, only we do it in the places where no one can find us.