WHAT DRAWINGS DO NOT SHOW

(for Sara Bichão)

She lives in a lighthouse, on a rugged island made of rock and wind, but she told me she could live in many places, illuminated or not, and that sometimes she moved without warning. I approach, heedfully, hoping she might wave to me from up high. All these years I've always believed that she and I could see each other, even if lost in a crowd or during a lunar eclipse. I push forward with difficulty across a jagged field; at first, it seems strewn with stones and shards of rock, but it is in fact littered with fossilised, dried thorny leaves scattered at random. I feel the searing heat of the red sun pouring down on this island. Only the sharp, salty wind sweeping in from the sea through the cliffs offers some relief as I walk. She had warned me the weather here is harsh.

After climbing the endless steps to the lighthouse, I pass through the delicate membrane that guards her space. "A transparent, porous membrane that separates that which is the same," I remember her once explaining. A little uneasy, I carefully step into a white-hot space flooded with light – I'm nearly blinded. Despite the extreme brightness, she waits calmly, her eyes solemn. I had only ever seen her from afar, never this close; I'm startled and awestruck to find she has no skin, only a tangled mesh of veins pulsing with her rebellious blood.

She's dressed in fabric made from her grandfather's old clothes. The seams, wild and jagged in their geometry, look like scarifications or tattoos. In places, spikes and thorns push from the inside out, tearing through the stretched fabric with the surprising violence of a first rupture. I imagine that once she undresses, the cloth will forever retain the negative imprint of her body.

Her mouth moves, but no sound escapes her intensely red lips; I can't make out what she's saying. She seems to be drowning, submerged in dark water. She gestures gently, her hair drifting, her beautiful solemn eyes as though waiting for a question so she can answer. Now and then, she laughs – sudden, abrupt bursts of laughter, explosions of ever-restrained joy – throwing her head back swiftly before returning to her usual taut, hieratic stance. In those moments, her eyes flash with the mischievous, defiant glint of a gambler. These sudden laughs, which end just as abruptly, are words uttered in a different way – a way, perhaps, for the soft to overcome the hard, the slow to overtake the fast.

Through her skinless, transparent body, I watch her blood coursing through endless tunnels, carrying the pits of peaches eaten by friends and lovers, past or present. Her birdlike bones know the wind, and her flesh shimmers with vivid pinks, mauves, searing oranges, yellows, and countless shades of grey – an unceasing, violently beautiful swirl of colours folding into one another. A rose of flesh. A boundless body with a heady, delicate scent, as if from a distant dream. I understand her body to be an obstacle, a rung, a vehicle, a zero point... I read in her eyes: "Rose, flesh, earth, bones, blue, night, water, light... I am the story that begins where all the others end."

She comes a little closer and gently offers me a full glass. She speaks to me in silence. She watches me closely as I drink; I sense she drinks other poisons, not this one. Then she gives me a small notebook, its cover made of remarkably soft skin, filled with delicate drawings on transparent paper, each one bleeding through to the next. Red eyes, purple silence, lungs, crying suns, retching roses, shadows of shadows. On one page, in hand-drawn letters, I read: "It's a mystery that there is A meaning to everything and that some things make no sense at all. We must accept loss, death. We must accept everything: loss, death, the edge of things. Desire comes and goes. The wind is ever coming and ever going. Despair comes and goes." Beauty comes from the silence between words, I reckon.

We draw with the limitations of hand and body, with our scale, our reach. Our walking, too, draws fine invisible lines, crossing paths and spaces, until we arrive at the zero point of the world. Art must be a declaration of love. Each time we encounter it, it must carry the same emotion and astonishment as the first time: revelation, emotion, expectation, communion, and transformation, endlessly. It brings together what is separate; it throws things off balance to find a new one. The starting point, where everything begins, is rough, uneven, filled with strange textures and tight squeezes that must be overcome – and this is not

an obstacle; rather, it underlines the fascination of discovery, the revelation of paths that lie ahead. Much later, with time passing and experience accumulating, the paths smooth out, free of ridges or tight turns, making it easy for us to go forward... but what we gain in ease we lose in wonder. Still, when we make something, we should burn out like a beautiful firework and never speak again of what we made or the path we travelled. We do it, it's done, and then we move on. True art doesn't look like art. It can be looked at, but can't be seen; it can be touched, but can't be grasped. An image without an image, without beginning or end.

Lonely children spend hours in solitude dissecting dolls and toys, trying to see what lies within, what light seeps from their darkness, how their underside might upend our gaze. That's how the geometers are born – the ones who stitch scars in pencil, inventing a writing that carries within it the edges of language. That's their only form of freedom. They fill their walls and notebooks with scribbles and scrawls, blending plans for impossible machines and improbable flying devices with mute, incomplete figures. Lines with no clear origin overlap and intersect, birthing one another until they form images that don't exist. Viral drawings in constant contamination, time-scars inscribed across the void of a silent surface. How long does it take for a drawing to fade? As long as a wave takes to smooth the sand? Or as long as the ailing figure we carry within us takes to finally die? It is in the death of others that we glimpse our own.

Her face, ringed in darkness, seems made of compressed, crumpled gravel – a blind, mute skull. Her eyes emit a light that is hypnotic, aching, searing, sincere at once. Her head blazes with a tremendous red glow, her body melting in flame. Her work is a gesture, a wild urge to find traction in the world and give it weight. She wants to make the invisible visible, for therein dwell the dead, the ancient ancestors, the gods; therein unfolds the hidden life of things as they endlessly and silently connect with one another, and with the time that came before. I see the immense, blazing solitude with which she contemplates the world and probes the secrets of matter at the origin of the forms she builds. She is wholly herself, on this side and the other, and she knows how to speak with stones, roots, shells, refuse, flowers, mushrooms, water, thorns, with other creatures... She is always tuned in to the details and nuances we overlook, always seeking out encounters with elements of nature, scents, materials, forgotten objects, and useless, fragile, empty, fleeting things that whisper to us constantly, though we never see them. She knows the world is fluid, that all

things depend on other things. Nothing exists alone. The smallest flower represents a thought, the pure intuition of a moment, a frozen explosion of truth.

She takes my hand, and I feel her blood throb. "Everything is too late..." I say. "... or too early," she replies. Or maybe I only imagined her voice. She takes me with her, walking effortlessly like melting ice. All that lacks substance enters where there is no space. We swim underneath the red sun. We dream of swimming across the vast black crater of a volcano. Beneath us, the silent abyss presses with the frightening weight of emptiness. Our tiny, minuscule bodies inch towards the centre, equidistant from the edge. I feel everything could end here, now. Or everything could begin. If she dives into the abyss, towards the crater's heart, she might dissolve in the darkness, and finally give meaning to her love of geometry. Maybe she has brought others here before – all those who ate peaches and gave her the pits. Suddenly, I no longer see her. I look everywhere, but she's gone. I give up searching and swim away towards the edge. I'm certain she will kill me if I find her.

I emerge from the water with a gentle weight of pleasure within my body. The night birds wake in this timeless silence. I remember the light of her face, the light of her body. The sky darkens. Light and shadow are one and the same, born of the same source. When there is no light, light is blue. Time does not exist; we are swallowed by illusion. Things have no yesterday or tomorrow, only today: the secret wound between infinite past and infinite future, the ether of a sorrowful tear.

Rui Chafes (Lisbon, May 2025)